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Looking after grandchildren: the motivation, pattern, and the impact of intergenerational engagements on grandparents in rural China

Final Thesis Submitted to The University of Edinburgh, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences as Part of the Requirement for the Award of a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

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Abstract

Across the world, grandparents are increasingly becoming the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. China is no exception. The rapid growth of an ageing population, large scale rural–urban internal labour migration, and the large population of left-behind elders and children in rural China have made grandparenting in this area unprecedentedly prevalent. In 2016, there were 9.02 million left-behind children (whose parents were both internal migrants) in rural China, and nearly 90 percent of them were cared for by grandparents.

Despite the prevalence of grandparenting in rural China, research on this topic is limited. It particularly lacks qualitative studies from grandparents’ perspectives. Under these circumstances, this study aims to address this gap through a detailed qualitative study based on 38 in-depth interviews with grandparents from three different villages in rural China and ten interviews with key informants. The study explores the motivation for, patterns in, and impact of grandparenting on grandparents with themes captured from interview data and discusses the operation and function of grandparenting in the large “society-family-individual” system.

The study argues that the prevalent grandparenting in rural China is deliberately led by the state and driven by an economic-growth orientation. This feature distinguishes today’s grandparenting in rural China from the traditional Chinese grandparent–grandchild relationship and grandparenting in many Western countries. Grandparenting is profoundly influenced by and also has profound effects on the “society-family-individual” system. In this mutual impact process, it also demonstrates heterogeneity, as some grandfamilies and grandparents are more deeply influenced by modernity and the economic-growth orientation. This heterogeneity has an influence on both the grandparenting style and the grandparents’ experience. In general, grandparenting benefits the functioning and development of society as a whole, but it has more profound and long-term negative effects on grandparents' subjective well-being.

All in all, the study provides detailed pictures of rural grandparents’ daily lives and grandparenting experiences. However, it is not restricted to the scope of individuals and families. Instead, it examines grandparenting from its causes to its impacts, discussing its operation and function in the more extensive “society-family-individual” system. It emphasises the relationship between grandparenting and the transformation of the entire
system, as well as the mutual feedback between grandparenting and the society. By doing so, the study adds a comprehensive description and explanation of why and how grandparenting occurs, provides a tool to categorise and better study grandparents, offers an answer to the contentious question of grandparenting’s impacts, and discusses grandparenting in the bigger picture to show grandparents’ struggles and contributions.
Lay Summary

In 2015, more than half of grandparents in rural China were involved in raising grandchildren. When China experienced one of the largest internal labour migration movements in human history, migrant workers left 9.02 million children in rural China in 2016. Almost 90% of those children were looked after by grandparents. Despite the prevalence of grandparenting in rural China, research on this topic is limited. It particularly lacks studies based on grandparents' narratives and from grandparents' perspectives. This study aims to address this gap.

This study is based on in-depth interview data I collected from three villages in rural China. Through analysing grandparents' and key informants' narratives, this study focuses on the causes, contours, and outcome of grandparenting and connects grandparents in rural China to a broad socio-cultural background. It argues that grandparenting in rural China is deliberately led by the state and is driven by the goal of increasing family income. Both grandparents and the grandparenting process are deeply influenced by state policy and the socio-cultural change happening in China. But there are also different subtypes of grandparents. Each subtype of grandparent has its own characteristics. In general, grandparenting is good for society as a whole, but it has deeper and longer-lasting negative effects on the subjective well-being of the
grandparents. The effects of grandparenting also have differences between each grandparent's type.

This study has four main contributions. First, the study adds to research on Chinese peasant families and family transformation by pointing out the main reasons for grandparenting and defining it as economic-growth-oriented grandparenting. Secondly, the study expands on existing categories of grandparents and provides a new tool for researching grandparents, particularly in rural China. Thirdly, the study provides a concrete and detailed explanation of grandparenting's effects on grandparents and offers a possible solution for alleviating negative impacts. Fourthly, the study identifies the underestimated contribution of grandparents and demonstrates the necessity and insufficiency of assisting grandparents.
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The acknowledgements are at the start of this thesis, but it is the last part I wrote. It is the support and love that make this entire project possible, and it also ends with that love and support.

Let us now move to the start of the project.
Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 3

Lay Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 5

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 15

1.1 Empirical background .................................................................................................................... 15
  1.1.1 Population Ageing .................................................................................................................... 15
  1.1.2 Grandparenting as a trend ....................................................................................................... 17

1.2 Rationale for studying grandparenting in rural China ................................................................. 21
  1.2.1 Why only rural China? ............................................................................................................. 21
  1.2.2 Research gap and needs ........................................................................................................ 21
  1.2.3 Personal motivation ............................................................................................................... 23

1.3 Research Questions and Aims ...................................................................................................... 24
  1.3.1 Forming the research questions ............................................................................................ 24
  1.3.2 Research aims ....................................................................................................................... 26
  1.3.3 Definitions of key concepts ................................................................................................... 27

1.4 Structure of the study .................................................................................................................... 29

Chapter 2 Literature review and socio-cultural background ................................................................. 31

2.1 Research on grandparenting ........................................................................................................ 32
  2.1.1 Grandparenting and its categories ........................................................................................ 32
  2.1.2 Trend of grandparenting and its causes ................................................................................. 34
  2.1.3 The demographic change of grandparenthood .................................................................... 36
  2.1.4 Gender contexts of grandparenting ....................................................................................... 37
  2.1.5 Grandparenting in a socio-cultural context .......................................................................... 38
  2.1.6 The cost and benefit of grandparenting ............................................................................... 40
  2.1.7 A brief introduction of theories on caregiving ..................................................................... 44

2.2 Research on grandparenting in China .......................................................................................... 46
  2.2.1 Family sociology studies and grandparenting in peasant families ...................................... 47
  2.2.2 The impacts of grandparenting on grandparents in China ................................................... 52

2.3 Setting the context ....................................................................................................................... 54
2.3.1 Demographic background of grandparenting in China ........54
2.3.2 The cultural context of grandparenting in China ..............56
2.3.3 The social and policy-related context of grandparenting ......63
2.4 Conclusion ........................................................................70

Chapter 3 Research design and methodology .......................72
3.1 Introduction ......................................................................72
3.2 Research paradigm ............................................................72
  3.2.1 Pragmatism .................................................................72
  3.2.2 Qualitative research strategies .......................................75
3.3 Designing and conducting ethnographic interviews and
  observations in rural China: data collection .........................77
  3.3.1 Selection of three villages ............................................77
  3.3.2 Sampling and data collection .......................................83
  3.3.3 Data management and analysis ....................................91
3.4 Ethics ..............................................................................96
  3.4.1 Informed consent .......................................................97
  3.4.2 Confidentiality and anonymity ....................................99
3.5 Positionality and reflexivity ..............................................100
3.6 Challenges ......................................................................104
3.7 Conclusion ......................................................................107

Chapter 4 Economy, Culture and Emotion: Why Grandparents Rear
  their Children's Children in Rural China ...............................108
4.1 General introduction to the empirical chapters...............108
4.2 Introduction of this chapter ..............................................110
4.3 Economic factors: the engine of contemporary grandparenting..
  4.3.1 Internal migration in China .........................................111
  4.3.2 Competition within villages .......................................114
4.4 Cultural expectations as motivation ...................................121
  4.4.1 The continuity of the family line .................................121
  4.4.2 Social influence and pressure .....................................123
4.5 Family cohesion: Intimate relations and grandparenting .......125
  4.5.1 Altruistic intention ....................................................126
4.5.2 Intergenerational bonding between grandparents and grandchildren .................................................................128
4.6 The goal of family urbanisation and economic growth-oriented grandparenting .................................................................130
  4.6.1 The subordinate role of grandparents ........................................131
  4.6.2 The shrinking of grandparental activities ..................................134
  4.6.3 The limited expectation of rewards and eldercare ......................139
4.7 Conclusion .....................................................................................143

Chapter 5 Heterogeneity and homogeneity: different types of grandparents and a typical grandparents’ day .................146
  5.1 The proactivity of grandparents ..................................................147
    5.1.1 Proactive grandparents ..............................................................148
    5.1.2 Passive grandparents ................................................................150
  5.2 The belief of grandparents ............................................................152
    5.2.1 Familistic grandparents ..............................................................153
    5.2.2 Individualistic grandparents ......................................................154
  5.3 Four ideal types of grandparent caregivers ....................................157
    5.3.1 Leading grandparents ..............................................................159
    5.3.2 Sacrificial grandparents ............................................................163
    5.3.3 Reciprocal grandparents ...........................................................166
    5.3.4 Reluctant grandparents .............................................................169
  5.4 A typical day of interviewed grandparents ....................................172
  5.5 Conclusion .....................................................................................174

Chapter 6 How grandparenting influences grandparent caregivers and their coping strategies ..................................................176
  6.1 Introduction ...................................................................................176
  6.2 Positive effect on grandparents’ subjective well-being ..............179
    6.2.1 Fulfilment of emotional needs ..................................................180
    6.2.2 The purpose of life and self-fulfilment .....................................185
  6.3 Negative impacts on well-being ....................................................188
    6.3.1 stress ........................................................................................189
    6.3.2 Concerns ..................................................................................192
6.3.3 Guilt .................................................................194
6.3.4 Loss of freedom ..................................................196
6.4 Physical health: a crucial moderator in grandparenting experience ........................................................................197
6.5 Coping strategies applied by grandparents ......................200
   6.5.1 Fatalism (Ming) ....................................................201
   6.5.2 Sense of contentment ..........................................204
   6.5.3 Social supports ..................................................206
6.6 Conclusion ..................................................................209

Chapter 7: The operation, function, and position of grandparenting in social, family and individual systems ...............212
7.1 Introduction ................................................................212
7.2 Grandparenting and the society-family-individual system ....213
   7.2.1 Government-driven grandparenting and its contribution to the state ..........................................................214
   7.2.2 The buffering role of grandfamilies and grandparents between society and individuals, and between urban and rural areas ...........................................................................221
   7.2.3 Patriarchy and gender norms: a toxic adhesion ..........226
   7.2.4 The traits of rural grandparents and their transformation ..232
7.3 Conclusion ..................................................................237

Chapter 8 Conclusion and implications .............................238
8.1 Policy sets the tune, and the elders dance: Economically-oriented grandparenting and the state .........................238
8.2 Theoretical and empirical contributions of the present study ....239
8.3 Implications ................................................................242
   8.3.1 Increasing awareness .............................................243
   8.3.2 Strengthening the social welfare system in rural China ..245
   8.3.3 Mobilising non-profit organisations .........................247
   8.3.4 Increase the application of professional social work in the field .................................................................250
8.4 Reflections-limitations ...................................................253
8.5 Future research agenda ................................................255
References...........................................................................................................................................258
Appendix A: Basic information about participants .................................................................302
Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (English/Chinese)..............................308
Appendix C: Consent Form (English/Chinese).................................................................310
Looking after grandchildren: the motivation, pattern, and the impact of intergenerational engagements on grandparents in rural China

“Sway away, sway away, sway to Grandma's bridge.’’(yao a yao, yao a yao, yao dao wai po qiao) When I first heard this popular nursery rhyme, I was about four years old, with severe pneumonia, being cared for by my maternal grandmother. While my father was pursuing his PhD and my mother had a full-time job, my grandparents suspended their own lives, joined my family in an entirely alien city, and took over the job of caring for the sick, fragile only child. At that time, my grandmother was in her early 50s. In the next 15 years, she and my grandfather intermittently moved to different places and provided care for their four grandchildren.

My grandparents are not alone. Later in my life, I saw and heard many stories of how grandparents dedicate themselves to looking after grandchildren, both in rural and urban China. I was cared for by my grandparents, and one day in the future, I may become a grandmother. The strong emotional link to the grandparent group and curiosity towards grandparents’ experiences impelled me to discover more about grandparenting.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the world, grandparents are increasingly becoming the primary caregivers of their grandchildren (Ku et al., 2012). Using data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, researchers found that across Europe, 44 percent of grandmothers and 42 percent of grandparents become the caregivers of their grandchildren (Glaser et al., 2013). In 2009, nearly half of all grandparents in the United States provided financial assistance to their children and grandchildren, and nearly 40 percent of grandparents provided grandchild care (Livingston and Parker, 2010). Approximately 8 million American children live in grandparent-led households, and this number is growing rapidly (Peterson, 2018). The high prevalence of care provided by grandparents is also observed in China; one study finds more than 50 percent of Chinese grandparents provide care to at least one grandchild (Ko and Hank, 2013). In particular, due to the large-scale internal migration of the peasant labour force, many rural grandparents become the only adults in their villages and play the primary caregiver role for their grandchildren by default.

Until the late 2010s, studies focused on grandparenting1 in China were very limited, considering their prevalence. Why do so many grandparents suspend their daily lives and become caregivers? What have they experienced during grandparenting? What did grandparenting bring to the grandparents' lives? Furthermore, what does "grandparenting" mean for China? To answer those questions, this study systematically explores the rural grandparent group, grandparenting, and the impacts of grandparenting by interviewing 38 rural grandparents and 10 key informants. It fills the research gap with a grandparent-centred perspective and explores grandparenting’s motivation, operation, and function on multiple levels. But before diving into those contents, I would like to picture the background of the study first.

1.1 Empirical background

1.1.1 Population Ageing

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1 I will use the terms grandparent, grandparenthood, grandparenting, and providing caregiving for grandchildren throughout this thesis. Definitions for those terms are found in section 1.3.3.
Population ageing is salient to grandparenthood studies, as it reflects the size of the population influenced by grandparenting and how urgent the issue is with the rapidly increasing prevalence of the phenomenon. For many people, grandparenthood is a crucial part of the ageing process. According to Lang and colleagues (2013), when compared to middle-aged adults, the elderly place a higher value on emotional close relationships. Perceiving their limited time, the elderly tend to treat grandparenthood as more important (Fung et al., 2005). Meanwhile, the fast population ageing contributes to the increase in grandparenting.

In the 21st century, with longer life expectancy and lower fertility rates, an ageing population has become a worldwide tendency. Data shows that the absolute number and proportion of elderly people are increasing worldwide, which raises issues in both developed and developing countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), the percentage of the world's population over 60 years old will nearly double between 2015 and 2050, rising from 12 percent to 22 percent. WHO (2021) also predicted that there will be 1 billion people aged 60 and over by 2030, and at that time, one in six people in the world will be 60 and over.

Thanks to modernisation and fast development, life expectancy has increased significantly in China. Meanwhile, the fertility rate in China has decreased, partially due to the one-child policy, transformation of family ideology by modernisation, and the increasing life pressures (Wang and Sun, 2016). Under these circumstances, China is ageing dramatically and will face the ageing issue beginning in the 2020s. The pace of the Chinese population ageing is much faster than in other countries (WHO, 2015). In fact, in the next 25 years, the country is predicted to experience a faster trend of population ageing than Japan, the country with the highest ageing population level in the world (Chen et al., 2019). In 2010, 12.4 percent (168 million people) of Chinese people were aged over 60. This percentage will double in 2040 to 28 percent (402 million) (WHO, 2015). By the middle of this century, approximately one-third of the Chinese population will be aged 60 and over, which means a higher dependency ratio and a significant burden on the labour force (Xinhua, 2018). It has also been reported that China will have the largest population in the oldest age group (aged over 80) by 2050 (WHO, 2015).

Population ageing and related issues are more serious in rural China as the economic conditions and social welfare system are not ideal there, raising issues related to grandparenting. While I will later detail the
eldercare system in China (see section 2.3.3), here I briefly introduce it to set the scene. Traditionally, the Chinese family system was marked by a seniority- and gender-based hierarchy. Adult children have a basic and obligatory duty to support and care for their elderly parents (Kim and Park 2000; Liang, 2005). However, this traditional family care system has been challenged by modernisation, the market economy, and individualism. Adult peasants’ willingness to provide eldercare for their parents has decreased, especially for those who are married (Hu et al., 2012).

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the government started to establish a public eldercare system. However, the entire social welfare system in China is rural-urban dualised (Luo, 2012; Chan and Wei, 2019). Chinese policymakers have concentrated their efforts on urban inhabitants with non-agricultural hukou status in the early stages of the country’s social security development (Luo, 2012; Smart and Smart, 2001). Due to the poor social welfare system in rural areas, family-based eldercare is still mainstream in rural China (Song, 2001; Wang and Xia, 1994). Meanwhile, China has experienced one of the largest internal labour migration movements in human history since the 1980s (Chan, 2013). One outcome of this internal rural-urban migration is a large number of peasants leaving their parents and children and migrating to cities for work. As a result, the family-based eldercare system in rural China has become more fragile, and the old-age dependency ratio in rural areas has been consistently higher than in urban China (Cai et al., 2012). In 1982, the rural and urban old-age dependency ratios were 8.4 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively, and had risen to 13.9 percent and 11.8 percent, respectively, by 2005 (Cai et al., 2012). It is suggested that by 2030, the proportion of elderly people aged 60 and over in rural areas will be 21.8 percent, while in urban areas it will be 14.8 percent (Cai et al., 2012). Eroded family eldercare, the poor social eldercare system, and the high dependency ratio deeply influence peasant elders’ lives and impact their grandparenting activity.

1.1.2 Grandparenting as a trend

The rapidly ageing population across the world means growing numbers of grandparents. Meanwhile, with longer life expectancy, many grandparents will experience this family role for more than 30 years (Uhlenberg, 1996). For multiple reasons, such as the increasing number of young women in labour markets and the higher costs for caregiving, a
large proportion of grandparents play a vital role in providing care for their grandchildren worldwide. Grandparent households and intergenerational co-residence gradually became a trend in Western industrial countries, such as the US and many Western European countries (Glaser et al., 2018). Wellard (2011) shows that there were approximately 14 million grandparents in Britain, with nearly two-thirds of them providing some grandparental childcare. According to the American Community Survey, about 7 million grandparents in the United States currently live with grandchildren under the age of eighteen. Among this group, around 39 percent have assumed primary caregiving responsibilities (Chen et al., 2014). In South Africa, the prevalence of grandparenting is related to culture but also family crises such as parental illnesses, especially HIV/AIDS (Dunham and Flores-Yeffal, 2021). Grandparents looking after grandchildren is undoubtedly a worldwide trend.

Some researchers argue that being a grandparent caregiver is the most common role expectation of Asian grandparents, especially grandmothers, due to the influence of Confucianism and traditional familism (Mehta and Thang, 2012). Data also shows how common grandparenting is in today’s China. It was reported that in 2005, 41.4 percent of urban Chinese elderly residents and about 35.4 percent of elderly residents in rural China provided care for their grandchildren (Burnette et al., 2013). Several years later, the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS), a national wide longitudinal dataset, has shown that the grandparenting rate in rural China was approximately 46.5 percent in 2011.

The high prevalence of interactions between grandparents and grandchildren is not a new phenomenon in China. Partially influenced by Confucianism, which emphasises harmony, filial piety, and strong connections between family members, Chinese families used to be clan-based or extended-family-based. Under these circumstances, Chinese seniors were proud of living with their children, and multigenerational co-residence with older family members was also a common and ideal living arrangement in China (Peng, 2013; Xu, 2018a). These arrangements facilitated interactions between grandparents and grandchildren and increased the opportunity for intergenerational engagement between the old and young. This interaction, however, was not a formal obligation for grandparents. While grandparents were expected to be active in intergenerational engagement, the traditional
division of labour stated that the primary caregivers of young children should be their parents, particularly their mothers. Grandparenting was more like a supplement to parenting than a burden for seniors.

This seniority-gender-based labour division, however, has been challenged since Chinese women began to enter the labour market. Women in China have been encouraged to work since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In the 1960s, one well-known revolutionary slogan was "women hold up half the sky" (Wang, 2010). Even though the Chinese government encouraged women to have more children in the 1960s, the rising employment rate of Chinese women could not be ignored. In the 1990s, the labour force participation rate of Chinese females was greater than 70 percent (World Bank, 2019). Despite the fact that female labour force participation in China has steadily declined over the last 17 years, it was still higher in 2017 than in the United Kingdom and the United States (World Bank, 2019). Although part-time employment is highly gendered and widely viewed as a method of balancing work and family duties for females (Russell et al., 2009), the majority of Chinese women in the labour force work full-time due to the low wage of part-time jobs and the difficulty in finding them (Cooke, 2006). Since a large proportion of young females have begun to work full-time, their traditional family roles have shifted from doing housework and caring for the family to financially supporting the family. In these circumstances, many grandparents, particularly in skip-generation families (families that have only grandparents and grandchildren, not the middle generation), have begun to provide primary care to their grandchildren.

Internal migration in China is another significant factor, especially for rural grandparents and their families. Here I would briefly introduce it to set the scene. The high-speed development of Chinese urban areas relies on cheap labour and the resources that are constantly drained from rural areas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more than 290 million internal migrants in China in 2019, and 35.1 percent of them were female (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The average age of internal migrants in 2018 was approximately 40.8, which means that working-age migrants were the main component of this group. When working-age peasants move to the cities, it is quite difficult for them to bring their parents and children with them due to high living expenses and the restrictions of the hukou system (see section 2.3.3). Therefore, two large
groups, left-behind children and left-behind elders, have appeared. A study based on the Sixth National Population Census of the People’s Republic of China has estimated that China has more than 60 million left-behind children with at least one parent having migrated to the cities (All-China Women’s Federation, 2013). Defining left-behind children as children whose parents are both internal migrants, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC has estimated that there were 9.02 million left-behind children in 2016. They also found that among these left-behind children, 89.3 percent were cared for by their grandparents (China News, 2016). The United Nations’ Children’s Fund defined left-behind children as children in rural settings aged 18 years and under who have at least one parent who has migrated and reported that there were about 40.5 million left-behind children in China in 2015, 26.3 percent of whom lived with their grandparents (UNICEF et al., 2017). No matter how the group is defined, there is no doubt that millions of children are not living with their parents and being cared for by their grandparents. It is the outcome of peasants’ internal migration, and the labour force it frees to assist urban China to achieve its fast development.

Figure 1.1 Childcare situation of left-behind children in rural China

![Pie chart showing childcare situation of left-behind children in rural China](Data source: The Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC, 2016)

The rapid ageing progress, the tradition of intergenerational engagement in Asian culture, the large scale internal migration, and the large population of the left-behind children in rural China together contribute to the prevalence of grandparenting in today's rural China.
1.2 Rationale for studying grandparenting in rural China

1.2.1 Why only rural China?

Grandparenting is a nationwide phenomenon in China. People can find grandparents looking after grandchildren in every area, urban or rural. However, this study will only focus on grandparenting in rural China. The reasons why are articulated below:

Firstly, there is a huge and clear gap between urban and rural China, which means studying grandparents in rural and urban China together can be difficult. The inequality between urban and rural China is evident in many aspects, such as income, infrastructure, and social welfare services (Luo and Sicilar, 2013). While some of those gaps will be discussed in later sections, here, I argue that grandparents in rural China face multiple challenges caused by those gaps. Rural grandparents have less access to resources and are more at risk than their urban counterparts, which makes a better understanding of them more urgent.

Meanwhile, large scale internal migration and the popularity of skip-generation families force many rural grandparents provide grandparenting to their grandchildren independently. Compared with urban grandparents, who are more commonly co-residents and do co-parenting with their adult children, primary grandparent caregivers in rural China experience a different, and usually more challenging, grandparenting experience, necessitating more targeted research on this population.

1.2.2 Research gap and needs

Since grandparenthood became an independent research topic in the 1950s, researchers have examined grandparenting from multiple perspectives and in various cultural contexts (e.g., Szinovacz, 1998a). However, studies on grandparenting in mainland China began in the twenty-first century and are still uncommon (Cheng et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2016; Sun and Zhang, 2013). Chapter 2 will provide a more comprehensive literature review and background introduction for this study. Here, I aim to summarise three research gaps unaddressed by previous studies, emphasising the importance of this study.

First, while grandparenting in skip-generation households, particularly the grandparenting of left-behind children in rural China, has garnered increased attention from the public and researchers, researchers have examined this phenomenon primarily from the perspective of
grandchildren. In comparison to their grandchildren, the experiences and impact of grandparenting on grandparent caregivers have been largely ignored (Sun and Zhang, 2013). Intergenerational exchange and money transfer between grandparents and adult children have been explored more frequently in studies of the Chinese grandparent population than the grandparenting experience and its possible influence (Cong and Silverstein, 2011; Lee and Xiao, 1998; Xu et al., 2012). As a result, more research on grandparents in rural areas is needed to better understand their experiences, challenges, and contributions.

Second, in terms of methodology, the majority of previous studies used quantitative data analysis of secondary data (Chen and Liu, 2011; Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Silverstein et al., 2006; Xu, 2018a). While quantitative approaches are effective in providing an overview of the subject and drawing broad conclusions, they lack a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, by relying exclusively on secondary data that was not designed and collected for the grandparenting study, certain potentially significant explanatory variables may be overlooked during model construction. As a result, a study based on first-hand qualitative data may bring such overlooked attributes to researchers’ attention.

Furthermore, since many previous studies rely on secondary data and quantitative analysis, the diversity and complexity of grandparenting and rural grandparents are overlooked. For instance, when I reviewed the literature on Chinese grandparenting, I found many early-stage studies tend to explain today’s grandparenting with altruism and Confucianism. Taking grandparenting for granted, this perspective further influences their understanding of grandparenting’s impacts on grandparents (Shen, 2001; Sun and Zhang, 2013). As those studies describe, Chinese grandparents are satisfied with the cultural expectation of grandparenting, benefit from it mentally, and are willing to do this job as long as it helps their families.

On the contrary, there are also studies explaining why grandparenting is an intergenerational exchange. Grandparents sell their time and labour to get money and the promise of better eldercare (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a). While these two explanations are contrary, they all simplify the intricacy and diversity of grandparenting in China. Chinese grandparents are a complex and heterogeneous group. Not all of them believe in altruism and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the family, and not all are good businessmen negotiating a profitable exchange with their
offspring through grandparenting. Instead, their motivation, experience, and outcome of grandparenting are diverse and need to be examined in connection with their life stories. The findings of this study do not fit either of these two descriptions and provide a more comprehensive explanation of grandparenting in rural China.

Third, previous studies tended to focus on grandparenting in China at the family and individual levels, ignoring its role in the larger system and contribution to society. The majority of studies have focused solely on the concrete challenges grandparents in rural China face and the vulnerabilities they have, with little regard for their resilience and the contribution they make at the macro level.

To address these three research gaps, this study conducted 48 semi-structured interviews with rural grandparents and key informants in order to demonstrate the driving force, categorisation, and effects of grandparenting from a grandparent-centred perspective. Observation and interviews are used in the study, but it also looks at rural grandparenting through the lens of a "society-family-individual" system, which explains its role and function in the big picture. But what in my life history motivated me to undertake this research?

1.2.3 Personal motivation

My initial research interest in grandparenting and the influence it has on grandparent caregivers stems from personal experience. Throughout my childhood, I was frail and weak. My father was doing a PhD at the time, and my mother struggled to balance work and childcare. As a result, my maternal grandparents chose to leave their hometown and move in with us to care for me. My maternal grandparents have since lived with my nuclear family on and off for almost 15 years. My close relationship with my grandparents and this personal experience motivated me to do this research in the first place.

When I was pursuing my Master in Social Work, I noticed a lack of studies on the older population and social work with older adults in China, even when considering the large ageing population and the serious ageing issues that will be faced in the future. While the potential health impacts of providing childcare have been extensively discussed in the Western world, this topic is new in the Chinese context. China has a large population of grandparent caregivers, but studies on this population are limited. Under these circumstances, I decided to focus on social work
with the older population and began to study grandparent caregivers in China. After completing my Master’s, I found a position in a non-profit organisation and worked in a Chinese rural village for eight months. During this period, I gained the opportunity to immerse myself in the field and observe grandparents in rural China. By organising a twice-a-week outside of school course for children in that village during my leisure time, I gained the opportunity to build relationships with the children and their primary caregivers, including grandparents. Watching grandparents care for their grandchildren, and the stories I’ve heard and the conversations I’ve had with both grandparents and their grandchildren have made me want to do this research. Beyond satisfying personal curiosity, what will this research contribute?

1.3 Research Questions and Aims

1.3.1 Forming the research questions

Grandparenting is not a new phenomenon. However, social changes in the last few decades, especially after the Chinese economic reform, as well as the subsequent transformation of Chinese families, necessitate a reconsideration of this intergenerational activity. Using the framework and perspective of modernisation theory, a large number of scholars have examined how the Chinese families' structure and function have changed with the modernisation and urbanisation processes (Wang, 1996; Yang and Shen, 2000; Bian and Logan, 2001; Tang, 2005). Against this background, this study is curious about whether the driving force of grandparenting has also changed, particularly considering the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon in rural China after the economic reforms of 1978. What motivates so many rural grandparents to engage in grandparenting given the new socio-cultural conditions?

Rural families have been impacted by urbanisation and modernisation, resulting in de-agriculturalisation (Yang, 2009). A specific example of this is the internal migration of young Chinese peasants, which, when combined with the household registration system known as hukou (introduced in section 2.3.3), results in the emergence of new social phenomena such as left-behind children, left-behind elderly, and grandparents caring for their grandchildren in rural China. Ethical and ideological changes are also a part of the process of de-agriculturalisation (He, 2008a). Within all those changes, what does the grandparenting in rural China look like now? Meanwhile, considering the diversity in rural
China and the asynchronism of ethical and ideological changes, will grandparenting also demonstrate heterogeneity?

Finally, what does grandparenting offer grandparents? Previous research on the effects of grandparenting on grandparents has yielded inconclusive results, both in China and in other social and cultural contexts (Grinstead et al., 2003; Xiao et al., 2021). Using qualitative methods and the grandparents' own narratives, this study aims to explore the outcome of grandparenting from the grandparents' perspective. Instead of only providing a positive or negative answer, this study sets a goal to discuss in rich detail how grandparenting influences rural grandparents' well-being.

While research on grandparenthood and grandparenting began to develop in the Western world in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Szinovacz, 1998a), studies have produced conflicting results on a variety of issues, including how grandparenting influences grandparents. Despite the vast number of rural grandparents and the high incidence of grandparenting in these areas, prior research on grandparenting in rural China is scarce. Indeed, Chen and colleagues (2011, p. 572) asserted that their study was the first to "systematically explore the prevalence, intensity, and drivers of grandparent-grandchild care in contemporary China." It is clear that there is not enough systematic research on grandparent care in rural China.

Based on the above factors, this study set three research questions:

1) What is the main driving force behind contemporary grandparents' activities in rural China?

2) What are the grandparenting patterns in rural China and how do they relate to the socio-cultural context?

3) What are the consequences of grandparenting for grandparents and the broader society?

This study explores grandparenting in rural China against the backdrop of modernisation and urbanisation. It connects grandparenting to contemporary societal issues such as the urban-rural gap, the transformation of rural families, and the rural eldercare crisis. To answer the research questions, the study examines grandparenting in rural China from both horizontal and vertical perspectives. It explores the driving forces, patterns, typologies, and impacts of grandparenting with the grandparents' narration and also discusses the operation, function, and
contribution of grandparenting within the "state-family-individual" vertical system. This study paints a vivid image and comprehensively explains grandparenting in a changing rural China, shedding light on policymaking and practice concerning this phenomenon.

1.3.2 Research aims

Despite the widespread recognition of the complexity of grandparenting in rural China, many previous studies applied theories and frameworks originally based on grandparenting in developed countries (such as the U.S.) to grandparent caregivers and grandparenting in China without considering the differences. Due to these considerations, the current research seeks to develop a more appropriate and comprehensive explanatory model for the prevalence of grandparenting in rural China that is informed by the social conditions of this shifting era. The research objectives related to the first research question are:

1) Identifying driving forces of grandparenting in rural China and their relative strengths.
2) Developing an explanatory model for rural Chinese grandparenting; and
3) Investigating the role of grandparenting in the advancement of modernity, particularly in East Asian culture.

This objective will be accomplished through induction. As a result, the first research question will be answered empirically rather than theoretically.

The driving forces impact the prevalence of grandparenting, and also shape it in multiple ways. Based on the answer to the first research question, the second research question aims to explore and articulate grandparenting patterns in rural China. To be more explicit, the three objectives to the second research question are:

1) Demonstrating the prominent characteristics of grandparenting in rural China.
2) Elucidating the heterogeneity of rural grandparents and grandparenting; and
3) Examining the impact of social and ideological shifts on grandparenting.
The third question seeks to ascertain the influence of grandparenting on rural grandparents' well-being. Earlier Western research has produced contradictory findings regarding the influence of grandparenting, and practically all previous Chinese research has relied on quantitative datasets not designed for this purpose. To fill this gap, the third question gathers first-hand qualitative data about what it's like to be a grandparent caregiver in rural China and how it works. The objectives of this question are:

1) Figuring out the effects of grandparenthood on grandparents.
2) Pointing out the pathway of grandparenting’s influence; and
3) Exploring grandparents’ coping strategies.

Another objective of the last study question is to identify potential strategies for improving the quality of life of rural grandparent caregivers, which will have implications for policymakers and practitioners. Grandparenting in rural China is not only a family affair. It relates to the macro-level urban-rural gap, the meso-level family transformation, and micro-level grandparenting difficulties. Therefore, to achieve the above objectives, the study needs to also discuss grandparenting in a larger "state-family-individual" system. To make sure there are no misunderstandings about terminology, here I will explain some of the most important terms that are relevant to the study.

1.3.3 Definitions of key concepts

Grandparenthood, as the target of the study, is understood as a role and a social relationship with cognitive, symbolic, behavioural, and affective dimensions (Werner et al., 1998). While all people who have grandchildren are experiencing grandparenthood, the study particularly focuses on grandparents who give their grandchildren care. Therefore, in this study, the term "grandparent" implies a grandparent caregiver who provides caregiving to grandchildren unless otherwise noted. The terms "grandparenting" and "grandparent caregiving" are interchangeable in the study; both refer to the activity of grandparents looking after grandchildren. In most cases, I would use grandparenting to maintain the coherency of the thesis, except when referencing other studies that used the term "grandparent caregiving."
Unless otherwise noted, the majority of the families discussed in this study are peasant-multigenerational-grandfamilies from rural China. For the sake of readability and writing ease, I will abbreviate this term and instead refer to peasant families or grandfamilies in rural China in the text. The exact word used depends on whether the context emphasises the peasant identity or the grandfamil structure.

While both “old” and “elderly” mean “more/most advanced in age”, there is a subtle difference between these two words (Merriam-Webster n.d). According to Merriam-Webster’s website (n.d), the word “elderly” has a sense of reverence which “old” does not have. In the Oxford Dictionary, the second interpretation of the noun “elder” is “a leader or senior figure in a tribe or other group”. It seems that “elder” suggests the wisdom and experience of people who are advanced in age. In academia, there is a convention to use the term "elderly" to define a chronological age of 65 years or older (Orimo et al., 2006). Previous medical journals tended to use the terms "older" and "elderly" equivocally (Quinlan and Neil, 2008). However, “elderly” is also associated with ageism and stereotypes of older people, with some researchers advocating to replace the word “elderly” with other more neutral words (Avers et al. 2011; Putnam, 2015). In the Chinese context, the meaning of the word “elderly” is closer to the one with reverence. The authoritative translation of the “elder law” in China, called “Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People” also uses “elderly people” to refer to citizens aged 60 or above. Since this study is based on the Chinese context, the researcher will use “elderly people” to indicate older people, especially when emphasising the dominant position of old people within families. In the literature review, I will maintain the consistency of terms between the review and the original paper.

In English, there is no distinction between a son's and a daughter's children; they are all referred to as grandchildren. However, there are two different words for them in Chinese. Sun, which means grandchildren, refers to the children of the sons, while Wai Sun refers to the children of daughters. Wai means "outside," and the daughters' children are referred to as "outside grandchildren." Most participants in the study were paternal grandparents who looked after children for their adult sons, influenced by patriarchal family tradition. Therefore, unless otherwise specified, the term "grandchildren" in the study refers to the Chinese Sun. After clarifying the key concepts, now I would introduce the structure of the study.
1.4 Structure of the study

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the previous literature on the subject and establishes the context for the research. It begins by reviewing previous research on grandparenting, particularly from aspects that are also addressed in this study, such as categories, causes, demographic changes in, gender and socio-cultural context, and the cost and benefits of grandparenting. The chapter then narrows its focus and examines studies on grandparenting in China. Following a review of previous academic studies, the chapter introduces the demographic context as well as the cultural, social, and policy-related context for the study, laying the groundwork for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design, why it was designed that way, and how the study was carried out. It introduces the study's data collection and analysis processes, as well as the decisions I made in the field. The chapter also discusses the study's ethical issues and challenges, as well as my thoughts on positionality and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 to 6 are the findings of the study. Chapter 4 targets the driving force of grandparenting in rural China and identifies one major cause (the economic factor) as well as two secondary causes (cultural expectations and family cohesion). Based on this, the chapter defines grandparenting in current rural China as economic-growth-oriented grandparenting and discusses three characteristics of it.

In Chapter 5, the study focuses on the heterogeneity and homogeneity of grandparenting in rural China. It establishes a new category and divides rural grandparents into four sub-groups. After introducing four different types of rural grandparents separately, the chapter portrays a typical day of rural grandparents to also illustrate their homogeneity.

Chapter 6 explores the impacts of grandparenting on rural grandparents' subjective well-being. It talks about both the positive and negative effects that grandparenting has on grandparents' subjective well-being, explains how those effects work, and sums up three common strategies rural grandparents use to deal with the negative effects of grandparenting.

Unlike the previous three finding chapters that target grandparenting itself and examine the phenomenon mainly within the scope of the grandfamily, Chapter 7 revisits the operation, function, and contribution
of grandparenting in the "state-family-individual" system. Identifying four themes, the chapter further explores the interaction between the state, multigenerational grandfamilies and rural grandparents.

Finally, chapter 8 summarises the study's findings and discusses their implications. It also includes the study's limitations and sets up a research agenda for future research on this topic.

Overall, the study argues that grandparenting in rural China is led by the state deliberately and driven by an economic-growth orientation. This feature distinguishes today’s grandparenting in rural China from traditional Chinese grandparent-grandchildren relationships and grandparenting in many Western countries. Grandparenting is profoundly influenced by and also have profound effects on the "state-family-individual" system. In this feedback loop, it also demonstrates heterogeneity, as some grandfamilies and grandparents are more deeply influenced by modernity and the economic-growth orientation. This heterogeneity has an influence on both the grandparenting style and the grandparents' experience. In general, grandparenting benefits the functioning and development of society as a whole, but it has more profound and long-term negative effects on grandparents' subjective well-being. We turn now to the existing research on the topic.
Chapter 2 Literature review and socio-cultural background

Grandparenthood and grandparenting are multidisciplinary themes examined by sociology, psychology, and anthropology, among others. Due to the global significance of grandparenting, there is also a substantial body of related literature exists; however, some of that previous research should be interpreted cautiously due to design flaws (Ku, 2011). Meanwhile, many traits, values, and patterns of grandparenting are crucially influenced by distinct cultural environments. Therefore, when reviewing previous studies on grandparenting, one should be careful about socio-cultural difference.

With the consideration of the above factors, the remainder of this chapter will be divided into three substantial sections. In the first section (2.1), I will review the research on grandparenting and grandparenthood in general. It includes studies on the typology of grandparents (2.1.1), which will be discussed further in Chapter 5 of this study. Then, I'll discuss research on the trend of grandparenting and its causes (2.1.2) as well as the demographic changes associated with grandparenthood (2.1.3). In 2.1.4, I will discuss studies on the gender contexts of grandparenting, which is extremely relevant to this study, as patriarchy has had a profound effect on Chinese society. The study's foundation is built on an understanding of how and why sociocultural context is critical for understanding grandparenting. Therefore, 2.1.5 reviews studies about the influence of sociocultural context on grandparenting. Due to the fact that the cost and benefits of grandparenting are a hot topic in this area, I summarise studies on the subject in 2.1.6 and lay the groundwork for Chapter 6. Finally, I will briefly discuss caregiving theories to lay a conceptual groundwork to explore grandparenting.

The chapter's second section (2.2) focuses exclusively on grandparenting in China, providing an overview of studies that examined it in the context of the Chinese urbanisation process (2.2.1). It also covers family studies that mentioned grandparenting (2.2.2) and summarises the inconsistent findings regarding the impact on grandparents in China (2.2.3).

Following a review of the literature from multiple perspectives, the third section (2.3) of the chapter describes the socio-cultural context of the study. It introduces the demographic context (2.3.1) of contemporary
China, which is shaped by population processes as well as state policies. 2.3.2 then discusses the study's cultural context, emphasising the traditional close connections between state and family, and the ideal intergenerational relationship in Chinese culture, which has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism and its modern manifestations. Finally, the last section of the chapter (2.3.3) talks about the social and policy context for grandparenting, with a focus on the hukou system and elder care in rural China.

