



**Intergenerational Childcare Arrangements in
Urban China: Negotiations across Gender,
Generations, and Socioeconomic Status**

Kankan Zhang

**Emmanuel College
Department of Sociology
University of Cambridge
September 2021**

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Sociology Degree Committee.

Abstract

Intergenerational Childcare Arrangements in Urban China: Negotiations across Gender, Generations, and Socioeconomic Status

by

Kankan Zhang

As a result of the economic reforms in the 1980s, publicly funded childcare services for children under three have largely disappeared in contemporary China. This thesis focuses on the intergenerational childcare arrangements prevailing in urban China, where dual-earner parents rely on grandparents to provide full-time care for their children. Given grandparental care has been traditionally practiced in China, policymakers and scholars tend to regard it as a readily available solution to the lack of public childcare service. Little is known about how it has changed in response to the dramatic social transformations in the past few decades, and about the potential differences among families adopting such an arrangement.

This study draws on in-depth interviews with paired parents and grandparents who are jointly involved in the care of a child under three. The sample consists of 46 middle-class families from the first-tier city of Guangzhou. Three aspects of the intergenerational arrangements of childcare are investigated: the motivations of parents and grandparents, division of childcare labour, and decision-making related to childcare.

My study confirms there is a strong preference for grandparental care within my sample and that the arrangements and experiences of intergenerational childcare vary considerably across families and are shaped by the interweaving factors of gender, generation and socioeconomic status. There are marked differences in the agency exercised by individual family members regarding their level of involvement and styles and approaches of caregiving. While grandparents' provision of care is a source of support, it can also give rise to disappointment, ambivalence and tensions.

My study finds that, the prevalence of intergenerational childcare not only reflects the resilience of the cultural tradition of familism, it also exemplifies the shifting gender and intergenerational relationships at a time of rapid social change. While there are signs of progress in gender equality, traditional gender roles remain salient in the daily organisation of care. In addition, the rising status of the younger generation challenges the traditional intergenerational power hierarchy.

Overall, these findings suggest that while grandparents play a fundamental role in supporting their adult children to combine parenthood and paid work, their childcare provision should not be assumed, or regarded as a panacea for the deficit of childcare services in urban China.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this study and thesis is made possible by the advice, support and kindness of many people. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Jacqueline Scott for her meticulous guidance and indefatigable patience since I started my MPhil with her exactly six years ago. I am grateful to her for holding me to a high standard throughout my academic journey. Her kind encouragement and support helped me strive through the final few months of writing this thesis, which means a great deal to me.

I would like to thank Maria Iacovou, Mónica Moreno Figueroa, and Yang Hu for reading earlier drafts of this thesis and for providing valuable insights. I also would like to thank the administrative staff in the Department of Sociology for their kind and patient support.

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to all the participants involved in this study, who generously allowed me into their homes and their lives despite their busy schedules. I hope I have in some ways lived up to their faith in me, that my research manages to capture the happiness, sorrow and challenges experienced by many parents and grandparents in similar situations. I am indebted to their candour, generosity and enthusiasm, and I have learnt a great deal from them intellectually and personally. My gratitude also goes to all the people who have assisted with my fieldwork.

Finishing a PhD thesis during the pandemic would not have been possible without the support and company of my friends. I thank Tinghe for her ten years of friendship and for her unwavering support readily available across time zones. I thank Aida, Mai-Linh, Abbie and everyone in the Park Lodge household for their kindness and help, which supported me through one lockdown after another. Many thanks to Stephen for offering me an “office” during my final writing-up. To Xiaokun, Shuting, Tianqi, Haotian, Liming, Bo and Lijia – I am deeply grateful for your comradely company and support throughout the years.

I have been lucky enough to have all four of my grandparents significantly involved in my life as I grow up. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them for their warm and loving care.

Last but not least, I am most indebted to my parents, who have supported this study in every possible way they are capable of. I was living with them during my fieldwork, when I joked about whether I would ever be able to find a research assistant as good as them. I could not express my gratitude enough for their unconditional love through thick and thin.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction: Traditions and changes in Chinese families and childcare provision	6
1.1 The traditional Chinese family	9
1.2 Social changes since 1949 and Chinese families in transition	12
1.2.1 Socialist period (1949-1977)	13
1.2.2 Reform period (1978 onwards)	15
1.3 Shifting care policies and arrangements for children under three	22
1.3.1 Formal/non-familial care	22
1.3.2 Informal/familial care	24
1.4 The current study and research questions	26
1.5 Outline of the thesis	28
Chapter 2 Literature review	31
2.1 Intergenerational relationships in contemporary China	31
2.2 Childrearing ideals and practices in contemporary China	35
2.3 Existing literature on grandparental childcare	38
2.3.1 Grandparental care in Western and Asian contexts	38
2.3.2 Grandparental care in China	41
Chapter 3 Theoretical perspectives concerning the intergenerational childcare arrangements	48
3.1 Intergenerational childcare arrangements from a perspective of intersectionality	48
3.1.1 The intersectionality approach	48
3.1.2 Intersectionality and feminist studies of care work and reproductive labour	51
3.1.3 Applying intersectionality to the Chinese context	52
3.2 Theoretical perspectives on intergenerational relationships	55

3.2.1	The intergenerational solidarity-conflict paradigm.....	56
3.2.2	The intergenerational ambivalence paradigm	59
3.2.3	Intimacy in intergenerational relationships	61
3.3	Childrearing from a class perspective	63
3.3.1	Class differences in parenting styles and social reproduction.....	64
3.3.2	Bourdieu’s cultural and social reproduction theory	65
3.4	Summary	70
Chapter 4	Research Methodology	73
4.1	Site of research: Guangzhou	73
4.2	Sample selection.....	76
4.3	Recruiting respondents	78
4.4	Profiles of participants	82
4.4.1	The parent generation.....	84
4.4.2	The grandparent generation.....	86
4.5	Data collection.....	90
4.5.1	Interviews	90
4.5.2	Observations.....	94
4.6	Data analysis	95
Chapter 5	Ambivalence in parents and grandparents’ motivations behind their intergenerational childcare arrangements	99
5.1	Understanding motivations from the perspective of ambivalence	99
5.2	Grandparents’ motivations for providing childcare	102
5.2.1	Tradition-abiding grandparents	103
5.2.2	Reflexive grandparents.....	108
5.3	Parents’ motivations for utilising grandparental childcare	122
5.3.1	Whether to involve grandparents in caregiving	122
5.3.2	Which grandparent(s) to involve.....	128

5.4 Discussion	133
Chapter 6 Childcare provision as an intergenerational project: the gendered and generational division of childcare	136
6.1 Intergenerational childcare as a group project	138
6.2 Grandparents' vulnerable position in the intergenerational division of childcare	139
6.2.1 Extended childcare shifts by grandparents.....	139
6.2.2 Intergenerational specialisation in different childcare tasks	144
6.2.3 Variations in childcare provision among grandparents.....	151
6.3 Persistent gendered division of childcare between parents	161
6.3.1 Supplementing grandparents' care provision.....	162
6.3.2 Emotional labour towards the grandparents.....	169
6.4 Conclusion.....	172
Chapter 7 Childcare decision-making, intergenerational power dynamics and emotional economies	174
7.1 Conceptualisation of power in the context of intergenerational childcare	176
7.2 Pattern I: Intergenerational coordination.....	179
7.2.1 "Being there" while "not interfering"	180
7.2.2 Parents' compromises as an expression of gratitude.....	188
7.3 Pattern II: Dominating parents and compliant grandparents.....	190
7.3.1 Grandparents' alleged inadequacy as caregivers	192
7.3.2 Grandparents' compliance in face of divergence.....	195
7.3.3 Mothers' strategies in securing grandparents' compliance	199
7.4 Pattern III: Intergenerational power struggle	201
7.4.1 Substantial intergenerational divergence in childcare.....	202
7.4.2 Grandparents' refusal to back down.....	203

7.4.3 Reactions from discontented mothers: from resistance to concession	206
7.5 Conclusion.....	209
Chapter 8 Conclusion.....	212
8.1 Intergenerational childcare arrangement as a heterogeneous experience	213
8.1.1 A typology of intergenerational childcare arrangements	213
8.1.2 The intersection of gender-generation-SES in intergenerational childcare arrangements	217
8.2 Coexisting traditional and modern practices and ideals in contemporary Chinese families.....	225
8.3 Implications of this research	230
8.3.1 Limitations and directions for future research	230
8.3.2 Practical implications	231
Appendix 1 List of participating families	235
Appendix 2 List of parents.....	238
Appendix 3 List of caregiving grandparents.....	242
Appendix 4 Interview schedule	245
References.....	254

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 China's TFR between 1960 and 2018	19
Figure 2 Location of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province and China	74
Figure 3 Summary of sample selection criteria	76
Table 1 1991-2011 care arrangements for children under 3	23
Table 2 Typology of intergenerational relations in rural Chinese families by Guo et al. (2012)	58
Table 3 Characteristics of families in the study (N=46)	83
Table 4 Characteristics of parents in this study.....	85
Table 5 Wu's (C2) daily routine of caregiving on weekdays	152
Table 6 Families with intergenerational coordination (n=13).....	180
Table 7 Families with dominating parents and compliant grandparents (n=33)	191
Table 8 Families with intergenerational power struggle (n=7).....	202
Table 9 Three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics	210
Table 10 Typology of intergenerational childcare arrangements.....	214

Chapter 1 Introduction: Traditions and changes in Chinese families and childcare provision

With the enactment of the “universal two-child” policy in 2016, the one-child policy in China has come to an end after nearly forty years. However, the relaxation of birth control has not resulted in the desired fertility boost expected by the government. After a brief rise, the birth rate began to decline again since 2018. According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of newborns was 12 million in 2020, which is the lowest level since 1961.¹ The continuing low birth rate and the resulting demographic challenge in China is attracting considerable attention from home and abroad. For example, an article entitled “Gilding the Cradle” from the British publication *The Economist* discusses the reversal in terms of the state’s growing anxiety about China’s stark demographic transition.² While back in the 1980s, Chinese policymakers were concerned with the issue of overpopulation, now they are worried that young people are not procreating enough. The decline in working-age population and an ageing population will strain the social security system and constrict the labour market. The *Economist* article concludes by citing the feminist academic Leta Hong-Fincher, who warns that the Chinese officials may end up trying to nudge busy and ambitious women into accepting more domestic roles, as a solution to the population challenge.

Both the Chinese state and the researchers have been trying to identify the causes for the decline in fertility rate, especially after the end of the one-child policy. Preliminary findings suggest that high costs of childrearing and education, lack of childcare services, time pressure and work-life pressure are among the major obstacles to people’s fertility intentions (Ji et al., 2020; Wu and Wang, 2017; Zhou, 2018). In particular, the insufficiency of affordable childcare services has recently attracted the attention of policymakers at the top level. According to the state news agency Xinhua, by 2020, only around 5% of the 47 million children under the age of three are in formal childcare services, and less than 20% of these childcare services are state-run with government-guided pricing.³ It is thus not a surprise that the

¹ See <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1223326.shtml>

² For the article, see <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/02/08/china-is-in-a-muddle-over-population-policy>

³ See http://www.gd.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2020-12/25/c_1126904564.htm

majority of the families find it hard to afford the expensive private nurseries. In a news briefing by the State Council (the cabinet in China) in March 2021, an official confirmed that in order to boost the fertility intentions of young people, a series of state policies will be implemented to reduce the costs of childbirth, care, and education.⁴ In particular, one of the goals outlined in China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) is to raise the availability of childcare services for under three by 150%, so that there will be 4.5 nursery places for per 1,000 population by 2025.⁵

However, nurseries take time to be built, and so does the recruitment and training of qualified staff. Regional variations in the coverage of childcare services are likely to be another challenge. Therefore, despite the state's ambition to expand the formal childcare services, in a government document in 2019, "The Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council for Promoting the Development of Infant and Childcare Services under Three Years Old", families are named as the mainstay of care provision for children under three, while the role of childcare services is supplementary.⁶ Given female employment is largely normalised in urban China even after childbirth (Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011; Short et al., 2002; Zuo and Bian, 2001), at present it is typically grandparents who are providing home-based childcare.

Grandparents' involvement in childcare has been traditionally practised in China and becomes increasingly salient in the contemporary context (Chen et al., 2011; Goh, 2011; Jankowiak, 2008; C Zhang, 2016). Both national statistics and anecdotal experiences confirm the prevalence of grandparental care in urban regions. It is reported that as of 2013, two-thirds of urban children under six are being cared for by at least one grandparent in addition to their parents (China Research Center on Aging, 2013, cited by C Zhang, 2016). According to a survey by the University of Shanghai in 2017, in big cities like Shanghai, 73% of the children under three receive grandparental care.⁷

⁴ See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-03/13/content_5592798.htm

⁵ See <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0311/c90000-9827703.html>

⁶ See http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2019-05/09/content_5389983.htm

⁷ See <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2018-02-18/doc-ifyrrhct9311330.shtml>

Wandering around any neighbourhood in urban China on a weekday morning, it is hard to miss the sight of grandparents pushing a pram or watching their grandchildren toddling around. In fact, Chinese grandparents often continue to look after their grandchildren after they reach school-age, as confirmed by the large number of grandparents waiting outside kindergartens and primary schools every afternoon to fetch their grandchildren home. Since the shortage of childcare services will not be eliminated anytime soon, it is highly likely that the need for grandparental care will persist in the near future. However, despite its prevalence in China, there is a paucity of knowledge of how grandparental childcare is actually practised in urban Chinese families, which serves as the initial motivation for my current research.

The continuing prevalence of grandparental care may reflect the longstanding cultural tradition of familism and intergenerational interdependence (Chen et al., 2011; Ji et al., 2020; Silverstein et al., 2006). Indeed, policymakers and scholars often regard grandparental care as a readily available solution to the lack of public childcare services. However, considering the fast-paced economic reforms, industrialisation, urbanisation and globalization that have taken place in China over the past few decades, new norms, patterns and meanings regarding grandparental care are bound to emerge in the contemporary context. As a rapidly changing nation with a deep-rooted Confucian tradition, China provides a unique setting to investigate transformations in the family domain. This thesis focuses on the prevailing intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban China, where parents and grandparents from the same household are jointly involved in the provision of childcare. I examine how the current arrangements of intergenerational childcare are shaped by recent societal changes in China, and how the arrangements may vary across different families. Using intergenerational childcare as an analytical lens, I seek to illustrate the evolving family ideals and practices, as well as gender and intergenerational dynamics in contemporary China.

This study is based on in-depth interviews with matched pairs of parents and grandparents from 46 middle-class families in the metropolis of Guangzhou. At the time of the study, all of them were involved in the care of at least one child under the age of three. In the rest of this thesis, the two adult generations are respectively referred to from the vantage point of the children they are caring for as the parent

generation and the grandparent generation, or as the younger and the older generation. The parents are sometimes also referred to as the “adult children” of the grandparents.

It is important to be clear that this thesis focuses only on the *joint* caregiving by parents and grandparents from the same *multigenerational* households. This should not be confused with the *custodial* care exclusively provided by grandparents of “left-behind” children in rural China, as a result of their parents migrating to urban regions for better employment opportunities (thereby *skipped-generation* households) (Baker and Silverstein, 2012; Cong and Silverstein, 2012). The qualitatively different experiences of custodial and non-custodial grandparents require these two groups to be studied separately. As demonstrated in the following empirical chapters, the intergenerational childcare examined in the current study is characterised by frequent intergenerational interactions, and is often accompanied by a lack of spatial and temporal boundaries between the parents and grandparents, who collaborate closely on caregiving on a daily basis.

To fully appreciate why the arrangement of intergenerational childcare is becoming increasingly salient in contemporary China and to understand the potential new patterns and meanings related to grandparental care, we need to first consider the drastic transformation that the Chinese family has been through in recent decades and the implications for childcare arrangements. In the remainder of this chapter, I first present the traditional model of the Chinese family and the related norms. This is followed by an overview of the major social changes that have affected family life in general during the socialist period (1949-1977) and the reform period (from 1978 onwards). I then provide a more focused review of the transformation in childcare policies and arrangements since the mid-twentieth century. This chapter ends with my research questions and a brief overview of the thesis.

1.1 The traditional Chinese family

The body of literature on the traditional Chinese family system and its recent transformation is enormous, and therefore cannot be boiled down in any simple ways. At the risk of oversimplification, what I selectively present here is a broad sketch of the aspects I deem most relevant to my inquiries in this thesis.

Overall, the traditional Chinese family is characterised by a collectivist ideology of familism (Chen and Li, 2014), which is a family-centred worldview emphasising “the pooling of the family resources, the placement of family interests over personal demands, and the achieving of relational harmony through familial sentiments and the fulfilment of individuals to their family obligations” (Zuo and Bian, 2005: 603). Intergenerational coresidence is common, and the all-encompassing multigenerational family is often compared to a corporate organisation, responsible for the distribution of key resources such as land, capital and food, care for the elderly and young, and the continuation of family lineage (Whyte, 2003; Yan, 2003, 2011). As such, mutual interdependence within the family is commonly expected and is favoured over the exchange with individuals outside the family (Chen and Li, 2014).

More specifically, rooted in Confucian ethics, the traditional Chinese family is characterised as patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal (Levy, 1949: 48). Family relationships are organised along two major axes: the intergenerational axis between parents and their children, as well as the conjugal axis between husband and wife (Hu and Scott, 2016; Santos and Harrell, 2016). Confucianism emphasises a hierarchical order based on generation and gender, with parents normatively having more authority over their children, and husbands over wives (Chen and Li, 2014).

The intergenerational relationship is predominantly governed by the value of filial piety, which requires children to provide care and support for their elderly parents and to show them absolute respect and obedience (Whyte, 2004). Accordingly, the traditionally ideal form of family is the patrilineal extended family, where the oldest son continues to live with his parents after getting married and is responsible for the wellbeing of his elderly parents (Levy, 1949; Whyte, 2003). In response, the parents would provide their son and daughter-in-law with support in terms of household chores and childcare (Xu et al., 2014).

On the whole, the intergenerational relationship in traditional Chinese families is parent-centred. The older generation has authority over the economic, marital and personal lives of the younger generation. The needs of the parents also come ahead of the children, and the net direction of intergenerational exchange goes upwards (Levy, 1949; Logan et al., 1998). The Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1983) summarises the patterns of intergenerational exchange in China and the West

respectively as the “feedback model” and the “relay model”. By “feedback”, Fei (1983) suggests that the traditional intergenerational relationship in China follows the principle of reciprocity, which expects the adult children to repay their elderly parents with old-age support in exchange for the nurture they received when they were young.

The intergenerational relationship in the traditional Chinese family is highly gendered, with the male line of descent being prioritised (Santos and Harrell, 2016). According to the patrilineal and patrilocal principles, once a woman becomes married, she would move into her husband’s family, and her filial obligations are redirected from her natal parents towards her parents-in-law (Whyte, 2003). This is vividly captured by the traditional proverb “married out daughter, spilt water” (Zhang, 2009). Likewise, grandchildren are seen as the bloodline of the patrilineal extended family, with the paternal grandparents (instead of the maternal grandparents) being the normative care providers (Kamo, 1998; Zhang et al., 2019). The lineage difference is explicitly reflected by the nomenclature, as the literal translation of the contemporary Chinese terms for maternal grandfather and grandmother are “external grandfather” (*waigong*) and “external grandmother” (*waipo*) (Feng, 2014; Ikels, 1998).

Moreover, following the power hierarchy based on gender and generation, the daughter-in-law occupies the lowest position in the patrilineal extended family (DY Du, 2013; Ho, 1987). The daughter-in-law tends to be seen as an outsider who needs to be disciplined by her mother-in-law (Yan, 2003). She is also required to alleviate her mother-in-law’s burden by taking up the majority of household labour (Chen, 2004; Zuo, 2009). When conflicts arise between a man’s mother and his wife, he is supposed to align with his mother and urge his wife to obey (Chen et al., 2000; Whyte, 2003: 6). As such, the mother/daughter-in-law relationship has been an age-old source of conflicts in Chinese families, which can have significant implications for the arrangements of grandparental care in contemporary China (Zhang et al., 2019; Zuo, 2009).

Regarding the conjugal relation, the patriarchal norms place husbands in the centre of the household and wives in an inferior position. Men are associated with the “outer world” of productive labour and are expected to engage in public affairs. In comparison, women belong to the domestic sphere, with their major duty being giving birth to offspring, raising the children, and facilitating their husband’s productivity

(Chen and Li, 2014: 64; Hershatter, 2007: 51; Hsiung, 2007). With no independent source of income, women have to rely entirely on their husbands for financial support (Zuo and Bian, 2005). In terms of the parental role differentiation, the father is generally expected to be the strict disciplinarian at distance, while the mother is the affectionate and lenient nurturer who provides daily care for her children. Such a gendered image of parenthood is summarised by the traditional adage of “strict father, kind mother (*yanfu cimu*)” (Ho, 1989).

Overall, in this traditional model of Chinese families, different facets of family ideals and practices such as familism, filial piety, patrilineality and the gendered division of labour intertwined closely. These practices and ideals were consistent with the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of the premodern period, when agriculture was the major mode of production, and a state-run welfare system was largely absent. Although such a model is not always actualised in reality, it nevertheless remains an influential cultural ideal that has guided family life in China for centuries, and continues to be useful for our understanding of contemporary Chinese families (Gruijters, 2016; Hu and Scott, 2016; Whyte, 2003). Nonetheless, as discussed below, this traditional model has been considerably challenged and transformed since the mid-twentieth century.

1.2 Social changes since 1949 and Chinese families in transition

Chinese society has witnessed dramatic changes after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. This section reviews the major transformations in general and those in the family domain in particular, roughly divided into the socialist period (1949-1977) and the reform period (1978-present). The purpose of this review is two-fold: to map out the historical and institutional backgrounds that are key to my study of the childcare arrangements in contemporary Chinese families; and to place the parents and grandparents involved in this study within the respective historical contexts where they grew up (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the participants’ profiles). Through the following review, I hope to illustrate that the recent social changes have given rise to a complex coexistence of traditional and modern practices and values in contemporary Chinese families, and that the grandparents (mostly born in the 1950s and 1960s) and parents (mostly born

in the 1980s and 1990s) in my study have grown up in very distinctive sociohistorical circumstances.

1.2.1 Socialist period (1949-1977)

The socialist era (which largely overlaps with the “Maoist era” and hereafter the two phrases are used interchangeably) commonly refers to the period between the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and the beginning of the economic reforms at the end of the 1970s. Social and political changes during this period affected families in a paradoxical manner: while new norms of gender and intergenerational relationships had emerged, some traditional ideals and practices survived or even thrived (Davis and Harrell, 1993; Santos and Harrell, 2016; Whyte, 2003).

After the establishment of the PRC, the socialist state played a significant role in promoting gender equality, which was explicitly stipulated in the 1954 Constitution (He and Wu, 2018). Upholding the slogan of “women hold up half the sky”, the state encouraged universal female labour participation in urban areas (Hershatter, 2007; Whyte and Parish, 1985). Welfare facilities such as public daycare centres, canteens and laundries were organised by work units (*danwei*) to alleviate the domestic responsibilities of working women (Short et al., 2002: 34). As a result, the rate of female employment in urban areas had reached over 90% by the end of the 1970s (Jiang, 2003; Zuo and Bian, 2001: 1125). Gender inequality in education was also reduced, with universal primary and secondary education opening to children of both sexes in urban areas (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Whyte and Parish, 1985; Xie, 2013). In comparison, gender equality progressed much slower in rural areas, where traditional patriarchal norms largely endured (Santos and Harrell, 2016).

In terms of the intergenerational relationship, it is argued that some of the state policies had undermined the traditional bond between parents and their adult children, particularly in urban areas (Santos and Harrell, 2016). With the socialist transformations completed around 1957, private businesses, farms and property held by individual families were confiscated and controlled by the state. As a result, parents were no longer in command of the resources key to their children’s future, which largely undermined their power (Whyte, 2003). The state also assumed almost full control over the employment, housing and welfare of its citizens through the

socialist bureaucratic structure of work units (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Whyte, 2003). With the establishment and the later expansion of a pension system for urban state employees since 1951, parents were potentially less reliant on their children for old-age support, which also weakened the tradition of familism (Cai and Cheng, 2014; Whyte, 2005; Xie and Zhu, 2009).

At the same time, other dimensions of the traditional intergenerational relationship persisted. While many of the Confucian teachings were attacked by the state as backward during this period, at no point did the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) systematically attempt to urge the young people to denounce their filial obligations (Whyte, 2003). For example, the 1950 Marriage Law stipulated the legal obligation of children to support their ageing parents, with continuing efforts on the socialisation for filial piety through official propaganda and education (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Whyte, 2003). The intergenerational bond was particularly salient in the rural sector, where state-provided welfare services were much more limited. Care for children, the elderly, and the sick in the countryside was primarily undertaken by the family on an intergenerational basis (Connelly et al., 2018).

The household registration (*hukou*) system was established during the socialist period, with far-reaching ramifications for the entrenched rural-urban division that persists till today. The *hukou* system was first set up in 1951 as a monitoring rather than control mechanism for population migration and movement (Chan and Zhang, 1999). However, in the late 1950s, following the failure of the Great Leap Forward campaign (1958-60) and the ensuing Great Famine (1959-61),⁸ the fully-fledged *hukou* system as understood today was put in place to restrict population migration. The *hukou* system assigns every Chinese citizen to either a rural or urban status, which is systematically related to one's access to welfare benefits such as education, health care, and pensions, and is extremely difficult to change (Shang and Wu, 2011; Wu and Treiman, 2007). As urban regions are prioritised by national policies and are therefore much more developed, the dual *hukou* system becomes the basis of a series of spatial and social inequalities. For grandparents in my study, as discussed in the

⁸ The Great Leap Forward was a campaign led by the CCP to accelerate the pace of economic and technical development. With unrealistic goals, the campaign ended up as a disastrous failure, which caused enormous waste of resources, and partially contributed to the Great Famine in the following three years (Peng, 1987).

empirical chapters, great discrepancies exist between those with a rural and urban *hukou* status, as reflected by their education and employment experiences as well as their access to social welfare. This is further closely relevant to the kind of roles they play in childcare provision and decision-making (see Chapter 6 and 7), and their expectations for repayment from their adult children regarding old-age security (see Chapter 5).

The ten years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) witnessed one of the most tumultuous periods in China's recent history, with almost every aspect of the social life severely disrupted. In urban areas, many universities and high schools were shut down. The quality of school education was poor, and school progression based on merit was replaced by political recommendation (Chu and Yu, 2010; Song, 2009). For the cohorts born between 1950 and 1970 (which is the case for most grandparents in my study), their education was therefore largely interrupted. During this time, 17 million urban "educated youth" (mostly graduates from junior and senior high schools) were "sent down" to live and work in the underdeveloped countryside and were only allowed to return since the late 1970s, which caused profound disruption to their life course (Bernstein, 1977; Zhou and Hou, 1999).

1.2.2 Reform period (1978 onwards)

The reform period started around 1978 when China embarked on a transition from a planned economy to a market economy. More profound changes took place during this period, which in many aspects constituted a rejection of the previous social order during the socialist period (Whyte, 2003). The following section reviews the impacts of the major socioeconomic, demographic, and sociocultural developments on Chinese families during the reform era.

1.2.2.1 Economic reforms and relevant socioeconomic changes

The Reform and Opening-up since 1979 marks a period of accelerated social change in China. On the one hand, the country experiences a rapid economic development, with a substantial improvement in average disposable income, reduction in poverty, and rise in overall living conditions (Li, 2020). On the other hand, with CCP's previous commitment to egalitarianism replaced by economic growth and efficiency (Wu and Dong, 2019), social inequalities that used to be low during the

socialist period began to grow sharply. The Gini coefficient – a measure of income disparity – increased from 0.30 in 1980 to 0.55 in 2012 (Xie and Zhou, 2014). It is generally believed that around 2000, a newly affluent middle class began to come into being and has expanded rapidly since then, although the exact timing and scale is still under debate (Li, 2010, 2013). Around the same time, since the mid-1990s, accelerated economic decentralization and privatization also pushed many small- and medium-sized state-owned enterprises to the market or into bankruptcy (Connelly et al., 2018; Sun and Chen, 2017). This brought to an end to the “iron rice bowl” of lifetime employment for many urban employees, which was replaced by millions of layoffs and growing insecurity in the increasingly competitive job market (Du and Dong, 2013; Whyte, 2003).

The decline of the state-owned enterprises also leads to a substantial drop in social welfare provided by the state and work units. Services such as childcare (see Section 1.3 for a more detailed discussion) and elderly care are shifted to individual families and the market in order to lower the costs for the state and the employers (Connelly et al., 2018; Cook and Dong, 2011). These changes reinforce the essential role of the family as a safety net in providing financial, care, and emotional support for its members at a time of increasing uncertainties (Cook and Dong, 2011; Song and Ji, 2020).

Since the late 2000s, there have been attempts from the state to increase the provision of social welfare, such as the introduction of the Comprehensive New Cooperative Medical Insurance Scheme in 2008, and the New Rural Pension Programme in 2009 (Gruijters, 2016). However, due to the highly limited coverage and low level of benefits, the elderly still depend a lot on family support, especially in rural areas (P Du, 2013; Liu and Cook, 2020; J Zhang, 2016). Chapter 5 will discuss how urban and rural grandparents’ different access to social welfare can make a difference in their motivations to provide childcare support.

The economic reforms have mixed impacts on women’s socioeconomic status. For one thing, the state no longer upholds the ideals of gender equality, which is becoming a secondary consideration compared with economic development. In the public sphere, urban women’s employment continued to be in a steady uptrend during the early years of reforms (the late 1970s to mid-1990s). Starting from the late 1990s

to the early 2000s when reform efforts were intensified, the rates of female labour participation dropped drastically (Dasgupta et al., 2015; Wu and Zhou, 2015). Women were overrepresented among the ranks of the laid-off and suffered from gender-based discrimination during job seeking (Zhang et al., 2008). A widening gender pay gap has also been noted between the late 1980s and 2000s (Chi and Li, 2014). Drawing on data from six waves of the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS) between 1991 and 2006,⁹ Du and Dong (2013) found that the labour force participation of mothers with preschool children dropped steeply during this period, with the sharpest decline observed among women with children aged 0-2. After the early 2000s, there has been another increase in the female employment rate, which scholars attribute to the surge of living costs in areas such as housing, education, and healthcare (Wu and Zhou, 2015). In 2017, the rate of female labour participation in China was 62%, which was higher than the world average level (49%) and most of the developed countries.¹⁰

In the domestic sphere, women have always been disproportionately responsible for housework and childcare, even during the socialist era (Sun and Chen, 2017; Zuo and Bian, 2001). The abolishment of the socialist welfare system, including public daycare centres, canteens, and laundries has potentially exacerbated women's domestic burden and work-life conflict during the reform era (Cook and Dong, 2011; Sun and Chen, 2017). According to the third wave of the Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status (SCWSS) in 2010,¹¹ compared with their husbands, wives in urban dual-earner families spent only 17 minutes less on paid labour, yet 61 minutes more on housework on a weekday (Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011). Data from the 2010 China Family Panel Studies

⁹ CHNS is an ongoing survey that aims to examine the effects of social transformations and state policies on the health and nutritional status of the Chinese population. The sample is drawn from nine selected provinces and autonomous regions, covering about 4,400 households and 19,000 individuals. Although the CHNS sample is not nationally representative, it corresponds closely to national statistics according to existing studies (Chen et al., 2011).

¹⁰ Data provided by the World Bank, see:

https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?end=2017&locations=CN&start=1990&view=chart&year_high_desc=true

¹¹ The SCWSS is a nationally representative decennial survey jointly conducted by the All-China Women's Federation and the National Bureau of Statistics. The third wave survey conducted in 2010 includes a sample of 105,573 individuals aged 18-64. Multi-stage probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling was applied (Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011).

(CFPS) also reveal that in urban areas,¹² women spent nearly twice as much time as men on housework (Yu, 2014).

1.2.2.2 Demographic changes

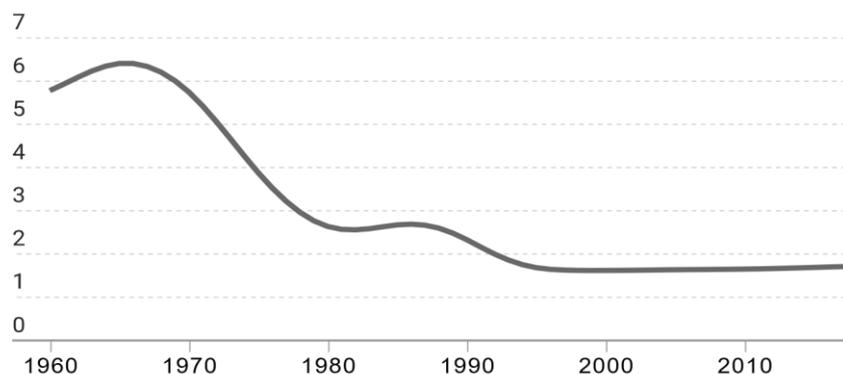
Population policies and demographic changes constitute another important dimension of transformation during the reform era. In fact, as early as 1973, the state had already announced the population policy of “later-longer-fewer” (*wan xi shao*) that called for later marriage, longer spacing, and fewer births (Greenhalgh, 2010). The one-child policy was further introduced in 1980 to slow down population growth and promote economic development, as the large population was then problematised as an impediment to the country’s modernisation project (Greenhalgh, 2010). The implementation of the one-child policy was uneven nationwide, with the enforcement more strict in urban than rural areas (Greenhalgh, 2010; Murphy et al., 2011). The state’s efforts to bring down the quantity of the population was accompanied by a new emphasis on the *suzhi* (quality) of the population, which is a broad construct that includes “education, health, ethics, civic values, and global savvy” (Greenhalgh, 2010: x). The cultivation of a population with high *suzhi* is considered to be essential for the nation to create a competitive labour force in the modern global economy.

Demographers have reached the consensus that both the birth control policies and economic development have contributed to the fertility decline in the reform era (Ji et al., 2020). China’s total fertility rate (TFR)¹³ dropped from 5.8 in 1970 to 2.7 in 1978 (see **Figure 1**), suggesting even before the one-child policy, the TFR was close to the replacement level (Davis and Harrell, 1993). Since the 1990s, the TFR continued to fall and remained slightly above 1.5 since 1995 (Ji et al., 2020). To address the challenges of low fertility and population ageing, the Chinese government began to gradually relax its birth control, with the selective two-child policy (applying to married couples with one spouse being an only child) introduced in 2014, followed by the universal two-child policy (applying to all married couples) in 2016 and the

¹² CFPS is an ongoing general-purpose, nationally representative, longitudinal survey of Chinese society launched in 2010 by Peking University. The 2010 data come from the first wave of this survey, which include all the members from 19,986 households (Xie and Hu, 2014).

¹³ TFR represents the average number of children women would have, if they survive to the end of their childbearing years and give birth to children in line with the prevailing age-specific fertility rates.

three-child policy in 2021. However, as noted earlier, a strong surge in newborns did not take place as desired, with the birth rate reaching a record low in 2019.



Data from datacatalog.worldbank.org via Data Commons

Figure 1 China's TFR between 1960 and 2018

The one-child policy has brought profound impacts on Chinese society and families, not least in terms of the family structure, intra-family relationships, and ideals of childrearing. In urban areas, the so-called “4-2-1” family structure has emerged, which means for parents who are both the only child, up to four grandparents could be exclusively available for the care of their children. The one-child policy may also contribute to a decline in the patrilineal and patrilocal traditions (Croll, 2006; Feng et al., 2014; C Zhang, 2016). Parents whose only child is a girl are found to concentrate their resources and attention on their only daughter (Fong, 2002); and in reverse, they also count on their only daughter for old-age support (Xie and Zhu, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Coresidence between a married couple and the wife’s parents is no longer uncommon and is likely to become more prevalent (Pimentel and Liu, 2004).

Alongside the decline in fertility, the state’s emphasis on the *suzhi* of the population also alters how children are perceived and raised in Chinese families (Fong, 2004; Woronov, 2003, 2009). As there are fewer children in each family, parents are now attaching great importance to the cultivation of a high-quality child through proper care and education (Kuan, 2015; Naftali, 2014). Meanwhile, the ideologies of intensive and scientific parenting are gaining increasing popularity among the urban middle class (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Hanser and Li, 2017; Su et al., 2018; Xiao, 2016). Parents have been under heightened pressure to invest heavily in

their only child, giving rise to the prevalence of a child-centred parenting ideal in urban China (Fong, 2004; Kuan, 2015; Zhang et al., 2008). There is also a change in parenting styles, as compared to earlier generations, parents nowadays are less authoritarian and more affectionate towards their children (Lu and Chang, 2013; Naftali, 2014). It remains unknown whether these transformations in parenting will continue after the one-child policy was scrapped.

1.2.2.3 Sociocultural changes

Several sociocultural changes during the reform period also profoundly reshape family practices and ideals in contemporary China, which include the state's renewed endorsement of Confucianism, China's opening up to the Western world, and the expansion of the education sector.

Firstly, the state's attitude towards Confucianism has been notably changing from a total hostility during the Maoist era towards an ambivalent tolerance or even open embrace in recent decades (Whyte, 2003: 13; Wu and Dong, 2019). Scholars observe in the state discourse a decline of egalitarian gender ideologies and a resurgence of patriarchal values (Evans, 2021; Pimentel, 2006; Sun and Chen, 2017), which put pressure on married women to "return home" when unemployment rates were high during the 1990s (Ding et al., 2009; Song, 2011; Summerfield, 1994). This is further related to the state's retreat from social welfare provision, with growing reference to Confucian teachings to justify the predominant role of the family (more specifically women) in care provision (Cook and Dong, 2011; Shang and Wu, 2011).

Secondly, thanks to the open-door policy in 1978 and the connection to the Internet in 1994, China has been increasingly exposed to products, culture, ideas, and knowledge from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West (Whyte, 2003). This is a sharp transition from the socialist period when Western ideas and international contacts were largely kept away. China's recent access to the global world is found to be contributing to the rise of Western ideologies among younger generations, including individualism, liberal attitudes towards family and marriage, and feminist thoughts (Qian and Li, 2020; Tian, 2017). In this sense, the cohort born during the reform period (i.e. the parent generation in my study) is brought up in a cultural environment very different from the one their parents grew up in.

Thirdly, the education sector in China has developed considerably after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. School progression based on political and ideological considerations were abolished and replaced by merit-based exams (Chu and Yu, 2010). In 1977, the National College Entrance Examination was resumed after ten years of interruption. Unprecedented education expansion took place during this period. The Law on Compulsory Education in 1986 stipulated that the nine-year compulsory education should be universally available to all school-age children in urban and rural regions (Pan, 2016). The literacy rate of those above the age of 15 rose from 66% in 1982 to 97% in 2018.¹⁴ Since the government set out to expand the higher education sector in 1999 (Yeung, 2013), the gross college admission rate has surged from 12.5% in 2000 to 54.4% in 2020.¹⁵ The expansion in higher education is of particular significance, because acquiring a university degree has been one of the limited pathways for a rural-to-urban *hukou* conversion (Wu and Treiman, 2004). Thanks to the recent development in the education sector, the cohorts born after the 1980s on average have much higher educational attainments than the preceding ones. This could undermine the traditional power hierarchy based on seniority in both individual families and the wider Chinese society (Li, 2020), which will be discussed in Chapter 6 and 7.

Gender disparity in education also declines during this period (Whyte and Parish, 1985; Xie, 2013), as women in China have caught up or even exceeded men as in other OECD countries. In 2014, 52% of the university students in China were female (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). Empowered by their improved socioeconomic status and educational attainments, it is argued that women in contemporary China may enjoy a rise in bargaining power in both conjugal and intergenerational relationships (Cheng, 2019; Gruijters and Ermisch, 2019; Zuo and Bian, 2005).

¹⁴ Data provided by the World Bank, see: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=CN>

¹⁵ Ministry of Education of the PRC, data retrieved from http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/202103/t20210301_516062.html and http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202005/t20200520_456751.html

1.3 Shifting care policies and arrangements for children under three

China's transition from a collectivised planned economy towards a market economy has considerably reconfigured the organisation of childcare. Currently, children under three (the targeted age group of my study) in urban areas are predominantly cared for by their families (Wu and Wang, 2017), which has not always been the case during the past few decades. This section reviews the evolving childcare policies and arrangements in urban China since the socialist period, starting with the formal/non-familial care, followed by the informal/familial care.

1.3.1 Formal/non-familial care

In China, formal childcare services for preschool children generally refer to those provided by nurseries (*tuoersuo*) and kindergartens (*youeryuan*). Depending on the age, nurseries are for children aged 0-2 and are overseen by the Ministry of Health, while kindergartens are for children aged 3-6 and are overseen by the Ministry of Education (Song and Dong, 2018; Zhu and Zhang, 2008).

During the socialist period, to facilitate women's full-time labour participation, the state established a publicly funded childcare system, which consisted of nurseries and kindergartens that accommodated children as young as 56-day-old (i.e. the length of maternity leave at the time), until they were old enough for primary schools at the age of seven (Liu et al., 2009; Nyland, Nyland, et al., 2009). The responsibility of childcare provision was distributed between the Ministry of Education, the work units (parents' place of employment), and the neighbourhood committees (Du and Dong, 2013). The "Regulations for Kindergartens (trial basis)" issued in 1952 called for the development of nurseries and kindergartens by local governments and employers. According to this document, childcare programmes had two major goals: (1) "to educate children so their health and cognitive capabilities will be fully developed prior to primary school"; and (2) "to reduce the burdens of childcare on mothers so they will have time to participate in political life, productive work, and cultural and educational activities" (Du and Dong, 2013; He and Jiang, 2008: 4). This reflects the state's dual emphasis on children's education and women's liberation through the provision of formal childcare services. Furthermore, employers also provided on-site nursing rooms and paid maternity leave to support female workers to combine paid work and childrearing (Liu et al., 2009).

Moving onto the reform period, with the economic decentralization and privatization, the landscape of the childcare system in China changed dramatically. Du and Dong (2013) summarise two major changes. Firstly, while the policy discourse in the reform period continued to stress the educational role of centre-based childcare, it downplayed its function of supporting working women. The decoupling of the dual functions of childcare programmes was stipulated in the 1989 “Regulations for Kindergartens”. According to this document, nurseries for children aged 0-2 were considered more to be care facilities rather than educational institutions; they no longer enjoyed governments support, and were either closed down or transferred into the private sector (Du and Dong, 2013). Up till now, publicly subsidised nurseries are next to non-existent in China (Du and Dong, 2013). According to **Table 1**, which is compiled based on the panel data from CHNS, the percentage of children under 3 in public childcare services continued to decline after 1991 and dropped to 0 by 2000 (Yang, 2019).

Table 1 1991-2011 care arrangements for children under 3

Year	Percentage of informal care (%)	Percentage of formal care (%)	
		Public care institutions	Private care institutions
1991	86.5	11.9	1.6
1993	88.3	9.6	2.1
1997	95.9	3.1	1.0
2000	92.1	0.0	7.9
2004	95.8	0.0	4.2
2011	98.8	0.0	1.2

Source: CHNS 1991-2011 (Yang, 2019)

Secondly, publicly subsidised childcare for children aged 3-6 has also been severely reduced (Du and Dong, 2013). With a substantial cutback in government and employer support, the number of publicly funded kindergartens decreased by 65% between 1997 and 2006 (Du and Dong, 2013). At the same time, private kindergartens grew rapidly, with the share rising from 17.0% in 1998 to 67.2% in 2013 (Connelly et al., 2018). The rise of private kindergartens has caused concerns about the availability, affordability, and quality of childcare among both scholars and individual families (Du and Dong, 2013; Li et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2009).

To summarise, at the moment, the state provides no formal support in either policy or service regarding the care of children under three (Liu et al., 2009: xiv; L Zhang, 2016). Apart from a limited supply of daycare services in the private sector, it is mostly individual families that are responsible for the provision of childcare (see **Table 1** above). In recent years, in addition to private daycare centres (nurseries), a new form of commercialised childcare service, commonly referred to as “early education classes” (*zaojiaoban*), has become popular in urban areas. These classes are typically available at the weekend and require parents’ participation, with an aim to stimulate the children’s motor, language and interaction skills (Liu et al., 2009; Qi and Melhuish, 2017). These classes are particularly popular among ambitious parents who are eager to ensure a competitive edge for their children from an early age, but the high costs have kept away parents from middle- and low-income backgrounds (Liu et al., 2009).

Apart from out-of-home care provided by nurseries and daycare centres, some families are relying on nannies for childcare. The sector of domestic services has grown rapidly since China’s transition to a market economy (Dong et al., 2017), but statistics on its exact scale are unavailable, as a large number of nannies are hired through informal networks (Hu, 2010). Existing qualitative studies have noticed a general distrust of nannies among parents, especially if the nannies are hired as the sole carers without the supervision of family members (Goh, 2011; C Zhang, 2016). Frequent media coverage of children abused by nannies further exacerbates parents’ anxiety.

1.3.2 Informal/familial care

Without sufficient access to high-quality and affordable formal childcare services, families now serve as the major provider of care for children under 3 in urban China, which typically include parents and grandparents.

The common expectation for mothers to be the primary carer of the child does not sit well with the reality in contemporary China. Despite the decline in recent years, female employment is still largely normalised in urban regions (Hu, 2016a). It is common for mothers to resume full-time employment right after their mandated maternity leave (Short et al., 2002; Zuo and Bian, 2001). According to the third wave

of the Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status in 2010, 72% of the urban mothers aged 25–34 with children under the age of 6 were in paid employment (Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011). In particular, employment rates of women who are better educated or married to husbands with high earnings are found to be relatively high (Ding et al., 2009).

The current parental leave policy in China is generous compared with many other countries. Nevertheless, it does not coordinate well with the existing configuration of public childcare services. During the socialist period, the length of paid maternity leave was 56 days, and right afterwards the babies can be admitted to public nurseries. In 2012, the length of paid maternity leave was extended to 98 days, which was further extended to a minimum of 128 days after the introduction of the universal two-child policy in 2016 (Connelly et al., 2018). Statutory paternity leave is also now available in 29 provinces and cities, ranging between 7 days and one month, with 15 days being the standard (Wallace, 2020). In the city of Guangzhou where I conducted my fieldwork, the current paid leave for mothers and fathers are 178 days and 15 days respectively. Still, even with the recent extensions, after the end of the current maternity leave, there remains a gap of more than two years until the children reach the entrance age of three for kindergartens. Furthermore, the provision of paid leave is uneven across sectors. The coverage is lower in private sectors due to weak monitoring and less effective regulations (Liu et al., 2009).

Moreover, the prevalence of the overtime work culture (for example, “996”, i.e. working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week) in China further exacerbates the work-life conflict faced by young parents (Liu et al., 2009; Lu et al., 2016; Mustillo et al., 2021). Due to the unaffordability of private childcare services and a widespread distrust of non-familial caregivers, many parents are turning to grandparents to look after their children while they go to work.

As the state has largely retreated from the provision of welfare services since the economic reforms, grandparental care as a traditional childcare arrangement is becoming increasingly salient in contemporary China. The extensive role played by grandparents in the provision of care for preschool children is confirmed by various national surveys (Chen et al., 2011; Wu and Wang, 2017). Factors including the rise in life expectancy, improved health conditions, the decline in fertility and the early

retirement age¹⁶ are found to facilitate Chinese grandparents' availability in childcare provision (Chen et al., 2011; Sun, 2013; Zhang et al., 2019). The prevalence of this multiple caregivers configuration differentiates China from many of the Western countries (Short et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2020), where mothers are considered the primary and optimal providers of childcare (Hays, 1996; Macdonald, 2011; Uttal, 2002).

Furthermore, in accordance with the patrilineal tradition, Chen et al. (2011) find that for children aged 0-6, the percentage of coresidence with paternal grandparents on average is about three times higher than with maternal grandparents, based on the pooled sample of CHNS from 1991 to 2004. However, some of the more recent qualitative studies have observed a rise in maternal grandparents' childcare involvement in both rural (Zhang, 2009) and urban regions (Ji et al., 2020; Shen, 2013; Zhang et al., 2019); and that sometimes both sets of grandparents may have to compete for the opportunity to take care of their grandchildren, which some scholars attribute to the decline in fertility (Zavorett, 2016). Considering the highly gendered nature of intergenerational relationships in Chinese families (Santos and Harrell, 2016), maternal grandparents may not simply represent an equivalent alternative to paternal grandparents who are the traditionally normative caregivers. Instead, the involvement of maternal grandparents may give rise to a distinctive type of intergenerational dynamics, and may carry different meanings for the father and mother (Hu and Mu, 2020).

1.4 The current study and research questions

Given the social changes discussed above are significantly reshaping the landscape of Chinese families and their arrangements of childcare, it is now a good time to reconceptualise the grandparental care in contemporary China. There are two widespread assumptions among the limited body of research on grandparental care in urban China – that following the long-lasting cultural tradition of familism, grandparents' childcare provision is automatically expected; and that families drawing

¹⁶ China's retirement threshold is low compared with international standards. Currently, it is 50 for blue-collar women employees, 55 for white-collar women employees, and 60 for men (Connelly et al., 2018).

on intergenerational childcare constitute a largely homogeneous group (see Chapter 2 for details).

My study challenges these assumptions by examining three aspects of the intergenerational childcare arrangements: the motivations of parents and grandparents, their division of childcare labour, and their decision-making related to childcare. Given the lack of systematic research on grandparental care in urban China, the aim of my research is to explore, document, and analyse. In particular, this thesis addresses the following questions:

1. What are grandparents' and parents' motivations behind their arrangements of intergenerational childcare? Do parents and grandparents see it as a "natural" decision, or do they experience ambivalence when setting up their intergenerational childcare arrangements? For those who experience ambivalence, what kind of strategies do they draw on to cope with their ambivalent feelings? How do factors such as grandparents' socioeconomic status and lineage contribute to the variations in motivations across families?
2. How are the different types of childcare labour conceptualised and shared between the two generations? Whether and how does the pattern of intergenerational labour division vary across families? In what ways does the grandparents' participation decrease and/or increase the workload of the younger generation, and how might it be differently experienced by the mother and father? Whether and how is the gender-based inequality in childcare division replaced by a generation-based inequality?
3. How do parents and grandparents negotiate decisions related to childcare? How does the decision-making process differ across families and what does it inform us about the power dynamics and underlying emotional interplay between the two generations?
4. Taken together, how do the two generations' motivations, division of childcare labour, and decision-making related to childcare vary across families, potentially along the lines of gender, generation and socioeconomic status? What does it tell us about the internal diversity within middle-class families that draw on the arrangements of intergenerational childcare?

Examining these issues through the lens of intergenerational childcare, the larger aim of this study is to understand how the transformations in childcare arrangements in individual families may both reflect and contribute to a broader shift in gender and intergenerational relationships in contemporary China.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Having set the scene for this thesis by providing the historical, cultural and institutional contexts of intergenerational childcare arrangements in contemporary urban China, and listing the research questions that guide my study, the remainder of this thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter Two provides a review of the key findings and limitations of the existing empirical literature on Chinese intergenerational relationships, childrearing ideals and practices, and grandparental care that informs my study. **Chapter Three** discusses the three main conceptual frameworks underpinning my thesis: the perspective of intersectionality, theories regarding intergenerational relationships, and a class-based understanding of childrearing. **Chapter Four** describes my research design as well as reflections over the methodological challenges that arise from researching on intimate topics such as childcare and family relationships from an intergenerational perspective.

The next three empirical chapters constitute the main body of my analysis, each providing an in-depth exploration and analysis of one key dimension of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in my respondents' families.

Chapter Five investigates the socially situated motivations behind parents' and grandparents' utilisation and provision of grandparental childcare, the ambivalence they experience, and the strategies they adopt to cope with such ambivalence. This chapter finds that, parents and grandparents hold differing motivations for their chosen childcare arrangements, which to an extent correspond to their structural position in the society. For some grandparents and parents, the seemingly traditional practice of grandparental care no longer represents a taken-for-granted option and is instead associated with ambivalence. In particular, I identify two types of grandparents, i.e. "tradition-abiding" and "reflexive", depending on how much they view their caregiving as an obligation prescribed by traditional cultural

norms. I further demonstrate how parents, instead of directly going for the default paternal grandparents, actively take into account a variety of factors when deciding on the caregiving grandparents. The aim of the parents is to maintain a harmonious intergenerational relationship and to provide the best upbringing for their children.

Chapter Six examines how childcare labour is negotiated and shared between parents and grandparents along the lines of gender and generation. Findings from this chapter indicate that, in my respondents' families, childcare is organised as a coordinated group project with the joint involvement of multiple family members who are often positioned hierarchically. Compared with parents, grandparents are generally found in a vulnerable position in the intergenerational division of labour. Their childcare involvement is characterised by a greater time commitment, more time alone with children, more physical care and housework, as well as less flexibility. Grandparents' role is further differentiated by their gender, lineage and socioeconomic status. Within the younger generation, the division of childcare labour is still highly unequal between the parents. Mothers are disproportionately responsible for supplementing grandparents' care provision, and for the maintenance of a harmonious intergenerational relationship.

Chapter Seven turns to examine the power dynamics and emotional interplay between the parents and grandparents by focusing on their decision-making regarding childcare. Based on whether there is a consensus over childrearing approaches across the generations, and whether grandparents recognise parents' ultimate authority in making childcare-related decisions, this chapter identifies three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics: intergenerational coordination, dominating parents and compliant grandparents, and intergenerational power struggle. The different patterns point to the complexity of intergenerational power dynamics in contemporary urban China, that while the traditional hierarchy based on seniority is loosening, with the younger generation enjoying greater control over the upbringing of their children, the grandparents are still entitled to respect and authority granted by the norms of filial piety. It further suggests that, while grandparents' childcare provision can be a source of practical support, depending on how it is received by parents, it may also generate disappointment, conflicts and tensions. Therefore, a high level of intergenerational exchange of support is not necessarily accompanied by close emotional ties across generations.

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis with a discussion of my overall findings in light of the existing literature and my conceptual frameworks. I also discuss the directions for future research on grandparenting and family relationships in the Chinese context, as well as the implications of my findings for social policies.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Following the overview of the social, cultural, and institutional context of intergenerational childcare in urban China in the previous chapter, the current chapter presents a review of the relevant empirical literature in three areas with the focus primarily on contemporary China: intergenerational relationships, childrearing ideals and practices, and grandparental childcare.

2.1 Intergenerational relationships in contemporary China

In response to the societal transformation since 1949, intergenerational relationships in China have demonstrated both traditional and new features. It is generally believed that during the recent process of modernisation, family ties across generations have remained strong and salient, although the nature of intergenerational relationships has undergone considerable transformation.

One thread of literature focuses on the continuation of a high level of intergenerational solidarity (Yang and Li, 2009). Census data show that the proportion of three-generation households remains stable since the 1980s (Wang, 2014). Intergenerational exchange and support remain highly important, especially after the acceleration of the economic reforms and the dismantling of the welfare system provided by the work units (Croll, 2006; Gruijters, 2016; Song and Ji, 2020). Filial piety continues to be a widely embraced cultural ideal that defines intergenerational relationships (Deutsch, 2006; Hu and Scott, 2016; Nehring and Wang, 2016), although its exact meaning is subject to considerable reinterpretation as discussed later below.

On the other hand, another thread of literature observes that the intergenerational relationship in China is taking on a diversity of new forms and characteristics. Some scholars argue that the continuation of a strong intergenerational solidarity in contemporary China is accompanied by a rise of individualism (Svarverud and Hansen, 2010; Yan, 2003, 2010b). For example, scholars have questioned the existence of a unified interest among the entire household (Kang, 2012; Zuo and Bian, 2005). It has been observed that individual family members do not always prioritise the so-called “collective interests” and may instead seek personal fulfilment through the pursuit of education and professional advancement (Hu, 2016a;

Shen, 2013; Whyte, 2003), which could lead to a conflict of interests within the family (Connidis, 2010). Although there has not been a consensus on the level of detraditionalization and deinstitutionalisation in contemporary China, scholars generally agree that there is an uncomfortable coexistence of individualism and familism, which is closely related to the changes in intergenerational relationships as discussed below (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Song and Ji, 2020).

For example, evidence has suggested a loosening of the intergenerational hierarchy, with a decline in status and authority of the older generation, who now have little control over their adult children's career, marriage and other major life decisions in comparison to the pre-socialist period (Croll, 2006; Santos and Harrell, 2016; Shen, 2013; Whyte, 2003). Scholars also report a change in the direction of intergenerational transfer, with the predominance of the upstream transfer from adult children to their parents replaced by a more balanced bidirectional pattern (Santos and Harrell, 2016). Some scholars even argue that the direction has been reversed and is increasingly in favour of the younger generation (Yan, 2016). For example, with the expansion of the pension system in urban China, by 2016, 65% of the employees are covered by a public pension programme (Feng and Zhang, 2018; Zhao and Mi, 2019), which has reduced parents' reliance on their children for financial support (Xie and Zhu, 2009). At the same time, many adult children are found to be receiving financial and other forms of support such as childcare from their parents, which is facilitated by the decrease in fertility and sibship size due to the one-child policy (Feng and Zhang, 2018; Kang, 2009; Yang and Li, 2009; Zhong, 2014). In rural areas, elderly parents who are "left-behind" are widely involved in a "time-for-money" exchange, where they provide childcare and domestic assistance for their out-migrant children in exchange for money or food (Cong and Silverstein, 2011, 2012). From a long term perspective, these grandparents' childcare provision is also interpreted by some scholars as a strategic investment to instil a sense of gratitude in their adult children, so as to ensure their old-age security (Cong and Silverstein, 2011; Croll, 2006). Taken together, it is generally accepted that while intergenerational ties remain robust in contemporary Chinese families, there may have been a reversal in the intergenerational hierarchy, or at least a rise in the younger generation's status, which some scholars refer to as a form of "descending familism" (Song and Ji, 2020; Yan, 2016).

The fact that the younger generation is increasingly found at the receiving end of intergenerational exchange has led to a concern over “a crisis of filial piety” among some scholars, who accuse the young people of being “uncivil” and “self-centred” because of their reliance on their elderly parents (He, 2009; Yan, 2003). This line of literature largely focuses on families in rural areas or in poverty (Zheng, 2018). In contrast, other scholars argue that filial piety continues to be a core cultural ideal that shapes intergenerational relationships for Chinese people (Zheng, 2018), especially among those who are highly educated (Hu and Scott, 2016), or the only child of their parents (Deutsch, 2006; Zhan, 2004).

Nevertheless, the interpretations and practices related to filial piety have undergone significant changes (Croll, 2006; Eklund, 2018; Nehring and Wang, 2016). For instance, it is generally agreed that the traditional form of filial piety, which requires unconditional submission and service to elderly parents, is now giving way to a new form characterised by egalitarian and reciprocal affections as well as mutual needs (Yan, 2016; Yeh et al., 2013). Furthermore, as in other East Asian countries, bringing honour to one’s family through professional achievements is also becoming an important dimension of filial piety (Deutsch, 2006; Park et al., 2006; Yan, 2011, 2016). As such, many parents willingly provide their offspring with support for their success, which may take the form of financial support for their education, wedding and house purchasing, or practical support such as childcare (W Liu, 2017; Zheng, 2018). Therefore, it has been argued that, by willingly providing support to their adult children or actively yielding control over family decision-making, elderly parents are not necessarily reducing themselves to victims of their unfilial children; rather, it could be seen as an active attempt by the older generation to construct an emotional bond and intimacy with the younger generation (Xiao, 2016; Zhong, 2014).

In relation to this line of argument, affection rather than obligation is found to become an important element of contemporary intergenerational relationships (Evans, 2008; J Liu, 2017; Santos and Harrell, 2016; Yan, 2016), which some refer to as the “intimate turn” in Chinese families (Yan, 2016). For instance, in his ethnography in rural north China, Yan (2016: 245) found his elderly respondents described their children as “caring and supportive but not obedient” (*xiao er bushun*), which is a departure from the traditional expectations of filial piety. Similarly, especially in urban areas, parents are placing more emphasis on the emotional rather than economic

value of their children (Zheng et al., 2005), as the traditional ideal of “children as insurance for old age” (*yang'er fanglao*) is now replaced by “children as companions for old age” (*yang'er peilao*) (Goh, 2011: 5).

Another new feature of the contemporary intergenerational relationships is the weakening of the patrilineal and patrilocal traditions. Coresidence and exchange of support between a married daughter and her natal family are becoming increasingly common, especially in the urban regions (Chen et al., 2000; Gruijters and Ermisch, 2019; J Liu, 2017; Xie and Zhu, 2009; Xu, 2013; C Zhang, 2016). Some scholars attribute the strengthening of matrilineal ties to the one-child policy (Lei, 2013; Zhang, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019), that consistent with the resource dilution thesis, an only daughter can receive exclusive investment and support from her parents without the need to compete with siblings especially the male ones (Fong, 2004; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhao and Zhang, 2019). Parents, on the other hand, are increasingly found to rely on their daughters for practical and emotional support (J Liu, 2017; Santos and Harrell, 2016; Zhang, 2009). Scholars also highlight the impacts of women's empowerment on their better bargaining position against their spouses and parents-in-law, which also strengthens their ability to maintain close ties with their natal family (Gruijters, 2017; Shi, 2017; Xu, 2015).

The emergence of a bilateral trend in intergenerational exchange has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Some scholars interpret it as a utilitarian strategy by the younger generation to maximise their access to kinship support. This is represented by the rural youth in Zhang's (2009) study, who consciously draw on both patrilineal and matrilineal resources to increase their household income. Other studies further look into the gendered implications of patrilineal and matrilineal resources for women. For example, examining lineage differences in intergenerational coresidence, Yu and Xie (2018) find that the motherhood wage penalty, defined as mothers earning less than nonmothers, is largest for women living with their parents-in-law, smaller for those in nuclear families, and least for those living with their own parents. Yu and Xie (2018) suggest that such disparities could be explained by the varying domestic workload shouldered by women: those in patrilocal coresidence face the dual burden of caring for both their children and parents-in-law, while their counterparts in matrilocal coresidence can receive support for childcare and housework from their own parents. In a similar vein, studies by Zhang (2009) and Zhang et al. (2019) both

confirm that young couples in their study, especially mothers, prefer childcare support provided by maternal grandmothers vis-a-vis paternal grandmothers, due to their wish to avoid the historically conflictual relationship between the wife and her mother-in-law.

Overall, literature in this area suggests that, although intergenerational ties between parents and their adult children remain strong in contemporary China, the nature of the relationship has been largely transformed. It is generally agreed that the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal tradition of the Chinese family is weakened, and the hierarchy that favours the elderly generation is no longer stable and clearly defined (Chen, 2004; Gruijters, 2017). However, less is known about how these changes in intergenerational relationships may translate into new arrangements of childcare in extended families, especially considering the recent transformations in childrearing ideals and practices discussed in the next section.

