

# Two child policy means double trouble for Chinese grandparents?

The emerging phenomena of grandmothers' (pseudo) choice  
not to provide grandchild care

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# One-child to two-child policy

- One-child policy was introduced by the Chinese government in 1979 to curb overpopulation, lift China out of poverty, and achieve modernization goals (Gu et al, 2007).
- One-child policy was replaced by a universal two-child policy in 2016 due to the dire negative consequences of accelerating population aging (Zeng & Hesketh, 2016).
- However, the uptake rate of the two-child policy has been lower than expected. In fact the birth rate continue to decline after 2016 (NBSC, 2019).
- 2/3 of urban women prefer to only have one child (Attane, 2016)
- This presentation examines if Chinese women could continue to look to their own mothers or mother-in-law to provide childcare and how this might influence their fertility decisions.

# Systematic review of 20 years of published literature on Chinese Grand-Parents caring for Grandchildren

- High prevalence of grandparents providing childcare to grandchildren: **41%** grandparents in urban areas (Zhang, 2010); **60-70%** of under 2 year-old children nation-wide were mainly taken care of by their grandparents (Ko & Hank, 2013); Survey of 39 primary schools in Xiamen city showed **45.4%** (n=738) of grandparents were involved in caring for grandchildren of primary school age (Goh, Tsang & Chokkonadan, 2016).
- Benefits of provision of grandchild care to grandparents. Many studies showed Chinese grandparents who cared for grandchildren reported greater life satisfaction (Xu, 2019), reduced depressive symptoms (Liu & Lou, 2017), and perceived health and well-being of older adults (Zhou, Mao, Lee and Chi, 2017).

## Systematic review of 20 years of published literature on Chinese Grand-Parents caring for Grandchildren

Factors found to mediate provision of childcare and parental outcomes were

- Intensity of caregiving
- Urban versus rural differences
- Gender differences

Inconclusive findings on the costs and benefits of grandparents' provision of grandchild care. Nonetheless, these studies largely adopted the lens of *intergenerational reciprocity* and *solidarity* that stemmed from the frame of Confucius cultural value in China.

Few studies (Goh, 2009 & Goh, Tsang and Chokkonadan, 2016) attempted to examine the human agency of grandparents, and the undercurrents in the intergenerational dynamics and conflict-face of the phenomena of grandchild care provision in China.

# Methods

- Research site: Fuzhou, China.
- Data collection period: Spring 2018.
- Purposive Sampling - two sub-sets of grandmothers:
  - Caregiving Grandmothers (CG)
  - Non-caregiving Grandmothers (NCG)\*
- Mode of data collection: In-depth interview by local interviewers trained by PIs.
- Interview questions:
  - Reasons/Motivation for Caregiving (CG) or Non-Caregiving (NCG) to grandchildren
  - Experience of CG or NCG grandmothers
  - Relationships with adult children and grandchild
  - Hypothetical question on whether to CG second grandchild
  - Whether they welcome the new two child policy

# Experience of Non-Caregiving grandmothers

- Reasons for non-caregiving: deprived of a chance because the other set of GPs wanted to care for GC (n=5); health issues and old age (n=5); active work life (n=4)
- Assessment of the state of free from grandchild-care responsibility: happy 7/10 (very happy); neutral (3/10); loneliness (1/10).
- Past time: 11 sub-nodes emerged on what and how grandparents would spend their time – it shows that these grandmothers are active and know how to occupy their time meaningfully. They have many options other than caring for grand children.
- Relationship with grandchildren when not caregiving: all reported good relationship with adult children and grandchildren. Ways to maintain relationship: WeChat (6/10); Phone call (3/10); long distance visits (3/10).
- How do grandmothers compensate for defying cultural expectations?
  - Paid for nanny
  - Paid for insurance for grandchild
  - Provided financial support to adult children
  - Buy gifts for the other set of grandparents who are providing grandchild care

# Experience of Caregiving Grandmothers

- Rating of caregiving experience:
  - Average challenge (7/10);
  - Very tough (1/10);
  - Can manage (1/10);
  - Unsure (1/10)
- Why caregive? Sense of cultural obligation is still strong.
- Their perception of grandmothers who do not caregive.
- Perception of child care centres.

# Welcome two child policy?

## Caregivers

- No: (2/10)
- Yes: (7/10)

## Non-caregivers

- No: 5/10
- Yes: 5/10



# Discussions


## Grandmothers' *pseudo choice* of not providing grandchild care

- The hint of relieve and covet delight/pleasure for not having to care-give
- Pseudo choice – because grandmothers framed no providing grandchild care as 'it was not their choice'. Beside they felt the need to compensate for their non-active involvement.
- There is a shift from my earlier work where the choice of not responding to the call for help to provide grandchild care by adult children was perceived as not acceptable.

# Discussions

An emerging sense of human agency of grandmothers in China

	Response to request for Grandchild Care	
	Yes	No
Strong sense of agency	Active yes <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Active no <input type="radio"/>
Weak sense of agency	Passive yes <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Passive no <input type="radio"/>



# Discussions

## The success of two-child policy and grandmothers' human agency

- Findings from two researchers' interviews with 10 middle class grandmothers in Guangzhou (Zhong & Peng, 2020) in 2016 showed that most grandmothers, except 2, did not want to help rear a second grandchild.
- Grandmothers explicitly stated '*one time (grandchild caregiving) is totally enough! I cannot stand a second time*'.
- Grandmothers were unwilling to compromise their own priority to socialize or their health for caring for a second grandchild.
- Some grand mothers are beginning to withdraw from providing childcare under the two-child policy and their reluctance is discouraging young mothers from having second child.

# Conclusion

- The Chinese government persistent and instrumental use of the family, particularly older woman, as an unpaid childcare workforce to serve it's social and economic goals may not be sustainable in the wake of a new generation of grandmothers who have a stronger sense of their own human agency in deciding whether to provide grandchildren care.

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