2.1 Research on grandparenting

2.1.1 Grandparenting and its categories

To better understand the function, operation, and impact of grandparenting, clarifying the role of grandparents and the definition of grandparenting is necessary. Intergenerational interaction between grandparents and grandchildren is a relatively new topic. There were limited studies in this area until the 1990s, even though gerontologists, especially American gerontologists, had studied grandparenthood for a long time (Grinstead et al., 2003; Minkler et al., 1992). Some American researchers claim that before the increasing existence of family crises such as substance abuse and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, grandparents were not engaged in the rearing of grandchildren (Serevino et al. 1986). Traditionally, grandparents in some Western cultures were more peripheral to adult children’s family lives and can only be supportive as an external force. Unlike the parental surrogacy role, grandparents only monitor adult children’s family functions and intervene when necessary (Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964; Musil, 1998). However, once there is some family crisis such as substance abuse, parental abuse, or serious diseases emerging in the children’s parents, grandparents, especially grandmothers, would adopt those parents’ roles and become primary caregivers of their grandchildren (Burton, 1992; Minkler et al., 1992). Early research in the United States mainly focused on grandparent caregivers whose adult children had serious problems such as drug abuse and addiction (Burton, 1992; Minkler and Roc, 1993; Seamon, 1992), incarceration (Dressel and Barnhill, 1994), and other circumstances such as physical and mental illness (Schable et al., 1995), child neglect or abuse. Szinovacz (1998a) summarises three research themes for grandparent research in the 1990s, the first being what is discussed here—grandparents rescuing the family. Another two themes Szinovacz introduced are grandparents’ role in parenting and the consequences on
extended-family structures during the grandparenting process, which this study will also explore in Chapter 4.

With the increasing prevalence of grandparenting, early researchers started to explore the different types of grandparents. Although grandparenting is commonly understood as grandparents providing care for grandchildren, caregiving is not the only work for grandparents. According to Neugarten and Weinstein (1964), grandparents can play four types of roles: "fun seekers" who play with grandchildren for pleasure; "formal carers" who provide daily care; "reservoirs of family wisdom" who share family stories and spirit with the offspring; and "surrogate parents" who function as the parents of children. A pioneer in the study of grandparenting, Jendrek (1993), proposed three categories of grandparent caregivers based on a sample of 114 grandparents: custodial grandparents who lived with their grandchildren, noncustodial but co-resident grandparent caregivers, and grandparents who provided day care, indicating that grandparent caregiving ranged from full-time to occasional care. Many subsequent studies (Musil, 1998; Orb and Davey, 2005) have accepted these three categories as generally applicable.

Jendrek (1995) also identified the grandparents’ caregiving via court orders or decisions as legal custody, which is formal, and the grandparent's caregiving based on co-residence as physical custody, which is informal. Custodial grandparents are in charge of daytime care and have the authority to make important decisions regarding their grandchildren's education and medical care (Jendrek, 1994). Based on the caregiving workload, Fuller-Thomson and Minkler (2001) developed four categories for grandparent caregivers: primary caregivers (custodial grandparents), extensive caregivers (grandparents who provide a significant proportion of their grandchildren’s care but are not custodial grandparents), intermediate caregivers, and occasional caregivers. In recent years, it has become common to associate grandparenting and grandparents’ roles with their function. Grandparenting is viewed as a way for grandparents to act as "child savers" and "mother savers" when their adult children are unable to care for their grandchildren (Herlofson and Hagestad, 2012). Meanwhile, researchers have observed that in some societies, grandparents gradually become a critical source of information for younger family generations, serving as "family maximisers" (Baker and Silverstein, 2012).

Although systematic categories of grandparent caregivers exist, previous studies on grandparenting related topics draw mainly from Western
The definition of grandparenting and the categories of grandparent caregivers are commonly based on the U.S. or European context, even though the grandparenting circumstances vary in different regions. Due to this, in chapter 5, the study creates a new category for grandparents in rural China, based on the transformation of the family structure and an individual’s ideology. By doing so, the study contributes to the field by providing a new framework to understand the heterogeneity of grandparents and grandparenting in rural China and in other similar societies.

2.1.2 Trend of grandparenting and its causes

It has been noted that grandparents are increasingly becoming the major carers for their grandchildren globally during the last several decades (Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005; Orb and Davey, 2005). Researchers also identified many factors that may contribute to this trend. One crucial demographic change related to the prevalence of grandparenting is increased life expectancy, which allows more and more people to live to be grandparents and have a longer grandparenthood (Chen and Liu, 2011; Szinovacz, 1998b). The global life expectancy at birth in 2015 was 71.4 years, while in 1970 it was only 58.4 years (Wang et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2016). Additionally, the decreased mortality rate among infants and the reduction in fertility in recent years have shrunk the younger generation among families (Ribe, 2018; Szinovacz, 1998b). Researchers indicate that the reduction in the total fertility rate, sometimes even below the replacement level, is an inevitable fertility transition that every successful developing country must experience as a prerequisite for successful development (Galor, 2005; Strulik and Vollmer, 2015). Those demographic changes, therefore, impact the family structure across two dimensions. First, regarding the vertical dimension, more generations are now alive at a single time point among families. Three or even four generations coexisting in a family for a long period is much more common than at any other time in history (Ribe, 2018). Secondly, the number of children in younger generations has shrunk, referred to as the horizontal dimension (Connidis and Barnett, 2018). Increased life expectancy and the decreased fertility rate led to the verticalisation of today’s families and formed "beanpole families", a term referring to the vertical expansion and the horizontal shrinkage of families (George and Gold, 1991). This shift in family structure also affects the intergenerational engagement between grandparents and
grandchildren. Uhlenberg and Hammill (1998) pointed out that the number of grandchildren does influence the likelihood of frequent intergenerational contact. When the number of grandchildren increases, grandparents are less likely to have frequent contact with any particular grandchild. Therefore, the small pool of grandchildren allows grandparents to increase their support for the grandchildren (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1992).

Another factor related to the increase in grandparenting is female labour force participation (Hank and Buber, 2009; Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez, 2013). Childrearing is both labour- and time-intensive. Meanwhile, formal childcare costs have continued to rise in some countries, such as the United Kingdom, and the United States (Rutter and Stocker, 2014; Laughlin, 2010). When children's mothers work, grandparents, particularly grandmothers, gradually become informal caregivers to their grandchildren (Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez, 2013; Hank and Buber, 2009). Reciprocally, the study of Posadas and Vidal-Fernandez (2013) shows that grandparental childcare availability plays a crucial determinant role in mothers’ labour force participation.

Research suggests the increasing prevalence of grandparent caregiving is caused by the significant increase in social issues such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, the abandonment and negligence of grandchildren, or other problems that may affect parents’ capability to take care of their children (Hank and Buber, 2009). As family "rescuers," who play a supportive role in family life by assisting younger generations from various crises, grandparents become an important resource for family members once they need childcare (Ribe, 2018). This rescue represents the grandparent’s sense of responsibility and the recognition of moral obligations. However, this obligation is not looking after grandchildren but providing emergent assistance to adult children when in need.

Besides those common factors, previous studies also identified socio-cultural specific causes that relate to the prevalence of grandparenting in some societies. For instance, the disappearance of the middle generation caused by the epidemic of HIV/AIDS may lead to the rise of grandparenting in Sub-Saharan Africa (Oduaran and Oduaran, 2010). Meanwhile, cultural factors are also crucial in driving grandparenting, which will be discussed later. But now, the study would turn to the demographic characteristics of grandparenthood first, as they can be seen as a background for the shifting socio-cultural factors.
2.1.3 The demographic change of grandparenthood

One common way for early-stage studies to estimate grandparenthood’s prevalence and demographic characteristics was by using census data. However, some researchers point out the limitation of using the census as it cannot show the whole picture of grandparenthood and grandparenting. Grandparenthood is not a simple life stage for one generation. It involves three generations and is influenced by the structure of and the behavioural dispositions within families (Margolis, 2016; Szinovacz, 1998b). Szinovacz(1998b), therefore, indicates that grandparenthood, as a reflection of complex generational interactivity within families, cannot be simply examined and interpreted by census reports, which would potentially underestimate this phenomenon. Another limitation of early-stage studies is the use of non-representative data or simulation methods due to the scarcity of large-scale representative data at the time. Due to the lack of representative data, researchers have to focus exclusively on some particular subgroups of grandparents, such as grandparents of teenagers or adolescents (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1986), and grandparents of adult grandchildren (Bengtson and Harootyan, 1994).

Generally speaking, research that has addressed the demography of grandparenthood focuses on two aspects: the age at beginning grandparenthood and the length of grandparenthood. In the 1980s and 1990s, several researchers attempted to use representative data to estimate the average age when people start to experience grandparenthood and found that people usually start grandparenthood in their 50s (Sprey and Matthews, 1982; Szinovacz, 1998b). Leopold and Skopek (2015a) conducted a comparative study based on data from the United States and 24 European countries and found out the timing of grandparenthood and the length of the grandparent stage of life in those countries separately. Their study indicates that the timing of grandparenthood varies a lot across countries and the length of it is more related to the fertility rate than mortality.

Some research also focuses on the change at the beginning of grandparenthood. For example, Sprey and Matthews (1982) indicate that there was no significant change in the starting age of grandparenthood in the 20th century in the United States. Leopold and Skopek (2015b) find a delay in grandparenthood in Germany based on a large-scale survey in
2010. Regarding the length of grandparenthood, it is relatively difficult for researchers to calculate it for the current cohort since the mortality rate of this cohort is presently unknown (Margolis, 2016). Based on data from Canada in 1985 and 2011, Margolis (2016) estimated the length of grandparenthood for Canadian grandparents and found the average length of grandparenthood increased from 17.0 years to 18.9 years.

Increased life expectancy and the decreasing mortality rate not only result in demographic changes in grandparenthood but also lead to population ageing and its consequences. Additionally, the postponement of grandparenthood has increased the overlap between grandparenthood and later life, decreasing the proportion of free time among the elderly. As researchers have already indicated that ageing increases the risk of many physical and mental disorders such as diabetes, depression, and dementia (WHO, 2015), the relationship between grandparenting and grandparents' chronic diseases has been studied by many researchers (e.g., Celdran et al., 2012; Werner and Lowenstein, 2001). Research on grandparenting and grandparenthood also frequently takes gender context into account, as we see below.

2.1.4 Gender contexts of grandparenting

A clear division of labour has developed based on patrilineal and patriarchal cultures in many Western and East Asian cultures. Females, for example, have traditionally been in charge of things like housekeeping and childcare in Chinese culture, while men are expected to make money for the family (Lou, 2011; Xu, 2018a). This division of labour has also been carried over into grandparenting, as the number of grandmother caregivers is much greater than that of grandfather caregivers in many countries, such as the United States (Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997), China (Burnette, 1997; Dressel and Barnhill, 1994; Chen et al., 2011), and most European countries (Glaser et al., 2013).

In the 1980s and 90s, some research on grandparenthood or grandparent caregiving only focused on grandmothers, instead of all grandparents. Baydar and Brooks-Gunn (1998) provide an empirical typology of grandmothers with four categories based on a series of demographic characteristics. Musil’s study (1998) about the stress and health status of grandmother caregivers is based on a sample size of 90 grandmothers, and although it might not be representative due to the comparatively small sample size, it nonetheless sheds light on the impacts of grandparent caregiving. Other early studies about grandmothers or
grandmother caregiving also focus on the economic aspect of grandmother caregiving (Presser, 1989) and the different levels of grandmother caregiving (Bowers and Myers, 1999). On the other hand, grandfathers as caregivers, as a comparatively rare phenomenon, are comparatively understudied (Kolomer and McCallion, 2005; Tarrant, 2010). Early studies tend to exclude grandfather caregivers because of an assumption that grandfathers are less interested and involved in family life than grandmothers (Harper, 2005).

The gendered norm of grandparenting implies that there is some difference between grandmothers and grandfathers regarding intergenerational engagement. Two studies based in the United States stress that intensive childcare is related to more serious depressive symptoms in grandmother caregivers when compared with grandfather caregivers (Blustein et al., 2004; Szinovacz et al., 1999). A study in Europe indicates a positive association between grandparent caregiving and physical health status only for grandmother caregivers, not for grandfathers (Di Gessa et al., 2016). In China, grandfather caregivers experienced a faster self-rated health decline than grandmothers after providing intensive caregiving services for their grandchildren (Chen and Liu, 2012). Another study in China indicates that the role of grandfathers in the caregiving process is different from that of grandmothers: Instead of feeding, bathing, or dressing, grandfather caregivers are more likely to become fun-seekers or playmates (Lo and Liu, 2009). Patriarchy and gender inequality are pervasive factors that can be observed throughout the grandparenting process. With the recognition of this gender context, section 7.2.4 of the study discusses how patriarchy and gender norms affect grandparenting in rural China.

Grandparenthood is a life course stage, and grandparenting is seen as a fundamental personal and social role (Thiele and Whelan, 2006). This role, however, is culturally relevant and can be shaped by the particular socio-cultural context (Hermalin et al., 1998; Szinovacz, 1998a). Thus, when examining and studying the grandparenting phenomenon, many researchers explore grandparenting in particular socio-cultural contexts and discuss the interconnection between those contexts and grandparenting activity.

### 2.1.5 Grandparenting in a socio-cultural context

Previous studies in the United States chiefly focused on specific minority ethnic groups, especially when exploring the impacts of grandparenting,
due to the socio-cultural context and its effects. Regarding the African-American grandparent caregiver group, which is often related to a vulnerable economic situation, a large proportion of them face a lack of public assistance (Minkler and Fuller-Thomson, 2005) and experience a clinically significant level of stress (Kelly, 1993; Musil, 1998; Ross and Aday, 2006). Researchers are also interested in the grandparenting phenomenon among Latinos and point out that ethnic values and identity, as well as the language barrier, result in particular difficulties for Latino grandparent caregivers in accessing social services (Burnette, 1999a; Zambrana, 1995). However, most Latino grandparent caregivers receive frequent visits and some assistance for childrearing, which might be explained by their culture (Brunette, 2000). Despite cultural context often considered when researching grandparenting, many studies in the second half of the 20th century also pointed out that clear cultural guidelines for modern grandparenting did not exist (Herlofson and Hagestad, 2012).

Though no concrete norms exist, some patterns in the function and role of grandparenting can be observed, all of them deeply related to the socio-cultural context. For example, in the United States and some other Western cultures, the emphasis on individual autonomy means grandparents are not expected to intervene deeply in their grandchildren’s lives unless there are crises or special needs (Bengtson, 2001). Therefore, one common role that American grandparent caregivers play is that of "child savers," as their interventions usually happen when there is some crisis in the middle generation (Baker and Silverstein, 2012; Herlofson and Hagestad, 2012).

On the other hand, the increase in skipped-generation families and the "child savers" in Africa over the last few decades is the result of the growing number of people affected by HIV and AIDS (Ice et al., 2012; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2018). Based on African culture, grandparents are expected to provide care for their grandchildren, and multigenerational households, or extended families, are common in sub-Saharan Africa (Ice et al. 2012; Oduaran and Oduaran 2010). Additionally, the skipped-generation household existed in sub-Saharan Africa before the AIDS epidemic due to the high rates of labour migration (Zimmer and Dayton, 2005). Therefore, the role of "child savers" in Africa is not the same as in the United States. Ice and her colleagues (2012) indicate that even though Kenyan Luo grandparent caregivers have a higher perceived level of stress, there is no significant connection between caregiving and the
biomarkers of stress. This result, according to Ice and her colleagues (2012), can be explained by the traditional culture of Africa.

In contrast to the United States, describing grandparent caregivers as "child savers" is comparatively rare in the European context (Herlofson and Hagestad, 2012). In contrast, the phrase "mother saver" is more common in some European research (Tobio, 2007; McNally et al., 2014). The motivation for European grandparents to provide care for their grandchildren is more likely to enable young women to work and combine motherhood and employment (Hank and Buber, 2009). Some researchers view "mother savers" as a substitute for the inadequacy of public-fund childcare or a response to the rise in single-parent families and increasing divorce rates (Baker and Silverstein 2012). Therefore, they pointed out that "mother savers" mainly exist in countries with a comparatively weak public childcare system. Meanwhile, globalisation and the increased employment of females as a result of economic shifts have increased the prevalence of "mother savers" (Arber and Timonen 2012).

All in all, examining grandparenting requires researchers to consider the socio-cultural context (Hermalin et al., 1998; Szinovacz, 1998a), as the role, function, and impact of grandparenting vary among various countries and cultures (Ice et al., 2012). Regarding grandparenting in East Asian countries, viewing it from an East Asian perspective is necessary. The ideal role of grandparents in a traditional Asian family is the family authority and centre of intergenerational family relationships (Strom et al., 1999; Brian and Logan, 2001). Meanwhile, the co-residential tradition and emphasis on filial piety are two significant factors that researchers often highlight (Chen et al., 2011; Baker and Silverstein, 2012). While drastic development and demographic shifts have changed some traditional values, including filial piety and intergenerational relationships in Asia (Brian and Logan, 2001), examining grandparenting from both traditional and modern perspectives is required. Since this study focuses on grandparents and grandparenting in China, more details and background on this context will be discussed later.

2.1.6 The cost and benefit of grandparenting

In a critical literature review, Hayslip and Kaminski (2005) summarise five salient issues in the literature on custodial grandparenting, and the first is the cost and benefits of grandparent caregivers. Another systematic literature review indicates that a considerable number of
studies have focused on the impact of grandparent caregiving on grandparents’ health, both mental and physical (Grinstead et al., 2003). However, the results of those studies are inconsistent (Grinstead et al., 2003; Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005; Hank et al., 2018).

Numerous researchers have concluded that caring for grandchildren can have a detrimental effect on grandparents’ physical and mental health (Burnette, 1999a; Burton, 1992; Dowdell, 1995; Minkler and Fuller-Thompson, 1999; Musil and Ahmad, 2002; Musil et al., 2009; Brunello and Rocco, 2019). Experiencing more stress (Kelley, 1993; Musil and Ahmad, 2002; Musil et al., 2010), reporting worse physical health (Haglund, 2000; Leder et al., 2003; Musil et al., 2010; Komonpaisarn and Loichinger, 2019), feeling exhausted (Jendrek, 1993; Waldrop and Weber, 2001) and reporting more depressive symptoms (Minkler et al., 1997; Musil and Ahmad, 2002; Musil et al., 2010; Li et al., 2021) are common negative impacts of grandparenting caregiving experienced by grandparents. The stress that grandparent-caregivers suffer might lead to a decline in the emotional well-being of grandparents (Szinovacz et al., 1999; Waldrop, 2004). Some studies also indicate that grandparent caregivers are socially isolated from peers (Dowdell, 1995; Kelly, 1993), especially grandparents of autistic children (Hillman and Anderson, 2019), and social isolation is a predictor of psychological distress in grandparent caregivers (Kelly, 1993). Some researchers point out that switching to higher levels of caregiving or providing intensive care is related to worsening physical health and more stress (Musil et al., 2010).

One common models that early researchers used is Pearlin’s stress process model, which proposes that caregiving is a stressor for caregivers, therefore resulting in psychological distress and even declining physical health (Pearlin, 1989; Pearlin et al., 1990). Pearlin and his colleagues (1990) further indicate that in addition to the hardships and problems directly associated with caregiving (usually known as a primary stressor), secondary role strains might be developed when there are conflicts between caregiving responsibilities and other family roles.

In addition to the health impacts, grandparenting might also influence grandparents negatively in other ways. Several studies find a decline in marital satisfaction among custodial grandparent caregivers compared to grandparents who only provide day-care. This is due to more arguing, tension, and less privacy and sexual activity during the grandparenting process (Bowers and Myers, 1999; Jendrek, 1993; Wang and Mutchler, 2020). In order to take care of grandchildren, some grandmothers have to
give up paid work, which then removes income and other intangible benefits of employment (Musil et al., 2000). Meanwhile, grandparents often report a lack of access to financial resources and insufficient funds to meet their needs (Kelly, 1993; Burnette, 1999a). Due to the time conflicts or financial issues caused by grandparenting, grandparent caregivers sometimes delay or give up seeking health care (Haglund, 2000). Grandparent caregivers may also have disagreements with or be disappointed by their adult children. Grandmother caregivers have the most intrafamily strain, which may get worse when the grandmother starts to provide more care (Wohl et al., 2003).

The predictors, mediators, and buffers of the negative effects of grandparenting have also been investigated. A study focused on grandmother caregivers in skipped-generation families (n=102) indicates that family resources, social support, and physical health of grandmothers influence the psychological distress grandmothers experience during grandparenting (Kelly et al., 2000), which is consistent with previous studies (Pearlin et al., 1990). Studies that focus on the social support and resources of grandparents find that grandparents who are raising children with special needs or caring for multiple grandchildren receive less support compared to those caring for only one child or raising healthy grandchildren (Dowdell, 1993; Emick and Hayslip 1999). It is shown by several studies that both formal and informal social connections can buffer the psychological distress of grandparent caregivers (Kelly, 1993; Kelly et al., 2000; Sands and Goldberg-Glen, 2000). Meanwhile, social support has been examined by researchers as a potential element in coping with grandparenting stress (Ku, 2011). Generally speaking, receiving social support improves the mental health of grandparents (Kelly et al., 2000; Jang and Tang, 2016). However, there are also studies argue that having support groups is useless for decreasing the level of anxiety among grandparents (eg. Sands and Goldberg-Glen, 2000).

Although there are a large number of studies that find negative effects and plenty of costs associated with grandparenting, several researchers point out that grandparenting can bring positive impacts to grandparent caregivers. Based on a longitudinal survey in Europe, researchers found a positive connection between grandparenting and the health status of grandmother caregivers (Di Gessa et al., 2016). Longitudinal studies based in Taiwan reach the same conclusion that compared with non-caregivers, long-term grandparent caregivers have greater self-rated health, higher life satisfaction, and fewer depressive symptoms (Ku, 2011;
Another longitudinal study based on a nationally representative survey in the United States finds the same result, that instead of causing dramatic negative effects on grandmothers, grandparenting might improve their health (Hughes et al., 2007). Some grandparents believe that caring for their grandchildren is a healthier way of life that will benefit their physical health (Waldrop and Weber, 2001). Grandparenting is also able to lend purpose to life, which then benefits the mental health of caregivers (Burton, 1992; Jendrek, 1993; Coall and Herwig, 2011). Ku (2011) summarised that the distinction between studies finding negative and positive effects of grandparents is representativity; large population-based surveys with representative samples find positive outcomes. Additionally, some studies suggest that grandparenting lacks both statistically significant negative impacts and universally beneficial impacts on grandparents (Lo and Liu, 2009; Chen and Liu, 2012; Ice et al., 2012).

Overall, previous studies demonstrated an inconsistent results on the impacts of grandparenting. Regarding research design and methodologies, a large proportion of early quantitative studies, particularly in the United States, used cross-sectional study designs with comparatively small sample sizes and found negative impacts of grandparenting on grandparent caregivers (Burton, 1992; Kelley, 1993; Musil, 1998; Burnette, 1999a; Musil and Ahmad, 2002). However, cross-sectional studies cannot prove a causal link between grandparenting and the lower level of health. The poor health of grandparents could be the result of grandparenting, but it could also be a characteristic of grandparents that existed even before the grandparenting. On the other hand, improved health might be a result of grandparenting but can also be a reason for the elderly to become grandparent caregivers. While a considerable number of earlier studies in the United States claimed negative impacts of grandparenting, those results became less persuasive in light of their small sample sizes and cross-sectional design (Hughes et al., 2007; Ku, 2011). Recently, more and more studies on this topic have started to use longitudinal data and found that there is no severe harm in grandparenting (Chen and Liu, 2012; Hughes et al., 2007; Ku et al., 2013).

Another crucial factor in research design is sample selection, which can influence the establishment of causality between grandparenting and grandparents’ status, especially health status, in multiple ways. Some earlier studies in the United States only focused on specific ethnic groups, such as African-Americans or Latino-Americans, who are comparatively
vulnerable with typically low socio-economic status (Burton, 1992; Fuller-Thomason and Minkler, 1992; Burnette, 1999b; Haglund, 2000). Researchers that focused on the association between socioeconomic status and health, as well as the relationship between socioeconomic status and minority ethnicity, indicate that people living in poverty and people from minority racial groups are more vulnerable when facing health problems (Clark and Gibson, 1997). Therefore, research that only focuses on minority groups may be less reliable due to the lack of a control group. Meanwhile, some quantitative research studies did not have control groups to compare the status of grandparent caregivers with their non-caregiving peers (Fuller-Thomason and Minkler, 1992; Burnette, 1999b). Under these circumstances, the comparatively lower or higher level of health of grandparent caregivers that those studies found could be the result of caregiving or the endogenous character of the group. As mentioned above, grandparenting is a heavily culturally based phenomenon whose impacts are also profoundly influenced by cultural background. Therefore, the results the researchers found in a specific cultural context might not be reliable in other backgrounds, and results from different cultural contexts cannot be used directly in the target cultural context.

Besides, another group of studies mainly considered the role of grandparenting for children in special situations, such as children with high risk (Dowdell, 1995), children with substance-abusing parents (Minkler et al., 1992; Huglund, 2000), or children whose parents are incarcerated (Ruiz and Kopak, 2014). Without controlling for those factors, the conclusion that caregiving activities have a positive or negative influence in general is less persuasive (Musil et al., 2009).

As Ice and her colleagues (2012) pointed out that, while previous models are significant for us in examining how and to what extent the caregiving role might produce stress for grandparents, the socio-cultural context is another significant factor that needs to be considered. Aranda and Knight (1997) propose the Sociocultural Stress and Coping Model of Caregivers, which believes that ethnicity and culture are significant for caregivers in the stress and coping process and may even influence the outcome of the caregiving. Therefore, to examine grandparenting and its impacts in the Chinese context, studies need to focus on this specific socio-cultural and policy-related context.

### 2.1.7 A brief introduction of theories on caregiving
Grandparenting, as a type of caregiving, is often studied by researchers with theories of caregiving, especially due to the absence of specific theories or perspectives for it. As an interdisciplinary topic, theories and models from sociology and psychology are likely to be borrowed in order to explore the process and experience of caregiving (Ghosh et al., 2017).

Role theory is a fundamental sociological theory that researchers discuss and apply in their research on grandparenting caregiving (Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005; Dockery, 2020). In role theory, there are two major perspectives, called role occupancy theory and role quality theory, that are commonly used as guidance for research on how informal caregiver roles influence people’s subjective well-being (Ghosh et al., 2017). For role occupancy theory, which emphasises the number of roles an individual holds, there are two contraries, known as the scarcity/depletion hypothesis and the enhancement/enrichment hypothesis.

The scarcity/depletion hypothesis of role theory suggests that fulfilling role obligations with limited resources results in role strain and is commonly referred to when explaining the negative effects of grandparenting. Having multiple roles impacts individuals negatively and would result in psychological distress (Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977; Repetti et al., 1989; Komonpaisarn and Loichinger, 2019;). If demands from multiple roles overwhelm individuals, it will be maladaptive, and the new role could increase the competition with those existing roles (Brody, 1981). The enhancement/enrichment hypothesis, on the other hand, argues that having multiple social roles can increase one's sense of satisfaction, which can then have a protective effect on one's health, has frequently been used to explain the positive influence of grandparenting (Sieber, 1974; Moen et al., 1995). It is believed that the accumulation of roles brings four types of positive outcomes to individuals: “(1) role privileges, (2) overall status security, (3) resources for status enhancement, and (4) enrichment of the personality and ego gratification (Sieber, 1974, p.569).”

The second perspective within role theory, role quality, contends that it is the quality, not the number, of roles, that has a significant influence on people’s psychological well-being (Baruch and Barnett, 1985). Therefore, different roles might have different impacts on individuals (ibid).

In addition to the role theory, several models are also widely used in grandparenting research. The stress and coping model, developed by Pearlin and his colleagues, comes from the health sciences and postulates
that caregiving brings stress to caregivers, which then impacts well-being (Pearlin et al., 1990). Pearlin and colleagues (ibid) indicate that caregiver stress comes from several interrelated factors, including socio-economic characteristics, resources that caregivers have and two types of stressors caregivers are exposed to, categorised as primary stress and secondary stress. However, caregiving stress can also be mitigated by some moderating factors, such as coping strategies and social support. While this model was developed in Alzheimer’s care, it is widely used in caregiving research in the United States. In terms of cultural adaptation of the stress and coping model, some researchers discovered that it can be adapted in other cultural backgrounds (Ghosh et al., 2017), while others disagree (Ice et al., 2012).

Although the life course perspective is not a theory for caregiving specifically, researchers frequently use it in this area for both health-related and other types of care (Moen et al., 1995). As a multidisciplinary perspective, it borrows from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and demography to view and explain people’s status via a life-course lens whereby life is viewed longitudinally (Ghosh et al., 2017; Bengston and Allen, 2009). In contrast to the stress and coping model, the life course perspective does not regard caregiving as detrimental and stressful. Instead, it is just a normal part of people’s lives that may happen several times during their whole lifespan (Elder et al., 1996). The emphasis on historical time and space in the life course perspective allows researchers to understand how historical and demographic characteristics influence people's ideas, family size, intergenerational relationships, and the impacts of those factors on old-age caregivers (Elder, 1994). In addition to the stress and coping model and life course perspective, the strengths-resilience perspective (Sands et al., 2009) and life-span perspective (Hayslip anbd Patrick, 2003) are also used by researchers in grandparenting. How then are these and other concepts in studies of Chinese grandparenting?

2.2 Research on grandparenting in China

Grandparenting studies in China began in the 1990s and slowly increased after 2000. Since 2015, research in this field has increased significantly, which may be related to Xi Jinping’s (the Chinese president) emphasis on so-called traditional familial virtues and the construction of civilised families (Chen et al., 2021). In addition to studies targeting grandparenting, some research on family transformation also involves
grandparenting. By reviewing studies related to grandparenting in China, I identify two salient research topics: middle-range theories for explaining grandparenting; and the context-specific impacts of grandparenting.

2.2.1 Family sociology studies and grandparenting in peasant families

Grandparenting is frequently studied in family sociology studies that focus on family transitions and intergenerational interactions at the meso-level. As a result of urbanisation and modernisation, Chinese families have undergone a metamorphosis, which has been used to explain the widespread practice of grandparenting. Here, I will discuss two prominent notions and introduce one new theory concerning the changing multigenerational family and transforming intergenerational relationships, named "half-employed and half-farming family," (ban gong ban geng/ban gong ban nong) "intergenerational exploitation," (dai ji bo xue) and neo-familism, among other things.

"The half-employed and half-farming family" was first proposed by Philip Huang (2006) to illustrate how industrialisation influences rural society. Later, it was widely used in studies on peasant family transformation. This term accurately describes the structure and also the division of labour of many Chinese peasant families. In some studies, the "half-employed and half-farming families" are also known as "half-urban and half-rural families," as the middle generations are employed in urban areas while the older generations are still in their rural hometowns, farming and looking after the youngest generations (Yang and Wang, 2018). According to research, half-employed and half-farming families are a transitional form for peasant families to complete urbanisation (Chen, 2018). From the perspective of peasant families, research further indicates that in this new family form, the division of labour is no longer based on gender but generation (Yang and Wang, 2018). In this type of family, the elderly adjust their work to meet the needs of their adult children. While young females are more competitive in urban job markets, it is still difficult for many migrant parents to bring their children with them; therefore, childrearing has become a new task for grandparents, or a way for them to complete family obligations.

The structure and operation of entire peasant families are highlighted in studies on "the half-employed and half-farming family." As a result, while they frequently touch on grandparenting, grandparents' experiences
and interactions with other generations are rarely explored. Intergenerational exploitation, the second concept introduced here, partially addresses this research gap. When studying intergenerational interaction among three-generation households, researchers propose the idea of intergenerational exploitation. Noting that elderly peasants now have to spend almost all of their savings to help their adult sons get married and also need to be deeply involved in childrearing, researchers point out that today’s young peasants can use their marriage to extract resources from the older generation for their nuclear families’ development and urbanisation (Yang and Ouyang, 2013; Chen, 2014). From this perspective, grandparenting is a symptom of the exploitation of the elderly labour force. Many elderly peasants are forced to leave their jobs in the cities and return home to give care. This unpaid work will continue indefinitely until all children are independent or the elderly become dependent.

Intergenerational exploitation also demonstrates the collapse of parental authority and the rising power of the younger generation. Traditional filial piety and the upstream resource flow are replaced by the elderly's sacrifice. Based on those phenomena, Yan (2021) pointed out that current Chinese families are inverted. The conventional patriarchal hierarchy in Chinese families, which classified people according to generation and gender, is rapidly disintegrating, and a new descending familism is emerging (Yan, 2016). According to Yan, descending familism means that all emotional attachments and monetary resources flow downward to the youngest generation, and the purpose of life for the Chinese people has shifted away from "glorifying the ancestors" and toward "supporting the grandchildren" (Yan, 2021, p.8). On the basis of this concept, Yan (ibid) further argued that a new form of familism, dubbed "neo-familism," is gaining traction in China. Given that neo-familism is characterised by a concentration of resources on the youngest generations and a focus on children, some researchers regard the widespread practice of grandparenting in rural and urban China as a manifestation of neo-familism (Thimason, 2021; Qi, 2021). Under neo-familism, benefiting grandchildren through self-sacrifice and even suffering is an approach for grandparents to prove their worth and contribute to the family (Thimason, 2021). In an inverted family, family obligation flows downward, and the elder generations now manage their resources for the benefit of their descendants (Qi, 2021). While this study’s findings are not entirely consistent with the predictions of neo-familism, they do fit the theory’s
general direction. I will expand on this theory in later chapters when needed.

The above two concepts and one theory examine grandparenting in the family setting, along with other characteristics of family transition. Now, I move to an even more micro perspective and review two common explanatory models for grandparenting in rural China. These two models focus only on grandparenting activities and explain it using grandparents’ motivations.

It is usually assumed that familism has a significant impact on Chinese family values. Familism emphasises the importance of family and group interests. It is ethically created through a discourse on family members’ obligations and self-sacrifice, rather than on personal rights and interests (Garzon, 2000). Traditionally, familism in China is based on a seniority-gender hierarchy, with the elderly serving as moral models for other family members. Therefore, in the theory, if familistic grandparents believe their self-sacrifice can benefit the family interests, they are supposed to do so. In this case, it means familistic grandparents are supposed to over-exploit their own labour for childrearing for the collective good of the family.

Based on this, some scholars (e.g., Chen et al., 2011) point out that in China, both upstream and downstream intergenerational transfers are motivated by altruism and the belief in familism. Older individuals devote themselves to their offspring as a result of the emphasis on collective family interests (ibid). According to those researchers, rural families in today’s China have been moulded and modified from traditional extended families, and therefore should retain webs of interdependence that are present as the connections between family members at every stage of their lives. Therefore, grandparenting is a strategy for the elderly to practice familism and increase the family’s collective welfare and a way to generate intimacy amongst generations. Baker and Silverstein (2012) indicated that grandparent caregivers in rural China present a role that might be defined as "family maximiser."

When seeing an intergenerational family as an integrated multigenerational economic system within which resources are shared, those researchers find that grandparents in rural areas can free their adult children and enable them to work in cities by providing grandparenting. As a result, the total income and the economic potential of the whole family will be maximised by grandparenting, and all family members
benefit (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Cong and Silverstein, 2011; Baker and Silverstein, 2012). Compared with the "child saver" or "mother saver" types of grandparent caregiver in Western countries where grandparenting is an involuntary response to crisis or difficulties that adult children’s families face, the "family maximiser" type of grandparenting in rural China is more like a multigenerational coordinated strategy that aims to improve the collective finances and resources of the family (Baker and Silverstein, 2012). Grandparenting, in this view, is an intergenerational collaboration between grandparents and their adult children, with the grandparents carrying the burden due to their familism and altruism.

This model considers the Chinese cultural context and has some explanatory power. However, two points are unclear. Firstly, according to this familistic cooperation model, grandparents provide grandparenting due to their belief in familism and altruism. But are all grandparents with familism belief willing to be proactive in grandparenting? In fact, many familistic grandparents start their grandparenting work passively, only after required to by their adult children. Second, the model asserts that this multigenerational coordinated strategy aims to improve the family's collective interests and, as a result, can benefit all family members. But are grandparents still altruistic if they have a clear expectation of a better life after grandparenting? In addition, contrary to the model's description, I encountered many familistic grandparents in the field who had no hope for improved quality of life.

Having many similarities to this familistic cooperation model, some researchers call today’s three-generation families in rural China the "new three-generation family" and identify grandparenting as a means for the family to increase competitiveness (Yang and Wang, 2012). This type of family consists of married adult children from the post-1980 and post-1990 generations who are influenced by migration and urbanisation. It is "new" as it is commonly half-employment and half-farming, half-urban and half-rural. In some cases, new three-generation families consist of two independent households: the elderly couple’s household and their adult children’s household. Unlike the traditional multi-generation family, which only had one accounting unit and was controlled by the older generation, Yang and Wang (ibid) found that many adult children’s families have their own independent accounting units after "household division," which usually happens after marriage. Therefore, even though the intergenerational cooperation within new three-generation families is
based on traditional collectivism and the emphasis on family, the relationship between different generations and the allocation of power within families have changed.

According to Yang and Wang’s (ibid) study, intergenerational cooperation in new three-generation families is mainly motivated by fierce village competition. Chinese villages are known as "a society of acquaintance"," where communication and comparison are common and important for peasants. In the past, when China was in the collective economy stage, the gap between the poor and the rich in villages was not noticeable. However, since the 1980s, the situation has greatly changed. Nowadays, resource disparities have become more severe, and the gap between families has widened. Under these circumstances, Yang and Wang (2012) point out that intergenerational cooperation within the new three-generational family, especially grandparenting, is a rational choice for the middle generation to win the competition. They further predict that the more intense the competition is, the more intergenerational cooperation will happen within the family.

Unlike the above model, which generally views intergenerational families as a single integrated unit, the exchange model finds that grandparenting in rural areas is a "time-for-money" exchange between grandparents and their adult children who live in one household (Shi, 1993; Cong and Silverstein, 2008a). One important function of the family is the transfer of various resources between members (Franken et al., 2002). Because family is still the most important source of eldercare in rural China, monetary transfers from adult children are extremely valuable to the elderly (Silverstein et al., 2006). Meanwhile, the prevalence of grandparenting in rural China demonstrates that intergenerational support occurs both up- and down-stream of the child-parent relationship, even though ideally adult children are both morally and legally obligated to provide financial assistance to their ageing parents.

According to the "time-for-money" exchange model, grandparents decide to provide care for their left-behind grandchildren partially because they have an expectation of reciprocity and providing childcare can enhance the capacity of those adult children to offer more cash remittances (Agree

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1 Traditional Chinese rural villages are described by Fei Xiaotong as a "society of acquaintance" (shuren shehui), in which all members are acquainted with one another. According to Fei, in a traditional Chinese village, there are no total strangers because all villagers are extensively connected by various social relationships, and a village is a small area/community where people inevitably interact with one another frequently. This concept is well known and frequently cited in the following studies of rural China.
et al., 2002; Cong and Silverstein, 2011). Typically, cash remittances from migrant adult children to grandparents who care for grandchildren not only cover the costs of childrearing but also include a small sum to repay them for their time and effort. From the grandparents’ perspective, the additional funds they get serve as a form of payment for the childcare they provide. Additionally, since the elderly are dependent upon the middle generation, some studies view this transfer as a contract for additional eldercare from them (Luo, 2012). Among multigenerational families, this extra money is regarded as a form of "time-for-money" exchange, which has been witnessed not only in China but also in other Asian nations such as Indonesia and South Korea (Shi, 1993; Frankenberg et al., 2002).

The time-for-money reciprocity model has a strong connection to the framework of exchange theory, indicating that people are ready to maintain interpersonal symmetry and balance. Additionally, exchange theory believes that long-term one-way transfers may have a detrimental effect on people’s psychological well-being (Dowd, 1975). As people age, their ability to pay for their offspring diminishes. Caring for grandchildren enables the elderly to develop a sense of self-efficacy and decrease anxieties about impotence in independent interactions (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a). Meanwhile, seniors make "deposits" for childcare, ensuring that they can withdraw from their adult children in the event of a need for care or financial support (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a). According to some studies, giving childcare establishes expectations for return, even more so when the cost and expenditure of day-care are substantial (Cong and Silverstein, 2008; Luo, 2012).

In comparison to the cooperation model, which is based on the collective interests of families, the exchange model takes into account some novel phenomena, such as cash remittances from adult children to their parents and independent accounting units between the older generations and the young couples’ families, which makes the model more realistic. However, while filial piety and traditional family values have waned in recent years, their effect remains unmistakable. Also, this model cannot explain passive grandparenting and the intergenerational exploitation.

Grandparenting research in China follows the international trend of focusing on the influence of grandparenting. I will summarise three major points from studies on this subject.

2.2.2 The impacts of grandparenting on grandparents in China
To begin with, in terms of time, research on the effects of grandparenting on grandparents was scarce prior to the 2000s, before exploding since the 2010s. At an earlier stage, related studies mainly focused on intergenerational transfers and the financial benefits of grandparenting (Silverstein and Cong, 2006; Cong and Silverstein, 2008a, 2008b) and the effects of grandparenting on grandchildren (Chen et al., 2000), while the impacts on grandparents’ physical and mental health were ignored to some extent. In her PhD thesis, Ku (2011) concluded that until 2011, there was no published study that focused on the health of Chinese grandparent caregivers in either English or Chinese. Although this conclusion contains a flaw due to the fact that only a few studies have been conducted on the subject (e.g., Guo et al., 2008; Song et al., 2008), it demonstrates the paucity of research in this field.