2.2 Childrearing ideals and practices in contemporary China

There has been a growing body of literature on the new characteristics of childrearing and parenthood in China that appeared since the 1970s, after China's implementation of the one-child policy and opening-up. The one-child policy is often regarded as related to the Chinese government's campaign to elevate the *suzhi* (quality) of its population especially after China joining the global economy (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005). In this context, a number of studies have examined how parents, especially those in the urban areas, are encouraged to invest heavily in the upbringing of their only child, following modern and scientific methods devised by experts from China and abroad (Fong, 2004; Kuan, 2015; Naftali, 2014; Xiao, 2016). Hays (1996: 8) coins the term "intensive mothering" to describe a prevailing childrearing ideal in America, which is "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive". Despite the differences in the cultural and institutional contexts between China and Western societies, scholars have adopted the concept of "intensive mothering/parenting" to make sense of the enormous investments of money, time, and energy made by Chinese parents to facilitate the physical, psychological, and cognitive development of their children (Chen, 2018; Jin and Yang, 2015; Su et al., 2018). In particular, scholars have noticed that the ideology of intensive parenting is now extending to parents of very young

children, who believe infants' early years are a critical period that requires meticulous caregiving and proper stimulations (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Brengaard, 2017; Hanser and Li, 2017). In an extreme example presented by Higgins (2015), some pregnant mothers in urban China draw on a myriad of techniques such as *taijiao* (fetal education), fetal testing, and other forms of pregnancy management in order to give birth to the smartest and healthiest baby possible.

Furthermore, there is one line of literature that explores how childrearing practices are related to class status. Overall, urban middle-class parents in China are seen as particularly affected by the ideologies of intensive and scientific parenting (Brengaard, 2017; Su et al., 2018; Xiao, 2016). They also tend to raise their children following the ideal of “concerted education” (Lareau, 2003), which emphasises all-rounded development, enrolment in enrichment classes, and cultivation of their children's autonomy and emotional expressions (Tian and Jing, 2021; Tian and Liang, 2019; Wu and Zhang, 2016). Scholars attribute parents' subscription to the ideal of intensive parenting to their anxiety to maintain their class-based privileges for their children, which mirrors what Macdonald (2011: 25) terms as a “class-based ideology of competitive mothering”. In contrast, some research observes no significant differences in parenting values between middle- and low-class families (Hong and Zhao, 2015). Still, most scholars agree that middle-class parents have significant advantages in their possession of resources, which enables them to actualise the ideal of intensive parenting (Hong and Zhao, 2015; Kuan, 2015; Naftali, 2014).

In addition to class status, some scholars also examine how mobility experience may influence parenting practices, as Chinese society has recently witnessed considerable upward mobility due to the rapid economic development. In particular, Tian and Jing (2021) find that parents who were born in working-class families and have achieved upward mobility to the middle class are likely to adopt parenting practices similar to those who stay in the middle class.

Other scholars focus on the recent celebration of scientifically approved and expert-led childrearing methods, and how it may shape the conceptualisation of the ideal of parenthood, especially motherhood, in contemporary China. For example, Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005: 237) argue that starting from the 1980s, “the good mother” is defined as someone who is self-sacrificing and uses scientific methods to

raise a “quality” child. Some scholars argue that the emphasis on expert-led childcare not only represents a concern for the children’s best interests, but is also related to the construction of a certain image of motherhood that is intertwined with modernity, class status, and moralisation (Brengaard, 2017; Higgins, 2015; Naftali, 2014). A widely discussed example is the debate around infant feeding. While infant formula was once seen as the representation of “science and modernity” in China, since the 1990s, breastfeeding has been increasingly promoted by the state as a key component of good motherhood (Brengaard, 2017). Scholars have critically pointed out that the state’s advocacy of breastfeeding may have neglected the considerable physical sacrifices as well as logistical and financial burdens on the part of working mothers (Brengaard, 2018; Hanser and Li, 2017; Jia et al., 2018). As such, it has been argued that the adoption of intensive parenting very much depends on the possession of the necessary economic and cultural resources, and that childrearing ideals and practices have become a rich source of hierarchical divisions that are drawn between different social classes, age groups, as well as rural/urban regions (Brengaard, 2017; Hanser and Li, 2017; Naftali, 2007).

Despite the significant parallels between China and Western countries regarding the prevalence of intensive mothering, scholars have identified at least one key difference that separates these two contexts. The ideology of intensive mothering in the West posits that only mothers are the appropriate caregivers for their children (Blair–Loy, 2006; Hays, 1996). This is hardly the case in China, where an ideal of joint care provided by multiple caregivers has been widely identified (Goh, 2011; Short et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2020). In relation to this, literature on motherhood and employment in China generally finds that mothers continue to attach high importance to their work even after childbirth (Chen, 2018; Jin, 2013; Short et al., 2002)

Existing research on childrearing in China largely ignores grandparents despite their extensive involvement. Therefore, little is known about how grandparents are reacting to the latest transformation in childcare practices and ideals. Given grandparents and parents in my study grew up in very different historical periods, and that many of them are of different socioeconomic status, it is likely that conflicts in values and methods of childrearing may arise between the two generations when they are providing childcare alongside each other. Scholars report that many contemporary Chinese parents adopt a narrative of “a generation gap” when

describing their upbringing, that their childhood environment is very different from that of their children, which prompts them to deliberately change their parenting practices (Tian and Jing, 2021). A small number of studies on grandparental care in China have observed that the older generation's "hands-on experience" or "traditional wisdom" is considered by the younger generation to be "outdated", "scientifically incorrect" (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Breengaard, 2016; Xiao, 2016). As such, it is important to understand how middle-class parents cope with the potential intergenerational conflicts, when they are delegating a large proportion of childcare to grandparents who may not share their endorsement of the ideologies of intensive and scientific childrearing. As suggested above, a seemingly trivial fight over the infant's diet is not simply about diet; it can reflect class-based moral judgements about parenting, as well as a competition for power and authority within the traditionally hierarchical context of Chinese families.

2.3 Existing literature on grandparental childcare

2.3.1 Grandparental care in Western and Asian contexts

Despite being a universal phenomenon, grandparenting has not attracted much scholarly attention until recently. In classical sociological theories of the family, the older generation tends to be placed on the periphery of family life (Goode, 1963). Since the 1980s, however, in response to the demographic and social transformation in Western societies, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of intergenerational relationships beyond nuclear families (Arber and Attias-Donfut, 2000; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991). Accordingly, research focusing on grandparents has expanded dramatically, which highlights the valuable roles they play in ensuring the stability and wellbeing of their families (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Bengtson and Lowenstein, 2003; Szinovácz, 1998).

A large body of literature examines the different roles and functions of grandparents in their families, which give rise to various typologies of grandparenthood. For example, Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) distinguish between grandparenting styles including "formal", "fun-seekers", "distant", "surrogate parents" and "reservoirs of family wisdom". More recently, among the multiple functions assumed by grandparents, their role as caregivers has attracted increasing

attention. A prominent strand of studies in this area focuses on the rise of custodial grandparents in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, who came to “rescue” their grandchildren because the middle-generation could not perform their parental duties due to drug use, HIV/AIDS, incarceration, and divorce (thereby these grandparents are dubbed as “child savers”) (Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005). In more common cases, rather than assuming full-time care, grandparents provide regular or occasional care for their non-coresident grandchildren so that their mothers can be employed away from home, as exemplified by the many studies based in European countries (Hank and Buber, 2009; Wheelock and Jones, 2002).

A recurring theme in the grandparenthood literature is heterogeneity, as the role of grandparents “varies across personal and historical time, as well as across cultural and regional contexts” (Bengtson and Lowenstein, 2003: 75). Cross-national research is particularly useful in identifying the variations in terms of the prevalence and intensity of grandparental care across countries, which is often attributed to differences in cultural and socioeconomic factors such as family norms, demographic structure, and welfare policies (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2018; Hank and Buber, 2009). For example, drawing on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and Norwegian data, Herlofson and Hagestad (2012) observe a North-South gradient regarding the intensity of grandparental childcare in Europe, which exists in parallel to national variations in the availability of formal childcare. In Nordic countries where formal childcare is widely available, the demand for grandparental care is seldomly very intensive and mainly takes place in times of crisis. Grandparents in these countries play the role of “family savers” by *complementing* formal childcare services provided by the states. By contrast, grandparents in the Mediterranean countries tend to be heavily involved, as they have to *substitute* for the inadequate childcare support by the state and hence are described as “mother savers”.

In addition to macro-level factors such as welfare state structures and cultural traditions that vary across countries, within the same nation, differences in grandparental roles can be further attributed to micro-level factors including gender, age, socioeconomic status, and health of the grandparents and their offspring. For example, researchers find that in countries without sufficient formal childcare services by the state, the reliance on grandparental care is further differentiated by parents’

financial circumstances, as those who are economically privileged are better able to afford marketized care (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Hansen, 2005; Vincent et al., 2008). Acknowledging these micro-level differences, Arber and Timonen (2012) remind researchers to pay attention to the different “weight” of structure and agency in shaping grandparents’ role, as some may be located in a more privileged position to exercise a lot of choices over the form and intensity of their caregiving, while others are more subject to structural constraints. More research is needed to understand how factors such as gender and socioeconomic differences could influence grandparents’ ability to exercise agency in their care provision and in constructing their identities.

Taken together, Western literature on grandparenting informs my current study in two major ways. Firstly, in order to fully understand grandparenting, it is critical to adopt a relational perspective by embedding grandparenting within an interlinked network of family relationships including their adult children and grandchildren (Hagestad, 2006). Therefore, my research includes interviews with parents and grandparents from the same family to gain a more comprehensive and dynamic picture of their childcare arrangements.

Secondly, given the heterogeneity among grandparents and the indeterminate nature of grandparenting norms (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Goodfellow and Lavery, 2003), Silverstein et al. (2012) argue that the enactment of grandparental role needs to be understood as a social construction that varies across time and contexts. This points to the importance of focusing on the everyday lived experiences of grandparents and their offspring “on the ground”, in order to uncover the interactive and dynamic *processes* where grandparental (and parental) roles are constantly negotiated and constructed. Moreover, it highlights the need to understand grandparental care within the specific societal and cultural contexts of a certain nation. Nevertheless, acknowledging the structuring impacts of contextual factors does not mean families are rigidly following a set of prescribed norms. Rather, grandparents and other family members should be understood as active agents in their daily construction of family roles and relationships (Chambers et al., 2009; Timonen and Doyle, 2012).

Compared with grandparents in the West, Asian grandparents are embedded in a very different economic, cultural and societal context. Despite their internal diversity, some commonalities are observed among Asian grandparents (Kamo, 1998;

Mehta and Thang, 2011). For example, grandparents in Asian societies continue to be subject to the cultural and social expectations to provide care for their grandchildren, and play an important role in “ensuring family stability and cultural continuity” (Mehta and Thang, 2011: 5). Following the Confucian teachings and the ethics of filial piety, they are entitled to high respect and authority within their family. Unlike Western grandparents who are expected to refrain from interfering childcare decisions made by their adult children (Breheny et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2007), extensive involvement in the upbringing of their grandchildren is culturally permitted or even expected for Asian grandparents (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Kamo, 1998; Xu, 2018: 107). Different from the “matrilineal bias” in Western societies, in countries such as China and South Korea, the role of paternal grandparents is traditionally more pronounced (Kamo, 1998; Lee and Bauer, 2013).

At the same time, scholars also stress that more attention should be given to how expectations, subjective understandings, and practices related to grandparenthood in Asian societies are being redefined in light of the recent social changes. For example, one thread of literature points to the rise of ambivalence in grandparenting experiences. Especially in some of the more industrialised countries such as Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, a new generation of grandparents who are in good health, some still working, and have access to a stable source of income no longer live up to the traditional expectation of caregiving (Lee and Bauer, 2013; Thang et al., 2011). Rather, they embrace a discourse of “active ageing” and place their personal development ahead of their caregiving responsibilities (Quah, 2008; Thang, 2005). Such trends indicate that even in Asia, taking up extensive care for grandchildren may no longer be an automatic decision for some grandparents, and that their grandparenting experience may be characterised by a coexistence of intergenerational solidarity and ambivalence.

2.3.2 Grandparental care in China

Despite the prevalence of grandparental care in China, relevant research has been relatively sparse and fragmented. The study by Chen et al. (2011) is one of the few that provides a systematic examination of the prevalence, intensity and determinants of grandparental care using a longitudinal dataset (China Health and Nutrition Survey). They find that a high level of coresidence (45% of the

grandparents) between grandchildren aged 0-6 and their grandparents, and that both coresident and non-coresident grandparents are extensively involved in caregiving. They further demonstrate that grandparents' childcare provision is in response to familial needs, as reflected by the household structure and characteristics of household members including children's age, grandparents' age and employment status, and mothers' employment status (Chen et al., 2011). Quantitative analysis of large datasets like this one is useful in uncovering the overall patterns and determinants of grandparental care. However, little is known about the process of how grandparental care is initiated and carried out in individual families, and how it is understood by grandparents themselves and their adult children, which calls for more qualitative studies that provide a thick description of the micropolitics inside family life (Macdonald, 2011: 4; Silverstein and Giarrusso, 2010).

As a significant characteristic of Chinese society, the vast differences between urban and rural regions are well acknowledged in the literature on grandparental care. It has been pointed out that the motivation, pattern and intensity of caregiving, and the lived experience of urban and rural grandparents differ remarkably (Chen et al., 2011; Chen and Liu, 2012; Xu, 2018). Xu (2018) summarises several ways of how grandparenting experiences may be shaped by rural-urban differences. First, family-related norms and values appear to be less traditional in urban than rural areas, as a result of the recent economic development, urbanisation, and state policies (Hu and Scott, 2016; Raymo et al., 2015; Santos and Harrell, 2016; Yu and Xie, 2015). Second, urban grandparents are more likely to have access to retirement income and high-quality healthcare compared with their rural counterparts, thereby reducing their dependence on their adult children for elderly support (Chen and Liu, 2012; Cong and Silverstein, 2008b, 2011). Third, as the one-child policy was carried out more stringently in cities, rural grandparents often need to juggle multiple grandchildren from different adult children (with priority typically oriented towards their sons), while urban grandparents may need to compete for the opportunity to care for their single grandchild (Cong and Silverstein, 2012; Santos, 2017). Taken together, Xu (2018) concludes that compared with their urban counterparts, rural grandparents may be more inclined and accustomed to fulfil the traditional obligation of providing intensive childcare, and are more ready to manage the accompanying physical and psychological pressures. Moreover, rural grandparents may feel compelled to provide

childcare support by a sense of economic necessity, rather than seeing it as an altruistic and emotionally rewarding activity (Chen and Liu, 2012; Xu, 2018).

This geographical distinction is useful in highlighting the unique characteristics of grandparenting experiences in rural and urban regions. However, it might also represent an oversimplified dichotomy that neglects the prevalence of domestic migration and intergenerational upward mobility in contemporary China. Although my current study is based in urban China, nearly half of the grandparents in my sample are originally from rural areas and only come to live in the city of Guangzhou recently to look after their grandchildren (see Chapter 4). This means studies of grandparenting based in both rural and urban China could be in some ways relevant to my current research, as discussed below.

Most research based in rural areas focuses on grandparents in skipped-generation households who provide custodial care for their “left-behind” grandchildren. Dubbed as “family-maximisers”, these grandparents’ caregiving activities are often regarded as part of an “intergenerational contract” in exchange for financial and hands-on support from their out-migrant children in the short and long run (Croll, 2006). Most literature adopts a quantitative design to examine the content, amount, and frequency of intergenerational transfer and how variations in these aspects may be explained by factors such as gender, lineage, and the migration status of the adult children (Baker and Silverstein, 2012; Cong and Silverstein, 2008a, 2011, 2012; Xu and Chi, 2018). A limited number of qualitative studies also examine the power struggles and negotiations embedded in the grandparents’ caregiving and shed light on the broader transformations in gender and intergenerational dynamics in rural Chinese families (Santos, 2017; Zhang, 2009). Still, little is known about rural grandparents who later migrate to the cities to join their adult children and grandchildren.

Research on urban grandparents mainly focuses on those who look after their grandchildren so that their mothers can go to work. One strand of literature investigates the impacts of grandparents’ caregiving on issues such as the middle generation’s fertility intention and decisions (Ji et al., 2015, 2020; Wang and Yang, 2017; Zhao and Zhang, 2019), employment patterns (Lu et al., 2017; Short et al., 2002), work-life conflict (Chen et al., 2000; Mustillo et al., 2021), as well as

grandparents' physical and mental wellbeing (Chen and Liu, 2012; Cheng et al., 2017; He and Wang, 2015; Wang and Mutchler, 2020; Xu, 2018). Another line of inquiry directly examines aspects of the care provision itself, which relates more closely to my current study and therefore I now review in greater detail.

Drawing on interviews with parents from 77 families in the city of Nanjing, Zhang et al. (2019) investigate parents' *motivations* for choosing between paternal and maternal grandparents for childcare provision. Their study reveals a departure from the traditional lineage-based consideration that favours paternal grandparents, as parents are now choosing grandparents following a skill-based and child-centred logic, taking into account grandparents' availability, caregiving qualifications, as well as the nature and quality of the intergenerational relationship.

Other studies examine the *process* of grandparents' care provision, which typically features conflicts over childcare values and methods between grandparents and parents. For example, drawing on an ethnographic study of five families with school-age children in the city of Xiamen, Goh (2011: 124) observes two common sources of conflicts between parents and grandparents: differences in childrearing methods and philosophies, and difficulties in coordinating disciplinary measures among multiple caregivers. Binah-Pollak (2014) conducts a 13-month fieldwork among middle-class families in Beijing, where grandparents are heavily involved in childcare provision. Her findings point to a gap between the new childrearing discourses advocated by professionals, which stress children's individualism and freedom, and the practices adopted by grandparents, which tend to reinforce their grandchildren's obedience and dependence. While Binah-Pollak's (2014) generalised problematisation of Chinese grandparents' care practices remains debatable, it is likely that there is indeed a divergence between the childcare ideals and practices adopted by many of the parents and grandparents.

Furthermore, some scholars take a further step to investigate the implications of such conflicts for intergenerational power dynamics. Xiao (2016) conducted interviews and observations with parents and grandparents from 13 families in Beijing, from which she observed the formation of a new set of fluid and uninstitutionalised power relations across generations. Young mothers equipped with scientific parenting methods tend to dominate decisions related to their children, while

grandparents who are heavily involved in care provision are marginalised in decision-making. Xiao (2016) argues that, grandparents' purposive concessions to the younger generation should be seen as a strategic effort to maintain mutual cooperation and emotional intimacy within the family. In a similar vein, in a study of 23 middle-class mothers in Beijing, Brengaard (2016) observes that mothers' utilisation of modern, scientific childcare knowledge often leads to intergenerational conflicts. Brengaard (2016) argues that, from a Foucauldian perspective of knowledge/power, the young mothers are empowered by such knowledge in their negotiation with the older generation. At the same time, the mothers are still subject to the ethics of filial piety, which grants power and authority to the grandparents, making them hard to be rejected or dismissed by the younger generation. Therefore, questioning previous studies that portray the older generation as subjugated and voiceless (Shen, 2013), Brengaard (2016) highlights the ambiguities in the contemporary Chinese intergenerational power dynamics, which is simultaneously subject to the influences of traditional (i.e. filial piety) and modern (i.e. scientific knowledge) powers.

The above-mentioned study by Xiao (2016) also represents a rare case that examines the division of childcare labour in a multigenerational context. She finds that mothers typically act as the manager, responsible for major childcare decisions and tasks related to sociocultural reproduction such as reading books and monitoring education; grandparents are helpers who specialise in daily physical care and have little authority in childrearing affairs; fathers' responsibility is largely limited to financial provision, which is used to justify their absence from the daily care of their children (Xiao, 2016).

Although childcare provision has to a large extent been seen as an obligation for Chinese grandparents, scholars have noticed a rise of reluctant and ambivalent feelings among grandparents regarding their intensive responsibilities of caregiving. There has been some evidence that physical and mental stress, lack of gratitude from their adult children, loss of free time, isolation from previous social network are related to the negative caregiving experience of grandparents, which may discourage them from caring for their grandchildren in the future (Goh, 2009, 2011; Zhong and Peng, 2020).

While these studies provide valuable insights into grandparenting in contemporary China, they do have several weaknesses. First, given the prevalence and long history of grandparental care in China, most studies seem to assume that it occurs naturally and therefore pay little attention to how it is actually initiated in the first place. However, it would be problematic to think all grandparents in urban China are willing and readily available to provide extensive childcare, or that their support is straightforwardly accepted by parents. Instead, it is necessary to examine the process where the intergenerational childcare arrangement is set up within the family, as well as the motivations and considerations of both the parents and grandparents. This allows us to gain a more nuanced understanding of how both generations differently exercise their agency during their negotiations for the arrangements of childcare, while acknowledging the structuring role of traditional cultural norms.

Second, most existing studies do not give sufficient consideration to the diversity among the grandparents, with one example being the distinctions between those from rural and urban regions. Grandparents are often portrayed as a homogeneous group, holding similar childcare values and methods that are disapproved by the younger generation (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Goh, 2011), which further contributes to their seemingly universal subordination in decision-making related to childcare (Xiao, 2016). This largely unified image of grandparents may risk over-simplification. In order to capture the systematic variances in the arrangements of intergenerational childcare across urban Chinese families, it is necessary to take into account the complex intersection of factors including but not limited to gender, generation, rural/urban origin, health, education, social-economic status, maternal/paternal lineage of both generations.

Third, as suggested by Nyland et al. (2009), childcare aimed at very young children often carries the dual purposes of care and education. However, existing research on grandparenting in China either mixes these two aspects together, or downplays the educational dimension. This prevents researchers from making a comprehensive examination of the intergenerational division of childcare labour, as the distinctive natures and requirements of different care tasks are not fully recognised. Still, a few studies based in Singapore and China are starting to notice some parents' concern and dissatisfaction over grandparents' ability to fulfil the intellectual and developmental needs of their children (Sun, 2012; Zhang et al., 2019).

With the acceleration of the ideologies of intensive and competitive parenthood in urban China, the stimulation of intellectual development is increasingly regarded as an important component of childcare. The insufficient attention to the dual purposes of childcare might be related to a lack of focus regarding the age of the children. In the above-mentioned studies, they range from those as young as 3-month-old to those in primary school, and accordingly, the care responsibilities of the grandparents vary considerably and cannot be compared directly. My current study focuses on families with children under three, who are in need of both care and education provided by their families, given the lack of formal care services. This allows me to fill in the gaps in the literature by examining who takes up which aspects of childcare in an intergenerational childcare arrangement, what does such a division of labour mean to each generation, as well as the power dynamics between them.

In terms of the methodology, many of the qualitative studies mentioned above draw on relatively small samples, often under 15 families, which may also contribute to the homogeneity of grandparents (Goh, 2009; Xiao, 2016; Zhong and Peng, 2020). Furthermore, some studies focus solely on the perspective of the parent generation, while grandparents' voices are largely missing (Breengaard, 2016; C Zhang, 2016). Acknowledging the importance of viewing the multiple generations within the same family as interlinked, my study adopts an intergenerational perspective to examine the childcare practices and attitudes of parents and grandparents, which are embedded in the context of their entire family unit.

The current chapter provides a review of the key findings and limitations of the existing empirical literature on intergenerational relationships, childrearing ideals and practices, and grandparental care that informs my study. The next chapter moves on to introduce the theoretical perspectives that I draw on to make sense of the intergenerational arrangements of childcare in urban China.

Chapter 3 Theoretical perspectives concerning the intergenerational childcare arrangements

Having discussed the relevant empirical research in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines three major theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin my study: the perspective of intersectionality, theories regarding intergenerational relationships, and a class-based understanding of childrearing, which will be used to make sense of the various aspects of the intergenerational childcare in urban Chinese families.

3.1 Intergenerational childcare arrangements from a perspective of intersectionality

Given the grandparenting experience is generally characterised by heterogeneity (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Bengtson and Lowenstein, 2003; Goodfellow and Lavery, 2003), a key premise of my thesis is that practices and understandings related to the arrangements of intergenerational childcare should be understood as social constructions that vary across time and context. They are also under constant negotiations, construction, and transformation initiated by members of the multigenerational families in structurally and culturally constituted ways. Therefore, the intersectionality approach is useful in elucidating how the enactment of the intergenerational childcare is shaped by the intersection of certain categories such as gender, generation, and socioeconomic status, which collectively give rise to a complex and fluid landscape of privileges and oppression within families. In this section, I first review the emergence of intersectionality as an analytical approach and how it has been applied in the feminist discussion of care work and reproductive labour. I then discuss how it can be applied to the Chinese context to enhance our understanding of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban China.

3.1.1 The intersectionality approach

Despite criticisms about its vague conceptualisation, the intersectionality approach explicitly argues that the examination of inequalities should not be limited to isolated factors. Instead, gender, race, class, age, sexuality, disability, and other forms of subordination that exist across time and geography should be studied in relation to each other, not as an addition of separate factors, but as a multiplication (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Few-Demo and Allen, 2020). First coined by Crenshaw

(1991), the establishment of the intersectionality theory has its critical root in Black feminism in the USA, which argues that neither gender nor race alone is sufficient to explain the oppression and disadvantages experienced by “women of colour”, and questions the unjustified universalization of the experiences of white, middle-class women in feminist literature (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991).

The utility of the intersectionality approach has been well acknowledged in the literature. First, by taking into account the interlocking factors that jointly shape inequality and oppression, researchers are capable of identifying the internal diversity within social groups and thus bringing into the spotlight some of the multiply marginalised subgroups, so that they can have a voice (Choo and Ferree, 2010). This position is summarised by some scholars as the *locational* approach to intersectionality (Ferree, 2010), or the *inclusion-centred* intersectionality (Choo and Ferree, 2010) because of its emphasis on identity categories and social positions. For example, literature following this tradition argues that the oppression experienced by “women of colour” is qualitatively different from those of white women or black men, and therefore deserves separate attention (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245).

However, it has been criticised that the conceptualisation of intersectionality as “giving voice” may risk reducing inequality to diversity, without giving enough attention to the process of how powerful and normative groups are defined and come into being (Brekhus, 1998). Hancock (2007: 64) warns against a “content specialization” approach to intersectionality that focuses on marginalised groups, while neglecting the wider social systems that shape their experiences. Cautious about the recent neoliberalism culture in feminist studies, Bilge (2013) denounces what she considers to be a superficial and depoliticalized use of intersectionality. According to Bilge, such “ornamental intersectionality” is detrimental, because it is “part and parcel of the neutralization, even active disarticulation, of radical politics of social justice”, and that it “undermines intersectionality’s credibility and potentials for addressing interlocking power structures and developing an ethics of non-oppressive coalition-building and claims-making” (Bilge, 2013: 408). Taken together, while it is important for the intersectionality approach to identify and highlight the diversity within seemingly unified groups, a more critical agenda is needed, which leads to the next point.

Secondly, since it is not sufficient to merely conduct comparisons across multiple categories within a group, scholars have emphasised the necessity for intersectionality to have an explicit aim of social justice and to be sensitive to the issues of inequality, oppression, and power (Bilge, 2013; Collins and Bigle, 2016; Few-Demo and Allen, 2020). In particular, scholars call for a contextualised approach, attentive to the structural and systematic oppression experienced by individuals and groups that are socially located in distinctive ways (Few-Demo and Allen, 2020). In response to the overly static *locational* or *inclusion-centred* intersectionality mentioned above, scholars have alternatively proposed *relational* (Ferree, 2010; Glenn, 1999), *process-centred* (Choo and Ferree, 2010), or *intercategorical* intersectionality (McCall, 2005). This line of conceptualisation sees intersectionality as relations, and focuses on the process where different dimensions of subordination act together to construct intricate and dynamic patterns of inequality for everyone, rather than only for the most disadvantaged groups (Ferree, 2010). In this way, attention is extended from the most marginalised components found at a given, pre-existing intersection, to changing configurations of power and oppression across different situations, where various components within the group may rise above one another or become subjugated (McCall, 2005). Overall, by emphasising the “context and comparison at the intersections”, this relational/processual model of intersectionality has the potential to reveal the underlying structural processes that organise power (Choo and Ferree, 2010: 134).

Nevertheless, scholars are aware of the danger that by overly focusing on the abstract structures in intersectional configurations, the models of intersectionality mentioned above may underestimate the degree of agency individuals can exert, thereby reducing them to “passive bearers of the meanings of social categories” (Prins, 2006: 280). Therefore, in response, a group of scholars advocate a constructionist understanding of intersectionality, which acknowledges individuals’ ability to make personally meaningful choices in their own right (Ferree, 2010). Nonetheless, such choices are not entirely free but constructed through the wider social contexts that are time- and place-specific. For example, following the discursive turn in sociology, some theorists explore how individuals are not simply “subjected to” or “recruited to” social categories; instead, they have access to choices

about their “subject positions” during the contested process of “becoming a subject” (Adams and Padamsee, 2001; Choo and Ferree, 2010; Prins, 2006).

3.1.2 Intersectionality and feminist studies of care work and reproductive labour

Intersectionality has proved to be a fruitful approach in feminist studies of care work and reproductive labour (Duffy, 2005; Ferree, 2010), where it is used to illustrate the intricate mutual influences between gender, class, race/ethnicity, and citizenship underlying the provision of care across a variety of contexts (Baldassar, 2013; Lan, 2010).

Scholars argue that in Western industrialised societies, white middle-class women’s labour participation is largely made possible by transferring a significant proportion of domestic labour and childcare to other women who are typically poor, immigrants, and of colour (Colen, 2009; Glenn, 1985). Roberts (1997) further highlights a two-fold division – spiritual versus menial – within domestic labour. The spiritual dimension, which is considered key to the “proper functioning of the household and the moral upbringing of children”, is highly valued and reserved for white, middle-class mothers; while the menial, unpleasant aspect that is thought to require little moral or intellectual skills is delegated to women of colour (Roberts, 1997). Glenn (1992: 10) points to a similar dichotomy regarding waged reproductive work in the US, which according to her is embedded in “a differentiated hierarchy of race, color, and culture”. She finds that supervisory, administrative and lower professional positions were disproportionately taken by white women, while ethnic women were concentrated in lower-level, heavy and dirty “back-room” jobs such as maids, janitors, and kitchen workers (Glenn, 1992). The hierarchical differentiation between different types of care work is of particular relevance to my study of intergenerational childcare arrangements, where childcare labour may also be differently conceptualised and shouldered by stay-at-home grandparents and middle-class parents who work full-time.

More recently, scholars begin to introduce a global economic perspective to the intersectionality approach, as represented by studies of transnational domestic workers. For example, drawing on the experiences of migrant Filipina domestic

workers in Western countries, Parreñas (2016) identifies a three-tier “international transfer of caretaking” between women in receiving and sending countries of migration: (1) middle-class women in receiving countries who hire migrant Filipina workers, (2) migrant domestic workers, and (3) women in sending countries who are too poor to migrate, and are hired by the migrant workers to look after their left-behind families. Underlying this three-tier intergenerational transfer of care lies a hierarchy of womanhood based on race, class, and nationality (Parreñas, 2016). Similarly, other scholars use the concept of “global care chain” to understand the structured inequalities in transnational care transfer that are based on gender, class, race and ethnicity (Hochschild, 2015; Parreñas, 2000; Romero et al., 2016; Yeates, 2012).

3.1.3 Applying intersectionality to the Chinese context

Although the theory of intersectionality originates from Black feminism in the USA, there is evidence of its applicability to the Chinese context. In fact, in face of the recent exacerbation of gender inequality, urban/rural disparity and social stratification, local scholars have actively called for the adoption of an intersectional approach to understand the emergence and reinforcement of new and existing inequalities in contemporary China (Ji and Wu, 2018; Su, 2016; Wu, 2018, 2019; Xiao and Jian, 2020).

A few empirical studies have explicitly or implicitly used the language of intersectionality in their inquiries (Hanser, 2008; He et al., 2021; Lui, 2017; Su et al., 2018; Tan and Short, 2004). For example, Lui (2017) draws on the intersectional approach to examine the enactment of power and inequalities for rural wives in inter-*hukou* families, and argues that the patriarchal and *hukou* system jointly construct and shape one another, giving rise to overlapping disadvantages experienced by these rural women vis-a-vis their urban husbands. In Hanser’s (2008) study of salesclerks in China, without directly using the term “intersectionality”, she examines how interlocking social divisions along the lines of class, gender, and age contribute to the formation and legitimisation of new inequalities in the setting of service work. Such overlapping inequalities, according to Hanser (2008), give rise to gendered symbolic distinctions that exclude middle-aged and rural women from the most well-paid, high-end jobs in the service sector.

Overall, the above studies have confirmed the potential of intersectionality as an approach to highlight inequalities at the intersection of an array of divisions in contemporary China. The categories of differences commonly featuring in this body of literature include gender, generation, socioeconomic status, and *hukou* status, which are of relevance to my investigation of intergenerational childcare. It should be noted that the definitions of these concepts are not static and under ongoing debate in scholarly works. Nevertheless, it is useful to take note of some working definitions in order to set up the direction and scope of my current study. In fact, this is consistent with the intercategorical approach to intersectionality recommended by McCall (2005), which starts with a provisional use of existing analytical categories (the “anchor points”), while the main concern lies in the everchanging relationships of inequalities among the social groups being studied. I now move on to review the differential categories of gender, generation and socioeconomic status in the context of contemporary China.

First, gender is a key dimension to the discussion of intergenerational childcare, as the labour of care and housework has long been strongly connected to women. This is further related to the social devaluation of such work, and the structural oppression experienced by women in both the private and public sphere (Coltrane, 2000; Few-Demo and Allen, 2020; Folbre, 2001; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). My study follows Ferree’s (2010: 421) framework of an institutional and intersectional analysis of gender and families, which considers gender, as opposed to the biologically assigned identity of sex, as one of the systems of inequality that interacts with other inequalities such as class, age, disability and sexuality (see also Few-Demo and Allen, 2020). Differences between women and men are not only socially constructed, but can also connote power inequalities that are embedded in larger structures. From here, the family is seen as an interactive institution where gender-based relations of inequality are contested and transformed in connection to other gendered institutions such as markets and states (Ferree, 2010). Risman (2004) further points to the multiple layers within the concept of gender, which include an *individual* level of gendered selves; an *interactional* level where gendered cultural expectations operate; and an *institutional* level of gender-specific regulations regarding opportunities and constraints.

Of the many mechanisms about how gender shapes the differences and inequalities between women and men, the influences of gender ideology have attracted considerable scholarly attention. It is argued that people's behaviours are influenced by dominant cultural norms which define what is appropriate for their role as women and men in a specific time and context, although the individual agency is not out of the picture. This links to Hochschild's (2012b: 15) concept of "gender strategies", which refers to "a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand" with regard to cultural notions of gender at play, as well as one's past experience and the resources at their disposal. As discussed in Chapter 1, in traditional Chinese families, a woman is expected to be subordinate to her husband, who is at the centre of their household and undertake the productive activities, while she is confined to the reproductive activities such as housework and childcare (Hu and Scott, 2016). Even today, when female labour participation is normalised in China, the belief of "men rule outside, women rule inside" (*nanzhuwai, nvzhunei*) is still widely embraced (Ji et al., 2017; Luo and Chui, 2018). It remains to be explored how gender ideologies as such are translated into the division of childcare labour in contemporary urban Chinese families.

Nevertheless, feminist researchers have long been aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytical category of inequalities (McCall, 2005). It is widely acknowledged that the Chinese family has been and continues to be located in a highly patriarchal system (Greenhalgh, 1985), which is characterised by two axes of inequalities – gender and generation – that closely interact with each other (Santos and Harrell, 2016). The concept of generation, as an additional category of differences, carries multiple connotations in the sociological literature (Arber and Attias-Donfut, 2000). For example, it can refer to "family generations" related to the kinship relationships between grandparents, parents and the child(ren), which in the Chinese context is significantly differentiated by the patrilineal and matrilineal lines. The second definition is related to the concept of "historical/social generation", also known as "social cohort", which is derived from Mannheim's (1952) sociology of generations. It refers to groups of people born roughly at the same time and have shared historical experiences in their formative years, which influences their attitudes and behaviours, and sets them apart from previous generations (Arber and Attias-Donfut, 2000; Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994).

The dual conceptualisations of generation point to the ambivalent status of the older generation in the Chinese context. On the one hand, as the seniors in their families, according to the ideology of filial piety, the older generation is entitled to authority and respect from their offspring, with those from the patrilineal line further privileged. On the other hand, their knowledge, values and practices may be demarcated as outdated by the younger generation (Leung and Fung, 2014), which some scholars describe as a “generativity mismatch” (McAdams et al., 1998). This is particularly relevant to the contemporary situation in China, where there has been an unprecedented education expansion and rapid social and technological changes in the past few decades (see Chapter 1). As a result, it has been argued that Chinese society has transformed into a “prefigurative culture” (Mead, 1970), where young members of the society know more about the world they are living in than the elderly (Wu, 2006).

Thirdly, in Western literature with an intersectional perspective, another frequently examined dimension of differences is social class (Choo and Ferree, 2010). However, as the concept of class is notoriously difficult to define in the Chinese context, studies in China tend to alternatively draw on the concept of socioeconomic status (see Hanser (2008) for an exception), which is generally based on indicators such as occupation and educational attainment (Guo, 2018). An additional indicator of socioeconomic status, as suggested by multiple intersectional studies in China, is the household registration (*hukou*) status (Lui, 2017; Tan and Short, 2004). As the urban sector is prioritised by national policies and therefore much more developed, the *hukou* system has become the basis of a series of social inequalities (see Chapter 1).

Informed by studies drawing on an intersectionality approach within and beyond China, my study seeks to examine the arrangements of intergenerational childcare in urban China at the crossroad of gender, generation, and socioeconomic status, in order to reveal the patterned variations in the way childcare is carried out across different families.

3.2 Theoretical perspectives on intergenerational relationships

This section provides a review of the major theoretical perspectives I use to conceptualise the complexities and new characteristics of the intergenerational

relationships between parents and their adult children in contemporary China, which include the paradigms of intergenerational solidarity-conflict and ambivalence, as well as the concept of intergenerational intimacy.

3.2.1 The intergenerational solidarity-conflict paradigm

In the past few decades, considerable effort has been made to conceptualise and measure the complexity of intergenerational relationships in later life (Katz and Lowenstein, 2010). One of the most prominent models is the intergenerational solidarity paradigm raised by Bengtson and his colleagues (Bengtson et al., 1976; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997). They defined intergenerational solidarity as a multidimensional concept with six elements (Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997): (1) associational solidarity (contact frequency); (2) functional solidarity (exchange of assistance and support); (3) structural solidarity (opportunities for intergenerational exchange); (4) affectual solidarity (positive feelings for each other); (5) consensual solidarity (agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles); and (6) normative solidarity (commitments and obligations towards family members). In later analysis, these six dimensions are further grouped into clusters based on statistical analysis. For example, scholars identified two broad dimensions of solidarity: (1) structural-behavioural: associational, functional and structural solidarity; and (2) cognitive-affective: affectual, consensus and normative solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997). The former cluster represents a more latent form of solidarity while the latter a more manifest form (Silverstein et al., 1998).

The early solidarity paradigm has been criticised for its normative and idealised view of the family, that it focuses only on the positive aspects of intergenerational relations and thereby neglects conflicts in family life (Katz and Lowenstein, 2010). In response, Bengtson et al. (2002: 571) later transform the solidarity paradigm into the solidarity-conflict paradigm, which expands the original six dimensions into six pairs of dialectics: (1) intimacy and distance (affectual); (2) agreement and dissent (consensual); (3) dependency and autonomy (functional); (4) integration and isolation (associational); (5) opportunities and barriers for interaction (structural); and (6) familism and individualism (normative). Within this modified model, solidarity and conflict do not represent the two ends of a single continuum.

Instead, each dimension has its positive and negative poles, depending on both the individuals involved in the relationship and the concrete family dynamics and circumstances (Bengtson et al., 2002; Chambers et al., 2009; Lowenstein, 2007). Moreover, Bengtson and his colleagues also take into account the potential negative effects of solidarity at an excessive level, which can include distress for the receivers of unnecessary support, and heavy demands for time and resources of the providers (Bengtson et al., 2002; Silverstein et al., 1996).

Although the framework of intergenerational solidarity and its later modification was originally developed in the American context, it has proved to be a highly adaptive model and has been applied to various national contexts (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Katz and Lowenstein, 2010) including China (Chen et al., 2011; Gruijters, 2016; Guo et al., 2012). The usefulness of the intergenerational solidarity paradigm in understanding intergenerational relationships is reflected not least by the following two points.

Firstly, the intergenerational solidarity paradigm emphasises that intergenerational relationships are multidimensional, with no single indicator capable of fully measuring the strength of intergenerational ties. Therefore, it underlines the need for a holistic approach. Scholars have pointed out that existing studies of intergenerational relationships in China tend to concentrate on the manifest dimensions of solidarity (associational, functional and structural), which is at the expense of the more latent dimensions, especially the emotional aspects of intergenerational relationships (W Liu, 2017). For example, focusing on the practical support provided by grandparents, some studies of grandparental care conclude that functional and structural solidarity is strong in contemporary China (e.g. Chen et al., 2011). However, such a conclusion may risk being one-sided unless the “sentiments, behaviours, attitudes, values and structural arrangements” that co-construct the provision of intergenerational childcare are all taken into account (Silverstein and Giarrusso, 2010: 1040).

Secondly, as emphasised by Bengtson et al. (2002), the multiple dimensions of the solidarity paradigm are synergistically interrelated and can be organised into a myriad of combinations. Drawing on these combinations, scholars can generate typologies of intergenerational relationships through classification analysis, which are

useful for capturing the diversity and complexity of family life. For example, using a nationally representative sample from the US, Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) identified five types of intergenerational relationships that include (1) tight-knit (strong on all dimensions); (2) sociable (strong on all dimensions except functional); (3) intimate but distant (strong on only consensual and affectual dimensions); (4) obligatory (strong on structural, associational and functional dimensions; weak on consensual and affectual dimensions); and (5) detached (weak on all dimensions).

Table 2 Typology of intergenerational relations in rural Chinese families by Guo et al. (2012)

Type	Description	Percentage
Tight-knit	The most cohesive parent-child ties. Endorsed all domains of intergenerational solidarity, with weak conflict	22.5%
Near but discordant ties	High geographic proximity, frequent contact, low monetary exchange and moderate instrumental support exchange, high conflict and low emotional closeness	16.9%
Distant discordant ties	The least cohesive parent-child ties. Strong conflict and weak cohesion, great geographic distance, the least frequent contact, and the least tangible support exchanges	14.9%
Distant reciprocal ties	Great geographic distance and little contact between generations, the highest monetary exchange, high downward instrumental support, and high ambivalence	12.1%
Distant ascending ties	Great geographic distance and little contact between generations, high upward monetary support, strong cohesion and weak conflict	33.6%

Similarly, drawing on a sample of rural elderly from an underdeveloped Chinese province, Guo et al. (2012) used latent class analysis to uncover five types of intergenerational relations in rural China (see **Table 2**): (1) tight-knit, (2) near but discordant, (3) distant discordant, (4) distant reciprocal, and (5) distant ascending. Although the exact classification and the corresponding percentages of each relationship type may be specific to the rural population featuring in this particular study, it is highly likely that the contradictions and diversity in intergenerational relationships observed by Guo et al. (2012) will be mirrored by other areas in China. With that said, more qualitative studies are needed, given quantitative research such

as this one can only infer interactions between parents and their adult children based on survey data without directly examining the process where different types of family relations are negotiated and come into being.

3.2.2 The intergenerational ambivalence paradigm

As an alternative to the dichotomous solidarity-conflict paradigm, some scholars propose the concept of ambivalence to examine the coexistence of harmony and conflict in intergenerational relationships (Connidis, 2015; Luescher and Pillemer, 1998; Lüscher, 2004). The early conceptualisation by Luescher and Pillemer (1998) distinguishes between two dimensions of ambivalence: *psychological* ambivalence, which refers to the coexistence of positive and negative emotions or attitudes at the subjective level; and *sociological* ambivalence, which is generally understood as the result of “incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior” (Merton and Barber, 1963: 95).

However, this conceptualisation by Luescher and Pillemer has been criticised for reducing individuals to “psychological states and feelings”, and thus failing to acknowledge the power imbalance embedded in social interactions (Connidis and McMullin, 2002b: 561). Accordingly, drawing on critical theory, Connidis and McMullin (2002a, 2002b: 565) later propose an alternative conceptualisation of *sociological* ambivalence as “socially structured contradictions made manifest in interaction”. Individuals, who have varying access to opportunities, rights and privileges, may experience ambivalence when their attempts to exercise agency over their lives are constrained by broader economic, social and cultural structures. For example, Connidis and McMullin (2002b) argue that women are more likely than men to experience pressure and ambivalence that arise from the competing demands of work and caregiving, due to normative expectations on women to provide care and derive fulfilment from it. Such ambivalence could be further exacerbated or mitigated by the varying agency of individuals who are unevenly located in overlapping social structures. Women with ample economic resources can alleviate their ambivalence by hiring others to provide care (Glenn, 1992; Lan, 2006), while disadvantaged women are more likely to cut back their work hours or give up their jobs for the sake of caregiving. Nevertheless, some professional middle-class women may further suffer from a heightened ambivalence when they delegate childcare responsibilities to

someone else, because the ideal of intensive mothering would expect them to maintain an exclusive bond with their children (Macdonald, 2011). In this way, the reconceptualisation of ambivalence by Connidis and McMullin (2002b: 562) recognises individuals as social actors who are “grounded in structured sets of power relations” with unequal access to rights and privileges.

The concept of ambivalence has been extensively used in empirical studies in and beyond China, to reveal the contradictions and tensions embedded in intergenerational relationships in general (Girardin et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2013; W Liu, 2017; Willson et al., 2003). For instance, due to the conflicting norms of intergenerational solidarity and independence, those engaged in an intergenerational exchange may experience ambivalent feelings, with the typical example being adult children who fail to achieve socially expected status (e.g. unemployed or not married) and have to depend on their parents for support such as money and housing (Pillemer and Suitor, 2002).

More specifically, researchers from Western countries and East Asia have also applied the concept of ambivalence to research on grandparental care (Ko, 2012; May et al., 2012; Sun, 2012; Zartler et al., 2021). For example, studies have examined the coexistence of positive and negative feelings among caregiving grandparents (e.g. sense of fulfilment and distress) and parents (e.g. gratitude and concern for grandparents' competency) (Ko, 2012; Sun, 2012) in East Asia; conflicts between the norms for Western grandparents to “be there” and “not to interfere” (Breheny et al., 2013; May et al., 2012); as well as conflicts between the norm of filial piety and the reality of the intensive workload on grandparents in Hong Kong (Ko, 2012). In particular, researchers highlight that differences in opinions and practices regarding “appropriate” childcare could be a key source of intergenerational tensions and may generate ambivalence for both generations (Gilligan et al., 2015; Guo et al., 2013; Zartler et al., 2021). It is further acknowledged that the feeling of ambivalence is perceived as stressful, which can have negative consequences on the quality of their relationship, as well as the physical and psychological wellbeing of those in the intergenerational relationships (Ferring et al., 2009; Fingerman et al., 2008; Silverstein and Giarrusso, 2010).

3.2.3 Intimacy in intergenerational relationships

Although the affectual dimension in intergenerational relationships has been covered by the solidarity-conflict paradigm discussed earlier, this section refocuses on it specifically. This is because of a growing interest in the concept of intimacy as an analytical lens for Chinese intergenerational relationships. There has been an increasing awareness that existing studies of Chinese families are problematically preoccupied with obligations and norms, as well as structure and functions, while ignoring individual emotions and quality of relationships (Evans, 2010; J Liu, 2017; W Liu, 2017).

The emotional aspect of intergenerational relationships is important for several reasons. First, it has been argued that in addition to filial norms, emotions and affections may also be part of the motivations behind the contact and support exchange within families (Fingerman et al., 2008, 2013; Gruijters, 2016; J Liu, 2017). Second, for relationships that involve care exchange, emotions could be related to the quality of the relationship and care, as well as to the wellbeing of those in the relationship (Fingerman et al., 2013; Liu, 2016). Third, by highlighting the “subjective experience” (Jamieson, 2011) such as emotions, researchers are able to capture the agency and autonomy of individuals in their negotiations of family relationships, in addition to the normative forces of norms and obligations (Finch, 1989; J Liu, 2017; Yan, 2016). Thus in the rest of this section, I discuss the emergence of intergenerational intimacy as an analytical conceptualisation in studies of Chinese families and its definition.

In recent years, there has been an “intimate turn” in the studies of Chinese intergenerational relationships, as an attempt to overcome the domination of obligation in the existing literature (Yan, 2016). Scholars also observe a rise of intimate feelings in the domain of family life, which they attribute to the loosening of the hierarchical patriarchal structure and the redefinition of the filial piety norms, both contributing to the rise in status and bargaining power of the younger generation and a departure from obedience to consensus and empathy in parent-children relationships (Evans, 2010; Xiao, 2016; Yan, 2016). It is against this background that the concept of intergenerational intimacy arises, as a response to the advances in academic literature and the changing realities of family life (J Liu, 2017).

The concept of intimacy as an analytical category in psychology, sociology and anthropology originates from the West, which is associated with a shift in focus from family as a functional unit to relational connections and practices (Gabb, 2008). In the early days, discussion of intimacy is predominantly focused on heterosexual romantic and sexual relationships, and is later broadened to include same-sex relationships, parent-child relationships, carer-client relationships and friendships (Evans, 2010; Gabb, 2008). Despite its continuing evolution, intimacy is generally defined as the “*quality* [emphasis added] of close connection between people and the *process* [emphasis added] of building this quality” (Jamieson, 2011: 1.1). Building on David Morgan’s (1996, 2011) concept of “family practices”, Jamieson (2011: 1.2) further raises the term “practices of intimacy”, which refers to practices that “enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other”. This suggests intimacy is not necessarily an intrinsic element of family relationships, or any other forms of close interpersonal relationships. Instead, constant efforts are required for the maintenance of an intimate relationship, although such efforts may not always come to a successful end (Gabb, 2008; Jamieson, 1999).

The understanding of intimacy as an active *strategy* to maintain close ties over time can be further related to a broader definition of care. Some scholars differentiate between the concepts of “caring for” and “caring about”. The former refers to the provision of direct support, such as the care offered to infants, while the latter has more to do with emotional support (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Thomas, 1993). This allows researchers who study the intergenerational exchange of care to move beyond a unidirectional perspective, and reconceptualise the provision of care in extended families as a network involving multidirectional flows (Milligan and Wiles, 2010), or a “circulation of care” as termed by Baldassar (2013).¹⁷ The purpose here is to understand the intergenerational intimacy “in the making”, by identifying all the

¹⁷ Baldassar (2013: 22) coins this concept of “circulation of care” to describe the “reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life course within *transnational* [emphasis added] family networks”. Families in my study are not separated by geographic distance at the time of their intergenerational childcare arrangements, but the way various forms of care is exchanged in these families bears resemblance to multidirectional flows described by Baldassar (2013).

actors involved in family life, and the full extent of their care activities that include physical, emotional, moral, and symbolic support flowing from different directions.

Furthermore, scholars have noted that the rise of intimacy does not necessarily lead to more equal and democratic relationships in the family, where inequalities such as those of gender, generation and class continue to exist (Evans, 2010; Jamieson, 2011; Yan, 2016). For example, Jamieson (2011) argues that due to the gendered expectations of parenthood, mothers have to take on more of the direct practices of intimacy towards their children compared with their spouses.

In the Chinese context, scholars are drawing on the concept of intergenerational intimacy to study relationships between parents and their adult children in rural (J Liu, 2017; Yan, 2016) and urban families (Evans, 2010; Xiao, 2016; Zhong, 2014). Yan (2016: 250) concludes that intergenerational intimacy in China involves “mutual knowing, understanding, and emotional sharing across generational lines reflected through intensive communications, verbal expressions, and bodily displays of emotional attachment”. It has been observed that in the general daily interactions between the two generations, and in more specific negotiations over issues such as house purchasing (Zhong, 2014) or childcare provision (Xiao, 2016), the senior generation is actively offering various forms of support to their adult children and allowing the younger generation to assume more power and authority. This has been interpreted as a strategic practice by parents to cultivate and maintain intimate ties with their adult children, although it is sometimes at the expense of their privileged position as the senior generation in their families (Yan, 2016).

3.3 Childrearing from a class perspective

It is widely acknowledged that childrearing varies across social class strata. This section discusses why it is productive to examine intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban middle-class families from a class perspective, drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural and social reproduction, with recognition of its limitations in the Chinese context.

3.3.1 Class differences in parenting styles and social reproduction

An extensive body of research has examined the relationship between class status, parenting styles, and children's status attainments in the future. For example, research by Melvin Kohn (1963, 1969) suggests a relationship between parents' class position and their childrearing values, that middle-class parents are more likely to encourage their children to develop qualities such as autonomy and self-direction, while working-class parents tend to emphasise obedience to external authority. On the other hand, Bourdieu (1983, 1986) associates differences in parenting with concepts of capital and habitus, which are unevenly distributed within the society and are transmitted across generations. Bourdieu's theory will later be discussed in detail in Section 3.3.2. Expanding on these theoretical perspectives, Lareau's (2003) seminal ethnographic study of twelve American families differentiates between two "cultural logics of childrearing": "concerted cultivation" of the middle class, and "accomplishment of natural growth" of the working class and the poor. Although both strategies carry intrinsic benefits and burdens for the corresponding parents and children, they are differently evaluated by the (arbitrary) standards posed by important social institutions such as schools (Lareau, 2003). Therefore, the differences in parenting strategies may later translate into unequal advantages as the children age, often favouring those from a middle-class background.

Scholars particularly highlight the role of resources (or to use Bourdieu's term, "capital") in shaping parenting practices, which is closely related to parents' social class position (Bourdieu, 1986; Chin and Phillips, 2004; Lareau, 1989; Reay, 1998). For example, Hays (1996) observes that, although the ideology of intensive mothering is widely accepted as the proper approach to childrearing by mothers in contemporary America irrespective of their class background, it is the middle- and upper-middle-class mothers who are taking the lead in putting this financially expensive and labour-intensive ideology into action. In a similar vein, Lareau (1989) argues that most parents across the class spectrum value the educational success of their children, but how they engage with their children and interact with schools varies depending on their possession of (the correct) resources. Lareau (2003) concludes that the differences in childrearing between middle-class and working-class families may be partially explained by the intertwining disparities in parents' economic resources, occupational conditions, and educational backgrounds.

More recently, in addition to the influences of parental social class on child and adolescent achievements, scholars have been paying increasing attention to its impacts on adult children (Swartz, 2008, 2009). It is argued that early adulthood is a crucial phase when most young people are “completing their education, launching occupational paths, forming families, and purchasing their first homes” (Swartz, 2008: 13). Swartz argues that parents who provide more resources for their adult children, be it in the form of financial aid or practical support such as childcare, can contribute favourably to their children’s life chances in early adulthood and beyond. The continuation of parental support in adulthood thus serves as an additional mechanism through which social class is reproduced across generations.

Much of the Western research mentioned in this section draws on Bourdieu’s theory to explain class differences in parenting styles and educational choices, as well as the reproduction of social inequality. In recent years, studies based in mainland China (Sheng, 2014; Tian and Jing, 2021; Tian and Liang, 2019; Wu, 2013), Hong Kong (Lam, 2013), and Taiwan (Lan, 2014; Shih and Yi, 2014) have also utilised Bourdieu’s theory to understand class-based inequalities in the respective local field of education and childrearing. Therefore I now turn to discuss Bourdieu’s theory in greater detail.

3.3.2 Bourdieu’s cultural and social reproduction theory

This section gives a brief review of Bourdieu’s major concepts of capital, habitus and field, followed by how they can be adapted to make sense of intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban China.

3.3.2.1 *Capital and field*

Bourdieu (1986) proposes three types of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to economic resources such as income, property, wealth and other material possessions. Social capital refers to knowledge and membership of certain social networks that can be used to promote one’s interests. Cultural capital takes three forms: the embodied state, which is in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the objectified state, i.e., cultural goods such as pictures, books, dictionaries, etc.; and the institutionalised state, which is represented by educational qualifications.

From Bourdieu's perspective, parenting can be understood as a stratified "field" where families and the caregivers within are located hierarchically, according to the differing amount and composition of capital they possess. Those who are well-resourced can better support their children's future success by investing in their school education and extracurricular activities (economic capital), by instilling in their children an appreciation of higher education and an understanding of the implicit rules of the education system through direct socialisation (cultural capital), or by pulling the right strings to facilitate their children's school entrance (social capital). During this process, different forms of capital can be converted into one another, with new advantages and disadvantages constantly being generated (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital has been widely used in Western and Chinese contexts to understand how parents' social class can contribute to their children's achievements in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. However, both its original conceptualisation and later applications are largely confined to nuclear families consisting only of parents and their young children, thus failing to take into account the capital possession of other family members such as grandparents. More recently, scholars begin to acknowledge the insufficiency of this two-generation model in capturing the full effects of family background on children's educational outcomes, and call for a three-generation approach (Mare, 2011; Møllegaard and Jæger, 2015; Sheppard and Monden, 2018).

This recent line of literature has applied Bourdieu's framework to conceptualise grandparents' resources in a way similar to those of parents. Grandparents may invest their economic resources in their grandchildren by buying them gifts or covering costs such as education. Cultural capital also plays an important role. Grandparents can directly inculcate cultural capital in their grandchildren by reading to them, helping with their homework, organising cultural activities, and fostering their expectations about educational attainments (Møllegaard and Jæger, 2015; Sheppard and Monden, 2018). Another type of cultural capital at play is their childrearing know-how, which can take the form of expert-led childcare knowledge (Brengaard, 2016; Macdonald, 2011). Lastly, grandparents can also mobilise their social capital to support their grandchildren. Examples in the literature include grandparents knowing the right people in school admission boards, or those

running extracurricular classes that are of high academic potential (Møllegaard and Jæger, 2015).

By extending Bourdieu's concepts of capital to extended families, researchers have highlighted that in addition to parents, other family members such as grandparents may also affect children's educational outcomes. This is highly relevant to my research where grandparents are spending a considerable amount of time looking after their grandchildren on a daily basis. It calls for an investigation into how grandparents' varying possession of capital may shape their childcare provision, and the potential ramifications for their grandchildren's upbringing.

Furthermore, not all capital is equally recognised and rewarded within this stratified field of parenting, which is particularly evident in the case of cultural capital. This is demonstrated by Bourdieu's (1986) argument about the institutionalisation of class privilege in education, that only the cultural capital of the dominant group, who is in control of the economic, political and social resources in the society, is recognised by the major institutions such as schools. In practice, this group is often represented by (white) middle-class parents; while migrants and working-class parents and their children are disadvantaged in the education system, because their cultural capital is in the "wrong" currency (Lam, 2013; Lareau, 2003; Reay, 1998). This highlights the "fit" between the cultural capital and the field as an important mechanism in creating class advantages and disadvantages.

In relation to the process of social stratification, scholars have argued for the importance of including the moral and affective dimensions of class-making in the discussion (Lam, 2013; Lan, 2014; Sayer, 2002; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). In her study about young working-class women in the UK and their struggle for respectability, Skeggs (1997) finds that these women are under constant fear of "not getting it right" in multiple aspects of their lives, such as their body, clothes, home and caring practices. Therefore, Skeggs emphasises that categories of class not only "operate as an organizing principle which enable access to and limitations on social movement and interaction", they are also reproduced as a "structure of feeling" or "emotional politics of class", where "doubt, anxiety and fear inform the production" (Skeggs, 1997: 6). Sayer (2002) also recognises that class can be experienced as injuries, because it is related to an uneven distribution of valued practices and respect.

Similarly, studies in Taiwan and Hong Kong also observe that, working-class mothers' involvement in their children's education is often characterised by a sense of powerlessness, and feelings of shame and guilt about their inadequacy when compared to the more advantaged mothers, which may further hinder their mobilisation of cultural capital (Lam, 2013; Lan, 2014).

As will be detailed in Chapter 4, my study is comprised of middle-class parents, as well as grandparents from a variety of class backgrounds. When these two generations are jointly involved in childcare provision, the issue of compatibility between the field and the capital they respectively possess becomes particularly salient. Furthermore, if there is a significant gap regarding the class position between parents and grandparents from the same family, we need to pay attention to the possible symbolic competition over the "correct" capital within the family. Furthermore, following the "emotional politics of class" elucidated by Skeggs (1997), we also need to examine how intergenerational differences in class status may influence parents' and grandparents' affective experience during caregiving and the quality of their relationships.

3.3.2.2 *Habitus*

Another key concept in Bourdieu's framework is habitus. It refers to a system of embodied dispositions that individuals learn at home during childhood and later take for granted. For individuals at different social locations, their respective habitus generates practices that are in accordance with the structural distribution of capital in the social world (Bourdieu, 1993; Nash, 1993). In other words, habitus provides people with a sense of what is comfortable and natural for "people like us". For example, middle-class parents often demonstrate a sense of entitlement towards elite schools compared with their working-class counterparts. More generally, different habitus accords individuals with "varying cultural skills, social connections, educational practices, and other cultural resources", which are later translated into different forms of capital and privileges (Lareau, 2003: 276). According to Bourdieu, people's habitus stems from the class origin of their families and therefore is difficult to change. Although it is possible to adopt new habitus in later life, these late-obtained dispositions are not characterised by the comfort and naturalness associated with those learned in childhood.

The concept of habitus has been criticised for its over-determinism and for neglecting the agency of the working class (Jenkins, 2002). Empirical studies have challenged the sense of durability embedded in habitus, as scholars often observe ruptures in parenting beliefs and practices across generations from the same family (Lan, 2014; Lareau, 2003). For example, Lan (2014) criticises the structuralism that underlies Bourdieu's theory in her study of parenting practices and ideals in Taiwan, where rapid development has taken place in recent decades. Lan instead draws on Archer (2007), who argues that personal reflexivity is playing an unprecedentedly important role in determining how individuals navigate the world, as "discontinuities in structure, culture and life experience" intensify throughout modernity (2007: 47). Accordingly, Lan (2014) conceptualises the parenting experience of contemporary Taiwanese parents as a practice of reflexivity, which does not necessarily correspond to the stable endurance of habitus that stems from their class origin. Instead, many middle-class parents in her study explicitly criticised their own upbringing and changed their parenting practices.

Similarly, in a study of the influence of social mobility on parenting practice in urban China, Tian and Jing (2021) suggest that the direction of mobility may affect how parents evaluate the parenting practice associated with their class origin. The authors draw on the asymmetry hypothesis of class identification (Lipset and Bendix, 1992), which argues that people's class identification is usually asymmetrical, often inclined to higher class positions. Their findings confirm the hypothesis that upwardly mobile parents raise their children in a way similar to those who remain in the middle class, while downwardly mobile parents' parenting practice is somewhere between those of working-class parents and middle-class parents (Tian and Jing, 2021). A possible explanation is that parents who experienced downward mobility may prefer the parenting practice of their class origin, but their limited resources prevent them from actualising it.