Secondly, current studies cannot reach consistent conclusions regarding grandparenting's impacts on grandparents. This is partly because grandparenting and grandparents are complex and heterogeneous. The gender of grandparents and grandchildren, their rural-urban residence status, the intensity of caregiving, and intergenerational remittances all moderate the effects of grandparenting (Wang, 2018; Xu, 2018b; Zeng et al., 2020). Due to this complexity, the relationship between grandparenting and the grandparents' experience is not straightforward but can be curvilinear and vary according to sub-groups (Zeng et al., 2020; He et al., 2021). According to some studies, grandparenting is associated with improved self-rated health (Zhou et al., 2017), mental health (Xu, 2018b; Choi and Zhang, 2021), sense of satisfaction (Xu and Chi, 2011; Xu et al., 2012), and other positive factors in Chinese grandparents (Silverstein et al., 2006). On the other hand, some studies indicate that grandparenting is associated with a decline in grandparents' physical and mental health (Cheng et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021), cognitive capacity (Pan et al., 2020), and overall sense of satisfaction and quality of life (Xiao et al., 2021).

In addition to studies about mainland China, there are several studies focusing on grandparent caregivers in Taiwan (Chi, 2004; Ku, 2011; Ku et al., 2013; Liu, 2001; Peng, 2013). While some research finds that grandparent caregivers report a higher score for quality of life (Liu, 2001) or better self-reported health (Ku, 2011; Ku et al., 2013), grandparent caregivers in some research also reported a lower level of health status (Chi, 2004).
Thirdly, most studies on the impacts of grandparenting in China tend to apply quantitative methods to secondary datasets that are not specifically designed for the study. The commonly used dataset for these studies includes the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS) (Chen and Liu, 2011; Chen et al., 2012), the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) (Xu, 2018a; Wang, 2018; Wu, 2018; Zeng et al., 2020), and the Longitudinal Study of Older Adults in Anhui Province of China (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Cong and Silverstein, 2008b; Xu and Chi, 2018). Quantitative studies, which are based on positivism, seek to quantify and investigate the correlation and dependence between variables, typically without a value framework (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). While this type of research is generalizable and replicable, many previous quantitative studies place less emphasis on the perspectives of social actors and how they experience social processes. Furthermore, all the datasets that previous researchers used were not designed to examine grandparenting. Therefore, only relying on quantitative data analysis means researchers have to give up some specific factors or cultural characteristics (Ku, 2011). For instance, by conducting a six-month ethnographic study, Goh (2009) had a chance to communicate with grandparent caregivers directly about the sacrifice and benefits during the caregiving process with their personal feelings. This type of first-hand information is rare in other quantitative studies. Hence, I will examine the impact of grandparenting through the lens of grandparents' narratives in this study. Using a grandparent-cantered perspective, this study aims to investigate both the impact of grandparenting and its pathway, taking into account the Chinese socio-cultural context and the grandparent group's heterogeneity.

2.3 Setting the context
The complexity and heterogeneity of grandparenting partially relate to what and how different contexts have affected it. Due to this, many research studies are paying heed to the demographic, social, cultural, and policy-related contexts, applying a contextual approach to examine grandfamilies and grandparenting (Hayslip Jr et al., 2019). This section will give an overview of the demographic, sociocultural, and policy contexts of rural China's grandparenting, setting the stage for the next chapters.

2.3.1 Demographic background of grandparenting in China
As mentioned previously in this chapter, the increase in life expectancy and the decline in mortality and fertility rates are significant factors in the current global prevalence of grandparenting. China reports similar demographic trends.

China has been afflicted by constant wars, invasions, and extreme poverty for more than a century since the The First Opium War (1840 A.D)\textsuperscript{1}. The underdeveloped health service capacity and poor sanitation at the time all had a negative effect on the Chinese people's mortality rate and life expectancy. According to a WHO (2015) report, the overall mortality rate per 10,000 population was 22.2 in 1950, which then declined to 7.2 in 2015. When the PRC was founded in 1949, the average life expectancy in China was 35 years, which means that a large proportion of Chinese people never had the opportunity to experience grandparenthood, let alone grandparenting. Due to the rapid development and modernisation that occurred, particularly following the 1978 Chinese economic reform, this number has increased rapidly to 76.4 years (75 for males and 77.9 for females) in 2016 and is expected to reach approximately 80 years by 2050 (WHO, 2015; The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2017; WHO, 2018). The gap in life expectancy and the age difference between couples in China mean grandchildren are more likely to have living grandmothers than grandfathers.

While rising life expectancy enables an increasing number of Chinese to experience grandparenthood, the declining fertility rate reduces the number of grandchildren and creates more opportunities for deep intergenerational engagement (Uhlenberg and Kirby, 1998). Chinese women's total fertility rate has decreased from 6.11 in 1950 to 1.69 in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). While the decline in fertility is a global trend affecting numerous regions, the reasons for the decline are diverse. In contrast to developed Western countries, where declining fertility rates are a result of people's autonomous choices, China's precipitous decline in fertility is partially a result of the government's birth control.

The famous "one child policy," which was gradually implemented from 1978 until formally ended in 2015, exemplifies this (Ding and Hesketh, 2006; Hesketh et al., 2015). It is necessary to note that, while this policy is referred to as the "one child policy," it actually consists of a series of

\textsuperscript{1} Between 1839 and 1842, Britain and the Qing dynasty fought the First Opium War, also known as the Anglo-Chinese War or the Opium War. Chinese historians regard this war as a watershed moment in Chinese modern history, the start of China's modernisation, and the beginning of the semi-colonial period in China.
regulations limiting not only family size but also delaying marriage and childbearing. Meanwhile, the one child policy is implemented differently in different regions and according to different ethical standards. The one-child requirement is extremely strict for urban residents, particularly government employees. However, only about 30 percent of the Chinese population lives in cities. Rural residents were not subject to the one child policy as strictly because they were permitted to have a second child five years after the birth of the first child if the first child was female (Hesketh et al., 2005). This policy reflects rural China's strong son preference and contributed to an increase in the sex ratio (the reported ratio of male to female live births), which increased from 1.07 in 1980 to 1.16 in 2015 (United Nations, 2017). Certain ethnic minorities living in remote, undeveloped, and sparsely populated regions were permitted to have three children under the policy. As a result, while China's family planning policy is typically referred to as the "one child policy," exceptions are common. Apart from its effect on fertility rates and gender ratios, China's birth control policy had an effect on the elderly dependency ratio, family size and structure, and intergenerational relationships (Hesketh et al., 2005; Ding and Hesketh, 2006; Zhang and Goza, 2006).

Cherlin and Furstemberg (1986, p.28) summarise the impacts of changing mortality and fertility on grandparenting: "In past times, when the birth and death rates were high, grandparents were in relatively short supply. Today...grandchildren are in short supply." While this conclusion was for situations in the US, it also demonstrated the changing intergenerational demographic dynamics in China. For many Chinese, the younger generations are now more cherished than the elderly. For some grandparents, caring for their adult children's only child, or their adult children's only son, adds additional stress and burden. On the other hand, there are also grandparents who look after the grandchildren of various adult children. In those instances, the stress placed on grandparents by each child is significant, and the labour force of grandparents is in short supply.

### 2.3.2 The cultural context of grandparenting in China

According to Ice et al. (2012), grandparenting, which involves both older adults and children, is not only a form of intergenerational interaction but also a cultural embodiment of the family concept. Thus, in order to conduct a systematic review and gain a thorough understanding of grandparenting in rural China, it is necessary to discuss sociocultural
factors and contexts that reflect the cross-cultural heterogeneity of grandparents' roles (Chen et al., 2011). In this section, I will first discuss the cultural context of grandparenting from the perspectives of society, family, and individuals. Then, the social context in which modernisation and state-led policies operate will be discussed.

Culture significantly influences caregivers' motivation and coping strategies, as well as their utilisation of supports and resources (Knight and Sayegh, 2010). This significant impact can be achieved in a variety of ways, including through societal ideology, mainstream family values, and individual expectations. From a historical perspective, the mainstream ideology in society is inextricably linked to the concept, structure, and function of Chinese families (Mehta and Thang, 2012; Silverstein et al., 2006; Xie and Xia, 2011). It is widely believed that Confucianism and later Neo-Confucianism, the philosophies credited with shaping Chinese culture, had a profound influence on the traditional concept of family in China (Park and Chesla, 2007). Meanwhile, even though Confucianism has been the official philosophy of Ancient China since the Han Dynasty, other ideologies like Taoism and Buddhism have also been important in shaping Chinese culture.

The isomorphism of state and family (jia guo tong gou)

For a long period of time, China was a family-based society in which family and state were isomorphic (Shih, 2010). As Rappa and Tan (2003, p.93) concluded, "the family was the state in miniature, the state was the family written at large." This isomorphism is commonly expressed in two ways. In terms of structure, both Chinese families and traditional Chinese society were patriarchal. The state, according to Confucianism, is an extended family, and the relationship between officials and the state ruler resembles an intergenerational relationship (Zhou, 2011). As Confucius stated in his Analects, "there is government when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son (jun jun chen chen fu fu zi zi)" (Confucius and Waley, 1988, p.166). It emphasises the son's obligation to obey his father, just as the officials are expected to obey the prince. Meanwhile, according to the isomorphism of family and state, the family system's operation is inextricably linked to the overall social order.

An old saying from The Great Learning, a classic book that every intellectual in ancient China had to read, introduced the relationship between the family and the governance of the state as "those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to
align their households first refined their persons (yu zhi qi guo zhe, xian qi qi jia; yu qi qi jia zhe, xian xiu qi shen) \(^1\). The significant role of the family can also be shown in another old saying of Mencius: "The root of the kingdom is in the State. The root of the State is in the family. (tian xia zhi ben zai guo, guo zhi ben zai jia)\(^2\)". Families, or kinship unities, were viewed as part of China's general control system by the country's rulers historically. By moralising the harmony of the family and the fulfilment of family obligations, the rulers of China learned to domesticate families as the basis of the social pyramid and benefit their control of the state (Freedman, 1964).

Thus, in order to study the Chinese family, it is critical to understand the relationship between the family and the state, as well as the function of families for and their contribution to the state. For a long time, Chinese rulers have mastered the art of using the family as an effective governance tool, and the Chinese people have grown accustomed to using the family institution as an intermediary between the individual and the government.

**The traditional intergenerational relationship**

Within traditional Chinese families, the ideal intergenerational relationship can be defined as one between a filial son and kind parents, or as one in which "the father is affectionate and the son is dutiful" (fu ci zi xiao) (Shehan, 2016, p.1068). For the Chinese family system, a sense of filial piety and harmony is pervasive and vital (Lang, 1946; Tang, 2009). According to Ch’ien Mu, a renowned Chinese philosopher, Chinese culture is one of filial piety. This assertion is corroborated and expanded upon by two additional eminent historians, Xie Youwei and Liang Shuming (Liang, 2005). Confucianism's original filial virtues have complicated requirements for younger generations, including: parental care; no rebellion; showing love and respect; being well-mannered; ignoring and concealing parents' faults; and persistently, spontaneously, and cohesively mourning the death of parents (Lin, 1992). To summarise this Confucian core value, individuals should respect their parents and other senior citizens without rebellion and provide unconditional eldercare to their parents.

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\(^1\) This sentence comes from the first chapter of *The Great Learning*, which was written by Confucius and is treated as one of the most important classics of Confucianism. Please see below for the entire text: https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23422/Daxue-Zhongyong.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=2

\(^2\) For the entire text, please check: https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i/ens
As previously stated, filial piety has been compared to the relationship between citizens and their government (Wang, 2010). As a result, emperors have advocated filial piety and incorporated it into the legal system since the Han Dynasty, which also implied that people should observe unconditional obedience toward the state. In the past, older generations in China were unconcerned about eldercare because the entire society recognised the superiority of old age over youth and laws protected eldercare provided by their children. Additionally, in a three-generation family, the senior generation is always given precedence and is the most significant. A chapter from a classic book, The Twenty-Filial Exemplars, records an exemplary story called "Guo Ju Buried His Son for His Mother" (wei mu mai er), which tells the story of a man who planned to bury his son in order to save food for his mother during a famine. The story symbolises an ancient Chinese principle: parents always come first.

The concept of filial piety is not restricted to living individuals. Additionally, individuals must exhibit filial piety toward their ancestors, which is frequently manifested through ancestor worship and can serve to strengthen the authoritarian family (Lang, 1946). Through ancestor worship, Chinese people establish an emotional connection with their distant ancestors, as well as a connection with relatives and the entire patrilineal family line. Meanwhile, ancestor worship gives family affairs meaning. Taking care of family obligations is a way to console all ancestors. Once people have passed away, those who fulfilled their familial obligations will be worshipped by their descendants, and so individuals pursue self-achievement and self-fulfilment ethically. Thus, fulfilling family responsibilities becomes a life task concerned with the meaning and value of existence. Meanwhile, in ancient China, there were pieces of legislation that required clan-family members to assist one another. If adult children were unable to care for their elderly parents or nurture their young children, relatives in the clan-family were obligated to support and assist them. On the other hand, when individuals refused to care for their elderly parents, the entire clan-family and the local community would intervene. Since the Han Dynasty, the rulers of ancient China have also legalised filial piety ethics (Miao, 2015).

Therefore, the family, as society's fundamental unit, traditionally carried a sizable portion of the responsibility for child- and elder-care. Seniority and gender-based hierarchy shaped the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal nature of the traditional Chinese family system. Under the circumstances, everyone understood that the oldest male held the family's
leadership position. Even if the oldest male is incapable of regulating the family, he remains the nominal head of the family (Baker, 1979). In some families, the position of elderly females can be more complicated. The patriarchal family structure theoretically keeps females in a weak position throughout their lives. The Three Obediences and Four Virtues (san cong si de) are a set of moral requirements for traditional Chinese women, including obedience to their fathers prior to marriage, obedience to their husbands once married, and obedience to their sons after their husbands die (Gao, 2003). However, for women with sons, old age may confer some authority, particularly over their daughters-in-law (Baker, 1979). Meanwhile, female seniors also have worse financial status compared with their male peers. Because women lacked access to financial resources throughout their lives, they tended to have fewer savings and a greater reliance on their sons for support in old age (Nugent, 1985).

The attribution of family obligation also reflects the patriarchy of the Chinese family. Adult children, particularly sons, have a fundamental and obligatory responsibility to support and care for their parents (Kim and Park, 2000; Lang, 1946). As one of the most patriarchal family systems ever known, the traditional Chinese family system classified family members' roles and status according to their genders in a systematic manner (Greenhalgh, 1985). While male descendants were regarded as permanent members of the original family, female descendants were regarded as temporary members. Once married, the daughter ceased to be a member of her father's family and became a member of her husband's. As a result, sons have a long-term contractual relationship with their parents and are required to devote their entire lives to the original family. After marriage, daughters were not expected to support their natal families, and their primary family roles shifted from "daughter" to "wife," "mother," and "daughter-in-law" (Das Gupta and Li, 1999). In a traditional Chinese family, the gender division of labour was also evident. While men were expected to financially support the entire family through productive work outside the home, women were only permitted to work within the home and were excluded from the extra-domestic world. In terms of the intergenerational relationship, the son was expected to support the entire family, both the elderly and the young, but it was the son's wife who physically cared for the family and performed other routine care tasks.

The elderly were not simply recipients of services in traditional Chinese intergenerational relationships. They served as moral role models for their
descendants and served as the family's glue as head of the family (Liu et al., 2003). Apart from guiding the entire family with their experience and wisdom, the elderly were also expected to be "kind" to their descendants, reciprocating filial piety (Li, 2004). Parental kindness can be defined in multiple ways, including nurturing children, educating children with love, and arranging for their children's marriages (Xiao and Yao, 2018). This definition of kindness also applies to grandparents. That is the ideal intergenerational relationship, according to the ethic model of "filial sons and kind parents" (fu ci zi xiao).

Additionally, traditional Chinese families emphasised family-oriented collectivism, which was influenced by collectivism in Chinese society (Li et al., 2000). An example of this collectivism can be seen in the shared accounting unit and collective family wealth (Yang and Wang, 2018). As head of the family, the elderly, particularly the elderly males, had an obligation to devote themselves to advancing the family's collective interests. Thus, even though grandparents were rarely required to provide primary care for their grandchildren in the past (Secondi, 1997; Lo and Liu, 2009; Cong and Silverstein, 2012), they were traditionally involved in intergenerational engagement as educators and advisors (Thang, 2016).

Along with the "filial sons and kind parents" model, the Chinese elderly desired a multigenerational co-residential living arrangement (Chyi and Mao, 2011). The elderly are blessed by phrases such as "Four generations under one roof" (si shi tong tang) and "Surrounded by children and grandchildren" (er sun rao xi). This preference for living arrangements was consistent with the extended family structure prevalent in traditional Chinese society and created conditions conducive to filial piety fulfilment.

The change of intergenerational relationship
Over the last two centuries, China has been involved in constant wars, ideological revolutions, political reforms, social upheavals, and economic development, and has recently experienced rapid modernisation. Significant social change has also had a profound effect on the structure and function of the family. In terms of family structure, studies conducted at the turn of the twenty-first century concluded that the traditional Chinese extended family would gradually disintegrate into smaller, two-generation nuclear families (Sheng and Settles, 2006).

However, since the 2010s, studies have begun to argue that multigenerational families have persisted in China despite the fact that China's family size has decreased significantly. While the joint family,
which consists of parents, their unmarried children, their married sons, and their wives and children, has declined in popularity in rural China, the percentage of stem multigenerational family, which consists of parents, their unmarried children, and one married son with wife and children, has persisted (Huang, 2011; Yang and Wang, 2018). Notably, the persistence of the multigenerational family does not imply the continued existence of the previous family system. Many important aspects of the Chinese family have changed dramatically and profoundly (Yan, 2003).

Here, I would discuss two changes that have occurred in grandparenting: a shift in filial piety and the collapse of the old hierarchy based on gender-seniority. In China, one observed phenomenon is that older generations' belief in filial piety differs from younger generations' understanding of it (Wang, 2016). Although China has undergone social and cultural change since the late nineteenth century, the process of modernisation and industrialisation has been slow, particularly in rural areas, until the establishment of the PRC (Lang, 1964). Thus, for grandparents who were born prior to the cultural revolution, or even before the establishment of the PRC, it is unquestionably necessary to practice traditional filial piety when caring for their parents. They once had a strong belief in the traditional parental-child model, and that belief continues to influence them somewhat when it comes to intergenerational relationships (Wang et al., 2009).

Meanwhile, the state-led cultural shift that occurred following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, as well as rapid industrialization and modernization, weakened the foundation of filial piety. In the PRC, communist ideology rejected social hierarchy, including parental authority. Yeh and Bedford (2003) developed a dual filial piety model to conceptualise filial piety as two factors: reciprocity and authoritarianism. While reciprocal filial piety is founded on a long-standing close relationship between children and their parents, authoritarian filial piety is founded on the parents' absolute power, particularly the father. Older males have lost some of their absolute power and authority as a result of the suppression of Confucianism during the cultural revolution. As a result of this change, authoritarian filial piety decreased. This, combined with the dramatic economic growth that has occurred as a result of the "reform and opening up" policy, has the potential to transform the traditional intergenerational relationship into a commercial one (Yeh et al., 2013). Additionally, previous research indicates that economic
reforms have fundamentally altered Chinese families and eroded the social foundation for family care for the elderly (Leung, 1997; Sheng and Settles, 2013). One specific example is that, as a result of land collectivisation in rural areas, the older generation lost control of the family's primary resource, namely land, altering the basis of mutual support (Luo, 2012). The willingness and capacity of younger generations to provide eldercare are dwindling (Sheng and Settles, 2013). However, elderly people have expectations of filial piety and a requirement for family eldercare, resulting in a disconnect between expectations and reality.

The decline of filial piety and the intergenerational divide over how filial piety should be applied contributed to the collapse of the traditional intergenerational model. Yan (2021, p.1) noted two changes that occurred within Chinese peasant families: "the grandfather is turned into the grandson" (ye ye bian sun zi) and "the women have gone up to the sky" (fu nv shang le tian). With the loss of parental authority, younger generations now wield more influence and control over their families' resources. Meanwhile, females, particularly daughters-in-law, are gaining autonomy and voice, posing a threat to the traditional intergenerational labour division. While I will discuss it in greater detail later in the study, I want to emphasise two points here. To begin with, the loss of parental authority results in a crisis of high-quality family eldercare. Second, the rise in status of young women leads to a shift in caregiving responsibilities in multigenerational families. Then, what impact has governance had in the changing landscape of Chinese grandparenting?

2.3.3 The social and policy-related context of grandparenting

**Hukou System**

This study targets grandparenting happens in rural China and is relevant to both elder- and child-care systems in rural areas. One reason that the study only focuses on rural China is that the division between rural and urban areas is massive. It is, of course, the result of urbanisation and modernisation. But meanwhile, it is also heavily state-driven. A special household registration system, called the hukou system, makes a great contribution to that huge urban-rural gap. There is no doubt that hukou, the Chinese population registration system, has affected people in mainland China in multiple ways. In fact, it almost influences Chinese’ fates (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Cai, 2007).
The hukou system has its origins in both ancient China's population registration system and the Soviet passbook system (Cheng and Selden, 1994). After a few years' preparation, the People's Republic of China Hukou Registration Regulation was adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in 1958. The regulation required all Chinese citizens to register their hukou, and individuals were classified according to two factors: the location of the hukou registration, which also determines the citizen's official residence; and the type of registration, which is further classified as agricultural or non-agricultural. The hukou system has become "the most important institutional mechanism" for China's "profound rural-urban chasm" over the last 60 years because of the difference between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou (Chan, 2019, p. 1).

While China has had this system in place for more than 60 years, some studies divide it into two distinct phases (Chan, 2019). From 1958 to 1980, the PRC government followed the Soviet model and put a priority on heavy industry development in urban areas. To accomplish this, the state decided to create an "unequal exchange" between the agricultural and industrial sectors, syphoning resources away from rural areas for industrial capital accumulation and prioritising urban citizens' well-being (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Cai, 2007). The hukou system, then, is used to exert control over the population, particularly the rural population's mobility. During this time period, approximately 85 percent of the population was held in the agricultural or rural sector, and their primary function was to supply cheap raw materials, labour, and capital to the priority sector, the urban-industrial, in order for it to industrialise and modernise (Chan, 2019). Since the distribution of crucial goods and social services was monopolised by the state at that time, people who were not in their hukou registration place could hardly access necessities, let alone employment, unless they provided proper permissions and certifications. During that time period, migration from less developed to more developed areas was strictly regulated, but the reverse was not. It was extremely difficult to migrate from rural to urban areas, towns to cities, and small cities to large cities, while the government rationalised the opposite migration (Chan, 1999).

Since the 1980s, as the market economy has developed, urban and industrial sectors have tended to require a large labour force. Meanwhile, the de-collectivization of villages necessitated the reorganisation of a substantial surplus of rural labour. Under these conditions, the hukou
system has evolved and become more adaptable. Many Chinese with agricultural hukou have internally migrated, either with or without access to the destination's social welfare system and other benefits and rights (Chan, 2019). Indeed, labour migration is never a unique phenomenon, either globally or within a country. However, the hukou system and the distinctions between different types of hukou allowed many Chinese internal migrants to have restricted residential rights and access to limited public services and social welfare at their destination, which is uncommon in modern countries.

The current hukou system is complicated, as it incorporates state-level policies as well as hukou-related policies issued by various local governments (Song, 2014). To gain a better understanding of the hukou system's role in Chinese internal migration and its effects on grandparenting in rural China, I will further introduce two hukou system mechanisms: To begin with, the disparity between different hukou locations and agricultural and non-agricultural hukou; secondly, the conversion mechanism of hukou locations and types.

The hukou system's restrictions on citizens' mobility have been significantly loosened after a series of system reforms. However, the location and type of people's hukou continue to be relevant to their access to a variety of public services and welfare, such as public education, healthcare, social security coverage, and eldercare (Song, 2014; Chan, 2019). In general, every Chinese has an official and permanent residence, which is the location of their hukou registration, colloquially referred to as their hukou location. The location of one's hukou is commonly described by one's parents' hukou locations and cannot be easily changed. Meanwhile, hukou are divided into "agricultural" and "non-agricultural" categories. Thus, a person's hukou is either "agricultural" or "non-agricultural" in a particular location. When Chinese people internally migrate without changing their hukou locations, they are referred to as floating population or non-hukou migrants. Since many public services and social welfare systems are regionalized and available only to residents with a local hukou, non-hukou migrants and their family members are excluded from their migrant destinations, despite the fact that they have lived and worked there for an extended period of time (Song, 2014). In other words, the hukou location determines the eligibility for public services provided by the local government and further results in disparities between non-hukou migrants and those with local hukou.
At the same time, hukou-related public services and welfare benefits are dualistic regarding the agricultural and non-agricultural hukou types. Individuals with agricultural hukou are denied equal access to urban social services. In the late 1990s, numerous local urban governments adopted social welfare policies in order to address their residents' employment crisis and establish a basic social protection system. This system, which covers basic pensions, healthcare, and unemployment insurance, is not available to people with agricultural hukou (Cai, 2011). Additionally, people with agricultural hukou face widespread employment discrimination, and their agricultural hukou "functions as a maligned social label," implying lower socioeconomic status and a variety of stereotypical negative characteristics (Kuang and Liu, 2012). Since the late 1990s, a number of local governments have begun to phase out the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou. This change was finally formalised and implemented on a national scale in 2014 (Chan, 2019). As a result, the distinction between entitled welfare and benefits is more pertinent to the hukou location at the moment, even though discrimination against agricultural hukou continues.

Disparities between hukou locations and hukou types inevitably contribute to and exacerbate Chinese society's inequality. Along with the points made previously, researchers indicate that the hukou system has stifled social mobility for those with agricultural hukou (Chan, 2019), resulting in social stratification. In China, the hukou system is also associated with health stratification, with agricultural hukou being linked to poor mental health (Fu et al., 2018; Song and Smith, 2019). Additionally, there is widespread discrimination in the labour market based on hukou, including pre-market, hiring, and wage discrimination (Song, 2014).

Then a simple question comes to mind: how to change the hukou location and convert the hukou type? A physical move can never alter the location or type of a person's hukou. As a result, rural-urban migrants' hukou retain their original status unless they undergo a formal procedure for hukou conversion, which is typically regulated by local governments. There are no universally accepted criteria for hukou conversion. While converting from agricultural to non-agricultural hukou was once difficult, conversions in small cities and towns with limited local social welfare have become much easier in recent years (Chan, 2009; Chan, 2019). However, conversion of hukou is extremely difficult in popular internal
migration destinations, which are frequently large cities with employment opportunities and high-quality public services for people with local, urban hukou. The most common ways to complete the conversion are to pursue a higher education degree, work as a civil servant, join the army, or purchase a house (however, obtaining qualification for buying a house in large cities is also difficult), which are all seemingly impossible for peasant migrant workers.

For Chinese peasants, small cities offer few employment opportunities and few public services, while converting hukou to large cities is nearly impossible due to strict requirements, extremely limited annual quotas, and high living expenses. Thus, the hukou system can be viewed as a barrier to urbanisation for peasant families, resulting in a large number of "half-urban, half-rural" families. On the one hand, the hukou system's artificial inequality continues to motivate peasant labour to migrate in order to expedite family urbanisation. On the other hand, it impedes peasant urbanisation and results in a sizable left-behind population, leading to the prevalence of "half-urban, half-rural" families. Throughout the remainder of the study, I will demonstrate how the hukou system affects grandparents' decision-making and grandparenting behaviour.

Eldercare in rural China

Because grandparenting is so prevalent in rural China, people frequently overlook the fact that many grandparent caregivers should theoretically be care-recipients due to their age and health status. Eldercare is closely related to grandparenting. Academically, some studies used grandparents' eldercare plans to explain their grandparenting motivations, arguing grandparents do grandparenting for better eldercare (Kanji, 2018). In reality, numerous interviewees also discussed their expectations of eldercare and how they affect their grandparenting behaviours. As a result, I will provide an overview of eldercare in rural China.

Traditionally, elderly people in rural China were looked after by their children and extended family members. According to researchers, China's traditional family support system is composed of three lines: The first line of defence is for immediate family support, which is provided by co-resident family members in the same household; the second line of defence is for various social risks not covered by the first line; and the third and largest risk pooling institution is associated with kinship networks (Leisering et al., 2002). However, the decline in filial belief, combined with China's rapid social and economic development, has eroded the foundations and dynamics of the traditional family support
system for eldercare, especially for the kinship networks. The previous system of eldercare, which was entirely informal, is confronted with unprecedented challenges.

Following the establishment of the PRC, the urban-rural divide in elderly care became apparent and was institutionalised through a variety of policies, including hukou (Yu, 1995). During Mao's leadership, the attempt to establish people's communes resulted in rural China's temporary communal eldercare system. Since the 1980s, the family has again become the primary source of eldercare, supplemented by institutional and community-based care. In rural China, family-based care is dominant when it comes to eldercare, despite the fact that the family support system for the elderly is deteriorating (Song, 2001). Not only is the dominant role of family eldercare culturally ingrained, but it is also systematically externalised by law.

Article 5 of the People's Republic of China's Law on the Protection of the Elderly's Rights and Interests, as amended in 2012, states that, "The state shall establish and improve the social elderly care service system which is based on families and supported by communities and institutions." Again, Article 13 emphasises the importance of family care for the elderly, stating that "the elderly shall be provided mainly by their families, and their family members shall respect, care for, and look after them." Adult children are now legally required to provide eldercare to their parents. According to those articles, Chinese researchers predict that due to the state's support, family-based informal care will continue to be the primary type of elderly care for an extended period (Song, 2001; Zhong and Yang, 2016; Zhang, 2019).

While family eldercare ostensibly appears to be the continuation of traditional Chinese eldercare in rural China, the dynamics that underpin it are changing. Collectivism, filial piety, a small scale peasant economy, and an extended family structure all contributed to traditional family eldercare. All of these factors, however, have shifted as a result of state-led urbanisation and modernisation, affecting both the capacity and willingness of the young to care for the elderly, as well as establishing a new rationale and necessity for family eldercare (Leung, 2003). Apart from legal obligations, there are generally three explanations for family eldercare:

(1) the bargaining power model, which holds that elderly people can receive support for their children as long as they retain power or some resources in the family (Goode, 1963);
(2) the exchange model, which is based on trades between the older and younger generations (Cox, 1987; Morgan and Hirosima, 1983); and (3) the belief in altruism, which emphasises the importance of prosocial behaviours (Zimmer and Kwong, 2003). Each can partially explain family eldercare in today's rural China.

Meanwhile, demographic changes in rural China have exacerbated family stress associated with eldercare. Family size in rural China has begun to shrink as a result of birth control policies and the gradual decline of the small-scale peasant economy (Zimmer and Kwong, 2003). Historically, adult sons and their wives have assumed the majority of eldercare responsibilities. The declining number of sons within a generation has resulted in an increase in the burden of eldercare. While daughters-in-law were traditionally the primary caregivers for elderly adults, the migration of young females and an increasing divorce rate in rural China exacerbated the eldercare crisis. Additionally, rural China's unnaturally high sex ratio results in an excess of bachelors, who provide less financial and emotional support to their elderly parents than their married counterparts (Pan, 2018). In these circumstances, fears about the availability and quality of family eldercare spread among peasant elders. For some of them, multigenerational families' solidarity and the intergenerational relationships' stability have developed into potential safeguards for future eldercare.

Inadequate welfare system provisions and underdeveloped institutional care exacerbate grandparents' reliance on the frail system of family care. Researchers claim that, considering the capacity of the state, policymakers in China limited their focus to urban residents at the beginning of Chinese social security development (Luo, 2012; Smart and Smart, 2001). When the state was laying the groundwork for its social security system in the early 1950s, it intended to partner with state-owned firms to offer benefits to urban workers, while rural residents could only receive a source of old-age security through their land and family (Shi, 2006). This division contributes to family eldercare's high prevalence in rural China (Luo, 2012).

Until approximately 1990, rural areas were not covered by the formal social security system, and eldercare was primarily provided by families and informal support groups in villages. Since then, the Chinese government has been developing social security programmes such as the old-age pension and collective medical insurance for rural China. For instance, the pilot "Rural Social Pension Insurance System", also known
as the "Old Rural Social Pension Program," has been applied in some developed rural areas since 1986. However, according to Zhang and Chen (2014), the effectiveness of these programmes is limited and cannot completely replace the critical role of family support in elderly care.

In 2009, the state established the New Rural Pension Scheme (NRPS) (xin xing nong cun she huiyang lao bao xian) based on previous pilot programmes, in order to better assist elderly rural residents. The NRPS benefit is comprised of two components: a non-contributory (or basic) pension that varies according to local government; and an individual account that is based on individual contributions with a government-matched subsidy. However, the pension amount of the NRPS is insufficient for eldercare (Zhang et al., 2015; Zhang and Chen, 2014), and is insufficient to protect recipients from poverty, in light of rising prices (Tao, 2017). Along with the NRPS, there are a few institutional and community-based eldercare options. However, both institutional and community elder care services are deficient in rural areas, and their distribution is uneven and based on the local government's wealth (Zhang, 2015).

In summary, rural China's elderly are heavily dependent on adult children, particularly adult sons, for eldercare. While legislation protects this type of family eldercare, many elderly people remain concerned about its quality and even accessibility. On the other hand, the government is developing a rural social welfare network, which alleviates some of the pressure on family eldercare. However, family eldercare remains the primary source of care for the elderly with agricultural hukou, affecting grandparents' grandparenting decisions.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviews previous studies on grandparenthood and grandparenting and also sets the context for the study. In section 2.1, the chapter briefly goes through previous grandparenthood and grandparenting studies according to seven sub-attributes. Some of those sub-aspects, such as the demographic characteristics, are beneficial for better understanding grandparenting as both an academic topic and a social phenomenon. Some of the sub-topics, like the causes of grandparenting (relevant to chapter 4), how grandparents are categorised (relevant to chapter 5), and the cost and benefits of grandparenting
(relevant to chapter 6), are also important to the empirical chapters in the study.

In section 2.2, the chapter narrows down to studies on grandparenting in China, summarising several key concepts and models previous studies applied in explaining grandparenting in rural China. While this study does not apply one particular model in its entirety, it is deeply inspired by them and also replies to them with data.

After reviewing previous literature, section 2.3 introduces the social, cultural, and policy-related context of grandparenting in rural China, setting the macro scene for the study. It particularly focuses on the interconnection of the state, family, and individual, demonstrating how these three institutions are inextricably linked. The strengths and weaknesses of previous studies and theories influenced my own empirical approach. Therefore, we now turn to the methods I used to investigate rural grandparenting in contemporary China.
Chapter 3 Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in this study. In section 3.2, I discuss the research paradigm, as well as the reasons for using pragmatism and qualitative research methods. Section 3.3 discusses the design and implementation of data collection and analysis, including the selection of fieldwork settings, sampling and data collection methods, and data management and analysis. The chapter focuses on potential ethical concerns and coping strategies in section 3.4. In section 3.5, I reflect on the research and discuss how my positionality influenced it. Then, in section 3.6, I discussed the difficulties I encountered in the field and, and coping mechanisms I used during the fieldwork.

Research design is guided by research questions. It "has an important status as the linchpin of the research process" (Bryman, 2007, p.5). The study aims to answer three primary research questions:

What is the main driving force behind contemporary grandparents' activities in rural China?

What are the grandparenting patterns in rural China and how do they relate to the socio-cultural context?

What are the consequences of grandparenting for grandparents and the broader society?

The study will also discuss the function of grandparenting in rural China, moving from a macro to a micro level, by examining the above three questions. It aims to begin with grandparents' experience and voice in order to gain a more comprehensive perspective on this activity. This research aim determines the following research design.

3.2 Research paradigm

3.2.1 Pragmatism

Russell (2022) noted in the 1926 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica that, "This may seem surprising: at first sight, it might be thought that knowledge might be defined as belief which is in agreement with the facts. The trouble is that no one knows what a belief is, no one knows
what a fact is, and no one knows what sort of agreement between them would make a belief true." Giddens (1989, p.18) noted more than 50 years later that, "contrary to popular belief, 'facts' do not speak for themselves." To ascertaining the truth and communicate the facts, researchers must first develop an understanding of what constitutes truth, facts, and knowledge. Perspective, or how we perceive and explain the world around us, can influence our thinking, beliefs, and assumptions about both external society and our internal world. This is the paradigm within which social scientists operate (Schwandt, 2001).

Thus, once research questions have been established, it is necessary to select an appropriate paradigm for the study. In general, a paradigm is defined by two central concepts: the nature of social entities (referred to as ontology) and what constitutes knowledge and the manner in which knowledge is acquired (referred to as epistemology) (Blaikie, 2007; Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012; Bryman, 2016). The paradigm guides researchers in determining the most appropriate methods of systematic inquiry, or in other words, the methodology (Patton, 2002). The majority of prior research on grandparenting in rural China has been conducted without an explicit paradigm. However, given the quantitative nature of those studies, it is reasonable to assume that they are based on the belief that the world is knowable by causal reasoning, which implies they followed a strictly positivistic paradigm.

Unlike previous research in this field, this study's research design is guided by pragmatism. Introduced by Pierce (1878; 1905) and developed further by James (1907; reprinted in 1991) and Dewey (1917; 1920; 1929), pragmatism is a paradigm that focuses on the nature of truth, which is found in "what works" and is situation-dependent (McCaslin, 2008). As a problem-oriented worldview that places a premium on the questions asked rather than the methods used, pragmatism argues that limiting oneself to one ontology, epistemology, or axiology is implausible. Positions should be taken in light of the research questions (Ihuah and Eaton, 2013; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). Instead of involving contentious metaphysical concepts such as truth and reality, it admits that there can be one or more realities which can be empirically inquired into (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Thus, pragmatism is pluralistic, relying on "what works" to address research questions and resolve real-world problems, rather than on the dichotomous philosophical debate between the objective and subjective worlds (McCaslin, 2008; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).
Pragmatism's philosophical position is consistent with the origins of Western social work, which "might be viewed as rooted in efforts to apply the question "what works?" to Christian and socialist charitable endeavours in the nineteenth century" (Taylor, 2013, p.73). Both social work and pragmatism have a social problem-solving mission and are based on a person-in-environment perspective, which maintains that understanding people requires considering a variety of interactive aspects of environmental contexts (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Due to the mission of social work, it is not only an academic discipline but also a helping profession dedicated to providing effective interventions to assist individuals and improve their quality of life (Taylor, 2012). All in all, pragmatism is experience-based, action-oriented, and aims to assist in resolving practical issues concerning how we experience and understand world (Hothersall, 2019), and is suitable for social work study.

While I believe that the social world exists independently of my interpretation and understanding, this does not mean that what I understand and interpret based on subjective observations is not true. I argue that when I study the social world, I must take into account people's consciousness and worldview. For instance, this study set out to characterise and investigate grandparenting and intergenerational engagement in rural China. While the phenomenon is independent from my observation and understanding, it is intimately connected to contemporary China's family values, social structure, and sociocultural context, all of which are subjectively defined and profoundly influenced by human subjectivity. In other words, the subjective nature of humans and our society becomes an objective factor in the situation, which can be understood and examined through conscious reflections. Therefore, following pragmatism, I do not hold a clear distinction and preference between idealist and realist metaphysics. In Goles and Hirschheim’s (2000) study, they describe pragmatism as the middle position or dual position between positivism and interpretivism on ontology, where this study also stands.

Due to the complexity of truth, I argue that both quantitative and qualitative methods can assist researchers in learning more about reality, and that, rather than being mutually exclusive, these two sources of knowledge are complementary. While deductive strategies based on quantitative methods can provide relatively objective knowledge about the truth, I argue that interventions can also aid researchers in their quest for knowledge. As a result, I believe there are no epistemological
hierarchies or gaps between the various methods. Rather than that, the appropriate research strategy is determined by the research questions and objectives (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017).

The research questions in this study are exploratory in nature, meaning they are not primarily concerned with quantifying social phenomena. While the study's objective is to explore, describe, comprehend, and explain grandparenting in rural China, it required researchers to travel to the field and document grandparents' daily activities and interactions, as well as to use grandparents' perspectives and voices to gain a better understanding of grandparenting in a sociocultural context. As a result, the study relied heavily on qualitative methods. Meanwhile, the pragmatist paradigm does not preclude the study from incorporating additional data from previous quantitative studies and existing quantitative datasets. I now describe the qualitative methods employed.

### 3.2.2 Qualitative research strategies

The research questions and objectives define the research strategies. While the study's objective is to explore grandparenting through their eyes, it also seeks to describe and discuss the motivation, pattern, function, and influence of grandparenting in rural China. It inevitably requires the researcher to immerse herself in the field, observing and interacting with grandparents, who are the true experts. This requirement implies the implementation of qualitative research methods.

Meanwhile, as indicated in Chapter 2, previous research has established that grandparenting is culturally relevant and can be significantly influenced by the socio-cultural context in which it occurs (Hermalin et al., 1998; Szinovacz, 1998c). The concept, categories and patterns of grandparenting are social products that vary according to a variety of factors. Therefore, this study is influenced to some extent by social constructivism.

Social constructionism, which holds individuals to be integral to processes of cultural, political, and historical evolution (Galbin, 2014), enables exploring and understanding grandparenting in the face of cultural transformation, rapid urbanisation, and state-driven policies. This demonstrates that what we accept as true at a particular point in time cannot be divorced from the processes of power and their relationship to language. Foucault (1980, p.131) said,
Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function are true.

Therefore, this statement casts doubt on the existence of a single objective truth and thus prefers qualitative methods for delving into personal and socially shared constructions (Burr and Dick, 2017). Additionally, the emphasis on language implies the use of interviews to collect data.

Furthermore, grandparenting is not a solitary activity reserved for grandparents and grandchildren. While it is primarily concerned with grandparents and grandchildren, it connects entire multigenerational peasant families and even the entirety of Chinese society. As discussed in section 2.3.2, China was historically a family-centred society in which family and state were viewed as isomorphic. The Chinese family's structure and function have been profoundly shaped by the state, and the family value shares numerous similarities with the primary social value (Shih, 2010; Zhou, 2011). According to this perspective, the study situates grandparenting within the larger society-family-individual system in order to better understand the role and function of grandparenting. Apart from traditional family and state isomorphism, this perspective is influenced by functionalism, which emphasises the individual's role in ensuring the family's functioning and the family's role in ensuring the society's functioning (Kendall, 1999). As a result, the research strategy should ensure that the researcher has opportunities to participate in grandparenting activities within rural families. All these criteria necessitate the use of qualitative methods in the study.

“When we do scientific research, we strive for reasoned explanation, representational accuracy, and certainty. When we do art, we strive for arousal, vividness, and interpretive creativity. When we do qualitative research, we do science and art” (Daly, 2007, p.1). Qualitative research, as an inductive strategy, requires researchers to develop concepts, insights, and patterns precisely and creatively. It has accomplished this through the use of a variety of methodologies, including grounded theory, case studies, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative research (Petty et al., 2012). This study examines grandparenting in one socio-cultural context, rural China, and emphasises the daily experiences and voices of grandparents, which makes it suitable for an ethnographic approach.
Additionally, qualitative research encompasses a variety of data collection and analysis techniques, the most prevalent of which are interviews and observations (Jamshed, 2014; Petty et al., 2012). This study chose the tenets of ethnography as its methodology and applied semi-structured interviews and observations as data collection methods. As Goh (2009) points out in his study on grandparenting in Xiamen, China, interviews and observations obtained through an ethnographic approach can provide in-depth insight and knowledge into micro dynamics that cannot be obtained through a survey or a single interview without first understanding the setting. In a later section, more details of the research design will be introduced.

3.3 Designing and conducting ethnographic interviews and observations in rural China: data collection

3.3.1 Selection of three villages

Unlike other methods, where research hypotheses and procedures are fixed in advance, qualitative research allows for flexibility before and during the study process (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In these circumstances, decision-making becomes crucial in all steps, and each decision may profoundly influence the entire study.

When it comes to selecting fieldwork locations, there is a clear trade-off between breadth and depth of research (Hammerseley and Atkinson, 2019). The complexity and heterogeneity of rural China compel me to collect data from multiple villages. Meanwhile, the consideration of limited time, financial resources, and the difficulty of entering a village site impeded me from collecting data in various villages in different provinces. To strike a reasonable balance between these two objectives, I intended to conduct fieldwork in two villages located in distinct provinces. However, the beauty of qualitative research is that you never know what you're going to encounter in reality, and it's bound to surprise as well as frustrate you. In my case, I was pleasantly surprised to be offered the opportunity to enter a third field site and ultimately collect data from three villages in three different provinces.

Entering a rural Chinese village and completely immersing yourself in the culture is not an easy task. Due to the fact that rural China continues to be relation-oriented (Cui, 2015), researchers' pre-existing positions and relationships with local people can influence what they learn through
observation and interviews. Additionally, the Chinese make a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, and certain information is only shared with those they regard as "insiders." Indeed, family matters are one topic best discussed only among insiders. As the ancient maxims state, individuals should "protect inside information from outsiders" (nei wai you bie) and "domestic shame should not be published" (jia chou bu ke wai yang). As a result of this situation, gaining proper access to villages and gaining the trust of local grandparents was critical for the study's validity and reliability.

The study's first field location is Tea-Garden Village in Hunan province. The decision to conduct this study there was made even before I began my Ph.D. research journey, as I had worked and lived there for eight months prior to moving to Edinburgh.

When I applied for the Ph.D. programme, the original draft of this study's proposal was formed. Although I was fascinated by grandparents' grandparenting experiences in rural China and believed that the vast urban-rural divide makes rural grandparents more vulnerable than urban grandparents, I lacked access to rural villages at the time. As a result, I proposed studying grandparents in urban China. Then, out of nowhere, I was offered the opportunity to work and live in Tea-Garden Village as a poverty-reduction official, which allowed me to immerse myself in the community, become acquainted with all its residents, and lay the groundwork for this study.

Tea-Garden Village is a small but dispersed settlement of approximately 800 people and nearly 170 households. More than half its residents are from the Miao minority group. In terms of administration, it is located in Western Hunan province, bordering Guizhou province and Chongqing municipality. This area was located at the crossroads of three distinct administrative districts, and therefore the infighting between three local administrative centres had prevented a clear authority from emerging for a long period prior to the establishment of the PRC. This history has influenced some of the folk customs and culture there.

Geographically, Tea-Garden Village is located in the Wuling Mountains, a region designated by China's central government as extremely impoverished. The village is divided into eight villager-groups (cun min xiao zu), which originated in the people's commune era production teams, and four traditional stockaded villages. Historically, the four stockaded villages were self-contained and were located in four distinct areas on the
same mountain. It is the government that unites them for administrative purposes.

Until 2017, it was classified as an impoverished village in a state-designated county. When I visited in 2017 for poverty-reduction work, there were still a significant number of residents with an annual income of less than 3000 RMB (about 350 pounds). I began my poverty-reduction work in Tea-Garden Village in August 2017 and lived and worked there for the next eight months. While I was working for a grassroots non-profit organisation at the time, the organisation worked closely with local governments, and our positions were thus certified by the county government. This certification qualified me to live and work in the village committee building and to meet with town and county officials.

During those eight months, I accomplished three significant tasks in preparation for this study. First, I spent three months visiting the majority of households in Tea-Garden Village and conducting a survey of them (which typically taking an hour and a half per household). These procedures enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the village and its residents. Meanwhile, locals became acquainted with me through my work as a researcher.

Second, I ran an after-school course twice a week for children aged six to twelve who were still in primary school. By doing so, I developed a close relationship with each of those children and their primary caregivers, typically their grandparents. As a result of that close relationship, I was frequently invited to children's homes for meals and chats, and I had the opportunity to observe how those children interacted with their grandparents. One goal of ethnographic research is to "capture naturalistic behaviours on the research site" (Greener, 2011, p.75). My out-of-school course became routine for those children and their grandparents, and my presence in the village became a common occurrence for locals; as a result, I gradually lost significance to the locals as an ‘outsider’ and gained the opportunity to closely observe them.

Additionally, as a result of my work in Tea-Garden Village, I obtained permission from the villagers' committee, the village's self-government organisation, to conduct research there. While all members of the

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1 In 2013, Xi Jinping proposed the concept of "giving differentiated guidance for targeted poverty alleviation in line with local conditions by seeking truth from facts." Based on this idea, the PRC government initiated the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Campaign in 2015. According to the PRC government, one strategy to achieve the "targeted poverty alleviation" is to identify people in need. The state, therefore, identified 832 designated poor counties and 128,000 impoverished villages.
committee are elected by villagers and officially known as "grassroots cadres," village officials are frequently referred to as "party and state officials" rather than "non-state autonomous community leaders" by both local Chinese governmental authorities and Chinese villagers (Zhong, 2003, p.171). Due to the close relationship between residents and the nature of rural China as “a society of acquaintance”, conducting fieldwork in a village without notifying the village committee is nearly impossible. As Cornet (2010) concluded, permission from local authorities is required for researchers to conduct long-term fieldwork in rural China. Even if they are Chinese, locals frequently cast doubt on the research objectives of students studying abroad (Cui, 2015). As a result, establishing trust and subsequently obtaining permission from the village committee become critical for fieldwork.

Besides, grandparenting in rural China is inextricably linked to peasant labour and internal migration. As a result, when selecting a field site, it is necessary to consider the impact of internal migration on the setting. With 17.8 million migrant workers in 2019, Hunan province is China's fourth largest labour-exporter (Hunan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In terms of Tea-Garden Village, among the 802 residents, 330 were children and the elderly, and more than 400 residents migrated to urban areas for work in 2017. Thus, Tea-Garden Village was also demographically suitable for my research.

I returned to Tea-Garden Village in September 2019 to conduct fieldwork. Because I was not a certified poverty-reduction official at the time, I was unable to live in the village committee's building. As a result, I rented a small room in a nearby town and used my network to arrange for a local driver, whom I dubbed Uncle Mao, to drive me to and from work each day. I gradually became acquainted with Uncle Mao and also discussed my fieldwork progress with him during our travels. Uncle Mao informed me nearly three weeks later that he was a member of his local villagers' committee and was willing to invite me to his village. It took me completely by surprise, given the difficulty of entering a village in rural China. According to Uncle Mao, they were actually quite alarmed by strange visitors to their villages, both for security (e.g., violent crimes such as burglary and human trafficking) and political reasons. His invitation was critical to my fieldwork, and I discovered my second field site, Ma Village, by chance.

While the Ma Village is close to Tea-Garden Village, it is located in Guizhou province. This village is not in a mountain range, so residents
congregate in denser settlements. Around 1,600 residents (approximately 430 households) are divided into four villager groups, the majority of whom are Han. Unlike my fieldwork in Tea-Garden Village, where I was acquainted with the majority of the residents and also had a positive relationship with all village committee members, Uncle Mao was the only gatekeeper I had in the Ma Village. While I was able to conduct participant observation and interviews independently in Tea-Garden Village, I was unable to communicate with locals without the assistance of Uncle Mao or his family in the Ma Village. Typically, it was his second daughter, 19 years old at the time, who visited grandparents with me. In comparison to the other two fieldwork locations, I spent less time in Ma Village and obtained the majority of my information through interviews. The data collection procedure will be discussed in greater detail below.

When I began my search for the third fieldwork village, I established two fundamental criteria. The village should be distinct from Tea-Garden Village, while remaining accessible. Then, Ravine Village came to mind. It is located in Anhui, China's second largest labour exporting province. In comparison to the Tea-Garden and Ma Villages, Ravine Village is larger in terms of both area and population. The village has a population of 2,526 people living in 702 households. Due to internal migration of peasant labour, the village's long-term residents now number around 800, with the majority being elderly and children. In comparison to the previous two villages, Ravine Village had a significantly better economic situation, which was partly because villagers began migrant work much earlier there. According to locals, because the village is located near advanced, eastern coastal cities, residents began working in urban areas in the late 1970s, at least a decade earlier than most residents of the other two villages. Most of the grandparents I interviewed in Ravine Village had long-term internal migration experience when they were young.

One former villager returned there to see his relatives after converting his hukou to Guangzhou. He told me that many former villagers from Ravine Village now have their own businesses in urban areas, and they were willing to donate "50 thousand or 100 thousand" to support the village. This circumstance also set Ravine Village apart from the other field sites. However, while those donations will help the village to have more advanced infrastructure, it also means the gap between the wealthy and the poor is obvious in the village, which constantly irritates villagers who are unable to complete family urbanisation.
Ravine Village also has an abundance of natural resources and is a valuable tourist attraction. Even before the economic reform, it was also richer than the other two locales. The fertile rice paddies, abundant bamboo and mountain product resources such as bamboo shoots, mushrooms and wild fruits prevented locals from starving in most years. While residents of Tea-Garden and Ma Villages had experienced famine during the public commune era and subsisted on potatoes and corn alone, most inhabitants of Ravine Village ate decent food during that tough time. All these factors contributed to a more favourable economic condition. Residents commented that, "there are no very poor people in the village now." While this statement may be arbitrary, what I observed there was that the majority of households had already constructed their new house and installed at least one car, partially confirming that statement.

Along with variation in location, economic condition, and participants' internal migration experiences, Ravine Village was also chosen for its accessibility. A village can be considered a closed setting, which, as Bryman (2016) suggested, is commonly entered through people within the setting who have personal relationships with the researcher, such as friends and colleagues. One of my friends, Wen, a former colleague from the poverty-reduction programme, now works for a state-owned institution and had been living and working in Ravine Village for over a year when fieldwork began. Because she now works for a state-owned institution, she has developed a strong and stable relationship with the local government and members of the village committee. With her recommendation, I was able to gain access and conduct research there.

To adhere to ethnographic principles, I did not conduct data collection upon entering the village. Rather, I informally assisted my friend in preparing for a conference on village development. Throughout this process, I had the opportunity to meet and communicate with village officials, introducing my research project and data collection plan. Meanwhile, I gradually established contact with village residents. Many of them were elderly individuals caring for their grandchildren whose parents were labour migrants. After nearly three weeks, and with the permission of the village committee, I held a grandparent-grandchild handcraft workshop to strengthen my connection with local grandparents.

In summary, three villages were chosen for data collection: Tea-Garden Village in Hunan province, the Ma Village in Guizhou province, and Ravine Village in Anhui province. These three villages were distinctive
in their own way, contributing both homogeneity and heterogeneity to the data collected.

### 3.3.2 Sampling and data collection

In qualitative research, there are multiple ethnographic data collection methods, including participant observation, informal conversations, and interviews. In this study, I used semi-structured interviews as the main method, supplemented with participant observations and informal chats.

After contacting members of the villagers’ committee, I went back to Tea-Garden Village in September 2019, one year and four months after I left the village. For the next month, I lived in a nearby town and went to Tea-Garden Village every day for data collection. According to the original research design, I would only collect data from Tea-Garden Village and Ravine Village for approximately one and a half months each. Then, as I mentioned earlier, during fieldwork in Tea-Garden Village, I found a chance to do fieldwork in the Ma Village. As Uncle Mao was the only connection between the Ma Village and myself, I had to do my field research there with the assistance of Uncle Mao or his family members. This necessity influenced my participant observation there and therefore my fieldwork in the Ma Village was mostly interview-based, which took about two weeks. In November 2019, I started my trip to Ravine Village and then stayed there for roughly one and a half months.

**Participant observation**

While the semi-structured interview was the primary method for data collection in this study, participant observation was critical to the field research's progress and also supplemented the interview materials. Participant observation is the simplest and perhaps most ubiquitous method of ethnographic research (Laurier, 2010). It requires researchers to observe and participate in the daily activities, interactions, and rituals of a target population or community in order to gain an understanding of their life, routines, and culture (Musante and DeWalt, 2010). The study employed participant observation for two reasons.

To begin, it laid the groundwork for the semi-structured interviews that followed. For researchers born and raised in urban China, such as myself, having access to rural fieldwork settings, gaining acceptance from local residents, and earning the trust of potential research participants required both the help of gatekeepers and a period of immersion. I had to spend
time living and working with grandparents in order to gain a better understanding of their lives, beliefs, and the context of their villages. Meanwhile, they required time and constant contact to become acquainted with me and then have the willingness to talk with me.

My participant observation in Tea-Garden Village mainly happened when I first came there as a poverty-reduction official. At that time, I already received the admission letter from the University of Edinburgh. Therefore, I arrived with rough research questions in mind. As introduced earlier, I did a survey questionnaire for nearly all households that still lived there, and the regular off-school course I held for local children gave me a chance to establish personal relationships with local grandparents. On weekdays, my primary job was to organise residents to produce and sell local agricultural by-products via the internet, which, although it did not allow me to observe their daily lives, helped me understand the economic condition and provide basic information about locals. At the weekend, I was frequently invited to residents' homes and was able to observe interactions between grandparents and grandchildren and have informal chats with the grandparents.

Although I came to the village with vague research questions, my main identity at that time was not as a researcher. And, the participant observation conducted during that period was unsystematic. Follow-up participant observation conducted in September 2019 largely filled this gap. What I noticed when working in the village was that grandparents’ daily routine is heavily shaped by their grandchildren’s schedules. Therefore, there was a huge difference between the school and weekend/vacation days. On weekdays, grandparents' schedules can be further divided into three-time slots: the morning slot before grandchildren go to school; the daytime; and the evening slot after grandchildren return home. Because grandparenting occurs within families, I must enter their house to observe interactions between grandparents and grandchildren. Therefore, I chose three families as the main observation targets and combined these insights with the observations made through the "hanging out" method.

These three households were chosen for three reasons; they were found to be:
1) distinctive from one another while also being representative of other cases;
2) accessible, both in terms of grandparents' willingness and the location of the house; and
3) places where my participant observation would not cause the family any inconvenience or harm. Grandparents from these three families were informed about this study.

Since I did not live in the village, observing grandparents' activities in the morning slot (usually before 7:30 a.m.) every day was challenging. Therefore, I only joined the morning session a few times. In addition to observing grandparents' activities, I also paid attention to the grandchildren's experiences to better understand the nature and operation of grandparenting. For instance, because Tea-Garden Village does not have its own primary school, most children study at a primary school located in a nearby village, about an hour's walk away. As all children aged five to twelve have the same destination, grandparents ask older children to look after younger ones during the commute, rather than accompanying grandchildren themselves. When chatting with grandparents, they sometimes raised concerns about this. Therefore, I walked with the kids twice to evaluate that concern.

Observation in the daytime usually opened by assisting grandparents with housework or some farming. During this process, both observation and informal chats created data for the study. Some grandparents were also looking after pre-school-age grandchildren. In those situations, I also accompanied grandparents in caregiving. In Tea-Garden Village, grandparents frequently drop in on each other during the daytime, providing me opportunities to observe their interactions and visit different homes.

Meanwhile, I used the "hanging out" approach to regain trust and rapport with local residents (Bernard, 2017). Although peasant families set building new brick houses as a family goal, many grandparents still prefer to sit in their yard and chat with other villagers who walk by. As a result, by simply hanging out on the main road, I was able to communicate with grandparents and observe their normal daytime behaviour. Observations for the night slot mainly happened in the selected three families. However, because I did not live in Tea-Garden Village, I usually left before 9:00 p.m. On weekdays, I normally observed two time slots each day and did some reflection, writing notes, and modifying my interview plan. On weekends, not only do primary school students stay at home and engage with their grandparents but middle school, boarding students also return home. Therefore, I frequently spent entire weekend days with grandparents.
Participant observation in Ravine Village differed from that in Tea-Garden Village; because I was a complete stranger to the residents of that Village, I did not choose specific families to observe and instead relied heavily on "hanging out". With the support of the gatekeeper, I was able to live in Ravine Village and work with members of the villagers' committee and local residents in preparing conferences and selling agricultural products.

Two major turning points in my fieldwork came during that time. In Ravine Village, residents plant chrysanthemums to dry and sell as tea. Many elderly people came to the village's modest warehouse to pack chrysanthemum tea at the time. I decided to join them in this time-consuming and tedious job. Chatting and gossiping were common due to the repetitive nature of this type of work. When I joined them, many villagers became interested in me and proactively asked for details about my research. I took the chance to get familiar with a group of villagers, introducing my fieldwork plan and having informal conversations with them. Later, those villagers I worked with became my participants and new gatekeepers.

The second breakthrough point was a grandparent-grandchild handicraft workshop I led in the village. I decided to hold this workshop as a warm-up for participant recruitment by establishing a connection with local grandparents and increasing their trust in me. To publicise this event, I asked my gatekeeper to post an announcement on WeChat groups. However, I discovered a more effective promotion approach by accident.

Despite the fact that my research focuses on the elderly, I maintained a large number of informal contacts and conversations with local children in the field. One reason for this is that children are the most curious members of the community, and they are eager to speak with strangers in their villages. Meanwhile, compared with local elders, children in the village can speak Mandarin fluently with little accent and few dialect words. As a result, I was already getting along with the youngsters in Ravine Village just days after my arrival. I invited some kids I knew to the workshop when I set the dates and location, and I also let them invite their friends. Eventually, the workshop drew 45 children and their caregivers, including 29 grandparents, which was much beyond my expectation. Many of them went on to become interviewees.

In the Tea-Garden and Ravine Villages, semi-structured interviews were started after more than three weeks of participant observation. One
limitation of my research is that I did not conduct enough participant observation in the Ma Village. The systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and objects in a chosen social setting is what participant observation is all about (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p.98). It was time-consuming and required the researcher to find a chance to enter the field naturally. However, the field work in the Ma Village was unplanned, and the invitation from Uncle Mao was also temporary, so as to not upset his daily life for a long period. Therefore, I decided to forego participant observation in the Ma Village.

I kept fieldnotes of my observations and informal talks with locals throughout my fieldwork. Fieldnote-taking roughly followed the schema proposed by Mulhall (2003), which emphasises seven aspects:

- Structural and organisational features—what the buildings and environment look like in the village.
- People—how they act, interact, dress, and move.
- The routine of daily activities.
- Special occasions—such as a wedding attended by nearly half of the village's residents.
- Dialogue.
- A daily diary of events as they unfold chronologically—both in and out of the field.
- A personal/reflective record that includes both thoughts and feelings about entering the field and being there, and reflections based on my own life experiences that may influence how I interpret what I see.

Inspired by this schema, I collected and summarised information, which later enriches the data and gives a rich context for data analysis, as prior studies suggest (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Mulhall, 2003). I summarised those fragmented notes into two field research reports: one for Tea-Garden Village and another for Ravine Village.

**Semi-structured interviews**

The formal interview is one of the most commonly used research methods in both quantitative survey studies and qualitative research (Warren, 2004), even though it is criticised by some researchers for not being "naturalistic" (e.g., Greener, 2011, p.76). Through interviews with
an "ethnographic imaginary," researchers can better understand the lived experience of participants by inquiring about the beliefs, values, and social and cultural forces that underpin their socially patterned behaviours, as well as the meanings people attach to those conditions and forces (Hockey and Forsey, 2020). To overcome its shortcoming of being "unnaturalistic," the study also used supplementary data gathered through participant observation and informal conversations, which were collected in a more spontaneous manner.

After a period of participant observation, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with grandparents and key informants in the three selected villages. With the participants' agreement, all interviews were digitally recorded. The interview method was chosen because grandparents are real experts on the grandparenting phenomenon. Interviewing them was therefore an effective way of obtaining rich information on the motivation, operation, function, and impacts of grandparenting, as well as the discourses and meanings attached to them. One objective of the study is to explore grandparenting from the grandparents' perspective. Data generated by interviews provides grandparents' consideration, perception, and experience of grandparenting, which serves this research objective. The semi-structured interview, as compared to other forms of interviews, excels at striking a balance between control and flexibility (Fontana and Frey, 2008). With an interview guide that is constituted with analysis of objective knowledge but flexible enough to maintain the responsiveness of the participants (Bartholomew et al., 2000), semi-structured interviews were suitable for this study.

Although informal interviews happened frequently during participant observation, they could not replace in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The respondents were chosen based on both observations and gatekeepers' suggestions. Considering the research questions and objectives, I had three basic sampling criteria. Firstly, the participants should be current or former long-term caregivers of grandchildren. Second, the study's participants should represent a variety of grandparents in terms of gender, marital status, age, grandparenting experience, and family structure. Thirdly, they were available for the interview. Therefore, the study generally adopted the purposive sampling method, which means the selection of participants was made deliberately with the consideration of particular qualities that participants possessed (Etikan et al., 2016).
I conducted 17 interviews in Tea-Garden Village, with 16 grandparents and five key informants, including the village head and adult offspring of grandparents. Initially, I planned to conduct solely one-on-one interviews, but I met old couples together in some situations, and they insisted on conducting interviews jointly. With my knowledge of Tea-Garden Village, I selected all grandparent participants by myself, according to the three selection criteria. The rejection rate in Tea-Garden Village was very low. Only one key informant, an old teacher in the nearby primary school, refused the interview. This was owing in part to an over-survey in that area, which will be examined later.

Participants in the Ma Village were recruited at the suggestion of the gatekeeper. Uncle Mao, as the village's leader, was well aware of the local family's situation. He offered me a list of eight families, and six of them eventually agreed to participate in the study.

Sampling in Ravine Village was more complicated, using various strategies. After three weeks of participant observation, I developed a basic rapport with the locals and compiled a short list of potential participants with the assistance of the gatekeepers. I began my interviews with this list, and then used snowball sampling methods, in which participants nominated new participants for the study. Finally, I interviewed 17 grandparents and four key informants, including teachers and principals from the neighbouring primary and middle schools. The basic information about interviewed grandparents can be found in Appendix A.

All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, with local dialects. Because of my previous working experience, I am able to speak the dialect in Tea-Garden Village, which is also similar to what people speak in the Ma Village. Interviews in Ravine Village were more difficult. I had to ask the gatekeeper to join as an interpreter in a few situations due to the heavy accents and diverse dialects of the participants.

Based on previous research and participant observation, I designed an interview guide with four segments and 18 essential questions. The four sections addressed in turn:

1) The participant's and his or her family's basic information.

2) The fundamentals of grandparenting, including why and when it began, how it ended, and the intergenerational relationship while grandparenting.
3) The participant's life story.

4) The participant's physical health and well-being.

In most interviews, I followed the interview guide's broad framework, although the questions were changed based on their suitability for the particular respondents. I kept changing the questions in the interview guide and adding new ones based on the participants' responses and topics that emerged from their narratives. Originally, I proposed using standard scales, including the 10-item Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D-10) and the Activities of Daily Living scale (ADL), to measure participants' mental and physical health. In many cases, however, grandparents were unable to comprehend the questions on those scales and were unable to focus on a list of inquiries. As a result, I changed such scales to single-item scales of self-rated health, happiness, and quality of life. Although single-item scales meant I lost some detail, they are simple, transparent, and easy to follow, especially for the elderly (Bowling, 2005; Brown and Astell, 2012).

According to my original plan, all interviews should happen in participants' houses, where they feel more relaxed, comfortable, and have more privacy. The fieldwork plan, however, is designed to be broken. While I conducted many interviews in participants' homes, I also did some on farmland, in little restaurants, and at the construction sites of participants' new houses. Ravine Village does not have its own primary and middle schools, so the children must travel to the nearby town to attend classes. Because of the long distance between the village and the schools, many grandparents rent small flats or rooms near the school and stay there with their grandchildren during the week. They only return to Ravine Village on weekends and for vocations. As a result, several interviews with Ravine Village grandparents were conducted in the nearby town rather than in the village.

The average interview was 45–90 minutes. In two cases, participants attended the interviews but avoided providing any relevant information and constantly shifted subjects. Finally, I had to end the interviews politely and consider them invalid. In some cases, maintaining the interview’s focus on the proposed topic was difficult, as some participants were excited about sharing their stories with young people. Uncle Mao commented:

*Those elders like to talk with you. There are a few young people in the village, and none of them are patient enough to talk with the*
elders. So, when you came, the elderly finally found some young people who can sit with them and chat with them. Besides, you come from a big city and can speak our dialect. I guess they want to show you all the interesting things.

While I did face rejection when asking for interviews, Uncle Mao was partially right that many grandparents liked to chat with me about topics of personal interest that were irrelevant to this study. Therefore, I had to constantly redirect the interviews to ensure coherence.

In addition to the grandparents, I also interviewed ten key informants, including local officials and members of the villagers' committee, the adult children of grandparents, and teachers and principals from nearby primary and middle schools. Interviews with key informants took more time, from 60 to 120 minutes. These three types of key informants provided multiple perspectives on grandparenting. Local officials and members of the villagers' committee knew more about the general situation of the village and could connect grandparenting with other phenomena happening in their village. The adult children of grandparents, as insiders, viewed grandparenting from close-up, helping me to better understand the micro dynamics. Finally, teachers knew more about grandchildren's situations and how grandparenting influences them. They also communicate with grandparents, who are often in charge of attending parent-teacher conferences, and occasionally communicate with some migrant parents via messaging apps such as WeChat and QQ.

I left the field at the end of 2019 with the intention of returning to see some of the participants as the study progressed. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to return. Fortunately, I kept in touch with gatekeepers and some key informants, who supplied me with regular updates on the villages through online messaging while I analysed the data.

3.3.3 Data management and analysis

In-field data management and analysis

Data management started in the field as an effective tool for correcting and intensifying data collection (Pink and Morgan, 2013; Zhu, 2019). Data emerges every day in the field and the key point is to notice, record, and analyse them. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.142) highlight, "what to write down, how to write it down, and when to write it down" are things researchers need to decide when collecting data. Participant observation and informal dialogues can occur anywhere and at
any time, such as while travelling down a winding mountain road or picking and packing chrysanthemums. Standing alone and taking notes would make me appear bookish and out of place in many circumstances. Impressive information also emerged in interactions, such as when drinking with a huge group of locals or dancing with grandmothers. In all those situations, I tried to make mental notes first and then found a chance to type a few bullet points on my phone. While I also brought a small notepad with me, writing with a pen and a notebook is rare in such a setting, while most locals are accustomed to young people using smartphones. Actually, many locals, including the elderly, played on their smartphones frequently (e.g., taking photos and posting them on social media, watching short videos), even during dinner parties. Besides, I found that jotting on the phone is a good way to ensure the confidentiality of notetaking. While some locals, especially children, were curious about what I wrote on paper, they showed less interest in my phone.

A consensus holds that field notes should be written as close to when events observed as possible (Mulhall, 2003). Therefore, I tried to rewrite my jotted notes with details and organise them on my laptop daily when I went back to my room, except in cases of extreme exhaustion. Those notes helped me to revise my interview guide and direct future observations. As Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) suggest, those notes would also assist me later in the data coding and analysis process to notice emergent and recurring events, themes and ideas in the fieldwork.

All interviews were digitally recorded and sent to both my laptop and cloud storage on the same day. In interviews, I also brought a small notepad with me to jot down impressions. To avoid interrupting the conversational flow and/or distracting the participant, these notes were short and fragmented. Typically, my fieldnotes about interviews include three factors. First is the setting, including the geographic location and a brief physical description. For instance, the interview with participant M-04 "took place in her one-floor rundown building. Although the building looks old, it is very clean. In front of the building, the interviewed grandmother planted many flowers, which are rare in the village.” Secondly, I also recorded people in the interviews, including participants and any others present with the permission of the participants. I wrote down the impressive things about the participants' overall appearance and their demeanour. For instance, participant R-13 "looks older than her real age. Many of her teeth have fallen out, even though she is only 54 years old.” In addition, the notes include some non-verbal behaviours and
reactions of the participants. For instance, when talking about her relationship with her daughter-in-law, "R-04 dropped her voice and took me into another room".

After conducting two or three interviews, I suspended active fieldwork for one day to transcribe the most impressive parts. During this process, I also added some of my own feelings, comments, and reflexive thoughts on what I found during interviews, combined with the interview fieldnotes. The reason for doing this is to constantly reflect on my semi-structured interviews and add new themes to the interview guide. For instance, in the original interview guide, I only had a general question about how grandparents cope with the negative impacts caused by caregiving. Then, after a few interviews, I realised the belief in fatalism (see section 6.5.1 below) had a strong connection to this topic, and added a question about this.

Researchers contend that data analysis is a continuous activity that should not be limited, fixed, or delegated only to the formal data analysis stage (Gallagher, 2009). Several themes arose from the interview data during in-field data management. On the positive side, this led the semi-structured interviews to become more organised, highlighting some potential foci. However, due to the heterogeneity across the three villages, themes that emerged from interviews in one village were not always suitable for interviews in another. For instance, gift expenditures between villagers and relatives in ceremonies greatly burdened grandparents in Tea-Garden Village and influenced their budget for living expenses. But when I interviewed participants from the Ma Village with the assumption of high gift expenditures, only one participant confirmed my assumption. Therefore, in-field data management and primary analysis being constant allowed continuous course correction during fieldwork.

Post-field data management and analysis

Formal data analysis procedure started after I left the field. The raw data I brought from the field includes:

1) The reports on the Tea-Garden and Ma villages, written simultaneously with my fieldnotes during active fieldwork;

2) Audio recordings of 43 interviews (including interviews with 38 grandparents and 10 key informants) and fieldnotes on those interviews;

3) Rough transcripts of several interviews; and

4) Photos and short videos taken in the field.

93
Although speech-to-text software is now common, participants' accents and dialects cannot be recognised. Therefore, I personally transcribed all interviews into text in Chinese and combined the interview text with field notes taken during the interview in one document. Transcription is very time-consuming, and the estimated ratio of time required to transcribe is 4:1, which means a one-hour interview may take four hours to transcribe (Stuckey, 2014). In some cases, the heavy accents of participants, the noisy background sound (e.g., the sound of the loudspeakers in villages), and the dialect used by grandparents make the work even more difficult and takes more time. However, the transcription is also an effective way to refresh the fieldwork memory and immerse myself in the interview data. As Brid (2005, p. 227) argues, it is a “key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology.” After transcription, I became very familiar with all those interview texts.

All interviews are conducted in various dialects of Mandarin Chinese. As a result, translation became part of data analysis and writing. In this study, translation encompasses not just translating from Chinese to English but also the interpretation of local terminology and sayings in Mandarin. In qualitative research, language is a significant tool used to help researchers understand how the "social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, or constituted" (Mason, 2002, p. 3). During interviews, interviewees used similes and metaphors that cannot always be adequately translated (Sidhva, 2004). As a result, the content of the interview was analysed in its original language to prevent losing any hidden meaning from the interview participants (Larkin et al., 2007).

After transcription, I first identified dialect terms and sayings that grandparents used, then extracted the dialect-heavy sentence or paragraph and removed all identifiable information and discussed the meaning of the terms and the entire sentence with my gatekeepers. After the qualitative analysis, findings and quotations for use in the study were translated into English, as recommended by Van Nes and colleagues (2010).

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1 Cross-language studies, in which researchers must address language-related issues (Temple and Young, 2004), are not rare now. There is also a lot of research that explores the techniques, timing, and trustworthiness of translation in cross-language studies. After reviewing those papers and assessing the situation of my research, I decided to analyse the qualitative data in Chinese first, then translate the results into English. I described this decision-making process in greater detail in the original edition. After discussing it with my supervisor, we agreed to eliminate several lines in order to make the chapter tidy and coherent.
Qualitative approaches have a similar purpose in that they try to comprehend a phenomenon from the point of view of individuals who are experiencing it (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). To do so, researchers must first determine which method is most beneficial and suitable for a given study. In this study, thematic analysis was chosen and conducted with NVivo 12.

Thematic analysis, which is informed by social constructivism, is known for its accessibility and flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2012), which makes it appropriate for this study. Furthermore, thematic analysis allows researchers to investigate how people make sense of their lives and their surroundings (Ozuem et al., 2022; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This is consistent with the study's focus on the sociocultural context of grandparenting in rural China.

In their oft-cited articles about thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012) outlined six steps to thematic analysis which guided my practice:

1) Familiarising researchers with the data.
2) Generating initial codes.
3) Searching for themes.
4) Reviewing themes.
5) Defining and naming themes.
6) Producing the report.

Data familiarisation was completed by time-consuming transcription and reading and re-reading both interview texts and field notes. During this process, vague themes started to emerge from the raw data, and I noticed some undercurrents beneath the grandparents' narratives. Then, I moved to the next step, the first round of coding.

"If your analysis is a brick-built house with a tile roof, your themes are the walls and roofs and your codes are the individual bricks and tiles" (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.61). To build those bricks, I coded interview texts line by line with NVivo 12. My coding was data-driven, which means that the codes and themes (which I will explain soon) were determined by the data rather than any pre-conceived theories or assumptions. Generally speaking, at this stage, I generated two types of codes. Descriptive codes described and summarised the content of the data. For instance, regarding the factors that have an influence on grandparents’ experience, a descriptive code called "grandchildren's age" emerged. Meanwhile, I also built interpretative codes that identify the meanings behind grandparents' words. For example, another code called "the difficulty of family urbanisation," which is also about the factors that
impact grandparents' experience, arose. As no participant used the term "family urbanisation" in interviews, this code evolved from my interpretation. In the coding process, consistency is crucial. Therefore, when generating interpretive codes, I defined those codes to use them as criteria, as proposed by Castleberry and Nolen (2018). I also frequently went back to previously coded interviews and recoded them to ensure consistent application.

During coding, predominant themes started to emerge. However, as Braun and Clarke concluded, "searching for themes is an active process, meaning we generate or construct themes rather than discovering them" (2012, p.63). NVivo 12 allowed me to continually re-check my coding and find connections between codes. I then started to combine different codes into sub-themes, repeatedly reviewing them to find the links between them before combining sub-themes into potential themes. As a novice in thematic analysis, I used writing to test the validity and solidity of my themes. It also allowed me to receive feedback on my preliminary analysis from external auditors, who in this case were my supervisors. Because no one could access the raw data of the interviews except me due to confidentiality concerns, writing up the results of the data analysis and receiving feedback from my supervisors was an effective way to re-direct my analysis and clarify my findings. Therefore, there was no clear ending point to the data analysis in this study, as during the writing process I constantly went back to the interview texts and modified codes and themes. Fieldnotes about informal conversations were also coded and analysed, but not those about the settings and social context. Those notes helped to re-immersme in the place and refresh my memory, which had a significant impact on my data interpretation.

3.4 Ethics

Conducting research with human participants raises serious ethical concerns (Lee, 1993), and the current study is no exception. It followed the research ethics guidelines of the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh (Level 2) and the research ethics guidebook funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). I also obtained ethical approval from the School of Social and Political Science of the University of Edinburgh before the fieldwork commenced.
In its framework for research ethics, the ESRC (2015, p.4) outlines six key principles of ethical research:

1) Researcher participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected.

2) Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and minimise potential risk of harm to participants and researchers.

3) Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved.

4) Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected.

5) Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.

6) The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.

Due to unique characteristics of the ageing process and its related vulnerabilities, such as the decline in cognitive ability, researchers who work with older adults need to consider related potential ethical concerns (McGuire, 2009). Therefore, I was very careful during interviews to ensure no harm was done to participants. The current study aims to find out the nature, operation, impacts, and functions of grandparenting in rural China and may provide insight to future researchers and policymakers. Therefore, it is believed that the study will be beneficial for grandparents in rural China. In this following section, I will further introduce how the study protected the right to know, the confidentiality, and the anonymity of participants.

3.4.1 Informed consent
Informed consent "entails giving sufficient information about the research and ensuring that there is no explicit or implicit coercion" (ESRC, 2015, p.29) and therefore fulfils the first and third principles. Thus, to gain informed consent, I set two goals during the fieldwork: firstly, to keep all potential participants informed about the nature and basic information of the study so they do not feel coerced to join; and secondly, to ensure potential participants' free decision on involvement and leave them free to withdraw from the study at any stage as long as they wish to (the participant information sheet used in the study can be found in Appendix B).

My previous employment as a poverty-reduction official, and my gatekeepers from the villagers' committees and the state-owned institution were all beneficial for me when I entered villages. However, there was a risk that people misunderstood the study's purpose and assumed it was run by the government. As a result, one of the first tasks is to ensure that potential participants were aware of the study's independence from the government and that it was conducted only for my PhD research.

Locals in Tea-Garden Village still remembered my prior job in poverty-reduction, which worked with the local government and were interested in my experience after I left the village for the last time. It allowed me the opportunity to explain the nature of the research and the goal of the interviews in greater detail during informal conversations. I frequently highlighted my current student status and study intentions in casual chats. Because news spreads rapidly in villages, most residents already knew something about my study when I started interviewing them. In Ravine Village, the strategy was a little different. I wasn't the first or only researcher there to undertake fieldwork. As a result, when I arrived, my friend Wen who worked there introduced me as a researcher "who would do similar work as researchers who had come here previously." I also used prior researchers' examples to introduce myself and my position in the study when speaking with locals.

Emphasising the independence of the study and its independence from the government is one crucial point to ensuring voluntary participation. Meanwhile, I noticed locals may find it difficult to reject the interview due to personal relationships with or power held by the gatekeeper, especially in Ma Village. Because Uncle Mao was a member of the villagers’ committee, when he introduced me and my interview plan to the locals, he may have unconsciously transformed his power into a
coercive force. Therefore, after the introduction, I asked him to leave and let me speak with potential participants alone. With the gatekeeper physically absent, I reclaimed the nature of the research and clearly let the participants know their right to refuse. I promised I would not let others know about anything which happened, neither the content of the interview if they agreed nor their rejection, respectively.

After informing potential participants informally, I also asked them to read and sign a plain language consent form informing them of the purpose (see Appendix C), methods, and intended use of the research, as well as its potential risks and their rights. The form also provided an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality in all interview content, as well as the unconditional right to withdraw from the study at any stage. In cases where participants struggled to read the consent form, I read it aloud and explained it orally to ensure full understanding. As some participants are illiterate and cannot sign their names, I prepared an inkpad for fingerprints. However, as the interviews progressed, I found fingerprinting to be inconvenient for participants, so I switched to verbal consent recorded at the beginning of the interview.

3.4.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality is underpinned by the principle of respect for participants' autonomy, which means methods should be applied to remove identifiers and break the links between data and identifiable individuals (BSA, 2017). To ensure anonymity, all three villages were given pseudonyms in the thesis. Participants were assigned a two-part code: The first indicates village of origin, utilising T for Tea-Garden Village, M for the Ma Village, and R for Ravine Village, and the second indicating where the participant fell in the sequence of interviews (e.g., M-01 being the first interview in Ma Village).

To make it more difficult to identify the people and villages involved, some precise identifiers were purposefully veiled or omitted. While the study shows the province and basic location of three villages, I left out which city or county they belong to. When discussing the role of gatekeepers in their villages, I only mentioned that some of them were members of the villagers' committee, omitting their particular positions such as village secretary of the party or head of the village.