The studies mentioned above are particularly relevant to my study, as dramatic socioeconomic development and widespread upward social mobility have recently taken place in urban China. It remains to be examined how parents in my study negotiate the potential divergence in childrearing between themselves and the older generation, as well as between their past upbringing and their current way of parenting.

3.4 Summary

Having reviewed the three major theoretical frameworks that guide my inquiry and analysis in this thesis, this final section summarises how these frameworks work together to provide a coherent theoretical basis for my study.

The first framework, i.e. the intersectionality perspective, serves as an overarching analytical framework that guides my entire study. Given its emphasis on the internal diversity within seemingly homogenous social groups, I adopt this framework to illustrate how intergenerational childcare arrangements could vary systematically across families. More specifically, inspired by existing studies, my study chooses to examine how the enactment of intergenerational childcare is shaped by the intersection of three main factors, i.e. gender, generation, and socioeconomic status, which forms the key thread of analysis underlying the whole thesis. From here, I seek to understand how these factors work in interweaving ways to create a variety of privileged and oppressed positions within and across families. While emphasising the overlapping inequalities created by these interrelated structural constraints, the intersectionality perspective does not ignore the agency held by individuals. At the same time, however, it recognises that the level of agency individuals can exert is also shaped by their respective social positions.

The second cluster of frameworks consists of several theoretical perspectives on the intergenerational relationship between parents and their adult children. Despite some overlaps across these perspectives, each one of them has its own focus. To begin with, the multidimensional solidarity-conflict paradigm argues for a comprehensive approach to the study of intergenerational relationships, which should consider not only the manifest dimensions (e.g. structural and functional solidarity), but also the latent dimensions (e.g. affectual and consensual solidarity) often ignored by extant studies of intergenerational support in China. The solidarity-conflict paradigm has inspired the design of my fieldwork and the overall organisation of my empirical chapters, which consist of the different aspects of the intergenerational childcare arrangements (the motivations of parents and grandparents, division of childcare labour, and decision-making related to childcare) in order to shed light on the multiple facets of intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, in combination with the intersectionality perspective (gender-generation-SES) discussed above, the solidarity-

conflict paradigm allows me to highlight the diversity and complexity of family life by sorting families into categories according to their childcare arrangements, and to explore the underlying associations between these categories and the characteristics of the constituent families. This gives rise to the typology of families presented in the final chapter (Chapter 8), based on a synthesis of my empirical chapters.

Furthermore, the intergenerational solidarity-conflict paradigm and the ambivalence paradigm both call attention to not only the harmonious but also the conflictual aspects (or as emphasised by the concept of ambivalence, the *coexistence* of the two) of intergenerational relationships. This reminds me to avoid the simplistic interpretation which equates the availability of grandparental care with intergenerational solidarity, and to move on to examine the underlying tensions across generations.

Besides, to address the imbalance in the existing literature of intergenerational relationships in China, which is problematically dominated by a framework of obligations without enough attention paying to feelings and agency, I specifically adopt the concept of intergenerational intimacy. As detailed in the empirical chapters, the framework of intimacy provides a useful explanation for some of the new characteristics of the intergenerational relationships in urban China, such as the rising status of the younger generation.

The last theoretical framework posits my study of intergenerational childcare under a class perspective. Given the highly classed nature of childrearing, I limit my sample to families with middle-class parents for a more focused discussion (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on my sample selection). The concepts raised by Bourdieu such as capital, field and habitus, despite their limitations in the Chinese context, provides insightful ways for me to investigate how differences in class (or more precisely, socioeconomic status, as one of the three differential categories my intersectionality framework is interested in) work within the setting of an extended family, where two generations are jointly involved in the care of the third generation, as well as the implications for social stratification, and for intergenerational power dynamics within individual families.

Taken together, this chapter presents three theoretical perspectives that jointly form the basis of my inquiry in this thesis. Before presenting my empirical findings, the next chapter details the design of my research, including the composition of my sample and the methods I used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design to investigate the arrangements of intergenerational childcare in middle-class dual-earner families in urban China. I conducted the fieldwork between September 2018 and April 2019 in the city of Guangzhou, after receiving approval from the Sociology Ethics Committee at the University of Cambridge. Drawing on an intergenerational perspective, the data of this study is generated from interviews with paired parents and grandparents from 46 families, supplemented by participant and non-participant observations. This chapter details my choice of the research site, the composition of my sample, as well as the process of data collection and analysis. I also discuss the challenges that arise from studying childcare arrangements in a multigenerational context, and the strategies I adopted to address these issues.

4.1 Site of research: Guangzhou

I conducted my fieldwork in Guangzhou (also known as Canton), which is the capital city of Guangdong Province in the south of China (see **Figure 2**). Stretching over 7434 square kilometres, Guangzhou is one of the most populous cities in China, with a residential population of 18.7 million by 2020.¹⁸ Its GDP reached 2.5 trillion *yuan* (around 280 billion *pounds*) in 2020, ranking the fourth after Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen, which altogether constitute the so-called four “Tier 1” cities in China.¹⁹ Guangzhou has historically benefitted from its geographic location as a port city. More recently, following the Reform and Opening-up since 1979, it has been in the vanguard of reforms and enjoyed rapid economic development as a result of domestic and foreign investment for decades (Xu and Yeh, 2005). Currently, Guangzhou has grown into a metropolis that serves as a major centre of manufacturing, commercial and trade, and a transportation hub in southern China (Roberts et al., 2020). It is also home to the Guangzhou Higher Education Mega Centre, which comprises some of the most prestigious universities in China.

¹⁸ Data provided by the Guangzhou Statistics Bureau. Retrieved from http://www.gz.gov.cn/zwgk/sjfb/tjgb/content/post_7286268.html

¹⁹ Data provided by the Guangzhou Statistics Bureau. Retrieved from http://tjj.gz.gov.cn/tjfx/gztjfx/content/post_7057639.html

Map of Guangzhou and map of China removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holders are China Discovery and China International Travel CA.

*Figure 2 Location of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province and China*²⁰

As one of the most developed metropolises in China, Guangzhou in many ways is far from representative of the rest of the country. Nevertheless, it could be an appropriate setting for my study, given family transformation tends to be more pronounced in regions at the forefront of socioeconomic development. Furthermore, it is simply impossible for qualitative researchers to select one city that can represent a country as vast as China, given the considerable variations in family and gender values across the nation (Hu and Scott, 2016; Ma et al., 2011). By choosing Guangzhou as the site of my fieldwork, I do not claim the small sample I recruited can represent other middle-class families either in urban China or even in Guangzhou. However, by acknowledging the particular conditions of Guangzhou, I believe a context-specific case study like mine can still be useful as an exploratory study of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban China. Therefore, I now turn to discuss the three factors that make Guangzhou a suitable site for my research and the implications for my research design and my interpretation of the findings.

First, with its highly developed economy, Guangzhou hosts a vast number of professional and managerial occupations, making it an ideal choice for my research on middle-class families. In addition, Guangzhou has attracted a large population of domestic migrants from within and outside Guangdong Province for better education and employment opportunities. This is further facilitated by Guangzhou's pioneering

²⁰ Pictures retrieved from <http://www.chinatravelca.com/places/guangzhou/> and <https://www.chinadiscovery.com/guangzhou-tours/maps.html#lg=1&slide=1>

policies regarding the relaxation of *hukou* status conversion, which used to be notoriously rigid and demanding across China (see Chapter 1) (Wang, 2020). Currently, for example, non-local or rural *hukou* holders who have received a bachelor's degree from a university in Guangzhou are eligible for the urban *hukou* of Guangzhou. Partly due to Guangzhou's generous *hukou* policy, the local residential population has experienced a continuous growth in recent years. In 2019, the net increase in population who gained the local *hukou* was 167,000.²¹ Accordingly, as I discuss in Section 4.4, my sample consists of a mixture of families with local and non-local *hukou* origins, with grandparents in the latter category often having to first migrate to Guangzhou in order to provide childcare. Furthermore, the middle-class parents in my sample came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from those growing up in privileged families to those born in remote rural areas and later achieved significant upward social mobility. In short, the diversified population composition of Guangzhou allows me to document a wide variation within my sample, and to explore the differing implications for their childcare arrangements and family dynamics.

Second, as a first-tier metropolis, Guangzhou has a private childcare market that consists of an array of overseas and domestic providers, which is much larger in scale compared with many hinterland cities and towns.²² Choosing Guangzhou as the site of the research therefore enables me to investigate motivations for grandparental care that go beyond the lack of marketized childcare, as well as the way middle-class parents in an economically developed city evaluate, select and potentially combine formal and informal childcare.

Lastly, my experience of growing up in Guangzhou equips me with the local knowledge and social network crucial for this research. I speak both Mandarin and the local dialect Cantonese. These factors have greatly facilitated the process of my sample recruitment and data collection, as demonstrated in the following sections.

²¹ "The New Trend of Guangzhou's Residential Population", *South Daily*. Retrieved from: <http://news.timedg.com/2020-03/20/21079455.shtml>

²² *Analysis of the Early Education Market in China 2014*. Retrieved from <https://fudaoquan.com/p/7092.html>

4.2 Sample selection

This section lays out the major criteria for my sample selection and the underlying rationales. My study adopts an intergenerational design so that the experiences and opinions of parents and grandparents from the same household can be analysed side-by-side in the context of their family network. Therefore, when I first set out to conduct this research, only families where both generations agreed to participate were considered to be potential participants.

Although urban Chinese grandparents' widespread involvement in childcare is well supported by anecdotal evidence, reliable statistics on the exact composition of this population is not available, possibly due to the private and flexible nature of care provision in domestic settings. Therefore, based on the existing literature and anecdotal observations, I devise a purposeful sample strategy, which accentuates certain aspects potentially crucial for the arrangements of intergenerational childcare. My sample selection criteria are summarised in **Figure 3**.

- Both the parent and grandparent generations agree to participate
- The family has at least one child under the age of three, cared by grandparent(s) on a daily basis (at least on weekdays)
- Both parents are in full-time employment
- Both parents belong to the middle class (defined by occupation and education)

Figure 3 Summary of sample selection criteria

The selection criteria listed in **Figure 3** are devised to help highlight grandparents' caregiving roles, and negotiations between different family members around childcare. I choose to focus on families with children under three because, for this age group, state-run childcare services are not available while marketized care is limited and expensive (see Chapter 1). Besides, younger children generally have more intensive need for care and attention from adults, making the role of caregivers more essential and salient.

My focus on dual-earner families corresponds to the high level of female labour participation in urban China (Lu et al., 2016; Mustillo et al., 2021), which is often related to acute work-life conflict and a greater demand for external childcare support, especially in the case of young parents.

In terms of the socioeconomic status of my participants, for the pivot generation, i.e., the young parents, I limit my scope to those belonging to the middle class, while no restrictions are set for the grandparents. It is widely acknowledged that the conceptualisation of class is particularly tricky in the Chinese context, as the meaning of “class” shifts through different historical periods and can be different from its common usage in Western societies (Guo, 2018). As my study is not focused on the concept of class *per se*, I adopt a simplified definition of the middle class to facilitate my sample recruitment, which is measured by educational level and occupation. A family is considered middle class if both parents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, and work in white-collar jobs such as professional or managerial occupations.

This focus on middle-class parents is motivated by the following considerations. First, middle-class parents are better positioned to afford marketized childcare services such as nannies and day-care centres, therefore their utilisation of grandparental care is not entirely driven by economic constraints. Second, extensive research in China and the West has confirmed that middle-class parents in general are particularly affected by ideologies of intensive and scientific parenthood (Breengaard, 2016; Hays, 1996; Macdonald, 2011; Xiao, 2016). This often requires a significant investment of time, energy and resources on the part of parents, which could further exacerbate the work-life conflict they face and their need for extra childcare support from grandparents. Third, when this group of highly educated middle-class parents delegate a significant proportion of childcare tasks to grandparents, who are from a previous generation, with some occupying a markedly different socioeconomic position, there may be a divergence around childrearing beliefs and practices across the generations that could complicate the intergenerational power dynamics. By purposely including grandparents from various socioeconomic backgrounds, this study is able to gain a nuanced understanding of class differences *within* families and the differing roles of parents and grandparents in the intergenerational transmission of class advantages/disadvantages (Brannen et al., 2004; Guo, 2018). Therefore, despite my focus on middle-class parents, the intergenerational design of this study allows me to shed light on both the similarities and the internal variations along class lines within this apparently privileged group.

To be clear, I have no intention of equating middle-class families with the “norm”. Instead, what my study seeks to do is to highlight how decisions and opinions regarding childcare adopted by this group are shaped and constrained by the specific structural circumstances they are embedded in. As revealed in the following analysis, these relatively privileged middle-class parents, who are highly educated and well-resourced compared with the average level, are also faced with various challenges in their daily childcare arrangements.

Within the boundaries set out by the above baseline criteria, guided by the exploratory nature of my study, I adopt the strategy of “maximum variation sampling” to include as many different family compositions and childcare arrangements as possible. Efforts were made to recruit respondents with various living arrangements, occupations, educational attainments, places of origin, family sizes, etc., so that my sample can document a wide range of intergenerational childcare arrangements that emerge in response to the different needs and constraints of individual families.

Overall, using strict selection criteria to generate a relatively homogeneous sample is sensible for a small-scale qualitative study like mine. Otherwise, it would be difficult to identify any meaningful patterns in a small sample with overly diverse traits (Roy et al., 2015; Streib, 2015). Despite its analytic advantages, this sampling strategy limits my ability to generalise beyond this particular group. The findings of this study are based on a group of privileged dual-earner families living in a metropolitan area in Southern China, and therefore could not be directly extended to other populations. However, the major aim of this qualitative research is to provide an empathetic understanding of how middle-class families in urban China negotiate and carry out their intergenerational childcare arrangements, and how such experiences can shed light on broader social processes such as the transformation in family relationships and values. In other words, my study seeks “logical rather than statistical inference” (Small, 2009: 28), and “societal significance” rather than “statistical significance” (Burawoy et al., 1991: 281).

4.3 Recruiting respondents

The families in this study were recruited through personal contacts, online parent groups, early education centres, and snowballing from existing participants. A

flyer containing a brief introduction to myself, my research project (termed as “A study of intergenerational childcare in urban Chinese families”) and my sample selection criteria was sent to potential participants. After each interview, I asked my interviewees to introduce me to other potential participants or pass on my recruitment flyers to their friends, neighbours and colleagues. One mother I interviewed volunteered to post my flyers in the early education centres that she ran. I stopped recruiting new participants when I observed that themes arising from interviews began to exhibit less variation and add little theoretical significance to my analytical framework (Mason, 2002).

Recruiting participants through personal contacts and snowballing has some limitations, with one being the risk of generating a relatively homogeneous sample. There is also concern over how much the interviewees would open up to a researcher they know personally, or linked to common contacts (Wengraf, 2001). However, my own experience in this study indicates that, when used with caution, this could be an effective and appropriate sampling strategy, especially considering my research topic and the background of my participants, as I shall explain.

To ensure the diversity of my sample, I accepted no more than two referrals from one source. Furthermore, although I started with families introduced by my families, friends and exiting participants, as the recruitment went on, the sources of participants became diversified and extended beyond my existing network. On several occasions, when I asked my interviewees how they found out about my research, they replied with names of people or online discussion groups that I was not aware of. Obviously, some kind strangers had helped circulate my recruitment flyers without my knowledge. Overall, my effort to diversify the channels of recruitment was successful, which led to a sample with considerable internal heterogeneity (see Section 4.4 for a detailed description of my sample).

Furthermore, several studies in East Asia have suggested that topics such as childrearing and family relationships are considered to be private issues (Guo, 2018; Lan, 2006; Lui, 2013; Sun, 2012). Therefore, approaching potential participants through mutual contacts can facilitate rapport and trust from the beginning, making them more likely to accept interview invitations and open up to researchers. This also proves to be the case with my respondents. The vast majority of them told me this was

their first experience of participating in academic research, and they agreed to do so largely because they learned about it through someone they knew and trusted. My attempts to cold-call unknown parents and grandparents in parks and shopping malls was far less successful, as most treated me with suspicion and distrust. During the fieldwork, I also observed that participants who were directly referred by my families and close friends were more likely to invite me into their homes for interviews instead of choosing a public place. This can be seen as indicative of a higher level of trust.

It is worth highlighting the role of the instant messaging app “WeChat”²³ in my recruitment process, which is one of the most popular mobile apps used in China. A vast number of chat groups have been set up on WeChat by parents to exchange childcare information, with as many as 500 members in each group. All the mothers in my sample confirmed they belonged to at least five of such groups. More generally, people are also members of chat groups that consist of their neighbours, colleagues, alumni, etc. Circulating the flyer of my study in those chat groups was one effective way to gain access to potential participants. I also asked my personal contacts and existing participants to post my flyer on their personal pages in WeChat. Although the possession of smartphones with Internet access is a prerequisite, given my focus on middle-class parents, such a recruitment strategy was appropriate.

With all families except one that I interviewed, I made my initial contact with the parent generation, who then negotiated consent from the older generation on my behalf. The more prominent role played by parents vis-a-vis grandparents during sample recruitment might be attributed to my utilisation of WeChat to circulate my research. It might also reflect the pivotal role of the younger generation in maintaining intergenerational relationships and managing the lives of both generations. Usually through WeChat, I explained my study in greater detail to the parents, confirmed their eligibility, answered their questions, and asked them to pass on my interview request to the caregiving grandparents. If both generations agreed to participate, the time and location of the interview were chosen at the convenience of the participants. Before the interviews, I asked my respondents to complete a simple questionnaire to collect

²³ WeChat is a messaging and social media app for smart phone users popular in China. Users can message each other in formats of text, photo, voice, and video on a one-to-one basis, or create group chats with up to 500 members. In addition, each user has a personal page similar to the personal Timeline page of Facebook, where they share texts, photos, videos and weblinks with their friends.

basic information about their families, such as the age, educational background and occupation of the parents and grandparents, as well as their childcare arrangements (e.g. the children's primary carer(s) during the day/night, the involvement of nannies/domestic helpers, etc.). I used their responses to reconfirm their eligibility and to customise my interview schedule (see **Appendix 4**).

This study is interested in the perspectives and experiences of both the parent and the grandparent generations. Within the parent generation, although fathers' views and experiences are certainly valuable for the understanding of intergenerational childcare arrangements, I chose to prioritise those of mothers due to my constraints of time and resources. Studies in China and Western countries have widely confirmed that childcare continues to be seen as the responsibility of mothers (or females) (Macdonald, 2011; Naftali, 2007; Vincent and Ball, 2006; Xiao, 2016). Therefore, it made sense for me to treat interviews with fathers as optional, or I might end up having difficulties recruiting any participants considering my already demanding requirement on both generations' participation. Nevertheless, fathers were interviewed if they agreed to do so. I also sought to incorporate fathers' perspectives by talking to them informally, and by triangulating descriptions of them from mothers and grandparents. Irrespective of their participation in the interview, basic demographic information of all fathers was collected.

As mentioned, I set out to recruit families with the expectation of both generations' participation. Early during my fieldwork, after my initial contact with some parents, they claimed they were unable or unwilling to convince the grandparents to participate, and thereby they withdrew from the study (or were turned down by me). Realising my insistence on interviewing paired parents and grandparents from the same family may lead to a self-selected sample that leaves out families with strained intergenerational relationships, I decided if the grandparents could not be convinced to participate despite great efforts, I would still interview the parents. To remedy the absence of grandparents, I asked these parents extensive questions about the older generation and the possible reasons behind their refusal to the interview request. Data from these one-generation interviews were treated with due caution, as they consist of only the accounts of the parent generation.

Nevertheless, families with harmonious intergenerational relationships are inevitably overrepresented in my sample, although it would be wrong to assume all families enjoy good relationships, as we shall see in the following empirical chapters. To address such a bias, I asked my respondents about the experience of their friends, colleagues and neighbours who have conflictual intergenerational relationships. My sample does not include families where the intergenerational childcare arrangements have entirely broken down due to conflicts. To study this group would require a separate study.

4.4 Profiles of participants

Overall, for this study, I interviewed 46 mothers, 15 fathers, 38 grandmothers and 18 grandfathers from a total of 46 families. **Appendix 1** provides brief details of each family, including the age and gender of the children, the grandparents providing childcare, their living arrangements, and the utilisation of hired help. In all but five families, I interviewed at least one member from both the parent and grandparent generations. For the five families of C33, 34, 35, 39 and 44, only parents were interviewed, as the grandparents could not be convinced to participate or could not communicate in either Mandarin or Cantonese.

Table 3 presents a summary of the information listed in **Appendix 1**. At the time of the interview, 22 families had one child and 24 had two children (including one family with twins). The age of the child who was the target²⁴ of my study ranged from 2 months to 3 years, therefore not yet eligible for state-run kindergartens. In families with two children, the age of the older child ranged between 1 and 11 years.

Childcare support was provided exclusively by paternal grandparents in 16 families and by maternal grandparents in 15 families. For the remaining 15 families that relied on support from bilateral grandparents, the paternal and maternal grandparents from 7 families were involved simultaneously, while those from the other 8 families were involved in rotation (at the time of the fieldwork, 6 families were with the maternal grandparents and 2 with the paternal grandparents).

²⁴ The younger child if there are two in the family.

Table 3 Characteristics of families in the study (N=46)

Families (N=46)	n
Number of children in the family	
1	22
2	24
Age of the targeted child	
2-6 months	4
7-11 months	6
12-23 months	21
24-35 months	13
36-40 months	2
Grandparents involved in childcare	
Paternal grandparents	16
Maternal grandparents	15
Bilateral grandparents simultaneously	7
Bilateral grandparents in rotation	8
Living arrangement ²⁵	
(1) Three-generation coresidence throughout the week	38
(2) Three-generation coresidence on weekdays only	5
(3) Parents dropped their children at grandparents' home on weekdays	3
(4) Grandparents came to their adult children's home on weekdays	3
Utilisation of nanny/domestic helper	
Full-time nanny	2
Daily domestic helper	3
Weekly domestic helper	8
No hired help	33

Living arrangements varied across the sample, with the majority (43 families) in some form of a three-generation coresidence. Specifically, four living arrangements were identified in my sample: (1) in 38 families, the three generations coresided throughout the week; (2) in five families, coresidence took place only on weekdays, with the parent/grandparent generation returning to their own residence at weekends; (3) parents from three families sent their children to the grandparents' home on weekdays; and (4) grandparents from three families came to their adult children's home on weekdays where they looked after their grandchildren throughout the day.²⁵

²⁵ Here the total number adds up to 49, because the paternal and maternal grandparents in three families (C3, 40 and 41) were simultaneously involved in care provision and had different living arrangements.

All grandparents in the sample were involved in regular and intensive childcare provision, spending on average ten hours looking after their grandchildren on a typical weekday. The use of hired help was uncommon. Only two families employed a full-time nanny to help with childcare. Three had a domestic helper coming in daily to help with cooking and cleaning. Eight had a domestic helper coming in weekly for cleaning. The remaining 33 families did not use any hired help at the time of the interview.

4.4.1 The parent generation

Profiles of parents from the 46 families are presented in **Appendix 2**, including their age, educational level and occupation at the time of the interview; birthplace; *hukou* status before adulthood; number of siblings; and whether they were interviewed for the study. Because of my decision to prioritise mothers' perspectives within the parent generation, mothers from all families were interviewed and were given a pseudonym (see **Appendix 2**). Indeed, many mothers (and grandparents) in my study considered the role played by fathers in the daily childcare provision to be peripheral. For example, Zhiling's (C37) husband was only at home at weekends because his work was in another city. During our interview, Zhiling made fun of her husband when he accidentally entered the room: "We are doing an interview about childcare here. What do you know about childcare?" Shaking his head, her husband left the room with an embarrassed smile. Nevertheless, I interviewed a total of fifteen fathers. Not surprisingly, these were typically fathers who were heavily involved in the care of their children (e.g. C1, 12 and 23).

Consistent with my recruitment criteria, parents in my study shared similar demographic traits in many ways (see **Table 4** for a summary). All of them were in a different-sex marriage, aged 24 to 41, held at least a bachelor's degree, and were mostly employed in a full-time job.²⁶ Since all couples were in their first marriage and were raising their own children, the current study has little to say about the impact of

²⁶ At the time of the interview, four mothers (C27, 29, 42 and 43) were on the maternity leave of their second child and were planning to return to work shortly. One father (C11) resigned from his full-time job in the IT industry and started to work from home freelance three months before our interview. Therefore, all these families had been dual-earner families at some point. In the interviews, I asked these respondents to compare their childcare arrangements before and after the changes in the parents' employment status.

divorce and remarriage on the arrangements of intergenerational childcare. The majority of the parents held high-status professional or managerial positions such as teachers, professors, engineers, doctors, managers, civil servants; while a few, most of whom graduated recently, held a lower-level white-collar position such as clerical jobs. Overall, compared with the average population in Guangzhou, parents in my study constitute a relatively privileged group.

Table 4 Characteristics of parents in this study

	Fathers (<i>N</i> =46)	Mothers (<i>N</i> =46)
Age (<i>mean</i>)	35	32
Education (<i>n</i>)		
Undergraduate	22	15
Master	22	29
Doctoral	2	2
Regularly absent from home due to work (<i>n</i>)	8	0
Place of birth (<i>n</i>)		
Guangzhou	7	11
Other cities within Guangdong	13	10
Other provinces	26	25
<i>Hukou</i> status before adulthood (<i>n</i>)		
Urban	21	25
Rural	25	21
Number of siblings (<i>n</i>)		
0	15	21
1	22	17
2	6	5
3 and above	3	3

In all families, at least one parent was involved in the life of their children most of the time, therefore none belonged to the category of “skipped-generation households”, where both parents are absent and the children are under the exclusive care of grandparents. However, in 8 out of the 46 families, the father was regularly away from home on weekdays, either because they worked in another city (C15, 20, 21, 37 and 39), or their work required frequent travel (C2, 22 and 32). In contrast, no mother in my sample was regularly away from home.

However, my sample of parents is not entirely homogeneous regarding the following aspects. While all of them had their home in Guangzhou at the time of the interview, their birthplace spanned over a number of locations across China. Seven fathers were born in Guangzhou, thirteen were born in another city/town/village

within Guangdong Province and twenty-six were born in another province. For mothers, eleven were born in Guangzhou, ten within Guangdong Province, and twenty-five in another province.

For both the fathers and mothers, the percentage of those who held rural and urban household registration (*hukou*) status before they reached adulthood was roughly half and half. As tertiary education is one of the most important channels for rural-to-urban and cross-province *hukou* conversion in contemporary China (Wu and Treiman, 2007), most of the non-local parents first came to Guangzhou for undergraduate or postgraduate study, often from a less developed region. After graduation, they gained the local *hukou* status, became employed and started a family in Guangzhou. This generally indicates an upward social mobility, especially for those who originally held a rural *hukou*. By the time of the interview, all but one couple (C21) had received Guangzhou *hukou*. Furthermore, as the conversion of *hukou* status of the adult children does not extend to their parents, after the younger generation's relocation to Guangzhou, their parents generally remain in their hometown with their *hukou* status unchanged. Because of their stayed-behind parents, many of the younger generation maintain links with their hometown even after they moved away.

Although most parents were born after the introduction of the one-child policy in the late 1970s, fewer than half of them were the only child of their family. This means they may need to compete with their siblings for childcare support by the older generation. It corresponds to the observation that the implementation of the one-child policy was uneven nationwide, with the enforcement less strict in rural than urban areas (Greenhalgh, 2010; Murphy et al., 2011). As indicated by **Appendix 2**, most of the parents with siblings are originally from rural areas. For the remaining few with an urban origin, their own parents had been financially penalised or lost their positions in state-owned enterprises for breaking the rule.

4.4.2 The grandparent generation

This study considers only grandparents who were involved in childcare provision at the time of the fieldwork. In 7 out of the 46 families (C1, 3, 7, 25, 40, 41 and 45), grandparents from both sides were involved at the same time. Therefore, my

analysis is altogether based on 53 sets of grandparents, as paternal and maternal grandparents from these 7 families are counted separately. Profiles of these caregiving grandparents are presented in **Appendix 3**, including their lineage (paternal/maternal), age, place of residence before assuming the care of grandchildren (urban/town/rural; Guangzhou/Guangdong Province/other provinces), socioeconomic status, and motivation for childcare provision (tradition-abiding/reflexive, see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion). I assign a single surname to a couple for the sake of simplicity. For example, the paternal and maternal grandparents of Case 1 are respectively addressed as Grandpa/Grandma Lei and Grandpa/Grandma Xiao. In practice, none of the grandmothers in my study changed their surname to that of their husband's after getting married, as this is not a widespread norm in contemporary mainland China.

Most of the caregiving grandparents were in their 50s and 60s and were not in any form of formal employment at the time of the interview. Before assuming the care of their grandchildren, 12 sets of grandparents had already been living in the city of Guangzhou, and therefore had the advantage of being familiar with the local environment and surrounded by their own social network. In comparison, 41 sets of grandparents had to migrate to Guangzhou from another province or another city/village within Guangdong to care for their grandchildren, leaving behind their hometown and existing social circles. For these grandparents, their provision of care for a newborn was accompanied by the stress of starting a life in a different city. Many complained to me that they were not used to the climate, could not understand the local dialect, and felt lonely away from their old friends. Unfamiliar with the geography of the city, many of the non-local grandparents limited their daily activities to a small area that did not extend far away from their immediate neighbourhood.

Compared with the parent generation where I limit the scope to the middle class, the grandparents are from a variety of backgrounds and therefore constitute a rather heterogeneous group. In **Appendix 3**, I assign grandparents to two broadly defined categories, i.e. those of higher and lower socioeconomic status (SES), based on a set of criteria including their educational level, occupation, and *hukou* status. I purposely avoid the concept of class in my discussion of the grandparents. This is because most grandparents grew up in the socialist period, when economic differences across the nation were very low, and distinction of class identities was mainly based on political and social origins, which is different from the indicators of socioeconomic

status commonly used today (Guo, 2018; Wu and Dong, 2019). Overall, 28 sets of grandparents belong to the category of higher-SES, who are mostly from major cities, relatively better educated (high school or above), and used to be employed in white-collar and professional jobs. Another 25 sets of grandparents belong to the category of lower-SES, who have been living most of their life in villages and small towns, received limited education or are illiterate, and used to work in blue-collar jobs or run a small business. In the latter case, there has been notable upward mobility across the generations, where the younger generation is better educated, has more income, and enjoys higher social status. As I further explore in Chapter 6 and 7, such intergenerational differences in socioeconomic status can have significant implications for how childcare labour and decisions are negotiated between the two generations.

Appendix 3 does not include the educational background of each grandparent. As explained in Chapter 1, for grandparents in my study, their education was heavily distorted by the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976). Many had very fragmented education experiences, thus making it hard to measure. Moreover, as the school curriculum during the Cultural Revolution was largely ideology-oriented instead of knowledge-based (Chu and Yu, 2010), it is unknown how much the usual measurement of academic achievements can be applied to this cohort. Overall, a wide variation in education attainments is observed among grandparents in my sample, ranging from no formal education to undergraduate degrees. Generally, grandparents from urban areas are better educated than their rural counterparts. Roughly half of the families have caregiving grandparent(s) who are illiterate or have not completed primary school. Three families have caregiving grandparent(s) who managed to attain a university degree after the Cultural Revolution was over. The rest of the grandparents received some level of education that ranges between primary schools and high schools.

Grandparents in my sample had also worked in various types of job before they assumed the care of their grandchildren. Again, information about their occupation was omitted from **Appendix 3** because it was overly fragmented. Some, as their middle-class adult children, held professional or managerial positions in schools, universities, banks, civil service and companies. Others worked in blue-collar jobs, had their own business, did farm work, or stayed home as housewives.

It is therefore not hard to imagine how much the lives of these grandparents differed from each other before they came to care for their grandchildren. While some grandparents were living in big cities and travelled around China and abroad several times a year, others had spent all their life in a remote village. Grandparents who have been formally employed in the cities are generally entitled to the state pension and medical insurance, while most grandparents with rural *hukou* have limited access to such resources and are expected to rely on their adult children for elderly support. Such differences play a role in shaping grandparents' varying motivations behind their provision of care for their grandchildren, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Despite my effort to recruit a diverse group of grandparents, those with certain characteristics might be underrepresented in the current sample. For example, as detailed in the empirical chapters, the intergenerational childcare arrangements in individual families are heavily influenced by the lineage and *hukou* status of the grandparents. To better ascertain how lineage and *hukou* status may separately and/or jointly shape the childcare arrangements in these families, it would be ideal to recruit a sample with grandparents equally divided among these categories, in order to allow a systematic comparison across maternal and paternal grandparents from urban and rural areas. In practice, due to time and resource constraints, the current study ended up with a slightly unbalanced sample that consists of only 7 urban paternal grandparents (as compared to 18 rural paternal grandparents) and 10 rural maternal grandparents (as compared to 18 urban maternal grandparents). As a result, this limits my ability to draw conclusions about the lineage- and *hukou*-based differences among grandparents. For instance, in my discussion about grandparents' varying caregiving motivations (Chapter 5), while I draw a distinction between those I describe as "tradition-abiding grandparents" and "reflexive grandparents", the latter umbrella category of "reflexive grandparents" cannot sufficiently capture the more nuanced differences between rural maternal grandparents, urban paternal and maternal grandparents who all belong to this group.

4.5 Data collection

4.5.1 Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews are the primary instrument of data collection for this study. Before I formally started to interview my participants, I ran a focus group with 11 parents of small children as a pilot study to gain a preliminary understanding of my research project, which covered topics parents deemed relevant to their childcare experience. I then used the results to design and refine the content and structure of my interview schedule. Based on my pilot study and the relevant literature, I devised a semi-structured interview schedule for each generation that covers a number of topics: the enactment of grandparents' participation, the domestic division of childcare labour, understanding of intergenerational exchange of support, feelings and beliefs about intergenerational and conjugal relationships, considerations regarding the children's upbringing. A full list of the interview questions can be found in **Appendix 4**. According to the baseline demographic information I collected before the interview, the questions were further tailored to better reflect the actual conditions in each participant's family.

The interview schedule served more as a general guideline during the actual interviews, where I did not adhere to the original sequence of the questions in a strict manner. I conducted my interviews following the logic of "climbing the ladder of abstraction", which was used by Macdonald (2011) in her study of contemporary motherhood where she interviewed mothers and nannies. The initial stage is to elicit *narratives*, where I asked my participants to describe how they reached their current childcare arrangements and their caregiving routine on a typical day. The purpose was to encourage participants to raise topics they deemed salient and to present their experiences in their own words. I refrained from interrupting their narration and focused on jotting down the topics I wanted to probe later. I then followed up with more focused questions to elicit the *feelings, opinions and reflections* of my participants on specific issues. The interview process often alternated between the most concrete level of descriptions and the most abstract level of theorising, as I repeatedly asked my interviewees for their opinions and for detailed examples to illustrate their points. In this way, I managed to produce a richly layered thick description of my participants' lives as well as their emotions and thoughts.

Since data collected through these interviews are based on self-reports by parents and grandparents, they could be subject to social desirability bias, e.g., the respondents may tend to report what they think researchers would like to hear, or leave out certain practices and feelings they find embarrassing. This could be further fuelled by the traditional belief of “don’t wash your dirty linen in public” (*jiachou buke waiyang*) in China (Li and Liu, 2019; Low and Goh, 2015). Several strategies were adopted to address this concern. Firstly, my reliance on personal network and snowballing to recruit participants helped me build rapport and trust with my interviewees, who were generally willing to share with me their intimate thoughts about themselves and their families. Furthermore, all respondents were promised and assured of the confidentiality of the interviews and that their real names would be omitted in the thesis. Throughout the interviews, I repeatedly emphasised that as a sociology researcher and a young woman with no experience of raising a child, I was not there to judge their way of childrearing; instead, I just wanted to understand how caregiving was carried out in their family on a daily basis. Besides, as discussed later, by drawing on interviews from both the parent and grandparent generations as well as observations, I was able to compare data from different sources, which also helped to reduce the social desirability bias. Such strategies appeared to be successful, as my respondents tended to be fairly open about their family life, especially about the struggles, challenges and frustration they were experiencing. Several respondents thanked me afterwards for the opportunity to talk to someone from outside their family about their life, and described the interview as “a cathartic experience”. Nevertheless, when interpreting the findings of the current research, it should be kept in mind that the effects of social desirability are hard to eliminate, and that my participants may have wilfully or innocently “lied” about or left out certain information.

My interviews may be subject to further limitations due to the cross-sectional design of my study. Because I was only able to interview most of the respondents once, my data mostly constitute a snapshot of the ongoing childcare arrangements in these families at a single point in time. Still, I tried to document the evolving nature of family life by explicitly asking my participants to reflect on the changes in their families, especially if there were the involvement of different grandparents, the birth of more children, or more generally, as the children grew up. However, such

retrospective reports may be further dependent on memory accuracy, and on participants' afterwards reinterpretation of events and feelings at an earlier point in time. Therefore, the accuracy of the data could be potentially improved by adopting a longitudinal design, which can better capture how families and their childcare arrangements evolve over time.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese (either in Mandarin or Cantonese) and were recorded with the participants' consent. In most cases, I interviewed the two generations separately starting with the parents. At the end of the separate interviews, I invited both generations to join the conversation together and ask a few more questions. Interviews with each generation averaged 1.5 hours in length. Due to time constraints of some participants, the two generations from three families were interviewed together (C29, 38 and 40). These interviews took place during family meals where the whole family was present and lasted between 2 and 3 hours. Grandparents from two families (C21 and 28) could only communicate in a dialect I could not understand, so the interviews were conducted with the help their adult children(-law). These two interviews were shorter in length and lasted around 30 minutes. It was possible for participants to withhold their thoughts in front of other family members, yet during interviews where both generations were present, I was often surprised by the way they candidly discussed their divergence or even conflicts regarding their childcare ideals and practices.

Interviewing both generations from the same family allowed me to directly compare their experience and understanding of the same events. In terms of the factual descriptions about events and experiences, the two generations' narratives were largely consistent, although they often had different emphases and were thus complementary to each other. For example, since grandparents typically spent the most time with their grandchildren on weekdays, compared with parents, they were familiar with even the smallest details about the children's daily routine: the amount of food and milk they needed, the length of their naps, etc. On the other hand, most grandparents had limited understanding of the decisions regarding their grandchildren' education and enrichment classes, or the latest childcare knowledge advocated by childcare experts, while the parents were generally passionate about such topics and had plenty to share during the interviews. As I promised my interviewees that I would not repeat what they said to other family members, when a

discrepancy arose between interviews, I would carefully rephrase my questions to seek clarification without breaching confidentiality. Nevertheless, I did not expect complete consistency between the two generations, as the different or even conflicting perspectives can often reflect how each respondent make sense of their care arrangements from their particular standpoint.

While most interviews took place at the respondents' homes, some were conducted at coffee shops, restaurants, parks, early education centres as well as the respondents' offices. Conducting the interview inside respondents' homes afforded two advantages. First, the respondents generally felt more relaxed and comfortable in a familiar environment, and therefore were more willing to share their experiences and thoughts without any prompting. Second, going into the homes of participants allowed me to get a glimpse into the environment they lived in and the dynamics between members of their families. Often after the interview, they would invite me to stay longer for tea and/or meal, where I was able to interact informally with all the family members. However, interviews at home were inevitably subject to interruptions from time to time by family members walking into the room to fetch things, who might therefore overhear part of the interview; or by crying infants with all kinds of needs for their parents and grandparents. In comparison, interviews at other locations progressed more smoothly due to less interruption. Moreover, some participants found it easier to talk about their experiences and thoughts when other family members were out of earshot.

No monetary honorarium was offered to my participants. Instead, I gave their children a T-shirt from the University of Cambridge's souvenir store as an expression of my gratitude. If an interview was arranged at the participant's home, I would also bring along some cakes or fruits to share during the interview. If the interview was at a cafe or restaurant, I would offer to pay the bill, although it was sometimes declined by my participants.

A few words are needed about my role as the researcher of this study. At the time of my fieldwork, I was an unmarried, female PhD student from a middle-class background, studying at a well-known university in the UK, with no experience of raising children of my own. I was in my mid-twenties, so my age was close to the parents in my study, although most of them were slightly older. I found it generally

easy to build rapport with the parent generation, due to our similarity in age and social position. Because of my educational background, many parents automatically assumed that I would understand their high expectations for their children's future and their passion for "scientific childcare". Most of the parents were confident, articulate, and willing to share with me details of their childcare arrangements. From time to time, they also asked me questions about how young parents in the UK arranged care for their children and their sources of childcare knowledge.

In comparison, some grandparents, especially those from a less educated background, appeared to be less at ease at the beginning of the interviews. They later explained that they felt somehow nervous about being interviewed by a PhD student from an "overseas elite university", and feared they might be judged by what they had said and done. I repeatedly reassured them that I just wanted to learn how they took care of their grandchildren in their daily life, that there was no right or wrong answer, and that compared to me, they were much more experienced and skilful on the issue of childcare. Emphasising that I had no experience of parenting proved to be a useful strategy when interviewing both generations, as they would lower their guard and patiently give me all sorts of detailed examples to help me understand their experiences as parents and grandparents of small children.

4.5.2 Observations

In addition to interviews, I also conducted observations which allowed me to collect various forms of data. During the interviews, I made a note of the respondents' nonverbal expressions and interactions with other family members. I also conducted participant observations while I played with the children, dined with the family, and accompanied the children and the parents/grandparents to enrichment classes. Interviews conducted at the homes of the respondents also allowed me to have the first-hand experience of their living conditions and a contextualised understanding of their daily life. For example, when explaining their children's daily routine, many participants showed me pictures and videos of their children, as well as their food, books, toys and utensils. Parents also introduced to me the parenting literature they

read, the “Official Accounts”²⁷ about childcare they subscribed through WeChat, as well as the apps they used for their children’s early education. All this information was recorded with detailed fieldwork notes, and pictures of my respondents’ homes were taken with their consent.

I kept in touch with most of the parents during and after the fieldwork through WeChat. I continued to follow and comment on the photos they posted on their social media pages about their families, which enabled me to keep up with the updates in my participants’ families. Consent was gained from my participants before I used quotes from their social media pages in this thesis.

Overall, these observational data give me additional insights into the childcare arrangements and family dynamics in my participants’ families, which were not accessible through interviews alone. It also allows me to cross-check the information I gather from interviews, as participants may present slightly biased narratives when they try to look socially desirable.

Furthermore, during my time in the field, I tried to immerse myself in the local environment of Guangzhou and make observations in an ethnographic way. I followed discussions about childcare and family relationships on social media and in local newspapers. I spent hours around playgrounds, early education centres and daycare centres, where I observed the interactions between children and their caregivers and engaged in informal conversations with them. With the help of my participants, I also joined some WeChat groups formed by local parents, where I observed and took note of their daily discussions and concerns.

4.6 Data analysis

Data of this study consist of interview transcripts, observation notes, photos and fieldwork memos, which were imported into the NVivo software shortly after each interview and observation session.

²⁷ Official Accounts, known as *gongzhonghao* in Chinese, is a special type of social media accounts on WeChat that enables individuals and businesses to push articles, photos and videos to their subscribers.

All interviews were first transcribed and analysed in Chinese to keep their original meanings. Quotes that were used in this thesis were later translated into English. A preliminary analysis of the transcript was done immediately after each interview, which allowed me to make necessary adjustments to my subsequent recruiting strategies and interview questions. The early analytical notes were also very useful for me to keep track of how certain lines of inquiry evolved as my research proceeded.

After I finished my fieldwork, I reread and analysed all my data in a more systematic manner, using a combination of open and focused coding iteratively. I started with line-by-line coding to identify recurring themes and concepts that emerged from the data. These initial codes were then merged and regrouped into broad topical categories with reference to the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, which were used to guide my subsequent rounds of coding. This coding process helped me identify the three major aspects of my respondents' intergenerational childcare arrangements: the motivations of parents and grandparents, division of childcare labour, and decision-making related to childcare, which form the basis of the three respective empirical chapters.

I also adopted the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to analyse families in my study at different levels. I started with comparisons *within* cases (families), i.e., comparing the parent and grandparent generations within the same family. This was followed by comparisons *across* cases, where I explored commonalities and distinctions among members of each generation, and among parent-grandparent dyads in different families. To facilitate comparison, I constructed tables to explore whether there are any systematic patterns regarding how different families/respondents were associated with certain childcare arrangements. These tables were organised in a way where each row represented the parent/grandparent generation in each family, and each column delineated the broad analytical categories developed through the coding process. I then filled in each cell with the respective characteristics of each family/respondent, which allowed me to observe and capture the similarities and differences across my sample. Through exhaustive comparisons at different levels, I sought to investigate both *vertically* how childcare ideals and practices persist and evolve over generations, and *horizontally* how childcare arrangements and intergenerational relationships vary across families.

During this process, emerging patterns regarding different dimensions of intergenerational childcare arrangements (e.g. motivations, division of childcare labour, and power dynamics) were compared and grouped by their similarities, and it is from here analytical categories were identified from the data and later developed into typologies. Throughout this thesis, categorisation has been adopted as a major analytical tool, in order to illustrate the heterogeneity within my sample regarding their apparently similar childcare arrangements and to highlight the essential characteristics that define each category. For example, in the discussion of grandparents' caregiving motivations in Chapter 5, those who regarded the provision of care for their grandchildren as their prescribed obligation would be categorised as "tradition-abiding" and the rest as "reflexive".

While the categories raised in this thesis serve as a useful tool to capture the most distinctive characteristics of their respective groups, they should not be seen as an average representation of all observations. In other words, while I tried to assign all my participants to certain categories at some points of my analysis, some cases may be better represented by their given categories than others. This is because the messiness of the real world does not allow a definitive and neat assessment that researchers would have desired. Furthermore, these categories are further subject to the limitation that they represent only snapshots of ongoing relationships at the time of my fieldwork, whereas in reality, my participants' practices and beliefs regarding childcare are not static and evolve over time.

In my analysis, I understand the data generated from the interviews as being co-constructed through a dialogical process between myself and my respondents (Daly, 2007; Mason, 2002). I also view such data as a reflection of the respondents' current interpretations of their previous experiences and thoughts, which is highly subjective in nature and could be susceptible to biases such as social desirability and memory accuracy as discussed earlier. It would therefore be unsuitable to treat these interview data uncritically as an "objective" view of the reality (Wengraf, 2001). Accordingly, my analysis does not stop at gathering information about what actually happened to my respondents (with the recognition that such data do not necessarily represent a precise reflection of the reality of their life), and instead moves on to explore how my respondents are experiencing their current life, the way they understand and give meaning to their experiences, as well as the social meanings

underlying these experiences. This is achieved by analysing my respondents' accounts in context, with particular attention paid to the consistency and discrepancy within their own interviews and across the paired interviews by the two generations from the same family. I also tried to look for information conveyed by respondents through what Anderson and Jack (1991) described as "both the dominant and muted channels". In other words, in addition to the dominant discourses about the smooth collaboration between two generations, I also paid attention to the more muted discourses, such as the parents' ambivalence about grandparents' care provision, or grandparents' struggle to fulfil the younger generation's anticipation, which were sometimes in contradiction to their own statements elsewhere in the interviews. This approach allowed me to appreciate the multiple layers of meaning embedded in the interviews, which involve information regarding respondents' narratives about their family life, as well as their subjective feelings and opinions concerning these narratives. Furthermore, divergence between the parents and grandparents also provides an opportunity for me to understand how individuals' viewpoint is shaped by the specific structural circumstances they are located in. My predominant task is not to decide which party is correct, but to understand the underlying nature of such conflicts by shedding light on the "cultural and institutional constraints" around them (Macdonald, 2011). A recurring theme in the transcripts is parents' and grandparents' competing views regarding the latest teachings of "scientific childcare". It is not for my current research to determine which generation's childcare method is better. Instead, I used this case as an analytical lens to explore how childrearing beliefs may vary across the generations, and to investigate the potential implications for the intergenerational power dynamics and the quality of their relationship (see Chapter 6 and 7).

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the design of my research and the process of my empirical inquiry. The next chapter moves on to the findings of my study, starting with the motivations behind parents' and grandparents' utilisation and provision of grandparental childcare.

Chapter 5 Ambivalence in parents and grandparents' motivations behind their intergenerational childcare arrangements

The prevalence of grandparental care in contemporary China seems to run counter to the classical modernisation theories that predict the decline of extended kinship (Cherlin, 2012; Goode, 1963). Nevertheless, it could also be oversimplifying to assume that this prevalence of intergenerational support is driven by some long-standing cultural traditions and norms (Cong and Silverstein, 2012; Logan and Bian, 1999), because the correlation between practices and beliefs is often far from ideal (Kohli and Künemund, 2003; Lee and Bauer, 2013; Silverstein et al., 2002). This chapter seeks to challenge the common assumption that grandparents' childcare provision in contemporary urban China is a taken-for-granted decision largely motivated by pre-existing cultural norms. In doing so, this chapter provides a direct investigation of the varied motivations of parents and grandparents for their childcare arrangements, which highlights the ambivalence they experience when deciding on the intergenerational childcare.

This chapter starts by discussing the importance of understanding parents' and grandparents' motivations, and how the concept of ambivalence can be useful for this inquiry. This chapter then moves on to explore how such ambivalence is unevenly experienced by grandparents and parents, by examining the differing motivations behind their childcare arrangements and the management strategies they adopt to rationalise their decisions. I then investigate how parents, as the gatekeepers of grandparents' involvement, deliberately recruit and exclude certain grandparents based on several criteria. Overall, by examining how grandparental care, a seemingly "traditional" practice, is differently interpreted by parents and grandparents across families, this chapter reflects on how cultural traditions are reshaped while continue to play a role in contemporary urban Chinese families.

5.1 Understanding motivations from the perspective of ambivalence

Understanding the motivations behind intergenerational childcare arrangements is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. From the theoretical perspective, one of the most persistent themes in the literature on modernity is pluralism and ambivalence (Bengtson and Lowenstein, 2003; Izuhara,

2010). In a slow-changing pre-modern society, cultural rules tend to be authoritative and clearly defined. In comparison, people in developed societies are often confronted with a multitude of competing ideals which they need to sort out on their own. Chang (2010b: 444) coins the term “compressed modernity” to describe the situation in many East Asian countries, where “economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner”. As a result, in these societies, a plethora of values, ideologies and institutions originated from different socio-historical backgrounds coexist and interact with each other dynamically (Chang, 2010a). As discussed in Chapter 1, significant social changes have taken place alongside a series of deep-rooted cultural traditions in China. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to expect traditional norms related to grandparents’ childcare provision to remain unchanged and powerful in today’s China after all the recent changes.

Furthermore, at the micro level, the assumption of a unanimous compliance to cultural traditions risks neglecting the heterogeneity within the vast group of families relying on grandparental support. While all the participants of the current study are ultimately exposed to a similar universe of cultural traditions, some may be in a more privileged position to exercise a lot of choices over their childcare decisions, while others may be strongly constrained by structures (Connidis, 2015; Connidis and McMullin, 2002b). In other words, when individuals contemplate their childcare decisions, their exertion of agency is subject to their structured locations in social relations, leading to unequal access to rights and privileges, as in the case of urban and rural grandparents discussed later (Connidis, 2015; Connidis and McMullin, 2002b). Therefore, this chapter will examine the potential differences in parents’ and grandparents’ ability to exercise agency in choosing their childcare arrangements, and how that may shape their motivations.

From a practical perspective, motivations can make a difference in the quality of childcare support and of intergenerational relationships (Kohli and Künemund, 2003; J Liu, 2017). Whether grandparents’ childcare provision is driven by normative beliefs, self-interest, love, or the practical needs of their adult children can influence the moral burden it imposes on the middle generation, and have profound implications for intergenerational dynamics.

Due to the factors above, rather than assuming intergenerational childcare as a passive manifestation of cultural ideals, I argue it is important to construct a more direct and refined understanding of parents' and grandparents' motivations. This current chapter does not expand much on the practical benefits of grandparental care, which have attracted sufficient attention in the literature. Widely dubbed as "the next best thing" to parental care, grandparental care is considered to be more reliable, trustworthy, economic, and flexible compared to non-familial care by nannies and childcare institutions (Lee and Bauer, 2013; Wheelock and Jones, 2002).

However, less is known about the exact process where parents and grandparents agree upon such an arrangement and how they feel about it. Scholars have repeatedly reminded us that kinship status alone does not necessarily guarantee kinship responsibilities and privileges (Finch and Mason, 1993; Hansen, 2005), which have to be activated for intergenerational support such as grandparental childcare to be enacted. More often, as active agents, family members are in constant negotiations based on evaluations of cultural ideals and their concrete situational conditions, which gives rise to diverse forms of family life (Chen et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2013; Logan and Bian, 1999; Shih and Pyke, 2010). This chapter focuses on this process of negotiations to avoid reducing the enactment of intergenerational childcare to a given decision taken for granted by all members of the family.

As later elaborated on in this chapter, parents' and grandparents' negotiations around their childcare arrangements are often characterised by ambivalence. Despite the long-standing tradition of mutual support within the family, a growing sense of unease has now been documented in China regarding the young people's heavy reliance on grandparental care. For example, such behaviour is widely rebuked as "*kenlao*" in media coverage and everyday discussion, which literally translates as "chewing on the elderly", a graphic description of the younger generations' "parasitical exploitation" of their elderly parents (W Liu, 2017). In a similar vein, academic research highlights the imbalance within the exchange between parents and their adult children, criticising the self-centred younger generation for being "uncivil individuals", and lamenting the erosion of filial ideals (He, 2009; Yan, 2003).

For the younger generation, their extensive dependence on their parents' support can be viewed as in conflict with both the tradition of filial piety, and the

more contemporary value of individuality and self-reliance encouraged by the trend of globalization (Yan, 2010a). For grandparents, looking after their grandchildren can be a major source of fulfilment. But long-term intensive caregiving may also endanger their pursuit of self-determination and personal freedom (Kemp, 2004; Mason et al., 2007; Thang et al., 2011), which is becoming increasingly desirable with the rise of individualism in Chinese society. Therefore, two sources of conflict are likely to create paradoxical experiences and meanings for both generations involved in the intergenerational childcare arrangements: first, there are conflicts between the ideals of intergenerational solidarity, filial piety, self-reliance and self-determination; furthermore, there are also conflicts between these ideals and the realities of what people are actually able to do in their everyday life.

Informed by various studies of intergenerational relationships (Arber and Timonen, 2012; Guo et al., 2013; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2011), this chapter draws on the concept of ambivalence to reveal the underlying paradoxes in parents' and grandparents' understanding and experience of intergenerational childcare. The next section moves on to discuss the different motivations behind grandparents' childcare provision.

5.2 Grandparents' motivations for providing childcare

When explaining why they decided to take care of their grandchildren, almost all grandparents in my study emphasise the necessity of their involvement, as few are comfortable with the idea of putting their grandchildren under the exclusive care of a non-familial caregiver such as a nanny. In other words, most grandparents' caregiving is related to a deep distrust of carers from outside the family.

Apart from this commonality, however, there exist systematic differences in grandparents' motivations for taking care of their grandchildren, which is further related to the varying level of ambivalence they experience regarding their caregiving. Depending on how much they consider caregiving as an obligation prescribed by a fixed cultural tradition, I differentiate between two types²⁸ of grandparents: the

²⁸ Here I draw on the concept of "ideal type" by Max Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1991), which is not so much as an average or representative depiction of all the observations, but an epitome of the most essential characteristics of the type (Hattery, 2001).

tradition-abiding grandparents and the *reflexive* grandparents. In reality, the boundary between these two groups may not always be clear-cut, and it is unwise to assume each group is holding on to a single set of well-defined motivations (Kohli and Künemund, 2003). While not denying the messiness of the real world, my following discussion uses this classification as an analytical tool to highlight the most defining characteristics of each group. This allows a comparison of their distinctive motivations, and at a deeper level, a reflection on their different orientations towards cultural traditions.

5.2.1 Tradition-abiding grandparents

My interview with grandparents generally starts with the question, “Why did you decide to look after your grandchildren?” Grandpa Wu (C2), a forthright man aged 68, paused in puzzlement at my question as if the answer were too obvious:

We... I won't say it's our decision. It seems in the rural areas, we just have this custom. It's not up to us to decide. It's just the tradition, an obligation towards our son that we can't get away... You have to come [to look after your grandchildren] no matter you feel like it or not! (C2, Paternal grandfather, looking after two grandchildren with his wife)

Coming from a village in southeast China, Grandpa Wu used to work in the administrative committee of his village and ran some small business after he retired, while Grandma Wu, who had received no formal education, had been a farmer all her life. In order to move to the city to look after their grandchildren, Grandpa Wu sold his business and had their farmland taken care of by some relatives at home. For this elderly couple, it was simply natural to take upon the care of their grandchildren (from their son's family, as specified later).

As my fieldwork went along, I found the above response by Grandpa Wu repeatedly echoed by certain grandparents with some shared characteristics. It appears that most of them are the paternal grandparents of the children they are taking care of, and have been living in less-developed rural areas and small towns for the most part of their life. For these grandparents, their assumption of childcare is a straightforward, pre-made “decision”, explicitly prescribed by an external cultural norm they feel obliged to obey. Interesting enough, even though considerable sacrifices have to be

made before they can look after their grandchildren, few of them report experiencing ambivalence about their caregiving role. I call this group the *tradition-abiding* grandparents. In my study, 18 out of the 46 families have grandparent(s) belonging to this group. A full list of them can be found in **Appendix 3**.

The tradition-abiding grandparents' certainty about their assumption of care can be attributed to several factors. First of all, the tradition-abiding grandparents generally agree upon the existence of an unambiguous and authoritative norm about their caregiving responsibilities. During their interviews, I repeatedly heard expressions such as "it's the rule", "our tradition/habit/way since old times", or even the phrase "*tianjing diyi*", which translates as "justified by the principles of heaven and earth". In other words, the simple fact that they are the paternal grandparents is sufficient for them to step up their caregiving role without further questioning.

It is worth highlighting that following the patrilineal tradition, these grandparents' strong sense of obligation is reserved exclusively for their sons' families. The precedence of the patrilineal line is particularly salient when more than one adult child needs childcare support. For example, at the time of the interview, Grandpa Wu (C2) and his wife were taking care of the two children of his youngest son, leaving their second daughter, who also gave birth to a child recently, reluctantly making do with a nanny. For Grandpa Wu, choosing his son over his daughter was not a difficult decision:

My daughter said to me, "Dad, if you look after my child, I'll give you 20,000 yuan (approximately £2,500) every year. If you help my younger brother, he can't give you two cents". I turned her down. Even [if my son can't give me] two cents, it's still my duty, and it's wrong for me to accept your 20,000 yuan. (C2, Paternal grandfather)

Therefore, Grandpa Wu and his wife moved in with their son's family without hesitation, leaving their daughter with a grudge against them so bad that they did not talk for a year. Even so, Grandpa Wu is adamant that he made the right decision, "after all, a daughter is a daughter, a son is a son". What matters most for him is that he lives up to his duties set out by the cultural norms, which renders both the monetary reward and the strained relationship with his daughter less important. In some cases, there are two adult sons who need childcare support at the same time (e.g.

C1, 16 and 37). Feeling obliged to help both sons without showing favouritism, the older couple has no choice but to separate, each moving into one son's family. Despite the sacrifices they have to make, all these grandparents are convinced about their decision, which is in accordance with the tradition.

Furthermore, the cultural norm has a firm grip on these tradition-abiding grandparents, because it is widely embraced by other members in their immediate communities. Failure to abide would risk condemnation or even exclusion. As put by Granma Song (C16, paternal grandmother), if she fails to provide care for her grandchildren, she would "be gossiped by neighbours and relatives back in the village". When Linfang's (C3) first child was born, her mother-in-law was living in a town far from Guangzhou and had some health issues. Therefore, during the first month, Linfang only asked her own mother who lived next door for help. However, before long, her parents-in-law applied for early retirement so that they could move in with her and take up a substantial share of childcare and housework. It turned out that they felt extremely embarrassed and guilty, after being scolded by their own parents for failing to fulfil their obligations: "How can you leave your own grandson to your *qingjia* (parents of daughter-in-law) while you are sitting at home!"

The way these tradition-abiding grandparents experience their caregiving practice as a prescribed obligation reflects what Gross (2005) calls "regulative traditions", which is often related to the physical and symbolic exclusion of individuals from "some moral community if certain practices regarded as central to that community's historical identity fail to be engaged in" (Gross, 2005: 288). From the perspective of these grandparents, the clearly defined cultural codifications set out a normative course of action which they and their community take for granted and obey, therefore leaving little room for ambivalence.

Moreover, these grandparents choose to look after their grandchildren not merely because "it's the right thing to do" in an abstract sense. More often, it is also in line with their evaluation of their material conditions. According to the tradition, the grandparents' provision of childcare is part of a long-term, reciprocal intergenerational exchange that foretells elder care in the future. Therefore, for them, childcare and elderly care are in fact two sides of the same coin. This is explained by a mother, Feifei (C16), whose two sons are looked after by her mother-in-law:

You know the saying “yang’er fanglao” (raising up sons as the insurance for old age)? So in where we come from, looking after grandchildren is the paternal grandparents’ obligation as well as their right. In a sense, without the paternal grandmother’s permission, my mother is not entitled to look after my children. (C16, Mother)

Feifei and her husband both grew up in a small town in north-eastern Guangdong. While they had left their hometown to study at a university in Guangzhou and later started a family, their parents continued to live in the countryside. Feifei’s mother-in-law, Grandma Song, has been a farmer all her life and her father-in-law a construction worker. During the interview, Grandma Song did not hide her concern for her old age, which prompted her to help with the care of her grandsons:

If I didn’t come [to look after my grandchildren], I fear when I’m old and can’t take care of myself, I could not explain to my daughter-in-law why I didn’t come [and she won’t look after me]. (C16, Paternal grandmother)

Grandma Song’s situation is far from unique among her fellow tradition-abiding grandparents. While their adult children have been granted the more privileged urban *hukou* through their education and employment, the older generation maintains their rural *hukou* due to various institutional barriers. Most of them have not been formally employed and only have minimal access to the pension and other social security support. By engaging in this intergenerational time-for-money exchange, they are actively making deposits into an “emotional account” of their adult children for the sake of their old-age security, hoping for repayment in the future.

Underpinning the grandparents’ expectation to depend on their adult children for elderly care is a collectivist orientation, which convinces them their personal interests are ultimately tied to those of their children (to be more specific, their sons and daughters-in-law). By looking after their grandchildren, these grandparents play the role of “family maximiser”, which enables the parent generation to better focus on their careers. In this way, their adult children are more likely to have sufficient resources to reciprocate in the future, which ultimately contributes to their old-age security and maximises the wellbeing of the entire family. This kind of family dynamics has long been described in the literature as the “corporate group model”,

which is characterised by the emphasis on the mutual aid and collective wellbeing of the entire family (Cong and Silverstein, 2011, 2012; Silverstein, 2011; Sun, 2002). In the current study, the embrace of such a model is largely observed among tradition-abiding grandparents, with most of them coming from rural areas which lack an established social security and medical care system. This confirms findings from other studies that both cultural values and economic conditions are essential in shaping the landscape of intergenerational exchange in less-developed societies (Cong and Silverstein, 2008b, 2011; Xu, 2018), and partially accounts for the persistence of high-level intergenerational interdependence within some contemporary Chinese families.