Confidentiality also refers to the privacy of the interviews and the security of the collected data. In villages, residents frequently visit others
uninvited without prior notice. Therefore, some interviews were interrupted suddenly by other villagers. Such drop-ins helped with participant recruitment since when I explained my study and the ongoing interview, several visitors expressed interest in participating. However, I had to ask them to leave for a time in order to keep the interview private. During the interview, the participants' opinions and preferences were fully respected. In one case, I began interviewing a grandmother in the living room. Later, when we touched on a sensitive topic, she asked me to pause the conversation and we moved to her bedroom for privacy. There were also people who looked after their grandchildren with their partners and desired to be jointly interviewed. In those circumstances, I conducted couple interviews because it made them more comfortable.

I employed multiple strategies to ensure the security of collected data. In the field, observation notes were taken in bullet form on a password-protected smartphone with a full-cover privacy screen. The notes taken during interviews were written on a notepad that I always carried with me. Those notes were short, fragmented, and hard-to-read by others. Later, I reorganised those notes with details on a password-protected laptop.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transferred to a password-protected laptop and cloud storage on the day they were conducted. I was and am the only person who can access the raw data. I then deleted the original recordings from the recorder as it had no password protection. As stated in the consent form, all data was only used for academic research and there would be no disclosure of identifiable information to any third parties.

### 3.5 Positionality and reflexivity

Reflection, which Marshall (2019, p.411) defines as "a careful examination and bringing together of ideas to create new insight through ongoing cycles of expression and re-evaluation based on a systematic review of previous theoretical studies", is an important part of fieldwork practice and academic research (cf. Kwak, 2019; Mortari, 2015). While reflection can emerge from multiple approaches, I focus mainly on my positionality and its relationship with the various factors in this study.

As a researcher, my positionality affected every phase of the study, from research topic and question formulation to the final interpretation and conclusion (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). My original interest in grandparenting and its impact on grandparents came from my personal
experience of being cared for by my maternal grandparents when young. This experience made me and my parents grateful to my maternal grandparents, and we see providing care for them as our responsibility. Even now, typing this sentence 9,000 kilometres away from them, I can still feel their support and unconditional love. Due to this experience, enthusiasm about this study and motivation to conduct it were abundant. The intimacy between my grandparents and myself always let empathise with grandparents in my study. I also believe that my familiarity with the grandparent-grandchild relationship during grandparenting has strengthened my ability to identify the tacit meanings of participants in interviews. However, this familiarity may also lead to potential biases caused by my presumptions. During the study, I constantly warned myself not to make any presumptions based on my personal experience or the existing literature. The heterogeneity of grandparenting means I should concentrate chiefly on the collected data.

According to previous research, identifying positionality when conducting fieldwork in rural China is difficult for Chinese researchers because they can be insiders in some ways while being outsiders in others (Hu, 2007; Hsiung, 1996). This statement perfectly reflects my situation, as with the emic and etic perspective (Pike, 1954; 2015), I realise that I stand both inside and outside of the study’s context.

Although my paternal grandparents were peasants and still live in rural China, I was born and raised in urban China. When I was 6 years-old, my family moved to Beijing, one of the most advanced cities in China. Rural China seemed far away from my life in urban China. Meanwhile, the policy-driven urban-rural inequality and the opposing identities of urban and rural residents caused by the different hukou types lead to the stereotype of "urban resident" (cheng li ren) among many rural residents, and in some cases, even to complicated attitudes of rural residents towards city dwellers (Hu, 2007). A common assumption held by locals was that people who come to rural areas from the cities must have an ulterior motive, such as earning political capital. At the early stage, locals always asked me questions like "What did you want to gain from us or from this experience?" or "Can you earn money by doing this?" Can I gain something from them? The answer is certain: yes, I can. But what I earned was not what they commonly assumed, such as financial benefits or promotion. Therefore, I needed to clarify these benefits to locals to gain their trust. During the fieldwork, I tried to explain the purpose of the research and its relationship with my PhD programme to locals and aimed
to break the stereotype of urban residents by showing common disadvantages and difficulties.

Furthermore, my international educational background, which may be a sensitive element and cause local residents and officials to be defensive, placed me in an even more outside position. Because of the “direct political-ideological control and the more intangible influence of the dominant party discourse,” political sensitivity is a typical worry for academics conducting fieldwork in China (Heimer and Høgersen, 2006, p. 12). Due to the complicated relationship between China and the West in recent years, some local officials and members of villagers' committees have become wary of people with international backgrounds. After graduating from my undergraduate studies in China, I studied abroad in Western countries intermittently for six years. This study experience could be misunderstood and become a negative factor for my study. Recognising this potential risk, I consciously invited members of the villagers' committee to be my gatekeepers, as their authority and reputation in villages can partially dissipate the mistrust caused by my foreign education.

Raising the level of self-disclosure is another way to reduce mistrust. In the field, I reclaimed the independence of this study and emphasised the scholarship I received from the China Scholarship Council, which is viewed as proof of the political neutrality and harmlessness of the study towards China. In informal chats, I also talked about my family background and personal motivation for this study. The common experience of grandparenting and the intimacy between my grandparents and myself are effective tools to close the gap between researcher and interlocutors.

Meanwhile, my identity as a young unmarried female had a mixed impact on the fieldwork, positioning me as both an insider and outsider to the grandparenting discussion. On the one hand, my gender and age benefited me when I entered the field. To many interviewees, a young female is identified as less aggressive. Some interviewees said I reminded them of their own children or grandchildren, who were roughly the same age as me and worked away from home. However, this same status also reduced my authority and made me appear less professional in the field. All of my interviewees were 45 or older when I was 26 years old. As Friedan (2006) argued, young researchers were almost always considered outsiders when collecting data from the elderly due to their age difference. Locals in the field asked the same question as Biggs (2005): Can a younger researcher,
in this case, me, truly understand a life stage that I have not yet experienced? The profound influence of patriarchy and my young female identity may further strengthen this suspicion.

Am I a young researcher with proper academic training, or a young romantic girl with some unrealistic ideas? To dispel those doubts, I reminded myself to be professional when introducing the study and my previous educational background. I need to be close to the locals and become an insider when they disclosed family matters, but in some circumstances, it is also necessary to maintain professional standing to earn their trust.

While the factors mentioned above seem to put me in an outsider position in researching grandparenting in rural China, there were also factors that made me an insider. As Kjellgren (2006) concludes, hometown belonging plays a crucial role in Chinese people's interpersonal relationships. This crucial factor started to impact this study before I entered the field, since when I selected villages, I was also influenced by it: my father came from Anhui province, where Ravine Village is located, and my mother came from Hunan province, home of Tea-Garden Village. Even before I went to these two villages, I felt a sense of intimacy and familiarity with them. When I started my fieldwork, this connection between these two villages and myself, although tenuous, had an obvious effect of cementing my relationship with locals. While nearly all the locals asked me where I came from, I told the villagers in Tea-Garden Village that my mom is from Hunan and that I was born there, while in Ravine Village I would say my ancestral home is in Anhui.

Identifying myself as someone sharing the same nativity is a tactic to close the distance. Meanwhile, the language used in interviews has a similar impact. As Thogerson (2006, p.111) notes, "the Chinese language is a political construct in and of itself." Along with Mandarin, China's official language, there are seven major dialect groups and a nigh-infinite number of sub-dialects, which means that even a Chinese scholar conducting fieldwork may encounter language difficulties (Thogerson, 2006). Additionally, the official Chinese used in the media, textbooks, official documents, and public announcements is distinct from the informal Chinese spoken in everyday life (ibid). While all the locals in the field were good at neither Mandarin nor the official Chinese language, many of them tried to communicate with me in these formats during the beginning stages of my fieldwork. It demonstrates their respect for me and my research, but also shows distance and defence. Although I am not
fluent in the dialect shared by the Tea-Garden and nearby Ma Village, I deliberately used its tone and some slang in the interviews. The results of this tactic are remarkable. When I explained that my mother was from Hunan and that I had spent eight months living in Tea-Garden Village, one grandmother in Ma Village became animated and informed me that her younger daughter had married into a Hunan family.

Identifying and reflecting on one's positionality during fieldwork is critical for rigorous study. In my case, I discovered the intersectionality of several factors and recognised their influence on my field research. Indeed, the study's reflexivity should not end here; it has continued throughout data analysis and writing up, and will be referenced in the subsequent chapters as necessary.

3.6 Challenges

Difficulties and challenges are inevitable in conducting research and can happen at any research stage, from literature review to writing up. To deal with those challenges, reflexivity and flexibility are crucial, especially for novice researchers. In this section, I reflect on the difficulties this study faced and their solutions (if any).

When I proposed this study in the first year of my PhD programme, I intended to employ a mixed-methods approach and triangulate qualitative data with quantitative regression analysis. This plan, although being proposed on paper in a solid way, was judged "too ambitious" in the board exam. Later in the study, I discovered that my limited knowledge of quantitative methods, the time constraints of my PhD, and the complexity of qualitative data collection and analysis together made the mixed-methods plan less infeasible. The progress of any study is a process of adjustment, compromise, decision-making, and persistence. After consulting with my supervisors, I decided to forego the quantitative analysis to concentrate solely on qualitative methods. Admittedly, this decision may reduce the statistical generalisability of the study, which refers to "an inference being made about a population (or universe) on the basis of empirical data collected about a sample" (Yin, 2003, p.32). However, statistical generalisation is not the only type of generalisation. Through qualitative methods, this study aimed to achieve internal generalisation, which is defined as "generalising within the setting, institution, or case studied, to persons, events, times, and settings that were not directly observed" (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, p.4), and
thereby gain transferability. Following Maxwell (2011), this study paid particular attention to the diversity of grandparents and grandparenting in rural China to increase its internal generalisability and indicated this heterogeneity by establishing a new category for rural grandparents (see Chapter 5). While the study was unable to identify the "general conditions under which a finding or theory is valid," what it did discover can be applied to a new situation (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014, p.3).

Fieldwork is famous for its uncertainty and the possibility of going out of control. While unexpected gifts, such as the entrance to the Ma Village, can be viewed as positive surprises in the field, there were also unforeseen difficulties. One such difficulty was the negative impact of over-surveying and participant interview fatigue. Peasants have been often contacted and polled by officials from various levels in recent years as part of the government's nationwide poverty reduction campaign. When I worked in Tea-Garden Village, for example, I saw at least four rounds of household surveys done by governments at all levels, from the national to the county.

Residents are usually notified about such surveys the day before they take place by the village chief. On the day of the survey, several officials visit residents' homes with their archives and ask them questions about their financial situation and whether they had received official assistance from the local government (in an official manner and tone). When residents complain about poverty or a poor quality of life, visiting officials may request that the local government "accelerate the implementation of supportive policies" (jia kuai luo shi bang fu zheng ce) and assist residents in skipping some of the application steps for assistance. As a result, residents were tired of the frequent surveys as well as the semi-routine questions. Meanwhile, some of them take pleasure in it because it may result in financial aid for their families.

However, it brings two difficulties to my fieldwork. Firstly, some locals were over-surveyed and unwilling to be interviewed anymore. They have been flooded with outsiders who use official Mandarin and repeatedly ask similar questions over and over again. The survey fatigue of local residents increased the difficulty of participant recruitment. Therefore, participant observation and the establishment of personal relationships were crucial as they could raise locals' interest in and patience with me and my study, counteracting the negative impact of survey fatigue. Additionally, the frequent poverty-reduction-related surveys caused misunderstandings in my interview. Some locals were confused by the
nature of my interview and complained about the injustice of local government, saying they should receive more assistance. In those cases, I had to restate the independence of my study and clarify my identity as a researcher. After the clarification, I had to re-ask the interviewees whether they were willing to join the study, as they may have changed their minds.

There were also many practical difficulties in the field, especially for a novice researcher who did not grow up in rural China. How to find secure accommodation and navigate from one interviewed household to another were all problems I faced, particularly in villages located in mountain areas in which households can be very scattered. Also, the complicated relationship between different villager groups and conflicts of interest among villagers can negatively influence the fieldwork. In one case, I was rejected from a household because I had earlier interviewed their "enemy". Later, I learned from other villagers that these two households had applied for the same benefit, and the household I interviewed had received it. Under those circumstances, communication, compromise, and decision-making are very crucial. I constantly adjusted my original research plan and expectations to fit the situation. Meanwhile, I frequently communicated with locals to clarify and eliminate misunderstandings.

In the previous section, I reflected on my positionality. Indeed, I also realised that my own bias and the accompanied explicit and implicit subjectivity, which are inevitable, could be challenges for conducting this study. Because I have a close relationship with my grandparents and thus feel strong empathy for the interviewed grandparents, this emotional connection may lead to subjectivity and bias. During the study, I realised I unconsciously intended to emphasise the difficulties grandparents suffered and the contributions they made, while downplaying the benefits they had already gained. My motivation was to earn more attention and assistance for this population. This is dangerous for my study, and would have no substantiated benefit to grandparents. Therefore, after recognising the biases I possessed, I consciously reflected on them and re-examined the coding to ensure its accuracy. While biases were inevitable as the study is still a human activity, I strictly followed the criterion to ensure its trustworthiness.
3.7 Conclusion

In the chapter, I discussed why and how I applied participant observation and semi-structured interviews to collect first-hand data from grandparents' perspectives for this study, based on a pragmatist paradigm. The research questions and aims provide a rough direction for the research design, while the balance between the ideal research plan and real-world difficulties ultimately shaped the research. This chapter explains how and why the villages and interviewees were chosen, as well as describing the relevant contexts. In this part, the chapter particularly highlights accessibility and the crucial role gatekeepers played in the field. After providing a snapshot of the setting, it further discussed how data was collected through both participant observation and interviews and how it was analysed.

The chapter serves as both an introduction to the research process and a reflection. Therefore, it also mentioned ethical considerations of the study and provided reflexivity on the entire study. Finally, it discussed challenges and the strategies applied in the study.

Compared with research findings, the methodology chapter may seem less attractive to some readers. However, it provides a context for the findings and offers proof of their trustworthiness. By introducing the expectations I had, reality I faced, and the compromises I made during the research process, this chapter described how the research and the researcher evolved on this academic journey. While what I wrote in this chapter is only for this study, I wish my experiences, both positive and negative, might inspire or alarm other peers.

After introducing how the study was conducted, in the next three chapters I will share the findings of the study. It will start by exploring what grandparenting is and how it works in contemporary rural China.
Chapter 4 Economy, Culture and Emotion: Why Grandparents Rear their Children's Children in Rural China

4.1 General introduction to the empirical chapters

Chapters 4 through 6 explore grandparenting in rural China with three major themes emerging from the data: driving forces (chapter 4), heterogeneity and homogeneity (chapter 5) and mixed outcomes impacts (Chapter 6). With these three themes and several sub-themes, the study draws the horizontal axis for the entire grandparenting process in rural China, from why and how it works to what it brings to grandparents’ subjective well-being.

Meanwhile, grandparenting is not an isolated phenomenon. Instead, attention should be paid to "the social-interpersonal, cultural, and policy-related context in which grandfamilies are embedded” (Hayslip et al., 2019, 152). This is especially noticeable in the Chinese context, where state and family are traditionally isomorphic for the sake of governance (see section 2.3.2). Before the establishment of the PRC, Chinese rulers used Confucius as a control instrument to minimise the function of communities while empowering the family system to maintain their control (Starr, 2001). With this cultural and historical inertia, the PRC’s government has also implemented public policies that contoured Chinese families to the state's interests (Fowler et al., 2010). One famous example of this is the one-child policy, which directly shaped the structure of the Chinese family. Therefore, when presenting findings around the driving forces, heterogeneity and homogeneity, and the mixed impacts of grandparenting, this study also set up a "state-family-individual" system as the vertical axis for examining grandparenting.

The term “system” here is borrowed from structural-functionalism. Although it has been widely criticised, this theory can provide one particular “basis for understanding how families work at the macro-level” (Allen and Henderson, 2016, p.31), by examining the interaction, interdependency and relationships between the family and other social institutions. Being inspired by Parsons’ (2013) argument that multiple systems (e.g., social, cultural, personality) constitute the general system of human action, this study applied the "state-family-individual system" as an analytical tool. Although this study does not engage in any theoretical debates about structural-functionalism, it does accept some points of view on the subject, as the study argues peasant families'
arrangements and activities have mutual effects on the operation and transformation of Chinese society, and the interactions between the state's policies, peasant families' arrangements, and individuals' beliefs deeply affect grandparents' daily lives.

When analysing the forces that changed Chinese families from 1949 to the 1980s, Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell (1993, p.5) pointed out: "Clearly, in the People's Republic of China, state power and policies have been the creators, not the creations, of a transformed society." Whyte (2005, p.13) refined this statement by identifying the state's legislation and propaganda campaigns as well as the cultural diffusion of new family forms, as the direct causes of family change; and the economic development and the state-initiated socialist transformation of various social institutions, defined as indirect causes.

Therefore, when exploring grandparenting in peasant families, the study includes the state, due to its influence. Grandparents' narratives typically provide a micro perspective on grandparenting. But the analysis of those narratives can go further, exploring the relationship between the "state-family-individual system" and grandparenting and the interdependency between the state, peasant families, and individuals during the grandparenting process. The influence of the cultural system is also considered.

![Figure 4.1 Two axes of the study](image-url)
From chapters 4 to 6, the study will mainly follow the horizontal axis and target grandparenting itself first, with scattered considerations of the interaction between grandparenting and the "state-family-individual system". Later, in Chapter 7, the study would shift its perspective and discuss the operation and function of grandparenting under the framework of the state-family-individual system.

4.2 Introduction of this chapter

As introduced in Chapter 1, grandparenting has become a common intergenerational interaction in today's rural China. In fact, it is almost taken as the norm now. However, when looking back in time, grandparents involved in childrearing were generally not the primary caregivers in rural China (Xiao, 2014; Santos, 2021). Although multigenerational families were common, the grandparents' traditional role was more advisor or educator than caregiver (Mjelde-Mossey, 2007).

So, why are an increasing number of grandparents in rural China taking on the role of caregiver for their grandchildren? Is it voluntary or compelled? What is the motivation for this type of caregiving? How does this driving force shape grandparenting? What role do the state and socioeconomic factors play? As previous studies (e.g., Lee and Xiao, 1998) have noted, grandparenting in China is motivated by a variety of different factors, including familism, modernisation, and traditional values. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the motivations for grandparenting in rural China through participant narratives and the researcher's fieldwork notes. Understanding the causes of grandparenting from the grandparents' perspective is instructive for the subsequent chapters, which will examine the operation, heterogeneity, and impacts of grandparenting.

Three overarching themes and six sub-themes emerged from grandparents' narratives regarding the driving forces of grandparenting, namely economic factors, cultural expectations, and family cohesion. These three themes, however, are not parallel. Confronted with urbanisation and internal migration, the multigenerational peasant family transforms into an economic unit with the goal of completing intergenerational social mobility through family urbanisation. During this process, grandparents are culturally expected and emotionally entangled to take responsibility for childrearing. From this perspective, grandparenting's major driving force is peasant families' economic-
growth orientation in the urbanisation context. This major cause continues to shape grandparenting in rural China, resulting in a clash between tradition and modernity in terms of intergenerational relationships.

Sections 4.3 to 4.5 introduce three themes that emerged from grandparents' discussions of what motivated their childrearing activities. Section 4.3 focuses on how economic considerations influence rural grandparents and their families, resulting in the necessity and rationality of grandparenting. It also demonstrates how state-driven policies, directly and indirectly, affect peasant families' goals and the intergenerational division of labour. Section 4.4 discusses how cultural expectations, especially traditional family values, lead grandparents to become primary caregivers of grandchildren when the second-generation is absent. Section 4.5 reviews how altruistic feelings drive grandparents to start grandparenting when the second-generation faces crises. Based on the major driving force of grandparenting, I then define grandparenting in rural China as economic-growth-oriented grandparenting. Finally, section 4.6 further defines the characteristics of this type of grandparenting and its clash with traditional, intergenerational interactions.

4.3 Economic factors: the engine of contemporary grandparenting

When asking grandparents why they became their grandchildren's primary caregivers, the most common answer they provided without thinking was, "Because we need money." Although grandparenting is an intergenerational interaction that cannot bring direct economic benefits, participants' narratives indicate the pivotal role economic considerations play in this activity. In particular, grandparents raised two concrete factors that make the reconfiguration of labour division within their families economically beneficial and even necessary. The following text will discuss these two factors, namely, internal migration and village competition.

4.3.1 Internal migration in China

When I first came to the Tea-Garden Village as an NGO official to do poverty reduction work, I was told by local governors that there were only elders and children in the village as young peasants are all in the cities now. The local officials further told me that if they found young peasants in the village, they would persuade them to be migrant workers
as, "It is the fastest way to reduce poverty". Under the circumstances, the reason for grandparents to become primary caregivers for their grandchildren seems very simple and obvious. A widowed grandmother from Ravine Village, who has looked after her grandson for 15 years, said:

*My daughter-in-law went back home after her pregnancy and left home again when my grandson was weaned at six months. She and my son do not have hukou in the city they work in, so it is difficult for them to raise my grandson there. Therefore, I have the responsibility of looking after my grandson...You asked me why I became a grandparent caregiver. The answer is simple: my grandson's parents could not take him with them, so I became an alternative caregiver.* (R-14)

Another grandmother in Tea-Garden Village who also ran a small Chinese medicine business stated that:

*Honestly speaking, we are so poor. If they (her sons and daughters-in-law) don't go outside for work, life can be very tough. If I did not look after those children, how could we survive?* (T-02)

Among the 38 grandparent interviewees, 33 are currently raising grandchildren independently, while the second-generation remains absent. The remaining interviewees live with their daughters-in-law, who are currently unable to work either due to pregnancy or illness. For all these grandparents, the son and daughter-in-law's migration is the direct cause of their grandparenting.

The above two narratives indicate two points about internal migration and grandparenting. Firstly, it shows that compared with farming and other work in rural areas, being a migrant worker can bring more economic benefits to the family. In the Tea-Garden Village, locals use the words "zhao qian" or "zuo huo lu" to express their migrant work experience. "Zhao qian" can be translated directly as "to find money", as "zhao" means "to find" and "qian" means "money". "Zuo huo lu" means "to make a living", as "zuo" means "to make", and "huo lu" means "the way to live". These two words clearly explain why grandparents view the second-generation's migration as reasonable or even necessary. For peasants, the widening income gap between urban and rural areas and the increasing significance of wage income for their families partially result
in the second-generation's migration (Guan, 2013). This necessity and the possibility of internal migration are based on policy changes in hukou and employment systems, which now allow peasants to work in urban areas while restricting their access to urban welfare systems. Meanwhile, it is also relevant to the changing attitudes of peasants toward economic development, which is driven by propaganda.

Secondly, the restriction on the type and the location of hukou prevents the migration of peasant families and leads to family separation and the new intergenerational division of labour. Although peasants are allowed to work in cities, converting hukou locations to migration destinations is difficult for them, let alone their family members. Therefore, only a few migrant workers and their family members have unfettered access to public services or the social welfare system in urban areas. More than 132 million migrant workers had left various family members in the villages, accounting for 81 percent of the total number of migrants in 2014 (National Bureau of Statistics of PRC, 2015). In 2016, there were 9.02 million children in rural China whose parents were both internal migrants. Among them, 89.3 percent were cared for by their grandparents (China News, 2016).

For many peasant families, there is a dilemma between the family's economic growth and the integration of the family. Letting the middle generation, the main labour resource of the family, stay in the village means the family can follow the traditional intergenerational division of labour and maintain its unity at the cost of low family economic growth. Or, peasant families can apply a new division of labour, letting grandparents look after grandchildren in villages while the parents work alone in urban areas.

Facing this dilemma, peasant families demonstrate their family resilience. As Walsh (2002) argues, to adapt to new situations, families have to change their internal functions and structures as well as transform relationships between family members. When grandparents express how economic considerations push the second-generation to the cities and get them involved in childcare, they reveal how their families attempt to reach a new equilibrium through the rearrangement of family labour resources under the socio-economic shift.

Meanwhile, when the second-generation's migration leads to conflict and various issues, some grandparents regard grandparenting as part of a coping strategy. For instance, a grandmother started grandparenting
voluntarily when her daughter-in-law's migration plan triggered a family conflict.

When my youngest granddaughter was eight months old, her mother told us she planned to work in the city. At that time, both my son and my husband were opposed to her migration since the baby was so young. Finally, I told my husband and my son that I could take care of my granddaughter. Thus, they allowed my daughter-in-law to work. (M-04)

The narratives quoted above all demonstrate the close relationship between the second-generation's internal migration and grandparenting. However, there are distinctions among them. In R-14's case, she was forced to care for grandchildren as a result of her daughter-in-law's migration, whereas in M-04's case, the grandmother took the initiative and used grandparenting to facilitate the migration of the second-generation. The absence of the second-generation, typically for the sake of family income, is a major factor in the reorganisation of intergenerational labour. The negotiation process for the rearrangement and the intergenerational power structure, on the other hand, can vary considerably between families.

While the second-generation's rural-urban migration causes the reconfiguration and leads to the re-division of labour in multigenerational families, one may ask why increasing economic benefits is so crucial for peasant families. In interviews, grandparents frequently mentioned one factor: village competition.

4.3.2 Competition within villages

In the last section, I quoted a grandmother's (T-02) complaint that:

Honestly speaking, we are so poor.

When she said this, we were sitting in her two-storey brick house. Next to this house, the grandmother and her family have another three-floor house which was then under construction. Although the paucity of money is a common reason for peasants to leave their children behind with grandparents, only a few participants in this study still suffer from extreme or absolute poverty. Benefiting from the rural development
policy and the increasing family income, most participants have gotten rid of their old mud tile houses and now live in newly built brick houses, and some families have vehicles. Young peasants' internal migration work greatly improved their families' economic condition. The national poverty threshold in 2020 was 4000 RMB per person per year (around 455 GBP), while the average monthly income for migrant workers was 4072 RMB (National Bureau Statistics, 2021). As there were three migrant workers in T-02's eight-member family, her family should not be (and also did not look) extremely poor.

What makes T-02 and other villagers feel poor and eager to increase the family's income is the competition within villages in housing, consumption, and family urbanisation. One grandmother in Ravine Village told me:

*Every family competes with the others. You bring money from the outside and buy good things. Then, others want to buy better things. It is a competition...*  
*...If your sons don't go outside to find money, your family will always be the loser.* (R-09)

Traditionally, with a strong emphasis on the bloodline-based clan family and the fixed hierarchy within villages, peasants focused more on mutual aid among the clan's families than on competing with their peers (Yang and Wang, 2018). However, this situation changed following the Chinese economic reform and the implementation of the household responsibility system in 1978, which allowed rural families to become responsible for their profits and losses. Since then, competition around and comparisons based on financial status and property ownership have significantly escalated among peasants (He, 2018). As He and Dong (2009) point out, migrant workers and their families now hold two common developmental goals. The short-term goal is to increase the family income through migrant work to maintain a decent life in villages. Once this goal is achieved, a Chinese peasant family will start the family urbanisation process. This process usually includes three steps, in order: buying an apartment, moving all family members to the city and changing their hukou location and type. Competition between villagers can be found in all those processes and influences grandparents' decisions on grandparenting.

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1 The study uses the 2019 average exchange rate between GBP and RMB, where 1 GBP = 8.8 RMB.
According to the existing studies and the narratives of respondents, competition in the villages has three main characteristics; it is:

1. both intense and costly (He, 2018; Yang and Wang, 2018),
2. deeply influential in peasant life across numerous aspects, such as marriage, reputation and interpersonal communication (Yang and Wang, 2018; Yang and Ouyang, 2013), and
3. continually evolving without end (Chen, 2019).

These three characteristics work together to both motivate grandparents and shape grandparenting itself.

The intensity and costliness of competition are represented in the house building and gift-giving processes. In Tea-Garden and Ma villages, which are less advanced than Ravine Village, many grandparents' families strive to build or refurbish their houses. For instance, a grandfather with 20 years of grandparenting experience complained about the economic pressure of building a house. For this grandfather, grandparenting is an effective coping mechanism in the situation:

_We do all kind of things for money. We help our son to raise the kids so he and his wife can earn money in the cities. If we do not play this role, they would have to stay at home. Then, where would we get the money to survive? We also need to build our house...It is really costly._ (M-06)

In rural China, the house is not only a habitation but is representative of the household's economic strength. The meaning of the house for a family is similar to a person's face. Peasants believe that the house represents the family's overall status and, as a result, will have an impact on the family's reputation. Under these circumstances, the peasants began to compete among themselves in terms of building new houses, with the symbolic role of the house exceeding practicality in significance. Based on his fieldwork experience, Chen concluded that, "When doing fieldwork in villages, the first thing that captures our attention is villagers' houses. The competition around houses is also a commonality among villages. Houses are a major competition programme in villages, although the concrete form of the competition may vary" (2019, p.45). Since this form of competition is more about ostentation and extravagance than improving the living conditions, it can lead to a heavy financial burden for peasant families and often leaves them feeling overwhelmed.
Gift-giving is also a crucial battlefield for some peasants. In rural China, rituals such as weddings, funerals, birthday celebrations, childbirth, and the establishment of a new house are all accompanied by gift-giving. Similar to the symbolic role of houses, gifts also become a sign of the wealth and generosity of the provider, resulting in an expensive form of competition. Various studies have estimated that the gift/income ratio of rural families is larger than 10 percent, and this ratio is continually increasing (Bulte et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2011). In my study, almost all participants' families spend more than 10,000 RMB (around 1,136 GBP) on gifts each year. The grandfather (M-06), who found difficulties in building a new family house, even spent more than 20,000 RMB (around 2,273 GBP) each year, while the average monthly income of migrant workers was 3,962 RMB (around 450 GBP) in the year interviews were conducted. Competitive pressures and the long-term goal of family urbanisation both contribute to the high expenses, urging the family to maximise its economic growth through the rearrangement of labour sources. The grandmother in this family told me that,

*You cannot say grandparenting is easy...But I never complain to my daughter-in-law since I would like them to stay in the city and earn more money. We have such huge expenses that grandparenting is necessary.* (M-05)

Exploiting the elderly's labour resources in order to win the competition between villagers seems like an example of "beating one's own face to make it swell enough to appear fat and show off an air of authority" (大国连冲胖子) for peasant families. However, competition between villagers is not only related to intangible reputation or recognition by others (面子). It also impacts grandparents' daily lives in three main ways and therefore can force grandparents into the role of childrearing.

First, it influences the second-generation's marriages. In rural China, helping adult sons into marriage is a part of the parents' duty and life task (Yang and Wang, 2018; Chen, 2014; He, 2008b). Parents who are unable to accomplish this mission will be labelled as failures since they have not fulfilled their responsibility and continue the family line (jiang zi). In traditional Chinese weddings, the groom was expected to pay the bride's family as a token of gratitude for raising the bride. Due to the rural sex imbalance for marriageable mates, economic growth, and the vicious cycle of villages competing for the marriage price, this tradition
has evolved into a ballooning cost of marriage (Jiang et al., 2015). Most brides require the groom's family to have a new or at least renovated house as well as a fair sum of money for cash gifts. In Tea-Garden Village, the grandparents told me that the average cost of securing a daughter-in-law is around 100,000 to 150,000 RMB (around 11,364 to 17,045 GBP). Therefore, peasants have to either borrow money for their adult sons' marriages or cooperate with their married sons to help younger sons get married. In either case, they have to release their adult children's labour and let them become migrant workers in order to maximise family income. By directly affecting young males' marriages, competition between villagers now is central to the fulfilment of the elderly's life tasks.

Additionally, the family's performance in the competition determines their social status within the village and influences the other villagers' attitudes toward them. In interviews, many grandparents mentioned that if their families did not perform well in the competition related to housing, gift-giving and consumption, other villagers would often despise them and discriminate against them. In fact, this would appear to be a common phenomenon in all three villages I visited. A widowed grandmother taking care of her grandson in Ma Village describes:

_They may not express their scorn, but I know they look down on me. When you are poor, rich people are not even willing to hang out with you._ (M-03)

Meanwhile, a father who came back home to support his oldest son in preparing for the high-school entrance examination noted the following:

_I think it is the same everywhere...The rich discriminate against the poor. However, it is more obvious in our rural areas...In the past, if you did not leave the village, you could still live well by farming. Nowadays, farming only allows you to feed yourself and will never provide a good life. You have to be a migrant worker._ (KI-07)

This narrative denotes one crucial point: farming can no longer help peasants achieve the standard of "a good life" in villages. Facing intense competition, peasant families are now development-oriented and economic-growth-oriented, forcing all family members, including grandparents, to strive to increase family income. Under the circumstances, grandparents' lifestyles, behavioural logic, and expectations for eldercare are all affected.
Thirdly, some grandparents are deeply engaged in the competition with other villagers simply because they were never outsiders to this competitive environment. Since becoming a migrant worker was more lucrative than farming, peasants began to migrate from the late 1970s. Many grandparent caregivers and their spouses, particular in Ravine Village, were migrant workers themselves. They have experienced the steadily increasing economic inequality among peasant families and are sensitive to the competitive environment of the villages.

Notably, the competition in the villages is continually evolving, and in accordance, the attendant costs are increasing. Thus, there is no end to this competition until peasants complete family urbanisation and become urban residents.

Here the house-related competition in Tea-Garden Village serves as an example. Located in a state-designated county¹, the average income of the migrating workers from the village is approximately 3,000 RMB per month (around 341 GBP). In the past, the main goal for peasants there was to reconstruct their houses. However, when the peasants had achieved this goal, house-related competition did not stop; rather, a new standard for a decent house emerged, that is, the new brick and concrete house that typically costs from 100,000 to 300,000 RMB (around 11,364 to 34,091 GBP). As a result, many peasant families had to borrow money to establish their houses and subsequently lived in debt for an extended period. The liabilities related to building a house tend to propel families into long-term financial crises.

A grandmother who currently cares for the two children of her only son talked about how the family’s debt forced her into grandparenting:

*We built our new house in the birth year of my first grandson. Now he is already five years old, and we still owe my relatives 50,000RMB (around 5,682 GBP). My son and his wife left home when the baby was six months old, and I have raised him since then... We still have liabilities, so I cannot ask my daughter-in-law to stay home and raise her children. (T-07)*

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¹ As a reminder, the PRC government initiated the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Campaign in 2015. According to the PRC government, one strategy to achieve the “targeted poverty alleviation” is to identify people in need. The state, therefore, identified 832 designated poor counties and 128,000 impoverished villages.
Furthermore, once peasant families achieve the short-term goal of having a decent life in the village, efforts towards the long-term family urbanisation goal will start. In Ravine Village, the house-related competition has already escalated, with the villagers now competing to buy apartments in urban areas:

_We have a house in our village. But if you look around, you will find that others have already bought apartments in the cities, or at least in our town... For us, we have nothing but this small concrete building. Grandparenting is tiring, but I must not only think of myself. We have such great expenses, and we need to buy an apartment. I must put my back into it._ (R-15)

The endless and continuously evolving competition in the villages forces grandparents to raise their grandchildren so that the second-generation can migrate to the cities and earn more money. While some grandparents are unwilling to take this role, the severe outcome of losing face in a competitive environment leaves them with little choice. Since the competition is prolonged, grandparenting generally lasts for an extended period. In fact, many grandparents continue caring for their grandchildren until the end of their lives. From this perspective, the intergenerational engagement between grandparents and grandchildren is no longer driven by traditional ethics. Instead, it is primarily driven by economic considerations.

As "everyone in the village is doing it now," relieving the middle generation from childcare and increasing family income is usual and natural for grandparents. In interviews, none of the grandparents linked their grandparenting to the state's policies or rural China's state-driven social welfare shortage. But many of them frequently mentioned the huge urban-rural gap, the restriction of hukou, and the difficulty of family urbanisation, which are all driven by the state's policies.

The prevalence of grandparenting is an outcome of the shrink of social welfare provisions. During the marketisation process, the government made the family the primary caregiver in order to lessen its own burden (Tang, 2013; Wu, 2015). Due to a lack of welfare for rural residents and a poor civil society, peasants are forced to rely on their families as their only source of protection when faced with hardships (Yan, 2018). When all policy-driven factors combine to put peasants under stress, individual peasants and their families have to shoulder the entire burden, rearranging the division of labour and exploiting labour resources from both
grandparents and the middle generation. While grandparents believed in "family problems and family duties," this illustrates the state's continued neglect.

Economic considerations are the main driving force behind grandparenting, but behind them lie the policy-driven predicament faced by rural residents. Meanwhile, culture does continue to play a role in this intergenerational activity, albeit in an attenuated form.

4.4 Cultural expectations as motivation

Although the economic factor is the fundamental driver for grandparents who look after grandchildren, it is not the only one. Additionally, cultural expectations, particularly the traditional family culture and newer forms of social and peer pressure, also play a role.

4.4.1 The continuity of the family line

Being primary caregivers of grandchildren when the second-generation is absent seems to be undoubtedly logical for grandparents. Many of them stated that they 'should do that work' when the second-generation is striving for family economic benefits. For example, a grandfather from Tea-Garden Village, who is currently taking care of two grandchildren with his wife, stated:

I agreed to look after the two kids without any hesitation. When we helped my son to build this house and get married, our goal was to have grandchildren. Having grandchildren, especially having a grandson, means our family has an heir. It is a blessing (T-12).

Meanwhile, another grandfather used one short sentence to describe the motivation behind grandparenting: 'having a son is to gain a grandson'. While economic factors are the fundamental driving forces behind grandparenting and lead to the second-generation's migration, the family values grandparents uphold, especially their emphasis on family continuity, also push them into the caregiver role.

There is a common view that traditional Chinese culture has a deep influence on the concept, structure, and function of contemporary Chinese families (Xie and Xia, 2011; Silverstein et al., 2006). It places special emphasis on the importance of bloodlines and the continuity of
the patrilineal family line. As He (2008a) concludes, perpetuating the family line through reproduction is one of the fundamental values of Chinese culture. People who do not have male offspring are considered miserable failures, while those with more offspring are seen as blessed. Although urbanisation and modernisation push peasant families to pursue economic development and family urbanisation, the continuity of the family line remains significant for grandparents. Furthermore, it keeps up with the new economic-growth orientation and now not only emphasises that a family should have descendants but also highlights the success of descendants (Li, 2018). In many cases, this success means the urbanisation of descendants, which requires the grandparents' long-term dedication and assistance.

The emphasis on continuing the family line and its role in motivating grandparenting can be clearly embodied in a specific type of marriage known as 'ruzhui'. Ruzhui refers to a matrilocal residence marriage style in which the children of the couple will take the mother's surname and are considered the offspring of the mother's family line. Traditionally, patrilineal surnames are inherited along the male line and are viewed as a symbol of family continuity. Therefore, by adopting a ruzhui marriage, grandparents without sons can still have grandchildren bearing their family name and continue the family line. In Ravine Village, I met two grandmothers who care for their daughters' children who share the family name. The first grandmother and her husband also used savings to build a new house for their 2-year-old grandson. She told me that:

*We only have two daughters. Villagers said that my husband was a good guy but did not have any sons. It was quite hurtful. So, we decided to let my oldest daughter obtain a ruzhui marriage...Since my grandchildren belong to our family and will carry on our bloodline, I have no reason to refuse the role of grandparenting. In fact, my husband and I even use our own money to raise our grandchildren and build a new house for them.* (R-09)

I then asked what if her oldest daughter had not obtained a ruzhui marriage and her grandchildren had taken the paternal surname?

*In that case, my husband and I would need to save money for eldercare since we do not have offspring. After all, they have paternal grandparents, right? I would not need to help them unless they were really in crisis.* (R-09)

The other maternal grandmother also stated a similar opinion:
We spent lots of money on arranging a ruzhui marriage for my daughter, just because we wanted to have grandchildren with our family name. Finally, we achieved this goal. So, I definitely need to look after these kids. (R-05)

Being influenced by traditional family values, especially the Confucian ideal of intergenerational relationships, many grandparents still regard finding wives for their sons and having grandchildren as a responsibility (He, 2008a). Therefore, once economic factors push young peasants to become migrant workers, their elderly parents are most likely to look after their left-behind children. The existence of ruzhui marriage and the grandparenting that goes alongside it confirms the role of patrilineal family continuity in this process. Concurrently, it explains the disproportionate proportion of paternal grandparent caregivers compared to maternal ones. Since only the children who bear the family name are considered offspring of the family, among the 38 interviewed grandparents, only seven were looking after their daughter's children. Of these seven, two had arranged ruzhui marriages.

However, it is notable that family values and the emphasis on family continuity are not the major driving forces of today's grandparenting. It is a supplementary factor that persuades or pushes grandparents to rear grandchildren when the second-generation's migration is inevitable. Being primary caregivers is not the traditional duty of Chinese grandparents. Many participants remembered merely receiving some childrearing support from their parents since mothers should be their children's primary caregivers, even if they have other work. As Santos (2017) concludes, until the 1980s, Chinese peasant families were largely unaffected by urbanisation and modernisation. After that, grandparents gradually became responsible for the "feminine" work of caregiving, while the middle generation, no matter what gender, carried out the "masculine" work of earning an income in urban areas. Therefore, while traditional family values play a role in motivating grandparents to be caregivers, today's grandparenting is not a continuation but a transformation of tradition. Apart from the internal motivation created by the grandparents' emphasis on family continuity, there is also outward pressure imposed by social influence.