Taken together, compelled by the clearly defined norms, the moral sanctions posed by the immediate community, as well as the prospects of better old-age security, the tradition-abiding grandparents appear to have relatively little ambivalence about their childcare responsibilities, despite the significant sacrifices they have to make. For one thing, since all of them were previously living in villages and towns outside Guangzhou, assuming the care of their grandchildren means they have to leave their hometown and adopt a whole different way of life. Many have to sell or even give up their farmland, livestock and business due to their relocation. Nevertheless, most grandparents downplayed these troubles or did not even bother to mention unless I probed specifically. Grandma Qian (C21), a rural woman who had not left her village all her life, moved to Guangzhou alone after the birth of her grandson without hesitation: “Wherever my grandson goes, I follow”. Her reaction is an epitome of the determination of her fellow tradition-abiding grandparents, who are keen to fulfil their childcare obligation as per the traditional norm, and are more than willing to make whatever compromises necessary to actualise their caregiving role.

One caveat is that, while the tradition-abiding grandparents are readily available or even eager to look after their grandchildren, their high level of functional and normative solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991) is not always accompanied by a strong affective bond across the generations (affectual solidarity). They are expected to provide childcare support regardless of how they feel about their adult children and grandchildren. To be fair, many grandparents profess profound affection and concerns for their grandchildren, reflected by the way they describe them such as “my flesh and bone” (*gurou*). Grandma Zhou (C7) and Grandma Song (C16) both told me whenever

they had to go back to their villages and separate from their grandsons only for a few days, they “couldn’t stop worrying if they were eating and sleeping well without me”.

In comparison, it is uncommon to see these grandparents extending similar affections to the mothers of their grandchildren, which is in sharp contrast to the next group of grandparents I shall turn to shortly.²⁹ While it is unfair to claim that the tradition-abiding grandparents do not care about their daughters-in-law, it is likely that this was not a major motivation behind their childcare provision in the beginning. This distinction is in accordance with the patrilineal tradition, that grandchildren (especially grandsons) who carry the family name of the patrilineal lineage are seen as the continuation of family bloodline, and are automatically qualified as essential members of the paternal grandparents’ family (Kamo, 1998). In contrast, daughters-in-law are traditionally seen as outsiders who may exert a potential threat to family solidarity (Yan, 2003; Zuo, 2009). As I expand on in Chapter 7, the lack of strong emotional bonds between paternal grandparents and their daughter-in-law can have significant implications for the intergenerational power dynamics when it comes to childcare arrangements and decision-making. In fact, families that suffer from a conflictual and strained intergenerational relationship are mostly those with tradition-abiding grandparents.

5.2.2 Reflexive grandparents

The rest of the grandparents hold a very different attitude towards the norm about their caregiving role. Instead of simply carrying out what the established norm compels them to do, these grandparents make a conscious decision about their caregiving. They take into consideration not only the cultural traditions, but also the concrete situation of themselves and their relationships with their adult children. I call this second group the *reflexive* grandparents, which consists mainly of maternal grandparents from 28 families, and a few paternal grandparents from 7 families (see

²⁹ Nevertheless, in a few families (e.g. C3 and 15), the tradition-abiding grandparents managed to establish an amicable relationship with their daughters-in-law. In Chapter 7, I will discuss how that affects the intergenerational power dynamics when it comes to decision-making regarding childcare.

Appendix 3).³⁰ More than two-thirds of the reflexive grandparents are originally from urban areas. As I demonstrate in the following discussion, in comparison with the tradition-abiding grandparents, reflexive grandparents' assumption of care for their grandchildren is often less straightforward and involves a higher level of ambivalence.

5.2.2.1 Ambivalence towards childcare provision

For reflexive grandparents, a major source of ambivalence derives from the conflicting ideals of intergenerational solidarity versus self-determination. Many are caught between their desire to support their adult children and grandchildren, and their hesitance to yield control over their own life and make considerable sacrifices in terms of their material, physical, and psychological wellbeing.

In stark contrast to their tradition-abiding counterparts, the reflexive grandparents make no effort in concealing their struggle or reluctance regarding their caregiving. A response I repeatedly hear from this group is, "if there were other ways, I would not have come". In response to my opening question about why they decided to look after their grandchildren, several grandparents asked me back, "what else were we supposed to do", with a wry smile on their face. The negative sentiments harboured by the reflexive grandparents suggest that, their caregiving is more or less an expedient decision to address their adult children's pressing needs. It also conveys a rejection of the regulative dimension of the cultural traditions about grandparenthood. A few of the reflexive grandparents explicitly challenge the idea of caregiving as an obligation. When I asked Grandpa Chen (C3), a 69-year-old retired university lecturer, whether he saw helping his daughter with childcare as his duty, he responded point-blank:

Duty? What duty? I've done my duty to her (referring to his daughter) by bringing her up. I've done my bit educating her well, that's my duty. I don't have the obligation to take care of her children for her. (C3, Maternal grandfather, two grandsons looked after by all four grandparents)

³⁰ Seven out of the 46 families in my study had paternal and maternal grandparents involved in caregiving at the same time. Since paternal and maternal grandparents from these seven families are counted separately, there are altogether 53 sets of grandparents.

Similarly, Grandma Cai (C6), a 66-year-old former employee of a state-owned enterprise, echoed:

You know, no rule says we must come. She (referring to her daughter) could not complain about a thing if we were not here to help. (C6, Maternal grandmother, alternating with the paternal grandparents for the care of their granddaughter)

Other grandparents expressed their disapproval in a more subtle way, but none would agree with the tradition-abiding grandparents who consider grandchildren care as their intrinsic, unnegotiable duty “justified by the principles of heaven and earth”. Moreover, the reflexive grandparents are aware of the potential moral pressure they may suffer, should they decide not to look after their grandchildren. However, as put by Grandma Cai (C6), “they can talk all they want, but it’s *my* life and I decide how I want to live”.

Several factors heighten reflexive grandparents’ sense of ambivalence. To begin with, many emphasise the substantial sacrifices and compromise they have to make. Grandpa and Grandma Liang (C19), for example, used to work as accountants in a state-owned enterprise in Guangzhou. After they retired, they enrolled in a University of the Third Age (U3A) where they took a variety of classes including singing, photography, computer skills, etc. In their free time, they enjoyed visiting their friends and travelled around China and abroad. All of these were put to an end since they assumed full-time care for their granddaughter nearly three years ago. Recalling the old days when they just retired, Grandma Liang lamented that “we used to have *a life of our own*”. She went on to compare herself with other grandparents who “have nothing else to do other than looking after their grandchildren”:

Unlike them, I don’t crave the opportunity to look after my grandchildren. I’m more of the active type. I want to travel around. I have all the hobbies I’d like to pursue if I don’t need to look after the child. (C19, Maternal grandmother, looking after one granddaughter with her husband)

In a similar vein, other reflexive grandparents talk extensively with pity about their premature retirement, loss of contact with friends, lack of personal time, aborted hobbies and travel plans, etc. If circumstances permit, the reflexive grandparents have a very different vision for their life in old age which does not entirely revolve around

their grandchildren. Instead, it involves professional commitments, social engagement, leisure and recreational activities – things typically fall under the category of “productive ageing” (Chen et al., 2018; Ko and Yeung, 2019).

While I highlight the reflexive grandparents’ awareness about their personal loss, I am not suggesting that they only care about their self-interest and resent caring for their grandchildren, as what happens in practice is quite the contrary. This is particularly the case for grandparents who suffer from fewer constraints: some have already retired before their grandchildren were born, or genuinely enjoy the company of young children, or are already living in proximity to their adult children, which altogether make it less of a hassle for them to be involved. Still, almost all reflexive grandparents have other competing pursuits apart from the wellbeing of their children and grandchildren, which results in a feeling of ambivalence that varies in intensity from person to person.

Furthermore, the reflexive grandparents’ sense of ambivalence is exacerbated by their desire and capability to remain independent from their adult children in terms of elderly support, at least financially. As mentioned earlier, most of the reflexive grandparents are of urban *hukou* and have been formally employed, and therefore have access to comfortable levels of savings and pensions, health insurance, and better medical care service compared to their rural counterparts. Even for the small number of grandparents with rural *hukou* in this group,³¹ they either have sufficient savings from their successful business (C14, 25, 41 and 42) or plan to rely on their sons (C7, 31 and 45) instead of daughters for old-age support.

Some grandparents are further sceptical about the feasibility of their children caring for them in their old age. Grandma Zhao (C26), a former staff of a state-owned enterprise, commented on her daughter, who works as a researcher at a local prestigious university:

By the time I reach my eighties, my daughter will be in my age now. What can I expect from her? She has her career, she has her family, she might even have her own grandchildren to look after. She will be busy for sure. Even if

³¹ All the reflexive grandparents with rural *hukou* were the maternal grandparents of the children they were looking after at the time of the study.

she wants to help me, I don't think it's possible for her. (C26, Maternal grandmother, looking after one granddaughter)

In some extreme cases such as Grandpa and Grandma Cai (C6), they make it clear that they are planning to move into a care home, so that “we won't be a burden for our daughter”. Both were previously employees of a large state-own energy company and therefore have little concern for their old-age security. Their consideration about a care home is unusual in the Chinese context, given the deep-rooted tradition of filial piety and the normative expectation for adult children to take care of their ageing parents (Evans, 2008; Jackson et al., 2013). Overall, from the perspective of the reflexive grandparents, as they are capable of being self-dependent, they expect little from their adult children for old-age support. In other words, their old-age security hardly has a bearing on their intention to look after their grandchildren.

The ambivalence felt by the reflexive grandparents indicates that they do not always see the interests of their children and themselves sit comfortably with each other. In contrast to their tradition-abiding counterparts, their personal desire for autonomy and self-actualisation may not be straightforwardly compatible with the intensive nature of grandchildren care. This challenges the underlying ideal of the corporate group model, which celebrates the harmony of collective interests within a family. Existing research on intergenerational relationships in China has noted a newly emerged individualistic tendency among the younger generation, who value individual desires and personal fulfilment over the collective interests of the family (Kang, 2012; Shen, 2013; Yan, 2010a). Evidence from the current study suggests that this trend may also extend into the older generation, especially those who reside in more developed areas, and are better educated and economically independent.

Overall, in face of the conflicts between the interests of their children and themselves, the reflexive grandparents make the decision, however constrained, to prioritise their offspring over themselves. However, their agreement to provide childcare should not be simply interpreted as a submission to traditional norms. As demonstrated in the next section, the reflexive grandparents are actively drawing on a series of management strategies to reconcile the disjuncture between their desire to help their offspring and to maintain self-determination, through which they introduce new meanings to cultural traditions.

5.2.2.2 *Reflexive grandparents' management strategies*

Compared with their tradition-abiding counterparts who feel constrained by a prefixed tradition, the reflexive grandparents may have more freedom to decide how they wish to conduct their family relationships. At the same time, the ambivalence they experience as a result of their caregiving means they have to spend time and energy to justify their chosen care arrangements, as reflected by their extensive discussion about their management strategies. To borrow Hays' (1996: 133) words, these strategies can be understood as the grandparents doing the "socially necessary ideological work", to develop some connection between what they hope for and what they actually do. Hays (1996) emphasises that the ideals people adopt for their ideological work tend to be socially shaped by their circumstances. In the context of my study, the reflexive grandparents' strategies are informed by traditional cultural ideals such as intra-familial solidarity and filial piety, which in their redefined forms continue to be "meaning-constitutive" in the contemporary context (Gross, 2005). Three major strategies of justification are identified from the transcripts: grandparents regard their caregiving as motivated by intergenerational intimacy, as part of a shared sacrifice across generations, and as a way of active ageing, which I now turn to discuss in detail.

Caregiving motivated by intergenerational intimacy

When explaining the reasons they agree to care for their grandchildren, almost all reflexive grandparents refer to how deeply they are concerned about the wellbeing of their adult children(-in-law). Their strong affections are captured by recurring phrases such as "that's *my* child we're talking about", "I care for him/her and want him/her to be happy", "I can't just stand there and watch them struggle". Many grandparents express their wish to help their children handle the stress of their transition to parenthood and to ease their work-life conflict. For example, Grandma Xiao (C1) talked about her daughter, whose job at a bank frequently involves overtime working in evenings and weekends:

From my perspective, deep down it's because I care about my daughter. Her work is exhausting. She is extremely busy, and compared to her, I have more free time, so I give her a hand. I hate to see her suffer. (C1, Maternal grandmother, looking after two granddaughters with paternal grandmother)

Consistent with existing studies, one important factor that appears to contribute to this close emotional bond between grandparents and their adult children is the reduction in family size due to the one-child policy (Yan, 2016; Zheng, 2018). In my sample, 22 out of the 35 families with reflexive grandparents have only one adult child; while in the 18 families with tradition-abiding grandparents, only 4 have one adult child. Many reflexive grandparents make a comparison between the current relationship they have with their only child and what they used to have with their own parents, as illustrated by Grandma Cai (C6):

In the past we had so many siblings, our parents could not possibly have time for each of us. Now there is this one daughter, we have no one else to care about other than her. We help her as much as we could. (C6, Maternal grandmother)

These grandparents further confirm that throughout the years, their only child has been the focus of the entire family, whom they have been heavily invested in both materially and emotionally. It is not uncommon for their only child to live with or near them all their life, and such geographical closeness has contributed greatly to their emotional closeness. In the case of Grandma Xiao (C1) cited above, her only daughter, Wenyi, has been living with her in Guangzhou all her life. Even after Wenyi was married, the two generations continue to live together in an apartment brought by Grandma Xiao in Wenyi's name. So when Wenyi's child was born, Grandma Xiao found she was naturally involved in the care of her grandchild. In other cases, the only child has to move to other cities due to their education or work. This is the case of Grandma Cai (C6), whose daughter moved from their hometown in Shandong to Guangzhou for university and has been away from them ever since. However, the intimate ties between them are actively maintained through frequent phone calls and visits, and are readily mobilised when needs such as childcare support arise.

Given the close bonds between the reflexive grandparents and their adult children, it is not hard to understand their recurring remarks "as long as they (referring to their adult children's family) are happy, I'm happy". These grandparents are making a point that their caregiving is not impelled by some external rules they do not necessarily identify with, as in the case of tradition-abiding grandparents. Rather, it is a conscious decision motivated by the deep affections they develop for their children throughout the years. In this sense, the way reflexive grandparents interpret

their childcare provision exemplifies the concept of “practices of intimacy”, which Jamieson (2011) uses to describe practices that “enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each”. Intimacy does not naturally occur in family relationships, but has to be built up through the investment of time and effort (Gabb, 2008). Therefore, the reflexive grandparents’ childcare provision represents both the cumulative consequences of pre-existing practices of intimacy within their family so far, and their continual efforts to cultivate close affective ties with their adult children. As intimacy places emphasis on “subjective experience” (Jamieson, 2011), by emphasising the heartfelt concerns they have for their adult children, the reflexive grandparents manage to posit themselves as agentic individuals capable of exerting control over their own life (W Liu, 2017). This to an extent eases their sense of ambivalence that arises from the conflicting ideals of intergenerational solidarity versus self-determination.

This emphasis on intimacy has important implications for the arrangements of intergenerational childcare in at least two ways. Firstly, it highlights the emotionally rewarding dimension of childcare provision. As explained earlier, most of the reflexive grandparents expect little material repayment from their adult children. Nevertheless, they actively seek emotional fulfilment. For example, Grandpa Chen (C3) considers his relationship with his daughter’s family as well as with the parents of his son-in-law (*qingjia*) to be an important component of his retirement life. Every day he and his wife are responsible for preparing dinner for their daughter’s family, often joined by his *qingjia*. Surely cooking for such a large group (there could be as many as six adults and two children) takes a lot of effort, yet Grandpa Chen derives pleasure from it:

I know there’s a lot of work and it’s tiring, but imagine we don’t do it this way. I don’t need to care about whether or what my daughter [and her family] is eating. Sounds fine. But then every day it would be just the two of us eating together, me and my wife. Don’t you think life is a bit boring? (C3, Maternal grandfather)

Similar sentiments are echoed by other reflexive grandparents. Grandpa and Grandma Fei (C33) expected little in return for looking after their granddaughter. According to their daughter-in-law, Limeng, the older couple’s only wish was “every day after work, we can go to visit them and have dinner together”. This is consistent

with observations by research in many countries that, from the perspective of older parents who are relatively affluent and healthy, emotional support rather than instrumental help from their adult children has become the pivotal dimension of their intergenerational relationships (Bengtson and Lowenstein, 2003; Trommsdorff, 2005). Similarly, in China, scholars have documented a shift from the traditional ideal of *yang'er fanglao* (children as insurance for old age), which focuses on children's economic value, to *yang'er peilao* (children as companions for old age), that focuses on their emotional value (Chen and Liu, 2012; Goh, 2011). Furthermore, this emphasis on intergenerational intimacy also reflects a redefinition of the longstanding ideal of filial piety that guides intergenerational relationships in China (Nehring and Wang, 2016). Departing from the authoritarian form of filial piety which is characterised by unconditional obedience and support from the junior to the senior generation, the reflexive grandparents are now embracing a modified form that is grounded in "the psychological need for mutual relatedness between two individuals" (Yeh et al., 2013: 278).

Secondly, given how much the emotional dimension features in their intergenerational childcare arrangements, it is highly likely that parents and grandparents in these families both demonstrate a high level of sympathy and understanding towards each other (C Zhang, 2016). This can have significant implications for the emotional tone of their relationships, especially when a disagreement about childcare methods and ideals arises between the two generations. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 7, for families where an intimate intergenerational relationship is already in place, the divergence across generations seldom escalates into intensive conflicts or cold wars, as both parents and grandparents are willing to take a step back in the interests of the harmonious atmosphere in their family.

Caregiving as part of a shared sacrifice

For grandparents, ambivalence may also be triggered by their children's continuing heavy dependence on their support after reaching adulthood, or what is commonly referred to as "*kenlao*" (Guo et al., 2013; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2011; Pillemer and Sutor, 2002). For reflexive grandparents in my study, this is overcome by reconceptualising their care provision as part of an intergenerational shared sacrifice for the pursuit of some higher goals endorsed by both generations. According to the reflexive grandparents, their adult children rely on them not because

of their lack of independence or failure to achieve normative adult status; quite the contrary, it is for the sake of becoming even more successful and competitive in their professional pursuit.

Grandparents' defence of their adult children is related to another shift in the discourse of filial piety observed in China and other East Asian countries (Park et al., 2006; Yan, 2016; Yeh et al., 2013). There has been a change of focus from children's obedience to them honouring the family through their success (Lee and Bauer, 2013; Yan, 2011, 2016). In the context of my study, the reflexive grandparents generally hold high expectations for their children's educational and professional achievements. Accordingly, they are willing to provide practical support to assist them. In particular, they make a point in minimising the interruption of childbirth on the career trajectories of the mothers. All mothers in this study have received education at tertiary level or above, often with extensive support from their family. Naturally, their parents(-in-law) are not comfortable with the idea of them giving up their careers to become a stay-at-home mother. This is evident from the following statement by Grandpa Chen (C3), the retired university lecturer I quoted earlier:

I know some people would resign after they have children and only go back to work until their children are old enough. However, this is not realistic for my daughter. For families like us, our children have received considerable education. You can't expect them to just give up their promising career and stay at home to look after their children. (C3, Maternal grandfather)

His daughter Linfang, who teaches at a local college, received her master's and PhD degrees from top universities in the UK and China respectively, with considerable financial support from her parents. Shortly after her first son was born, Grandpa Chen and his wife both arranged for early retirement to give her a hand, even though he made it clear it was not his obligation (see an earlier quotation on page 104). Grandpa Chen explained his decision:

Don't you wish your children have higher achievements than you? In my case, I've worked my way to an associate professor, so I hope she will become a professor one day. I definitely want to see the next generation excel us, which means I must support her with actual actions. (C3, Maternal grandfather)

Grandparents are fully aware of the urgency for mothers to resume their work right after their mandated maternity leave, as women who have extended intermissions in their career trajectories would be subject to significant disadvantages when they try to rejoin the labour market in urban China (Zhou, 2018). The following excerpt from Grandma Xiao (C1) illustrates a typical concern among grandparents:

My daughter won't be able to keep her original post in her company if she takes a few years off to look after her child. It would also be extremely difficult if she wants to start all over again somewhere else. So I must help her now. (C1, Maternal grandmother)

As captured by the quotes of Grandpa Chen and Grandma Xiao, the reflexive grandparents who value the achievements of their children also feel responsible to support them personally, especially considering the great efforts made by the younger generation themselves towards such goals. Therefore, although assuming care for their grandchildren could be a burden, these grandparents see it as the necessary sacrifice jointly shouldered by themselves and their adult children for a common cause.

In a qualitative study of Nicaraguan grandmothers who assumed care for their grandchildren when their mothers migrated abroad to work, Yarris (2017) found the grandmothers framed their grandchildren care as part of a “shared sacrifice” parallel with the mothers’ migration and employment abroad. Other researchers also observe that the level of ambivalence experienced by parents who provide aid for their adult children is conditioned by the circumstances of their children, that parents are generally more willing to support children who are “working hard” toward a well-recognised goal (Descartes, 2006; W Liu, 2017).

In the context of the current research, the young generation’s needs to remain in paid employment and arguably to secure a better future for their children serve as a legitimate ground for the grandparents to make the necessary sacrifice, which helps to ease their ambivalence (see also Hansen, 2005). However, as argued by Connidis and McMullin (2002b), certain causes are deemed legitimate only because they reflect the dominant relations of social structure. In my research, parents’ needs to remain in paid employment appears to be more important and urgent than grandparents’ needs, given many grandparents had to give up their own job in order to help with childcare.

In some families, grandparents' ambivalence is further alleviated because of the discrepancy in socioeconomic status between themselves and their adult children (Cheng, 2019; Xiao, 2016). Compared with their tradition-abiding counterparts, the majority of the reflexive grandparents are more privileged in the sense that they hold urban *hukou*, have received a certain level of education, and are financially independent. However, many of their adult children are generally even better educated and have equivalent or higher social status. Against this background, the relatively less privileged grandparents are willing to support their high-achieving children, even that means significant sacrifices on their part. For example, Grandma Bai (C20), who used to be an accountant in the administrative office of her village, is proud of her daughter (an actuary in an investment bank) and son-in-law's (a PhD student at an elite university) achievements in Guangzhou:

The young couple is doing great in making a living in a city like Guangzhou starting from scratch, and they are under a lot of pressure... My daughter has been preparing for her Certified Public Accountant examination for months after coming home from work... I can't help her with her exams or work, but I want to share their burden as much as I can, so I help them with the child and housework while they focus on their work. (C20, Maternal grandmother, looking after one grandson)

Caregiving as a way of active ageing

The reflexive grandparents further deal with their ambivalence by highlighting the sense of purpose they gain from looking after their grandchildren, thereby reframing caregiving as an important way to achieve active ageing. Grandparents, especially those who are relatively well-educated, emphasise that the infanthood is a key phrase for the future development of their grandchildren. Many of them make an evaluation of the capability of all the available caregivers in the family, and decide that they are the most qualified ones in exerting the correct influences on their grandchildren's upbringing. Grandpa Liu (C9) exemplifies grandparents who impose a high standard regarding the carers of their grandchildren. He is one of the few grandparents in my study who hold a university degree, and he had studied in Japan when China first opened up in the 1980s. He explained why he and his wife were determined to take over the care of their granddaughter, after she was looked after by her rural-origin paternal grandmother for a few weeks:

The original plan was to ask the paternal grandmother [to care for the child], because she didn't have to work as I did. However, she didn't receive much education. After spending some time with her, we all felt it would be better for the child to grow up with us, as she might pick up something wrong from her grandma from an early age, which will be very difficult to correct later on. After careful consideration, it was decided that we are more suitable to look after our granddaughter. (C9, Maternal grandfather, looking after his granddaughter with his wife)

Grandpa Liu further ruled out the option of hiring a nanny based on similar considerations:

Nannies could be another interference... To be honest, people who are genuinely capable won't end up becoming a nanny. Most nannies nowadays are from rural regions. I don't think a nanny is necessarily better than her paternal grandmother. (C9, Maternal grandfather)

In the end, Grandpa Liu rearranged his working hours and took upon the care of his granddaughter with his wife. Similarly, in Case 3, while all four grandparents are involved in the care of their two grandsons, Grandpa Chen, the retired university lecturer, is aware of the stark differences in childrearing styles between him and the paternal grandparents, which prompts him to take on more:

If my daughter and son-in-law have some work to do and leave the boys at home, what should I do? Suppose I turn my eyes away and let the paternal grandfather look after them. To use my daughter's words, all he's capable of doing is fighting for the TV remote with the boys [laugh]. I'm not complaining about them, but coming from a small town, their educational level is not high. It is impossible for them to instruct the boys in terms of their education. (C3, Maternal grandfather)

At the time of the interview, the boys and their parents are living with the paternal grandparents, while Grandpa and Grandma Chen live in their own apartment nearby. When the boys' parents are sometimes away in the evening or at the weekend, they are brought to their maternal grandparents, who take it upon themselves to supervise the older boy's homework and keep the younger boy away from the TV. Grandpa Chen gives credits to the paternal grandparents for the daily physical care they provide, but insists that he and his wife are the ones qualified for the education of

their grandchildren. As discussed in Chapter 6, in addition to the parents, grandparents may also play a role in reproducing class differences in the lives of their grandchildren.

Furthermore, the grandparents emphasise their participation is not solely for the sake of their grandchildren's future development at the individual level. Ultimately, it is consistent with the benefits of the entire society. Grandpa Chen (C3) illustrated this point:

We all have our responsibilities, not just to our families, but to our society as well... If we fail to bring up our grandchildren properly and they later turn out to be thieves and criminals, I think we are being irresponsible to our society. (C3, Maternal grandfather)

Thus grandparents are gaining a sense of purpose by framing their childcare provision as a socially useful work. This is further in line with the discourse of productive ageing that is gaining increasing recognition in contemporary China (Sun, 2013). Grandparents cherish the opportunity to look after their grandchildren, for it enables them to continue to be “useful” in their old age:

All my life I've been an ordinary factory worker. Now I've retired, and looking after my grandson is still within my power, I want to do it to the best of my abilities and make my contribution to society. (C17, Paternal grandfather, looking after one grandson with his wife)

As I demonstrate in Chapter 6, grandparents in almost all families are heavily involved in the physical care of their grandchildren and in domestic chores in general. Many are aware of the low status associated with caregiving and mockingly describe themselves as “unpaid nannies”. Against this background, it is particularly important for reflexive grandparents, who are already ambivalent about taking up the caregiving role, to reframe childcare provision as an important and valuable job, or even as their “mission” as put by Grandpa Chen (C3). The way they ascribe meaning to their roles is similar to the full-time middle-class mothers in Western countries, who actively differentiate themselves from the low-status, low-skilled carers by emphasising the professional skills and knowledge they possess and the pedagogy roles they play in their children's life (Orgad, 2019; Vincent and Ball, 2006). While most of the reflexive grandparents do not rely on hired help for housework, they often emphasise

that their caregiving involves far more than simply changing nappies and cooking meals – their role is intellectually demanding and has societal implications that extend beyond their individual families.

5.3 Parents’ motivations for utilising grandparental childcare

Compared with the grandparent generation, parents in my study appear to be largely consistent, in the sense that most of them have experienced some level of ambivalence about their reliance on the older generation for childcare. Interviews with parents reveal two aspects of their decisions about grandparental care that are characterised by ambivalence. First, when weighing grandparental care against other options (e.g. nanny care, one parent giving up working to look after the child, etc.), parents experience tensions between their desire for grandparental care versus the ideals of filial piety and self-independence. Second, when deciding which grandparents(s) to involve, there are also conflicts between choosing the ones that are “normative” (i.e. paternal grandparents) or most available, and the ones they prefer the most. This section examines these two aspects of parents’ childcare decisions, as well as their strategies to tackle the underlying ambivalence.

5.3.1 Whether to involve grandparents in caregiving

Parents’ preference for grandparental care over marketized care is evident in the interviews, where grandparental care is described as highly trustworthy, flexible and affordable. Parents repeatedly emphasise that grandparents are “part of the family” and would thus love their grandchildren with all their heart, which is something nannies and carers from daycare centres can never match. While some parents are aware that the grandparents might not be able to fulfil their children’s developmental needs due to their limited education, they still prefer grandparents to be the primary carers while they are away, because of the inherent trust they have in their parents-(in-law), as illustrated by Feifei’s husband (C16):

You see, my mother does not have much education, so she can’t read to my son or teach him poems. And from time to time, we have arguments about the ways of educating the child. But there’s one thing I’m certain about. As my son’s grandma, no way she would do anything to hurt him on purpose. She

*loves her grandson from the bottom of her heart. That's good enough for me.
(Case 16, Father, two sons looked after by paternal grandmother)*

In fact, most parents already expected that they could rely on the older generation for childcare before their children were born. Parents' sense of entitlement to the older generation's support is not unfounded. For those relying on *tradition-abiding* grandparents, they know from the beginning that they can trust the older generation to fulfil their prescribed duty. Whereas those with reflexive grandparents are certain that their parents care about them deeply, and therefore would not watch them struggle without giving a hand. Indeed, several parents made it clear that their decision to have children was ultimately contingent upon the grandparents' willingness to help with childcare. For instance, Linfang (C3), who relies on all four grandparents, highlighted the essential role played by the grandparents in her decision to have two children: "I've never imagined the scenario of getting no support from the grandparents. If I know they can't be there, I wouldn't even consider having children in the first place".

Paradoxically, while parents might be certain that the grandparents will offer support, they are not entirely comfortable with the idea. Parents are aware that they are not simply asking for occasional babysitting, but intensive caregiving on a daily basis, often accompanied by additional costs on the part of the grandparents. Shortly after she gave birth, Xiaojuan's (C20) mother moved in with her to help with childcare, while her father remained in their hometown to work. Xiaojuan expressed her mixed feelings about her reliance on her mother's support:

*I really believe the child is our [me and my husband's] own business...
I'm very grateful that my mum can help me, because without her...[sigh] our
life would be in a dreadful state, everything would be a mess and out of
control. So I can't express how grateful I am, because I know clearly this is
not her obligation. (C20, Mother, son looked after by maternal grandmother)*

Xiaojuan speaks highly of the indispensable role played by her mother in helping her and her husband. At the same time, since she does not consider it as her mother's obligation, Xiaojuan feels she is imposing her personal problem on her mother and therefore suffers from a sense of guilt. This conflictual feeling is widely echoed by other parents, including those relying on tradition-abiding grandparents. For example, speaking of her mother-in-law, Feifei (C16) still experiences a pang of

conscience, even though this capable rural woman has taken on the care of her grandsons without a moment's hesitation:

It occurs to me that she's trapped here because of us. She could have lived a free life, she could have gone dancing every day or played card games like many people of her age are doing. But the current situation leaves her no choice other than being stuck with us. (C16, Mother)

Overall, while most parents are certain that it is inevitable for them to rely on the grandparents, they are not entirely at ease with their level of dependency. Many of them mockingly describe themselves as *kenlao* (exploiting the elderly), as the intensive burden of childcare they impose on grandparents is neither in line with the ideal of independence in adulthood or with the teachings of filial piety. As a result, parents feel compelled to justify their decision, mostly drawing on the three strategies specified below.

5.3.1.1 Compliance with grandparents' will

The strategies adopted by parents partially depend on the orientations of grandparents. For parents relying on tradition-abiding grandparents, they reframe their dependence as their way of being compliant with the older generations' will, which has always been an important aspect of filial piety. The way Feifei's husband (C16) defends himself exemplifies this line of thinking:

Call us kenlao if you want, but for my mother, if I don't allow her to look after her grandchildren, I'm exploiting her rights, because she is so adamant about her caregiving role as a grandmother. Taking it away from her would make her life empty and meaningless, which leads to conflicts instead of harmony. (C16, Father)

Similar arguments are used by other parents, who claim that for their tradition-abiding parents, caring for their grandchildren constitutes the foundation of their identity. This may also explain why some parents' attempt to ease the grandparents' burden by hiring a domestic helper was rejected by the grandparents, especially those with lower socioeconomic status. It mirrors what Lan (2003) observes in her qualitative study of Taiwanese families, where paternal grandmothers tend to be angry with the presence of domestic workers, whom they consider a threat to their

caregiving role in their son's families. Similarly, Luting (C2) explained her rural parents-in-law's rejection of domestic workers:

I thought about hiring an extra helper to lighten their workload, and my father-in-law said no. They have always counted on us for their old age as they don't have a pension or a medical insurance. He worries that with the helper replacing their role, we won't look after them in the future! (C2, Mother, son and daughter looked after by paternal grandparents)

In this way, these parents present their reliance on grandparental care as their way of complying with the older generation's will and easing their anxiety about old age, which renders them filial children. They further argue that their elderly parents, most of whom are of a rural origin, have a different understanding of an ideal life in old age. According to Luting (C2):

I have several colleagues whose parents are from the city. They have a good pension, and their retirement life is so occupied and ... self-sufficient. They got their retirement life all planned out, travelling, studying, socialising... So they don't have that much of an incentive to look after their grandchildren. But it's quite the opposite with my in-laws, as they expect none of these. (C2, Mother)

According to the parents, for these tradition-abiding grandparents, unlike their urban counterparts, the word "personal pleasure" does not exist in their dictionary:

The older generation in our family doesn't really have a life of their own. My mum has worked in the field as a farmer all her life, but she's a bit too old for that now. Apart from caring for her grandchildren, she doesn't know what else to do. (C16, Father)

I'd like my mother-in-law to have some hobbies of her own, such as dancing or playing poker games like others of her age in our neighbourhood. I want her to have some life of her own besides the kids. But she has no interest in any of these. Her only hobby, if you like, is doing housework non-stop. (C34, Mother, son and daughter looked after by paternal grandparents)

By describing the tradition-abiding grandparents' lives in old age as monotonous, these parents are trying to downplay the impacts they inflicted on the older generation. In this way, they avoid appearing as irresponsible children who

demand their old-age parents to make significant sacrifices, because there is little for them to lose in the first place.

5.3.1.2 *Intergenerational intimacy*

The above rhetoric of complying with the older generation's wishes cannot be easily applied to the reflexive grandparents who are clearly hesitant about assuming childcare. Therefore, parents in these families (as well as some parents relying on tradition-abiding grandparents) have to draw on additional strategies to legitimise themselves.

Similar to the reflexive grandparents, the younger generation also draws on the intimate relationship they share with their parents to justify their reliance. After her son was born, Huajuan (C8) declined assistance from her rural mother-in-law, whom she described as “a difficult person” and “had hardly received any education”. Instead, she turned to her own parents for help. Since her father, a high school teacher, had not reached retirement age, it was her mother (Grandma Shen) who gave up her profitable daycare business and moved to Guangzhou alone. I asked Huajuan how she felt about all the efforts made by her parents, she paused uneasily for a few seconds and said:

But they do this to ease my burden. If I am struggling, they aren't happy either. They want to see me happy and achieve something with my life. So... this is what we end up with. (C8, Mother, one son looked after by maternal grandmother)

Huajuan's response reflects what some scholars describe as the “emotional structure of parent-child unity” that is becoming salient in Chinese families (W Liu, 2017). It emphasises the emotional integration and coexistence of parents and their adult children, with their respective wellbeing highly connected to each other. Huajuan further explained how her identity as a single child contributed to this sense of unity between her and her parents, “Ever since I was a child, I'm pampered by my parents who always try to offer me the best”. Huajuan's emphasis on intergenerational unity is consistently echoed by other parents, especially those who are also the only child of their family.

Because of the close bond between the two generations, it is natural for the older generation to gain a sense of satisfaction from the achievements of their

children, which parents use to justify their dependence. Luting (C2) and her husband both grew up in a rural family and later managed to settle down in Guangzhou after receiving their master's degrees. She told me that her father-in-law could not hide his pride in this self-made couple, praising them for being “capable to contend with the urban people for their job”. For Luting, this serves as the approval for her and her husband to delegate much of caregiving to the older generation:

Since both of us are originally from rural areas, we don't have any connections in Guangzhou. We have to start from nothing. Therefore, we need to be 100% devoted to our work, so for things like housework and childcare, we rely on the elderly. (C2, Mother)

Similarly, other parents argue that they have to rely on the older generation for childcare because of the intensive demands of their careers, which in the long run could be a source of pride for themselves and for the entire family, and therefore serves as a legitimate reason for their dependence.

5.3.1.3 For the sake of the third generation

A further justification used by parents is that, their decision to be a two-paycheck household is ultimately beneficial for the upbringing of their children. They feel their responsibility as parents is to provide their children with the most comfortable, guaranteed, and enriching lifestyle they are capable of, which has to be achieved through the full-time employment of both parents, with the assistance of grandparents:

If I don't have to worry about money, why should I work this hard at my job? If I can afford to be a full-time mother, there's no need for me to trouble my parents-in-law like this. So it's not about myself. The reason that my husband and I are working so many hours is for the sake of our family, so my child can have a better future. (C17, Mother, son looked after by paternal grandparents)

Furthermore, parents, especially mothers, feel they would be a better parent when they are enriched by adult interactions in the professional environment, in comparison to spending all their time at home with their children. In this way, parents redefine their employment as an endeavour to enhance their children's life chances in the future, and exonerate themselves from being negligent and selfish parents who

only care about their personal achievements. Yueping (C38) is a mother working in a foreign pharmaceutical company, with her son being looked after by her own parents. At one point during our interview, after listing all the childcare tasks taken by her parents, Yueping changed the subject abruptly, as if she were embarrassed by her lack of involvement:

After all, for people of my age, the major focus of life is still our career. Even so, my husband and I would make it up to our son in the evening and at the weekend. Ultimately, it is to create a better life for our boy. So the grandparents have to [step in], though it's not very fair for them... If I stayed at home to look after him, we'd lose half of the income, and I'll be disconnected from society, which can't be good for the upbringing of the boy. So whatever we are doing now is to give him a better future. (C38, Mother, son looked after by maternal grandparents)

In his longitudinal ethnographic study of a north China village, Yan (2016: 245) observes the rise of what he terms as “descending familism”, that “the trinity of the three generations adapts to a new and flexible form of family structure, family resources of all sorts flow downward, and, most important, the focus of the existential meanings of life has shifted from the ancestors to the grandchildren”. In my study, the way some parents mobilise grandparental support also embodies the logic of descending familism, as they justify their reliance in the name of the third generation, who represents the future interests of the entire family. In this sense, parents’ devotion to their career and the concomitant delegation of childcare are arguably not just for the pursuit of personal achievements, but can be understood as a justifiable or even laudable endeavour for the sake of the greater good.

5.3.2 Which grandparent(s) to involve

Because of the patrilineal tradition, paternal rather than maternal grandparents used to be seen as the default carers of their grandchildren in Chinese families. Recently, however, with the decline in family size and the increase in the availability of grandparents due to the one-child policy, scholars have observed increasing involvement from maternal grandparents (Chen et al., 2011; Ma et al., 2011). This new bilateral trend in grandparental care suggests that, parents’ decision about which

grandparents to rely on can no longer be simply explained by the patrilineal tradition, as it may involve more complicated considerations (Zhang et al., 2019).

For parents in my study, their choice of grandparents is first of all mitigated by grandparents' availability. It is difficult for some grandparents to look after their grandchildren, due to structural constraints such as their health status, geographical distance, work commitments, and other caregiving commitments. However, in some cases, parents' preferences transcend these structural constraints. This typically requires major adjustments on the part of the grandparents, who may overcome their unavailability by relocating to their children's city, retiring prematurely, or adjusting their existing caregiving commitments.

In practice, more than half of the parents in my study reported they had access to both sets of grandparents, and many went through a process of active screening and choosing. The rest of the parents accepted whichever grandparents that were available as they had no other options. But often without me prompting, they talked about how their childcare arrangement would be different if circumstances had allowed. Indeed, when parents in this study have access to both sets of grandparents, they can find themselves caught up in the dilemma of either choosing according to the patrilineal norm or according to their personal preferences, especially when they find the normative grandparents (i.e. paternal grandparents) are not the most ideal caregivers. The remainder of this section examines two major considerations of parents when choosing which grandparent(s) to involve: to uphold a harmonious intergenerational relationship, and to provide the best upbringing for their children.

5.3.2.1 Harmonious intergenerational relationship

A major consideration for almost all parents is to maintain a harmonious relationship with the caregiving grandparents, given they have to collaborate closely and even live together on a daily basis. Among all factors, the lineage of grandparents weighs importantly on parents' decision. In most cases, parents try to avoid the historically troubled mother/daughter-in-law relationship by choosing the maternal grandparents. This is because the mother-in-law in traditional Chinese families is endowed with more authority and power because of her seniority, and accordingly, the daughter-in-law is supposed to show her respect and compliance (Zuo, 2009). Furthermore, since generally, it is the mother who is predominantly involved in

childcare, maternal grandparents are also preferred because their lifestyles, childrearing beliefs and practices tend to be more consistent with the mothers.

Mothers across the sample confirm the advantages of relying on their own parents: “they just agree with me, so it’s really easy to communicate with them and there aren’t many clashes” (Yueping, C38), “even if I lose my temper with my parents, they get upset, but things will pass when I say sorry. I can’t do that with my in-laws” (Yehai, C19). Even several fathers also express their preference for maternal grandparents, which would spare them the trouble of being the mediator between their parents and wife (see Chapter 7). Qihui and her husband (C10) have been relying on her mother to look after their son because her parents-in-law are still working full-time. Asked about whether they would involve the paternal grandparents after their retirement next year, the response by Qihui’s husband is typical among the fathers:

I won’t say no to my parents’ help, but from the bottom of my heart, I prefer my mother-in-law. Because she and my wife get along easily. In general, my wife can be very persistent and serious when it comes to the child, while I’m more tolerant and laid-back. Her mother listens to her willingly and so do I. But I can’t imagine what would happen if she and my mother hold conflicting opinions. It’ll definitely put me in a very difficult situation. (C10, Father, son looked after by maternal grandmother)

As a result, most parents choose the maternal grandparents so long as they are available, with the patrilineal norm largely ignored. For those who have no choice but to rely on the paternal grandparents, they confess their preference for maternal grandparents if the situation had allowed:

If you ask me, I really want my mum to help me. She’s very capable and more detail-oriented [than my in-laws]. But my elder sister had children earlier than me and my mum was already there to help her. (Luting, C2, mother)

To further avoid intergenerational conflicts, some parents go beyond the logic of lineage and take into account the grandparents’ individual temperament. For example, parents actively exclude grandparents whom they perceive as stubborn and difficult. Wenyi’s husband (C1) described his father as a “macho” and “stubborn” man. As a result, he and his wife kept him away consciously:

He tends to insist on his own opinion on a lot of things and wants everyone to obey him. It would be rather difficult to persuade him. If he comes here to look after the children, there could be great conflicts between us... You know what kind of person your parents are, so you need to consider such matters in advance. (C1, Father, two daughters looked after by paternal and maternal grandmothers)

In another case, Linfang (C3) made a comparison between her father and her parents-in-law:

My dad is a strict person with high expectations for everyone. During the day, he puts in lots of efforts to teach the boys, so in the evening he expects us to entirely take over the kids and housework. He simply gets angry if we don't. So if we live together with him there will be trouble. My in-laws are quite the opposite. They think we must be very tired after a day's work, so they take care of everything while we are sitting there – we get along really well. (C2, Mother)

As a result, Linfang chose to coreside with her in-laws, who happily take on all the domestic chores and childcare tasks to ease the burden of the young couple, while her own parents live separately from them nearby. This way, Linfang manages to maximise the support she receives from grandparents of both sides while maintaining a harmonious relationship with all of them.

5.3.2.2 Best upbringing for the children

Parents' another major consideration is to choose grandparents who are capable of providing the best upbringing for their children, which is often closely related to the grandparents' cultural capital. The distinction is most salient in families with one set of grandparents with an urban origin and the other rural. As further explained in Chapter 6, compared with their urban counterparts, rural grandparents are often regarded as less capable to carry out the scientific, expert-guided childcare widely embraced by middle-class parents. For example, Huajuan (C8), who chose her mother over her rural mother-in-law, compared their differences:

My mother-in-law could not teach my boy anything, which is one reason I don't want her. My mum used to be a kindergarten teacher, so she knows how to teach him to count, to sing, or to develop his motor skills. I think she

does a better job than many of the commercial early education centres. During this summer holiday, my dad, who is a high school maths teacher, also taught him numbers. (C8, Mother)

Another mother, Bingxin (C9) also turned down her rural mother-in-law who was ready to help, because “she doesn’t listen to us, but her way of looking after the child is often wrong because of her limited education”.

In addition, parents also take into account grandparents’ personalities. Miaoli (C35) is convinced she should not count on her mother because of her mysophobia:

For example, when it comes to baby bottles, she insists on sterilising them at least three times after use. Also, she can’t tolerate any stains on the floor. It would be very stressful for her to look after an infant who’s definitely going to make a mess. It would be stifling and tiring for my daughter too. (C35, Mother, daughter looked after by paternal grandparents)

Therefore, Miaoli finds herself lucky to have parents-in-law who have characters quite the opposite:

They have this playful spirit in them. So, for example, when they’re preparing the vegetables for lunch, in order for my daughter to join, they put two large basins filled with vegetables in the middle of the living room and let her have fun. One day I was shocked to see green beans all over the floor, but they don’t mind. They let her enjoy herself, never concerned about the messiness. (C35, Mother)

Some parents strategically make use of the differences in grandparents’ specialisation and character to stimulate their children’s development. For example, Meiyong (C6) observes the paternal and maternal grandparents of her daughter are of very different personalities:

My parents are very outgoing and talkative. When we travelled together, the three of us used to sing all the way. The paternal grandparents are relatively quiet, very gentle, they don’t express themselves much. (C6, Mother)

Meiyong’s parents and parents-in-law have been taking turns to travel to Guangzhou to look after her daughter according to a schedule carefully designed by her. In particular, Meiyong made sure that when her daughter reached what childcare

handbooks describe as “the critical period for language development”, her “outgoing and talkative” parents were there to facilitate her daughter’s language learning.

To sum up, when it comes to which grandparents to be involved in the provision of care, provided that the parents have the options, their personal preferences override the patrilineal norm. In order to maintain a harmonious intergenerational relationship and to provide the best upbringing for their children, these parents carefully select grandparents they consider to be the most ideal. Some have turned down grandparents whom they deemed as less qualified even though they were readily available, as Huajuan (C8) and Bingxin (C9) did with their less-educated mothers-in-law. Others, like Linfang (C3) and Meiyang (C6), strategically pooled the strength of grandparents from both sides and relied on their support simultaneously or alternatingly.

However, the rest of the families have to accept whichever grandparents that are available, who might not represent the most ideal choice they would desire. From parents’ point of view, grandparents’ childrearing capacity and philosophy vary significantly, which is also relevant to the kinds of expertise they are able to bring in and the types of childcare tasks they are able to perform (see Chapter 6 and 7). As the following chapters will show, the variance between grandparents, especially in terms of their cultural capital, can play a significant role in the negotiations of childcare labour division and decision-making across generations, as well as in reproducing social inequalities in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

5.4 Discussion

Contrary to the detraditionalization thesis of classic modernisation theories, plenty of evidence has suggested that certain apparently traditional values (e.g. filial piety) and behaviours (e.g. intergenerational coresidence and support) continue to be prevalent in contemporary Chinese society (Chen et al., 2011: 2; Croll, 2006; Hu and Scott, 2016; Logan and Bian, 1999). To gain a more nuanced understanding of the continuation of one “traditional” practice, i.e. grandparental childcare support, the current chapter directly investigates the parents’ and grandparents’ motivations behind their intergenerational childcare arrangements. Evidence from this chapter suggests that, individuals may hold differing interpretations for what appears to be a

“traditional” practice on the surface. This is not surprising, given China and many other East Asian societies have experienced “compressed modernity” (Chang, 2010a), which is characterised by the plurality of family ideologies. To put it differently, the enactment of an apparently “traditional” practice such as grandparental care may not necessarily be a simple and straightforward decision driven by pre-existing cultural norms. Instead, it can be a complex and dynamic process that involves a myriad of considerations about traditional ideals, practical conditions and personal preferences, where grandparents and parents often have to deal with ambivalence that arises from conflicts between competing norms, as well as conflicts between norms and their individual realities.

Parents and grandparents’ adoption of different motivations for their childcare arrangements does not happen randomly. Within the grandparent generation, I distinguish between two ideal types based on their interpretation of the role of cultural tradition in motivating their decision of childcare provision. While the tradition-abiding grandparents are likely to take their childcare obligation for granted, the reflexive grandparents, who are often from a relatively privileged background, experience considerable ambivalence before taking on the care of their grandchildren. Most parents also experience ambivalence, as they are not entirely at ease with their heavy reliance on the grandparents and therefore feel the necessity to justify themselves.

The way both the reflexive grandparents and parents understand grandparental childcare indicates an emphasis upon reflexivity over cultural conventions (Gilding, 2010). Following the distinction between “regulative tradition” and “meaning-constitutive tradition” made by Gross (2005), the reflexive grandparents and parents recognise a decline in the strength of the regulative aspects of grandparental childcare and therefore do not consider it as a predetermined option. Nevertheless, this does not indicate a complete rejection of cultural traditions. On the contrary, some traditional ideals, such as the pursuit of harmonious family relationships, intergenerational solidarity, and a redefined understanding of filial piety continue to be meaning-constitutive, and play a central role in their decisions about their childcare arrangements. This is evident from the ways they provide justification for their practices, by drawing on a set of culturally preferred strategies informed by these ideals. This further reflects Swidler’s (1986) argument of “culture as a toolkit” that

enables people to devise their own life strategies based on their practical conditions, following a “culturally constrained array of opportunities available to them” (Thornton and Fricke, 1987: 770). This in part, may encourage the intergenerational relationships in Chinese families to shift from being norm-based to affection-based, as there are signs where intimacy across generations triumphs obligations and plays an essential part in motivating the exchange of support. To conclude, the enactment of intergenerational childcare arrangements in contemporary China may not be entirely driven by pre-existing cultural norms. It can also represent a strategic decision by parents and grandparents, informed by the diverse options made available through cultural traditions in a more active and reflexive nature.

Chapter 6 Childcare provision as an intergenerational project: the gendered and generational division of childcare labour

In Western societies, following the dominant ideology of “intensive motherhood” (Hays, 1996), mothers are generally expected to be the primary and sole caregiver for their children. Even when they outsource childcare to hired help such as nannies, who are considered to be less-than-ideal substitutes for maternal care, mothers are still invested with the major childcare responsibilities (Blair–Loy, 2006; Macdonald, 2011). In contrast, existing studies have pointed out that in Chinese families, mothers tend not to be viewed as the sole and optimal childcare providers; instead, there is an ideal of “joint care” by multiple caregivers, with each playing a distinctive role (Goh, 2009; Short et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2020). So far, little is known about the division of childcare labour within the family when two generations of caregivers are simultaneously involved. Therefore, the central aim of the present chapter is to provide a detailed description and analysis of how childcare is negotiated and carried out in the extended families of my study.

It is well-established that women around the world do more in domestic work and childcare than men. Extensive studies have sought to explain the gendered division of domestic labour by drawing on a combination of theoretical perspectives that include relative resources, comparative advantage, time availability, and gender ideology (Coltrane, 2000; Craig and Mullan, 2011; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). However, these studies largely assume a household type of nuclear families, which can be problematic in the Chinese context given the prevalence of intergenerational coresidence and interdependence (Gruijters, 2016; Kang, 2010).

Furthermore, the discussion of intergenerational childcare division must also take into account the possible divergence in childcare ideals between parents and grandparents. While ideologies such as intensive and scientific parenting are widely embraced by middle-class parents in urban China, they may not have spread to the grandparents, considering the huge differences in the historical contexts the two generations grew up in (see Chapter 1), and the distinctions in their socioeconomic status and cultural background (see Chapter 4). Therefore, the way parents may selectively delegate certain childcare tasks to grandparents can reveal a lot about their

priorities regarding their children's upbringing and highlight issues about boundaries, entitlement and competence related to intergenerational caregiving.

This chapter contributes to the literature on the division of domestic labour and childcare by investigating the following questions: How do dual-earner parents negotiate and divide childcare and housework with grandparents, who in comparison often have more time available, less earning potential, yet traditionally hold a superior and privileged position within the Chinese family? How does the intergenerational labour division reflect the way different childcare tasks are being conceptualised and valued by parents and grandparents? Whether and how does the pattern of intergenerational labour division vary across families? In what ways does the grandparents' participation decrease and/or increase the workload of the younger generation, and how might it be differently experienced by the mother and father? Whether and how is the gender-based inequality in childcare division replaced by a generation-based inequality?

The following analysis purposely adopts a broad definition of childcare. This is because during the interviews, parents and grandparents demonstrate a generalised understanding of childcare labour that extends far beyond daily routine care. Childcare labour discussed in this chapter includes both *direct* (such as the daily feeding, bathing, dressing, playing with the child, teaching the child, etc.) and *indirect* care (such as food preparation, laundry, shopping for children's food, toys, utensils, etc., many of which overlap with tasks of housework). It also includes some of the less tangible tasks, such as gathering childcare information and decision-making. Tasks like these are termed *cognitive labour* by Daminger (2019: 609), which often entails "anticipating needs, making decisions, and overseeing family logistics". Furthermore, enlightened by Baldassar's (2013) framework of care circulation, which sees the exchange of care as multidirectional, this chapter also discusses parents' *emotional labour* towards grandparents as a form of care provision. Given its important role in facilitating the smooth operation of the intergenerational childcare, parents' emotional labour is included in the discussion even though it is not directed at the children.

To be sure, these types of labour are often intricately bound together, with many occurring simultaneously. However, I try to conceptualise them separately in

my analysis not least because of their distinctive nature (Cheung and Lui, 2021; Groves and Lui, 2012; Sullivan, 2013). Due to the design of my research, this chapter does not provide a detailed inventory of the amount of time each family member spends on different childcare tasks, which would require a rigorous time diary. Instead, I am more interested in how parents and grandparents in the intergenerational childcare arrangements make sense of their respective roles and their relationship with other family members. I start the rest of this chapter with a brief overview of the main characteristics of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in my participants' families. I then move on to examine in greater detail how childcare is divided across the generations and between the parents.

6.1 Intergenerational childcare as a group project

For families in this study, grandparents play an indispensable role in everyday childcare provision, while parents, due to their full-time employment, are essentially “evening and weekend parents”. On a typical weekday, after parents have left for work, their child would be entirely under the care of grandparent(s) for the entire day. Even after parents' return in the evening, as explained later, it is common for grandparents to continue to assist them with childcare and housework. One mother, Xiaojuan (C20), commented on the vital role played by the grandmother in her family: “it's perfectly fine for me or my husband to be away for a few days, but one day without my mum would be a disaster”. Parents across the study echoed Xiaojuan, that without the grandparents, their current way of life would simply be unsustainable.

In a sense, the organisation of childcare in these families is like a coordinated group project, which involves joint contributions from multiple members within the family. However, these members are often positioned differently, if not hierarchically, as reflected by the type of tasks they specialise in and the workload they are responsible for. Their division of childcare thus provides us with a lens into the issues of equality, entitlement and fairness along the lines of gender and generation within these families, where negotiations and compromises are constantly made. In the next section, I move on to examine how childcare labour is divided between the two generations, and how this may raise concerns about grandparents' vulnerable position within the intergenerational division of childcare.

6.2 Grandparents' vulnerable position in the intergenerational division of childcare

Observations from my fieldwork reveal systematic differences in the caregiving roles of parents and grandparents. This section focuses on two aspects of these differences: the overall time they spend on caregiving, and the type of care tasks they specialise in. As I shall demonstrate, these generation-based differences are often related to grandparents' vulnerable and subordinated position in negotiations related to childcare division. Grandparents not only spend more time on childcare than parents, they also have little control over the type of tasks they are responsible for, which often tend to be those that are less valued by parents.

6.2.1 Extended childcare shifts by grandparents

Grandparents across my sample spend an extensive amount of time looking after their grandchildren, not only when the parents are working during the day, but also in the evenings and on non-working days. This is often a result of grandparents consciously prioritising the needs and wellbeing of their adult children.

For parents, their primary aim of involving grandparents is to have their children looked after while they are working away from home. As a result, grandparents' caregiving schedule is predominantly defined by parents' work schedule. It is worth mentioning that, hardly any grandparents in my study have set out a clearly defined limit regarding their caregiving hours and expect their adult children to accommodate them.

As the middle class in the megacity of Guangzhou, parents in my study are largely employed in professional and managerial jobs characterised by extended hours and long commutes. Accordingly, during the day, grandparents typically spend 10 hours or more per day looking after their grandchildren, which is comparable to the commitment of a full-time job but without the equivalent remuneration. During this lengthy shift, grandparents watch over their grandchildren, feed them, play with them, and take them out for walks. They are also responsible for domestic chores around the house, such as cleaning and laundry. Multitasking of childcare and housework is the normality of grandparents' life, especially for those who are on their own.

However, most grandparents do not simply become “off-duty” in the evenings and weekends. A major factor behind grandparents’ additional shifts is the prevalence of intergenerational coresidence in my sample. In 42 out of the 46 families, grandparents are living together with their adult children and grandchildren at least on weekdays (see **Appendix 1**), and even those who live separately are within walking distance. For two-thirds of the grandparents who are not originally from Guangzhou, intergenerational coresidence after their relocation is largely inevitable because of the high housing price. For the remaining grandparents who have been living locally, most still choose coresidence (at least on weekdays) to facilitate childcare provision, unless their homes are close enough. Living under the same roof makes it possible and often unavoidable for grandparents to step in whenever their help is needed, even after their prolonged first shift. Coresidence with the younger generations means the grandparents have limited control over their own time and are never really off-duty.

More specifically, some grandparents are involved in the evenings and weekends because of parents’ additional work commitments. Grandparents thus serve as the shock absorbers for parents’ work-life spillover so that they can focus on their work without worrying too much about their children. Yehai (C19) and her husband purchased their own apartment after they married. However, they have been living at the place of Yehai’s parents (Grandpa and Grandma Liang) on weekdays, who are helping them with the care of their daughter. Due to the young couple’s busy work schedule, Grandpa and Grandma Liang’s childcare shift often extends way into the evening:

It’s mostly down to us to take care of everything. By the time they (Yehai and her husband) arrive home, it’s past 7 p.m. We have dinner ready on the table and their girl is fed. All they need to do is to play or read with her for a while and soon it’s her bedtime. Sometimes if they are home early, they give her a bath. Otherwise, we take care of everything. (C19, Maternal grandmother)

While Yehai and her husband are relieved of much of the childcare and housework after their long day of work, Grandpa and Grandma Liang feel this is at the cost of their own needs and personal time. From time to time, Grandma Liang receives calls from her friends asking where she has been, because they have hardly seen her around the neighbourhood or coming to their choir practices: “of course I’m

at home busy looking after the kid! There're so many days I don't even have time to take a walk after dinner".

Parents across the sample report experiences similar to that of Yehai, that whenever they have to work overtime, or study for their degree or professional certifications in the evenings and weekends, they can rest assured that the grandparents will keep their children attended. However, from the perspective of some grandparents, such as Grandma Liang (C19) mentioned above, they feel their caregiving responsibilities are overstretched and have interfered with their personal life and wellbeing. During the interviews, they talk about their lack of time and energy for hobbies, friends, or even doctor's appointments. Nevertheless, many of them at the same time show great understanding towards the younger generation, and therefore willingly take up their greater share of care labour. According to Grandpa Wu (C2):

They (referring to his son and daughter-in-law) are too busy with work. Especially after the second child, with one more mouth in the family, both are trying so hard to make more money. So we as the older generation need to support their career with our heart and soul. (C2, Paternal grandfather)

Similarly, Grandma Bai (C20) is happy that she can support her daughter's work by sparing her the burden of childcare and housework:

It's good that the two of them (referring to her daughter and son-in-law) are very much into studying. I always tell them if you have exams coming, just go to study. I'll take care of the kid and the house. Don't waste your time. (C20, Maternal grandmother)

The above two quotes capture a widely shared belief among grandparents, that the younger generation's need to work, even outside normal hours, should be treated with the highest priority. The high value assigned to parents' employment exempts them from domestic and childcare responsibilities, and entitles them to place their professional pursuits above the needs of the grandparents.

Moreover, even when parents are at home without further work commitments, some grandparents still try to relieve them of the domestic duties. Grandma Cai (C6) spoke of her daughter, a college lecturer, who usually arrives home late due to her long commute:

After dinner, if she gets up to clean the table, her dad will tell her to sit down and relax. If one day she happens to come home early, she can help if she wants to, but we never insist. She's already exhausted from work. (C6, Maternal grandmother)

Like Grandpa Cai, more than half of the grandparents reported they would purposely stop their children from taking up domestic work in the evening because of the pressure they suffer from work. These grandparents are not being overprotective, considering the recent prevalence of “996 work culture” in urban China, which refers to a hectic schedule of working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week. It is first embraced by the tech industry and later extends to many other sectors. Linfang (C3), the university lecturer, recalled how she came home after 8 p.m. after a hectic day of six lectures and two meetings. She fell asleep on the sofa right after dinner, while her father-in-law cleaned up the table, and her mother-in-law bathed her younger son and put him to bed without waking her up. According to Linfang:

My in-laws never expect us to do any housework or complain about feeling unfair. They think it's hard enough for young people to earn a living in a big city, so they should help us as much as they could. In the beginning, I felt embarrassed watching them doing housework, now I am used to it [laugh]. My husband is worse, as he helps with nothing. He would even ask his dad to make him a cup of tea! Of course, my in-laws would do that happily, for he is their biggest pride [laugh]. (C3, Mother)

While not all grandparents are as indulgent as Linfang's parents-in-law, their intention to ease the burden of their adult children is widely observed, which is further exemplified by the sleeping arrangements of their grandchildren. In China, it is common for infants under five to co-sleep (either bed-sharing or room-sharing) with their caregivers (Jiang et al., 2006), which is the case for all families in my study. Co-sleeping is commonly preferred because it allows caregivers to be more responsive to the infants' needs. However, the caregivers' own sleep is subject to considerable disturbance, due to the infants' crying and demands for feedings over the night, which is related to potential negative health outcomes (Arber and Venn, 2011; Richter et al., 2019). Grandparents from 20 families co-sleep regularly with their grandchildren. Speaking of the reason why they agree to do so after their intensive first shift during the day, grandparents almost unanimously reply that they want their adult children to

have a good night's sleep, so that "they have enough energy to face the challenge of work next day" (C1, Grandma Xiao). In comparison, these grandparents' own need for high-quality sleep seems to be less emphasised, even though there is also a challenging shift of caregiving waiting ahead of them.

In a sense, in the multigenerational families in my study, with the younger couple both working full time, grandparents are taking up a role similar to homemaking mothers in traditional nuclear families (Blair-Loy, 2006; Chesley and Flood, 2017; Craig and Mullan, 2011; Kaufman, 2013). The way parents and grandparents divide childcare labour is to some extent consistent with the theories of time availability and comparative advantage. The time availability theory posits that partners divide domestic work according to the time they each have available, and individuals who spend more time on paid work tend to have less time to spend on domestic work (Coverman, 1985). Furthermore, according to Becker's (1993) specialisation model, individuals would allocate their time between market work, non-market work and leisure to the most efficient use. Based on the general assumption that the highly educated younger generation has better earning potential than the older generation, especially those who work in farming and manual labour, parents in my study have a "comparative advantage" in paid work. Therefore, it is allegedly rational for the stay-at-home grandparents to support their wage-earning children's career, by taking up the bulk of childcare and housework during normal work hours as well as the evenings and weekends.

While grandparents' lengthy involvement in childcare may be an economically "efficient" arrangement for the entire family, and that some are gaining considerable satisfaction from supporting their adult children, the exhaustion and strain suffered by grandparents should not be ignored. Nevertheless, hardly any grandparents in my study have attempted to terminate or cut back their care provision (unless they are suffering from severe health issues), which many attribute to the deep concerns they have for their children and/or grandchildren. In a sense, these heavily involved grandparents in my study can be seen as "prisoners of love" (England, 2005; Folbre, 2001), who are in a vulnerable position in the intergenerational childcare division, reluctant to make changes that might cause adverse effects on the recipients of their care support.

6.2.2 Intergenerational specialisation in different childcare tasks

If grandparents' lengthy caregiving shifts reflect the precedence of paid work over unpaid domestic work, the following discussion about the two generations' caregiving specialisation reveals a further differentiated hierarchy within the category of domestic and childcare tasks. Since parents' time with their children is scarce, instead of splitting childcare with grandparents randomly or fifty-fifty, parents tend to be selective about the type of tasks they undertake in the evenings and weekends. In particular, I identify two rationales behind the way parents divide childcare and housework with grandparents: parents aim to enhance their bond with their children, and to provide the best stimulation for their children's development. This section examines how these two rationales may give rise to a generation-based specialisation in childcare provision, and how such specialisation may contribute to the vulnerability of grandparents. Before I explore the variations in the level of specialisation across families in Section 6.2.3, I first focus on the threads of similarity that highlight grandparents' overall subjugated position in the intergenerational labour division.

6.2.2.1 *Building the parent-child bond*

Many parents are grateful for grandparents' help with housework such as cooking and dishwashing in the evening, which enables them to spend some "quality time" with their children after their long day at work. Grandparents often do so consciously to free up the time-deprived parents:

In the morning, they always go to work in a rush, so the few hours in the evening are the only time they are there for their kid. Of course they miss their son after working outside the whole day. I want them to spend as much time with the boy as they can, rather than doing the washing-up. (Grandma Shi, C10, Maternal grandmother, looking after one grandson)

As a result, in the evenings and weekends, grandparents would "fade into the background" and take up domestic chores, while parents talk and play with their children, bathe them and put them to bed. All these activities involve intimate physical contacts with their children that are considered essential for the parent-child bond and are of symbolic importance (Bittman et al., 2004; Macdonald, 2011). Although subjective experiences of housework and childcare vary on an individual basis, it is generally accepted that childcare, at least in some of its aspects, can be more enjoyable and rewarding than routine housework (Groves and Lui, 2012;

Sullivan, 2013). Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next section, compared with the educational activities with the children, housework is often considered basic and are less valued by the younger generation. As a result, with parents' need to spend more time with their children being prioritised, much of the housework that could be seen as trivial, laborious and boring are pushed down to grandparents. This suggests that for the younger generation, their ideal of being a "good parent" who maintains an intimate and involved relationship with their children takes precedence over the other ideal of being a "filial child", which would require them to alleviate the burden of domestic responsibilities shouldered by their parents. The priority ascribed to the needs of parents and their children reflects the logic of "descending familism", which highlights the downward flow of resources and attention within intergenerational families (Yan, 2016).

However, this division regarding emotional bonding tasks between parents and grandparents is not definite in my sample, as parents often count on additional support from grandparents. Some studies observe that mothers are generally not happy with the idea of their children developing a strong attachment to other caregivers such as nannies. Therefore, they often designate certain intimate childcare activities such as bathing and feeding as "mother-only" and anxiously fend off involvement by other people (Lan, 2006; Macdonald, 2011). By contrast, similar concerns over grandparents are rarely reported by parents in my study, not least because of their identity as family members. Very often, parents find grandparents' assistance in these areas more than welcomed, especially when they are preoccupied with work, or their children are being exceptionally difficult. For example, Qihui (C10) recalled a period when brushing her son's teeth became increasingly tricky, which always ended up with the boy throwing a tantrum. In the end, Qihui had to turn to her mother for help, who "knows exactly how to please him and push his buttons". Her mother would coax the boy into his pyjamas and hold him in her arms while Qihui cleaned his teeth. Compared with the risk of having their children's physical and emotional needs unsatisfied, parents in my study seldom limit grandparents' involvement in these so-called emotional bonding tasks. Parents' view of grandparents as collaborators rather than competitors attests to the ideal of "joint care" observed in other studies of Chinese families (Goh, 2009; Short et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2020).

6.2.2.2 *Providing developmentally appropriate stimulation and care*

While the boundary between parents and grandparents regarding emotional bonding tasks is rather loosely defined, the situation is different when it comes to tasks that are of educational and developmental nature. Despite grandparents' heavy involvement in routine care, they are not recognised as all-round caregivers by parents (and in many cases by grandparents themselves). In fact, when asked about the intergenerational division of childcare in their family, a frequent answer from both generations is that, grandparents are responsible for “routine physical care” (*yang*) while parents are responsible for “education” (*jiao*). This may be an oversimplified summary, but it reveals a differentiated understanding widely held by my respondents regarding the respective importance of various childcare tasks and the competence of different caregivers. As detailed below, it is generally believed that tasks closely related to children's development would require certain advanced skills that grandparents tend not to possess, and therefore must be left with the parents. This section examines the formation of this generation-based specialisation regarding different childcare tasks, and how it may create a hierarchical boundary between parents and grandparents.

Influenced by the teachings of “scientific childcare” and “competitive parenting”, parents in my study hold a high standard for what counts as “good” care. For one thing, parents believe that the capacity to provide “good” care is not necessarily a natural attribute of mothers, or a result of past caring experience. Instead, it has to be achieved by consulting the latest scientific research and expert advice, a process that can be labour-intensive and intellectually demanding. All mothers in my study, even those who self-identify as “laid-back” and “laissez-faire”, report they have read at least two childrearing advice books and relied on expert advice to inform their childcare decisions. Furthermore, parents believe that “good” childcare should be all-round. As the children progress from infants to toddlers, the focus should expand from basic physical needs such as “eating well and dressing warm” (*chibao chuannuan*), to a comprehensive development of physical, cognitive, linguistic and social skills (Xiao, 2016). It is against such background that grandparents are deemed less “qualified” for certain tasks, due to the following three factors.

Firstly, grandparents are considered to lack the necessary cultural capital for tasks related to cognitive stimulation and socialisation. Grandparents' perceived incapability is most pronounced among those of rural origin and with little education. Roughly half of the grandparents in my study belong to this category, who find it hard to read for their grandchildren or to keep up with the latest childcare advice literature, which are activities highly valued by parents. In comparison, urban grandparents who are better equipped with cultural capital are often reported to read for their grandchildren, or teach them numbers, nursery rhymes and songs from an early age. With that said, even these relatively better-educated grandparents may still be described as less qualified by their adult children, due to their lack of certain specialised knowledge. For example, Yehai (C19), who works as a university counsellor, compares the way she and her parents play with the daughter:

The toys I choose for my daughter are specifically aimed at her development stages. So when I play with her, I have an agenda in my head. I know the kind of skills, motions, and capacities I should be focusing on at each stage. Whereas my parents are just playing with her for fun. (C19, Mother)

Yehai's parents both grew up in the city of Guangzhou and were well educated. After retiring from their job as accountants, they were actively involved in the local U3A, so their cultural capital is no doubt above the average level in my sample. Still, Yehai emphasises that her expertise in developmental psychology enables her to interact with her daughter in a "scientifically informed" way her parents are incapable of. Therefore, Yehai makes sure that every week, she sets aside enough time to "play" with her daughter, as she is the only one in the family who can give her daughter the desired stimulation. Similarly, Meiyong (C6) believes her daughter does not enjoy playing with her grandparents because the games they know are "old-fashion" and "boring". Instead, Meiyong has been drawing on game ideas from advice books, which are "designed by experts who understand the psychology of infants".

The high standard set by parents is recognised and accepted by some grandparents, who also self-identify as less-than-ideal caregivers due to their insufficient cultural capital. For example, when showing me their grandchildren's books, both Grandma Yuan (C22) and Grandma Zhao (C26) admit it was a pity that they could only read Chinese, so their grandchildren had to wait for their parents to

read them books in English. Grandpa Huo (C46) used to supervise his older grandson's homework when he was in kindergarten. After the boy went to primary school, he felt he was no longer up to the task:

Some questions are too tricky for me to answer. Sometimes the boy lies about finishing his homework and I couldn't tell. When his mum comes back and checks, it turns out it's not the case. I guess things like schoolwork has to be left with the young people. (C46, Maternal grandfather, looking after two grandsons with his wife)

Secondly, parents often describe grandparents' childrearing style as overindulgent, which makes them unfit to enforce the necessary training, discipline, and moral education for their grandchildren. Several parents worry that their children might not develop enough self-care skills due to grandparents' excessive pampering. Luting (C2) blamed her overprotective parents-in-law for her older son's lack of independence, who as a six-year-old still struggled to eat, dress, and use the toilet on his own. After the birth of her daughter, Luting decided that this time she needed to play a greater role in training her daughter's independence. Other parents are concerned that grandparents would easily give in to their children's unreasonable requests for things like snacks and the TV, or they would be reluctant to give them the necessary discipline and punishment.

Thirdly, in a more general sense, grandparents' childrearing experience in the past is considered irrelevant to the contemporary context and therefore of little value. Almost all my respondents comment on the stark differences between how children are raised now and in the past. Grandparents from rural and urban areas alike describe their past childrearing styles as "simple", "crude", "low-maintenance", and "laissez-faire", especially before their children reached three. Many grandmothers recall how they used to bring their infants to workplaces or to the field, and left them largely unattended while they were busy working. Moreover, few grandparents had the experience of reading childrearing advice literature when they first became parents. This is understandable as the emphasis on scientific parenting in China first appeared in the 1980s and only began to prevail in urban areas in the past twenty years (Evans, 2010; Xiao, 2016). Another new experience for grandparents is the plethora of utensils, toys, food, books and educational services that are specially designed for infants. Grandparents have to familiarise themselves with these new products and

services, often with considerable instructions by the younger generation. As a result, it is no surprise that when parents need advice and guidance regarding childcare, they rely heavily on advice literature, paediatricians, and other parents of young children instead of grandparents.

Taken together, a boundary is being drawn between parents and grandparents based on the alleged differences in their competence in childcare. The well-educated parents equipped with the latest childcare knowledge are seen as highly competent. In comparison, grandparents are often considered lacking certain knowledge or outdated, which renders their opinions less valuable and excludes them from certain tasks. This boundary thus creates a generation-based specialisation in childcare. The parents consciously focus their time on tasks they consider as conducive to the development of their children, which include face-to-face activities such as reading, playing, teaching, disciplining, habit-forming and homework tutoring; as well as the less visible tasks such as designing the children's daily schedule, choosing appropriate books, toys and food, and making educational decisions (see Section 6.3.1.2). At the same time, it is up to the grandparents to fill in for the routine physical care and housework.

However, even when it comes to the routine care and housework, grandparents are not always entitled to full autonomy and trust, as many are subject to the micromanagement of parents. Abiding by the tenets of scientific childcare, parents often give grandparents exhaustive instructions on their caregiving, which include tasks related to their children's diet, hygiene, and daily routine. For example, in several respondents' homes, there is a detailed list of nutritional guidelines for infants on the wall, specifying the recommended daily intake of food, drink, and vitamin supplements, as well as foods that should be avoided. Many grandparents also report that every time after they come back home with their grandchild from the outside, they need to follow an elaborate protocol set by the parents to sanitise themselves and the child.

From the parents' perspective, it could be argued that this generation-based specialisation serves as a strategy for them to combine their professional pursuits and their ideals of intensive and scientific parenting. However, this may at the same time put the grandparents in a less favourable position by demarcating them as less

qualified caregivers. As a result, some grandparents feel they are not treated with the level of autonomy and authority they deserve, and their skills and experience as veteran caregivers are not respected by the younger generation. Grandma Zhao (C26) is obviously frustrated by her daughter's obsession with "scientific childrearing" and her ever-changing instructions regarding every aspect of her baby girl's daily care. During the interview, Grandma Zhao pointed to a collection of feeding bottles of various shapes and sizes behind her and said irritably:

Back in the day, children are fed with the bottle, end of the story. Now with my daughter, one day she said the rubber teat is bad for the teeth, so we changed to straw cups. Then there's something wrong with straw cups, and we changed again... I don't get what all the fuss is about, it's just drinking! In the past we never had these rules, my daughter learned to drink from a glass from very early on. Now she keeps coming up with new demands, and see, the whole cupboard is filled with gadgets she bought for the girl! (C26, Maternal grandmother)

Macdonald (2011) coins the term "intensive mothering by proxy" to describe practices of mothers who seek full control over the caregivers they hire, to the extent that the caregivers are reduced to a "childrearing apparatus" or an extension of the mother herself. Many grandparents in my study voice similar complaints, that the younger generation's emphasis on expert-led childcare leaves them with little autonomy in their daily caregiving. In practice, not all grandparents willingly accept the younger generation's instructions, which can be a major source of intergenerational conflicts. Chapter 7 examines how grandparents react differently towards parents' ideals of childrearing and the consequent power dynamics between the generations.

Moreover, the divide of parents and grandparents into competent and incompetent caregivers is further related to a conceptual hierarchy about the childcare tasks they are respectively responsible for. Participants in my study tend to differentiate between tasks that are "physical" and "intellectual", "basic" and "advanced", with the former associated with grandparents and the latter with parents. Dorothy Roberts (1997) first used the two-fold division of "menial/spiritual" to describe how middle-class white women in nineteenth-century America transferred the "menial" housework such as cooking and cleaning to coloured or working-class

women, while they retained responsibilities for the “spiritual” reproduction work such as mothering. Scholars have also found a contemporary spiritual/mental division of work between middle-class mothers and the nannies they hire (Lan, 2006; Macdonald, 2011). In the context of my study, the differences in specialisation between parents and grandparents again mirror such a hierarchy, which may risk devaluing grandparents’ contributions, as several of them report feeling unrecognised and taken for granted, and self-mockingly compare themselves to unpaid babysitters.

6.2.3 Variations in childcare provision among grandparents

The discussion so far has identified some of the general characteristics of the intergenerational division of childcare labour in my respondents’ families. The following sections move on to examine how grandparents’ role may differ across families depending on their gender, lineage, and socioeconomic status.

6.2.3.1 Gendered childcare provision among grandparents

Evidence from my fieldwork suggests that grandparents’ involvement in childcare differs by gender, with grandmothers unsurprisingly doing more than grandfathers. At the same time, there are also some signs that this gendered pattern is loosening.

The gender-based inequality is first reflected by the gender composition of the caregiving grandparents, with grandmothers generally more ready to offer help. In 17 out of the 46 families in this study, it is the grandmothers alone who are looking after their grandchildren. Reasons for grandfathers’ absence include they are still in paid work, they do not feel capable of caregiving, or they simply do not want to be involved. Siyun (C7), whose two sons are looked after by their paternal and maternal grandmothers, described a typical situation where grandfathers’ participation was ruled out from the beginning:

Both grandfathers in our family are not very reliable. The way they’d like to spend a day is to smoke a cigarette and relax. We don’t trust them to look after the kids, and they don’t want to come. They would rather stay in their hometown alone and enjoy themselves. (C7, Mother, two sons looked after by paternal and maternal grandmothers)

In comparison, it is very uncommon for grandfathers to provide childcare on their own, with only three families belonging to this category. Reasons for grandmothers' unavailability are mostly related to health problems and existing caregiving commitments. Seldom do grandmothers use "not knowing how to look after the children" as their reason for not being involved in childcare, which highlights the deep-rooted gender ideology that views childcare as a predominantly female responsibility and expertise.

Gender differences can further be observed in the division of childcare when both grandparents are involved. **Table 5** provides a summary of the daily routine of Grandpa and Grandma Wu (C2), who are looking after their 6-year-old grandson (enrolled in kindergarten) and 21-month-old granddaughter.

Table 5 Wu's (C2) daily routine of caregiving on weekdays

Grandpa Wu	Grandma Wu
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wakes up the grandson, gets him washed and dressed, packs his school bag, and walks him to kindergarten Shops for groceries on the way home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast preparation Wakes up the granddaughter, gets her washed and dressed Laundry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two have breakfast together, and Grandma Wu feeds the granddaughter After Grandma Wu washes the dishes, the three of them go to a park nearby 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises in the park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches over the granddaughter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches over the granddaughter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises in the park
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches the granddaughter playing in the playground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lunch preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two have lunch together and Grandma Wu feeds the granddaughter 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goes out to play poker games with neighbours or watches TV at home Picks up the grandson from kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts the granddaughter down for a nap Prepares snacks for the granddaughter and feeds her when she wakes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches over the two grandchildren 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dinner preparation

The above table captures several common characteristics of the gendered division of childcare between grandparents. Overall, compared with grandfathers, grandmothers are more likely to assume the primary responsibility for the children's physical care such as feeding, bathing and changing diapers, as well as for housework

such as cooking, laundry and cleaning. In comparison, grandfathers often describe their role as “giving my wife a hand”. Their job usually involves shopping for groceries, taking the children out, or watching over the children while their wives are preoccupied with other domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. The gender specialisation between the grandmother and grandfather reflects the typical “manager-helper” relationship between the husband and wife (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Craig, 2006; Latshaw and Hale, 2016). Besides, when there is not much housework to be done, it is more common for the grandfather to take a break, while the grandmother continues to care for the grandchildren. Of the 26 families where the grandfather and grandmother were both involved, only 9 families reported childcare and housework were shared equally between the grandparents. In the remaining 17 families, it was the grandmother who took the lead.

However, there are some promising signs that suggest the disruption of this gender specialisation among grandparents. The three grandfathers who are the only caregiver (C15, 23 and 37) prove to be no less capable than grandmothers in juggling both the children and housework at the same time. Even for grandfathers who work alongside their wives, their contribution should not be overlooked, especially when compared with their limited involvement in domestic work when they were younger. Grandfathers in this study generally agree that becoming a grandparent gives them a second chance to reconnect with their family. A few recalled with regret that in their early years, they were prioritising their career over their family. Grandpa Zhong (C25), who used to be a businessman, explained his newfound passion for cooking:

I used to travel all the time because of work. As soon as I retired, I decided to learn how to cook so that I don't need to rely on my wife. And although I'm getting old, I can be helpful to my family and make my contribution... Funny as it may sound, now it's me cooking for the entire family. (C25, Paternal grandfather, looking after one grandson with maternal grandparents)

Echoing this quotation, a few grandfathers state that they are now making a conscious decision to step up in housework and to emotionally invest in their grandchildren, which becomes possible partially due to their recent retirement. They reported a sense of achievement they gained through easing the burden of their spouses, playing a significant role in their grandchildren's upbringing, and at the same

time managing to make up for the lost opportunities with their own children. By taking up (however limited) housework and childcare tasks that are generally considered the preserve of women, these small number of grandfathers are contributing to the loosening of the gender boundary in the domestic sphere.

6.2.3.2 Lineage differences among grandparents

Given the patrilineal and patrilocal traditions of Chinese families, lineage differences constitute an important dimension in discussions about intergenerational relationships and support (Hu and Mu, 2020; C Zhang, 2016). In the context of my study, childcare support by paternal and maternal grandparents may encompass different family dynamics and have distinct implications for the mother and father. Consistent with a study of grandmother care in the eastern Chinese city of Nanjing (Zhang et al., 2019), the current study also observes that mothers tend to be more at ease with their own parents' help than with their parents-in-law's. Such lineage-based differences may be attributed to gender-specific expectations related to housework and childcare (Hochschild, 2012b), that depending on the lineage of the caregiving grandparents, mothers are expected to "do gender" (Lui, 2013; West and Zimmerman, 1987) in different ways – those living with their parents-in-law may feel particularly obliged to live up to the ideal of a filial daughter-in-law by assuming more domestic responsibilities.

However, such lineage-based differences are not consistent across my sample. More often, it depends on the dynamics in a specific family. For example, several mothers supported by their own parents also report a sense of indebtedness. They actively seek to ease their parents' burden either by hiring additional help or by increasing their own engagement in childcare and housework. For example, Grandma Dong (C4) was heavily involved in the care of her first grandson. However, eight years later when her second grandson was born, her daughter, Yaqin, asked her to step back and let her and her husband assume greater responsibility. According to Yaqin, "my mum is getting on in years. I can't let her take care of everything like before". So as soon as the boy reached one, Yaqin enrolled him in a half-day nursery. Yaqin's husband also switched to a new job with more regular working hours, so that he could take over the work of dinner preparation and cleaning from his mother-in-law.

At the same time, there are also mothers who feel comfortable enough to delegate the majority of childcare and housework to the paternal grandparents. Several mothers report that their parents-in-law treat them as if they were their natal daughter, providing meticulous postpartum care and attending to all their needs. Junyi (C17) is touched that her mother-in-law always helps her feed her son at dinner, so that “I can eat as soon as I arrive home. She always worries I might be starving as I’m still breastfeeding”. Luting (C2) confesses with embarrassment that she does not know how to use the washing machine, as laundry has always been done by her parents-in-law since she married. In the case of Linfang (C3), both she and her husband are heavily relying on the paternal grandparents, who are “happy to bring us tea as long as we ask”. If we recall from Chapter 5, this couple has been counting on all four grandparents to look after their two sons. However, in order to avoid intergenerational conflicts, they purposely choose to coreside with the more easy-going paternal grandparents, instead of the maternal grandparents who expect them to share domestic duties when they are off work. According to Linfang, “I felt embarrassed for not involving much at first. But my in-laws keep telling us ‘Leave it there’, ‘Don’t trouble yourself’. Now I’m getting used to doing nothing [laugh]”.

As I expand on in the next section, Linfang’s parents and in-laws are from very distinctive social backgrounds, with her own parents’ background much more privileged. It is not a coincidence that many of these pampering grandparents who are tirelessly involved in housework and routine childcare are of a rural origin. This points to the role of socioeconomic status in shaping grandparents’ childcare involvement, as I now turn to discuss.

6.2.3.3 Socioeconomic differences among grandparents

As discussed in Section 6.2.2.2, families in my study adopt a generation-based specialisation in childcare provision to best facilitate their children’s development, with an underlying preference for parents’ childcare skillset over grandparents’. However, a closer look suggests that the boundary between the two generations is less defined in certain families, depending on the grandparents’ socioeconomic status (SES). Grandparents in my study constitute a socially heterogeneous group, with distinctive work experience, educational level and social circles. Accordingly, to use Bourdieu’s (1986) term, the quantity and quality of capital they can mobilise in their

childcare provision also vary significantly, as illustrated by the following examples of Grandma Qian and Grandpa Chen.

Grandma Qian (C21) is a 63-year-old rural grandmother with little education. Her daughter-in-law, Muhui, is extremely grateful to her for keeping the house organised and her son attended while she is working. However, as the boy grows older, Muhui becomes increasingly concerned that her mother-in-law is incapable of giving him the necessary discipline and cognitive stimulation. Being illiterate, Grandma Qian cannot read for the boy, and that she is not local and can only speak in dialect makes it difficult for her to use the public transportation and take him anywhere far from home. What worries Muhui the most is that her son is becoming increasingly wayward, which she and her husband attribute to Grandma Qian's excessive indulgence towards the boy.

Grandpa Chen and his wife (C3), as introduced in the previous chapter, were born and grew up locally in Guangzhou. Both had studied in top schools in the city and later made their way into universities after the Cultural Revolution. Grandpa Chen used to teach maths in a university and Grandma Chen worked as a corporate manager. As the daily life of their two grandsons is largely taken care of by the paternal grandparents (who are from a smaller town outside Guangzhou and are comparably less educated), they put their focus on providing the boys with the necessary "guidance and education". According to the boys' mother, Linfang:

The way my dad brought up Mingming (older son), it's like he was designing a personalised curriculum for him. For someone who has been a teacher all his life, even when my dad is just playing with Mingming, there is a theme, or a goal underlying the activities he designs.

Shortly after Mingming was able to walk, Grandpa Chen took him to a park nearby to do a variety of exercises. Following a curriculum he carefully designed, their activities progressed from simple running and jumping, to cycling, rope jumping and throwing medicine balls. At the same time, Grandma Chen taught Mingming how to read. Later Linfang signed up swimming, fencing, and roller-blading lessons for the boy. As she and her husband were busy with work, it was Grandpa Chen who drove Mingming to these classes and supervised his practice.

Grandpa Chen emphasises the importance of reasoning with the children, even when Mingming was only beginning to speak:

I don't allow him to cry. So right from the start, I say to him repeatedly, if you want something, you need to tell me, whether you're hungry, thirsty, or feeling unwell. We can then talk about it, but tears won't get you anywhere.

Both Grandpa and Grandma Chen are steadfast in the discipline of the boys. For instance, they make it clear that unhealthy snacks such as sweets are not allowed. Their adamant attitude is widely acknowledged by grandparents and parents in their neighbourhood, who would tacitly refrain from offering snacks to the boys when they are playing with other children.

When the two boys reached the age for kindergarten, because the competition for state-run kindergartens in Guangzhou is fierce (with a success rate lower than 20%), Grandpa Chen pulled some strings through his old acquaintances in the education system and secured spaces for both boys. Now that Mingming has entered primary school, his demand for physical care has become less intensive, but Grandpa Chen continues to be closely involved in tutoring him in his homework and accompanying him to after-school classes.

Grandma Qian and Grandpa Chen may represent two extreme cases in my study, but the disparities between them encapsulate a systematic divergence among grandparents of different socioeconomic status in terms of their childcare provision. Higher-SES grandparents exemplified by Grandpa Chen (C3) are involved in a wide range of childcare activities. Their role has a large overlap with the parents, particularly regarding tasks related to the children's education and cognitive stimulation. Moreover, their childrearing style appears to be consistent with the intensive parenting endorsed by the younger generation.

Higher-SES grandparents' childcare involvement is enabled by their abundance of cultural and social capital. Consistent with previous studies of socioeconomic differences in parental expectations (Hoff et al., 2002), higher-SES grandparents in my study also have higher expectations for their grandchildren's developmental outcomes. They would consciously draw on their cultural capital to engage in regular educational activities with their grandchildren, such as reading, singing, drawing, and physical activities to cultivate their relevant skills. Like the

middle-class parents in Lareau's (2003) study, the higher-SES grandparents also emphasise the development of language skills through reasoning and negotiation with their grandchildren. Furthermore, as in the case of Grandpa Chen, many are highly supportive of the idea of enrichment classes. They report giving parents advice on class choices, accompanying their grandchildren to the lessons, supervising their practice, with some even providing financial support.

These grandparents are also more open to the latest expert guidance on childcare, and actively use their cultural capital to acquire and filter childcare knowledge from advice literature. Miaoli (C35) described her parents-in-law:

The reason that I entrust my daughter to my in-laws is that, they don't stick to the old ways as some grandparents do. They are good with the Internet, so they'll search for childcare methods to see what is the best and discuss with me. For example, I started to wean my daughter when she was six-month-old. The traditional way was to feed her rice paste, which all of us were doubtful about. So we went to ask the doctors together and search online. (C35, Mother)

Grandparents' social capital also proves to be useful in facilitating their grandchildren's education, as indicated by how Grandpa Chen drew on his personal contacts to ensure his grandsons' entrance to public kindergartens. Another example comes from Grandpa Liu (C9), who put in serious thoughts about how enrichment classes could be used to facilitate his granddaughter's future development. After consulting several friends in the field of sports, he suggested football to his daughter. Using his connections from work, he had also located someone who used to coach local professional teams as his granddaughter's potential instructor.

It is interesting to note that, when grandparents are considered capable of the intellectually demanding care tasks, the rest of the "menial" tasks are further pushed down, either to hired help or to other grandparents who are of lower socioeconomic status (as in the case of Grandpa Chen). This again reinforces the symbolic hierarchy around childcare tasks within the family. In the five families that have nannies/domestic helpers coming in daily (C5, 10, 26, 30, 34), all the grandparents are of higher socioeconomic status, except for one family (C34) where the rural-origin grandparents find it overly challenging to look after their twin grandchildren.

Yangshan (C26), for example, explained why she hired a helper for cooking and cleaning:

With my daughter beginning to walk around the house, it's not safe if my mum spends a lot of time cooking in the kitchen without keeping an eye on her. And she's entering the stage of asking a lot of questions or asking you to read her stories. I prefer to have my mum keep her company and let others do the housework. (C26, Mother)

In comparison, the role of lower-SES grandparents in childcare is largely limited to physical care and housework. Rural grandparents from outside Guangzhou like Grandma Qian (C21) mentioned above are perceived as particularly incapable due to their insufficient cultural and social capital. Not only does their limited education prevent them from reading to their grandchildren or consulting the latest advice literature, the fact that they are not local means that they have little knowledge of the local language and environment in Guangzhou, and that their previous social network in their hometown can no longer be readily mobilised. As a result, many grandparents in this category are heavily involved in the “basic” housework and physical care, so that their adult children can be “freed up” and focus on the tasks conducive to their children’s development.

The variations in grandparents’ socioeconomic status can have differing implications for the parents and the grandchildren they look after. For the time-pressured parents, grandparents’ level of childcare involvement can make a difference in the work-life conflict they are facing and in their career prospects in the long run (Swartz, 2008, 2009). For parents like Linfang (C3), who have higher-SES grandparents to count on, they feel reassured that their children’s development will not suffer even if they cannot take time off to read to their children. In fact, Linfang started a part-time PhD shortly after her first son was born. With substantial support from all four grandparents, in the following years, Linfang finished her PhD degree, received a promotion to associate professor and became the head of her department; she also started up her own company of early childhood education. Meanwhile, Linfang’s older son was about to enter an elite junior high school with top grades. He has also received multiple certificates in piano and Mathematical Olympiad and is skilled at several sports.

In contrast, parents who are counting on lower-SES grandparents often feel they have to make up for grandparents' insufficiency, or engage in a "monitoring-repair sequence" (Reay, 1998) through which they keep a close eye on the potential problems arising from grandparents' caregiving and take action to rectify. For example, following the latest expert advice, parents generally believe infants' diet should not contain salt or honey. However, many lower-SES grandparents in my study tend to ignore these guidelines, either because they do not read advice books or find it inconsistent with their experiences. Therefore, parents report they have to repeatedly check on the food of their children and communicate with the grandparents. For parents, this means they need to set aside time from their already busy schedule, which could be at the price of their professional pursuits. Shuwen (C30) recounted a case of her colleague, where the rural grandmother is allegedly incapable of handling some simple tasks due to a lack of basic know-how:

This colleague of mine, because her husband works in another city, so it's mostly she and her mother-in-law looking after her two sons. While her mother-in-law is very diligent, there're just so many things she can't do. When she first came to Guangzhou from the village, she didn't know how to use the gas stove, so my colleague didn't dare to let her cook alone. And because she can't read, so for example, bringing the children to hospital is impossible, for she can't read the signs or register the kids. Every time the kids are sick or due for a check-up or vaccination, my colleague needs to ask for a leave.
(C30, Mother, two sons looked after by maternal grandparents)

Anxious about leaving her sons alone with her mother-in-law for an extended period, this colleague of Shuwen had turned down all the requests for overnight business trips in the past five years. As her superior, Shuwen felt pity for her, as promotion opportunities have been given to others who can be more involved in work with less distraction.

In a study of mothers' involvement in their children's schooling in the UK, Reay (1998) summarises three ways of how mothers conceptualise their relationship to schooling: complementing, compensatory and modifying, which can also be used to describe parents' relationship to grandparental care in my study. Parents are largely satisfied with the care provided by higher-SES grandparents, so their relationship with grandparents are mostly complementing and compensatory. In contrast, parents in

families with lower-SES grandparents often find themselves with more pressing needs to compensate or even modify some of the practices they consider problematic. As I explore further in Chapter 7, the socioeconomic variations among grandparents also make a difference in how the two generations negotiate decisions regarding childcare, with parents more likely to welcome grandparents on board for decision-making if they are of higher socioeconomic status.

Due to the cross-sectional design of my study, I cannot ascertain whether and how these disparities in grandparental care may translate into differences in their grandchildren's future educational attainments. However, based on existing studies of parenting styles and the status attainments of their children, grandparental care could potentially serve as another pathway for the reproduction of social inequality in society (Møllegaard and Jæger, 2015; Sheppard and Monden, 2018). Overall, this suggests the existence of “grandparenting gaps” in addition to “parenting gaps” (Doepke and Zilibotti, 2019), which may exacerbate the already uneven transmission of class-based advantages and disadvantages across generations.

6.3 Persistent gendered division of childcare between parents

Grandparents' childcare provision may vary across individual families, but their substantial support on the whole has made life much easier for their adult children. Nonetheless, grandparents do not entirely substitute parents' role in caregiving, and their involvement may create additional work for parents. As demonstrated below, even with grandparents' participation, the way mothers and fathers divide the residual work of childcare is still highly unequal. Based on the reports of my participants, mothers from half of the families (23) play a major role in caregiving, while their husbands are marginally involved. This gendered division of childcare has attracted heated discussion in China because of its prevalence, and is ironically referred to as “widow-style childrearing” (*sang'oushi yu'er*) in daily conversations. This current section seeks to explain this gendered division of childcare between parents by examining how they experience grandparental care in different ways: it appears that mothers are more likely to supplement grandparental care with their own labour or by arranging hired help, and they are more likely to feel responsible for maintaining a harmonious intergenerational relationship through their emotional labour.

6.3.1 Supplementing grandparents' care provision

Compared with their husbands, mothers' devotion to their children is not weakened by grandparents' involvement, and they are more likely to spot the limitations of grandparental care. As a result, mothers in my study often seek to supplement and/or modify the older generation's caregiving, as reflected by their more pronounced role in the following two areas: the routine physical care, and the less tangible care work in the form of cognitive labour.

6.3.1.1 Routine physical care

Although housework and physical care have largely been shouldered by grandparents, there is still some work left for parents, with fundamental differences between the roles of fathers and mothers. For many fathers in this study, the involvement of grandparents simply means they can be exempted from childcare provision, which is reflected by their work arrangements. Fathers from eight (C2, 15, 20, 21, 22, 32, 37 and 39) out of the 46 families are away from home most of the time either because their work is in another city or requires frequent travel. Another seven fathers work overtime regularly (C5, 6, 9, 26, 34, 36 and 41), and by the time they arrive home, their children have already gone to bed. In comparison, while mothers also have occasional business travel, none is regularly away and only five have to work overtime frequently.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for fathers to have little understanding of the basics of caregiving, even a few years after the birth of their child. Therefore, if a father is capable of looking after his child without the help from the grandparents or his wife, it would almost be an achievement to be proud of. For example, when I was talking to Yehai (C19) about the division of childcare within her family, her husband suddenly chipped in, proudly claiming that after the recent training by his wife, he could finish the morning routine – preparing milk formula for his daughter, taking her to the toilet, changing her nappy, and cleaning – all by himself. Accordingly, mothers like Yehai talk about how “lucky” they are to have such “capable” men as their husbands, and the envy they received from friends and colleagues.

The majority of the fathers are not too bothered by their incapability or their lack of involvement in childcare. Many attribute their peace of mind to the substantial support provided by the grandparents (in addition to their wives), whom they

described as a qualified if not a better substitute for themselves. One father (C16) described how his two-year-old son “naturally” came to his grandmother whenever he wanted to use the bathroom, which serves as the perfect justification for his lack of involvement: “my son doesn’t want me, what else can I do?” In other cases, mothers suspected that their husbands might be feigning their incapability purposely to avoid childcare responsibilities. Linfang (C3) described how her husband reacted to her demand to spend more time with their two-year-old son:

He says okay and then lies in front of the TV. He puts the boy on his chest and holds him tightly (so he doesn’t crawl around). Soon the boy gets uncomfortable and bored. Next time he wants someone to play with him, he won’t look for his dad, he comes to me. My husband is probably doing this on purpose. [laugh] (C3, Mother)

In contrast, it would be hard to imagine a mother taking pride in her ability to change nappies, or consciously steering away from her child. While mothers in my study may not be as involved as grandparents in the daily care of their children, their contribution during the limited time in evenings and weekends is much more pronounced than their husbands’. Given the negligible role of fathers in half of the families, most childcare tasks are essentially shared between the mother and grandparents. This highlights the gendered meanings of grandparental care for mothers and fathers, as mothers tend not to react to grandparents’ involvement by reducing their own participation. Instead, subject to a sense of “blanket accountability” (Macdonald, 2011), which charges them with the ultimate responsibility for their children, mothers in my study seek to supplement grandparents during their time at home. Even if they are away, mothers are also assuming a supervisory role around-the-clock, making sure their children are raised by the grandparents in the way they desire. This “intensive mothering by proxy” (Macdonald, 2011) is made possible by mothers’ heavy involvement in the kind of cognitive labour discussed below.

6.3.1.2 Cognitive labour at a distance

Daminger (2019) coins the term “cognitive labour” to describe the kind of non-physical domestic work that may include anticipating needs, identifying solutions, making decisions, and monitoring progress. As demonstrated in the analysis below, cognitive labour as such is essential for the actualisation of parents’ ideal of

intensive parenting, especially when their children are cared for by grandparents in their absence. In practice, such work is disproportionately shouldered by mothers, which mainly falls in the following three categories: collecting childcare-related information, making childcare decisions, and coordinating different forms of childcare arrangements.

Collecting childcare-related information

As firm supporters of “scientific childcare”, mothers in my study spend an enormous amount of time gathering childcare information since pregnancy. Whenever our interview touched upon the topic of “scientific childcare”, mothers would readily talk about the numerous childcare experts they followed on social media, as well as the childrearing apps and websites frequented by them. If an interview took place at home, mothers also showed me stacks of books written by paediatricians and psychologists from China and abroad, and talked me through their merits and demerits. Considering their highly educated background, it is not difficult to understand their eagerness for expert advice. However, such enthusiasm is seldom mirrored by fathers or grandparents. Fathers and grandparents from only ten families are reported to have read about such materials, often forwarded to them by the mothers.

Grandparents’ lack of interest is understandable given many of them are illiterate, and mothers in general do not insist on their involvement. Even for the higher-SES grandparents who are capable of reading, mothers see it as an extra burden beyond their responsibilities as grandparents:

My parents are already spending a lot of time looking after my daughter. When they are free, they have their own business to attend to. I don't think it's right for me to ask them to read these when they finally got some free time.
(C9, Mother, one daughter looked after by maternal grandparents)

As a result, it is often left to the grandparents to decide: “If one day they feel interested and read an article or two, that’s great. Otherwise, it’s totally fine as I will read it anyway and let them know” (C6, Mother).

In contrast, mothers generally express a strong desire for their husband’s involvement. Mothers leave books on their husband’s bedside table or send them links to the articles. Yet despite their efforts, the result is often less than satisfactory.

Yangshan's (C26) recounted a frustrating experience of her persuading her husband to read with her:

I chose a book about children's development stages. I chose that book on purpose because it's a straightforward one. I divided the chapters between us. I expected him to summarise the key points after he finishes his part, so I don't have to read it. But when I asked him about it, he couldn't come up with anything meaningful! (C26, Mother)

By asking for a book summary, Yangshan may be trying to ensure that her husband is getting the most from his reading. Ironically, this high standard she set for her husband, who is a busy corporate executive, ended up as a form of "maternal gatekeeping" (Allen and Hawkins, 1999) that hindered his further involvement:

After that, I no longer count on him. So now it's mostly me who pick out the useful articles and have the key points summarised, which I then send to my husband and my mum. If there are things my husband doesn't understand, he won't bother to figure out, he just listens to whatever I tell him. (C26, Mother)

In addition to advice literature, mothers also consult other mothers with children of similar age. Many notice that during breaks at work, the conversations among female colleagues largely revolve around childrearing, while their male colleagues talk passionately about politics, cars and sports, but seldom about their children. In addition, all the mothers in my study were involved in at least five online parents groups, where parents (mostly mothers) exchange all kinds of information about their children's lives: the selection of food, clothes, books and toys, children's illness, early childhood education programmes, kindergartens, etc. For many mothers, checking these chat groups is part of their daily routine:

I have a long commute on the bus after work. If I don't have work to do, I just automatically click on these groups or read articles by childcare experts. If I see people recommending some products that I find useful, I'd make an order immediately. If I'm experiencing the same kind of difficulties with my daughter, I'd take a note of how people are coping with it and later share it with my parents and my husband. It has become a habit. Whenever I'm not sure about something, I ask mothers in those groups. (Yehai, C19, Mother)

The composition of these chat groups is highly gendered, which largely comprise only of mothers. I repeatedly asked my respondents about the existence of “fathers’ groups”, and I either received a straightforward “no”, or laughter because of the seeming absurdity of the idea. Qihui’s husband (C10), despite his heavy involvement in the care of his son, does not believe in the idea of “fathers’ groups”. In a joking tone, he recalled his experience with a short-lived “fathers’ group”:

After my wife gave birth, she and other mothers at the hospital created a chat group. So did the fathers. It didn’t take long for our group to become completely silent, while the mothers’ group continues to thrive. The mothers shop together, discuss what to do when a child is ill, how to negotiate with their in-laws... In our group, if someone ever speaks, it would only be calling others to join him for video games. No one talks about the children. (C10, Father)

Sometimes a few devoted fathers may seek to join these chat groups. However, their effort is not well received by the mothers, as illustrated by Yehai (C19):

At one time, one of those “nurturing fathers” somehow found his way into our group. All the mothers thought it was so bizarre – we were watching him as if staring at a monkey in a zoo... We couldn’t understand why there’s a man in a group about childrearing. In the end, we sort of drove him away. To be honest, I don’t want my husband to be in such a group either, it just sounds strange. (Mother, C19)

Making childcare decisions

With the collection of childcare information largely in the purview of mothers, fathers often regard their wives as “all-knowing”, whom they rely on for instructions or even entirely entrust with the decisions regarding their children. As a result, it is typical for families in my study to have mothers acting as the managers of the entire childcare project by planning, making instructions and decisions, while fathers act as helpers who carry out their instructions and decisions (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Coltrane, 1996). Only mothers from seven families reported their husband was equally involved in decision-making. The division of childcare-related decisions

between parents and grandparents is more complicated, which is the main topic of Chapter 7.

Mothers in my study are responsible for a wide range of childcare decisions. For example, mothers are constantly keeping a close eye on the daily care of their children. As the child reaches a new developmental stage, it is usually the mother who initiates changes to the care routine, such as the introduction of solid foods and potty training. Mothers would first consult advice books, doctors and their friends, and then work together with the grandparents. Later when these new practices are carried out, other family members, including the father and grandparents, would also come to the mother for clarification. Similarly, mothers are also responsible for trivial decisions such as choosing milk formula or Vitamin D, or major educational decisions about how to discipline the child, and about the selection of enrichment classes and kindergartens. Qihui's (C10) husband summarises a typical scenario in my study: "My wife does all the mental work and keeps track of things. She's the one with the greatest knowledge of the child. She gives me the orders and I carry them out".

From time to time, some fathers may try to contribute to the decision-making. However, as demonstrated by Meiyi (C6), whose husband is a busy marketing manager, the father's opinion can be easily dismissed:

You know, the key to decision-making lies in the amount of information you have. As a mother, my social circle is filled with other mothers, and the books I read are entirely about childrearing. So if there is any disagreement between us, I have more than enough theories and examples to support my opinion, so there is no chance for him to convince me. After a few times, he simply gives up. Now he's like, as long as you have enough evidence, we'll do it in your way. (C6, Mother)

In some cases, mothers explicitly refuse the sporadic involvement from their husband, which they find irrelevant and intrusive. Jiaqian (C22) spoke disapprovingly about an occasion where her husband, who was busy with work most of the time, suddenly decided that they should change the way they interacted with their son:

There's this weekend he was at home, he suddenly felt our son was crying a lot and made a fuss about it. He thought we needed to be tougher... I was annoyed: if you had been paying enough attention to the boy or read the books, you would

know there's nothing wrong, it's just normal for a kid at this age. I don't need him to show up suddenly and tell me how to raise the kid. (C22, Mother, son looked after by paternal grandparents)

Since fathers are generally less informed about childrearing, it becomes accepted over time that childcare decisions are better left with mothers. Many mothers actually feel empowered by this responsibility. According to Meiyi (C6), "it's definitely not fair for my husband to leave me all the decisions. But if you think about it, it is actually a *sweet* burden. I am enjoying all the trust and power".

Coordinating different forms of childcare

Many families in my study have been drawing on additional help to supplement the childcare provided by grandparents. Half of the families hired a *yuesao* (helpers specialised in postpartum care) during the first month after the child's birth, and 13 families had nannies or cleaners coming on a daily or weekly basis. With no exception, it is the mother who initiated the idea of involving extra help and made the necessary arrangements.

It generally started with mothers anticipating a forthcoming need for extra help or noticing potential problems underlying their current arrangements. All mothers had confirmed grandparents' availability to help before or shortly after they became pregnant, and many were making arrangements for hired help around the same time. Linfang's (C3) experience with her first child had convinced her that she could not count on her husband for caregiving. By the time she became pregnant with her second child, she was determined to hire both a *yuesao* and a nanny, so that "everything will be taken care of once the child is born". Besides, because of her demanding job, she had communicated with the entire family in advance that she would not co-sleep with the child, which would be undertaken either by the nanny or by the paternal grandmother. In the case of Jiexia (C41), with her second child on the way, she expected it would be too difficult for her mother-in-law to look after two children on her own. So Jiexia rented an apartment nearby and arranged for her mother to move from her hometown to Guangzhou to help.

As documented by studies in East Asia, hired domestic help may not be well accepted by grandparents (Lan, 2003, 2006). Many are concerned that the presence of domestic workers may undermine their authority and old-age security, as their

opportunity to look after their grandchildren is taken away. In my study, half of the mothers experienced objections from the older generation against the hiring domestic helpers. Therefore, a mother's work is not finished even she has made the arrangements for additional help, as she often has to convince the entire family to support her decision. In the case of Meiying (C6), by the time her child was born, all four grandparents were readily on board with her idea of hiring a *yuesao*, which Meiying attributed to her advance planning:

You need to plan everything well, working on your parents and in-laws beforehand step by step. If you raise the idea all of a sudden, no way will the older generation agree with you. The only reason that my parents said yes was that I've been instilling this idea in them every day for more than 6 months before I gave birth. (C6, Mother)

6.3.2 Emotional labour towards the grandparents

In the multigenerational families of my study, the provision of care is not just directed towards the third generation. In order to maintain the smooth operation of the intergenerational childcare, parents also find it vital for them to be involved in the care of grandparents, which often takes the form of “emotional labour”. Scholars use the term emotional labour to describe activities that seek to enhance others' emotional wellbeing, to cultivate closeness, to provide emotional support, and to repair and regulate conflicts and negative feelings (Erickson, 1993, 2005; Lui, 2013). Emotional labour may be less visible compared to the typical housework, but it also requires a great amount of time, efforts, and skills (Hochschild, 2012a; Lui, 2013). In my study, such work is largely shouldered by mothers, who are more likely to feel uneasy about the huge burden they exert on the older generation, and the potential criticism of them being unfilial. As demonstrated below, mothers are engaged in various types of emotional labour to express their gratitude towards the older generation, and to demonstrate their adherence to the cultural tradition of filial piety.

One-third of the parents give grandparents allowance for daily expenses such as groceries and transport. Although the costs of the allowance are generally shared between the parents, it is often mothers who initiate the idea. After they married,

Junyi (C17) and her husband have been living with her parents-in-law, who help with the care of their son. According to Junyi:

My husband somehow takes it for granted that his parents would give us a hand with childcare. I disagree. They look after your child day and night, and they have other costs such as groceries and bills. So I told my husband we should give them some allowance every month. Besides, my mother-in-law used to work as a cleaner and she doesn't have much savings. I think we should support her financially because she has given up her job to take care of my son full-time. (C17, Mother)

In addition, as another way to express their gratitude, mothers are also responsible for arranging celebrations on special occasions such as the New Year and the birthdays of their parents(-in-law). They also send in-kind thanks, such as buying gifts or taking their parents to dinners and travel. Linfang (C3) and her husband have been heavily relying on all four grandparents for the care of their two sons. Knowing their successful careers owe a great deal to the older generation's support, Linfang has been regularly taking them abroad for holidays in the past eight years, taking care of everything including the visa, flight, hotel, and travel plan. During my interview with her father, Grandpa Chen, without me prompting, he talked about their various family trips, listing all the countries his daughter had taken him to visit with great satisfaction.

The expression of gratitude does not have to be in material forms, as the older generation also takes the younger generation's compliments seriously. This is particularly important for younger couples who are less well-off economically. In the case of Luting (C2), as her husband is away from home most of the time, it is she who performs most of the emotional work. Every now and then, despite her disagreement with her parents-in-law on certain childcare practices, Luting makes sure she compliments her mother-in-law on her cooking, or thanks her father-in-law for taking her son to school on her behalf. On one occasion, hearing her in-laws mockingly compare themselves to "cheap labour" like unpaid nannies, Luting said to them:

Please don't say so, mum and dad. We are genuinely grateful that you help us with the children in such a devoted way. If you ask me, I don't think I

can find a nanny better than you even with a salary of a million yuan. (C2, Mother)

The older couple was apparently pleased with Luting's effort. According to Luting's father-in-law, "we do enjoy looking after the kids for them, even though they don't give us any money".

The importance of emotional labour is most salient when the younger generation fails to express their appreciation to their parents, who would thus suffer from a grievance because of their intensive workload and their ungrateful children. Grandma Shen (C8), who described her life as "worse than a nanny", complained about her daughter in tears:

I've come to live with my daughter for almost two years, and for all this time, she didn't cook for me even once. I know she's busy with work, so I really don't expect much. But at least she could show me some understanding and say thank you...She's also short-tempered. Sometimes when I do things in ways she doesn't like, she just blows up at me... She could have told me "Mum, don't be upset, it's my fault to lose my temper". But she never said so. (C8, Maternal grandmother, looking after one grandson)

As a result, Grandma Shen constantly has the urge to leave and let her daughter sort things out on her own. Yet as a "prisoner of love", Grandma Shen does not have the heart to do so. Without sufficient emotional support from her daughter, she turned to her own mother to pour out her bitterness. This confirms that to maintain the smooth operation of intergenerational childcare, it is essential for parents to address the emotional needs of the grandparents, which in my study is largely undertaken by mothers.

Taken together, this section on parents' childcare involvement demonstrates that, grandparents' support may help to relieve parents' childcare burden, but in some ways, it also reinforces the gender divide between them, with fathers feeling less pressured to contribute. Furthermore, the involvement of grandparents may bring about new tasks for parents, such as monitoring and supplementing grandparents' care provision and providing them with the necessary emotional support, which in my study is predominantly undertaken by the mothers. Interestingly, many mothers hold an ambivalent attitude towards their husbands' involvement. Although most mothers

have expressed the wish for their husbands to play a greater part in their children's lives, at the same time, some are not happy for their husbands to take up certain childcare tasks or decisions. For example, mothers in a few families have been explicitly or implicitly discouraging their husbands from joining a childrearing chat group or being involved with the discipline of their children. This gender divide may have to do with the deep-rooted gender ideology of "men rule outside, women rule inside" (*nanzhuwai, nvzhunei*) in China, and the general belief that women are naturally skilled at childcare and kinship work such as communicating with the older generation. It may be also because mothers feel the pressure to "do gender" by playing the role of a responsible mother and a filial daughter(-in-law). Some mothers report that they enjoy their authority as the manager of the entire childcare edifice in their family, which may encourage their acts of maternal gatekeeping (Allen and Hawkins, 1999), such as setting high standards for childcare and refusing involvement from caregivers they deem less competent. Practices like these arguably enable the mother to reinforce her parenting ideals and to safeguard her control over the care arrangements of her children.

6.4 Conclusion

Studies in American and other Asian countries have noticed that when middle-class dual-earner families are faced with heightened work-life conflict, instead of the husbands increasing their domestic involvement, such responsibilities are more likely to be further "pushed down" to paid domestic helpers, who are typically women, immigrants and low-paid (Groves and Lui, 2012; Hochschild, 2012b; Lan, 2003). For the Chinese middle-class couples in my study, their division of domestic labour and childcare is also highly gendered. What sets them apart from their Western and Asian counterparts is that, instead of hiring a domestic helper, they cope with their work-life conflict by delegating a significant amount of childcare and domestic work to grandparents, often at a minimal or no cost. As demonstrated in this chapter, the arrangement of childcare in these multigenerational families is like a group project, with tasks shared unevenly across the lines of gender and generation.

In many senses, grandparents' role in the intergenerational childcare project resembles those of homemaking mothers in traditional nuclear families (Blair-Loy, 2006; Craig and Mullan, 2011). Their substantial involvement enables parents,

particularly mothers, to resume full-time employment shortly after childbirth while actualising their ideal of intensive parenting. Compared with parents, grandparents' childcare involvement is characterised by a greater time commitment, more time alone with the children, more physical care and housework, as well as less flexibility. Furthermore, there exists a generation-based specialisation in childcare, with the aim of allowing parents to focus on emotional bonding with their children and providing the best stimulation for their development. Accordingly, grandparents would take up the "basic" tasks of housework and physical care that allegedly require less advanced skills. Grandparents' caregiving role is further differentiated by their gender, lineage and socioeconomic status and therefore varies significantly across families. Overall, within this intergenerational childcare arrangement, it is the younger generation's wellbeing, professional pursuit, and ideal of intensive parenting that tend to be prioritised. In comparison, grandparents are often found in a vulnerable and subjugated position. Many grandparents report feeling overstretched and undervalued, with relatively little control over their care involvement. Parents' privileged position in the intergenerational childcare configuration is in some ways consistent with theories of time availability and comparative advantage.

Within the younger generation, even with grandparents' significant support, the division of childcare between parents in my study is highly unequal much like the rest of the world. However, grandparents' involvement in childcare has in some ways placed additional pressure on mothers in my study, who experience grandparents' support in a way different from their husbands. Evidence from this chapter suggests that, mothers are disproportionately responsible for supplementing grandparents' care provision and for the maintenance of a harmonious intergenerational relationship.

Taken together, this chapter demonstrates a high level of functional solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991) between parents and grandparents in my study, who are working closely on the provision of childcare on a daily basis. Nevertheless, little is known about the emotional tenor and power dynamics underlying this collaboration, especially when disagreements over childcare beliefs and practices arise between the two generations. The next chapter thus focuses on the decision-making related to childcare between parents and grandparents and the implications for their intergenerational power dynamics.

Chapter 7 Childcare decision-making, intergenerational power dynamics and emotional economies

The organisation of childcare involves not only the actual provision of care (Chapter 6), but also the decision-making about how a child should be raised, which will be the focus of the current chapter. Examples of childcare decisions include everyday decisions about what food children should eat or how they should spend their time; strategic decisions about how they should be disciplined; or more formal decisions such as their kindergarten and school choices. The previous chapter has demonstrated that in the multigenerational families of my study, there is a considerable sharing regarding the provision of childcare across generations. However, this might not be the case when it comes to the childcare decision-making, especially considering the personal and emotional nature of raising children, as well as how much parenting styles can be segregated by social class.

Indeed, as confirmed by Chapter 6 and existing studies (Binah-Pollak, 2014; Brengaard, 2015; Xiao, 2016), in light of the recent prevalence of intensive and scientific parenting in urban China, there exists a considerable divergence between childcare practices and ideals adopted by parents and grandparents. Therefore, given the possible mismatch between the care *desired* by parents and the care *provided* by grandparents, the process where the two generations make decisions about whose practices and ideals to be ultimately valued and adopted in the rearing of their children serves as a rich site for the examination of intergenerational power dynamics. As will be later demonstrated, while the multigenerational family can be an indispensable source of support and security, it may also harbour disappointment, conflicts and tensions at the same time (Baldassar, 2007).

It has been widely acknowledged that power dynamics is an important feature of intergenerational relationships in Chinese families. Traditionally, the intergenerational relationship in China is embedded in an order of filial piety, with the older generation having absolute authority over their offspring. More recently, scholars have noticed a loosening or even reversal of the traditional hierarchy based on generation in Chinese families (Croll, 2006; Santos and Harrell, 2016). However, existing literature often makes sweeping generalisations about contemporary intergenerational power dynamics, leaving variations across families largely

unexamined. For example, in a qualitative study of intergenerational childcare in Beijing, Xiao (2016) observes that grandparents have little say in childcare decisions while the powerful mother has full control, and therefore concludes that the older generation is marginalised in family power relations. Similarly, Shen (2013) also finds the older generation in her ethnography based in Shanghai in a subjugated position regarding familial affairs decisions, and argues that family power has shifted down to the younger generation. The current chapter seeks to advance our understanding of the intergenerational power dynamics in contemporary China, by examining how childcare decisions are negotiated between parents and grandparents and the enactment of power during this process. As I demonstrate later, while my findings lend partial support to past studies, I find the intergenerational power dynamics and the underlying emotional tone in contemporary Chinese families are characterised by complexity and diversity.

Since between parents, childcare decisions are predominantly made by mothers (see Chapter 6), this chapter mainly focuses on the relationship between the mother, dubbed as the “manager” of the intergenerational childcare project, and grandparents, who are heavily involved in the everyday childcare provision. The role of the father is less salient, yet it will also be discussed, especially in families where paternal grandparents are involved. This chapter explores the following: How do mothers and grandparents in different families negotiate their childcare decisions? What does it tell us about the variations in the intergenerational power dynamics across families? What are the possible explanations for such variations? By focusing on the issues of power and control, this chapter seeks to move beyond the apparent high level of functional solidarity in my respondents’ families, and reveal the possible confrontations, conflicts, and tensions that underlie their intergenerational childcare collaboration.

This chapter first presents how power is conceptualised in the context of my study, which takes both the manifest and covert forms, followed by a discussion of the related concept of emotional economies. From here I discuss three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics around childcare decisions derived from families in my study.

7.1 Conceptualisation of power in the context of intergenerational childcare

My analysis in this chapter considers both manifest and covert power.

Manifest power (or *overt* power) is enacted when one is able to overtly carry out her or his will despite others' resistance, or to win when there are open disagreements and conflicts (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). This early understanding of power has been criticised for reducing power to a static outcome and ignoring how hidden inequalities shape latent power processes where issues and conflicts are prevented from erupting to the surface (Komter, 1989; Pyke, 1994). In contrast, *covert* power works in a less visible way, where the more powerful individuals are able to secure compliance from the subjugated without the occurrence of conflict. This is because the less powerful would internalise the wishes and interests of the more powerful, due to a fear of conflict or a sense of futility, sometimes at the cost of their own interests (Komter, 1989; Pyke, 1994, 1999). In empirical studies, the indicators of *manifest* power often focus on who wins in occasions of conflicts and disagreements. For *covert* power, researchers tend to examine the desire for change that respondents reveal during the study but hold back in their daily family life and are therefore not realised (Pyke, 1999). My study draws on both conceptualisations to provide a comprehensive assessment of intergenerational power dynamics in my respondents' families.

While it might be possible to identify indicators of power/powerlessness in a specific situation, power dynamics in practice often work in more complicated ways. Power dynamics and outcomes often shift across situations and over time, as individuals who have the most power in a given relationship do not remain fixed (Kranichfeld, 1987; Shih and Pyke, 2010). Furthermore, it has been noted that individuals in structurally powerful positions do not necessarily exercise their power, for fear of jeopardising the harmony of interpersonal relationships (Shih and Pyke, 2010; Zuo, 2009). They may also deliberately delegate some of their decision-making power to the less powerful party, in order to ease their personal workload (Zuo and Bian, 2005). In some cases, power may exist in dispersed forms, with no one being the absolute dominant or subjugated party in the relationship (Shih and Pyke, 2010). Taken together, my analysis views the operation of power between parents and grandparents as a shifting *process* embedded in their ongoing daily interactions, instead of just trying to identify the winners and losers in the relationships from a

static perspective. The aim is to capture the subtle variations in power dynamics across different families and over time.

To further understand power as a process, this chapter draws on the concept of “emotional economies” used in studies of marital relations (Hochschild, 2012b; Pyke, 1994; Pyke and Coltrane, 1996) and intergenerational relationships (Pyke, 1999; Shih and Pyke, 2010). It is argued that emotions such as entitlement, obligation, gratitude that arise in family relationships are shaped by cultural ideologies and exchange principles, which can further shed light on the power dynamics between family members (Pyke and Coltrane, 1996; Shih and Pyke, 2010). One example provided by Shih and Pyke (2010) is that, following the norms of filial piety, a mother-in-law may feel entitled to deference and service from her daughter-in-law, who would feel obligated to do so. Shih and Pyke (2010) argue that in this case, the daughter-in-law’s power is reduced by the norms of filial piety and the related emotional interplays of entitlement and obligation. In another scenario, if a daughter-in-law is grateful for the childcare support provided by her mother-in-law, she may feel indebted and hence obligated to reciprocate with compliance, which would also reduce her power (Shih and Pyke, 2010). Therefore, my analysis pays attention to the emotional tone of the childcare collaboration between parents and grandparents and how that might affect their power dynamics.

According to the literature, the intergenerational power dynamics in Chinese families is shaped by a complex array of factors, including cultural traditions, relative resources and situational factors such as dependency on others’ support (Cheng, 2019; Shih and Pyke, 2010; Zuo, 2009). According to the traditional intergenerational power hierarchy, which is embedded in an order of filial piety, the younger generation, especially mothers do not have the institutionalised status to exert authority over the grandparents (Brengaard, 2016; Xiao, 2016; Zuo, 2009). Another factor that may contribute to grandparents’ superior power status is their identity as the providers of childcare support, as according to the exchange theory, those who bring service to the relationship will have more power (Blau, 1964; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Szinovácz, 1987).

On the other hand, there has been evidence that the patriarchal hierarchy in Chinese families is loosening, with the norms of filial piety under redefinition, and the

demand and wellbeing of the younger generation being prioritised (W Liu, 2017; Shen, 2013). Some scholars refer to an “intimate turn” in intergenerational relationships in contemporary China, that the older generation would purposely give up their authority and power in decision-making in exchange for an intimate and harmonious relationship with their adult children (Xiao, 2016; Yan, 2016; Zhong, 2014). Scholars have partly attributed the empowerment of the younger generation to the increase in their resources such as education and income (Cheng, 2019; Gruijters, 2017; Zhang, 2009). In particular, it has been observed that parents’ possession of expert-led childcare knowledge could lend them expertise and authority in their negotiations with the older generation (Breengaard, 2016).