4.4.2 Social influence and pressure
Fei Xiaotong (1992), a Chinese sociologist and anthropologist, has a well-known discussion about the society of acquaintance in rural China. Based on this, some researchers tend to describe the villages of today as a 'society of half-acquaintance' in which all residents know each other and are influenced by unwritten rules (Chen, 2019). Under the circumstances, the universal pursuit of economic growth, the influence of traditional family values and collectivism all lead to grandparenting becoming a norm in rural China. Grandparents who provide grandparenting are considered responsible, while those who refuse the role are accused of being selfish.

Wen, my gatekeeper in Ravine Village, shared her opinion:

Now, it is almost a convention. The young peasants do not even need to negotiate with their parents since it is has become the consensus...In this village, many grandparents enjoy their lives without grandparenting. However, it is difficult for them to refuse grandparenting if the second-generation requires it due to social pressure. (KI-01)

In Tea-Garden village, a grandmother who has looked after her grandchildren for 15 years talked about how the activities of other grandparents influenced her:

Every grandparent here needs to look after their grandchildren. Some take this job for a short period, while others, including me, provide grandparenting for a long period of time. Grandparenting is not easy. However, how can I refuse this role while the other grandparents all engage in grandparenting? It is our destiny. It is a rule. (T-14)

Meanwhile, in Ravine Village, one grandmother shared how social pressure led her to abandon her own plans in favour of grandparenting:

I have looked after my grandson for five years. Compared with grandparenting, I prefer to work and earn money for myself. However, my daughter-in-law asked me to do grandparenting and I could not refuse. All the grandparents in our village do the same thing. There is no room to negotiate...In the last year, my grandson entered primary school and I asked my daughter-in-law to come back home since I was unable to help him with his homework. I also wanted to do some odd jobs and give some of my income to her. So, this year I did not care for my grandson. However, since
my income is much less than my daughter-in-law's city income, I may resume the grandparenting next year. (R-02)

With grandparenting gradually becoming a new norm in rural China, grandparents who refuse this work face great pressure. Since in most cases the grandparents' income is less than their sons' and daughters-in-law's, their insistence on working might be criticised as wilful. Paternal grandparents who reject grandparenting can be judged as selfish, based on the prevalent familism and the new grandparenting norm.

A member of Tea-Garden Village villagers' committee shared his observations of the villagers' attitudes toward grandparents who reject the role of grandparenting:

In our village, grandparents are expected to take care of their grandchildren. Only a few elders reject their children's request for grandparenting. Some believe that these grandparents are selfish, only focusing on their own interests and ignoring their children's difficulties. However, I do not agree. These elders have lived a tough life and are no longer able to engage in childrearing. Sometimes, the young people will also blame their parents for not grandparenting, believing that if most grandparents can do it, it is unreasonable for their parents to refuse the role. (KI-09)

Rural grandparents do not wish to stand out; instead, they tend to blend in with the throng (He, 2008a). Even though modernisation and urbanisation have undermined the old family system and its associated values, the remnant is still linked with the new grandparenting habit and exerts pressure on grandparents. It is represented by the familistic ideology that is still held by many grandparents. As Liu (2011) found in two large-scale surveys, many Chinese still prioritise family over individual interests and have a strong sense of responsibility to family members. Once peasants identify economic growth as the priority of the family, parents who refuse to migrate for work and grandparents who refuse grandparenting will be labelled as selfish and could be censured and isolated. Grandparenting expectations have since grown into moral judgments, criticising grandparents who decline to take on the role.

4.5 Family cohesion: Intimate relations and grandparenting

In the last two sections, I looked at how economic considerations and cultural expectations interact to create the newly common practice of grandparenting in rural China. Apart from these two significant socio-
cultural factors, grandparents expressed a personal concern that drove their grandparenting, namely, family cohesion. Some participants, in particular, talked about how their altruistic intentions and intergenerational bonds led them to work as caretakers.

4.5.1 Altruistic intention

In the previous section, I introduced the disproportionate ratio between paternal and maternal grandparent caregivers, which exists due to the patrilineal and patriarchal family values held in rural China. In most cases, grandparents are not in the same family unit as their married daughters and also have no responsibility to look after those grandchildren. However, in the field, I also met grandparents who took care of daughters' children neither for economic benefits nor family continuity but with altruistic intentions.

In Tea-Garden Village, I met a grandmother looking after her daughter's son. She told me that her daughter was divorced from her husband and brought her son back home six years ago. Two years later, she got married again and had a baby with her current husband. To avoid any potential conflict with her husband, the daughter asked the grandmother to take care of her oldest son in the village. The grandmother agreed due to her altruistic intention, stating the following:

*Looking after the child of my daughter is not my responsibility. But if I rejected her, her life would be very tough. Her husband is not willing to live with her oldest son. I do not want her to suffer from any marriage conflicts, and I also worry about my grandson's quality of life. (T-08)*

Another maternal grandmother from Tea-Garden village looks after four children for her eldest daughter. She is not a resident of the village; rather, she came here simply for grandparenting. Because this grandmother is Miao¹ and cannot speak Mandarin, I interviewed her younger daughter. She said the following:

*After getting married, my sister gave birth to four daughters, which saddled her with both a financial and a caregiving burden. So, my father told my mother to look after my nieces. My sister and her

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¹ Miao is an official ethnic minority group in China. According to the Sixth National Population Census of the PRC, Miao ethnic group has a population of 9,426,007 in 2010. Miao people have their own Hmongic language and, compared with Han people, are less influenced by Confucianism.
husband have not yet built their new house, which means they are...they are relatively poor in the village. So, my parents want to assist her. (KI-10)

In some cases, maternal grandparents would look after their daughters' children if they have no paternal grandparents. By doing so, they can expect eldercare rewards since they are the only elders in the family. However, in this case, those children also have living paternal grandparents who are busy looking after grandchildren from another adult son. Therefore, the maternal grandmother can rarely get rewards and mainly did grandparenting for altruistic reasons.

To assist her eldest daughter, this grandmother had to temporarily separate from her husband since the grandfather needs to remain home and farm. She is 64 years of age and takes care of four children alone, simply because she wants to help her daughter. As previous studies (Shen, 2001; Song et al., 2008) have noted, some grandparents provide childcare for altruistic reasons, with the aim of assisting their adult children, especially when they face certain challenges. This type of grandparenting is usually temporary, and the grandparents' role is more "family saver" than "family maximiser."

While family-based altruism is a part of the traditional family values, it is notable that not all grandparents hold this belief. In fact, grandparents' altruistic activities are often both conditional and selective. While a grandparent may engage in altruistic childrearing with some of their children, they may refuse the role of grandparenting or expect some reward for it with their other children. One grandmother talked about her different responses to her two sons when asked to engage in grandparenting:

"I do not like my eldest son and his current wife. Therefore, I really don't want to look after their children for them...My younger son is a kind person who has had a bit of bad luck. His wife divorced him and left three children behind. So, I decided to help him through this tough time by grandparenting...Raising these three grandchildren is expensive. But I am willing to spend my own money on raising them...When my eldest son asked me to look after his children temporarily, I asked him for payment. In so doing, I can obtain more money to assist my younger son. (T-06)"

For this grandmother, the motivation to engage in grandparenting varies according to the relationships she has with her two sons. While she
provides childrearing altruistically for her younger son, she refuses to look after her eldest son's children for free. This case reveals that altruistic intentions are a direct motivation for grandparenting, while the emotional bond between the grandparents and their adult children, as well as the high level of family cohesion, is also a significant motivational factor.

4.5.2 Intergenerational bonding between grandparents and grandchildren

Intergenerational bonds are used to define the emotional closeness, intimate connections and kinship ties between generations, including the attachment between the grandparent caregivers and the grandchildren (Hodgson, 1992; Boon and Brussoni, 1996; Taylor Jr, 1998). Although rarely the sole motivation of grandparenting, the intergenerational bond between grandparents and grandchildren still plays a role in motivating grandparenting. Furthermore, some grandparents who initially engage in childcare for multiple reasons often continue in this role due to the strong intergenerational affective bonds. Some respondents claimed that they have a closer relationship with their grandchildren than with their migrant children. One grandmother from Tea-Garden Village who has looked after her grandson since he was born, sees him almost as her own child:

*I became the full-time caregiver of my grandson since he was four months. I feed him, play with him and sleep with him. For me, he is like my youngest son. We have such a close affective bond, which is definitely stronger than the bond between my grandson and his parents...Even when his parents come back home, my grandson still insists on living and sleeping with me. I am not grandparenting for my son; rather, I do all those things because I love my grandson.* (T-07)

In China, it is believed that grandparents have naturally strong intergenerational bonds with their grandchildren due to the emphasis on family continuity. In Chinese, the term "ge dai qin" refers to grandparents being naturally closer to their grandchildren than to their own children. Meanwhile, the phrase 'han yi nong sun', which means grandparents enjoy playing with grandchildren, is commonly used to describe the desirable elderly life. The cultural preference for intergenerational bonds
and the emotional bonds created during grandparenting motivate some grandparents to maintain their caregiver role. In Ravine Village, one grandmother told me how she fought for custody of her grandchildren with her ex-daughter-in-law, stating the following:

I have one grandson and one granddaughter. Just after the birth of my grandson, my daughter-in-law left our home with a man she met online. This was such an embarrassing scandal in our village, and it beat my son down. Since then, my son has rarely returned home and only sends a little money back. Three years ago, my ex-daughter-in-law returned and asked for custody of my grandchildren. I rejected her. So, she made a concession and wanted to bring one child with her, leaving another one with me. I rejected her again. I told her that both of them were my sweethearts, while she had never done anything for them. I love my grandchildren, and I want to take care of them until they grow up. No one, not even their mother, can take them away from me. (R-12)

The above cases show that grandparenting is not a one-way resource transfer. During this interaction, grandparents also receive emotional support and company from their grandchildren. Long-term face-to-face interaction between grandparents and grandchildren can promote emotional intimacy, as Ribe (2018) discovered based on his research on grandparenting in Scotland. While economic considerations related to state policies and social transformation, as well as cultural expectations of grandparenting, which are linked to the socio-cultural context, all contribute to the prevalence of grandparenting, individual will and interpersonal emotional links also play a role in this process, as evidenced by the intergenerational bonding between grandparents and their grandchildren.

In interviews, grandparents also introduced how grandparenting reduces their loneliness and brings joy to their lives. Since those factors are more like benefits of grandparenting, I will discuss them in Chapter 6. Now, after delineating the causes of grandparenting, I would like to explore the nature and characteristics of it.
4.6 The goal of family urbanisation and economic growth-oriented grandparenting

I have argued that economic factors fundamentally cause today's grandparenting in rural China, while other elements play a supplementary role. Experiencing high-speed modernisation and urbanisation, peasant families are not satisfied with biological and social reproduction and are now setting family urbanisation as their long-term goal (He, 2008a; Li, 2018). It is this new family goal that urges the new intergenerational division of labour and endows the necessity and significance of grandparenting.

The pursuit of family urbanisation is a result of the long-term exploitation of rural China during the industrialisation process, the widening rural-urban gap, the restriction of agricultural hukou, and place-based public goods provisioning. However, completing family urbanisation is not simple. To accumulate enough economic and social capital to buy an apartment in the city, find a stable income to cover living expenses and change hukou location and type, peasant families have to maintain the "half-rural and half-urban" and the "half-employed and half-farming" status for an extended period. Chen (2018) describes this status as "half-urbanisation" in her monograph.

Peasants are also competing with their fellow villages during this process, which requires them to maximise household income while minimising living expenses. Therefore, today's grandparenting in rural China presents economic-growth-oriented characteristics. Those attributes distinguish it from traditional Chinese grandparenting and grandparenting in other socio-cultural contexts. Grandparenting in rural China is neither purely motivated by family values or ethics, nor caused by an emergency or family crisis. The target of it is neither successful childrearing nor improving grandparents' quality of life. Instead, it is an intergenerational family strategy that aims at economic growth.

In this part, I will delineate three prominent characteristics of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting and its clash with traditional grandparenting, particularly regarding grandparents' position and vulnerabilities, the range of grandparental activities, and the expected reward for grandparenting. Those characteristics, in turn, further influence the long-term development of peasant families.
4.6.1 The subordinate role of grandparents

One prominent characteristic of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting is that grandparents are no longer highly respected within their families but subordinate to the middle generation while grandparenting. To articulate the subordinate role of grandparents, I must briefly introduce the traditional Chinese family’s operation first.

The traditional Chinese peasant family is based on a triad of ethics, structure and function (Li, 2018). Among these three elements, family ethics is central, shaping the family structure and determining the family function. Under family ethical rules, traditional Chinese families followed a gender- and seniority-based hierarchy, in which elders usually sit in the highest place. These rules also establish reproduction and continuation as the family goal. While moving up in social class was praised, peasant families were satisfied with perpetuating the family line. Therefore, family life could be less stressful or exploitative (Li, 2018). Instead, it was smooth, day-to-day and can be infinitely continued by reproduction. By raising children, letting them get married, and handing down the family property to the remaining son, peasants can accomplish their family goals and achieve ethical success (Chen, 2011; Li, 2018). During this life process, which is called guo ri zi, means 'living a life', people's value and status are evaluated by their contribution to the family (Wu, 2007; Li, 2018). Thus, elders were naturally respected and did not worry about the decline of health and labour capacity with age.

The new family urbanisation goal and accompanying economic-growth-oriented rules, on the other hand, shift the family goal from reproduction to promotion and development (Chen, 2018). It also gives birth to a new criterion for evaluating the values of family members. Their worth and prestige are now defined by the economic value they provide now and in the future, rather than by their former contributions. The ageing process is characterised by the accumulation of weaknesses. Peasants' labour and resources dwindle as they grow older, resulting in marginalisation and a decline in family status. The more a peasant family's urbanisation goal is weighted, the more economic-growth-oriented the family becomes, and the more subordinate the elders become in the family. As the elderly's workload decreases, they are increasingly devalued under this new standard.

As a result, grandparents usually play a subordinate role in their families. Many of them lack decision-making power during the grandparenting
process. Because grandparenting cannot bring direct economic benefits to the family, it is also devalued. Some grandparents also do extra work or farm to increase the family's income.

Grandparents' subordinate role is most pronounced when they want to stop grandparenting. Some participants admitted that they gradually felt grandparenting to be more challenging with increasing age and declining health. However, the journey from thinking about ending grandparenting to actual cessation is full of negotiation and compromise due to grandparents' powerlessness.

Generally speaking, grandparents who start the work passively are more subordinate in their families; therefore, they also find more difficulties in stopping due to the structured vulnerability. Once a peasant family becomes economic-growth-oriented, maximising family income and minimising the expense will dominate the family's priorities for a long time. As long as grandparents are physically able to rear children, they lack legitimate justification to withdraw.

A 61-year-old grandmother with serious rheumatism (R-06) was special. Unlike most participants whose adult children are migrant workers, this grandmother's son and daughter-in-law have stable jobs in the nearby city and therefore receive the non-agricultural hukou. From a policy perspective, this young couple had already finished the nuclear family urbanisation. However, high living expenses in urban areas lead the family to remain economic-growth-oriented. As a result, the grandmother has to be subordinate and cannot quit grandparenting:

My son has two children. I had raised the oldest one until she was old enough to enter kindergarten. It was that experience that let me get rheumatism...

Now, I feel overwhelmed. My hands are deformed due to rheumatism, which makes me incapable of doing housework... I told my son that my health condition does not allow me to do the work anymore, but it changes nothing. I still need to raise this youngest grandson until he can go to school. (R-06)

From the economic-growth-oriented perspective, grandparents find little leverage to negotiate. The limited income they are able to draw now puts them in a subordinate position compared with the middle generation. It is also predictable that the benefits they create will further decrease while the eldercare expense may increase in the future. Under the circumstances,
grandparents' complaints are commonly ignored by the second-generation so long as grandparents are still fit for childrearing.

Meanwhile, stopping grandparenting without the second-generation's permission will lead to both moral and material predicaments. On the one hand, grandparents will feel guilty for not assisting in the family urbanisation goal and are blamed or judged by relatives and villagers. On the other hand, their limited identified contribution will influence the quality of future eldercare. As a result, grandparents commonly find difficulties in ending grandparenting.

Grandparents in more traditional families are more potent than their peers. The traditional family structure gives them a natural power with age. Meanwhile, less transformation on intergenerational economic advancement and thereby less emphasis on the competition and family urbanisation reduces grandparenting's necessity. A grandfather explained how he refused to do grandparenting for one of his sons:

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\text{I have raised my granddaughter (the child of the grandfather's youngest son) since she was one year old. Later, my oldest son gave birth to my two grandsons. In the last year, I felt overwhelmed by grandparenting. Because I have raised my granddaughter for a long period and cannot bear to leave her, I told my oldest son for not looking after his children. He said he could ask his mother-in-law but he needed to pay for it. This is reasonable, so I let my son discuss it with his mother-in-law. (R-01)}
\]

This grandfather can stop grandparenting easily because his family is not that economic-growth-oriented. In the interview, this grandfather admitted both he and his sons are not presently interested in moving to cities. Therefore, they have little economic pressure and more options for the division of labour. Grandparents' own feelings and opinions are more valued than the economic benefits, so family members are willing to take on an extra expense to release the grandfather from childrearing.

However, with the increasing dominance of the market economy and the decline of villages, more rural families become economic-growth-oriented. Grandparenting gradually becomes work without the withdrawal mechanism. Meanwhile, grandparents are subordinate to the middle generation even if they continually work for their families.
4.6.2 The shrinking of grandparental activities

The roles grandparents play within multigenerational families can be visualised as being on a spectrum with symbolic roles at one end and instrumental and decisive roles at the other. There is also a wide range of grandparental activities as this work needs to meet the families' diverse needs and fit with the grandparents' capacity.

However, narratives indicate that grandparental activities shrunk a lot in economic-growth-oriented peasant families. One villagers’ committee member in Tea-Garden village told me that,

*Grandparenting is about raising those kids. It is to feed and clothe them so they would not be hungry and cold. Additionally, grandparents need to keep grandchildren healthy and safe. Their parents left healthy children behind with grandparents, so it is the grandparents' responsibility to keep them safe and healthy.* (KI-09)

Although Chinese grandparenting is traditionally rich, including education, moral guidance, mediation, and primary care (Lou, 2011), current grandparenting in rural China only focuses on essential daily care. To be more specific, grandparental activities have shrunk to only feeding and clothing the grandchildren and keeping them safe and healthy.

Most interviewed grandparents treated daily care as their major job, and some viewed it as the only task of grandparenting. A grandmother in Ravine Village admitted that,

*I am responsible for cooking and feeding my grandchildren. Taking care of them is all about cooking, washing clothes and keeping them safe. That is what I do and what I can do for them.* (R-14)

This statement was echoed by the local elementary school principal:

*When grandparents take part in parent-teacher meetings, they only care about the quality of our school kitchen. A lot of them are illiterate and unable to communicate with our teachers on students’ school performance. The quality of our lunch is the only topic between them and teachers.* (KI-08)

In her study on left-behind children, Murphy (2020) noticed the difference between "raising" (yang) and "educating" (jiao/yu). As grandparents paid more attention to "life" matters such as food, clothing, or warmth, they were blamed by local elites (e.g., local officials, teachers
etc) for "paying attention to *yang* but not to education/instruction (zhong yang bu zhong yu)” (Murphy, 2020, p.181).

This study partially confirms the above statement, as the shrinking of grandparental activities is represented in the lack of education, including the inadequacy of tutoring and moral cultivation. Although it is widely believed that education is an effective way to change peoples' fate, out of the 38 participants, only 12 grandparents mentioned family education or basic tutoring. Among those 12 grandparents, 4 of them provided tutoring for their grandchildren's homework while the rest only regularly encouraged their grandchildren to study. Regarding the moral educator and advisor role, which used to be significant for Chinese grandparents, only one participant still mentions this task in their narrative.

The principal of the local primary school near Ravine Village shared her observations on family habit cultivation. She said,

> For grandparents, keeping grandchildren full and warm is enough. They rarely get involved in good habit cultivation and bad habit correction. The parents pass the buck to grandparents, and those grandparents pass the responsibilities to our school. As teachers, we try our best to correct their bad habits from Monday to Friday. When we achieve some progress, the weekend comes, and all those kids go back home. The next Monday, all those go back to the origin again, and we have to re-correct their bad habits. You see, grandparents really do little work in cultivating habits. (KI-08)

The above statement indicates two points. Firstly, family education, especially behavioural training, is important for the growth and development of left-behind children. Secondly, the lack of moral education and habit cultivation in grandparenting negatively impacts grandchildren.

One direct cause of this situation is the limited capacity of grandparents. Most grandparent caregivers in rural China are aged 50 and above, which means they rarely received systematic education due to a turbulent childhood. Therefore, more than half of participants admitted they have difficulties in tutoring their grandchildren. The difficult experiences of grandparents' youth, particularly the Great Famine of 1959–1961, can also explain the emphasis on sustaining life (Murphy, 2020). Food holds special cultural significance for many grandparents, expressing the desire to nourish grandchildren both physically and emotionally (Jiang et al.,
2007; Jankowiak, 2011). As a result, grandparents' attention to their grandchildren's food can be an expression of their concern and love.

Some grandparents also limit grandparenting to essential daily care for subjective reasons. As Santos (2021) summarised from his fieldwork, peasants view the parenting job as a combination of various tasks, and now both parents and grandparents share this parenting job. While migrant parents are responsible for the "breadwinner" role and grandparents, especially grandmothers, work as "everyday caregivers", the "educator" and "advisor" roles are missing. Many grandparents pin their hopes on the middle generation, wishing migrant parents could educate their children through video calls. However, this hope is rarely satisfied. Meanwhile, many grandparents are involved in grandparenting with the aim of increasing family income or due to the stress of decreasing family status, therefore they are less motivated to improve the quality of childrearing.

Having worked in Ravine Villages for years, Wen has her idea on grandparenting. She saw grandparents' negative attitudes towards tutoring and family education as a strategy to avoid being overburdened:

*For those grandparents who conduct grandparenting unwillingly, they do not want to take more responsibility. Therefore, they only include basic care in grandparenting and exclude other additional work, including tutoring. In fact, some grandparents I met have junior or even high school degrees but are unwilling to help their grandchildren with elementary school homework. It is a way to relieve themselves of responsibility. (KI-01)*

The economic-growth orientation makes economic benefits the main priority of the family. Under the circumstances of increasing education expenses, decreasing college enrolment rate of rural students and the uncertainty of long-term education investment reduce peasants' expectations towards education (Wu and Lu, 2013). Therefore, even though almost all participants expressed the wish for their grandchildren to perform well in school, only a few acts. In the field, grandparents prefer farming or doing other odd jobs over educating their grandchildren, as the former can bring extra income. This overlooking of grandchildren's education is further represented by how remittances are allocated. According to a quantitative study, remittances from migrant workers can lead to increased consumption by left-behind family
members, but they are also linked to a decrease in education expenditures (Demurger and Wang, 2016).

Understanding how and why grandparental activities have shrunk is significant for capturing the nature of current multigenerational peasant families. A growing recognition is that multigenerational families reverse the traditional flow of resources from resource-upward to downward. Yan (2016; 2018) proposes that Chinese rural families now follow descending familism, or neo-familism, which sets the children's happiness and success as the ultimate goal and endows children with centrality. This notion is somewhat refuted by the popularity of grandparenting, particularly "poor quality" grandparenting with inadequate family education and instruction (yu). Especially since both grandparents and the children's parents recognise grandparenting's limitations and its harmful consequences. One mother admitted the limitations of grandparental activities:

When I left my children at home with their grandparents, I rarely make specific demands on grandparenting. Because when you ask elders to do childrearing, you already have expectations of the quality. My only requirement for grandparents is making those children full. After all, the capacity of grandparents is limited. (KI-10)

Local teachers also observe the negative impacts of limited grandparental activities. The principal of the middle school near the Ravine Village said,

You cannot rely on grandparents correcting students' bad habits. Meanwhile, they rarely educate those children. As teachers, we find a clear difference between students raised by their parents and those cared for by grandparents in terms of learning habits, study enthusiasm and communication skills...

The absence of parents and the prevalence of grandparenting impact those kids negatively; however, those parents have no choice. If they stay home and raise their children, they can only feed family members and cannot make the family prosperous. Those parents have to sacrifice, and if their children cannot succeed, it is highly possible their families will get even worse. (KI-05)

The nearly universal consensus on grandparenting's low quality partially refutes the theorised centrality of children. Although the peasant family's
resources no longer flow upward to the old generation, neither does it drip down to the young generation. Having been formed and shaped by the economic-growth-oriented family, grandparenting's focus is neither the experience of grandparents nor the long-term development of grandchildren. Instead, it is about increasing the economic benefits and accelerating family urbanisation. Meanwhile, families that are able to motivate grandparents to do childrearing can also press the individual interests of the younger generation in order to achieve family prosperity.

A typical path of family urbanisation in China is to buy an apartment in urban areas and have a stable income to cover those living expenses (Chen, 2018). To achieve this, the leading labourers of the family, now the second-generations, need to find a well-paid job in the city. The shrinking of grandparental activities indicates that those families are still in the early stage of family urbanisation. While grandparenting is a strategy for economic-growth-oriented families to increase short-term benefits, the limited grandparental activities restrict the third generation's development and therefore decrease those families' expected long-term income in the future. Even though the peasant family has an apartment in urban areas with three generations' efforts, the third generation's comparatively low educational attainment and lower income makes life in urban areas difficult.

The middle school principal near Ravine Village shared his thoughts about the shrinking of grandparental activities. He said,

Now, everyone wants to be rich. To be rich, young parents must do migrant work. It is inevitable.

Grandparents need to sacrifice, so do those parents. Regarding the third generation, they also have to pay something during their growth. If they are lucky and smart enough, grandparenting only has some emotional costs. But if those children are not that lucky and cannot enter colleges, then they have to follow their parents' life course and to sacrifice for the development of the family. In that case, it is their children who will take the benefits of family development. (KI-05)

The shrinking of grandparental activities indicates that the economic-growth-oriented family is not descendent-focused. While the resource allocation is no longer upward, neither is it downward. The long and challenging family urbanisation process forces peasant families to be resource-outward for an extended period. During this process, all family
members, including grandparents and grandchildren, make sacrifices. Both the subordinate role of grandparents and grandchildren's limited family education are outcomes of peasant families' overemphasis on the economic growth. But how does this arrangement impact grandparents' perceptions of the future?

4.6.3 The limited expectation of rewards and eldercare

A common explanatory framework of grandparenting in rural China is the mutual aid model, according to which grandparenting triggers a "time-for-money" exchange between grandparents and their adult children (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Cong and Silverstein, 2012). It is believed that grandparents can receive payments for their grandparenting work and benefit from the entire family's development. This model makes two assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that increasing family income will be used to improve family members' quality of life. Secondly, it assumes the family resource allocation follows a balanced rule as all family members share the same interests. However, my data support neither of these assumptions. In fact, I show that in economic-growth-oriented families, grandparent caregivers rarely look forward to rewards or an increasing quality of eldercare.

The allocation of peasant families' expenditures is strongly tied to the fierce village competition and family urbanisation. While peasants do not hesitate to build a new house in the village, send gifts to others or buy an apartment in urban areas, they have to cut other expenses to balance the books. Eldercare, which is not related to the family developmental goal, is one of those cut projects. Furthermore, economic-growth-oriented peasant families follow a new rule of resource allocation, under which the oldest generation is put in the last place. Therefore, grandparents rarely benefit from the family's increasing income, even though it cannot be achieved without their grandparenting work. Recognising this situation, grandparents also have little expectation of economic and emotional rewards for their economic-growth-oriented grandparenting.

Although previous studies found a common remittance from migrated parents to grandparent caregivers (Cong and Silverstein, 2008b), the interviews show that this remittance only covers grandchildren and grandparents' living expense in many families. The grandfather (M-06) quoted earlier in this chapter whose family spends at least 20,000 RMB on gift-giving each year only received a 1,000 RMB (around 114GBP)
monthly remittance from his migrant son. This amount barely covers the living expenses of the two grandparents and their 11-year-old grandson.

In some cases, grandparents even reject the remittance and raise grandchildren with their own savings:

*My son planned to send me some money, but I rejected it. They need money to pay for the apartment in the city. If I take their money, it would take them more time to pay the mortgage.* (R-03)

With the goal of family urbanisation, grandparenting is a strategy to free productive labour and minimise childrearing costs. Rewarding grandparents economically violates the goal of minimising childrearing costs and therefore becomes irrational. For grandparents who believed in familism, using their labour and savings to support family urbanisation is a necessary task. Otherwise, they are unable to carry out their family responsibilities by contributing to the family goal and will feel guilt for an extended period. The normalisation of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting further justifies the scant economic rewards of grandparenting. Now grandparents who reject grandparenting or ask for extra payments are occasionally criticised by villagers.

The normalisation of grandparenting and grandparents' subordinate role also reduce the emotional rewards grandparents receive for grandparenting. Under the economic-growth-oriented rules, grandparenting is no longer the extra help grandparents give to their children but the necessary work they ought to do. When both grandparents and their adult children struggle to increase family income, emotional communication becomes a luxury.

When I asked participants whether they receive gratitude from their children for grandparenting, the most common answer was no. Participants provided two explanations for this situation. Firstly, some participants believed that grandparenting responds to the family economic crisis during family urbanisation. Therefore, they do not treat grandparenting as a favour but a necessary task:

*They did not show appreciation for this. I am also not looking forward to that. I do grandparenting because we lack money. Grandparenting is the last resort.* (R-03)

*We are family. I don't need their appreciation. As long as they can earn money, it is fine. As long as we have money, all is well.* (R-05)
Secondly, the increasing prevalence of grandparenting normalised this activity. While grandparenting gradually becomes a duty, it is difficult for grandparents to receive praise for it. One grandmother repeated her daughter-in-law's words to me:

*My daughter-in-law said I would not thank you for grandparenting. Nowadays, all grandparents look after their own grandchildren.*

(T-04)

In addition to the limited expectation of rewards, grandparents also hold shrunken expectations for the quality of future eldercare. Expectations are limited in two aspects.

Firstly, grandparents generally hold negative views of family eldercare. Although grandparents are continually contributing to their families, some are unsure whether they will receive appropriate eldercare in the future. One typical approach is putting that worry aside for now as eldercare is something out of their control. A grandfather told me that,

*There is a local saying: "chopping wood from the mountain you are on." This saying means thinking about the solution when you have already faced the problem. I don't worry about eldercare now because the worry is useless. Even if you think a lot about it, it changes nothing. Eldercare is something beyond my control.*

(R-10)

For grandparents in the subordinate position within their economic-growth-oriented families, their eldercare needs are deprioritised as it does not economically advance the family. Grandparents who still hold family power also experienced peer pressure as other grandparents devoted little family income to eldercare. When the mainstream value orientation transformed from ethical to economic growth, family eldercare quality no longer matters for a family's reputation in the village. Instead, elders would be judged if they do not put family interests first and make substantial demands for eldercare. Under the circumstances, grandparenting no longer guarantees family eldercare. Peasant elders who do grandparenting still hold some bargaining chips in the negotiation with their adult children, while elders who reject caregiving will be blamed for delaying family development. In interviews, some participants told me that nowadays, elders need to learn how to be good elders. When I asked them what the standard for being good elders is, they further explained that good elders should do grandparenting for their children unconditionally and require support only when they lose capacity. In other words, good elders should do a lot and ask for little.
Even if the middle generation completes the first task of family urbanisation and has an urban apartment, the city's high living expenses still force the family to be economic-growth-oriented and makes eldercare uncertain. The grandmother with severe rheumatism (R-06) introduced earlier admitted she is not sure what will happen when she is dependent:

*My son has his own worries. Living in the city is expensive. Therefore, my husband and I did not discuss the futural eldercare with my son. Never mind...Never mind.* (R-06)

The uncertainty of eldercare is caused by both their subordinate role and the considerable, foreseeable cost of family urbanisation. Due to these two reasons, most participants only report a fundamental requirement for the futural family eldercare.

*I only have a small requirement. As long as my son gives me enough food, I have no extra requirement for eldercare.* (M-01)

*It is fine if my son can provide us with food and clothes. When I am dependent, my grandchildren also grow up and need money to buy an apartment and get married. At that time, my son has to spend money on my grandchildren. How can I ask them to serve me?* (R-15)

While grandparents shrink their grandparental activities only to provide essential daily care, their narratives indicate that they also require only basic eldercare. It confirms the earlier statement that peasant families' resource allocation is neither upward nor downward but outward in the current stage.

Another radical representation of grandparents' limited eldercare requirement is giving up treatment when sick. Although treatable, many sick grandparents refuse to see doctors in order to save money for their families. Also, once the grandparents go to the hospital, the second-generation has to go back home to provide childcare unless they can find another alternative. This will cut the family income. To not become a burden for the family, a grandmother told me that,

*When I am too old and dependent, I also cannot eat too much. So, I think I would not be a burden for my son. I plan NOT to go to the hospital if I get severe diseases at that time. After all, everyone will die. It is unnecessary to waste money.* (R-03)
The grandmother who refused her ex-daughter-in-law's requirement and insisted on raising two grandchildren suffered from a severe anal fistula and had to wear a diaper all day due to faecal incontinence. However, she gave up treatment. She explained,

*Although I am sick, I still can survive. My son asked me to see doctors in our nearby city, but I refused. I was already diagnosed by local doctors. Even if I go to the big hospital, the diagnosis will not change. They said I needed to have operations. But if I am laying on the bed, who can take care of my grandchildren and me? Of course, I want to get treatment, but who can go to the hospital with me? Who can take care of my grandchildren for me?* (R-12)

Although devalued, grandparenting plays an indispensable role in multigenerational families. Therefore, suspending grandparenting and getting treatment will cause considerable direct economic losses, let alone additional medical expenses. Under such circumstances, grandparents who believed in familism are likely to give up treatment. Meanwhile, grandparents who put their own needs first can be blamed by others.

For grandparents, grandparenting is one contribution to family urbanisation, while limiting eldercare requirements is another. Grandparents' limited expectation for rewards and eldercare partially refutes the mutual-aid model and distinguishes present grandparenting in peasant families from traditional intergenerational interaction.

### 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer two questions. Firstly, why have many Chinese rural grandparents now become the primary caregivers for their grandchildren? Secondly, what particular characteristics define current grandparenting in rural China, considering its driving forces?
Through discussing the three most prominent themes with six sub-themes emerged from interviews—economic factors, with internal migration and competition within villages as sub-themes; cultural expectation, with the continuity of the family line and the social influence and pressure as sub-themes; family cohesion, with altruistic intention and intergenerational bonding between grandparents and grandchildren as sub-themes—I argue that today's grandparenting in rural China is fundamentally driven by economic factors, while other elements play a supplementary role in motivating grandparents.

Diagram 4.1: The driving forces of grandparenting in rural China

As peasant families gradually become economic-growth-oriented and set family urbanisation as the ultimate goal, grandparenting is no longer a simple intergenerational interaction but an economic-growth-oriented activity that accelerates family urbanisation. This economic nature differentiates rural China's grandparenting from traditional Chinese grandparenting and grandparenting in other cultural contexts.

Three major characteristics of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting can be distilled from grandparents' narratives and my observations. Firstly, as peasant families transform from ethically- to economic-growth-oriented, grandparents' status has declined significantly. In economic-growth-oriented grandparenting, grandparents are generally subordinate to their adult children. Secondly, with the change in grandparenting's nature, educating and cultivating offspring are no longer emphasised. As a result, grandparental activities shrink significantly, and now grandparents usually only provide essential daily care to grandchildren. Finally, as more and more peasant families set family
urbanisation as their goal and therefore treat economic advancement as the first priority, grandparents, who sit in a subordinate place in their families, hold a limited expectation for rewards and future eldercare.

Understanding the driving forces and characteristics of grandparenting is a basis for discussing the typology and impacts of grandparenting. In the next chapter, I will move to the typology of grandparents and grandparenting in rural China, exploring both the heterogeneity and homogeneity of this prevalent intergenerational arrangement.
Chapter 5 Heterogeneity and homogeneity: different types of grandparents and a typical grandparents’ day

Although all grandparent caregivers provide grandparenting, they provide it in different ways. The heterogeneity of grandparent caregivers has been a pronounced research issue in grandparenting studies (e.g., Hayslip et al., 2005). As mentioned in section 2.1.1, researchers have categorised grandparents based on different criteria, including their living arrangement (Jendrek, 1994; Musil, 1998), their caregiving workload (Fuller-Thomson and Minkler, 2001) and whether they are the legal guardians of their grandchildren (Jendrek, 1995). However, those classifications usually view grandparents from a single perspective, ignoring the practice’s complex context. Therefore, discussions based on such classifications are more likely to be superficial and narrow.

Current grandparenting in rural China is not a static phenomenon. It is related to state policies, family arrangements, and also individual tactics during a drastic social and cultural transformation. When peasant families transform from ethically- to economic-growth-oriented, this transformation is not immediate but gradual. Families in different transitional stages have different family structures. Meanwhile, grandparents also uphold diverse family values and therefore experience different types of grandparenting.

Considering the heterogeneity of grandparents, this chapter argues that grandparents in rural China can be classified into four different types based on two dichotomies. The first dichotomy (Section 5.1) distinguishes grandparents on proactivity and their status within families, separating those who start grandparenting actively versus passively. The second dichotomy (Section 5.2) characterises grandparents’ belief in individualism or familism, thus illustrating their subjective motivation and the extent of grandparents’ ideological transformation. Given these two dichotomies, in Section 5.3, I categorise Chinese rural grandparents into four different ideal types: leading grandparents, sacrificial grandparents, reciprocal grandparents and reluctant grandparents. Albeit the difference between grandparents, this group also share commonalities due to their similar macro background and micro situations. In section 5.4, I describe a typical day for grandparents to illustrate the homogeneity of grandparenting and provide a concrete picture of grandparents’ daily routine.
5.1 The proactivity of grandparents

In his ethnographic research, Goh (2009) points out that grandparents in urban China lack choice when their adult children call for child-rearing assistance for multiple reasons, including the grandparents’ residential status, sense of responsibility, and social expectations. The same situation happens in rural China. Although many rural grandparents eventually became primary caregivers of grandchildren, not all of them embrace this role from the deepest corners of their hearts.

Previous studies find that grandparents’ choices in negotiating with their adult children relate to the degree of satisfaction they experience from grandparenting (Goodfellow, 2003). For grandparent caregivers who take on the role passively or unwillingly, experiences and outcomes can differ significantly from grandparents who actively and voluntarily take on the role. The grandparents' narratives also resonate with this statement. The theme "willingness" is captured in the interviews, as there is an obvious distinction between grandparents who show internal "willingness" to perform grandparenting and those who are forced to do so due to external pressure.

Therefore, I borrow the concept of proactivity and distinguish between grandparents who take on the role actively and voluntarily and those who take it on passively and involuntarily due to external pressure. Proactivity is a concept that is usually applied in work and organisational psychology research. While generally proactive personality and proactive behaviour are distinguished (Tornau and Frese, 2013; Zacher and Kooij, 2017), I apply only the concept of proactive behaviour and test whether participants’ grandparenting activity is proactive or not. Previous studies point out that “proactivity has three key attributes: it is self-starting, change-oriented, and future-focused” (Parker et al., 2010, p.828; confirmed by meta-analysis in Tornau and Frese, 2013).

Proactivity in grandparenting is similar to proactivity in the workplace. Grandparents who offer to be caregivers before being asked are identified as proactive grandparents. Their grandparenting is self-starting, and they show a willingness to change the division of labour within their families. In most cases, proactive grandparents are future-focused as they are looking for futural benefits for either themselves or their families. Grandparents who are forced to take on the role are passive. Their
grandparenting work is involuntary and only a passive reaction to family transformation. In a few cases, grandparents who actively offered to be grandparent caregivers admitted that they did so reluctantly; since they speculated that their adult children would ask for it anyway, they chose to offer it actively to earn more credit. These grandparents are identified as passive since they are, in essence, passively reacting to the situation.

The proactivity of grandparents can further reveal their families’ predominant value orientation. For passive grandparents, their subordinate and passive role reflects the family structure’s transformation caused by an economic-growth orientation and the oldest generation’s declining status. On the other hand, there are two possibilities for proactive grandparents. In the first situation, their families still hold an ethical orientation, and grandparents have a voice in family decision making. It is also possible that the multigenerational family is divided, and the older generation has an equal relationship with their adult children. In this situation, the grandparents’ will is intact, and they are free to choose to become grandparent caregivers or not. However, this type of family is rare in the field.

5.1.1 Proactive grandparents

For grandparents who are willing to become their grandchildren’s primary caregivers, their grandparenting lives usually start under one of two circumstances.

In the first circumstance, grandparents still have a voice in their families’ division of labour. Based on economic considerations, grandparents ask their adult children to migrate and offer caregiving after the grandchildren’s birth. For example, in Tea-Garden Village, a widowed grandfather who is currently taking care of three grandchildren alone talked about how he pushed his son and daughter-in-law to migrate:

Young people should migrate to cities and earn money. Therefore, after the birth of my oldest grandchildren, I talked with my son, said that both he and his wife need to be migrant workers…. The birth of my grandchildren would increase the expense. Thus, they should earn more. I can look after those kids for them. (T-01)

Another example is a grandmother from Ravine Village who, for economic reasons, forced her son to leave home for work:
After the birth of my granddaughter, my son had stayed home for three years. He loves my granddaughter so much and was not willing to leave her...Finally, I had to negotiate with my son, telling him that it is necessary for him to work in urban areas...I know it is tough, and grandparenting is tiring for me. But we need money.