This chapter thus adopts a process-oriented perspective to explore the variations in intergenerational power dynamics around childcare decision-making across families, and the different power mechanisms at work. Based on how childcare decisions are made in the 53 parent-grandparent dyads³² in my study, I identify three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics: (1) intergenerational coordination, (2) dominating parents and compliant grandparents, (3) intergenerational power struggle. To develop these three patterns, during my analysis, I first assigned codes to interview excerpts that captured the processes of how power was carried out within each family, the level of harmony, conflict and tension between parents and grandparents, as well as their emotional economies. Based on these codes, families were compared and roughly sorted by their similarities regarding their intergenerational power dynamics. During this process, it appeared that families belonging to the same group often shared similar characteristics in two related dimensions: whether there is a consensus over childrearing approaches across the generations, and whether grandparents recognise parents’ ultimate authority in making childcare-related decisions. As illustrated in the following analysis, in most of the families, grandparents recognised the ultimate authority of the younger generation, and depending on whether the two generations held consistent views on childrearing, these families are further divided

³² Paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents from the same family are counted as two separate dyads and analysed separately. Since in 7 families, grandparents of both sides are involved simultaneously, there are altogether 53 parent-grandparent dyads coming from the 46 families. Grandparents from 5 families (C33, 34, 35, 39, and 44) were not interviewed, either due to strained intergenerational relationships, or because the grandparents could only communicate in dialect. Data from these families are treated with due caution because they are based on only one generation.

into two groups which represent Pattern I and II. By contrast, grandparents from a small number of families neither shared the younger generation's views on childrearing, nor did they recognise their authority in decision-making. Families in this group constitute Pattern III.

Note that such a classification is not static in practice. Some of the families could be or have been in the process of transforming from one pattern to another. The way that my participants are categorised in this chapter is mainly based on the situation of their family at the time of the interview. In cases where there was a shift in the intergenerational power dynamics (e.g. Case 37, due to a change in the caregiving grandparent), I choose to focus on the previous pattern because the change took place not long before our interview, and therefore the new intergenerational power dynamics were still developing. Furthermore, not all families could be neatly categorised into one of these three patterns, as some are best described as borderline cases that lie between categories. These nevertheless represent a very small proportion of my sample. Therefore, instead of getting bogged down in a few obscure cases, it is more analytically beneficial to regard the three patterns as "ideal types" on a more general level, which are useful for the understanding of the variations in intergenerational power dynamics in my sample by illustrating the distinctive characteristics of each type. The rest of this chapter explains these three patterns in greater detail.

7.2 Pattern I: Intergenerational coordination

Thirteen dyads of parents and grandparents have a type of power dynamics that I describe as *intergenerational coordination* (see **Table 6**), where both generations are largely synchronised in terms of their childrearing philosophies and practices, and are jointly involved in childcare-related decisions as a cooperative alliance. All the grandparents in this group are of urban origin with relatively high socioeconomic status and belong to the category of reflexive grandparents.

Table 6 Families with intergenerational coordination (n=13)

No.	Mother	Caregiving grandparent(s)				
		Surname	Caregiving grandparent(s)	Original residence	SES	Motivation
1	Wenyi	Xiao	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
3	Linfang	Chen	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
4	Yaqin	Dong	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
6	Meiying	Cai	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
9	Bingxin	Liu	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
10	Qihui	Shi	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
12	Gaohong	Jin	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
19	Yehai	Liang	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
25	Geyun	Zhong	Paternal grandfather	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
29	Liulin	Peng	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
30	Shuwen	Yu	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
35	Miaoli	Cui	Paternal grandfather and grandmother*	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
38	Yueping	Huang	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive

*Grandparents were not interviewed due to time constraints, and because they preferred communicating in dialect.

7.2.1 “Being there” while “not interfering”

Grandparents in this group are “being there” for their adult children and grandchildren not only by providing practical care, but also by contributing to decisions related to childcare. Grandparents’ level of involvement in different childcare decisions varies, often depending on their personal interest and expertise. In some cases, grandparents take an active role, which often leads to a process of joint decision-making between the two generations in a power-sharing manner. This is best exemplified by the following case of Yueping’s family (C38).

As the only daughter, Yueping has always been living with her parents in Guangzhou. After she was married, her husband also moved in to live with the three of them. Currently, the younger couple is relying on Yueping’s parents for the care of their son, Junjun, who was 20-month-old at the time of the fieldwork. I met Yueping, her parents and Junjun in a restaurant on a Saturday for our interview, while her

husband had other work commitments. From the way Yueping and her parents affectionately interacted with each other, it was obvious that they had a very close relationship.

Yueping's parents had both worked in a kindergarten before they retired – Grandma Huang used to work as a caregiver and Grandpa Huang was in charge of catering. At the moment, they are looking after Junjun following a meticulously designed routine, which incorporates regular meals, outdoor playing, sports, reading, and sleeping. As explained by Yueping and her mother, this routine is the result of ongoing discussions between both generations:

***Yueping:** We constantly discuss how Junjun should spend his day... I read a lot of articles about scientific childrearing when I was pregnant. Besides, my parents are rather open-minded, we talk a lot about how we should raise the kid.*

***Grandma Huang:** I have the experience of being a mother and I've also looked after many other children in the kindergarten. So it's about combining her ways and our experience.*

Yueping's parents are both veteran caregivers because of their job in the kindergarten. Nevertheless, they did not rely entirely on their past experience. Grandma Huang acknowledged the necessity for them to update their childcare knowledge:

What we know about childrearing is from years ago, which is definitely different from the current situation. We need to move forward and learn from the young people.

Therefore, in their free time, the older couple takes the initiative to read about the latest information on childcare and adjust their practice accordingly:

We read a lot of childcare articles. Sometimes my daughter sends them to us, but we also search the Internet ourselves. There's too much information nowadays, so you really need to analyse and compare carefully. (Grandma Huang)

Grandpa Huang recounted with pride how his wife once came across an article about the damage of excessive screen time to children's eyes and brought it to the

attention of their daughter right away. Taking her parents' concerns seriously, Yueping made instant adjustments to Junjun's daily activities. On the same day, she ordered toys such as puzzles and building bricks to replace the time he spent in front of the iPad. The next day, without being prompted, the grandparents refrained from watching TV and using their phones in front of Junjun, and guided him to play with his new toys.

Because of her parents' ample experience and their openness towards expert advice, Yueping trusts her parents' judgement on most decisions about her son's care. One example raised by Yueping is food preparation. In fact, since her return to her intensive job at a foreign pharmaceutical company, it has been her parents who take full responsibility for Junjun's diet, following nutritionists' advice they gathered from books and the Internet. Yueping once posted on her social media page photos she took from their fridge, which showed a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and meat in containers neatly packed and labelled by Grandma Huang. Her caption for her photos is filled with pride: "Since I went back to work, I've never worried about my son's diet because of his amazing grandma – she has everything planned out according to the scientific instructions". Having full trust in her mother's ability to organise her son's diet, Yueping admitted it was her who was taking instructions from her mother from time to time.

The interaction between Yueping and her parents encapsulates some key characteristics of the intergenerational power dynamics in this group. Parents and grandparents report a high level of consistency in terms of their childrearing philosophies and practices. It is not a coincidence that all the grandparents in this group are of urban origin and well educated, with a few having worked in childcare or education-related sectors. Compared with their counterparts in other groups, these grandparents are characterised by their endorsement and grasp of modern expert-led childcare approaches, with many regularly consulting childcare literature like the parents. As a result, they are frequently praised by their adult children for being "progressive" (C4, Yaqin), "tech-savvy in terms of information gathering" (C35, Miaoli), and "open-minded and receptive towards scientific childcare methods" (C10, Qihui).

Nevertheless, some extent of divergence is inevitable between the two generations. Most of the time, it is resolved by amicable negotiations and seldom ends up as overt conflicts. The following response by Yueping is repeatedly echoed by other families in this group: “there isn’t such a person everyone has to obey. Things are always open for discussion, and we follow whatever suggestion that is sensible”. Yueping continued with an example:

My mum used to encourage my son to eat a lot. One day, he began to vomit for no obvious reason. I told my mum to reduce the amount of milk and food, and we’ll see after a few days, which she did accordingly. Later we could tell he’s getting used to it and could take more food, and without me prompting, my mum gradually increased the amount. I trust her, because she spends a lot of time around the boy, and she knows the best.

Grandma Huang, sitting next to Yueping, nodded in approval and added: “It’s not about who said it. As long as it proves to be good for the boy, we are open to suggestions”.

Yueping’s parents are less involved in decisions about their grandson’s education, such as the enrolment in enrichment classes and the selection of kindergartens. Often it is Yueping who initiates the idea, does the research, and brings options to the entire family for discussion. Yueping would make sure that her husband and parents all have the opportunity to express their views before she makes the final decision.

Indeed, grandparents in this group sometimes prefer a more detached stance regarding certain childcare decisions. They make it clear that they want their adult children(-in-law) to take charge of decision-making, and that as grandparents, their role is simply to follow their children’s instructions in a supportive and not interfering manner. Recurring responses from grandparents include “we simply follow the young people’s ideas and be as supportive as we can” (C12, Grandma Jin), or “we’re only here to back them up” (C6, Grandma Cai).

One reason for grandparents’ detached stance is because they are aware of the amount of cognitive labour required for making informed choices (see Chapter 6). For example, Grandma Xiao (C1) explained that she let her daughter take full responsibility regarding the purchase of formula milk and supplements for her

granddaughters, because she found it “very confusing to keep on top of all those different brands”:

We as grandparents don't bother with such things. Let the young people do their research and decide for themselves. We're only responsible for feeding the kids. (C1, Maternal grandmother)

Grandma Xiao's reluctance to get involved is echoed by other grandparents in this group, especially when it comes to decisions regarding the more technical and specialised domains, such as choosing the children's utensils, enrichment classes, or overseeing their habit-forming, which often involves an enormous amount of time and energy. In a sense, by conceding decision-making power to the younger generation, grandparents are trying to achieve greater control over their own life. It is worth emphasising that, unlike grandparents who may be constrained by their insufficient cultural capital (such as those in the next group), grandparents in the current group have all gone through basic formal education and used to work in white-collar or even professional occupations. In other words, their avoidance of involvement is not due to incapability. Instead, it is a strategic decision they make autonomously in light of their identity as grandparents, which leads to the next point.

At a deeper level, these grandparents' attempt to stay away from such decisions is related to their understanding of the fundamental differences between parenthood and grandparenthood. They believe that the ultimate responsibility for the children should be vested in the parents, rather than grandparents:

As far as I'm concerned, as a grandmother, it is not my duty to make decisions for the girls. Me or the paternal grandma are just helping with their daily care. We keep them fed, we keep them safe, that's all. But bringing up a child is far more than that. You need to educate them properly, guide and inspire their intellectual development, build emotional bond with them, which I think is the parents' responsibility, not ours... Suppose one of my granddaughters is not feeling well, it should be their parents who decide whether and when to take them to the doctors. If we as grandparents are making such decisions for them, surely it saves them a lot of trouble, but what is the point of them being parents? (C1, Maternal grandmother)

Similarly, Grandpa Chen (C3), the retired university maths lecturer, compared his role against his daughter and son-in-law regarding decisions about his grandson's enrichment classes:

From the bottom of my heart, I very much support the idea of enrolling my grandson in various lessons. But I don't feel it's my position to say it, because the primary responsibility of the boy doesn't reside with me. However, if such an idea is raised by his parents, I'll try my best to assist. Currently, every Thursday after school, I take my older grandson to swimming classes his mum signed up for him... The parents give us instructions, and we carry them out. (C3, Maternal grandfather)

In this sense, grandparents' decision to concede decision-making power is not entirely self-serving, it is also motivated by their recognition of the intrinsic parental authority held by their adult children. They believe parents should have the final say over the upbringing of their children, and they as grandparents do not have the legitimacy to press on their personal opinions. Even in the above case of Yueping (C38), where the grandparents are actively involved in many childcare decisions, they recognise the ultimate authority of Yueping as a mother:

After all, we are from the previous generation, our ideas may not be as updated as the younger generation. Most importantly, it's her child, so we need to respect her will and do whatever she thinks it's right. In the end, we're only here to back them up. (C38, Maternal grandmother)

The stance of these grandparents' echoes many studies of grandparenting in Western societies (Breheny et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2007), which have identified an almost universal norm of "not interfering" that dissuades grandparents from overstepping themselves and intruding on decisions made by their adult children. However, as later demonstrated in this chapter, this rule of "not interfering" may not always have the same level of legitimacy in the Chinese context of my study.

For grandparents in this group, their stance of "non-interfering" reflects an expectation for their adult children to become autonomous and self-determining parents, who can take the initiatives in making their own decision for their children. Nevertheless, in practice, grandparents often find themselves involved in childcare decisions ranging from mundane matters such as diets or clothing, to something more

serious including the children's discipline, education and character formations. Situations like these may arise when parents are too occupied with their jobs, or when grandparents notice mistakes or blind spots in the younger generation's way of parenting. Either way, these grandparents feel obliged to intervene, especially if they anticipate long-lasting negative impacts on their grandchildren. Take Grandpa Chen (C3) again as an example. Despite his point of not overstepping, he took the initiative to intervene in the upbringing of his grandsons on several occasions, as illustrated below.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, Grandpa Chen attached great importance to the physical fitness of his grandsons, much before such consideration crossed the mind of the boys' parents. They only decided to enrol their sons in sports lessons such as swimming and fencing, after they were inspired and amazed by the daily physical training Grandpa Chen arranged for their older son. In addition, Grandpa Chen kept a close eye on his grandsons' character development. He was alarmed when he noticed the boys began to imitate their parents, who sometimes spoke or even shouted to the paternal grandparents in an impatient tone. Grandpa Chen felt he had to intervene, or his grandsons would develop problematic manners. As a result, he brought his concern to the attention of the parents and seriously urged them to adjust their behaviours.

Some grandparents are also involved in decisions about their grandchildren's enrichment classes. Because some parents are too busy with their work to do any proper research, it is the grandparents who initiate the idea and propose the options. For example, Grandpa Liu (C9) compiled a list of suggested lessons, which included football, swimming, public speech, etc., with each supported by careful considerations about how it could benefit the future development of his granddaughter. Explaining why he had put in so many thoughts on this, Grandpa Liu said:

I made my suggestions based on my own personal experience, because there are things my daughter couldn't see at this stage of her life, and it is up to me to point them out to her. (C9, Maternal grandfather)

At the same time, Grandpa Liu made it clear that his opinions served only as a reference:

I'm involved in almost every possible aspect of my granddaughter's care and education, but it's not me who makes the final decision. If you think of the care of my granddaughter as a company, my daughter is the president, and her husband is the vice-president. My job is to counsel them.

Parents in this group generally welcome grandparents' advice and intervention, often with a sense of gratitude. Instead of viewing it as a challenge to their parental authority, parents see it as a "gift" or a favour, because the grandparents are filling in a gap in their parenting regime which they fail to notice or are incapable of fixing, and because the grandparents seldom press on their opinions in a single-handed manner.

Grandparents, however, are more ambivalent. On the one hand, they appreciate the opportunity to utilise their knowledge and experience to support their adult children. Grandparents are noticeably proud when they speak of their positive influences on their grandchildren, as well as the compliments they receive from their children(-in-law) on their intervention. On the other hand, many of them are constantly questioning whether their involvement is excessive, and may impede their adult children's autonomous transition into parenthood. According to Grandma Xiao (C1):

I know the young people are busy with their careers, and when they are not available, I tend to lean in a bit more. But from time to time I ask myself, "Isn't this their job?" (C1, Maternal grandmother)

Grandpa Chen (C3) took great pleasure in his grandson's achievements in sports, and felt obliged to intervene when he found the boys' manners concerning. Nevertheless, he was also aware that for him to make such meaningful contributions to his grandsons' upbringing, he had to be constantly "on guard", which had become increasingly demanding for him due to his age. Several times during the interview, he reflected with uncertainty whether he should take the back seat and let the parents take full responsibility for their decisions, "after all, it is supposed to be their job".

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some scholars argue that in Chinese families, the power has moved from the older generation to the younger generation, with many grandparents marginalised in family power relations (Shen, 2013; Xiao, 2016). My study suggests such arguments may represent an

oversimplified understanding of grandparenthood and decision-making power. To begin with, grandparents in the current group of my study are in no way marginalised – they are closely involved in decisions regarding the care of their grandchildren, with their input often valued and even encouraged by parents.

Furthermore, grandparents' absence from decision-making should not be simply interpreted as a lack of power. In a study of conjugal decision-making power in urban China, Zuo and Bian's (2005) observe that some individuals with higher socioeconomic status may strategically relinquish power regarding mundane decisions to their spouses so that they can focus on their careers. Similarly, in the context of my study, some grandparents actively refrain from certain decision-making, which they consider to be an undue workload and liability for themselves, and may also risk "infringing on the authority of the children's parents" (C3, Grandpa Chen). These grandparents' attitude points to the double nature of decision-making power, which can be a privilege and a burden at the same time. By willingly conceding control to the younger generation, the grandparents arguably exempt themselves from certain duties and gain more freedom and control over their personal life. As we recall from Chapter 5, many reflexive grandparents (all grandparents in the current group belong to this category) feel they have to make considerable personal sacrifices in order to care for their grandchildren. Refraining from decision-making to an extent helps them to draw a boundary between the responsibilities of themselves and their adult children and saves them from infinite involvement in childcare.

7.2.2 Parents' compromises as an expression of gratitude

From time to time, parents in this group are also making concessions to grandparents, which further confirms that the power dynamics in these families does not tilt one-sidedly towards the younger generation. Since it is hard for the two generations to achieve a total synchronisation between their childcare practices, parents may choose to acquiesce in some of grandparents' approaches, as long as it does not fundamentally jeopardise the long-term wellbeing or development of their children. For example, Miaoli (C35) described how she handled the discrepancy between she and her parents-in-law over her daughter's clothing without hard feelings:

I always pay attention to my daughter's appearance. I love to dress her up, so I bought her lots of pretty dresses. My in-laws don't care about such things as I do. They often let her go outside in her pyjamas. I found it a bit unacceptable at the beginning, but you got to adjust yourself. If I set a high standard for everything, it would be too hard for them, as it would take away all the fun. So I bite my tongue. Then I realise the bright side: I simply don't need to buy her so many clothes, which saves me a lot of money [laugh]!
(C35, Mother)

Sometimes the grandparents' childcare practices are not in line with expert advice. Parents choose to acquiesce despite their endorsement of expert-led childcare, because they see no better solutions. Bingxin (C9) described a common dilemma encountered by parents. When her two-year-old daughter refuses to do something or throws a tantrum, her grandparents would show her videos on a tablet or phone to coax her into cooperation. Bingxin is hesitant about giving in to her daughter's demands and worried about the impacts of electronic devices on eyesight, but she also admits the effectiveness of her parents' way: "So far that's the only successful way to calm her down. My parents spend the most time with the girl, so they know". Therefore, Bingxin complies with her parents despite her reluctance, especially when they are in public or in a rush. However, she makes certain everyone in the family is communicating what they are doing to ensure mutual understanding and consistency:

We talk a lot among ourselves about things such as how to deal with my daughter's tantrums. I understand why they are showing her the videos, and I won't blame them for this. There are no hard feelings because we're in this together. Still, all of us are trying to change things gradually. For example, sometimes my parents would let her calm down on her own, and they keep me updated on how things are going, which I really appreciate. (C9, Mother)

The way parents give in to the grandparents highlights the role of deference in power dynamics (Pyke, 1999). According to the exchange theory, the party that is dependent on the resources or services of another will have relatively less power. In situations like this, deference can be used as a means of reciprocation to restore balance in the otherwise unbalanced relationship (Blau, 1964; Pyke, 1999). Parents in this group feel indebted to the grandparents, not only for their practical childcare support, but more importantly, for sharing their childcare philosophies, and being

supportive and not overbearing. Therefore, they consider themselves exceptionally “lucky” compared with some other parents (as discussed in Section 7.4). To reciprocate, parents consciously choose to “turn a blind eye” to the minor divergence between themselves and the grandparents and “just muddle along”. Parents’ purposeful stance of acquiescence proves to be essential for the maintenance of a harmonious emotional climate and a smooth intergenerational collaboration in these families, which can also be interpreted as what Jamieson (2011) calls “practices of intimacy”. In this way, the older generation is accorded a certain level of autonomy, and their advice and service are received with appreciation and respect, which encourages them to feel positive about their caregiving and ensures their ongoing collaboration with the younger generation.

To summarise, the most defining characteristic of this group is the harmonious emotional tenor that underlies the relationship between parents and grandparents. The childcare practices and values of the higher-SES urban grandparents are well received by their adult children. Some grandparents actively contribute to childcare-related decisions, while others expect their adult children to take the lead. But all grandparents acknowledge the ultimate authority held by the younger generation as the parents of their children. With that said, in reality, the two generations often work in close collaboration to provide the best care and guidance for the children. Furthermore, parents in this group often use deference as a strategic means to reciprocate grandparents’ help and to maintain a harmonious intergenerational relationship. Consequently, the intergenerational power dynamics in these families are characterised by power-sharing, with no single party being overwhelmingly dominant. Besides, the existence of grandparents who actively refrain from decision-making highlights a different form of power, that is the ability to delegate decision-making to others, although in practice these grandparents do not always succeed.

7.3 Pattern II: Dominating parents and compliant grandparents

The high level of intergenerational consistency in childrearing styles demonstrated by the previous 13 families does not represent the mainstream in my study. In the remaining families, a considerable divergence underlies the daily interactions between parents and grandparents, which could be an ever-present trigger for intergenerational conflicts. Among these families, as I shall demonstrate, a large

number of grandparents choose to forego such differences and allow the younger generation to take control. Thanks to grandparents' concession, overt conflicts between the two generations are rare. I describe this pattern of intergenerational power dynamics as *dominating parents and compliant grandparents*, which consists of 33 parent-grandparent dyads (see **Table 7**) and thereby the largest of the three groups in this chapter.

Table 7 Families with dominating parents and compliant grandparents (n=33)

No.	Mother	Caregiving grandparent(s)				
		Surname	Caregiving grandparent(s)	Original residence	SES	Motivation
1	Wenyi	Lei	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
3	Linfang	Xie	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
5	Linjing	Sun	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
7	Siyun	Zhou	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
7		Wan	Maternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
8	Huajuan	Shen	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
11	Aifei	Kong	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
13	Congli	Lu	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
14	Bianxue	Wei	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
15	Peiran	Tao	Paternal grandfather	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
16	Feifei	Song	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
17	Junyi	Pan	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Town	Higher	Reflexive
18	Luoxi	Jiang	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Town	Lower	Tradition-abiding
20	Xiaojuan	Bai	Maternal grandmother	Rural	Higher	Reflexive
21	Muhui	Qian	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
23	Anxuan	Hao	Paternal grandfather	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
24	Yuhui	Luo	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
25	Geyun	Fan	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
26	Yangshan	Zhao	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
27	Keyao	Tang	Maternal grandmother	Town	Higher	Reflexive

31	Xingyue	Ma	Maternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
32	Manjun	Qin	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
33	Limeng	Fei	Paternal grandfather and grandmother*	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
36	Yuanmu	Jia	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
40	Qijia	Feng	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
40		Pei	Maternal grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
41	Jiexia	Ni	Maternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
42	Yiqiao	Cao	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
43	Ziyi	Yan	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Town	Lower	Tradition-abiding
44	Heting	Fang	Paternal grandmother*	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
45	Liaojiang	Yin	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
45		Xu	Maternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Reflexive
46	Yuhong	Huo	Maternal grandfather and grandmother	Urban	Higher	Reflexive

*Grandparents were not interviewed because they could only communicate in dialect.

7.3.1 Grandparents' alleged inadequacy as caregivers

With parents' emphasis on expert-led childcare (see Chapter 6), grandparents in this group are largely considered as inadequate caregivers both by their adult children and by themselves. Grandparents acknowledge the vast changes in childrearing approaches between the time they first became parents and now. Willingly or unwillingly, they see the contemporary way of childrearing as more advanced, which renders them less capable of making decisions about the care of their grandchildren. Typical responses from these grandparents include "the old ways no longer work, so we as the older generation must listen to the young" (C20, Grandma Bai); "no one looks after their children like we used to do, so I have to relearn everything. I do whatever my daughter-in-law tells me" (C21, Grandma Qian).

Grandparents' sense of inadequacy is largely related to their apparent lack of scientific childcare knowledge. This can be partially explained by their socioeconomic status, as nearly two-thirds of the grandparents in this group are from smaller towns and rural regions and have received little formal education. They either find it too difficult to obtain expert advice from books and the Internet, or they are

simply not interested. Accordingly, they recognise the younger generation's greater expertise in childrearing and rely on them to make the best decisions for their grandchildren. When I met Grandma Bai (C20) for interview, right after I introduced my research topic, before I could pose any questions, the rural grandmother said eagerly:

To be honest with you, I think young people nowadays are more educated and knowledgeable after all. We as the older generation is no match for them. All we can do is help them as much as we can. (C20, Maternal grandmother)

Grandma Bai is proud of the educational achievements of her daughter and son-in-law, who have respectively received their master's and PhD degrees from top universities in China. Impressed by the vast number of childrearing books her daughter had read before she gave birth, Grandma Bai said: "if this is how educated young people raise kids nowadays, I'll just do whatever they tell me".

However, the remaining one-third of grandparents in this group are from urban areas and have received certain formal education, yet they still self-identify as less capable caregivers. This usually happens when the younger generation sets out exceptionally high standards of childcare based on their possession of childcare knowledge. As a result, these grandparents find themselves to be inferior to their adult children, even though their socioeconomic status is higher compared with their rural counterparts.

Such situations are exemplified by the experience of Grandma Zhao (C26), a retired state-owned enterprise employee from Guangzhou. Despite her ample experience of looking after the children of her relatives, when it comes to the care of her own granddaughter, she feels being ordered around by her daughter, Yangshan, as if she were an incompetent novice. Yangshan received her PhD degree from an elite university in the UK and now works as a researcher in a university in Guangzhou. As a fervent supporter of scientific childrearing, Yangshan treats the care of her daughter as a research project and reads childcare advice books in the way of doing a literature review. Accordingly, Yangshan lays out clear instructions for Grandma Zhao on every aspect of her care provision, all backed up by expert opinions she has read. Additionally, Yangshan registers her daughter with an expensive private paediatric clinic. She makes sure Grandma Zhao comes to every doctor's appointment so the

paediatricians could directly explain to her things that need extra attention during her daily caregiving. Grandma Zhao finds that, vis-a-vis her well-educated daughter and professional figures such as the paediatricians, there is no room left for her opinions on most childcare matters. As I shall discuss later, higher-SES grandparents such as Grandma Zhao are more likely to react with frustration and resentment towards their adult children's domination.

As a result, grandparents in this group generally assume a stance of compliance and non-interference when it comes to the care of their grandchildren, due to their alleged incompetence. They are largely absent from the technical and strategic childcare decisions, such as habit formation, disciplining, purchasing of utensils, and choices of formal education. For example, Linjing (C5) explained why she decided not to leave certain decisions with her mother:

For technical stuff that involves doing research, it's me who make the decisions. For example, when to introduce my son to picture books, when to start sports lessons, and so on. I'm also responsible for buying his clothes and toys. My mum knows nothing about the brands of children's clothes, and what she buys are often cheap and of poor quality... So, it seems other than the basics, such as eating and playing outside, I take charge of all the decisions. (C5, Mother, son looked after by maternal grandmother)

In a similar vein, Grandpa Tao (C15) from the countryside explained why he stayed away from decisions about his grandchildren's education: "It's not something within my power, so me not involving is the best, which saves us from conflicts".

Furthermore, despite grandparents' heavy involvement in routine physical care, they take meticulous instructions from parents about what to feed their grandchildren, how many clothes to put on, or whether to go to hospital when the child is not feeling well. Grandma Bai (C20), for instance, explained how she prepared meals for her grandson, faithfully abiding by her daughter's instructions:

I make sure each day, the boy has 600ml of milk, an egg, and at least a portion of fish. His mother has read books by nutritionists, and this is the scientific way. (C20, Maternal grandmother)

In addition to how their children should be raised, the younger generation sometimes even has a say in how the grandparents should live their life. Several

grandparents (e.g. C14, 15, 20) reported they refrained from watching TV during the day because they were explicitly requested not to do so by their adult children, for fear of the negative impacts on the children's eyesight and attention span.

These grandparents' position in the intergenerational power dynamics mirrors those in Xiao's (2016) study, who are largely marginalised compared to the powerful mothers. Similar to the nannies hired by the middle-class mothers in Macdonald's (2011) study, grandparents in the current group are treated as an extension of the mother, rather than an independent individual with their own experience and understanding regarding childcare. The job of these grandparents is to actualise the younger generation's ideal of intensive parenting on their behalf, while their own opinions on childcare are dismissed compared with expert advice.

Families in the current group thus have the greatest intergenerational power disparity in my study. The parent generation is empowered by their possession of scientific childcare knowledge and their overall more privileged socioeconomic background. Grandparents' renunciation of control over childcare decisions points to their powerlessness, which is particularly salient if we look at how they react to the divergence between the parents and themselves on certain childcare issues, as I move on to examine in the next section.

7.3.2 Grandparents' compliance in face of divergence

We know parents in this group are in a dominant position regarding childcare decisions in their families. By looking into how grandparents are dealing with their divergence from the parents, this section illustrates how parents' advantages and grandparents' disadvantages are played out in the process of their interactions, as well as the variations in emotional tone across families. As demonstrated later, not all parents manage to secure dominance right from the beginning. Instead, parents may come into power through an ongoing process, which stretches over varying lengths of time. In response, grandparents may react with a spectrum of emotions ranging from willingness to resentment; but in the end, they all give in and adhere to the decisions made by the younger generation.

In some cases, grandparents willingly comply with the younger generation. This usually happens because they realise the parents' way is more effective, either

from the beginning or after a brief period of confrontation. One example quoted by several grandparents is about the method of feeding. Grandparents generally prefer spoon-feeding because it takes less time and causes less mess. Therefore, they are not keen to let the children eat on their own as advocated by most parents. Grandma Zhao (C26) was one of them when her daughter first told her to stop spoon-feeding her six-month-old granddaughter. But she changed her mind shortly after the baby girl grasped the ability to self-feed. When they went out to eat at restaurants, the girl often received compliments from family friends and relatives: “What a smart girl! Eating with a spoon so skilfully!” Feeling proud of her granddaughter and perhaps also of herself, Grandma Zhao has been happily sharing her experience and encouraging others to wean from spoon-feeding their children from early on.

Grandma Bai (C20) recounted another typical example. Like many grandparents, every time her grandson had a fever, she used to become very anxious and could not understand why his parents did not bring him to hospital. Her daughter explained to her that a high temperature is common in young children and would go down within days, so going to hospital is unnecessary and may risk further cross-infection. Feeling dubious at the beginning, Grandma Bai lost her temper once or twice to pressure the younger generation. However, she gradually saw the point in her daughter’s way:

Kids in our neighbourhood get sick very often, but not my grandson. Just as his mum says, we don’t bring him to hospital as often as some people do, so now he has developed a strong immune system. His mum is cautious about giving him medicine. Back in the day, we gave children antibiotics whenever they were sick, even though it’s not necessarily the right treatment. Now I understand it’s not scientific. (C20, Maternal grandmother)

Similar experiences are echoed by grandparents within the group, who hope to give their grandchildren the best care, and therefore willingly change their childcare practices once they see the merits of the younger generation’s approach.

Sometimes grandparents may not necessarily understand or approve of parents’ childcare philosophies and practices, but they acquiesce anyway, because they do not want to challenge their children’s authority or jeopardise family harmony. For example, Grandpa Hao (C23) finds it hard to understand the younger generation’s

cautious attitude towards the diet of their seven-month-old son, especially their strict prohibition on the use of salt. During the interview, Grandpa Hao spent plenty of time explaining why he believed the so-called expert advice was “nonsense”. However, when asked about how he prepared food for his grandson, he admitted it was done “in the young people’s way”: “Of course, it’s us the older generation who makes the concession. After all, it’s their child, it’s their call”. In other words, Grandpa Hao’s objection goes no further than the verbal level and is never put into practice.

Similarly, Grandma Zhao (C26) commented on her relationship with her daughter:

Now I say to myself, just do whatever she tells you. Otherwise, if she is stubborn, you’re stubborn, it’s going to be difficult for the whole family. Because she’s my child, there is no point in me fighting against her. So I do whatever she wants. (C26, Maternal grandmother)

The responses by Grandpa Hao and Grandma Zhao are typical among the reflexive grandparents in this group (see **Table 7**), whose childcare provision is motivated by a strong emotional connection with their children and a concern for their wellbeing. Therefore, it is natural for them to adopt a stance of compliance in the interests of family harmony.

Interestingly, the remaining one-third of the grandparents in this group belong to the category of tradition-abiding. Yet it is not uncommon for them to also quote family harmony as the reason behind their acquiescence, as exemplified by Grandpa Tao (C15). Grandpa Tao’s daughter-in-law is widely envied by other mothers in her neighbourhood, not only because Grandpa Tao is extremely capable of taking care of her two children on his own, but also because of the amicable intergenerational relationship in her family. Grandpa Tao explained why he seldom had conflicts with his daughter-in-law, unlike many paternal grandparents:

I never feel that because I’m the paternal grandfather, everybody should listen to me. We don’t have these status differences in our family. I respect what the young people decide for their children, because in the end, we just want to help them live a good life. Keeping a harmonious relationship within the family makes everybody happy, so there is no reason to start a fight. (C15, Paternal grandfather)

In traditional Chinese families, the relationship between a daughter-in-law and her parents-in-law has been described as inherently conflictual, due to the gender- and seniority-based hierarchy prescribed by the patriarchal tradition. In contrast, here we see Grandpa Tao actively renounces the power granted by his identity as a paternal grandfather, a role endowed with the highest status in an extended Chinese family. Tradition-abiding grandparents generally assume the care of their grandchildren out of obligation. However, some of them like Grandpa Tao manage to establish a close emotional bond with their daughter-in-law over time, in a way similar to the reflexive grandparents. This shows that even for intergenerational relationships that are initially dominated by obligation, it is still possible for intimacy to triumph over obligation and play an important role in guiding the daily interactions across generations.

For some tradition-abiding grandparents, their efforts to maintain family harmony is further related to their concerns over their old-age security. This is usually the case for grandparents from a less privileged background (e.g. C18, 21, and 32), who are of rural origin and have limited access to personal savings, pensions, and medical insurance. Expecting that their old-age security will entirely depend on their children, grandparents from these families admitted that they have purposely avoided challenging the younger generation. Either way, whether these grandparents' compliance is out of the intimate feelings they have for their children(-in-law), or driven by economic necessity, they constitute a sharp contrast to their counterparts in the next group, who refuse to forego their authority and are therefore subject to strained intergenerational relationships.

Furthermore, some grandparents choose to concede to the younger generation due to a sense of futility. Unsurprisingly, these are often the grandparents who also report a feeling of resentment. Grandma Zhao (C26) used to make suggestions to her highly educated daughter about her granddaughter's daily routine or choice of kindergartens. She then realised her words would make no difference once her daughter had made up her mind: "I no longer tell her what I think, for it won't change anything. She always has her own idea"; or "If she says to do it this way, then this way it is. I'll say no more, it's a waste of breath and she'll think I'm nagging her". Grandma Zhao repeated such sayings almost ten times during her interview, which is a clear indication of her powerlessness vis-a-vis her daughter.

In another family (C21), Muhui recalled how her mother-in-law did not approve her decision to enrol her son in an early education programme, but could not really do anything about it:

My mother-in-law is against the idea. When she heard about the price, she thought it's such a waste of money. But that doesn't stop me, because it's not like she is paying for it. So she might be unhappy about it, but she can't do anything to stop me. (C21, Mother)

Similarly, grandparents in other families find it pointless to question parents' decisions about their children's education, which is something they know little about and are not financially involved. This illustrates how grandparents' limitation in both economic and cultural capital could restrict their exertion of personal opinions and decision-making power.

Overall, despite grandparents' disapproval of certain decisions by the younger generation, during their actual caregiving, they put aside their personal preferences to make sure things are done in a way that pleases their adult children. Here the younger generation can be seen as more powerful in terms of both overt and hidden power. In cases where there is an open disagreement across the generations, it is the parents' wish that ends up being honoured. In the long run, grandparents internalise the needs of the younger generation and altogether refrain from voicing their disagreement, even though it might be against their own wishes and interests, which also indicates their subordinated position within the family. Grandpa Tao (C15) succinctly summarised how he and other grandparents in this group approached their caregiving role alongside the younger generation: "Talk less, do more".

7.3.3 Mothers' strategies in securing grandparents' compliance

Mothers in this group generally demonstrate a sense of entitlement to their authority over childcare decision. They emphasise that the main rationale behind their dominance is to ensure the best possible care for their children, which is allegedly beyond the ability of the grandparents. In this sense, mothers' possession of scientific childcare knowledge lends them power over the senior generation. Still, their dominance is at odds with both the exchange theory which favours the provider of the service, and the traditional power hierarchy in Chinese families. Indeed, mothers in

this group do not automatically enjoy such authority. Instead, they draw on the following strategies to secure compliance from grandparents.

Many mothers attribute the grandparents' compliance to their efforts to initiate an open and candid communication between the two generations. According to Xiaojuan (C20):

If I want my mother to do things differently, for example, letting the boy do up the buttons by himself instead of helping him, or eat by himself, I make sure I explain to her why this is the better way, making it easier for her to accept. I tell her it's not because I don't appreciate what she's doing. It's just what I learn from books written by scientists who did plenty of research. (C20, Mother)

In several families where paternal grandparents are involved (C17, 33, and 44), in order to avoid potential conflicts, it is the father who plays the important role of communicating with the older generation. Since daughters-in-law occupy the most powerless position in traditional Chinese families, by drawing on their husband's support, mothers in my study are strategically striking a "patriarchal bargain" to maximise their power in their negotiation with the older generation (Lan, 2003; Shih and Pyke, 2010).

Mothers also try to strive for grandparents' compliance by relieving the older generation's childcare burden, with some consciously taking up more childcare tasks when they are at home. In particular, they make sure grandparents are spared some of the most complicated tasks, as illustrated by Limeng (C33):

Because my mother-in-law already has to take care of the entire family, we feel we'd better not add to her workload. So although both my husband and I are very much into scientific childrearing, we don't really expect her to do so. Instead, we save all the physical and cognitive training to evenings when we arrive home from work. It is also us who introduced my daughter to finger food, because to do that you need to get the kid changed, coax her into eating, and do the cleaning afterwards. It's such a hassle that we don't want to trouble my mother-in-law. (C33, Mother, daughter looked after by paternal grandparents)

As mentioned earlier, one reason behind grandparents' disapproval of children eating by themselves is because of the extra work caused by it. Therefore, in order to gain her parents-in-law's approval for their childcare approaches, Limeng made sure the difficult parts were shouldered by her and her husband.

In a minority of families, parents also choose to "turn a blind eye" to some of the grandparents' practices, as demonstrated by Linfang's (C3) reference to her parents-in-law:

I always believe parents should not make such a fuss about their children. Because while your children have their needs, so does the older generation. You can't just focus on the children... So don't be so nit-picking with your parents(-in-law) over trivial stuff and make all those demands. It's hard enough for them to look after your children at their age. I feel grateful to them, especially because I'm often away and not doing my job as a parent.
(C3, Mother)

To summarise, grandparents in this group have little control over childcare decisions compared to their adult children(-in-law). Some grandparents make peace with their secondary status as they acknowledge their incapability in making well-informed decisions for their grandchildren. They may also choose to acquiesce in the interests of family harmony or in some cases due to a sense of futility. Similarly, parents feel they could not trust the older generation to make the best decisions for their children, which justifies their dominating position in the intergenerational power dynamics. Thanks to grandparents' compliance, the divergence in childcare approaches between the two generations seldom upgrades into open conflicts.

7.4 Pattern III: Intergenerational power struggle

The final group consists of seven families that experience the most turbulent intergenerational relationships (see **Table 8**). Parents and grandparents in these families do not agree with each other's childrearing methods, and often neither of them wishes to give in. Even before I met them in person, I was often warned about the friction within these families by people who introduced me to them or by the respondents themselves. The interviews attested to their warnings, that these families are indeed no strangers to showdowns and cold wars, with both generations constantly

fighting for control over childcare decisions. I describe this last pattern of intergenerational power dynamics as *intergenerational power struggle*. As indicated by **Table 8**, all grandparents in this group are from the paternal side and belong to the category of tradition-abiding.

Table 8 Families with intergenerational power struggle (n=7)

No.	Mother	Caregiving grandparent(s)				
		Surname	Caregiving grandparent(s)	Original residence	SES	Motivation
2	Luting	Wu	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
22	Jiaqian	Yuan	Paternal grandfather and grandmother	Town	Higher	Tradition-abiding
28	Weiqing	Ding	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding
34	Wuman	Gu	Paternal grandfather and grandmother*	Town	Lower	Tradition-abiding
37	Zhiling	Xi	Paternal grandfather (previously paternal grandmother)	Town	Lower	Tradition-abiding
39	Ruojin	Ji	Paternal grandfather and grandmother*	Town	Higher	Tradition-abiding
41	Jiexia	Yang	Paternal grandmother	Rural	Lower	Tradition-abiding

*Grandparents were not interviewed due to strained intergenerational relationships.

7.4.1 Substantial intergenerational divergence in childcare

Mothers in this group report substantial discrepancy in childrearing styles between themselves and the older generation, which they often frame as a clash between “new and old” or “scientific and outdated”. As indicated by **Table 8**, none of these grandparents is of urban origin, and those from five out of the seven families are of lower socioeconomic status with little education. It is thus understandable that the mothers often disapprovingly describe the grandparents as holding onto experiences in the past, which is a time of extreme poverty and food shortage they consider irrelevant to their current way of life. Interviews with these mothers are thus filled with complaints about the older generation’s childcare methods, which they criticise as anachronistic or even detrimental to their children’s development. It is obvious that the control over childcare decisions constitutes a heated battlefield for parents and grandparents in these families, with overt disputes happening all the time regarding the following areas.

Conflicts may arise when grandparents refuse to abide by contemporary childcare guidelines set out by experts, which often collide with their past experiences. A frequently quoted example is the children's diet. Zhiling (C37) recounted how her mother-in-law insisted on feeding her son rice paste instead of formula milk when he was only a few days old, while Ruojin (C39) complained about her mother-in-law, who refused to acknowledge her granddaughter's egg intolerance and insisted on feeding it to her despite Ruojin's protest.

Another common complaint by mothers is that, the older generation may hinder their children's independence by spoiling them and being overly helpful. Luting (C2) frowned upon how her parents-in-law spoon-fed everything to the mouth of her son even after he was two-year-old. When Luting tried to express her disapproval, she was aghast at her father-in-law's response: "I'm going to feed him till he's eight, don't you bother!"

A further source of conflict is how easily grandparents would give in to their grandchildren's unreasonable demands. For example, Weiqing (C28) complained about her mother-in-law's overreliance on snacks when dealing with her son: "She uses snacks to coax the boy all the time, whenever he cries, throws a tantrum, or refuses to do this or that. She never tries to reason with him". Jiexia (C41) only realised her mother-in-law had been secretly slipping sweets to her son, when she noticed half of the boy's teeth were severely decayed. It also worried Jiexia that her mother-in-law set no limit to her son's TV hours, as long as it kept him quiet.

7.4.2 Grandparents' refusal to back down

Mothers in this group have tried to convince the older generation to adopt their preferred childcare approaches, but their attempts are often unsuccessful. Typically, grandparents either continue with their own methods covertly "in the backstage" (Goffman, 1959; Shih and Pyke, 2010), or resist in more open and aggressive ways. In sharp contrast to the compliant grandparents in the previous group, who acknowledge the limitation of themselves and the authority of their adult children, grandparents in the current group demonstrate a sense of entitlement that prompts them to resist the younger generation. As demonstrated below, grandparents draw on several arguments to proclaim their control over the care of their grandchildren.

With regard to mothers' reference to scientific childcare knowledge, grandparents simply choose to ignore and instead emphasise their abundant childrearing experience in the past. In addition to their own children,³³ most grandparents in this group have also looked after other grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. Therefore, it is the mothers who reported being treated as novices, whose words carried no weight in front of the older generation. As mentioned earlier, Zhiling (C37) had arguments with her mother-in-law, Grandma Xi, over feeding rice paste to her newborn son. Grandma Xi insisted that it was how everyone in her hometown fed their children, and that her three children were brought up exactly this way. Zhiling tried all she could to stop her mother-in-law, but she had little success:

I told her infants under four-month-old should only be fed with milk because they can't digest rice. I showed her whatever books and articles I could find, but she wouldn't believe me... Once we went to hospital with my son for an examination, and on the wall of the hospital, there were posters about what infants should and should not eat at each stage. I pointed it out to her, but she still refused to change her mind. (C37, Mother, two sons first looked after by paternal grandmother, later by paternal grandfather)

The divergence between Zhiling and her mother-in-law later extend to other aspects of their childcare collaboration. At a point, both found it impossible to carry on. When her older son reached two, Zhiling sent him to a private nursery, while her mother-in-law returned to her hometown to look after the children of her other sons.

Grandparents also believe that, compared with the younger generation who are largely absent due to work, their extensive childcare involvement should earn them the right to look after their grandchildren in their chosen ways. For example, Luting (C2) recalled one occasion where she had to bring her son to hospital for his severe nappy rash, because her mother-in-law did not change his nappies frequently enough. When Luting later tried to point this out to her mother-in-law, her father-in-law interrupted her irritably in defence of his wife:

³³ In six out of the seven families, the grandparents have more than one adult child, which may be related to the fact that they are not from urban areas and are therefore not strictly restricted by the one-child policy.

If you are not happy, why don't you change the nappies yourself? You can't be so demanding with your mother-in-law. She's a rural woman, she thinks nappies are expensive so it's better not to waste. How can you blame her when she's helping you save money? Mind you, we are not servants hired by you, so stop pointing fingers! (C2, Paternal grandfather)

Luting felt it would be inappropriate for her to rebut, given how much she and her husband are relying on the older generation for childcare and housework. Luting's decision to back down is in accordance with the logic of exchange principles, which puts her in a subjugated position because of her dependency on her parents-in-law. The quote by Grandpa Wu also reflects the "power-responsibility congruency" observed in other Chinese families (Cheng, 2019; Zuo and Bian, 2005). According to this model, power related to mundane routine matters usually belongs to those who are responsible for the actual work, that is the grandparents in the context of my study. This further highlights another disadvantage suffered by parents, who are mostly away at work when their children are under the care of grandparents. This "backstage" (Goffman, 1959) created by parents' absence provides grandparents with leeway to carry out childcare in ways that might not be approved by the younger generation.

Moreover, some grandparents further draw on their seniority-based power (Zuo, 2009) to challenge the decisions made by mothers. When grandparents adopt such a narrative, mothers often find it difficult to question them without appearing as ungrateful and disrespectful daughters-in-law. Zhiling (C37), who experienced constant arguments with her mother-in-law over her son's diet, recalled it was impossible for her to press on her mother-in-law:

My mother-in-law is a sensitive person. Sometimes when we were arguing, I couldn't help raising my voice, and she was in tears. I felt I had to stop and let her have her way. I know I'm right and she's wrong, but she's the senior, which makes it bad for me to argue with her like that. (C37, Mother)

Additionally, as indicated in **Table 8**, all grandparents in this group are from the paternal side. Many of them referred to the patrilineal concept of bloodline to emphasise that their grandchildren are within the lineage of their own family. This entitles them to directly intervene in their grandchildren's upbringing, while the mother is seen as an outsider of their family who is supposed to have little say.

It is no surprise that all the grandparents in this group are tradition-abiding grandparents, whose provision of childcare support was motivated more by a sense of prescribed obligation and less out of an intimate bond. With low expectations for emotional closeness, when conflicts arise between the generations, it is understandable that the grandparents would resort to their seniority-based authority and refuse to concede, even if it may risk jeopardising the emotional climate within their families.

One may expect the father to mediate between the paternal grandparents and his wife, given evidence from the previous group has attested to their success in attaining compliance from their parents. Unfortunately, in six out of the seven families of this group, the father either works in a different city (C2, 37 and 39) or has to work for extended hours regularly (C22, 34 and 41). As a result, they are only marginally involved in the care of their children, which prevents them from noticing the problems with their children's upbringing, and from reconciling their wife and parents when conflicts erupt between them.

7.4.3 Reactions from discontented mothers: from resistance to concession

Unlike their counterparts in the previous two groups, mothers in the current group find themselves in a difficult situation. On the one hand, they are not satisfied with many of the grandparents' childcare practices, which they criticised as "detrimental" to their children. They also resent the older generation for being stubborn and overbearing. On the other hand, mothers feel they still need to rely on grandparents' support, and the traditional norm of filial piety further constrains how much they can challenge the authority of the older generation. As a result, for mothers in this group, they feel hard to see grandparents' caregiving simply as a gift they desire and feel grateful for; instead, it could be more like a burden. Jiaqian (C22) did not hide her discontent when she described her parents-in-law as "morally hijacking" her:

I know they are heavily involved in the care of my son, but that doesn't mean they can deprive me of my authority as a mum. Nor that they are the older generation in the family means I have to obey whatever they say. (C22, Mother)

Therefore, mothers report a constant power struggle between themselves and their parents-in-law. Depending on the specific context of their family, mothers react differently to grandparents' power and authority, ranging from active resistance to more passive concessions, as discussed below.

Some mothers adopt an unyielding stance against the grandparents and refuse to budge, for they are convinced of the superiority of their way of childcare. They expect the grandparents to change their minds after seeing the successful results of their methods. Jiaqian's (C22) parents-in-law used to insist on bringing their grandson to a doctor whenever he showed signs of coughing and a runny nose, which Jiaqian considered completely unnecessary. According to Jiaqian, after two years of her effort, alternating between civil discussions and stormy confrontation, her parents-in-law finally agreed with her that mild symptoms required only home care, and stopped accusing her as "an irresponsible mother". By standing firm to their stance, mothers like Jiaqian succeed in getting the grandparents to comply in the end, albeit often at the cost of family harmony. For the mother, she might further risk the criticism of being a disrespectful daughter-in-law. In the case of Zhiling (C37), neither she nor her mother-in-law was willing to give in. Their relationship became so strained that it completely broke down in two years, when her mother-in-law decided to return to her hometown.

In some cases where the grandparents are considered overly stubborn, or the mother feels inappropriate to directly challenge her parents-in-law, she would try to reinforce her control in a more roundabout way. Some mothers accept it is too hard for them to correct what they see as problematic in the older generation's practices. They instead seek to minimise the perceived negative influences on their children by replacing grandparents' caregiving with their own. Weiqing (C28) noticed her son was picking up some of the bad language used by her mother-in-law, a rural woman with limited education. Weiqing was also concerned that her son still could not eat on his own when he was almost three. Instead of asking her mother-in-law to make the changes, Weiqing turned down all her part-time work opportunities so that she could spend more time looking after her son.

Other mothers cut down the grandparents' involvement by introducing additional care arrangements. Jiaqian (C22) sent her son to a private nursery before he

reached the age for kindergarten, to which her parents-in-law responded with a two-month cold war. Wuman (C34) hired a nanny chosen by herself to ensure that even when she was away, there was someone at home who would look after her children in ways she approved. Zhiling (C37), who found it impossible to communicate with her overly stubborn mother-in-law, asked for the help of her more easy-going father-in-law when her second son was born.

Mothers also try to draw on their children to work against the older generation. For example, Luting (C2) noticed her daughter was not getting enough sleep. This was usually because her father-in-law, who was responsible for getting the girl ready for bed, often stayed up late watching TV. So Luting told her daughter: “If you want to grow as tall as mum, you need to get lots of sleep. So what do you say to grandpa? You tell him I want to go to bed early”.

In one family (C41), it is mostly the mother who defers to the older generation. Speaking of her son’s day with her mother-in-law, Jiexia told me he spent most of the time watching TV. Jiexia was aware of the negative impacts of excessive TV watching, but she felt there was little she could do:

Because I have to work, I can’t be there to look after him. I need my mother-in-law. And I can’t ask her not to watch TV, can I? It’s not my position to make such demands. To be honest, I find myself doing the same thing, because when I’m at home in the evening, I have to look after his younger sister. So if the TV could settle him down for a while, I just let him watch. (C41, Mother, son and daughter looked after by paternal and maternal grandmothers)

Jiexia’s words reflect her disadvantaged position in the intergenerational relationship. Despite her discontent with the practices of her mother-in-law, she could not live without her help. Her dependency thus reduces her power, rendering her reluctant to impose her demands on her mother-in-law, like many mothers in the previous group have been doing.

To summarise, for most families in this group, neither the grandparents nor the mothers are in an absolute dominance in their power struggle over childcare. Grandparents do not enjoy the automatic authority ascribed by the Confucian tradition and their identity as the provider of childcare support. Instead, they are constantly

challenged by the discontent younger generation, who disagrees with their ways of childrearing. At the same time, while mothers consider grandparents' childcare methods outdated, it does not mean that they can easily dismiss the grandparents in their decision-making. On the contrary, mothers struggle to regain their control, carefully not to be criticised as unfilial and disrespectful. Considering the conflictual power struggle between these mothers and grandparents, their relationship resembles the "near but discordant" intergenerational relations observed by Guo et al. (2012) in rural China, that while there is extensive functional exchange across the generations, emotional closeness is absent. The childcare collaboration in families of this group is more like an uneasy compromise driven by grandparents' sense of obligation and parents' pressing need for support.

7.5 Conclusion

Findings from this chapter highlight that the power dynamics between mothers and grandparents around childcare decisions are diverse and complex. Neither the traditional image of an authoritative older generation (Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2018), nor the more recent observation about their marginalised position in family decision-making (Shen, 2013; Xiao, 2016) can fully capture the complexity of the power dynamics and emotional interplays between the two generations in my study. This chapter identifies three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics: intergenerational coordination, dominating parents and compliant grandparents, as well as intergenerational power struggle (see **Table 9**). This typology derives from a two-fold distinction: whether there is a consensus over childrearing approaches between the two generations, and whether grandparents recognise parents' ultimate authority.

The different patterns of intergenerational power dynamics suggest that, while grandparents' childcare provision can be a source of practical support, depending on how it is received by parents, it may also generate disappointment, conflicts and tensions. Therefore, the existence of intergenerational functional solidarity, which in the current study takes the form of grandparental care, does not always guarantee a close and harmonious intergenerational relationship (affectual and consensus solidarity). This echoes scholars' argument for a more comprehensive approach to studies of intergenerational relationships, which has to take into account both the

manifest (e.g. structural and functional) and latent (e.g. affectual and consensus) dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (W Liu, 2017; Silverstein and Giarrusso, 2010).

Table 9 Three patterns of intergenerational power dynamics

	I: Intergenerational coordination	II: Dominating parents and compliant grandparents	III: Intergenerational power struggle
Intergenerational childcare understanding (Consensus solidarity)	Largely consistent	Inconsistent → consistent (concessions made by grandparents)	Largely inconsistent (both generations are reluctant to concede)
Grandparents' recognition of parents' authority	Yes	Yes	No
Affectual solidarity	Harmonious	Harmonious, albeit resentment from certain grandparents	Conflictual
Total	13	33	7

Furthermore, this chapter contributes to our understanding of the intergenerational power dynamics in contemporary China. My findings lend partial support to existing studies, which argue that the power of the younger generation in intergenerational childcare arrangements is on the rise, due to an increased emphasis on affection and intimacy in Chinese families, the younger generation's more privileged socioeconomic status, as well as their use of expert-led childcare knowledge (Brengaard, 2016; Xiao, 2016). This is particularly evident in the first and second type of families (see **Table 9**), where grandparents recognise parents' ultimate authority over the upbringing of their children. However, that does not mean grandparents are entirely dismissed or disrespected in the intergenerational negotiations. In fact, mothers across the study still abide by the norms of filial piety in many ways, who carefully negotiate with the older generation to avoid jeopardising family harmony or appearing as insensitive and disrespectful daughters(-in-law). In families where grandparents are from a privileged background, such as those in the first group, the older generation's opinions are often highly valued by the parents. Some grandparents may further emphasise their power and authority derived from their identity as the senior generation and provider of childcare support, which is most

prominent in the third group. Mothers in these families find it hard to neglect or contend with the grandparents despite their strong disagreement.

Taken together, my study highlights the coexistence of different intergenerational power dynamics in contemporary Chinese families, where multiple power mechanisms including cultural traditions, relative resources, and exchange principles are working together favouring the two generations in different ways (Brengaard, 2016). Therefore, unlike suggested by some studies, it would be insufficient to have a one-size-fits-all description and explanation for the intergenerational power dynamics and emotional economies in contemporary China, which are largely characterised by diversity and ambiguities.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis began with the Chinese government's recent relaxation of birth restrictions, in response to the persistent low fertility and the rapid ageing of the population. The latest policy change in May 2021 allows each married couple to have up to three children. However, the announcement of the three-child policy has prompted an instant backlash on the Chinese social media, where many were expressing their lack of interest in having more children, and concerns for worsening discrimination against women in the workplace.³⁴ One of the frequently referred fertility obstacles is the lack of affordable childcare services for children under three. Unlike the socialist period, when extensive childcare support was provided through the work unit (*danwei*), the state is currently expecting individual families to play the dominant role in looking after their children (see Chapter 1). This thesis examines a prevalent childcare arrangement in contemporary urban China, where parents in dual-earner families rely extensively on grandparents' support in looking after their children on a full-time basis.

My study confirms there is a strong preference and heavy reliance on grandparental care in contemporary China. Still, the exact arrangements and experiences of the intergenerational childcare arrangement vary considerably across families and are shaped by the interweaving factors of gender, generation and socioeconomic status. My study also finds that, the prevalence of intergenerational childcare not only reflects the resilience of the cultural tradition of familism, it also exemplifies the shifting gender and intergenerational relationships at a time of rapid social change. Findings from this study suggest that, while grandparents play a fundamental role in supporting their adult children to combine parenthood and paid work, their childcare provision should not be assumed or regarded as a panacea for the problem of childcare deficits in contemporary urban China.

In this concluding chapter, I first present the main findings derived from my empirical chapters in light of the theoretical frameworks and existing studies I have drawn on. I then discuss the directions for further research on grandparenting and

³⁴ For examples of people's reactions on social media, see <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/31/world/asia/china-three-child-policy.html>, and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-57303592>

family relationships in the Chinese context. This chapter ends with the practical implications of my study for childcare and work policies in contemporary China.

8.1 Intergenerational childcare arrangement as a heterogeneous experience

8.1.1 A typology of intergenerational childcare arrangements

In contrast to much of the existing literature on grandparenting in China, which assumes the urban families drawing on grandparental care to be a more or less homogeneous group, one of the main findings of my study is that the intergenerational childcare arrangements vary considerably across families and often evolve over time. To better capture the internal diversity among these families, my study examines three distinct yet related aspects of the intergenerational childcare arrangements: the motivations of parents and grandparents, their division of childcare labour and their decision-making related to childcare. Here the multidimensional framework of intergenerational solidarity-conflict (Bengtson et al., 2002; Bengtson and Roberts, 1991) proves to be useful, as it highlights both the manifest (e.g. associational, functional and structural) and the latent (e.g. affectual, consensual) aspects of intergenerational solidarity, with the latter often ignored by existing studies of intergenerational support in China (J Liu, 2017; W Liu, 2017). Overall, consistent with recent research on grandparental care in China (Chen et al., 2011; Xiao, 2016), families in my study demonstrate a high level of functional solidarity, as exemplified by the extensive support exchanged between parents and grandparents during their rearing of the third generation. This also concurs with the ideal of multiple caregivers identified in other studies of childrearing practices in urban China (Goh, 2011; Short et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2020). Furthermore, my study extends the existing research by investigating other dimensions of the intergenerational relationship between parents and grandparents apart from their exchange of functional support, where I observe considerable variations across families as discussed below.

To illustrate how intergenerational childcare arrangements vary across my sample, I now present four families that are typical of a certain pattern of

Table 10 Typology of intergenerational childcare arrangements

No.	Family No.	Lineage of the caregiving grandparent(s) (See Appndx 3)	SES of the caregiving grandparent(s) (See Appndx 3)	Motivation of the caregiving grandparent(s) (See Appndx 3)	Grandparents' childcare involvement	Intergenerational decision-making (See Chpt 7)	Type of intergenerational childcare arrangement
1	C3	Maternal	Urban, higher	Reflexive	Broad (inclusive of cognitive development)	Intergenerational coordination	Tight-knit (accordant)
2	C26	Maternal	Urban, higher	Reflexive	Broad (inclusive of cognitive development)	Dominating parents and compliant grandparents	Tight-knit (divergent)
3	C21	Paternal	Rural, lower	Tradition-abiding	Limited to mainly physical care	Dominating parents and compliant grandparents	Tight-knit (divergent)
4	C37	Paternal	Town, lower	Tradition-abiding	Limited to mainly physical care	Intergenerational power struggle	Close but conflictual

intergenerational childcare arrangements. As summarised in **Table 10**, they reflect the synthesised findings from my preceding three empirical chapters.

The first type is represented by Linfang, the successful university lecturer and entrepreneur, as well as her father, Grandpa Chen, the retired university lecturer (C3). As a reflexive grandparent, although Grandpa Chen made it clear it was not his obligation to take care of his grandchildren, both he and his wife applied for early retirement in order to do so. Explaining his decision, Grandpa Chen emphasised his concern for his daughter, especially his high hope for her professional achievements; his wish to secure a better upbringing for his grandsons; as well as the sense of purpose he derived from it. Grandpa Chen and his wife are involved in a wide range of childcare tasks. After the paternal grandparents moved in with Linfang's family and took up the majority of the physical care tasks and housework, Grandpa Chen and his wife shifted their focus towards providing the boys with the necessary cognitive stimulation, physical training and discipline. While Grandpa Chen believes his daughter holds the ultimate responsibility for the upbringing of his grandsons, from time to time he finds himself involved in decision-making regarding how they should be brought up, with his inputs highly appreciated by his daughter. Overall, Grandpa Chen and Linfang make a good team in raising the boys, which is characterised by their consistent viewpoints and close collaboration regarding childrearing. I describe families such as Linfang's as *tight-knit (accordant)*.

The second type, exemplified by Yangshan and her mother Grandma Zhao (C26), is similar to the previous one in terms of grandparents' caregiving motivation, and the intergenerational division of childcare labour. As a retired employee from a state-owned enterprise in Guangzhou, Grandma Zhao is also from a relatively high socioeconomic background. However, Grandma Zhao feels she is a less capable caregiver vis-a-vis her highly educated daughter, who is a firm believer in the teachings of scientific childcare. As a result, Grandma Zhao reluctantly acquiesces in Yangshan's dominating role regarding decisions about her granddaughter's care, and assumes a compliant stance when disagreements arise between them. Thanks to Grandma Zhao's compromises, the intergenerational relationship in their family is largely harmonious, despite her sense of powerlessness and complaints about the lack of personal time. Compared with the first group, I describe families like Grandma Zhao's as *tight-knit (divergent)*.

The third type provides another possibility of a *tight-knit (divergent)* family, where the grandparents are from a lower socioeconomic background, as represented by Grandpa Tao and his daughter-in-law Peiran (C15). Coming from a village in southern China, Grandpa Tao is one of the tradition-abiding grandparents who believe it is his duty as a paternal grandparent to provide care for his grandchildren. Interestingly, although his care provision was initially motivated by a sense of obligation, he and his daughter-in-law manage to form a close emotional bond over the course of their childcare collaboration. Guided by his desire to uphold a harmonious intergenerational relationship and the recognition of his relatively limited education, Grandpa Tao acknowledges Peiran's expertise in the care and education of his grandchildren, and stays away from decision-making willingly. Grandpa Tao also has limited involvement in educational childcare tasks and instead focuses on providing everyday physical care.

In sharp contrast to the amicable atmosphere in the previous three groups, families in the last group are experiencing estranged or even conflictual intergenerational relationships, despite their considerable exchange of practical support. This group, which I describe as *close but conflictual*, is represented by Zhiling and her mother-in-law Grandma Xi (C37). Similar to Grandpa Tao (C15) from the previous group, Grandma Xi is a tradition-abiding grandparent of lower socioeconomic status. However, what sets them apart is that, Grandma Xi does not recognise Zhiling's ultimate authority as a mother in making childcare-related decisions. Instead, she expects Zhiling to demonstrate respect to her, given her seniority and her ample childrearing experience in the past. When disagreements in childcare beliefs and practices arise between them, neither is willing to give in, which end up as numerous open conflicts. Compared with other families, parents and grandparents in this final category are characterised by a lack of intimate ties, with their childcare collaboration barely sustained by a sense of obligation. Such a collaboration can be short-lived and fragile, as Grandma Xi stopped looking after Zhiling's son and returned to her hometown in less than two years.

These four categories certainly do not capture every aspect of the childcare arrangements in all 46 families of this study. Some families may lie in-between two categories or do not particularly fit in any of the four. That said, each of these four families represents a typical form of intergenerational childcare with its own

distinctive characteristics, which suggests that the experience of intergenerational childcare is far from homogenous. One of the implications of this typology is that, as some researchers of grandparental care in China have recently noticed (Breengaard, 2016, 2017; Goh, 2011; Xiao, 2016), in order to understand the complexity of intergenerational relationships, apart from the actual exchange of practical support across the generations, the emotional tones and power dynamics across generations need separate attention. My findings challenge some of the simplistic interpretations that see the availability of grandparental care *per se* as a source of support or as an indication of family harmony (Chen et al., 2011), which may risk ignoring the possible intergenerational divergence or conflicts in childcare beliefs and practices, as highlighted by the above case of Zhiling and her mother-in-law (C37).

In recent years, a few studies of grandparental care are beginning to notice the intergenerational tension and conflicts within families, which corresponds to some of the categories I identify in my sample. For instance, Goh (2011) found frequent conflicts between parents and grandparents in her ethnographical study in Xiamen, which she attributed to their differences in childrearing philosophies and methods. In another study based in Beijing, Xiao (2016) observed that, in face of intergenerational divergence in childcare, mothers in her study often assume a dominant position in decision-making while grandparents are largely marginalised, which mirrors the second and third types of families I mention above. However, most of these past studies merely touch upon one type of families drawing on grandparental care, while a systematic examination of the vast internal diversity among these families is largely missing. My study addresses this gap in the literature by constructing this typology of intergenerational childcare arrangements that takes into account the multiple aspects of childcare arrangements. As discussed in the next section, by combing this typology with an intersectionality perspective that considers the differing impacts of gender, generation and socioeconomic status, my findings have the potential to shed light on the underlying mechanisms of how such categories come into being.

8.1.2 The intersection of gender-generation-SES in intergenerational childcare arrangements

Having identified the disparities in the experience of intergenerational childcare across families, a further argument made by this thesis is that such

disparities need to be understood at the intersection of gender, generation, and socioeconomic status. The intergenerational arrangements of childcare serve as a site where gender and intergenerational relationships are being actively constructed, negotiated, and transformed by parents and grandparents on a daily basis. During this process, gender, generation, and socioeconomic status are by no means the only influential factors. However, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, they provide valuable clues to the disparities in the lived experiences of parents and grandparents and the symbolic boundaries between them, and shed light on the interweaving privileges, oppression and inequalities embedded in these families.

It is widely accepted that the provision of childcare is a highly gendered activity, and in the intergenerational context of my study, the operation of gender as a category of difference is more complicated. In accordance with the traditional belief of “men rule outside, women rule inside”, mothers and grandmothers in this study are generally considered more “skilled” at caregiving by nature, and are expected to play a greater role in care provision compared with their spouses.

Such gendered experiences are further differentiated by generation. In the parent generation, by transferring a considerable amount of care work to the grandparents, mothers are able to juggle their full-time work and motherhood, as observed by other studies of grandparental care in China (Goh and Kuczynski, 2010; Shen et al., 2016). At the same time, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, the division of childcare labour between parents remains highly unequal even with grandparents’ support. Concurring with Xiao’s (2016) findings in Beijing, in half of the families in my sample, given the negligible role of the father, the intergenerational division of childcare labour essentially takes place between the mother and the grandparents. This in some ways mirrors the findings in studies of paid domestic help (Cheung and Lui, 2021; Groves and Lui, 2012), that even when a domestic helper is hired, the traditional gendered division of domestic labour between husbands and wives is often reproduced, especially regarding tasks such as childcare compared with household chores. Nevertheless, the unequal division of childcare between parents comes with a certain advantage for mothers. Consistent with the “power-responsibility congruence” observed in conjugal decision-making in China (Cheng, 2019; Zuo and Bian, 2005), mothers in my study enjoy greater authority regarding childcare-related decisions in comparison to their husbands.

In the grandparent generation, while grandmothers are also more involved generally, there are some promising signs that the gender boundary is loosening, not least because of grandfathers' increased time availability after their retirement. Mirroring the Australian grandfathers in Lavery's (2003) study, several grandfathers in my study felt they had missed out on spending time with their own children when they were younger and were therefore actively seeking to make up by taking care of their grandchildren. In particular, three grandfathers (C15, 23 and 37) in my sample were looking after their grandchildren on their own and proved to be as capable as grandmothers. My respondents also confirmed a general increase in grandfathers' domestic involvement compared to the time they first became fathers. Such evidence points to the potential of a "slow dripping of change" (Sullivan, 2004) that may contribute to the dissolution of the deeply entrenched gender inequalities in Chinese families.

Apart from gender, generation constitutes another source of inequalities in the patriarchal system in traditional Chinese families, where grandparents are entitled to respect and authority because of their seniority. My study lends support to recent studies of intergenerational relationships, that the contemporary intergenerational relationship in urban China is becoming more diverse and complex (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Song and Ji, 2020). In the context of my study, the evolving and diversifying intergenerational relationships to a large extent can be attributed to the disparities in socioeconomic status between parents and grandparents, which is mainly indicated by occupation, education and *hukou* status. Following my research design, parents in my study all belong to the middle class, while grandparents are from a variety of backgrounds. The collaboration between them provides an opportunity to observe how the highly class-specific work of childcare is enacted by parents and grandparents with potentially very different socioeconomic status. The value-laden interactions and conflicts between these two generations highlight issues of authority about whose beliefs and practices would be ultimately recognised in the upbringing of the third generation, and about whose needs are prioritised when there are clashes of interests. In this process, Bourdieu's concepts such as capital and field prove to be very useful in elucidating the class-related differences between parents and grandparents, as detailed below.

On the whole, concurring with existing studies of parenting in urban China (Breengaard, 2015, 2016; Kuan, 2015; Naftali, 2014), the highly educated and well-resourced middle-class parents in my study support the ideologies of intensive and scientific parenting. They invest an extensive amount of money, time and emotion in the upbringing of their children, with the hope of cultivating a competitive edge in them from infancy onwards. Drawing on these latest childcare ideals, parents are establishing boundaries between what they consider to be good and bad childcare practices, as well as competent and incompetent caregivers (Breengaard, 2015; Macdonald, 2011). It is against such background that grandparents in my study do not enjoy automatic authority and respect regarding childcare arrangements and decision-making. From the parents' perspective, the older generation's past childcare experience is largely deemed irrelevant and of little value. Grandparents instead have to work at "earning" their power, by demonstrating their capability to adopt the latest approaches approved by childcare experts. Yet such a capability is not distributed evenly, but is closely related to grandparents' possession of cultural and social capital, or more broadly, to their socioeconomic status. As a result, grandparents are accorded varying levels of recognition by the parents, as discussed below.

When parents are deciding on which grandparents to be involved in caregiving, those with higher socioeconomic status, such as the retired university lecturer Grandpa Chen (C3), are generally preferred. Their possession of the right type of cultural and social capital means they are also more likely to be entrusted with childcare tasks that are of an educational and disciplinary nature, and their opinions are valued when childcare decisions are being made. In contrast, consistent with findings on rural grandparents and domestic helpers in Breengaard's (2015) study, grandparents in my study with a rural origin and limited education are often considered less competent. They may even be excluded from childcare provision from the very beginning. Even if they are involved, they are expected to only take up the most "basic" tasks such as the physical care and housework, and have little say in decision-making, as in the case of Grandpa Tao (C15). These findings confirm the observation of the rise of a child-centred ideology in urban China (Goh, 2011; Zhang et al., 2019), as reflected by the way parents select the most qualified caregiving grandparents in order to secure the best upbringing for their children. Furthermore, the way parents draw a distinction between competent and incompetent grandparents,

which corresponds to the level of capital they possess and in turn defines their scope of childcare involvement, constitutes another example of how the intersection of categories such as gender, generation and socioeconomic status is creating hierarchical differentiation during the provision of care, in the tradition of a long thread of feminist studies of care work and reproductive labour (Colen, 2009; Glenn, 1992; Roberts, 1997). While past studies have found a division of “menial/spiritual” care work between middle-class mothers and the nannies they hire (Macdonald, 2011), my study shows that such a division may also exist between some middle-class parents and the caregiving grandparents they rely on.

Grandparents react to the boundaries imposed by parents in different ways, which is often closely related to the capital/resources at their disposal, and their level of reliance on their adult children for elderly support.

In terms of grandparents’ childcare involvement, grandparents across the class spectrum consistently arrange their caregiving according to the younger generation’s schedules. They also prioritise the younger generation’s needs to maintain a close parent-child bond and their concerns to provide the necessary developmental stimulation for their children, by taking up a large proportion of housework and/or routine physical care. Still, class-based differences can be observed from the level of intergenerational specialisation regarding the “intellectually demanding” tasks, where grandparents with lower socioeconomic status are largely absent due to their alleged incompetence, i.e. lack of the necessary cultural and social capital recognised by the parent generation. Class-based differences are also reflected by grandparents’ attitudes towards hired help. With their sufficient economic capital, those from a more privileged background are more likely to be comfortable with the idea of outsourcing the basic housework, and are more likely to be able to afford the cost of hired help. In comparison, rural grandparents in my study tend to mirror grandparents in past studies of Taiwan families (Lan, 2003, 2006), who are concerned that the presence of domestic help may lessen their children’s dependence on them and in turn endanger their old-age security in the future.

As documented by studies in East Asia, hired domestic help may not be well accepted by grandparents (Lan, 2003, 2006). Many are concerned that the presence of

domestic workers may undermine their authority and old-age security, as their opportunity to look after their grandchildren is taken away

Grandparents' stances towards childcare decision-making are also diverse. A few of the more privileged grandparents, such as Grandpa Chen (C3), actively draw on their cultural and social capital to assist their adult children without being overly interfering. More commonly, grandparents agree with the parents on their inadequacy in caregiving and assume a compliant position. This applies not only to grandparents whose socioeconomic status is low in the *absolute* sense, such as the rural-born Grandpa Tao (C15); even for the urban-born Grandma Zhao (C26), her *relative* disadvantage compared with her daughter also prompts her to take a deferential stance.

Cases like these suggest that, different from the traditional intergenerational power hierarchy in Chinese families, the younger generation, especially the mothers, are assuming greater authority in their daily childcare provision. Consistent with existing studies of decision-making power in China (Brengaard, 2016; Cheng, 2019; Gruijters, 2017), mothers' empowerment may be attributed to their higher level of education and earning power, as well as their grasp of modern childcare knowledge. The younger generation's rise in status may also be a result of grandparents' strategic concessions. Some grandparents compromise in order to uphold intergenerational intimacy (Yan, 2016; Zhong, 2014), or to free themselves from the burden of decision-making (Zuo and Bian, 2005). Others, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and expect to rely entirely on their adult children for elderly support, may purposely avoid challenging the younger generation to protect their old-age security. Taken together, within the stratified field of parenting in contemporary urban China, grandparents are largely located in a secondary position compared with their highly educated and well-resourced adult children, although in some cases this is an active choice made by the grandparents themselves.

However, not all grandparents are willing to reconcile themselves to this secondary position, as exemplified by Grandma Xi (C37) from the close-but-conflictual group. Being less concerned with intergenerational intimacy, grandparents such as Grandma Xi draw on the doctrine of filial piety and their seniority to actively confront their daughters-in-law. Mothers in these families often report feeling

constrained in pressing their wishes as they could be seen as unfilial daughters-in-law. Compared with other families, these parents' higher socioeconomic status fails to translate into greater control in the intergenerational power negotiation. Families like these support past studies of intergenerational relationships by confirming that, grandparents may be doubted as competent caregivers by the well-educated younger generation, however, they cannot be easily dismissed and still enjoy respect and power, given their seniority in the family and the fact that they are the providers of childcare support (Breengaard, 2016; Shih and Pyke, 2010).

Overall, the different intergenerational dynamics across families suggest it would be imprecise to conclude either the parent or grandparent generation is dominant or marginalised, as suggested by some studies (Shen, 2013; Xiao, 2016). More generally, drawing on the perspective of intersectionality, a key argument of my study is that, the examination of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in urban China must take into account the interweaving effects of gender, generation, and socioeconomic status, so as to avoid sweeping generalisations that ignore the complexity and diversity of family life. During this process, factors such as gender, generation, and socioeconomic status do not operate separately, and instead, the combination of the three works differently in individual families, creating a variety of privileged and oppressed positions across different aspects of intergenerational childcare.

Furthermore, the considerable divergence of childrearing approaches between parents and grandparents in my study challenges the applicability of the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1993) in societies like China, which have experienced rapid development in recent decades. My findings lend support to past studies that question the stability of intergenerational transmission suggested by habitus, and instead emphasise the role of personal reflexivity and agency in parenting (Archer, 2007), which may undermine the legitimacy of parents' past upbringing and thus challenge the class reproduction of parenting practices (Lan, 2014; Tian and Jing, 2021). In the context of my study, the intergenerational rupture in childrearing beliefs and practices are most noticeable in families that experience upward mobility. This suggests that, parents are actively reflecting on their past upbringing and adapting themselves to the new parenting ideals related to the aspirational middle class.

Disparities in the socioeconomic status matter not only between generations within the same family, but also across families, which is most salient in the grandparent generation. Findings from my study attest to the continuing effects of parents' social class on their children's achievements after they reach adulthood (Swartz, 2008, 2009), as reflected by the differing impacts of grandparents' care provision on their adult children and grandchildren.

For the parent generation, grandparents' different levels of childcare involvement, which are related to grandparents' possession of resources, can make a difference in the work-life conflict they are facing and influence their career prospects in the long run. Parents (in particular mothers) relying on grandparents with lower socioeconomic status, often report they have to make up for grandparents' "inadequacy" by spending additional time monitoring their caregiving and supplementing with their own labour. This means they have to set aside time from their already busy schedule, which may hinder their career progression.

My study also suggests that grandparents' socioeconomic status may have a direct influence on their grandchildren's future educational outcomes (Møllegaard and Jæger, 2015; Sheppard and Monden, 2018). As demonstrated in Chapter 6, grandparents' involvement in the care and education of their grandchildren is largely shaped by their possession of cultural and social capital. While it is not for my research to decide on the best way to raise children, plenty of studies have confirmed that class-specific logics of childrearing, such as the middle-class way of "concerted cultivation" and the working-class way of "accomplishment of natural growth", are differently received by dominant institutions such as schools and workplaces (Lareau, 2003; Streib, 2015). In contemporary China, social stratification can start as early as kindergarten. Although parents in my study generally laugh off the sensational headlines such as "bilingual interviews required for entering elite kindergartens" or "kindergarten child with a ten-page curriculum vitae", they are aware of the pressure of preparing their toddlers for the coming competitions that dictate the success of class transmission. Against such a background, it is hard to neglect the differing impacts on a child's school readiness upon entering kindergarten, when comparing between an illiterate grandparent and a grandparent capable of reading with her/him every day.

The vast differences in grandparents' socioeconomic status across my sample suggest that, even among families where both parents belong to the middle class, grandparents may act as a further source of social stratification. In other words, in addition to the younger generation's current class position, assortative mating by parental background, a type of marital sorting confirmed by existing research in China (Hu, 2016b), can also have implications for the intergenerational social reproduction. Middle-class couples who have both maternal and paternal grandparents with higher socioeconomic status may be better placed to pass their class-based privileges to their children, compared with those who have none or only one grandparental pair who are of higher socioeconomic status.

It should be noted that the above findings are drawn from a group of privileged middle-class parents, characterised by their endorsement for ideologies such as intensive and scientific parenting. In families where parents belong to a different class group, the intersection between gender, generation and socioeconomic status may play out differently. However, although the exact size of the middle class in China is under debate, it is a growing group whose "behavioral norms are setting the standards for a 'civilized' mode of conduct for other social groups" (Naftali, 2014: 134) such as the rural-to-urban migrants and the working class. Therefore, middle-class parents' embrace of intensive parenting and the associated family dynamics may extend to parents from other social strata (Xiao and Cai, 2014).

8.2 Coexisting traditional and modern practices and ideals in contemporary Chinese families

Having discussed the heterogeneity of intergenerational arrangements of childcare across individual families, the current section adopts a bottom-up perspective to consider how these experiences at the micro level may shed new light on wider social changes, in particular the shifts in family relationships in contemporary China.

Findings from the current study confirms the resilience and adaptability of grandparental care, or more generally, of intergenerational support in China at a time of rapid societal change (Croll, 2006; Gruijters, 2016; Yang and Li, 2009). Concurring with existing studies of intergenerational interdependence (Song and Ji,

2020; Zhang et al., 2019), the continuation of the tradition of intergenerational childcare can be understood as a strategic response to the limited welfare support in the post-socialist era, as individuals turn to their families for practical and emotional support. At the same time, the state is playing an active role in encouraging the resurgence of familism and reinforcing the traditional functions of the family as a safety net. For example, President Xi Jinping and the government have been extensively emphasising the importance of Confucian teachings (Evans, 2021), as well as “family, family rules, and family ethos” (*jiating, jiajiao, jiafeng*) on several occasions.³⁵ “Traditional family virtues” such as filial piety have also recurrently featured in official propaganda (Santos and Harrell, 2016). According to a controversial law amendment in 2012, elderly parents can file lawsuits against their children who fail to pay them frequent visits, send them greetings or attend to their spiritual needs. All of these point to the state’s emphasis on the essential role played by families in tackling the current insufficiency of social welfare.

While the prevalence of intergenerational childcare can be seen as an indication of the resilience of cultural traditions in response to the structural challenge of childcare deficit in contemporary China, it also captures some of the new patterns and meanings related to intergenerational and gender relationships that arise against the wider social development in recent years. Using intergenerational childcare arrangements as an analytical lens, my study advances our knowledge of the transformation of contemporary Chinese families in the following ways.

Firstly, guided by the concept of ambivalence (Connidis and McMullin, 2002b; Luescher and Pillemer, 1998), the current study emphasises that while intergenerational ties appear strong in contemporary China, grandparents’ childcare support should not be taken for granted, which is illustrated by the varying motivations of parents and grandparents who adopt the intergenerational childcare arrangements. The tradition-abiding grandparents in my study tend to feel obliged to look after their grandchildren, often due to their limited access to public elderly support and their reliance on their adult children for old-age support. In comparison, most parents and the reflexive grandparents do not consider grandparents’ provision

³⁵ For more examples of Xi’s talk on *jiating, jiajiao, jiafeng*, see: <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2017/02-10/8145929.shtml> [in Chinese]

of care as an unconditional obligation. Instead, they justify their intergenerational childcare arrangements by drawing on their close intergenerational bond and their shared concern for the third generation. Accordingly, for many of my respondents, grandparents' childcare provision does not take place automatically. On the contrary, it is a conscious decision often accompanied by feelings of ambivalence and negotiations (W Liu, 2017). This is particularly the case when grandparents have to make considerable sacrifices for the sake of caregiving, such as premature retirement, relocation, and living apart from their partners.

The ambivalence experienced by parents and grandparents points to the potential tension between family interests and the interests of individual family members, which may further be related to the wider trend of the budding individualism observed by past studies based in China (Svarverud and Hansen, 2010; Yan, 2003, 2010b). My study substantiates this line of argument by showing that, in terms of the parent generation, many are placing great emphasis on their individual professional pursuits, which are often paradoxically justified with collectivist arguments such as “for the better upbringing of my children” or “to make my parents proud”. At the same time, the older generation, especially the reflexive grandparents who are better educated and well-resourced, also voice their desire for opportunities of self-actualisation and leisure apart from their caregiving responsibilities. Against this uneasy coexistence of individualism and familism, compromises have to be made within the family in order to sustain the intergenerational childcare arrangements. In the context of my study, this is mostly done by the grandparents in support of their adult children's careers.

Secondly, my study demonstrates that maternal grandparents are playing an important if not even preferred role in childcare provision, which is consistent with the findings on the decline of the patrilineal tradition in other studies (Grujters and Ermisch, 2019; J Liu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). In the case of my study, the increased involvement from maternal grandparents and in some cases from bilateral grandparents is to some extent made possible by the reduction in family size. However, it remains to be seen whether mothers' additional access to support from their natal family will be followed by doubled duties for elderly support in the future. Furthermore, concurring with past research (C Zhang, 2016; Zhang, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019), parents in my study report different experiences of childcare support by

paternal and maternal grandparents. However, I am hesitant to conclude such lineage-based differences are systematic throughout my sample, given there are several cases where a close emotional bond is also formed between mothers and their parents-in-law. Nevertheless, the fact that grandparents in families with the most strained intergenerational relationships are all from the patrilineal side confirms that, the historically troubled mother/daughter-in-law relationship continues to be a source of conflict in contemporary Chinese families (Goh, 2011; Shih and Pyke, 2010).

Thirdly, within the contemporary intergenerational arrangements of childcare, the historically hierarchical intergenerational relationship favouring the older generation is becoming more flexible and diverse (Santos and Harrell, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). For the middle-class parents in my study, their privileged educational experience and earning power have contributed to their rising status in their families (Brengaard, 2016; Cheng, 2019). In the daily interactions between the two generations, it is often the parent generation's wellbeing, demands and interests that are prioritised. Childcare approaches desired by parents are often accepted by grandparents as the default standard. Parents may further use the third generation's wellbeing and future development as a pretext to solicit acquiescence from grandparents without appearing as egoistic and unfilial, indicating the emergence of a child-centred care ideology (Goh, 2011; Yan, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). All of these represent a departure from the seniority-based hierarchy in traditional Chinese families. It also points to the rise of "descending familism" (Yan, 2016), which describes the downward flow of resources and attention within the multigenerational family, at least at a time when most grandparents are still healthy and capable.

However, the rise in the status of the younger generations does not mean the intergenerational hierarchy is entirely subverted or that the value of filial piety is abandoned, as some studies have suggested (He, 2009; Shen, 2013). On the contrary, filial piety continues to feature heavily in the daily interactions between parents and grandparents and shape how they negotiate their relationships and childcare arrangements. Consistent with a recent thread of research (Eklund, 2018; Yan, 2016; Yeh et al., 2013), my study confirms that the meaning and understanding related to filial piety have undergone considerable changes. For many parents in my study, their career success and quality of life constitute a positive filial tribute towards their parents. The parent generation also uses this logic to fend off criticisms about their

reliance on or even “exploitation” of the older generation for childcare provision, by emphasising the pride and pleasure they bring to their parents. Moreover, except for a few families (close-but-conflictual) where grandparents adopt a domineering position with regard to decision-making, the traditional form of authoritarian filial piety that requires an unconditional submission to the older generation has largely disappeared (Yeh et al., 2013). It is replaced by a modified form characterised by affection and mutual understanding, as reflected by parents’ efforts in expressing their gratitude towards the older generation through various ways of reciprocation, and their selective compromises regarding childcare approaches. Although parents play a more prominent role in childcare decision-making on the whole, my study suggests that in accordance with Yan’s (2016) observation, they are adopting a new understanding of filial piety that involves being “caring and supportive but not obedient” (*xiao er bushun*).

Fourthly, while the intergenerational relationship in China has been largely examined under an obligatory framework, consistent with more recent research (J Liu, 2017; Yan, 2016; Zhong, 2014), my study finds that affection and intimacy are playing an increasingly important role. This is exemplified by the reflexive grandparents, who are motivated to provide childcare by the emotional rewards they gain from it, in comparison to the tradition-abiding grandparents bound by a sense of obligation and economic necessity. My study also shows that parents and grandparents in many families are making active efforts in cultivating and maintaining close emotional ties. Their pursuit of intergenerational intimacy partially explains why some grandparents continue to be heavily involved in caregiving despite complaints about the resulting physical and mental strains.

Lastly, grandparents’ involvement in caregiving has mixed implications for gender equality in contemporary China. On the one hand, with the socialist legacy continuing to the current date, women are generally expected to be employed full-time. The intergenerational solidarity partially eases some of the structural disadvantages suffered by working mothers, whose work-life conflict is alleviated by grandparents’ childcare support (Chen et al., 2011). On the other hand, mothers’ ability to combine paid work and motherhood should not be simply interpreted as progress towards gender equality, as the responsibilities of childcare are further offloaded along the intergenerational line at the expense of the older generation,

instead of being shared equally between mothers and fathers (Xiao, 2016; Zhong and Peng, 2020). In my study, the division of childcare remains largely gendered in both the parent and grandparent generations, which suggests that the gender norms related to childcare and the devaluation of care work against paid work remain to be challenged in the Chinese context.

Overall, the intergenerational arrangements of childcare in this study reflect a mixture of traditional and modern ideals and practices in terms of gender and intergenerational relationships in urban China. This complex coexistence echoes concepts such as “compressed modernity” (Chang, 2010b) and “mosaic temporalities” (Ji, 2017), which have been used to describe the interweaving influences of the Confucian tradition, socialist legacy, logics of market economy and globalisation on contemporary Chinese families. In response to the intensified competition and insecurity in the post-reform period, individuals are actively making strategic arrangements to draw on familial support, based on an array of culturally constrained options available to them. This is consistent with Swidler’s (1986) view of culture as a toolkit rather than a doctrine, albeit with individuals from different social locations having differing abilities to exercise their choices. It is during this process that family traditions and relationships are being actively negotiated, modified and recreated in variant ways.

8.3 Implications of this research

8.3.1 Limitations and directions for future research

As a small-scale qualitative study, the current research provides an in-depth examination of the intergenerational childcare arrangements in 46 families in the city of Guangzhou. The limited generalisability of such a study has implications for future research.

Firstly, my study is based on families in a first-tier city, with two parents who are middle-class and in full-time employment. Future qualitative studies may consider including parents from less privileged backgrounds, whose parenting ideals and expectations may be very different, which may result in distinctive intergenerational and gender dynamics (Randles, 2020). Future studies could also use large-scale

representative datasets to ascertain the relevance and applicability of my qualitative findings concerning intergenerational childcare practices and ideals for the broader urban middle-class population, and to identify potential differences across regions and social groups.

Secondly, in families where the parent generation is divorced, the arrangements of intergenerational care may be very different, as the work-life conflict faced by the custodial parent is heightened, while grandparents from the side of the noncustodial parent may experience problems regarding their access to their grandchildren. My research design precluded such divorced families, and may have over-represented families with harmonious intergenerational relationships. Future research could use purposive sampling to recruit families with young children where inter- and/or intra-generational relationships are strained and where collaborative childcare arrangements may have ended prematurely.

Thirdly, my study mainly focuses on the intergenerational care for children under the age of three. This provides a snapshot of the experiences and views of parents and grandparents at one point in their lives, and therefore does not capture the dynamics and changes over time. Future research can examine how the intergenerational childcare arrangements develop and change across the life course of different family members, especially after specific events such as the grandchildren's admission to school, the birth of new grandchildren, or changes in parents' work arrangements and grandparents' health conditions. Longitudinal studies are needed to investigate how grandparents' earlier childcare provision may relate to the support they receive from their adult children in later years, and to the future educational attainments of their grandchildren.

8.3.2 Practical implications

In response to the challenge of an ageing population, the Chinese government has been trying to boost the fertility rate but has achieved limited success so far. As discussed in Chapter 1, regarding the structural challenge of the nurturing gap for children under the age of three, the state is predominantly relying on individual families for care provision, with formal childcare services playing a supplementary role. Currently, unless the mother gives up her career and stays at home to look after

the child, family-based care in urban China is largely provided by grandparents. In the absence of universal coverage of formal early childcare in the near future, the demand for grandparental care is going to stay. Despite its current prevalence, there are at least three reasons, discussed in the following paragraphs, why the intergenerational arrangements of childcare may not be sustainable or a panacea for the lack of childcare services.

First of all, not all families have grandparents available for childcare, which may be due to grandparents' health issues, geographical distance or competing work and care commitments. With the newly announced three-child policy, by the time their third grandchild is born, grandparents are likely to be too frail to provide intensive full-time care for newborns. Besides, grandparents' availability is facilitated by the current early retirement age (60 for men and 50/55 for women), which the state is planning to raise to 65 in response to population ageing. Furthermore, the increase in life expectancy and the insufficiency of welfare means that, grandparents in the future may be caught between the multiple demands of work and care for both their grandchildren and elderly parents.

Moreover, as indicated by the current study, some grandparents are becoming ambivalent about the sacrifices necessary for the care of their grandchildren. In the future, it may be more common for urban Chinese grandparents who are in better health, well-educated, financially self-independent and have better access to welfare support to place their personal development ahead of their caregiving responsibilities. There is already evidence among their counterparts in other Asian countries such as Japan and Singapore (Thang et al., 2011).

Secondly, while caring for grandchildren can be a major source of joy, doing it intensively 24/7 can be physically and mentally stressful for grandparents. Moreover, since grandparents' caregiving is largely defined by parents' work schedule, the toxic work culture of "996" or even "007" prevailing in urban China not only means an aggravation of work-life conflict for parents, but also longer caregiving shifts for grandparents. Furthermore, with childrearing ideals becoming more labour-intensive and time-consuming among middle-class families, grandparents may have to devote greater time and effort in order to fulfil parents' expectations. Existing research has suggested that grandmothers in urban China are now refraining from the care of their

second grandchild because of stress and exhaustion (Zhong and Peng, 2020), which is likely to be exacerbated when it comes to their third grandchild.

Thirdly, as shown by the current study, not all grandparents agree with the younger generation's childcare ideals, or have the necessary cultural capital to implement the kind of childcare parents desire. In such cases, grandparents' provision of care may generate disappointment, conflicts and tensions for both generations.

Taken together, in order to boost the currently low fertility rate, more needs to be done by the Chinese government to address the childcare challenges faced by urban families. The provision of care (both childcare and elderly care) should not be entirely left with individual families, as not every family has the access to a supporting kinship network, and kinship support such as grandparental care may not be able to fulfil all the care needs. Thus more affordable and high-quality care services need to be provided and funded by the state.

The current study has demonstrated grandparents' fundamental role in childcare provision, which should not be taken for granted or seen as their unconditional obligation. The government should improve the old-age security programmes, especially in underdeveloped rural areas, so that grandparents do not feel compelled to provide childcare due to a sense of economic necessity. At the same time, more support should be given to caregiving grandparents to ease their workload and allow them to better combine caregiving and other personal pursuits.

Regulations and legislation are needed to help employees get reasonable, stable and predictable work schedules. This is important for increasing the compatibility between paid work and parenthood for the younger generation, and to relieve grandparents from unreasonably long shifts of childcare.

More gender-sensitive policies are necessary to encourage fathers' involvement in childcare and to avoid further aggravating women's already disadvantaged status in the labour market. A frequently discussed example in the Chinese context is the highly gendered policy about parental leave, which reinforces women's roles as the predominant carers of their children (Zhou, 2018). The announcement of the three-child policy raises a lot of concerns over the discrimination against women in the labour market, not least because of the lengthy

maternity leave (currently a minimum of 178 days in Guangzhou). One possible direction of policy change is to narrow the vast gap between paternity and maternity leave. Shared parental leave, and the “use it or lose it” or “daddy only” policies about paternity leave are worthy of consideration.

Lastly, the dominance of the ideology of intensive parenting and the highly competitive education system needs to be challenged. In my current study, the high expectations parents hold for their children and their anxiety over maintaining their social status are pushing them (and the grandparents) to heavily invest their time and money to secure the best upbringing for their children. In July 2021, the Chinese government announced a nationwide crackdown on tutoring classes, which may indicate some awareness of the links between fertility and competitive education systems.³⁶ However, while the grip of intensive parenting ideology remains, parents and grandparents will continue to be overwhelmed by the demands and costs of childcare and education, which may further discourage childbirth.

³⁶ For example, see <https://www.ft.com/content/db7004d1-b5ad-436b-b5c4-f5faed2e1c84> and <https://www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/social-welfare/article/3143439/chinese-parents-are-hanging-after-school>.

Appendix 1 List of participating families

Note:

1. PGs – Paternal grandparents, PGF – Paternal grandfather, PGM – Paternal grandmother, MGs – Maternal grandparents, MGF – Maternal grandfather, MGM – Maternal grandmother.
2. The grandparents that I interviewed are marked in bold.

Case No.	Child(ren)'s gender and age	Grandparents involved in childcare	Intergenerational living arrangements	Domestic helper/nanny
1	Boy, 4 years; Girl, 14 months	PGM, MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
2	Boy, 5 years; Girl, 21 months	PGF , PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
3	Boy, 10 years; Boy, 30 months	PGF, PGM, MGF , MGM	Full-time coresidence with PGs; parents brought the children to MGs on some weekdays	No
4	Boy, 10 years; Boy, 21 months	MGM	Weekday coresidence	No
5	Boy, 24 months	Currently MGM (rotating with paternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	Daily helper
6	Girl, 24 months	Currently MGF , MGM (rotating with paternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
7	Boy, 6 years, Boy, 8 months	PGM , MGM	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
8	Boy, 23 months	MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
9	Girl, 25 months	MGF , MGM	Parents brought the child to MGs' place on weekdays	No
10	Boy, 24 months	MGM	Weekday coresidence	Daily helper
11	Boy, 5 years; Boy, 12 months	MGF , MGM	MGs came to the middle generation's place	Weekly helper
12	Boy, 35 months	Currently MGM (rotating with paternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	No
13	Girl, 6 years; Girl, 12 months	Currently MGF , MGM (rotating with paternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	No
14	Girl, 21 months	MGF , MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
15	Girl, 6 years; Boy, 24 months	Currently PGF (rotating with maternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	No
16	Boy, 3 years and 6 months; Boy, 27 months	PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
17	Boy, 16 months	PGF , PGM	Full-time coresidence	No

18	Girl, 14 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
19	Girl, 30 months	MGF, MGM	Weekday coresidence	No
20	Boy, 18 months	MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
21	Boy, 19 months	PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
22	Boy, 24 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
23	Boy, 7 months	PGF	Full-time coresidence	No
24	Girl, 6 years; Boy, 33 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
25	Boy, 10 months	PGF, MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
26	Girl, 23 months	MGM	Weekday coresidence	Daily helper
27	Girl, 30 months; Boy, 3 months	MGM	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
28	Boy, 7 years; Girl, 20 months	PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
29	Boy, 6 months	Currently MGF, MGM (rotating with paternal grandparents)	Full-time coresidence	No
30	Boy, 6 years; Boy, 8 months	MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence	Full-time nanny
31	Boy, 3 years; Girl, 17 months	MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
32	Girl, 7 years; Girl, 12 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
33	Girl, 8 months	PGF, PGM	Parents brought the child to PGs' place on weekdays	No
34	Boy and girl (twins), 12 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	Full-time nanny
35	Girl, 3 years	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
36	Girl, 11 years; Girl, 14 months	Currently MGF, MGM (rotating with PGM)	Full-time coresidence	No
37	Boy, 9 years; Boy, 25 months	Currently PGF (rotating with PGM)	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
38	Boy, 20 months	MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
39	Girl, 5 years; Girl, 12 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
40	Boy, 5 years; Boy, 24 years	PGM, MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence with MGs; PGM came to the middle generation's place during the day	No

41	Boy, 5 years; Girl, 8 months	PGF, PGM, MGM	Full-time coresidence with PGs, MGM came to the middle generation's place during the day	No
42	Boy, 6 years; Boy, 2 months	MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence	No
43	Girl, 7 years; Girl, 2 months	PGF, PGM	Full-time coresidence	Weekly helper
44	Girl, 14 months	PGM	Full-time coresidence	No
45	Girl, 15 months	PGM, MGM	Weekday coresidence	No
46	Boy, 9 years; Boy, 3 years	MGF, MGM	Full-time coresidence	No

Appendix 2 List of parents

Note:

1. Pseudonyms are only given to mothers since all of them were interviewed.
2. The fathers that I interviewed are marked in bold.
3. Under the column of “Birthplace”, * indicates a city within the same province as Guangzhou, ** indicates a different province.

Case No.	Mothers					Fathers				
	Pseudonym	Age, education, occupation	Birthplace	<i>Hukou</i> before adulthood	Number of siblings	Age, education, occupation	Birthplace	<i>Hukou</i> before adulthood	Number of siblings	
1	Wenyi	32, Bachelor, employer at bank	Guangzhou	urban	0	35, Master, administrative staff at university	Shandong**	rural	1	
2	Luting	34, Master, university Lecturer	Hunan**	rural	3	36, Master, engineer	Jiangxi**	rural	2	
3	Linfang	36, PhD, associate professor at university and entrepreneur	Guangzhou	urban	0	36, Master, manager	Chaozhou, Guangdong*	urban	0	
4	Yaqin	39, Bachelor, civil servant	Guangzhou	urban	0	41, Bachelor, civil servant	Guangzhou	urban	1	
5	Linjing	31, Master, University Lecturer	Meizhou, Guangdong*	urban	0	33, Master, finance	Meizhou, Guangdong*	rural	1	
6	Meiying	37, Master, University Lecturer	Shandong**	urban	0	39, MBA, marketing manager	Shandong**	urban	0	
7	Siyun	34, Master, Consultant	Hunan**	rural	1	35, Master, Engineer	Jieyang, Guangdong*	rural	4	
8	Huajuan	29, Master, Engineer	Hunan**	rural	0	31, Master, engineer	Fujian**	rural	3	
9	Bingxin	26, Master, IT	Guangzhou	urban	0	27, Bachelor, Engineer	Guangzhou	rural	1	

10	Qihui	31, Master, Finance	Zhuhai, Guangdong*	urban	1	31, Master, civil servant	Maoming, Guangdong*	urban	1
11	Aifei	40, Master, Finance	Hubei**	urban	1	40, Bachelor, IT freelance	Hubei**	urban	0
12	Gaohong	28, Master, Finance	Guangxi**	urban	0	30, Master, Finance	Sichuan**	urban	0
13	Congli	35, Master, Civil servant	Guangxi**	urban	0	36, Master, Civil servant	Jiangsu**	urban	0
14	Bianxue	29, Bachelor, office worker	Hunan**	rural	2 (twin younger sisters)	31, Bachelor, office worker	Chaozhou, Guangzhou*	rural	0
15	Peiran	35, Bachelor, state-own enterprise employer	Hunan**	rural	1	38, Bachelor, state-own enterprise manager	Hunan**	rural	1
16	Feifei	34, Master, administrative staff	Shanto, Guangdong*	rural	3	33, Bachelor, administrative staff	Chaozhou, Guangdong*	rural	1
17	Junyi	29, Bachelor, administrative staff	Guangzhou	urban	1	32, Bachelor, director assistant	Guangzhou	urban	2
18	Luoxi	30, Master, finance	Gansu**	rural	2	34, Master, finance	Gansu**	rural	1
19	Yehai	33, Master, psychologist in university	Guangzhou	urban	0	33, Bachelor, police officer	Meizhou, Guangdong*	urban	1
20	Xiaojuan	29, Master, Finance	Hunan**	rural	1	30, PhD student	Chaozhou, Guangdong*	rural	2
21	Muhui	32, Bachelor, Sales	Chaozhou, Guangdong*	rural	1	36, Bachelor, engineer	Chaozhou, Guangdong*	rural	1
22	Jiaqian	31, Master, Finance	Henan**	rural	3	31, Master, marketing manager	Henan**	urban	1
23	Anxuan	28, Bachelor, engineer	Hunan**	urban	0	32, Bachelor, engineer	Shanxi**	urban	0

24	Yuhui	36, Master, Administrative staff	Hubei**	urban	0	38, Bachelor, Civil servant	Shannxi**	urban	0
25	Geyun	30, Master, bank	Jiangmen, Guangdong*	rural	2	33, Master, engineer	Henan**	urban	1
26	Yangshan	34, PhD, researcher	Guangzhou	urban	0	35, Master, manager	Shantou, Guangdong*	rural	1
27	Keyao	33, Master, civil servant (on maternity leave)	Hubei**	urban	0	33, Bachelor, civil servant	Guangzhou	rural	1
28	Weiqing	36, Master, teacher	Meizhou, Guangdong*	rural	2	36, PhD, teacher	Qingyuan, Guangdong*	rural	1
29	Liulin	30, Master, HR	Xinjiang**	urban	0	32, Master, engineer	Hunan**	urban	0
30	Shuwen	36, Master, engineer	Liaoning**	urban	0	35, Master, engineer	Jiangsu**	urban	1
31	Xingyue	30, Bachelor, market director	Shaoguan, Guangdong*	rural	1	32, Master, engineer	Hubei**	rural	1
32	Majun	36, Master, teacher	Hubei**	rural	1	36, Bachelor, engineer	Hubei**	rural	1
33	Limeng	24, Bachelor, clerk	Guangzhou	urban	1	25, Bachelor, e-commerce	Guangzhou	urban	1
34	Wuman	31, Master, secretary	Jiangmen, Guangdong*	rural	1	36, Master, civil servant	Hunan**	rural	1
35	Miaoli	29, Bachelor, owner of family business	Guangzhou	urban	0	32, Bachelor, owner of family business	Guangzhou	urban	0
36	Yuanmu	37, Master, teacher	Gansu**	rural	2	40, Bachelor, police	Gansu**	rural	4
37	Zhiling	37, Master, teacher	Heyuan, Guangdong*	rural	1	36, Bachelor, engineer	Heyuan, Guangdong*	rural	2

38	Yueping	30, Bachelor, sales manager	Guangzhou	urban	0	32, Bachelor, sales	Hunan**	rural	1
39	Ruojin	37, Bachelor, HR	Jilin**	urban	1	37, Master, finance	Shaanxi**	urban	0
40	Qijia	33, Bachelor, Manager	Guangzhou	urban	0	33, Bachelor, physical trainer	Guangzhou	urban	0
41	Jiexia	32, Master, teacher	Anhui**	rural	1	35, Bachelor, engineer	Anhui**	rural	2
42	Yiqiao	32, Master, teacher (on maternity leave)	Jiangsu**	rural	0	36, Master, doctor	Hunan**	urban	0
43	Ziyi	38, Master, Finance (on maternity leave)	Hunan**	urban	1	40, Master, teacher	Zhejiang**	urban	0
44	Heting	30, Bachelor, sales manager	Shantou, Guangdong*	rural	1	30, Bachelor, manager	Zhaoqing, Guangdong*	rural	2
45	Liaojiang	30, Master, teacher	Jiangxi**	rural	1	31, Master, teacher	Jiangxi**	rural	0
46	Yuhong	34, Bachelor, civil servant	Heilongjiang**	urban	0	38, Bachelor, civil servant	Jiangsu**	rural	1

Appendix 3 List of caregiving grandparents

Note:

1. I assign a single surname to the grandfather and grandmother from the same family for the sake of simplicity. In practice, none of the grandmothers in my study adopts their husband's name after they are married.
2. In cases where the paternal and maternal grandparents of the same family were involved in childcare in rotation, only the grandparents who were providing care at the time of the interview are included in this table.
3. The grandparents that I interviewed are marked in bold.
4. Under the column of "Original residence", no asterisk indicates Guangzhou, * indicates a village/city within the same province as Guangzhou, **indicates a different province.

	Surname	Lineage	Grandparent(s) and age	Original residence	SES	Motivation
1	Lei	Paternal	Grandmother (58)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
	Xiao	Maternal	Grandmother (55)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
2	Wu	Paternal	Grandfather (68) and grandmother (70)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
3	Xie	Paternal	Grandfather (63) and grandmother (63)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
	Chen	Maternal	Grandfather (69) and grandmother (69)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
4	Dong	Maternal	Grandmother (65)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
5	Sun	Maternal	Grandmother (55)	Urban*	Higher	Reflexive
6	Cai	Maternal	Grandfather (70) and grandmother (66)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
7	Zhou	Paternal	Grandmother (60)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
	Wan	Maternal	Grandmother (60)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
8	Shen	Maternal	Grandmother (54)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
9	Liu	Maternal	Grandfather (55) and grandmother (54)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
10	Shi	Maternal	Grandmother (54)	Urban*	Higher	Reflexive
11	Kong	Maternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (63)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
12	Jin	Maternal	Grandmother (55)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
13	Lu	Maternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (60)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
14	Wei	Maternal	Grandfather (52) and grandmother (50)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
15	Tao	Paternal	Grandfather (64)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding

16	Song	Paternal	Grandmother (61)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
17	Pan	Paternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (60)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
18	Jiang	Paternal	Grandfather (62) and grandmother (62)	Town**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
19	Liang	Maternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (62)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
20	Bai	Maternal	Grandmother (53)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
21	Qian	Paternal	Grandmother (63)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
22	Yuan	Paternal	Grandfather (55) and grandmother (55)	Town**	Higher	Tradition-abiding
23	Hao	Paternal	Grandfather (60)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
24	Luo	Paternal	Grandfather (66) and grandmother (63)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
25	Zhong	Paternal	Grandfather (65)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
	Fan	Maternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (60)	Rural*	Lower	Reflexive
26	Zhao	Maternal	Grandmother (58)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
27	Tang	Maternal	Grandmother (60)	Town**	Higher	Reflexive
28	Ding	Paternal	Grandmother (61)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
29	Peng	Maternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (57)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
30	Yu	Maternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (64)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive
31	Ma	Maternal	Grandmother (56)	Rural*	Lower	Reflexive
32	Qin	Paternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (58)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
33	Fei	Paternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (57)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
34	Gu	Paternal	Grandfather (67) and grandmother (67)	Town**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
35	Cui	Paternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (56)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
36	Jia	Maternal	Grandfather (63) and grandmother (63)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
37	Xi	Paternal	Grandfather (64)	Town*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
38	Huang	Maternal	Grandfather (62) and grandmother (59)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive

39	Ji	Paternal	Grandfather (65) and grandmother (65)	Town**	Higher	Tradition-abiding
40	Feng	Paternal	Grandmother (60)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
	Pei	Maternal	Grandfather (60) and grandmother (57)	Urban	Higher	Reflexive
41	Yang	Paternal	Grandfather (66) and grandmother (67)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
	Ni	Maternal	Grandmother (60)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
42	Cao	Maternal	Grandfather (58) and grandmother (59)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
43	Yan	Paternal	Grandfather (69) and grandmother (63)	Town**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
44	Fang	Paternal	Grandmother (57)	Rural*	Lower	Tradition-abiding
45	Yin	Paternal	Grandmother (53)	Rural**	Lower	Tradition-abiding
	Xu	Maternal	Grandmother (52)	Rural**	Lower	Reflexive
46	Huo	Maternal	Grandfather (64) and grandmother (62)	Urban**	Higher	Reflexive

Appendix 4 Interview schedule

Background information

Note: The following background information was first collected through a questionnaire before the interview and was reconfirmed during the interview.

- Age and gender of the child(ren)
- Parents' age, education, occupation, number of siblings, place of origin
- Grandparents' age, education level, employment status/occupation, place of origin
- The grandparent(s) involved in childcare provision
- Living arrangements of the child(ren), parents and the caregiving grandparents
- Domestic helper/nanny?
- Children enrolled in daycare centres/enrichment classes?

Interviews with parents

Note: The following questions are phrased with reference to mothers. When fathers are interviewed, the wordings are changed accordingly.

1. Enactment of grandparents' participation

- How did the grandparents come to look after your child(ren)? Was the idea first raised by you or by the older generation?
- Which grandparents are currently looking after your child(ren)? Any changes over the years?
- How did you decide which grandparent(s) to involve? What factors did you consider (gender, employment status, health, place of residence, quality of relationship, etc.)? Did you make a comparison among the grandparents?
- In particular, how did you choose between grandmothers and grandfathers? Why?
- When did the grandparent(s) start to look after your child(ren)?
- Do the grandparents have other care commitments, e.g., other grandchildren, their own parents? How do they allocate their time and energy?

[for families where **either** paternal or maternal grandparents are involved]

- Why grandparents from the other side are not involved in childcare provision?
- How often do they see your child(ren)?
- Are they involved in the care of your child(ren) in other ways (e.g. economic contribution)?

[for families with **paternal grandparents only**]

- How do you feel about your relationship with your mother-in-law? If possible, would you prefer to have your own mother to provide childcare?
- How does your spouse feel about your relationship with your mother-in-law? Does he play the role of the mediator?

[for families with **maternal grandparents only**]

- Did you purposely choose your own parents? Why? Do you consider this as an unorthodox childcare arrangement?
- How does your spouse feel about this arrangement? Does he consider this as an unorthodox childcare arrangement?

[for families where **both** paternal and maternal grandparents are involved]

- Do the grandparents from two sides provide childcare at the same time or do they rotate?
- If at the same time, how do they negotiate their roles?
- How is your relationship with grandparents from both sides? Do you feel any differences between the paternal and maternal grandparents?
- Did you have concerns about grandparents' involvement in childcare in the beginning? In what ways? How do you feel now?
- Have you considered alternative arrangements of childcare, such as full-time nannies, nurseries, or (either you or your spouse) becoming a stay-at-home parent?
- What do you think is the ideal arrangement of care for children under 3?

2. Understanding of intergenerational exchange of support

- How do you understand grandparents' provision of childcare? Do you see it as their obligation? A favour to you?
- Do you think of this as a form of "exploitation" of the grandparent (啃老), as sometimes described in the media? Do you think of it as a breach of the tradition of filial piety?
- Do you feel obliged to pay back grandparents for their help? Are you currently providing any forms of reward for the grandparents? Are you planning for any forms of reward in the future?
- Are you currently receiving other forms of support from the grandparents?
- At the moment, do you think the overall direction of intergenerational exchange of resources is upward from you to the older generation, or downward from the older generation to you?

3. Daily childcare arrangements

- Can you describe the life of your child(ren) on a typical weekday? At a typical weekend?

[Note: during the respondent's narrative, focus on the following information and seek further information]

- What is your role in the daily provision of care? How about your spouse? The grandparents? Domestic helpers (if applicable)?
- Where is the child looked after during the day? In the evening? During the week? Over the weekend?
- List of childcare tasks for reference:
 - Housework: shopping for groceries, cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.
 - Physical care: feeding the child, changing diapers, dressing, bathing, putting to bed, getting up at night, etc.
 - Playing, reading, disciplining, taking on outings, taking to the doctor or dentist, etc.
 - Reading childcare advice literature, gathering childcare information
 - Decision-making and planning: choosing and buying toys, books, utensils, etc.; making arrangements for childcare; choosing kindergartens/enrichment classes; planning activities/scheduling social meetings
- Comparing the present to the past, are there any changes in the arrangements of childcare in your family? (child grows older, the birth of a second child, change in grandparents' health status, etc.)
- Hired help:
 - Yes – Who decided to hire extra help? How do you feel about this arrangement? Who is paying for the help?
 - No – Why? How do you feel about this arrangement?

4. Intergenerational relationship

- Division of childcare labour
 - Describe the specialisation between you and the grandparents. How do you reach the current division of childcare labour?
 - In the evenings and weekends, do you feel the pressure to ease the burden on grandparents by taking up more chores?
 - How do you reach your current living arrangement? Do you think coresidence with the grandparents is the ideal arrangement? Why?
 - [if both generations coreside] Who owns (or rents) the current property you are living in? How long do you plan to coreside?
 - [if not] Do you own the current property you are living in? Did any of the grandparents help with the purchase? Will you live with the grandparents one day?

- Are there any tasks that you think should be mainly conducted by you instead of the grandparents? Why?
- Are you satisfied with the current division of labour between you and the grandparents? Do you think it is fair to you? To the grandparents? Why?
- If possible, how would you like to change the current division of labour? Are there tasks that you can/should do more? Are there tasks the grandparents can/should do more?
- How long do you plan to have grandparents involved in childcare?
- Negotiation, decision-making and conflicts
 - How do you feel about your collaboration with the grandparents on childcare? Do you feel you can communicate smoothly with the grandparents?
 - Between you and your spouse, who usually communicates with the grandparents? Why? How?
 - Who makes the major decisions about your children?
 - Do you have disagreements/conflicts with the grandparents regarding childcare methods and philosophy, division of labour, etc.? How is it resolved? Whose opinion prevails in the end? Can you give me an example of a recent incident?
 - Do you think the grandparents generally comply with you if there is a conflict between you and them? Why or why not?

5. Conjugal relationship within the parent generation

- Background information
 - Please briefly introduce your and your spouse's occupation, your relative income
 - Please briefly introduce your and your spouse's family
- Division of childcare labour and work-life balance
 - How do you describe the specialisation between you and your spouse? How do you reach the current division of childcare labour?
 - Do you think the situation in your family follows the saying "men rule outside, women rule inside"?
 - Do you feel you need to encourage/urge your spouse to participate in childcare?
 - Would you prefer your spouse not to involve in childcare?
 - Do you feel the need to give detailed instructions when your spouse is involved in childcare?
 - Are you satisfied with the current division of labour between you and your spouse? Do you think it is fair to you? To your spouse? Why?
 - If possible, how would you like to change the current division of labour? Are there tasks that you can/should do more? Are there tasks that your spouse can/should do more?

- How do you balance your time spend on your work and on your family? How about your spouse?
- Do you feel your child(ren) is the centre of your life? Do you feel you are spending enough time with your child?
- After the birth of your child, are there changes in the way you and your spouse divide housework? How?
- After the birth of your child, are there changes in your work arrangements (working hours, overnight travel, etc.)? How about your spouse?
- [if one of the parents is constantly away or works long hours] How this is affecting your child? What are the implications for the division of childcare in your family?
- Negotiation, decision-making and conflicts
 - Between you and your spouse, who makes the major decisions about your children?
 - Do you have disagreements with your spouse regarding childcare methods and philosophy, division of labour, etc.? How is it resolved? Can you give me some examples?
 - Do you think your spouse generally comply with you if there is a conflict between you and them? Why or why not?

6. Considerations related to the child(ren)'s upbringing and education

- How do you learn about how to care for your child (i.e., feeding, bathing, sleeping)? Who do you ask for advice regarding your child?
 - Do you read advice books about childcare? Your spouse? Grandparents?
 - Do you join any parents' groups? What do you discuss in the groups?
- Do you think there is a consensus in your family about how to bring up your child?
 - Yes – how do you reach the consensus?
 - No – how does each member think?
 - Who makes the final decision?
- Do you have any expectations/goals for your children's education and career?
- Do you and other members of the family teach your children to read, count, etc. before they reach the age of kindergarten?
- Does your child go to any kinds of early education classes/enrichment classes?
 - Why/why not?
 - [if yes] How did you decide on this? How do other family members think about it? Who pays for the classes? Who accompanies the child to the classes?
 - [if no] Will you sign up for your child in the future?

- When you were growing up, how did your parents take care of you? Any influence on how you bring up your children now? How do your current ideas of parenting compare to your parents' back in the day?
- Do you think your current socioeconomic status is an improvement/regression/similar compared to when you were going up?

Interviews with grandparents

1. Enactment of grandparents' participation

- How did you come to look after your grandchild(ren)? Was the idea first raised by you or by the younger generation?
- Do you have other grandchildren in addition to those you are caring for? Have you looked after them before?
- When did you first start to look after this current grandchild?
- What kind of arrangements did you make before taking upon the care of your grandchildren? (e.g. retirement, relocation, etc.)
- What was your life like before you care for your grandchildren?
- Do you have other care commitments, e.g. your own parents/parents-in-law? How do you allocate your time and energy?

[for families where **either** paternal or maternal grandparents are involved]

- Do you know why the other grandparents are not involved? How do you feel about that?
- [for paternal grandparents] How do you feel about your relationship with your daughter-in-law (婆媳关系)?
- [for maternal grandparents] Do you consider this as an unorthodox childcare arrangement?

[for families where **both** paternal and maternal grandparents are involved]

- Do you provide childcare along with the other grandparents or do you rotate?
- If at the same time, how do you negotiate your roles?
- How is your relationship with other grandparents from both sides?
- Have you considered not helping with childcare?
- What do you think is the ideal arrangement of care for children under 3?

2. Understanding of intergenerational exchange of support

- How do you understand your provision of childcare as grandparents? Do you see it as your obligation? A favour for your adult children?
- Do you enjoy looking after your grandchildren?

- Do you think your adult children should deal with childcare by themselves?
- Do you see this as a form of “exploitation” (啃老) of you, as sometimes described in the media? Do you think of it as a breach of the tradition of filial piety?
- Do you expect your children to reward you for your help? Are you currently receiving any reward from them?
- Are you counting on your children for elderly care in the future?
- Are you currently providing your children with other forms of support in addition to childcare?
- At the moment, do you think the overall direction of intergenerational exchange of resources is downward from you to the younger generation, or upward from the younger generation to you?

3. Daily childcare arrangements

- Can you describe the life of your grandchild(ren) on a typical weekday? At a typical weekend?
 - [Note: during the respondent’s narrative, focus on the following information and seek further information]
 - What is your role in the daily provision of care? The parents’ Domestic helpers (if applicable)?
 - Where is the child looked after during the day? In the evening? During the week? Over the weekend?
 - List of childcare tasks for reference:
 - Housework: shopping for groceries, cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.
 - Physical care: feeding the child, changing diapers, dressing, bathing, putting to bed, getting up at night, etc.
 - Playing, reading, disciplining, taking on outings, taking to the doctor or dentist, etc.
 - Reading childcare advice literature, gathering childcare information
 - Decision-making and planning: choosing and buying toys, books, utensils, etc.; making arrangements for childcare; choosing kindergartens/enrichment classes; planning activities/scheduling social meetings
- Comparing the present to the past, are there any changes in the arrangements of childcare in your family? (child grows older, the birth of a second child, change in grandparents’ health status, etc.)
- Hired help:
 - Yes – Who decided to hire extra help? How do you feel about this arrangement? Who is paying for the help?

- No – Why? How do you feel about this arrangement?

4. Intergenerational relationship

- Division of childcare labour
 - Describe the specialisation between you and the parents. How do you reach the current division of childcare labour?
 - In the evenings and weekends, do you expect the parents to take up more chores to ease your burden?
 - How do you reach your current living arrangement? Do you think coresidence with your adult children is the ideal arrangement? Why?
 - [if both generations coreside] Who owns (or rents) the current property you are living in? How long do you plan to coreside?
 - [if not] Do you own the current property you are living in? Did you help your adult children with buying their apartment? Will you live with them one day?
 - Are there any tasks that you think should be mainly conducted by the parents instead of you? Why?
 - Are you satisfied with the current division of labour between you and the parents? Do you think it is fair to you? To them? Why?
 - If possible, how would you like to change the current division of labour? Are there tasks that you can/should do more? Are there tasks the parents can/should do more?
 - How long do you plan to look after your grandchildren?
- Negotiation, decision-making and conflicts
 - How do you feel about your collaboration with the parents on childcare? Do you feel you can communicate smoothly with them?
 - Who makes the major decisions about your grandchildren?
 - Do you have disagreements/conflicts with the parents regarding childcare methods and philosophy, division of labour, etc.? How is it resolved? Whose opinion prevails in the end? Can you give me an example of a recent incident?
 - Do you generally comply with the younger generation if there is conflict? Why or why not?

5. Considerations related to the child(ren)'s upbringing and education

- Who do you ask for advice regarding your grandchild?
 - Do you read advice books about childcare?
- Do you think there is a consensus in your family about how to bring up your grandchild?
 - Yes – how do you reach the consensus?
 - No – how does each member think?
 - Who makes the final decision?
- Do you have any expectations/goals for your grandchild's education and career?

- Do you and other members of the family teach your grandchild to read, count, etc. before they reach the age of kindergarten?
- Does your grandchild go to any kinds of early education classes/enrichment classes?
 - Why/why not?
 - [if yes] How was this decided? How do you think about it? Who pays for the classes? Who accompanies the child to the classes?
 - [if no] Do you think your grandchild will go in the future?
- How does your current way of looking after your grandchild compare to how you brought up your child back in the day? Any influence on how you look after your grandchild now?
- Do you think the way you bring up your grandchild is different from the child's parents? In what ways?

References

- Adams J and Padamsee T (2001) Signs and Regimes: Rereading Feminist Work on Welfare States. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 8(1): 1–23. DOI: 10.1093/sp/8.1.1.
- Allen SM and Hawkins AJ (1999) Maternal Gatekeeping: Mothers' Beliefs and Behaviors That Inhibit Greater Father Involvement in Family Work. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61(1): 199–212. DOI: 10.2307/353894.
- Anderson K and Jack DC (1991) Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses. In: Gluck SB and Patai D (eds) *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. 1st edition. New York: Routledge.
- Arber S and Attias-Donfut C (eds) (2000) *The Myth of Generational Conflict: The Family and State in Ageing Societies*. 1 edition. London; New York: Routledge.
- Arber S and Timonen V (eds) (2012) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Arber S and Venn S (2011) Caregiving at night: Understanding the impact on carers. *Journal of Aging Studies* 25(2): 155–165. DOI: 10.1016/j.jaging.2010.08.020.
- Archer MS (2007) *Making Our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511618932.
- Baker L and Silverstein M (2012) The wellbeing of grandparents caring for grandchildren in China and the United States. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Baldassar L (2013) *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*. 1st ed. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9780203077535.
- Becker GS (1993) *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, United States: Harvard University Press.
- Bengtson V, Giarrusso R, Mabry JB, et al. (2002) Solidarity, Conflict, and Ambivalence: Complementary or Competing Perspectives on Intergenerational Relationships? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3): 568–576. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00568.x.
- Bengtson VL and Lowenstein A (2003) *Global Aging and Challenges to Families*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- Bengtson VL and Roberts REL (1991) Intergenerational Solidarity in Aging Families: An Example of Formal Theory Construction. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53(4): 856–870. DOI: 10.2307/352993.