(R-13)

In the above cases, grandparents have a voice in the intergenerational division of labour and show some authority when negotiating with adult children. “Voice”, as a proactivity related concept, is “making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Lepine and Van Dyne, 1998, p.109). Here I borrow this concept to illustrate the initiative and power proactive grandparents hold. With peasant families gradually transforming from ethical- to economic-growth-orientations, elders experience a decline in status and tend to lose their decision-making power. Voice in grandparenting can represent grandparents’ strong or at least equal position relative to their adult children. Although those families have adopted the new intergenerational division of labour, the grandparents’ proactive behaviour shows that intergenerational relationships within their families have not been totally revolutionised.

In the second circumstance, some grandparents offer to do grandparenting when their adult children face challenges. A typical example is a grandmother introduced in the previous chapter (KI-10) who left her home village to look after her youngest daughter’s four children. Even though she is not culturally expected to be responsible for her granddaughters, she volunteered because her daughter was having a hard time. Another grandmother mentioned in the previous chapter (T-06) decided to raise her youngest son’s children after he got a divorce:

*My younger son is not that healthy. His wife divorced him and left three children behind. So I decided to help him through this tough time by grandparenting. I told my younger son that mom would support him and look after those kids for him.*

In those cases, challenges and crises in the second-generation’s life trigger grandparenting. Grandparents are not looking for reciprocity; instead, they carry on the work with a sense of responsibility, an altruistic intention, or intimacy with their offspring. Traditional patriarchal family
values are present within these motivations, as the senior generation felt strong ethical responsibility towards younger family members, even though they are adults.

Generally speaking, proactive grandparents make their own choices and retain autonomy to some extent even though they are influenced by external factors, such as the second-generation’s migration or the stress of competition. As researchers (Goodfellow and Laverty 2003; Goh, 2009) indicate, grandparents need to achieve a balance in their lives and deal with the complexity of their personal needs, family obligations, and social expectations. Proactive grandparents are in a stronger position than their hesitant peers.

5.1.2 Passive grandparents

In contrast to their proactive counterparts, passive grandparents and their families have been heavily influenced by materialism, consumerism, and the goal of economic growth. When the division of labour was restructured, grandparents with lower earning power were gradually marginalised and had to wait for their adult children's commands. Meanwhile, the emergent needs of increasing family income force grandparents to work involuntarily. Some researchers describe this interaction in economic-growth-oriented families as ‘intergenerational exploitation’ (see section 2.2.1), since the second-generation migrant workers extract both material resources and labour from their parents for housing, marriage and raising their children during the family urbanisation process (Chen, 2014; Yang and Ouyang 2013; Yang and Wang 2018). For passive grandparents, their labour is exploited by the second-generation, and grandparenting is a passive reaction to their adult children’s requirements. Based on her observation in Ravine Village, Wen indicated that:

In this village, many grandparents enjoy their lives without grandparenting. However, it is difficult for them to refuse it if the second-generation asks for it due to social pressure. Grandparents play a passive role in the relationship with their adult children. (KI-01)

As the narration points out, many grandparents lose the right to say “no” to their adult children. Although traditional family values endowed elders with authority, the new economic-growth orientation puts elders into a subordinate position due to their poor earning capacity:
How can I not follow their arrangement? They can earn more money than me. I would like to stay home and farm, but it does not work. (R-02)

The emphasis on family economic growth means grandparents’ unwillingness is more likely to be ignored when the family faces heavy economic pressure. Meanwhile, few grandparents have determinations to refuse grandparenting sternly due to a new family-based work ethic: overworking to increase a family's income is not only important, but it can also be a sign of human decency (Harrell, 1985; Yan, 2013). In Ravine Village, a widowed grandmother complained that:

*I told them I am incapable of grandparenting, but they said we do not have enough money to pay the debt. They have to work in cities, and therefore I need to look after those kids.* (R-08)

The transformation of peasant families largely determines the prevalence of passive grandparents. However, I also met passive grandparents who started work because of a crisis in the second-generation. For instance, a grandmother who is looking after two grandchildren for her son, who has a serious gambling problem, recalls how she started grandparenting involuntarily:

*I don’t think it is my responsibility. But my son is... He is unable to raise those kids... I have no choice. I cannot leave my grandsons alone and watch them live in such a bad condition, right? I told myself that at least I needed to be humane. So I am a grandparent caregiver now.* (T-07)

Unlike her peers introduced in the previous section, who offered grandparenting voluntarily when their adult children faced challenges, this grandmother was compelled to be a grandparent caregiver because of her son’s crisis. Although the family crisis triggers grandparenting in both cases, the direct cause cannot determine whether grandparents are proactive or passive. When faced with similar circumstances, grandparents with altruistic and familistic intentions tend to be proactive, while those emphasising self-interest are passive. The significant role of the grandparents’ beliefs leads to the second dichotomy: familistic and individualistic grandparents.
5.2 The belief of grandparents

As shown in Chapter 2, many previous studies tend to explain intergenerational support, including grandparenting, as motivated by either altruism or exchange between family members based on self-interest (Becker, 1974; Cox, 1987). Given these two perspectives, previous studies have used two models to explain grandparenting in rural China (see section 2.2.1). One is the cooperation model, which emphasises collective family interests, and the other is the exchange model, which focuses on the reciprocity between grandparents and their offspring in grandparenting.

According to the cooperation model, grandparenting in rural China involves intergenerational collaboration, which aims to increase the family’s collective interests. Therefore, the motivation behind grandparenting is familism, which is rooted in Confucianism and in traditional Chinese family values. In contrast, the exchange model explains grandparenting as instantaneous reciprocity between grandparents and their adult children. In this case, grandparents provide grandparenting for their own benefit, such as financial support, emotional comfort or promises of eldercare. No matter the particular benefits grandparents receive from grandparenting, the exchange model argues that they provide care out of self-interest, representing individualism.

In the field, I found both grandparents who believed in familism and individualism. These beliefs partially determine their grandparenting decisions and subsequent experiences. For instance, when the second-generation faces challenges, grandparents who believe in familism tend to be proactive, while individualistic grandparents are more passive in assisting their children. Therefore, I propose using grandparents’ beliefs as the second distinguishing dichotomy when categorising them. Notable here is that while grandparents’ beliefs overlap with grandparenting’s driving forces, they are not the same. Motivations lead grandparents to perform grandparenting either actively or passively, while their belief in either familism or individualism is more about what benefits they expect to gain from grandparenting and to what extent they agree to the family goal. Grandparents who believe in familism emphasise the importance of family over individual interests and are thus willing to self-sacrifice in order to fulfil family obligations. Individual family members, in this view, are the means rather than the end (Yan, 2021). On the other hand,
individualism emphasises individual interests and considers the individual as an end in and of herself/himself (Dumont, 1986).

Regarding economic-growth-oriented families, grandparents who believe in familism are more likely to accept and be motivated by the goal of urbanisation. In contrast, grandparents who emphasise self-interest care less about increasing family income and pay more attention to the potential pay out from grandparenting.

Most participants are not fully aware of what familism, and individualism consist of, but their beliefs were implied when discussing their motivations for, expectations, and attitudes toward grandparenting. Generally, this study identifies grandparents’ beliefs based on three main factors: whose interests they considered in their decision to become grandparent caregivers, what benefits they expected to gain from grandparenting, and the extent to which they agree with their family goal. However, given the complexity and heterogeneity of grandparenting, it is difficult to impose one fixed measurement to identify grandparents’ central beliefs. Therefore, other factors were also considered.

5.2.1 Familistic grandparents

Section 2.3.2 briefly introduced the significant role that family has played in Chinese society. In traditional China, familism served as both the primary principle of connection in social life and the essential core ideology of the imperial state, according to Fei Xiaotong (1992 [1948]), a well-known Chinese anthropologist and sociologist. Under familism, all family members should fulfil their familial responsibility and be altruistic towards others to achieve collective interests. Meanwhile, familists can have a transcendent experience and achieve self-fulfilment through dedication to their families and completing the family goal.

In their narration, familistic grandparents commonly present three characteristics. Firstly, familistic grandparents usually agree with their family’s goals and prioritise them above self-interest. For familistic grandparents whose families are still ethically-oriented, they viewed family reproduction and continuity as one of their main tasks. Those whose families become economic-growth-oriented treat family urbanisation as a long-term goal even though they rarely benefit from it. Some grandparents told me that though they prefer to live in villages,
they engaged in grandparenting to accelerate family urbanisation, because this was the familial goal. From this perspective, familistic grandparents make light of grandparenting’s gains and losses and expect little personal payback.

Secondly, familistic grandparents attach high importance to their family responsibilities even if the traditional right-responsibility balance within families has been destroyed. As a core concept of Chinese familism, the fulfilment of family responsibility concerns people’s value of life and the achievement of self-fulfilment. In Ravine Village, a windowed grandmother who looked pretty sick but still looked after two grandchildren told me that:

Looking after those children is my responsibility. Elders’ responsibility is benefiting their families and assisting their offspring. (R-03)

Despite her poor health, this grandmother believes that carrying out her family's responsibilities is the worth and purpose of her existence and, therefore, never thinks about terminating grandparenting.

Thirdly, familistic grandparents tend to show altruistic intentions in grandparenting. According to Chinese familism, the family is the smallest unit in daily life. Therefore, altruistic and self-interested actions balance out within a family. For familistic grandparents, their own gains and losses in grandparenting are not that important as long as the second-generation needs their help. The grandmother I introduced before (KI-10), who looked after four children for her youngest daughter, is an example of this.

5.2.2 Individualistic grandparents

Identifying grandparent caregivers who believe in individualism is relatively tricky for two reasons. First, grandparents who firmly believe in individualism may avoid becoming caregivers, which excludes them from this study. For instance, a grandmother from Ravine Village who rejected her only son’s grandparenting request stated the following:

I am opening a restaurant in our village. My daughter-in-law asked me for grandparenting before, but I rejected her. I told her I am busy running this restaurant now. I also have my own business
in my family. In fact, I would rather lend them money and let my daughter-in-law stay home to raise children. (R-17)

Second, even though several studies indicate that, as a consequence of modernisation, collectivism in China is fading and that Chinese people are increasingly prioritising their own benefits and interests (Steel and Lynch, 2013; Yan, 2003), choosing self-interest over the family’s collective interests is still dangerous for an elder’s reputation, since individualism has long been associated with hedonism, as well as being regarded as selfish and self-indulgent (Yan, 2011).

One villagers’ committee member in Tea-Garden Village described grandparenting in his village thusly:

*Only a few elders reject their children’s request for them to engage in child-rearing. Some believe that these grandparents are selfish, only focusing on their own interests and ignoring their children’s difficulties.* (KI-09)

This quotation finds an echo in some other narratives, demonstrating that grandparents who focus on their own interests suffer from popular judgment and criticism. Even if they become grandparent caregivers from self-interest, they may mask their individualistic motivations in interviews. Therefore, identifying grandparents with individualistic beliefs is more complicated. Generally, grandparents who engage in grandparenting for their own self-interest consider three benefits when deciding to take this role.

First, they consider the financial incentives from their adult children. As previous studies – especially those that apply exchange theory – point out, financial transfers are normal between grandparent caregivers and their adult children (Cong and Silverstein 2008a; Cong and Silverstein 2012). It is interesting to note that, traditionally, adult children have to support their parents financially. Thus, financial transfers from adult children to their parents cannot simply be viewed as payments for grandparenting services. In this study, only when interviewed grandparents openly admit that they provide grandparenting services for financial incentives will they be recognised as having individualistic motivation.

For instance, a grandmother in Tea-Garden Village looked after four children of her sons and a child of her daughter. While she did not ask her
sons for caregiving fees, she received 5,000 RMB (568 GBP) from her daughter each year. Regarding grandparenting her daughter's child (wai sun), she is an individualistic grandparent. She said,

I am willing to look after kids for all children. I received money from my daughter because otherwise, her brothers would feel it was unfair. I cannot help her for free, but I am also happy to take care of my (outside-) grandchildren (wai sun) once I am paid... The fee covers their tuition and food, and the surplus would be my own savings. (R-02)

Moreover, some grandparent caregivers view grandparenting as a way to earn credit toward their future family eldercare. As introduced in Chapter 2, rural China had not been covered by a social welfare system for a long period after the PRC’s establishment (Luo, 2012). Even though the government has built and developed a welfare system for elders in rural China in recent years, family care is still the primary support (Zhang and Chen, 2014). Traditionally, adult children have an unquestioned moral obligation to look after their parents when they are no longer independent. However, the fading of traditional family values and the decline of filial piety have led to an increase in uncertainty regarding family elderly care, which worries some grandparents. Luo’s (2012) study points out that in some families, grandparents receive a small amount of ‘extra money’ from their adult children, which, in her opinion, is meant as a promise of proper care in the future. A similar phenomenon is observed in this study as some individualistic grandparents claimed that they assisted adult children with an expectation of proper family eldercare later.

A divorced grandmother who has no income shared her opinion on eldercare in the interview:

I helped my son in child-rearing, so when I became older and dependent, he should look after me in return. How your children treat you when you are old depends on what you have done for them. If you do more when you are capable, they definitely will treat you well in the future. That is how the world works. (R-13)

Another example is a grandmother who provides long-term child-rearing for her younger son but only assists the older son temporarily due to his discontent with his second marriage. She states:

My husband asked me why did I look after the children of my oldest son, although I do not actually like them. I told him that we could
not burn our bridges behind us. When we become old, we still need their support, right? I told my husband that one day if I am bedridden, he can reach my oldest son and his wife and ask for help. (T-06)

Grandparents’ low expectation of rewards and basic eldercare is characteristic of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting. However, since individualistic grandparents identify less with the collective family goal, they still require grandparenting returns.

Previous studies use the ‘support bank’ metaphor to describe how grandparenting can potentially influence family eldercare quality (Antonucci et al., 1990; Cong and Silverstein, 2008a). According to this metaphor, grandparenting is a way for grandparents to make deposits into their intergenerational relationships. When grandparents become dependent, their earlier deposits influence what they can withdraw from their adult children. The narratives of grandparents suggest that the ‘support bank’ exists in some rural multigenerational families. In such cases, grandparents are motivated to provide care for their grandchildren because of their self-interest.

Furthermore, I identify grandparent caregivers who are mainly motivated by their own emotional needs or the strong intergenerational bond with their grandchildren as driven by self-interests. Those grandparents feel less lonely and more emotionally satisfied when grandparenting. Essentially, they provide care for their grandchildren for their own benefit, which meets the criteria for individualistic grandparents in this study.

In brief, whether grandparent caregivers prioritise their own benefits or focus more on the family’s collective interests is the second dichotomy to categorise grandparent caregivers. Familistic grandparents look after their grandchildren to help achieve the family goal, maintain solidarity, increase their multigenerational family’s competitiveness and continue the family line. On the other hand, individualistic grandparents stress short-term payments, the guarantee of proper family eldercare, and what benefits they can gain from the grandparenting work.

5.3 Four ideal types of grandparent caregivers

Given the two dichotomies described above, this study uses the following 2×2 table (Diagram 5.1) to represent the four ideal types of grandparent caregivers in rural China, derived from grandparents’ narratives. The four
ideal types of grandparent caregivers are leading, sacrificial, reciprocal, and reluctant grandparents.

Diagram 5.1 Four ideal types of grandparents

Table 5.1 The percentage of four ideal types of grandparents in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The proactivity of grandparents</th>
<th>The belief of grandparents</th>
<th>The number of interviewed grandparents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading grandparents</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Familistic</td>
<td>14/38 (36.8 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrificial grandparents</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>17/38 (44.7 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal grandparents</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>4/38 (10.5 percent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant grandparents</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Familistic</td>
<td>3/38 (7.8 percent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. 1. There is an interviewed grandparent who refused second-generation’s grandparenting requirements and therefore cannot be categorised here. 2. Two reciprocal grandparents provide multiple types of grandparenting simultaneously, but this study focuses more on their reciprocal grandparenting.

Admittedly, as with other Weberian ideal types, the ideal types constructed in this study ‘state a logical extreme’ (Jary and Jary 1991, p.224) which means that they are abstracted from reality and might simplify complex situations. However, it is a useful tool for
understanding the heterogeneity among grandparents and the diversity of grandparenting in rural China.

5.3.1 Leading grandparents

Leading grandparent caregivers are those who proactively start grandparenting with a belief in familism. These individuals give importance to the multigenerational family’s common interests and are willing to look after their grandchildren as long as it benefits the family. The traditional paterfamilias role somewhat influences these grandparents, as they have a strong sense of mission and responsibility towards the family’s collective interests and other family members. However, given the drastic socio-economic changes in Chinese families in recent years, both the absolute and the relative status of grandparents have been diminished. When an increasing number of peasant families become economic-growth-oriented, villages’ mainstream values also change, putting pressure on leading grandparents. In interviews, some leading grandparents also expressed little expectation for eldercare due to peer pressure, despite the fact that they hold family power and control some family resources.

Among the 38 grandparent caregivers interviewed in this study, 14 generally fit into the category of leading grandparents, which accounts for roughly 37 percent. However, China is still experiencing rapid urbanisation and modernisation. The transition of peasant households and the shift in peasant groups’ ideologies may last for some time. Therefore, I predict that the number of leading grandparents will decrease.

The structure of leading grandparents’ families has similarities with the traditional Chinese family and generally follows a gender-seniority-based hierarchy, indicating less influence from urbanisation and modernity. Leading parents have some power and voice in their families and play a dominant role in grandparenting activities. Some of them are even the leaders of their multigenerational families. Their families are cohesive, showing solidarity and interdependence between family members. Believing in familism leads the grandparents to prioritise and induce the creation of strong bonds between family members. In turn, such a cohesive family further strengthens their beliefs, motivating them to work in the family’s common interests.
A typical example of a leading grandparent is a grandfather in Tea-Garden Village who lost his wife eight years ago and has since been the primary caregiver of his three grandchildren. He introduces his family as follows:

*I am the head of our family, and therefore I need to think for and also work for the entire family. Actually, we are one. So not only me but all family members should work for the common interests of our family. I do grandparenting not only for my grandchildren or sons’ benefits. It is also for me since we are an integrated whole.* (T-01)

Although many characteristics of leading grandparents' families, such as strong cohesion, solidarity, and the importance family members place on common interests, are similar to those of the traditional Chinese extended family, these families are inevitably influenced by urbanisation and the economic-growth orientation. Even the most powerful leading grandparents no longer have absolute control over their children and grandchildren. Despite this, leading grandparents had the most power among the four types of grandparent caregivers described in this study.

In reality, the power of leading grandparents can be seen in various aspects, such as in the domestic division of labour. A widowed grandmother who cares for two grandchildren from her oldest daughter’s ruzhui marriage states the following:

*After my husband died, I talked with my oldest daughter, saying that given the financial condition of our family, she and her husband have to do migrant work. I can look after those two kids and they need to earn more money to pay debts... If we have enough money, I will not push my daughter to migrate....* (R-05)

Given the need to increase family income, this leading grandparent offers to look after the third generation and encourages the second-generation to migrate. In the negotiations regarding migration and grandparenting, leading grandparents are in the dominant position, distinguishing them from the other three types of grandparents.

The traditional ethical-oriented value in leading grandparents’ families also gives them the power to call back their migrant children if necessary. In one case, a leading grandmother called her migrant son and daughter-in-law back to the nearby town to create a healthier growth environment for her grandchildren:
Their income decreased, admittedly, and we still don’t have enough money to buy an apartment in the nearby city. But we have this house in the village and can afford the rent in the town. I am satisfied with this life. Earning money takes forever. For me, all family members living together and enjoying a peaceful and harmonious life is more important. For my grandchildren, growing up with parents is much better than living with their grandmother alone. (R-07)

The goal of the family determines its division of labour. Pursuing a "harmonious life" shows a strong sense of Confucian and traditional family values and less reflects modernisation and materialism. This sense of Confucian and traditional family values is the source of this grandmother's power in her family and distinguishes it from other economic-growth-oriented families.

Control of the family's most precious assets is further evidence of the leading grandparents’ authority, even though the second-generation is the primary income source. The grandfather from Tea-Garden Village mentioned above states:

I am still the head of our family. My son and daughter-in-law sent most of their income to me, and I am responsible for managing our family property. Of course, I spend that money carefully, and all expenses are not for my personal interests but for our large family. (T-01)

The power leading grandparents held, the familism they believed in, and the characteristics of traditional Chinese families that were demonstrated in their families also influenced grandparenting. This leadership position of grandparents illustrates that their families are less influenced by the economic-growth orientation and it also alleviates the impacts caused by modernisation and materialism. Compared with their peers, leading grandparents are less obsessed with increasing family income and therefore demonstrate more attention to their grandchildren's growth. They are more likely to provide comprehensive grandparental activities. Among the 38 interviewed grandparents, only one leading grandfather mentioned habit cultivation and the moral education of grandchildren (R-01). Opposing the common opinion that grandparenting is not complicated as it is only about feeding and clothing, this grandfather said that,
There are so many things that need to be considered in grandparenting. There are many details. Since my granddaughter was three years old, I have cautiously cultivated good habits in her. (R-01)

This leading grandfather does not focus on maximising family income but pays more attention to grandparenting quality and its outcome. This fits the characteristics of traditional Chinese families. Due to the strong emphasis on family continuity, many traditional Chinese families tended to promote the quality of childcare and early childhood education as they believed it determines the quality and capacity of the family’s heirs. Group identification of family members makes children’s achievement a reflection of the entire family and leads to the emphasis on children’s education (Sigel, 1988; Lin and Fu, 1990).

In traditional Chinese households, authority is distributed based on three factors: generation, gender, and age. The younger generation should follow the older, females should follow males, and, more broadly, the young should follow the old (Hsu, 1985). The power structure of leading grandparents’ families is similar to this model as the oldest generation predominates in power, and the impacts of patriarchy are obvious. Meanwhile, traditional Chinese families balance power and responsibilities (Li, 2018; Wu, 2009). The leading grandparents, as leaders of their families, are expected to carry more family responsibilities, such as actively taking on caregiving work when needed.

However, even if leading grandparents have authority and relatively high status, waning Chinese traditional family values, alongside the faltering gender-seniority based hierarchy, has rendered their power and status more conditional. While the power of traditional Chinese families includes the power of allocation of resources, making decisions, and carrying on responsibilities (Cao et al., 2008), only a few leading grandparents still control the entirety of their family’s resources. Furthermore, their source of power is no longer the mainstream culture but their personal characteristics and the family’s emergent needs. It is worth noting that half of the 15 grandparents from this study who fit the leading grandparent type are facing family crises, such as debts and family members suffering from severe diseases. On the one hand, peasants sought traditional family structure to protect themselves from the crisis; on the other hand, the crisis reduced the possibility of family urbanisation and, as a result, the rationality of economic-growth orientation.
5.3.2 Sacrificial grandparents

Sacrificial grandparents take care of their grandchildren passively while maintaining their familism beliefs. Among the 38 interviewed grandparents, sacrificial grandparents are the most common, accounting for 17 respondents. Sacrificial grandparents’ families are commonly shaped by an economic-growth orientation, in which the older generation is marginalised and devalued, holding less decision-making power. Based on the power-responsibility balance principle, family members with more power and higher status should do more for the common interest. When grandparents gradually lose their leading status, they are less interested in sacrificing for their families. Thus, sacrificial grandparents are less willing to care for their grandchildren.

Meanwhile, traditional familism remains a strong influence on those grandparents. Under the circumstances, most sacrificial grandparents believe in the family urbanisation goal and accept grandparenting work when their adult children ask. Fulfilling familial responsibility is also an effective way for them to achieve self-fulfilment. If their adult children ask them to provide childcare, their subordinate role and belief in familism make it difficult to refuse grandparenting.

The interrelated contradictions between grandparents’ will, beliefs, and vulnerable position in their families render sacrificial grandparenting full of conflicts. The grandmother (R-06) I introduced in Chapter 4 expressed such conflicting feelings. After six years of grandparenting, she was diagnosed with rheumatism. However, her son still asked her to take care of his youngest son one year before our interview. Although she does not feel fit for the job, she could not reject his offer:

*Grandparenting is too much for me. However, it is impossible to refuse. Both my son and his wife need to work, and grandparenting is a kind of duty of our grandparents...*

She further complains that:

*Now I feel overwhelmed with child-rearing. You can see I have a deformity of hands due to rheumatism, which makes me incapable of doing housework. I tried to not complain to my son about this...*
since I knew I have to look after my grandchildren anyway. It is part of my duty...... (R-06)

Sacrificial grandparents, like leading grandparents, have inherited some traditional Chinese values and cultivated a moral obligation to dedicate themselves to the family. However, compared with leading grandparents, sacrificial grandparents’ families have experienced a more significant change in terms of the intergenerational power structure, which, as summarised in previous studies (e.g., Yan, 2016), shifts the allocation of power and resources from upward to downward and outward. As a result, sacrificial grandparents have little decision-making power and benefit less from attaining collective familial goals. The loss of power finally makes the moral obligation a one-way sacrifice for these grandparents. Sacrificial grandparents have a voice neither in when their grandparenting duties begin nor when they end. They are passive in the division of labour between their adult children and themselves. When the second-generation decides to migrate, sacrificial grandparents are expected to take on a child-rearing role. A sacrificial grandmother in Tea-Garden Village states that:

*Grandmothers in my cohort are lacking in luck. When we were young, we had to look after children as well as taking care of our parents. Now, we became grandparents and still have to look after children... If the second-generation is hard-working, we can get a bit of relief. If they cannot earn enough money in cities, we also need to do odd jobs for our livelihoods... When I was young, I took care of my children independently and also provided care to my parents-in-law. Now, my son and his wife just left their daughter behind and I have to be the primary caregiver. Life changes. It changes a lot.* (T-08)

As this grandmother stated, sacrificial grandparents, particularly sacrificial grandmothers, have experienced the transformation of family structure and have always been oppressed. When they were younger, their families followed seniority and gender-based hierarchies; however, as they grew older, their families took on a new form. Long-term marginalisation reduces the sacrificial grandparents' voice, and the belief in familism further restrains them from pursuing individual interests. Another grandmother comments that:

*It is unfair. But the reality is that my sons and their wives simply cannot sustain our family without assistance. We have to do grandparenting as a sacrifice to the family.* (T-15)
Facing the family's collective interests, the balance between rights and responsibilities is less important. The belief in familism and grandparents' strong confidence in their economic-growth-oriented family goals make sacrificial caregiving show almost all of the characteristics of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting as described in section 4.6.

One particular trait of this grandparent type is that group members have an evident willingness to sacrifice. This willingness is prominently expressed in two aspects. Firstly, some sacrificial grandparents do grandparenting at the cost of their health. When suffering from chronic diseases, several participants refused to get treatment since “grandparenting should not be stopped” (M-05). Although being a grandparent caregiver is against their will, their belief in familism makes those grandparents willing to sacrifice for grandparenting as long as it benefits the common family goal.

One typical example of those grandparents is a grandmother (M-05) in the Ma village, approximately age 75 (she is unsure about her exact birth year). Having already raised two grandchildren to adulthood, this grandmother is currently looking after her youngest grandson with her 80-year-old husband. According to the grandmother, she fainted twice in the past six months, elaborating that,

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ did not go to the hospital. I even did not tell my husband and son that I fainted. I guess it requires expensive treatments. I think it is not necessary to tell them about this. If they asked me to see doctors, who can look after my grandson for me? If my son or his wife come back home, how can we afford the cost of treatment with decreasing family income? Now I am very careful to keep myself as healthy as possible. I try to do more for my family.}
\end{align*}
\]

For this type of grandparents, sacrifice for family interests is reasonable and even sacred. With their traditional familistic beliefs, many sacrificial grandparents have a self-imposed sense of obligation and can only obtain self-fulfilment after completing family duties, despite the fact that they began grandparenting passively. However, the difficulty of family urbanisation makes achieving self-fulfilment unprecedentedly difficult. They have to exploit themselves endlessly and reduce material requirements to achieve their spiritual pursuits.
Additionally, although accepting the family urbanisation goal, many sacrificial grandparents clearly recognise that they rarely benefit from it. Firstly, with long-term sacrificial grandparenting and eldercare being limited in quality, many participants admitted they did not expect to live long enough to see family urbanisation completed. Meanwhile, even if given a chance to move, many participants frankly said that they prefer to stay in villages. Here is a representative conclusion on the benefits of staying in villages:

*My son and his family can live in the city. But as long as I am independent, I still want to stay home. I have been here for my entire life and have already gotten used to this lifestyle. I have familiares here. I have freedom here.* (R-14)

From this perspective, sacrificial grandparents’ caregiving is a wholehearted dedication with little tangible return. While not all types of grandparents suffer from intergenerational exploitation, sacrificial grandparents’ labour is overused and exploited. This type of grandparents also suffers from accumulated vulnerabilities due to their subordinate position and limited resource access, further explored in the discussion (Chapter 7).

### 5.3.3 Reciprocal grandparents

Reciprocal grandparents offer to take care of their grandchildren because they expect something in exchange. These grandparents put their own interests before the grandchildren or multigenerational family’s collective interests. Chinese families are currently experiencing changes due to modernisation which makes traditional values – such as filial piety and families – less prominent (Lee and Xiao, 1998). While sacrificial grandparents suffer from the conflict between traditional familism and the shift within multigenerational families, reciprocal grandparents have already changed their beliefs to adapt to the new intergenerational relationships.

The exchange model (introduced in section 2.2.2) can be used to understand reciprocal grandparenting as such grandparents conscientiously conduct time-for-money exchanges with their adult children. However, unlike previous studies (Cong and Silverstein, 2008a) that identified this exchange through remittances between grandparents
and their adult children, this study focused on the grandparents' individual initiative and beliefs.

The emergence of reciprocal grandparents indicates that the traditional rights and obligations between parents and their children are fading. In reciprocal grandparenting, older parents no longer provide unconditional support for their offspring and consider their own interests more, which, according to family collectivism, is selfish. On the other hand, adult children also do not provide unconditional high-quality eldercare for their parents, which, in the past, would have been considered unfilial. Given this, grandparenting becomes a new ‘intergenerational contract,’ which is not based on traditional morality but follows the principle of reciprocity.

Pure reciprocal grandparents are not common in the field. In some cases, grandparents look after grandchildren for different adult children utilising different grandparenting types. For instance, a grandmother in Tea-Garden Village (T-02) actively raised her son and daughter’s children simultaneously. While she did not ask her son for money, she required her daughter to pay for grandparenting. In another case (T-06), the grandmother used her own savings to raise her youngest son’s children. But when her oldest son asked for grandparenting, she only did so temporarily and for pay. Similar cases are also observed in the other two villages studied.

Reciprocal grandparents have a looser relationship with their offspring. While not all of them have experienced official division of the household, some do live separately from their adult children, with their own independent house and finances. In Tea-Garden Village, a young woman currently stays at home because her mother-in-law, who used to look after her children, is tired and has suspended her caregiving. This young woman’s narrative provides a glimpse into the new intergenerational relationship between adult children and reciprocal grandparents:

*My mother-in-law used to look after my children, and I sent regular remittances to her. In the last year, she was in serious conflict with my father-in-law...So finally, she decided to leave and be a migrant worker.*

... *I do not blame her... For me, I definitely hope she can stay home and do grandparenting. I am fine with paying for it. However, she is unwilling to do this, and I cannot push her, right? We are a family, but we build our own house and we do not eat together. We
also earn money separately and hold independent bank accounts. Therefore I have no power to push her. (KI-03)

Furthermore, when asked about the eldercare for her parents-in-law, she states:

(She sighs.) I cannot complain... When they become old and dependent, I will still need to take care of them. Even though they did not provide caregiving to my children, they are still my parents, which means I have a responsibility to look after them. (KI-03)

This quote suggests that reciprocal grandparents have a relatively equal and independent relationship with their offspring before they become physically dependent. These grandparents also have the power to make decisions for themselves. They are active in their grandparenting roles and can start and stop their caregiving duties as they wish.

It is notable that, in the above case, the second-generation views providing eldercare as an obligation. However, not all adult children can provide their parents with unconditional, proper eldercare. As Luo (2012) indicates, grandparent caregivers may receive a gift or extra money from the second-generation, symbolising a healthy intergenerational relationship and guarantees of proper support and eldercare. Therefore, some reciprocal grandparents offer grandparenting in exchange for future eldercare.

Existing studies on reciprocal grandparents in rural China mainly focus on the reciprocity between grandparents and their adult children (e.g., Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Chao, 2011). However, the mutual support between grandparents and grandchildren also plays a significant role in motivating reciprocal grandparenting. Intergenerational bonding between grandparents and grandchildren is one of the driving forces behind grandparenting. In addition to this type of emotional return, some middle-aged reciprocal grandparents view grandparenting as a long-term investment when they are disappointed with the second-generation.

One gatekeeper shared an example of this situation:

I knew a couple who is currently looking after their two grandchildren in the nearby county. The couple’s only son is a gambler who lost lots of money and lived with debts. The grandparents are almost disappointed with their son and do not want to get involved in his debts. After their son’s divorce, the
grandparents asked to look after their grandchildren because they do not want those kids to be influenced by their father. Also, they do not expect proper eldercare from their son. Therefore, they want to raise grandchildren by themselves, which is also an investment in future eldercare.

She further comments:

At least these two grandparents are in their middle age and still able to raise the children. They would not worry about their eldercare. I also knew elders whose sons are irresponsible and grandchildren who lack an emotional bond with their grandparents. As a result, those elders can only get limited family eldercare when they are weak. (KI-01)

Since the grandparents mentioned were not in the village, I did not have the chance to meet them. However, their story demonstrates the significance of mutual aid between grandparents and grandchildren in some cases.

In summary, reciprocal grandparents are a product of changes in both the family structure and grandparents’ beliefs. Unlike the other three grandparenting types, reciprocal grandparenting usually happens when grandparents and adult children do not belong to the same household. Reciprocal grandparents have a comparatively equal relationship with their children, which is the basis of exchange. Also, not belonging to a unified household means there is no common family goal between grandparents and their adult children, which releases grandparents from familial responsibility. While many prior research have highlighted the importance of reciprocity in grandparenting (e.g., Cong and Silverstein, 2008a; Goh et al., 2016), reciprocal grandparents only account for a small portion of the participants in this study. Among the 38 interviewed grandparents, only four fit the definition of reciprocal grandparents. This might be due to the shame associated with self-regard or individualism in rural China. While previous studies are based on quantitative data and include data from the second-generation, this study uses grandparents’ own narratives, which may be biased.

5.3.4 Reluctant grandparents

Reluctant grandparents are individualistic grandparents who are forced, for various reasons, to be caregivers. Their family structure is similar to
sacrificial grandparents, as these grandparents are subordinate to their adult children. However, reluctant grandparents believe less strongly in family collectivism and, therefore, are not motivated by family urbanisation. They usually become grandparent caregivers due to the heavy burden caused by their subordinate role or a second-generation crisis. Thus, reluctant grandparenting tends to be low quality and temporary compared with other types of grandparenting.

Many reluctant grandparents are first-generation migrant workers who have been ideologically influenced by modernisation. They gradually transformed from traditional familism to individualism and did not treat grandparenting as their responsibility. A grandfather in Ravine Village says:

*I don’t care about what my son and his wife experienced in the city. I only focus on grandparenting since it is my job now. I used to work for my boss, and now I am working for my son.* (R-11)

Some grandparents treated grandparenting as a type of work and compared it with migrant labour. They further admitted that they prefer to work in urban areas rather than looking after grandchildren at home. As a grandmother said:

*Regarding the status within our family, I do not have a proper status. In terms of payment, I did not receive enough remittance from my son. Providing grandparenting means I can’t work in cities anymore and no longer have income. I am in my 50s and still able to find a job in urban areas. In fact, I prefer to be a migrant worker and earn money for myself. If I had a choice, I would rather be a migrant worker.* (T-07)

The wide choice of entertainment in cities and social identity gained from work are also attractive for grandparents. Unlike their predecessors, this cohort of grandparents attains self-fulfilment not only within their families but also enjoys the sense of achievement gained from work. A grandmother from the Ma village shares how she really misses her colleagues from the factory where she used to work. She also spent almost half an hour explaining how she learnt to make packing boxes from scratch, then became skilled labour and was finally assigned as a master craft worker responsible for teaching apprentices. Recalling that experience, she said:

*My boss praised me frequently and offered to raise my salary when I told him I plan to resign. It is tiring to work in factories, but it is*
also fun when you work and live with other workers. I miss that period of time a lot, even though it was also tough. (M-08)

However, with their waning power and vulnerability in economic-growth-oriented families, grandparents always find it difficult to reject grandparenting. When individualistic grandparents have limited economic independence in their economic-growth-oriented families, they may reluctantly become grandparent caregivers.

In Tea-Garden Village, a grandfather talked about the grandparenting in his family. As a paternal grandfather, he believes without a doubt that grandparents are supposed to look after their grandchildren. However, his wife, who is the real primary caregiver of their grandchildren, is a reluctant grandparent:

I am drained every day. If they were not my grandchildren, I would never take care of them even if I was paid RMB 5000 (about 568 GBP) per month. All my family members assume grandparenting is an easy job, but I bet none of them can do this work for more than five minutes. They just assign this work to me with such a false assumption...

In my opinion, everyone should take care of their own kids. I raised my son and daughter, and now it is my son and his wife’s responsibility to raise those kids. My husband has an income. I do not need my son to send me money. They also did not pay me even though I am looking after children for them.

Under pressure from her husband, son and daughter-in-law, this grandmother feels obligated to take on grandparenting work, making her a reluctant caregiver. The tension between the increasingly popular individualism in Chinese society and decreasing grandparental power is a dilemma. Accepting grandparenting work means doing things reluctantly, while rejecting it would cause criticism and pressure from inside and outside the family. The awkward position of reluctant grandparents let them face more pressure and less pleasure during grandparenting.

Categorising grandparents is an effective way to understand the heterogeneity of this group. Beyond the heterogeneity, grandparents’ daily life also has a lot in common. In the next section, I try to describe a typical day of grandparents based on eight months of observation in Tea-Garden Village and the fieldwork in the Ma and Ravine Villages. Based on recognising diverse types of grandparents, the vignette aims to draw a
general picture of grandparents’ daily life and show the homogeneity in grandparenting.

5.4 A typical day of interviewed grandparents

All three villages do not have their own schools, and most children have to walk to school. In Tea-Garden Village, it usually costs around an hour, which means children need to leave home no later than 7:00 a.m. on weekdays. Grandparents, more often grandmothers, have to get up no later than 6:00 a.m. The essential tasks grandparents faced are preparing clothes and breakfasts. Although schools are far away from the village, only grandparents of children in the kindergarten will walk them to school. Once grandchildren enter primary school, most grandparents choose to let them go to school with other children, even though they expressed concerns about their grandchildren’s safety. This is because getting grandchildren to school and back would cost more than three hours per day and affect other work. There used to be an informal school bus between Tea-Garden Village and the nearby primary school. However, only a few grandparents paid and let their grandchildren take that school bus. According to the grandparents, that informal school bus was unsafe, as it was sometimes overloaded. Meanwhile, it causes an "unnecessary cost."

After the children go to school, the grandparents start their own business. Usually, grandparents will go to the hills to cut firewood or to their land to farm. To reduce living expenses, many grandparents insist on being subsistence farmers and eating the food they grow. They also save extra food for their adult children to eat when they return home for the Chinese New Year. Residents in Tea-Garden and the Ma villages only eat two meals each day. Usually, grandparents will eat a bit with their grandchildren and then have a meal when they get back home from the hills or farmland.

Every five days, grandparents go to the nearby town for market day. On that day, grandparents need to get up earlier and leave home before 7:00 a.m. Some grandparents choose to spend 5 RMB (0.57 GBP) to take vans while most will walk for an hour. Reducing living expenses is a principle for those elders.

Whether the daytime is busy or not partially depends on the number and age of grandchildren. If all grandchildren are school-aged, grandparents could have leisure time on weekdays. In addition to housework, grandparents also farm and do some odds jobs to increase family income.
In Tea-Garden Village, some grandparents have their own small businesses, such as selling vegetables (T-06), selling Chinese medicine (T-02), or operating small grocery shops (T-08; T-09). In Ma Village, grandparents prefer to grow cash crops such as pomelos and oranges (M-01; M-02). In Ravine Village, grandparents can earn money by selling freshly cut bamboo or making broomsticks. Compared with their peers, familistic grandparents are more motivated to do odds jobs to increase family income.

The workload of grandparents with young grandchildren is much heavier. With the development of rural areas, now almost every village has roads, which increases the risk of traffic accidents. As a result, grandparents cannot let their young grandchildren wander alone as they used to do. While those grandparents still need to do housework and some also farm, they put their grandchildren in a bamboo basket and carry them when working.