- Bengtson VL, Olander EB and Haddad AA (1976) The “generation gap” and aging family members: Toward a conceptual model. In: Gubrium JF (ed.) *Time, Roles and Self in Old Age*. New York: Human Sciences Press, pp. 237–263.
- Bernstein AM (1977) *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China*. 1st Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bilge S (2013) Intersectionality undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectionality Studies. *Du Bois Review* 10(2). Cambridge University Press: 405–424.
- Binah-Pollak A (2014) Discourses and practices of child-rearing in China: The bio-power of parenting in Beijing. *China Information* 28(1): 27–45. DOI: 10.1177/0920203X13517617.
- Bittman M, Craig L and Folbre N (2004) Packaging care: what happens when children receive nonparental care? In: Folbre N and Bittman M (eds) *Family Time: The Social Organization of Care*. 1st ed. Routledge.
- Blair–Loy M (2006) *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives*. New Ed edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Blau PM (1964) *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York: JWiley.
- Blood RO and Wolfe DM (1960) *Husbands & Wives: The Dynamics of Married Living*. Free Press.
- Bourdieu P (1983) The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed. *Poetics* 12(4–5): 311–356. DOI: 10.1016/0304-422X(83)90012-8.
- Bourdieu P (1986) The Forms of Capital. In: Richardson JG (ed.) *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York; London: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258.
- Bourdieu P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Polity Press.
- Brannen J, Moss P and Mooney A (2004) *Working and Caring over the Twentieth Century: Change and Continuity in Four Generation Families*.
- Brengaard MH (2015) Practices of Childcare in Urban China - The Making of Competent Mothering in Beijing. *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* (1). DOI: 10.7146/kkf.v24i1.28512.
- Brengaard MH (2016) Changing Mothering Practices and Intergenerational Relations in Contemporary Urban China. In: Pooley S and Qureshi K (eds) *Parenthood between Generations: Transforming Reproductive Cultures*. New York: Berghahn Books.

- Breengaard MH (2017) *How to mother? Practices of infant feeding and the formation of maternal subjectivity among middle-class mothers in Beijing*. PhD Thesis. University of Copenhagen.
- Breengaard MH (2018) Feeding Mothers' Love: Stories of Breastfeeding and Mothering in Urban China. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 26(4): 313–330. DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2018.1530298.
- Breheny M, Stephens C and Spilsbury L (2013) Involvement without interference: How grandparents negotiate intergenerational expectations in relationships with grandchildren. *Journal of Family Studies* 19(2): 174–184. DOI: 10.5172/jfs.2013.19.2.174.
- Brekhus W (1998) A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus. *Sociological Theory* 16(1). SAGE Publications Inc: 34–51. DOI: 10.1111/0735-2751.00041.
- Buchanan A and Rotkirch A (2018) Twenty-first century grandparents: global perspectives on changing roles and consequences. *Contemporary Social Science* 13(2): 131–144. DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2018.1467034.
- Burawoy M, Burton A, Ferguson AA, et al. (1991) *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. University of California Press.
- Cai Y and Cheng Y (2014) Pension Reform in China: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Economic Surveys* 28(4): 636–651. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12082>.
- Chambers P, Allan G, Phillipson PC, et al. (2009) *Family Practices in Later Life*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Chan KW and Zhang L (1999) The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes. *The China Quarterly* 160: 818–855. DOI: 10.1017/S0305741000001351.
- Chang K (2010a) *South Korea under Compressed Modernity: Familial Political Economy in Transition*. London: Routledge.
- Chang K (2010b) The second modern condition? Compressed modernity as internalized reflexive cosmopolitization. *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(3): 444–464. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01321.x.
- Chen F (2004) The Division of Labor Between Generations of Women in Rural China. *Social Science Research* 33(4): 557–580. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2003.09.005.
- Chen F and Liu G (2012) The Health Implications of Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren in China. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 67B(1): 99–112. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbr132.

- Chen F, Short SE and Entwisle B (2000) The Impact of Grandparental Proximity on Maternal Childcare in China. *Population Research and Policy Review* 19(6): 571–590.
- Chen F, Liu G and Mair CA (2011) Intergenerational Ties in Context: Grandparents Caring for Grandchildren in China. *Social Forces* 90(2): 571–594. DOI: 10.1093/sf/sor012.
- Chen M (2018) Understanding Ideal Motherhood from the Perspective of Urban Middle-Class Mothers: A Case Study of Families in Shanghai. *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies* 146(2).
- Chen Y-C, Wang Y, Cooper B, et al. (2018) A Research Note on Challenges of Cross-National Aging Research: An Example of Productive Activities Across Three Countries. *Research on Aging* 40(1). SAGE Publications Inc: 54–71. DOI: 10.1177/0164027516678997.
- Chen Y-CC and Li J-CA (2014) Family Change in East Asia. In: Treas J, Scott J, and Richards M (eds) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Families*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 61–82. DOI: 10.1002/9781118374085.ch4.
- Cheng C (2019) Women's Education, Intergenerational Coresidence, and Household Decision-Making in China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81(1): 115–132. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12511.
- Cheng ZW, Ye XJZ and Chen G (2017) Association between grandparenting, living arrangements and depressive symptoms among middle-aged and older adults. *Population and Development* 23(2): 70–79.
- Cherlin AJ (2012) Goode's World Revolution and Family Patterns: A Reconsideration at Fifty Years. *Population and Development Review* 38(4): 577–607. DOI: 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2012.00528.x.
- Chesley N and Flood S (2017) Signs of Change? At-Home and Breadwinner Parents' Housework and Child-Care Time. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79(2): 511–534. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12376.
- Cheung AK-L and Lui L (2021) Does live-in domestic help reduce unpaid household labor? The paradox of intensive parenting and domestic outsourcing. *Current Sociology*. SAGE Publications Ltd: 00113921211012744. DOI: 10.1177/00113921211012744.
- Chi W and Li B (2014) Trends in China's gender employment and pay gap: Estimating gender pay gaps with employment selection. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 42(3): 708–725. DOI: 10.1016/j.jce.2013.06.008.
- Chin T and Phillips M (2004) Social Reproduction and Child-Rearing Practices: Social Class, Children's Agency, and the Summer Activity Gap. *Sociology of Education* 77(3): 185–210.

- Choo HY and Ferree MM (2010) Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities. *Sociological Theory* 28(2): 129–149. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01370.x.
- Chu CYC and Yu R-R (2010) *Understanding Chinese Families*. Oxford University Press.
- Colen S (2009) Stratified reproduction and West Indian childcare workers and employers in New York. In: *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. Blackwell Malden.
- Collins C (2019) *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Collins PH and Bigle S (2016) *Intersectionality*. Key concepts series. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Coltrane S (1996) *Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework, and Gender Equity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Coltrane S (2000) Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62(4): 1208–1233. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x.
- Cong Z and Silverstein M (2008a) Intergenerational Support and Depression Among Elders in Rural China: Do Daughters-In-Law Matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(3): 599–612. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00508.x.
- Cong Z and Silverstein M (2008b) Intergenerational Time-for-Money Exchanges in Rural China: Does Reciprocity Reduce Depressive Symptoms of Older Grandparents? *Research in Human Development* 5(1): 6–25. DOI: 10.1080/15427600701853749.
- Cong Z and Silverstein M (2011) Intergenerational Exchange Between Parents and Migrant and Nonmigrant Sons in Rural China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73(1): 93–104. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00791.x.
- Cong Z and Silverstein M (2012) Caring for grandchildren and intergenerational support in rural China: a gendered extended family perspective. *Ageing and Society* 32(3): 425–450. DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X11000420.
- Connelly R, Dong X, Jacobsen J, et al. (2018) The Care Economy in Post-Reform China: Feminist Research on Unpaid and Paid Work and Well-Being. *Feminist Economics* 24(2). Routledge: 1–30. DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2018.1441534.
- Connidis IA (2010) *Family Ties and Aging*. Pine Forge Press.
- Connidis IA (2015) Exploring Ambivalence in Family Ties: Progress and Prospects. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77(1): 77–95. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12150.

- Connidis IA and McMullin JA (2002a) Ambivalence, Family Ties, and Doing Sociology. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3): 594–601. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00594.x.
- Connidis IA and McMullin JA (2002b) Sociological Ambivalence and Family Ties: A Critical Perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3): 558–567. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00558.x.
- Cook S and Dong X (2011) Harsh Choices: Chinese Women’s Paid Work and Unpaid Care Responsibilities under Economic Reform. *Development and Change* 42(4): 947–965. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2011.01721.x.
- Coverman S (1985) Explaining Husbands’ Participation in Domestic Labor. *The Sociological Quarterly* 26(1): 81–97. DOI: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.1985.tb00217.x.
- Craig L (2006) Does Father Care Mean Fathers Share?: A Comparison of How Mothers and Fathers in Intact Families Spend Time with Children. *Gender & Society* 20(2). SAGE Publications Inc: 259–281. DOI: 10.1177/0891243205285212.
- Craig L and Mullan K (2011) How Mothers and Fathers Share Childcare. *American Sociological Review*: 28.
- Crenshaw K (1991) Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–1300.
- Croll E (2006) The Intergenerational Contract in the Changing Asian Family. *Oxford Development Studies* 34(4): 473–491. DOI: 10.1080/13600810601045833.
- Daly KJ (2007) *Qualitative Methods for Family Studies & Human Development*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. DOI: 10.4135/9781452224800.
- Daminger A (2019) The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor. *American Sociological Review* 84(4): 609–633. DOI: 10.1177/0003122419859007.
- Dasgupta S, Matsumoto M and Xia C (2015) *Women and Men in China’s Labour Market*. International Labour Organization.
- Davis DS and Harrell S (1993) *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*.
- Descartes L (2006) “Put Your Money Where Your Love Is”: Parental Aid to Adult Children. *Journal of Adult Development* 13(3–4): 137–147. DOI: 10.1007/s10804-007-9023-6.
- Deutsch FM (2006) Filial Piety, Patrilineality, and China’s One-Child Policy. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(3): 366–389. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X05283097.

- Ding S, Dong X and Li S (2009) Women's Employment and Family Income Inequality during China's Economic Transition. *Feminist Economics* 15(3). Routledge: 163–190. DOI: 10.1080/13545700802526541.
- Doepke M and Zilibotti F (2019) *Love, Money, and Parenting: How Economics Explains the Way We Raise Our Kids*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Dong X, Feng J and Yu Y (2017) Relative Pay of Domestic Eldercare Workers in Shanghai, China. *Feminist Economics* 23(1). Routledge: 135–159. DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2016.1143108.
- Du DY (2013) Living under the Same Roof: A Genealogy of the Family Romance between Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law in Modern Chinese History. *Gender & History* 25(1): 170–191. DOI: 10.1111/gend.12000.
- Du F and Dong X (2013) Women's Employment and Child Care Choices in Urban China during the Economic Transition. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 62(1): 131–155. DOI: 10.1086/671714.
- Du P (2013) Intergenerational solidarity and old-age support for the social inclusion of elders in Mainland China: the changing roles of family and government. *Ageing & Society* 33(1). Cambridge University Press: 44–63. DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X12000773.
- Duffy M (2005) Reproducing Labor Inequalities: Challenges for Feminists Conceptualizing Care at the Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class. *Gender and Society* 19(1). Sage Publications, Inc.: 66–82.
- Eklund L (2018) Filial Daughter? Filial Son? How China's Young Urban Elite Negotiate Intergenerational Obligations. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 26(4): 295–312. DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2018.1534887.
- England P (2005) Emerging Theories of Care Work. *Annual Review of Sociology* 31(1): 381–399. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122317.
- Erickson RJ (1993) Reconceptualizing Family Work: The Effect of Emotion Work on Perceptions of Marital Quality. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 55(4): 888–900. DOI: 10.2307/352770.
- Erickson RJ (2005) Why emotion work matters: sex, gender, and the division of household labor. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(2): 337–351. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00120.x.
- Evans H (2008) *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Evans H (2010) The Gender of Communication: Changing Expectations of Mothers and Daughters in Urban China. *The China Quarterly* 204: 980–1000. DOI: 10.1017/S0305741010001050.

- Evans H (2021) “Patchy Patriarchy” and the Shifting Fortunes of the CCP’s Promise of Gender Equality since 1921. *The China Quarterly*: 1–21. DOI: 10.1017/S0305741021000709.
- Fei X (1983) Elderly support in a changing family structure: Review of the changes in Chinese family structure. *Journal of Peking University* 20(3): 7–16.
- Feng H (2014) *The Chinese Kinship System*. Harvard University Press.
- Feng J and Zhang X (2018) Retirement and Grandchild Care in Urban China. *Feminist Economics* 24(2). Routledge: 240–264. DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2017.1370120.
- Feng X-T, Poston DL and Wang X-T (2014) China’s One-child Policy and the Changing Family. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 45(1): 17–29.
- Ferree MM (2010) Filling the Glass: Gender Perspectives on Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(3): 420–439. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00711.x.
- Ferring D, Michels T, Boll T, et al. (2009) Emotional relationship quality of adult children with ageing parents: on solidarity, conflict and ambivalence. *European Journal of Ageing* 6(4): 253. DOI: 10.1007/s10433-009-0133-9.
- Few-Demo AL and Allen KR (2020) Gender, Feminist, and Intersectional Perspectives on Families: A Decade in Review. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82(1). Minneapolis, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: 326–345. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.1111/jomf.12638>.
- Finch J (1989) *Family Obligations and Social Change*. Family life series (Cambridge, England). Cambridge, UK: Polity, Polity Press.
- Finch J and Mason J (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*. London: Tavistock/Routledge.
- Fingerman K. L., Fingerman Karen L., Sechrist J, et al. (2013) Changing Views on Intergenerational Ties. *Gerontology* 59(1). Karger Publishers: 64–70. DOI: 10.1159/000342211.
- Fingerman KL, Pitzer L, Lefkowitz ES, et al. (2008) Ambivalent Relationship Qualities Between Adults and Their Parents: Implications for the Well-Being of Both Parties. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 63(6): P362–P371. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/63.6.P362.
- Folbre N (2001) *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*. New Press.
- Fong VL (2002) China’s One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters. *American Anthropologist* 104(4): 1098–1109.

- Fong VL (2004) *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-Child Policy*. Stanford University Press.
- Gabb J (2008) *Researching Intimacy in Families*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gerth HH and Mills CW (1991) Intellectual Orientations. In: Gerth HH and Mills CW (eds) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Psychology Press.
- Gilding M (2010) Reflexivity over and above convention: the new orthodoxy in the sociology of personal life, formerly sociology of the family. *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(4): 757–777. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01340.x.
- Gilligan M, Sutor JJ and Pillemer K (2015) Estrangement Between Mothers and Adult Children: The Role of Norms and Values. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77(4): 908–920. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12207>.
- Girardin M, Widmer ED, Connidis IA, et al. (2018) Ambivalence in Later-Life Family Networks: Beyond Intergenerational Dyads. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80(3): 768–784. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12469.
- Glaser BG and Strauss AL (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Glenn EN (1992) From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18(1). The University of Chicago Press: 1–43. DOI: 10.1086/494777.
- Glenn EN (1999) The social construction and institutionalization of gender and race: An integrative framework. In: Ferree MM, Lorber J, and Hess BB (eds) *Revisioning Gender*. New York: Sage, pp. 3–43.
- Glenn E nakano (1985) Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression. *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17(3). SAGE Publications Inc: 86–108. DOI: 10.1177/048661348501700306.
- Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. later Printing Edition. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.
- Goh ECL (2009) Grandparents as childcare providers: An in-depth analysis of the case of Xiamen, China. *Journal of Aging Studies* 23(1): 60–68. DOI: 10.1016/j.jaging.2007.08.001.
- Goh ECL (2011) *China's One-Child Policy and Multiple Caregiving: Raising Little Suns in Xiamen*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Goh ECL and Kuczynski L (2010) 'Only children' and their coalition of parents: Considering grandparents and parents as joint caregivers in urban Xiamen, China. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 13(4): 221–231. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-839X.2010.01314.x.

- Goode WJ (1963) *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. Free Press.
- Goodfellow J and Lavery J (2003) Grandparents supporting working families. *Family Matters* 66.
- Greenhalgh S (1985) Sexual Stratification: The Other Side of ‘Growth with Equity’ in East Asia. *Population and Development Review* 11(2). [Population Council, Wiley]: 265–314. DOI: 10.2307/1973489.
- Greenhalgh S (2010) *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China*. Edwin O Reischauer Lectures. Harvard University Press.
- Greenhalgh S and Winckler EA (2005) *Governing China’s Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Gross N (2005) The Detraditionalization of Intimacy Reconsidered. *Sociological Theory* 23(3): 286–311. DOI: 10.1111/j.0735-2751.2005.00255.x.
- Groves JM and Lui L (2012) The ‘Gift’ of Help: Domestic Helpers and the Maintenance of Hierarchy in the Household Division of Labour. *Sociology* 46(1): 57–73. DOI: 10.1177/0038038511416166.
- Grujters R (2016) *Beyond Filial Piety: Intergenerational Relations and Old Age Security in Contemporary China*. PhD Thesis. Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.
- Grujters RJ (2017) Intergenerational Contact in Chinese Families: Structural and Cultural Explanations. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79(3): 758–768. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12390.
- Grujters RJ and Ermisch J (2019) Patrilocal, Matrilocal, or Neolocal? Intergenerational Proximity of Married Couples in China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81(3). DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12538.
- Guo M, Chi I and Silverstein M (2012) The Structure of Intergenerational Relations in Rural China: A Latent Class Analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74(5): 1114–1128. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.01014.x.
- Guo M, Chi I and Silverstein M (2013) Sources of Older Parents’ Ambivalent Feelings Toward Their Adult Children: The Case of Rural China. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 68(3). Oxford Academic: 420–430. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbt022.
- Guo X (2018) *Shifting Traditions of Childrearing in China: Narratives from Three Generations of Women*. PhD Thesis. UCL.
- Hagestad GO (2006) Transfers between grandparents and grandchildren: the importance of taking a three-generation perspective. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* 18(3): 315–332.

- Hancock A-M (2007) When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics* 5(1). [American Political Science Association, Cambridge University Press]: 63–79.
- Hank K and Buber I (2009) Grandparents Caring for their Grandchildren: Findings From the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe. *Journal of Family Issues* 30(1): 53–73. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X08322627.
- Hansen KV (2005) *Not-so-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.
- Hanser A (2008) *Service Encounters: Class, Gender, and the Market for Social Distinction in Urban China*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Hanser A and Li J (2017) The hard work of feeding the baby: breastfeeding and intensive mothering in contemporary urban China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 4: 18. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-017-0065-2.
- Hattery A (2001) *Women, Work, and Families*. London: Sage.
- Hays S (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Hayslip B and Kaminski PL (2005) Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren: A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Practice. *The Gerontologist* 45(2): 262–269. DOI: 10.1093/geront/45.2.262.
- He G and Wu X (2018) Dynamics of the Gender Earnings Inequality in Reform-Era Urban China. *Work, Employment and Society* 32(4). SAGE Publications Ltd: 726–746. DOI: 10.1177/0950017017746907.
- He G, Zhang Y and Wu X (2021) The Higher the Education Level, the Later the Marriage? The Moderation Effect of Local Hukou in Urban Marriage Market. *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 41(2): 87–112.
- He J and Jiang Y (2008) An Analysis of China's Childcare Policy and Current Situation from the Perspective of Supporting Women and Balancing Family and Work. *Studies in Preschool Education* (08): 3-6+29.
- He X (2009) Generation Relationship in Rural Households: As well as the Value Foundation of Generation Relationship. *Social Science Research* 5: 84–92.
- He Y and Wang YP (2015) Do skip-generation raising and intergenerational transfer lead to early retirement of parents? An empirical analysis using CHARLS data. *Population Research* 39(02): 78–90.
- Herlofson K and Hagestad GO (2012) Transformations in the role of grandparents across welfare states. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Policy Press.

- Hershatter G (2007) *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*. University of California Press.
- Higgins AM (2015) *Labor of Care: Spectacular Fetuses, Healthy, Smart Babies, And Cosmopolitan Pregnancy in Middle Class Beijing*. PhD Thesis. UC Santa Cruz. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2883s6kp> (accessed 14 March 2021).
- Ho DYF (1989) Continuity and Variation in Chinese Patterns of Socialization. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 51(1): 149–163. DOI: 10.2307/352376.
- Ho YF (1987) Fatherhood in Chinese culture. In: Lamb ME (ed.) *The Father's Role: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 227–245.
- Hochschild A (2012a) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press.
- Hochschild A (2012b) *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.
- Hochschild AR (2015) Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value. In: Engster D, Metz T, and Metz T (eds) *Justice, Politics, and the Family*. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315633794.
- Hoff E, Laursen B and Tardif T (2002) Socioeconomic Status and Parenting. In: Bornstein MH (ed.) *Handbook of Parenting, Volume 2: Biology and Ecology of Parenting*. Mahwah, N.J.; London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hong Y and Zhao Y (2015) From capital to habitus: class differentiation of family educational patterns in urban China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 2: 18. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-015-0021-y.
- Hsiung P (2007) *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China*. Stanford University Press.
- Hu S and Mu Z (2020) Extended gender inequality? Intergenerational coresidence and division of household labor. *Social Science Research*: 102497. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102497.
- Hu X (2010) *Paid domestic labour as precarious work in China*. PhD Thesis. Department of Women's Studies-Simon Fraser University.
- Hu Y (2016a) *Chinese-British Inter-marriage*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-29281-6.
- Hu Y (2016b) Marriage of matching doors: Marital sorting on parental background in China. *Demographic Research* 35(20): 557–580. DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2016.35.20.

- Hu Y and Scott J (2016) Family and Gender Values in China: Generational, Geographic, and Gender Differences. *Journal of Family Issues* 37(9): 1267–1293. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X14528710.
- Ikels C (1998) Grandparenthood in Cross-Cultural Perspective. In: Szinovácz M (ed.) *Handbook on Grandparenthood*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Ingersoll-Dayton B, Dunkle RE, Chadiha L, et al. (2011) Intergenerational Ambivalence: Aging Mothers Whose Adult Daughters Are Mentally III. *Families in Society* 92(1). SAGE Publications Inc: 114–119. DOI: 10.1606/1044-3894.4077.
- Izuhara M (ed.) (2010) *Ageing and Intergenerational Relations: Family Reciprocity from a Global Perspective*. Policy Press.
- Jackson S, Ho PSY and Na JN (2013) Reshaping Tradition? Women Negotiating the Boundaries of Tradition and Modernity in Hong Kong and British Families. *The Sociological Review* 61(4): 667–687. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12077.
- Jamieson L (1999) Intimacy Transformed? A Critical Look at the 'Pure Relationship'. *Sociology* 33(3). SAGE Publications Ltd: 477–494. DOI: 10.1177/S0038038599000310.
- Jamieson L (2011) Intimacy as a Concept: Explaining Social Change in the Context of Globalisation or Another Form of Ethnocentrism? *Sociological Research Online* 16(4): 1–13. DOI: 10.5153/sro.2497.
- Jankowiak W (2008) Practicing connectiveness as kinship in urban China. In: Brandtstädter S (ed.) *Chinese Kinship: Contemporary Anthropological Perspectives*. 1st ed. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9780203889886.
- Jenkins R (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.
- Ji Y (2017) A Mosaic Temporality: New Dynamics of the Gender and Marriage System in Contemporary Urban China. *Temporalités. Revue de sciences sociales et humaines* (26). DOI: 10.4000/temporalites.3773.
- Ji Y and Wu X (2018) New Gender Dynamics in Post-Reform China: Family, Education, and Labor Market. *Chinese Sociological Review* 50(3): 231–239. DOI: 10.1080/21620555.2018.1452609.
- Ji Y, Chen F, Cai Y, et al. (2015) Do parents matter? Intergenerational ties and fertility preferences in a low-fertility context. *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 1(4): 485–514. DOI: 10.1177/2057150X15614545.
- Ji Y, Wu X, Sun S, et al. (2017) Unequal Care, Unequal Work: Toward a more Comprehensive Understanding of Gender Inequality in Post-Reform Urban China. *Sex Roles*: 1–14. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-017-0751-1.
- Ji Y, Wang H, Liu Y, et al. (2020) Young Women's Fertility Intentions and the Emerging Bilateral Family System under China's Two-Child Family Planning

- Policy. *China Review* 20(2). The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press: 113–141.
- Jia N, Dong X and Song Y (2018) Paid Maternity Leave and Breastfeeding in Urban China. *Feminist Economics* 24(2): 31–53. DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2017.1380309.
- Jiang J, Ma Y, An L, et al. (2006) Study on sleep habit and sleep disorder among children aged 0 ~ 5 years. *Chinese Journal of Child Health Care* (6).
- Jiang Y (2003) Employment and Chinese Urban Women under Two Systems. *Collection of Women's Studies* (01): 15–21.
- Jin Y (2013) Chinese working mothers during social transition. *Academia Bimestrie* (02): 56–63.
- Jin Y and Yang D (2015) Coming into the Times of ‘Competing Mothers in Educational Field’: The Popularity of Parentocracy and Reconstruction of Motherhood. *Nanjing Journal of Social Sciences* 45(2): 61–67.
- Kamo Y (1998) Asian Grandparents. In: Szinovácz M (ed.) *Handbook on Grandparenthood*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Kang L (2009) *The change of feedback model: Study on intergenerational relationship in the urban area from the perspective of generational gap*. PhD Thesis. Shanghai University.
- Kang L (2012) Differences and Similarities between Generations: The Emerging of New Familism Value. *Youth Studies* (3): 5.
- Katz R and Lowenstein A (2010) Theoretical perspectives on intergenerational solidarity, conflict and ambivalence. In: Izuhara M (ed.) *Ageing and Intergenerational Relations: Family Reciprocity from a Global Perspective*. Policy Press.
- Kaufman G (2013) *Superdads: How Fathers Balance Work and Family in the 21st Century*. New York University Press. Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/title/576998> (accessed 5 July 2020).
- Kemp CL (2004) ‘Grand’ Expectations: The Experiences of Grandparents and Adult Grandchildren. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 29(4): 499–525. DOI: 10.2307/3654708.
- Ko LSF (2012) Solidarity, ambivalence and multigenerational co-residence in Hong Kong. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ko P-C and Yeung W-JJ (2019) Contextualizing productive aging in Asia: Definitions, determinants, and health implications. *Social Science & Medicine*

229. Contextualizing Productive Aging in Asia: 1–5. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.01.016.
- Kohli M and Künemund H (2003) Intergenerational Transfers in the Family: What Motivates Giving? In: *Global Aging and Challenges to Families*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, pp. 123–1432.
- Kohn ML (1963) Social Class and Parent-Child Relationships: An Interpretation. *American Journal of Sociology* 68(4): 471–480.
- Kohn ML (1969) *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values*. Class and conformity: A study in values. Oxford, England: Dorsey.
- Komter A (1989) Hidden Power in Marriage. *Gender & Society* 3(2): 187–216. DOI: 10.1177/089124389003002003.
- Kranichfeld ML (1987) Rethinking Family Power. *Journal of Family Issues* 8(1): 42–56. DOI: 10.1177/019251387008001002.
- Kuan T (2015) *Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Lachance-Grzela M and Bouchard G (2010) Why Do Women Do the Lion's Share of Housework? A Decade of Research. *Sex Roles* 63(11–12): 767–780. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-010-9797-z.
- Lam OY (2013) *School choice-making, mothers' involvement in children's education and social reproduction in the education market in Hong Kong*. PhD Thesis. University of Manchester.
- Lan P-C (2003) Among Women: Migrant Domestic Workers and their Taiwanese Employers Across Generations. In: Ehrenreich B and Hochschild A (eds) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan, p. 27.
- Lan P-C (2006) *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestic Workers and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.
- Lan P-C (2010) Cultures of carework, carework across cultures. In: *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. Routledge Handbooks Online. DOI: 10.4324/9780203891377.ch42.
- Lan P-C (2014) Being Parents, Doing Class: Parenting Narratives, Childrearing Practice, and Class Inequality in Taiwan. *Taiwan Sociology* (27): 97–140.
- Lareau A (1989) *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*. London: The Palmer Press.
- Lareau A (2003) *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley, US: University of California Press.

- Latshaw BA and Hale SI (2016) 'The domestic handoff': stay-at-home fathers' time-use in female breadwinner families. *Journal of Family Studies* 22(2). Routledge: 97–120. DOI: 10.1080/13229400.2015.1034157.
- Laverty J (2003) *The experiences of grandparents providing regular child care for their grandchildren*. Master thesis. Western Sydney University. Available at: <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A733/> (accessed 18 July 2018).
- Lee J and Bauer JW (2013) Motivations for Providing and Utilizing Child Care by Grandmothers in South Korea. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 75(2): 381–402. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12014.
- Lei L (2013) Sons, Daughters, and Intergenerational Support in China. *Chinese Sociological Review* 45(3): 26–52. DOI: 10.2753/CSA2162-0555450302.
- Leung C and Fung B (2014) Non-custodial grandparent caregiving in Chinese families: implications for family dynamics. *Journal of Children's Services* 9(4): 307–318. DOI: 10.1108/JCS-04-2014-0026.
- Levy MJ (1949) *The Family Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Li C (ed.) (2010) *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation*. Brookings Institution Press. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt6wpd8c> (accessed 1 June 2021).
- Li C (2013) How to Define Middle Class in China. *Academia Bimestrie* 3: 008.
- Li C (2020) Children of the reform and opening-up: China's new generation and new era of development. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 7(1): 18. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-020-00130-x.
- Li H, Yang W and Chen JJ (2016) From 'Cinderella' to 'Beloved Princess': The Evolution of Early Childhood Education Policy in China. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy; Seoul* 10(1): 1–17. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40723-016-0018-2>.
- Li X and Liu Y (2019) Parent-Grandparent Coparenting Relationship, Maternal Parenting Self-efficacy, and Young Children's Social Competence in Chinese Urban Families. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 28(4): 1145–1153. DOI: 10.1007/s10826-019-01346-3.
- Lipset SM and Bendix R (1992) *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*. Transaction Publishers.
- Liu B, Zhang Y and Li Y (2009) *Reconciling work and family: Issues and policies in China*. Conditions of Work and Employment Series 22, Working paper. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization. Available at:

http://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_TRAVAIL_PUB_21/lang--en/index.htm (accessed 23 December 2017).

- Liu J (2016) Ageing in rural China: migration and care circulation. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 3: 9. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-016-0030-5.
- Liu J (2017) Intimacy and Intergenerational Relations in Rural China. *Sociology* 51(5): 1034–1049. DOI: 10.1177/0038038516639505.
- Liu J and Cook J (2020) Ageing and intergenerational care in rural China: a qualitative study of policy development. *Contemporary Social Science* 15(3). Routledge: 378–391. DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2018.1448943.
- Liu W (2017) Intergenerational emotion and solidarity in transitional China: comparisons of two kinds of “ken lao” families in Shanghai. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 4(1): 10. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-017-0058-1.
- Logan JR and Bian F (1999) Family Values and Coresidence with Married Children in Urban China. *Social Forces* 77(4): 1253–1282. DOI: 10.2307/3005876.
- Logan JR, Bian F and Bian Y (1998) Tradition and change in the urban Chinese family: The case of living arrangements. *Social Forces; Oxford* 76(3): 851–882.
- Low SSH and Goh ECL (2015) Granny as Nanny: Positive Outcomes for Grandparents providing Childcare for Dual-Income Families. Fact or Myth? *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 13(4): 302–319. DOI: 10.1080/15350770.2015.1111003.
- Lowenstein A (2007) Solidarity–Conflict and Ambivalence: Testing Two Conceptual Frameworks and Their Impact on Quality of Life for Older Family Members. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 62(2): S100–S107. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/62.2.S100.
- Lu C, Lu J-J, Du D, et al. (2016) Crossover effects of work-family conflict among Chinese couples. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 31(1): 235–250. DOI: 10.1108/JMP-09-2012-0283.
- Lu H, Yu J and Du Y (2017) The Influence of Older Parents’ Care-giving Activities on Labor Supply of Adult Children: A Study Based on CFPS. *Journal of Finance and Economics* 43(12). Editorial Office of Journal of Finance and Economics: 4–16.
- Lu HJ and Chang L (2013) Parenting and Socialization of Only Children in Urban China: An Example of Authoritative Parenting. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 174(3): 335–343. DOI: 10.1080/00221325.2012.681325.
- Luescher K and Pillemer K (1998) Intergenerational Ambivalence: A New Approach to the Study of Parent-Child Relations in Later Life. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60(2): 413–425. DOI: 10.2307/353858.

- Lui L (2013) *Re-Negotiating Gender: Household Division of Labor When She Earns More than He Does*. 1st ed. Springer Netherlands. Available at: <http://gen.lib.rus.ec/book/index.php?md5=b1aef9fdcaf85b7b39c74d7063503689> (accessed 27 February 2018).
- Lui L (2017) Marital Power in Inter-Hukou Families in China: An Intersectionality Approach. *Journal of Family Issues*: 0192513X17692378. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X17692378.
- Luo MS and Chui EWT (2018) Gender Division of Household Labor in China: Cohort Analysis in Life Course Patterns. *Journal of Family Issues*: 0192513X18776457. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X18776457.
- Lüscher K (2004) Intergenerational Ambivalence: Further Steps in Theory and Research. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3): 585–593. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00585.x.
- Ma C, Shi J, Li Y, et al. (2011) Family Change in Urban Areas of China: Main Trends and Latest Findings [in Chinese]. *Sociological Studies* (2): 182–216.
- Macdonald C (2011) *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available at: <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520266971/shadow-mothers> (accessed 22 October 2020).
- Mannheim K (1952) The Problems of Generations. In: *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 276–320.
- Mare RD (2011) A Multigenerational View of Inequality. *Demography* 48(1): 1–23. DOI: 10.1007/s13524-011-0014-7.
- Mason J (2002) *Qualitative Researching*. Sage.
- Mason J, May V and Clarke L (2007) Ambivalence and the paradoxes of grandparenting. *The Sociological Review* 55(4): 687–706. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00748.x.
- May V, Mason J and Clarke L (2012) Being there, yet not interfering: the paradoxes of grandparenting. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- McAdams DP, Hart HM and Maruna S (1998) The anatomy of generativity. In: *Generativity and Adult Development: How and Why We Care for the next Generation*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, pp. 7–43. DOI: 10.1037/10288-001.
- McCall L (2005) The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30(3). The University of Chicago Press: 1771–1800. DOI: 10.1086/426800.

- Mead M (1970) *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*. First Edition. London: The Bodley Head Ltd.
- Mehta KK and Thang LL (2011) *Experiencing Grandparenthood: An Asian Perspective*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Merton RK and Barber E (1963) Sociological ambivalence. In: Tiryakian EA (ed.) *Sociological Theory: Values and Sociocultural Change*. New York: Free Press, pp. 91–120.
- Milligan C and Wiles J (2010) Landscapes of care. *Progress in Human Geography* 34(6). SAGE Publications Ltd: 736–754. DOI: 10.1177/0309132510364556.
- Møllegaard S and Jæger MM (2015) The effect of grandparents' economic, cultural, and social capital on grandchildren's educational success. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 42: 11–19. DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2015.06.004.
- Morgan D (2011) *Rethinking Family Practices*. Springer.
- Morgan DHJ (1996) *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*. Wiley.
- Murphy R, Tao R and Lu X (2011) Son Preference in Rural China: Patrilineal Families and Socioeconomic Change. *Population and Development Review* 37(4): 665–690. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00452.x>.
- Mustillo S, Li M and Wang W (2021) Parent Work-to-Family Conflict and Child Psychological Well-Being: Moderating Role of Grandparent Coresidence. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 83(1): 27–39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12703>.
- Naftali O (2007) *Reforming the child: Childhood, citizenship, and subjectivity in contemporary China*. PhD Thesis. Available at: <http://search.proquest.com.easyaccess1.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/docview/304880974/abstract/FE3A2B7FB4074E8APQ/1> (accessed 23 October 2016).
- Naftali O (2014) *Children, Rights and Modernity in China: Raising Self-Governing Citizens*. Springer.
- Nash R (1993) *Succeeding Generations: Family Resources and Access to Education in New Zealand*. Auckland, N.Z: Oxford University Press.
- Nehring D and Wang X (2016) Making transnational intimacies: intergenerational relationships in Chinese-Western families in Beijing. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 3(1). DOI: 10.1186/s40711-016-0032-3.
- Nyland B, Nyland C and Maharaj EA (2009) Early childhood education and care in urban China: the importance of parental choice. *Early Child Development and Care* 179(4): 517–528. DOI: 10.1080/03004430701269275.
- Nyland B, Zeng X, Nyland C, et al. (2009) Grandparents as Educators and Carers in China. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 7(1): 46–57. DOI: 10.1177/1476718X08098353.

- Orgad S (2019) *Heading Home: Motherhood, Work, and the Failed Promise of Equality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2016) China. In: *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-47-en>.
- Pan Y (2016) *Education in China: A Snapshot*. OECD. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf> (accessed 24 March 2018).
- Park K-S, Phua V, McNally J, et al. (2006) Diversity and Structure of Intergenerational Relationships: Elderly Parent–Adult Child Relations in Korea. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 20(4): 285–305. DOI: 10.1007/s10823-006-9007-1.
- Parreñas RS (2000) Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor. *Gender & Society* 14(4). Sage Publications, Inc.: 560–580.
- Parreñas RS (2016) Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor. *Gender & Society*. Sage Publications, Inc. DOI: 10.1177/089124300014004005.
- Peng X (1987) Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward in China's Provinces. *Population and Development Review* 13(4). [Population Council, Wiley]: 639–670. DOI: 10.2307/1973026.
- Pilcher J (1994) Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy. *The British Journal of Sociology* 45(3): 481–495. DOI: 10.2307/591659.
- Pillemer K and Suito JJ (2002) Explaining Mothers' Ambivalence Toward Their Adult Children. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(3): 602–613. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00602.x.
- Pimentel EE (2006) Gender Ideology, Household Behavior, and Backlash in Urban China. *Journal of Family Issues* 27(3): 341–365. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X05283507.
- Pimentel EE and Liu J (2004) Exploring Nonnormative Coresidence in Urban China: Living with Wives' Parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(3): 821–836. DOI: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00055.x.
- Prins B (2006) Narrative Accounts of Origins: A Blind Spot in the Intersectional Approach? *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3). SAGE Publications Ltd: 277–290. DOI: 10.1177/1350506806065757.
- Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women (2011) Executive Report of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women. *Collection of Women's Studies* (6): 5–15.

- Pyke K (1999) The Micropolitics of Care in Relationships between Aging Parents and Adult Children: Individualism, Collectivism, and Power. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61(3): 661–672. DOI: 10.2307/353568.
- Pyke K and Coltrane S (1996) Entitlement, Obligation, and Gratitude in Family Work. *Journal of Family Issues* 17(1): 60–82. DOI: 10.1177/019251396017001005.
- Pyke KD (1994) Women's Employment as a Gift or Burden?: Marital Power across Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage. *Gender and Society* 8(1): 73–91.
- Qi X and Melhuish EC (2017) Early childhood education and care in China: history, current trends and challenges. *Early Years* 37(3). Routledge: 268–284. DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2016.1236780.
- Qian Y and Li J (2020) Separating Spheres: Cohort Differences in Gender Attitudes about Work and Family in China. *China Review* 20(2). The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press: 19–51.
- Quah S (2008) *Families in Asia: Home and Kin*. Routledge.
- Randles J (2020) “Willing to Do Anything for My Kids”: Inventive Mothering, Diapers, and the Inequalities of Carework. *American Sociological Review*. SAGE Publications Inc: 0003122420977480. DOI: 10.1177/0003122420977480.
- Raymo JM, Park H, Xie Y, et al. (2015) Marriage and Family in East Asia: Continuity and Change. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41(1): 471–492. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112428.
- Reay D (1998) *Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Primary Schooling*. London: UCL Press.
- Richter D, Krämer MD, Tang NKY, et al. (2019) Long-term effects of pregnancy and childbirth on sleep satisfaction and duration of first-time and experienced mothers and fathers. *Sleep* 42(4). DOI: 10.1093/sleep/zsz015.
- Risman BJ (2004) Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism. *Gender & Society* 18(4): 429–450. DOI: 10.1177/0891243204265349.
- Roberts DE (1997) Spiritual and Menial Housework. *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 9(1): 51–80.
- Roberts T, Williams I and Preston J (2020) The Southampton system: a new universal standard approach for port-city classification. *Maritime Policy & Management* 0(0). Routledge: 1–13. DOI: 10.1080/03088839.2020.1802785.
- Romero M, Preston V and Giles W (2016) *When Care Work Goes Global: Locating the Social Relations of Domestic Work*. Routledge.

- Roy K, Zvonkovic A, Goldberg A, et al. (2015) Sampling Richness and Qualitative Integrity: Challenges for Research with Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77(1): 243–260. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12147.
- Santos G and Harrell S (eds) (2016) *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Santos GD (2017) Multiple mothering and labor migration in rural South China. In: Santos GD and Harrell S (eds) *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, pp. 91–110.
- Sayer A (2002) What are You Worth?: Why Class is an Embarrassing Subject. *Sociological Research Online* 7(3). SAGE Publications Ltd: 19–35. DOI: 10.5153/sro.738.
- Shang X and Wu X (2011) The care regime in China: elder and child care. *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare* 27(2): 123–131. DOI: 10.1080/17486831.2011.567017.
- Shen K, Yan P and Zeng Y (2016) Coresidence with elderly parents and female labor supply in China. *Demographic Research* 35: 645–670. DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2016.35.23.
- Shen Y (2013) *Individual Family: Individual, Family, and State in the Modernization of Urban China [in Chinese]*. Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing Company.
- Sheng X (2014) *Higher Education Choice in China: Social Stratification, Gender and Educational Inequality*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Sheppard P and Monden C (2018) The Additive Advantage of Having Educated Grandfathers for Children's Education: Evidence from a Cross-National Sample in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 34(4): 365–380. DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcy026.
- Shi L (2017) *Choosing Daughters: Family Change in Rural China*. Stanford University Press.
- Shih KY and Pyke K (2010) Power, Resistance, and Emotional Economies in Women's Relationships with Mothers-in-Law in Chinese Immigrant Families. *Journal of Family Issues* 31(3): 333–357. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X09350875.
- Shih Y-P and Yi C-C (2014) Cultivating the Difference: Social Class, Parental Values, Cultural Capital and Children's After-School Activities in Taiwan. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 45(1): 55–75.
- Short SE, Zhai F, Xu S, et al. (2001) China's One-Child Policy and the Care of Children: An Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative Data. *Social Forces* 79(3): 913–943. DOI: 10.1353/sof.2001.0025.

- Short SE, Chen F, Entwisle B, et al. (2002) Maternal Work and Child Care in China: A Multi-Method Analysis. *Population and Development Review* 28(1): 31–57.
- Silverstein M (2011) Intergenerational Family Transfers in Social Context. In: Binstock RH, George LK, Cutler SJ, et al. (eds) *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*. Elsevier.
- Silverstein M and Bengtson VL (1997) Intergenerational Solidarity and the Structure of Adult Child–Parent Relationships in American Families. *American Journal of Sociology* 103(2): 429–60. DOI: 10.1086/231213.
- Silverstein M and Giarrusso R (2010) Aging and Family Life: A Decade Review. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(5): 1039–1058. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00749.x.
- Silverstein M, Chen X and Heller K (1996) Too Much of a Good Thing? Intergenerational Social Support and the Psychological Well-Being of Older Parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58(4). [Wiley, National Council on Family Relations]: 970–982. DOI: 10.2307/353984.
- Silverstein M, Giarrusso R and Bengtson VL (1998) Intergenerational Solidarity and the Grandparent Role. In: Szinovácz M (ed.) *Handbook on Grandparenthood*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 144–158.
- Silverstein M, Conroy SJ, Wang H, et al. (2002) Reciprocity in Parent–Child Relations Over the Adult Life Course. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 57(1): S3–S13. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/57.1.S3.
- Silverstein M, Cong Z and Li S (2006) Intergenerational Transfers and Living Arrangements of Older People in Rural China: Consequences for Psychological Well-Being. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 61(5): S256–S266. DOI: 10.1093/geronb/61.5.S256.
- Silverstein M, Giarrusso R and Bengtson VL (2012) Grandparents and grandchildren in family systems: A social-developmental perspective. In: Bengtson VL and Lowenstein A (eds) *Global Aging and Challenges to Families*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 75–102.
- Skeggs B (1997) *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. SAGE.
- Skeggs B (2004) Exchange, Value and Affect: Bourdieu and ‘The Self’. *The Sociological Review* 52(2_suppl). SAGE Publications Ltd: 75–95. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00525.x.
- Small ML (2009) ‘How many cases do I need?’: On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography* 10(1): 5–38. DOI: 10.1177/1466138108099586.
- Song J and Ji Y (2020) Complexity of Chinese Family Life: Individualism, Familism, and Gender. *China Review* 20(2). The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press: 1–17.

- Song L (2009) The Effect of the Cultural Revolution on Educational Homogamy in Urban China. *Social Forces* 88(1): 257–270. DOI: 10.1353/sof.0.0246.
- Song S (2011) Retreating back home willingly or being unwillingly sent home? Debates on ‘women-going-home’ and the ideological transformation in the course of marketization in China. *Collection of Women’s Studies* (4): 5–12.
- Song Y and Dong X (2018) Childcare Costs and Migrant and Local Mothers’ Labor Force Participation in Urban China. *Feminist Economics* 24(2). Routledge: 122–146. DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2017.1398405.
- Streib J (2015) *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Su Y (2016) Intersectionality: A new perspective for Chinese sociology of gender. *Sociological Studies* 4: 218–241.
- Su Y, Ni A and Ji Y (2018) In the Middle of Two Separated Yet Overlapped Spheres: Rural Nannies in Shanghai. *Chinese Sociological Review* 50(3): 367–389. DOI: 10.1080/21620555.2018.1435264.
- Sullivan O (2004) Changing Gender Practices within the Household: A Theoretical Perspective. *Gender & Society* 18(2). SAGE Publications Inc: 207–222. DOI: 10.1177/0891243203261571.
- Sullivan O (2013) What Do We Learn about Gender by Analyzing Housework Separately from Child Care? Some Considerations from Time-Use Evidence. *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 5(2): 72–84. DOI: 10.1111/jftr.12007.
- Summerfield G (1994) Economic Reform and the Employment of Chinese Women. *Journal of Economic Issues* 28(3). Routledge: 715–732. DOI: 10.1080/00213624.1994.11505579.
- Sun J (2013) Chinese Older Adults Taking Care of Grandchildren: Practices and Policies for Productive Aging. *Ageing International* 38(1): 58–70. DOI: 10.1007/s12126-012-9161-4.
- Sun R (2002) Old Age Support in Contemporary Urban China from Both Parents’ and Children’s Perspectives. *Research on Aging* 24(3): 337–359. DOI: 10.1177/0164027502243003.
- Sun S and Chen F (2017) Women’s employment trajectories during early adulthood in urban China: A cohort comparison. *Social Science Research* 68: 43–58. DOI: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.09.005.
- Sun SH-L (2012) Grandparenting in the context of care for grandchildren by foreign domestic workers. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*. Policy Press, pp. 113–136.

- Svarverud R and Hansen MH (eds) (2010) *ICChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*. NIAS Studies in Asian Topics. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Swartz TT (2008) Family capital and the invisible transfer of privilege: Intergenerational support and social class in early adulthood. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 2008(119): 11–24. DOI: 10.1002/cd.206.
- Swartz TT (2009) Intergenerational Family Relations in Adulthood: Patterns, Variations, and Implications in the Contemporary United States. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35(1): 191–212. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134615.
- Swidler A (1986) Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273–286. DOI: 10.2307/2095521.
- Szinovacz M (1998) *Handbook on Grandparenthood*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Szinovacz ME (1987) Family Power. In: Sussman MB and Steinmetz SK (eds) *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Tan L and Short S (2004) Living as double outsiders: Migrant women’s experiences of marriage in a county-level city. *On the Move: Women in Rural-to-Urban Migration in Contemporary China*: 151–174.
- Thang LL (2005) Experiencing Leisure in Later Life: A Study of Retirees and Activity in Singapore. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 20(4): 307–318. DOI: 10.1007/s10823-006-9010-6.
- Thang LL, Mehta K, Usui T, et al. (2011) Being a Good Grandparent: Roles and Expectations in Intergenerational Relationships in Japan and Singapore. *Marriage & Family Review* 47(8): 548–570. DOI: 10.1080/01494929.2011.619303.
- Thomas C (1993) De-Constructing Concepts of Care. *Sociology* 27(4). SAGE Publications Ltd: 649–669. DOI: 10.1177/0038038593027004006.
- Thornton A and Fricke TE (1987) Social change and the family: Comparative perspectives from the west, China, and South Asia. *Sociological Forum* 2(4): 746–779. DOI: 10.1007/BF01124383.
- Tian F and Liang D (2019) The Cultivating Strategies of Family Cultural Capital in Urban China and Class Difference. *Youth Studies* 428(05): 1–11.
- Tian FF (2017) Global Interactions and Family Formation Pathways in Reform-Era Urban China. *Chinese Sociological Review* 49(3). Routledge: 183–211. DOI: 10.1080/21620555.2016.1230011.

- Tian FF and Jing Y (2021) The reproduction of working class? Social mobility and the stratification of parenting practice in urban Chinese families. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 8(1): 12. DOI: 10.1186/s40711-021-00147-w.
- Timonen V and Doyle M (2012) Grandparental agency after adult children's divorce. In: Arber S and Timonen V (eds) *Global Aging and Challenges to Families*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 159–180.
- Trommsdorff G (2005) *The Value of Children in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Case Studies from Eight Societies*. Pabst.
- Uttal L (2002) *Making Care Work: Employed Mothers in the New Childcare Market*. Rutgers University Press.
- Vincent C and Ball SJ (2006) *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices: Middle Class Parents and Their Children*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Vincent C, Braun A and Ball SJ (2008) Childcare, choice and social class: Caring for young children in the UK. *Critical Social Policy* 28(1): 5–26. DOI: 10.1177/0261018307085505.
- Wallace C (2020) Between state, market and family: Changing childcare policies in urban China and the implications for working mothers. *International Sociology* 35(3). SAGE Publications Ltd: 336–352. DOI: 10.1177/0268580919885282.
- Wang J and Yang X (2017) A study of the division of family care and the willingness to have the second child in the process of urbanization. *Journal of Public Administration* 10(2): 140–155.
- Wang S and Mutchler JE (2020) The Implications of Providing Grandchild Care for Grandparents' Marital Quality. *Journal of Family Issues* 41(12). SAGE Publications Inc: 2476–2501. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X20934845.
- Wang X (2020) Permits, Points, and Permanent Household Registration: Recalibrating Hukou Policy under “Top-Level Design”. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. SAGE Publications Ltd: 1868102619894739. DOI: 10.1177/1868102619894739.
- Wang Y (2014) An Analysis of Changes in the Chinese Family Structure between Urban and Rural Areas: On the Basis of the 2010 National Census Data. *Social Sciences in China* 35(4): 100–116. DOI: 10.1080/02529203.2014.968349.
- Wengraf T (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. First edition. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- West C and Zimmerman DH (1987) Doing Gender. *Gender & Society* 1(2): 125–151. DOI: 10.1177/0891243287001002002.

- Wheellock J and Jones K (2002) 'Grandparents Are the Next Best Thing': Informal Childcare for Working Parents in Urban Britain. *Journal of Social Policy* 31(3): 441–463. DOI: 10.1017/S0047279402006657.
- Whyte MK (2003) China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations. In: Whyte MK (ed.) *China's Revolutions and Intergenerational Relations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, pp. 3–30. Available at: https://www.press.umich.edu/19840/chinas_revolutions_and_intergenerational_relations (accessed 2 November 2017).
- Whyte MK (2004) *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Whyte MK (2005) Continuity and Change in Urban Chinese Family Life. *The China Journal* 53: 9–33. DOI: 10.2307/20065990.
- Whyte MK and Parish WL (1985) *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. University of Chicago Press.
- Willson AE, Shuey KM and Elder GH (2003) Ambivalence in the Relationship of Adult Children to Aging Parents and In-Laws. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(3). DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.01055.x.
- Woronov TE (2003) *Transforming the future: 'Quality' children and the Chinese nation*. PhD Thesis. University of Chicago.
- Woronov TE (2009) Governing China's Children: Governmentality and "Education for Quality". *positions: asia critique* 17(3). Duke University Press: 567–589. DOI: 10.1215/10679847-2009-015.
- Wu A and Dong Y (2019) What is made-in-China feminism(s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China. *Critical Asian Studies* 51: 1–22. DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2019.1656538.
- Wu F and Wang L (2017) Family Care Arrangements and Policy Needs of Preschool Children in China: An Analysis Based on Multiple Data Sources [in Chinese]. *Population Research* (06): 71–83.
- Wu X (2006) Intergenerational Conflicts and the Transformation of Youth Discourse. *Youth Studies* (8): 1–8.
- Wu X (2013) *School Choice in China: A Different Tale?* Routledge.
- Wu X (2018) The Discourse of Gender Studies in China: From Topics to Debates. *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies* (5): 21–32.
- Wu X (2019) Commercialized Carework: Gender, Social Stratification and Intimate Labor. *Sociological Review of China* 7(01): 75–86.
- Wu X and Treiman DJ (2004) The household registration system and social stratification in China: 1955–1996. *Demography* 41(2): 363–384. DOI: 10.1353/dem.2004.0010.

- Wu X and Treiman DJ (2007) Inequality and Equality under Chinese Socialism: The Hukou System and Intergenerational Occupational Mobility. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(2): 415–445. DOI: 10.1086/518905.
- Wu Y and Zhang Y (2016) Social stratum distinction in “playing”— Family education concepts of urban parents of different social strata. *Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities* 27(05): 61–68.
- Wu Y and Zhou D (2015) Women’s Labor Force Participation in Urban China, 1990–2010. *Chinese Sociological Review* 47(4). Routledge: 314–342. DOI: 10.1080/21620555.2015.1036234.
- Xiao S (2016) Intimate Power: The Intergenerational Cooperation and Conflicts in Childrearing among Urban Families in Contemporary China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 3(1). DOI: 10.1186/s40711-016-0037-y.
- Xiao S and Cai Y (2014) Child Rearing and the Urban Sociocultural Adaptation of Migrant Workers. *Open Times* 4: 183–193.
- Xiao S and Jian Y (2020) Care Work and Social Inequality: Feminist Scholarship and its Implications for China. *Journal of Chinese Women’s Studies* (5).
- Xie Y (2013) *Gender and Family in Contemporary China*. 13–808, PSC Research Report. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Xie Y and Hu J (2014) An Introduction to the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). *Chinese Sociological Review* 47(1): 3–29. DOI: 10.2753/CSA2162-0555470101.2014.11082908.
- Xie Y and Zhou X (2014) Income inequality in today’s China. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(19). National Academy of Sciences: 6928–6933. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1403158111.
- Xie Y and Zhu H (2009) Do Sons or Daughters Give More Money to Parents in Urban China? *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71(1): 174–186. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00588.x.
- Xu H (2018) Physical and mental health of Chinese grandparents caring for grandchildren and great-grandparents. *Social Science & Medicine*. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.05.047.
- Xu J and Yeh AGO (2005) City Repositioning and Competitiveness Building in Regional Development: New Development Strategies in Guangzhou, China. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(2): 283–308. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00585.x>.
- Xu L and Chi I (2018) Determinants of Support Exchange Between Grandparents and Grandchildren in Rural China: The Roles of Grandparent Caregiving, Patrilineal Heritage, and Emotional Bonds. *Journal of Family Issues* 39(3): 579–601. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X16662102.

- Xu Q (2013) The Influence of Children's Needs on Intergenerational Coresidence. *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 33(3): 1–20.
- Xu Q (2015) Sons or daughters? Who are caring for aging parents: a gender comparative study of Chinese family. *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 4: 199–219.
- Xu Q, Li J and Yu X (2014) Continuity and Change in Chinese Marriage and the Family. *Chinese Sociological Review* 47(1): 30–56. DOI: 10.2753/CSA2162-0555470102.2014.11082909.
- Yan Y (2003) *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999*. Stanford University Press.
- Yan Y (2010a) Introduction: Conflicting Images of the Individual and Contested Process of Individualization. In: Svarverud R and Hansen MH (eds) *ICChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Yan Y (2010b) The Chinese path to individualization. *The British Journal of Sociology* 61(3): 489–512. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01323.x.
- Yan Y (2011) The Individualization of the Family in Rural China. *boundary 2* 38(1). Duke University Press: 203–229. DOI: 10.1215/01903659-1262590.
- Yan Y (2016) Intergenerational Intimacy and Descending Familism in Rural North China. *American Anthropologist* 118(2): 244–257. DOI: 10.1111/aman.12527.
- Yang J (2019) How to Promote the Availability of Childcare Service of Children under Age Three in the New Era. *The Journal of Jiangsu Administration Institute* (01): 69–76.
- Yang J and Li L (2009) Intergenerational Dynamics and Family Solidarity: A comparative study of mainland China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. *Sociological Studies* 24(3): 26–53.
- Yarris KE (2017) *Care Across Generations: Solidarity and Sacrifice in Transnational Families*. Redwood City, UNITED STATES: Stanford University Press. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=5013691> (accessed 20 June 2019).
- Yeates N (2012) Global care chains: a state-of-the-art review and future directions in care transnationalization research. *Global Networks* 12(2): 135–154. DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-0374.2012.00344.x.
- Yeh K-H, Yi C-C, Tsao W-C, et al. (2013) Filial Piety in Contemporary Chinese Societies: A Comparative Study of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. *International Sociology* 28(3): 277–296. DOI: 10.1177/0268580913484345.

- Yeung W-JJ (2013) Higher Education Expansion and Social Stratification in China. *Chinese Sociological Review* 45(4): 54–80. DOI: 10.2753/CSA2162-0555450403.
- Yu J (2014) Gender Ideology, Modernization, and Women's Housework Time in China. *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 34(2): 166–192.
- Yu J and Xie Y (2015) Changes in the Determinants of Marriage Entry in Post-Reform Urban China. *Demography* 52(6): 1869–1892. DOI: 10.1007/s13524-015-0432-z.
- Yu J and Xie Y (2018) Motherhood Penalties and Living Arrangements in China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 0(0). DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12496.
- Zartler U, Schmidt E-M, Schadler C, et al. (2021) “A Blessing and a Curse” Couples Dealing with Ambivalence Concerning Grandparental Involvement During the Transition to Parenthood—A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Family Issues* 42(5). SAGE Publications Inc: 958–983. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X20950786.
- Zavorett R (2016) Being the Right Woman for “Mr. Right”: Marriage and Household Politics in Present-Day Nanjing. In: Santos G and Harrell S (eds) *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp. 129–145.
- Zhan HJ (2004) Willingness and Expectations. *Marriage & Family Review* 36(1–2). Routledge: 175–200. DOI: 10.1300/J002v36n01_08.
- Zhang C (2016) *Patrilineal Ideology and Grandmother Care in Urban China*. PhD Thesis. Harvard University. Available at: <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/27112687> (accessed 22 February 2018).
- Zhang C, Fong VL, Yoshikawa H, et al. (2019) The Rise of Maternal Grandmother Child Care in Urban Chinese Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81(5). DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12598.
- Zhang C, Fong VL, Yoshikawa H, et al. (2020) How urban Chinese parents with 14-month-old children talk about nanny care and childrearing ideals. *Journal of Family Studies* 26(4). Routledge: 611–627. DOI: 10.1080/13229400.2018.1447983.
- Zhang J (2016) Research on Transformation and Development of Rural Homes for the Elderly. *Scientific Research on Aging* 4(08): 42–51.
- Zhang L (2016) *A Study of the Childcare Policy in China: From the Perspectives of Gender, Family and State*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House.
- Zhang W (2009) “A Married Out Daughter Is Like Spilt Water”?: Women's Increasing Contacts and Enhanced Ties with Their Natal Families in Post-Reform Rural North China. *Modern China* 35(3). SAGE Publications Inc: 256–283. DOI: 10.1177/0097700408329613.

- Zhang Y, Hannum E and Wang M (2008) Gender-Based Employment and Income Differences in Urban China: Considering the Contributions of Marriage and Parenthood. *Social Forces* 86(4): 1529–1560. DOI: 10.1353/sof.0.0035.
- Zhao M and Zhang Y (2019) Parental childcare support, sibship status, and mothers' second-child plans in urban China. *Demographic Research* 41. Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Foerderung der Wissenschaften: 1315–1346.
- Zhao Q and Mi H (2019) Evaluation on the Sustainability of Urban Public Pension System in China. *Sustainability* 11(5): 1418. DOI: 10.3390/su11051418.
- Zheng D (2018) Individualization and Integration: The Intergenerational Relationships from the Perspective of Three Generations. *Youth Studies* 418.
- Zheng G, Shi S and Tang H (2005) Population development and the value of children in the People's Republic of China. In: Trommsdorff G (ed.) *The Value of Children in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Case Studies from Eight Societies*. Lengerich: Pabst Science Publishers, pp. 239–282.
- Zhong X (2014) *The Purchase of Intimacy: Chinese Urban One-child Families in Housing Consumption*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Hong Kong. Available at: <http://hub.hku.hk/handle/10722/206671> (accessed 20 November 2017).
- Zhong X and Peng M (2020) The Grandmothers' Farewell to Childcare Provision under China's Two-Child Policy: Evidence from Guangzhou Middle-Class Families. *Social Inclusion* 8(2). 2: 36–46. DOI: 10.17645/si.v8i2.2674.
- Zhou X and Hou L (1999) Children of the Cultural Revolution: The State and the Life Course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review* 64(1). [American Sociological Association, Sage Publications, Inc.]: 12–36. DOI: 10.2307/2657275.
- Zhou Y (2018) The Dual Demands: Gender Equity and Fertility Intentions after the One-Child Policy. *Journal of Contemporary China* 0(0): 1–18. DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2018.1542219.
- Zhu J and Zhang J (2008) Contemporary trends and developments in early childhood education in China. *Early Years* 28(2). Routledge: 173–182. DOI: 10.1080/09575140802163584.
- Zuo J (2009) Rethinking Family Patriarchy and Women's Positions in Presocialist China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71(3): 542–557. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00618.x.
- Zuo J and Bian Y (2001) Gendered Resources, Division of Housework, and Perceived Fairness. A Case in Urban China. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(4): 1122–1133.
- Zuo J and Bian Y (2005) Beyond Resources and Patriarchy: Marital Construction of Family Decision-Making Power in Post-Mao Urban China. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 36(4): 601–622.