It is not easy to find crowds in villages most of the day since the main resident group, grandparents, are busy with housework and odd jobs. Only in the later afternoon can grandparents enjoy their precious leisure time, and many of them choose to gather together. In Tea-Garden and Ma Villages, grandmothers prefer to dance together on a small square in front of the building of the villagers’ committee. Although not all grandmothers are good at dancing, they enjoy chatting and playing together. At that time, the square becomes the most lively and bustling place in the village. Grandparents in Ravine Village prefer playing mah-jong, a traditional Chinese four-player game. They usually gather in one grandparent’s house in the later afternoon and play the game until grandchildren come back home. Compared with their peers, grandparents looking after young children have the least leisure time. Most of them rarely leave their grandchildren alone to dance or play games with villagers. In Tea-Garden Village’s small square, I met some grandmothers who carry their little grandchildren. When those grandparents were conversing with others, their young grandchildren's screams and crying frequently interrupted their conversations, forcing them to return home. For those grandparents, grandparenting work is 24 hours per day and seven days per week.

Grandchildren usually come back home at about 5 p.m. Before then, grandparents need to prepare dinner so their grandchildren can have hot food once they arrive home. Although it is the most important meal of the day, it is not always a feast since only a few grandparents pay attention to
nutrition. Primary school students are entitled to a free lunch, and some grandparents encourage their grandchildren to eat a significant portion of their lunch. A teacher once told me about a boy who ate excessively at lunch. When she questioned whether he was full, the kid explained that his grandmother did not prepare breakfast and asked him to eat more of this free lunch.

Based on my observations, most grandparents have few things to discuss with their grandchildren, and grandchildren are also not keen to share interests. The dinner, therefore, is commonly silent and dreary. On summer days, grandparents may let grandchildren play together in the village after dinner and ask them to go back home before sunset. As night falls, all children will return home, and grandparents will ask them to do homework. Some, mostly leading grandparents, will supervise grandchildren as they care more about grandchildren’s academic performance than their peers. For the rest of the night, grandparents will do some housework or watch T.V. When grandchildren claim they finished the homework, they can watch T.V. with their grandparents or play on the smartphone. When their migrated parents are available, those kids and grandparents will have video calls with them. The video call is now the most common opportunity for multigenerational family members to maintain an emotional relationship. Regular bedtime for grandchildren is between 9 and 10 p.m. After then grandparents can enjoy some leisure time before sleeping.

Although the intergenerational relationships and the grandparental activities of different grandparent types vary, their daily routines are similar. Most interviewed grandparents, no matter what type of grandparent, admitted their daily lives are boring and sometimes annoying due to the repetitive caregiving and the paucity of entertainment. Based on this, the coming chapter will further explore the impacts of grandparenting on grandparents.

5.5 Conclusion
Grandparenting in today’s rural China is a result of socio-cultural transformation. Based on grandparents’ proactivity and beliefs, this chapter creates four ideal grandparent types, which are leading, sacrificial, reciprocal, and reluctant grandparents.

The category of grandparents reflects the transformation trend of peasant families and individuals brought about by modernisation, urbanisation,
and related state-driven policies. According to Yunxiang Yan (2018), Chinese families are now motivated by materialism and consumerism, and the family centre is shifting from the older to the younger generation. Meanwhile, China was going through a process of individualisation, which was aided in part by the government's economic liberalisation policies. The passive grandparents' declining status and the emergence of individualistic grandparents are micro manifestations of those transformations. In the "state-family-individual" system, the state’s policies, the family arrangement, and the individuals’ tactics, as well as their experiences, are strongly intertwined and mutually influential. With this understanding, it is also reasonable to predict that if peasant families continue to prioritise economic growth and the individualisation process continues, the number of leading grandparents will decrease, while sacrificial and reluctant grandparents will increase.

It is noticeable that the transformation of family structure and individuals' beliefs have asynchronism, especially for the elderly, who deeply believe in familism. As a result, there is a high percentage of sacrificial grandparents in the field, as their traditional familism beliefs cannot match the new family structure, rendering them over-exploited.

From this perspective, different grandparent types represent different stages of those transformations to some extent, from the most traditional type, leading grandparents, to reciprocal grandparents, who represented the predominant influence of modernisation and individualisation. However, social transformation is never linear. For example, while previous studies observed an increase in individualisation and a decline in multigenerational families in rural China (Wang, 2007; Yan, 2013), researchers have recently observed a resurgence of multigenerational peasant families and an increase in people's reliance on their families (Yan, 2021; Wang, 2014; Yan, 2018). This new tendency reflects the strong vitality of familism and will influence the transformation of grandparent types.

The difference in family power structure and the grandparents' beliefs also influenced their grandparenting experience. The next chapter will explore the impact of grandparenting on grandparents, and some distinctions between four types of grandparents will also be further elaborated.
Chapter 6 How grandparenting influences grandparent caregivers and their coping strategies

6.1 Introduction
The impacts of grandparenting, or its costs and benefits for grandparent caregivers, are one of the most significant and commonly studied topics in the grandparenting field (Hayslip and Kaminski, 2005). With the booming number and increasing significance of grandparenting towards families, this question has become “more important than ever in the 21st century” (Chen and Liu, 2012, p. 99). While an increasing number of scholars have started to explore the impact of grandparenting, the results are inconsistent. A recent systematic literature review points out that grandparenting's effects can vary depending on the context in which grandparents live and type of grandparenting done (Danielsbacka et al., 2022). Studies on the consequences of grandparenting on Chinese rural grandparents offer theoretical as well as practical implications in this regard. Rural China offers a chance to examine the role of socio-cultural context in shaping the cost/benefit structure of grandparenting. Meanwhile, it focuses on a large vulnerable population in less developed rural China and can better serve this population.

Due to the limits imposed by the second-hand data they employed, earlier quantitative research may have been unable to study how the heterogeneity of grandparents affects the outcome and how the state's policies, family arrangements, and grandparents' tactics interact with others. This contributes to inconsistent results. Therefore, I used grandparents’ narrations and my observations to explore how grandparenting influences rural grandparents’ well-being and what coping strategies they develop to dealing with its downsides. In this process, I also consider the distinctions between the four types of grandparents.

Overall, this chapter finds that grandparenting brings both positive and negative affect to grandparents' subjective well-being. However, the positive impact of grandparenting is conditional and relative, whereas the negative impact is more profound and all-encompassing. Therefore, I

1 According to previous studies on well-being, positive affect and negative affect are crucial components of subjective well-being (Andrews and Withey, 2012; Tov, 2018). The term ‘affect’ here refers to “pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions” (Diener and Suh, 1997, p.200). When using positive/negative affect, I emphasised the emotional experience of grandparents. In this study, I also discuss the positive and negative effect of grandparenting on grandparents. When using positive/negative affect, I highlight the impacts of grandparenting on grandparents’ well-being.
argue that overall grandparenting has more negative impacts on grandparents’ subjective well-being than vice versa.

Section 6.2 introduces two common benefits of grandparenting, namely fulfilling grandparents’ emotional needs and providing self-fulfilment. However, those benefits are limited and conditional. With the limited childcare system in rural China, grandparenting becomes a prerequisite of young peasants’ migration, leading to grandparents’ loneliness and distance from their adult children. Grandparenting’s benefits in reducing loneliness, therefore, is compensatory but not rewarding. The great belief in modernisation and urbanisation transforms peasant families to be economic-growth-oriented, and self-fulfilment becomes challenging to achieve for elders. Although grandparents can get a sense of fulfilment through grandparenting, its price is high. After discussing the benefits of grandparenting, section 6.3 moves to its negative influences. Four sub-themes are discussed in this part: stress, concerns, guilt, and freedom loss. While the negative influence of grandparenting is universal, the vulnerabilities Chinese rural grandparents face on multiple levels exacerbate its detrimental effects. After exploring the relationship between grandparenting and grandparents’ subjective well-being, section 6.4 pays attention to the role of physical health and identifies it as a selective factor as well as a moderator. Grandparents with poor health are less likely to become caregivers and tend to suffer more during grandparenting. Although grandparents, particularly, sacrificial and reluctant grandparents, are comparatively passive in grandparenting, they do not suffer in silence. Section 6.5 lists three common strategies grandparents applied to buffer the negative impacts of grandparenting, which are fatalism, the sense of contentment and social supports. Finally, section 6.6 provides a conclusion.
Diagram 6.1 The structure of the chapter

Previous research has classified the outcomes of grandparenting into two categories: health and well-being (Danielsbacka et al., 2022). Because this study is based on ethnographic interviews, it was difficult to assess grandparents' physical and mental health. While I attempted to use scales in the field, many interviewees were perplexed by the multiple-item questionnaires in a formal translation, far from the dialect they used in everyday life. As a result, the focus of this study is ultimately on the well-being of grandparents.
There are many definitions of well-being, and this also demonstrates how this intangible concept differs from person to person and varies from culture to culture (Kiefer, 2008). A common expression of well-being is "doing well-feeling well," which also presents the multifaceted nature of this concept, as it pays attention "not only to external 'objective' measures of welfare but also to people's own perceptions and experiences of life" (White, 2010, p.160). While many factors contribute to well-being, there are generally two types: objective and subjective well-being, each with many sub-dimensions (Voukelatou et al., 2021). There are also cultural differences in subjective well-being, as people's values and beliefs have an impact on their perception of external and internal worlds (Tov and Nai, 2018).

In this chapter, I used themes from grandparents' narratives to examine what and how grandparenting affected their well-being. Those themes are more related to the perception of grandparents and, therefore, more about their subjective well-being. But meanwhile, some narratives also refer to objective indicators, which reveal the impacts of grandparenting on objective well-being.

Because there are many sub-factors in the framework of well-being, I chose only to discuss the ones mentioned by grandparents. We begin with the benefits of grandparenting.

6.2 Positive effect on grandparents’ subjective well-being
Subjective well-being is a pluralistic, compound conception that can be further separated into three components: life satisfaction judgments, positive affect, and negative affect (Andrews and Withey, 2012). Diener (2009) concluded from a literature review that the average levels of positive and negative affect are independent over a long period of time. Therefore, one activity can let people experience both positive and negative emotions and bring both positive and negative effects to their subjective well-being. In a systematic review (Kim et al., 2017), researchers point out that the impacts of providing supplementary childcare on psychological well-being vary according to multiple elements, including grandparents’ socio-demographic characteristics, caregiving status and family relations.

Given the heterogeneity of grandparents in rural China, I predict that grandparenting can variously impact subjective well-being depending on the characteristics of grandparents. The mixed emotional experience
during grandparenting, as well as the diversity of grandparents, made assessing the impacts of grandparenting difficult, which may explain previous studies' inconsistency. Therefore, I disaggregated the impacts of grandparenting and explored the positive effects it brings to grandparents first.

Based on quantitative analysis, some studies find positive impacts of grandparenting on Chinese grandparents’ psychological well-being (e.g. Wang, 2018) and suggest it may lead to greater life satisfaction (Xu et al., 2012; Song et al., 2013). A typical explanation for those positive impacts is role enhancement theory, highlighting the psychological benefits of occupying multiple roles, primarily through accumulating a sense of purpose, meaning in life, and self-esteem (Di Gessa, et al., 2016; Sieber, 1974). Studies also mention traditional Chinese family values and filial piety’s roles in the positive impacts of grandparenting in the Chinese socio-cultural context (Xu et., 2012).

In interviews, many grandparents talked about the positive side of grandparenting, which is mostly related to their subjective perception, echoing the above studies with richer details. The narrative further reveals two clear pathways of positive affect created by grandparenting: fulfilment of emotional needs and completing self-fulfillment.

### 6.2.1 Fulfilment of emotional needs

Fulfilment of emotional needs is a common benefit that participants mentioned in interviews. According to grandparents’ narratives, grandparenting and their intimate intergenerational emotional bonds with grandchildren alleviate the sense of loneliness and brings liveliness and levity to their lives. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies that discuss how being a caregiver of grandchildren reduced loneliness and social isolation scores (Chang et al., 2020; Quirke et al., 2019). However, my study identifies those benefits as being conditional and relative. The loneliness of grandparents is caused by the absence of the middle generation and lack of public life for peasant elders, and the joy of grandparenting is highly conditional on the workload, the family status of grandparents, and the family's living standards. The positive effects of grandparenting are also altered by the grandparents' characteristics. Using the two dichotomies used to classify grandparents as an example, the more proactive and familistic grandparents are, the more joy they can experience while grandparenting.
The positive impact of grandparenting is frequently derived from accompanying grandchildren, which alleviates the loneliness experienced by many left-behind elderly people. Loneliness has become a serious mental health issue for the left-behind elders and is closely related to suicide among the elderly in rural China (He et al., 2014; Niu et al., 2020). A quantitative study indicates that children’s internal migration is related to less happiness and a 3.3 percent higher probability of feeling lonely for elder parents in rural China (Scheffel and Zhang, 2018). In interviews, grandparents complained that they were always bored and lonely, especially after the family reunions that took place during the Chinese New Year. Grandparenting not only means looking after the children under these circumstances but also involves being close to other family members and enjoying the emotional closeness that comes with it. The narrative below demonstrates how intimacy between grandparents and grandchildren can alleviate the former’s loneliness:

*After my husband died, I lived and farmed alone in our home while my son and his wife worked in Xinjiang. Staying in the village is really boring. You look around and see the same scenery every day, all those surrounding mountains, that’s it... It is much more interesting to live with these young children. During the daytime, they go to school, and I do some housework as well as some farming. When they come back home, I play with them and cook for them. With their company, life became livelier. I enjoy spending time with them... After all, I like to be surrounded by my grandchildren.* (M-02)

Much like the grandchildren then, the grandparents are also left behind in rural areas. The lack of entertainment and insufficient family support means this group is mentally and emotionally vulnerable. Living and being intimate with grandchildren can effectively alleviate the grandparents’ loneliness and can empower them to a certain extent (He et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2020).

However, grandparenting is a prerequisite of the second-generation’s internal migration, and the loneliness the elderly suffer is an outcome of this migration. In traditional Chinese peasant families, elders lived with at least one son’s nuclear family and therefore should not be lonely no matter whether they are grandparent caregivers. As Confucius advocated, "While his parents are alive, the son may not go abroad to a distance. If he does go abroad, he must have a fixed place to which he goes (fu mu zai,
Grandparenting was not a condition for being accompanied by family members in the past. Instead, accompanying the elderly used to be a crucial part of filial piety. Therefore, grandparenting’s benefits in alleviating loneliness and bringing liveliness are conditional and relative. It does not promote grandparents’ subjective well-being to a new level but only alleviates some deteriorations caused by an economic-growth orientation and migration in peasant families.

As a sacrificial widowed grandmother said,

*Grandparenting means at least I have a family member living with me. At least my grandson does not bully me. Before I became a grandparent caregiver, I always sat in my house alone. Now, I have a companion.* (M-01)

Grandparenting changes the interviewee’s status from living alone to co-residence and therefore reduces her loneliness, which echoes studies about the benefits of co-residence for elders (Zhu et al., 2019), especially widowed or unmarried elders (Wang et al., 2014). This benefit is a direct result of co-residence rather than grandparental care. A grandmother stated,

*We want our family to become livelier. Elders love the lively atmosphere. Those kids bring great joy to the house, which is great.* (R-09)

What this grandmother tried to capture is the joy and liveliness caused by family members' presence, not the caregiving activity itself. Theoretically, families that still emphasise traditional filial piety would assign some middle-generation members to stay at home and look after both the elderly and children. In such a situation, grandparents can enjoy the company of young people without carrying childcare as a cost. However, in the three visited villages, this type of family is very rare. On a later trip, I found this type of family in an advanced village in Zhejiang province. That is a traditional village with valuable tourist attractions, and therefore, many young people stay at home to operate lodges. Peasants there neither aim to complete family urbanisation nor feel the need to be migrant workers to increase family income because their life in the village is much better than in cities. Holding family property, many elders in that village are the family leaders and do not need to provide primary childcare in exchange for their descendants' accompany. However, this village is not representative. Internal migration of the middle generation
is the most important source of family income for most peasant families in the less advanced central and western regions, and the huge urban-rural gap pushes them to pursue family urbanisation. Under these circumstances, the poorer the family and the village are, the more eager peasants are to complete family urbanization, and the grandparents more likely to experience loneliness due to the out-migration of young labourers.

Regarding different types of grandparents, grandparents who start the work proactively have more power and control over this work, and grandparents who believe in familism have more recognition of grandparenting. The more powerful and family-oriented grandparents are, the more obvious perception of grandparenting joy they experience. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some reciprocal grandparents began to grandparent proactively as a result of the closeness between their grandchildren and themselves. The positive affect of grandparenting is valuable to them. Leading grandparents' family power and the strong belief in familism allow them to dominate intergenerational relationships while also enjoying the feeling of being surrounded by grandchildren. Reluctant grandparents who are marginalised in the family and unconcerned about family goals, on the other hand, experience less grandparenting joy.

Another notable point is that grandparenting plays a substitutive role in fulfilling the grandparents’ emotional needs. Internal migration distances young peasants from their left-behind family members, not only physically but also emotionally. Many participants stated that their migrated children gradually become emotionally distant from them. Even with the prevalence of smartphones and increasing internet availability in rural China, grandparents rarely have an in-depth conversation with their migrant children. Interaction with grandchildren then gradually becomes an important, if not the most important, source of intimacy for many elderly people left behind. Because they rarely have a chance to face-to-face contact with their adult children, the joy of living with grandchildren become more valuable.

In interviews, participants expressed how the intimacy of grandparenting benefits them:

   My grandchildren always said: ‘Granny, do not work so hard and take some rest. We love you and wish you live for a hundred years.’ With my grandchildren’s love, I am not alone anymore. (R-07)
When I got sick, my children only called me and asked me to take rest, but my grandson... He was so young at that time, and he took care of me. It is so heart-warming. Grandparenting is valuable. (R-03)

Although the intimacy between grandparents and grandchildren is emotionally gratifying, it is accompanied by emotional distance between grandparents and their adult children. From this perspective, grandparent-grandchild intimacy substitutes for the relationship between grandparents and their adult children. Grandparents only receive some emotional compensation through grandparenting when they have to be separated from their adult children.

Furthermore, not all grandparents have developed a close relationship with their grandchildren due to the low quality of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting. For sacrificial, reluctant, and even some leading grandparents, looking after grandchildren is due to family members' functional needs for support, which is only a weak predictor of an emotionally close grandparent-grandchild relationship (Ribe, 2018). Many grandparents only pay attention to grandchildren's food and clothing, ignoring the communication with grandchildren, which also negatively influences intergenerational intimacy.

Some participants mentioned the word "recognition" in interviews, as they can achieve recognition and gratitude for grandparenting. For the elderly living in traditional Chinese families, respect, appreciation, and recognition are things they take for granted due to their seniority. However, grandparents experience devaluation with ageing under the economic-growth-oriented context. Their declining earning capacity decreases the recognition and appraisal they receive. In the field, many grandparents said, "I don't want to be a waster" (fei ren). Grandparents are afraid of being labelled as useless and a burden to their family, particularly if they are unable to assist the middle generation and benefit the family's development. Under these circumstances, looking after grandchildren is an approach for them to gain recognition from both adult children and grandchildren, which brings a positive effect to their subjective well-being.

One grandmother expressed her grandparenting happiness that,

*Taking care of grandchildren makes me feel great. Both of my grandsons said: ‘Granny, thank you for looking after us! When we are old enough to be migrant workers, we would send our income*
to you. We would not send it to our parents, but only to you.’ That is so heart-warming. (M-03)

As this narrative indicates, when an economic-growth orientation and the family urbanisation goal deprive many rural grandparents of family intimacy, respect, and worth, grandparenting and grandparent-grandchild relationships compensate those grandparents to some extent. From this perspective, grandparenting does alleviate some difficulties rural grandparents experience. But is it really a benefit to deprive grandparents of their power, resources, and well-deserved eldercare first and then offer them conditional compensation? Compared with grandparents in traditional Chinese families, current grandparent caregivers do not receive extra grandparenting benefits. As those benefits are limited, conditional, and comparative, it may not counter grandparenting’s negative influence.

6.2.2 The purpose of life and self-fulfilment

“Having a son is to gain a grandson” (T-11’s husband). “Having grandchildren is a happy thing. A complete family should have both young children and elders. Having grandchildren makes my life complete” (T-08). In interviews, grandparents frequently connected grandparenting with wholeness of life, completeness of family and even the meaning of life. Their narrations are consistent with previous studies, which indicate that grandparenting is connected to a sense of achievement and purpose (Chang et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2013). However, it is important to distinguish the self-fulfilment caused by having grandchildren and by taking care of grandchildren, especially in the Chinese context. When grandparents discuss how caring for grandchildren helps them achieve self-fulfilment, their stories reveal how the family obligations of the elderly have changed in economic-growth-oriented families and how achieving self-fulfilment has become increasingly difficult for rural elders. To clarify the background, I will re-emphasise the crucial meaning of family completeness and continuity for Chinese people.

Traditionally, the family is a place for Chinese peasants to find the meaning of life and self-fulfilment as long as they complete the family goal (Qian, 2011; Lin, 2007). With the combination of Confucianism and ancestor worship, traditional, ethical-oriented peasant families give reproduction and family continuity unique meaning. Although the culture is always changing and ideal beliefs have been constantly interwoven with transforming social practices, the spiritual meaning of family
reproduction and continuity have had a profound influence on Chinese people for a long time (He, 2008a). In one of the most crucial Confucian classics, Mencius states that, “there are three things which are unfilial and to have no posterity is the greatest (bu xiao you san wu hou wei da)” (Dawson, 1939, p.163). As Fei Xiaotong indicated (2013), the importance of family continuity is immersed in daily life, confirmed by religious and ethical norms, and has both ideal and practical value. Having descendants is a way for peasants to repay their ancestors and continue the family line biologically and spiritually, which in turn help them to achieve self-fulfilment. In interviews, many grandparents mentioned grandparenting-related self-fulfilment:

*Overall, it is a great thing. It should be. My life has to be fulfilled with the births of my grandchildren. But to be honest, looking after a child is also exhausting. I enjoy grandparenting because they are my descendants. But I am also overwhelmed to some extent.* (R-04)

*There is no need to say more. Having grandchildren makes my life complete. It is the biggest benefit.* (T-11)

*Having grandchildren means when you die, there will be someone to burn joss paper for you. For me, this life has been worth it after I had a grandson.* (R-09)

While participants were asked about the benefits of grandparenting, they actually talked about the meaning of having grandchildren rather than raising them. As in many other unilineal societies, carrying the family line forward is an approach to give back to ancestors. Having male descendants has ontological value for traditional peasants' spiritual world and has been identified as the primary meaning of one's life (Chen, 2007; He, 2008a). Therefore, for grandparents who believed in traditional familism, they can naturally achieve self-fulfilment with their grandchildren’s birth. The benefits grandparents mention here are gained from the cultural emphasis on family continuity rather than childrearing. The significance grandparents attached to their kinship with grandchildren further confirmed it.

*Of course, grandparenting is a good thing. It is looking after my own, not others’, grandchildren. It is definitely a joyful thing.* (M-02)

*Although it is tiring, I still feel happy. Because I have my own grandchildren, so it is joyful. I am satisfied with my
Having grandchildren to look after is a blessing. Therefore, I have no complaints. (T-13)

According to traditional family values, grandparents who have raised all their own children and also have paternal grandsons have completed their family obligations, meet their ancestors' requirements, and can achieve self-fulfilment. Because of this, many familistic participants consider having grandchildren to be a blessing. However, the transformation into economic-growth-oriented families changes the obligation of grandparents, asking them to contribute to the family's development continuously. Under these circumstances, grandparents who do not look after grandchildren cannot be identified as meeting their obligations and also cannot achieve self-fulfilment. The extension of family obligations increases the difficulty of achieving self-fulfilment for familistic grandparents and pushes them to look after grandchildren. Although many sacrificial grandparents claimed they felt blessed and fulfilled when grandchildren were born, they were not enthusiastic about grandparenting and only did it after being asked. The belief in familism still lets them be obsessed with carrying on the family line, but their subordinated role in the family and the increasing difficulty of complete family obligation decreases their proactivity in contributing to families. In the past, grandparents believed in familism could achieve self-fulfilment by having grandsons, but now they have to overexert themselves in grandparenting to accelerate family wealth accumulation and help the younger generation complete family urbanisation.

Since family urbanisation is a long-term project, only a few grandparents believe they can live long enough to see it. Familistic grandparents are always working on family goals, but now only a few of them can achieve them and be happy with their lives. Therefore, although some grandparents mentioned how grandparenting made them feel meaningful and blessed, they also emphasised that the work is still ongoing and requires them to continuously contribute in order to maintain this sense of self-fulfilment. Besides, since grandparenting work is devalued under the economic-growth orientation, grandparents rarely get a sense of achievement from other people’s recognition and praise. This is a notable difference between grandparenting in China and other cultural contexts.

On the other hand, reciprocal and reluctant grandparents do not recognise the sacred value of grandparenting and also rarely mention how grandparenting helps them to achieve self-fulfilment. Expressing more individualistic characteristics, these two types of grandparents tend to
pursue the meaning of life outside of multigenerational families. Therefore, the sense of self-fulfilment that is brought by grandparenting is culturally conditional and costly. It is rooted in traditional family values and is only for grandparents with familistic beliefs. When peasant families became more focused on economic growth, the prerequisites for achieving self-fulfilment shift to accommodate the new family goal and family structure. Therefore, while familistic grandparents seem to follow the old way to achieve self-fulfilment, they are indeed utilised. Now, leading and sacrificial grandparents need to constantly exploit their own labour to complete family obligations and find the meaning of life within their families. The desire to achieve self-fulfilment by fulfilling family obligations becomes both a motivator and a constraint for familistic grandparents.

In sum, the grandparents' narrative shows two prominent positive effects of grandparenting: it meets some emotional needs for the grandparents and may help them achieve self-fulfilment. However, these two benefits are conditional and comparative and will not result in a significant improvement for all grandparents. The emotional benefits caused by the company of grandchildren and grandparent-grandchild intimacies are a compensation or substitution rather than an independent benefit. The sense of meaning and self-fulfilment caused by grandparenting is culturally conditional, increasingly costly, and challenging to achieve. What, then, are the outright costs of grandparenting?

6.3 Negative impacts on well-being
The positive and negative effects of subjective well-being are independent of one another (Diener, 2009). In many cases, grandparents receive both positive and negative impacts from grandparenting in different aspects of life. Many participants hold mixed attitudes toward grandparenting in the field, saying it is "sweet and bitter" or "suffering but also joyful." This complicated perception of grandparenting is particularly prominent among sacrificial grandparents, who are subordinated and pushed into grandparenting but also believe in the family goal and can get a sense of self-fulfilment through completing family obligation, even though it means self-exploitation in the extreme.

As many studies find out, grandparenting is sometimes linked to high depression scores and elevated stress (Brunello and Rocco, 2019; Kelley, 1993; Musil and Ahmad, 2002; Musil et al., 2009). In interviews, grandparents shared stress, concerns, guilt and loss of freedom that were caused by grandparenting, which demonstrated the negative influence of
grandparenting on their subjective well-being and also showed how grandparenting negatively impacts some objective well-being indicators.

Worth noting here is that all those negative impacts are intertwined and relate to the cumulative vulnerabilities suffered by grandparents in rural China on multiple levels. From the state’s policies to the new arrangement of economic-growth-oriented families, and finally, to individual characteristics, all these factors work hand in hand to produce exploitation of rural grandparents’ labour. While the grandparents’ narrative shows the microscopic and concrete expressions of the difficulties they faced, the cause of those negative effects should be explored in the "state-family-individual" system. The vast, policy-driven rural-urban gap in the economic and social welfare systems makes all rural residents vulnerable compared with urban residents. While social exclusion, which includes financial deprivation, social isolation, and a lack of social rights, causes vulnerability and even cognitive impairment in Chinese elders, rural elders, particularly females, suffer the most as a result of their most vulnerable position (Yang et al., 2018). Due to general resource scarcity, peasant families in less developed regions gradually shift their family goal to family urbanisation and adhere to an economic-growth orientation to accelerate the family urbanisation process. Grandparents become subordinate and marginalised because of this family transformation, putting them in a disadvantaged position in the intergenerational relationship. This exacerbates the negative consequences of grandparenting. Finally, grandparents are vulnerable as they get older. When grandparents are caring for their grandchildren, the cumulative vulnerability from macro to micro aspects causes them a great deal of mental anguish.

6.3.1 stress

Grandparenting stress is a common topic in the field. Based on the stress-process model (Pearlson et al., 1981), previous studies explore stressors, mediators, and outcomes of and coping with both general caregiving and grandparenting stress (Choi et al., 2016, Emick and Hayslip, 1999; Sprang et al., 2015). In this study, all types of grandparents mentioned stress when talking about grandparenting. Particularly, they introduced two major sources of stress: the strong sense of responsibility and the fear of being blamed by the second-generation. The former relates to grandparents' recognition of their family obligation, and the latter is associated with grandparents' status within their families. All
grandparent caregivers can face situational stresses that are related to practical considerations such as lifestyle changes, difficulties in navigating the academic system, and situational issues such as conflicts with other families and legal issues (Doley et al., 2015). But what grandparents in rural China worry more about is stress caused by the rearrangement of family obligations and unequal intergenerational relationships.

In economic-growth-oriented peasant families, the urgent pursuit of family urbanisation and policy-driven difficulties such as the restriction of hukou lead to the rearrangement of the intergenerational division of labour and the expansion of the family obligation of the elderly. As many grandparents said, taking care of their grandchildren now causes them a lot of stress and strain. Theoretically, the more eager peasant families are to pursue family urbanisation, the more family structure is further transformed, and the less power grandparents have in their families. In that case, grandparents will face the external stress of grandparenting. Meanwhile, the more grandparents believe in familism, the heavier the internal stress of grandparenting. This stress is not only about how to deal with difficulties in grandparenting but also related to the compulsory nature of work and requirements of the middle generation.

*Even if grandparenting is stressful and causes negative influence, we still need to do this. After all, it is our responsibility* (T-12).

*They left the children with you. Then it is your responsibility to keep them well. If they have some problems, your daughter-in-law will blame you. She will blame you for not raising the children well. She will definitely say it.* (T-02)

Though grandparenting gradually becomes obligatory, subordinate grandparents do not have matching grandparental power. They cannot effectively mobilise family resources and have little voice in childrearing, which increases the difficulty and stress of the work. Meanwhile, when grandparenting is not related to the sacred meaning of family continuity but an imposed responsibility under an economic growth orientation, its nature changes. For grandparents who began the work passively (sacrificial and reluctant grandparents), grandparenting is now a responsibility imposed by their children for the sake of the family's collective benefits, and any mistakes in grandparenting can be labelled as impeding the development of the entire family.
Some interviewees admitted they treat grandparenting as working for their adult children. Their adult children are bosses while they are subordinates. The unequal relationship between grandparents and their adult children and the grandparenting responsibility-power-imbalance result in a stressful atmosphere for grandparenting as any carelessness can bring blame on themselves. Grandparenting, from this perspective, is both a burden and pressure source.

The attached stress also increases the difficulty of grandparenting. Almost half of the grandparents interviewed consider grandparenting more challenging than parenting:

*When I raised my own children, I only needed to be responsible for myself. Even if I missed something and let my children get sick or hurt, it does not matter a lot as long as it is not a big deal. But now you don’t want to let your daughter-in-law complain or look down on you, so you have to be more careful. I feel grandparenting is more difficult and also more stressful.* (R-02)

*Raising my own children was always fine. But grandparenting is looking after children for my son and his wife. It is different. If I did not do the work well, it would cause conflicts. That is the issue.* (R-15)

Although the workload of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting is acceptable for healthy grandparents, psychological stress is common to all grandparents. In their opinion, grandparenting is related to the intergenerational relationship between them and the second-generation and is associated with the entire family’s harmony. The fear of being blamed by the daughter-in-law always came to light in some interviewed grandparents’ families.

*There are always some conflicts between daughters-in-law and grandparent caregivers regarding how to raise those children. That is why I want to suspend grandparenting. You do a lot to raise those children but still can be blamed for not taking care of them well.* (R-02)

While studies based in Western contexts pointed out that role confusion is a cause of grandparenting stress (Doley et al., 2015), participants’ narratives indicate that grandparenting related stress is not only about grandparents’ identity or their caregiving. It is grandparents’ subordinate and vulnerable role within families that makes grandparenting so stressful.
When grandparents gradually replace their daughters-in-law in providing the “feminine” everyday care and let the young generation do the “masculine” work of earning family income, their lessor economic contribution and disadvantaged position magnify vulnerabilities in facing grandparenting stress. Furthermore, the accumulated vulnerability increases grandparenting’s practical difficulty and brings concrete concerns to grandparents.

6.3.2 Concerns

When reflecting on their grandparenting experience, many interviewees expressed concrete concerns and anxiety about their grandchildren’s health and safety. Those concerns, closely tied to the limited access to health care and the less advanced support system in rural China, affect grandparents’ subjective well-being constantly and also reveal the objective challenges rural grandparents face.

With the rural-urban gap in Chinese social welfare systems, rural grandparents face multiple structured difficulties in grandparenting. The lack of a robust healthcare system is one of the most mentioned examples in interviews. Almost all interviewees expressed long-term concerns about grandchildren’s health and getting their grandchildren to healthcare. Meanwhile, this concern, partly caused by the state's policies, is interwoven with the stress caused by the grandparents' subordinate status. On the one hand, grandparents worry about their grandchildren's health; on the other hand, they suffer from the long-term stress of how to deal with the middle generation's blame on grandchildren have health problems. The cumulative vulnerability of grandparents magnifies the negative impact of grandparenting.

Rural China has long suffered a severe shortage of paediatricians. The number of paediatricians per 1,000 children in rural China is 0.39, while the number is 0.62 in urban areas (Zhang et al., 2019). As it is challenging to find paediatricians in local clinics and hospitals, higher-level hospitals’ medical care is costlier, and the insurance reimbursement rate is low. Grandparents’ limited resources restrict them from providing grandchildren healthcare when needed. Unfortunately, compared with their peers, left-behind children have poor health and more chronic conditions (Li et al., 2015). Especially young children aged 0 to 6-years-old who are entirely raised by grandparents have significantly lower health status than their parent-raised peers (Man et al., 2019). As a result,
grandchildren’s health becomes a daily worry for grandparents, negatively influencing their subjective well-being.

During an interview, one grandmother told me what she went through the last time her grandson was sick:

*Ra*ising those grandchildren is much more stressful than looking after my sons in the past. Now, every time my grandchildren tell me they are unwell, I feel anxious and worried...

When my oldest grandson was three-year-old, he got the hand-foot-mouth-disease, that was terrible. But the most dangerous experience happened just three months before. At that time, my youngest grandson got the... Oh, I forgot the name of the disease. You know, I am illiterate. That disease was severe. In the beginning, I did not know how serious it is, so I just brought him to the hospital in our county. The doctor prescribed medicine and let me try it for three days. He said if it did not work, then I had to bring my grandson to the nearby city. That is too far for me. So, I let my grandson take medicine. However, on the second day, my grandson’s nose started to bleed. So, we had to go to Jishou (the nearest city). The doctor in Jishou questioned me why I brought my grandson there so late and said if I went there earlier, the situation would not be so serious... How could I know? I even don’t know the name of that disease. The doctor in the county only prescribed medicine. I was so scared at that time. The health of my grandchildren is my main worry. (T-07)

This narration is typical as it demonstrates how accumulated vulnerabilities make grandchildren’s sicknesses their grandparents’ nightmare, thereby causing grandparents to live with chronic concern. Firstly, underfunded health services in rural areas cause difficulties in finding qualified doctors nearby, making grandchildren’s healthcare an objective challenge for rural grandparents. Secondly, many grandparents with limited power in their families generally hesitate to bring grandchildren to city hospitals alone as they do not want to make any decision and also are unable to use family resources. Thirdly, many grandparents only have limited disposable income and are unfamiliar with the city. Together, the above factors lead to comparatively low health service utilisation for left-behind children raised by grandparents, particularly in impoverished areas (Zhao et al.,2012). Grandparents’ low
educational attainment and limited knowledge of medical care can further increase the concern and generate long-term anxiety.

Concerns about grandchildren’s health are a common negative effect of grandparenting. This concern is exacerbated by the unbalanced grandparenting responsibility and grandparents’ subordinate role.

*All grandparents are worried about their grandchildren’s health. If the child spike a fever in the night, grandparents will worry a lot. They are also afraid of taking the risk. Your children give you a healthy baby, so you must return them a healthy child. If the child gets sick, that is your fault.* (T-08)

While the objectively existing plight caused by accumulated vulnerabilities makes looking after sick grandchildren challenging, the worry of being blamed transforms this task into long-term stress. Even when grandchildren are healthy, grandparents still live with concern about their health status.

*The biggest worry is their health...If they get sick, how am I going to tell their mom? Thinking about this, I even cannot sleep well. I always wake up at midnight and have to check their well-being before going back to sleep* (R-15).

Sleeping problems are not rare among interviewees. Although not all participants connect their sleeping problems with concerns about grandchildren’s health, some admitted they woke up frequently to check their young grandchildren’s situation during the night, especially when beginning their grandparenting. Previous studies also identified grandparenting’s negative influences on grandparents’ sleeping hours and quality, which further deteriorates grandparents’ physical health (Gu, 2019; He et al., 2021). One particular negative outcome for Chinese rural grandparents is guilt, to which we turn now.

### 6.3.3 Guilt

Being described as “the unpleasant and remorseful feelings associated with the recognition that one has violated a personally relevant moral or social standard” (Kugler and Jones, 1992, p246), the sense of guilt may contribute to depression among both caregivers and non-caregivers (Ghatavi et al., 2002; Singh and Sharma, 2013; Spillers et al., 2008).

In Chapter 4, I discussed how grandparents in economic-growth-oriented families, particularly sacrificial and reluctant grandparents, find it
difficult to cease grandparenting. This difficulty then transforms into a sense of guilt once they successfully end it and so continues to influence grandparents. Guilt has two causes. Firstly, as current grandparenting is a strategy to accelerate family urbanisation, stopping is identified as impeding this process. It is especially prominent among sacrificial and reluctant grandparents whose families are deeply economic-growth-oriented. Although grandparenting may not be enough for grandparents to achieve self-fulfilment as it is not profitable, suspending grandparenting can lead to further self-devaluation and guilt. Secondly, the normalisation of grandparenting makes stopping it a dereliction of duty to some extent. Those who suspend grandparenting would be criticised by villagers as irresponsible and then feel guilty. As a result, grandparents feel guilty when their health conditions negatively influence grandparenting. This sense of guilt can be maintained or even strengthened when grandparents stop grandparenting due to their health issues, leading to long-term negative impacts.

The sacrificial grandmother who got rheumatism during grandparenting complained,

> I also blamed myself. I blamed myself for getting this rheumatism and could not look after my grandchildren well. I feel guilty for my son and his wife, as I cannot help them anymore. (R-06)

A leading grandmother who has a limp said,

> My life is miserable. I have limped since I was young. This limp foot destroyed my whole life. Now I have no complaints about others but really hate myself. I hate myself for this disability; otherwise, I could do more for my offspring. (T-13)

The grandparents' sense of guilt reflects their concern about not fulfilling the new family obligation of caring for the grandchildren, and it provides channels for processing stress or norm violation in self-punishment (Lebra, 1988). This sense of guilt further shapes many grandparents' behaviours, as they continue grandparenting to avoid experiencing guilt, even though they are suffering. Except for reciprocal grandparents, who are commonly independent from their adult children, the other three types of grandparents are all influenced by the sense of guilt to some extent. Because it is connected with the recognition of family obligation, leading and sacrificial grandparents who believed in familism feel the most guilt when they impede familial development.
Although declining health inevitably accompanies the ageing process, many grandparent caregivers suffer from a sense of guilt caused by this natural law. This sense of guilt is not a product of grandparenting activity itself but a result of the economic-growth orientation and the newly imposed family obligation of grandparenting. Under this value orientation, grandparenting is necessary and even mandatory as the peasant family needs to maximise family income. As providing care or not is no longer value-neutral, grandparents who believe in familism and accept the economic-growth orientation view suspending or stopping grandparenting as a violation of this moral standard. Although causing long-term harm to Chinese rural grandparents, this negative influence of grandparenting is uncommon in other socio-cultural contexts.

6.3.4 Loss of freedom

Some participants admitted they would prefer to be migrant workers than do grandparenting. This preference seems unreasonable at first glance as that workload is much heavier than basic childrearing activities. One cause of this preference is the economic-growth orientation, and the matched value system devalues grandparenting and marginalises grandparents in peasant families. For sacrificial and reluctant grandparents, staying at home and looking after grandchildren not only means doing work they are not interested in but also leads to a subordinate role. Meanwhile, participants complained that grandparenting restricts their freedom, squeezes leisure time, and limits the grandparents’ interpersonal relationships.

Frankly speaking, I miss the time as a migrant worker. At that time, I had much more freedom and all the leisure time belonged to me. I could hang out with my friends after work. It was tiring but also easy to handle. Grandparenting is more complicated and exhausting. (M-03)

Grandparents’ subordinate role and grandparenting stress restrict grandparents’ freedom in both time and space. This restriction is particularly serious for sacrificial and reluctant grandparents who are less powerful in their families. When grandparenting becomes the priority, grandparents must give up other aspects of life to make way for grandparenting. This work requires them to be available at all times and ever vigilant. It fragments grandparents’ time and separates them from regular social activities and entertainments such as dancing and playing mah-jong.
During this process, some grandparents have experienced role engulfment and losing self, as grandparenting left them “little time for other activities and behaviours that may defined them previously” (Eifert et al., 2015). Looking after grandchildren can “expand to a point where it has, in effect, restructured and largely taken over the life” of the grandparents (Skaff and Pearlin, 1992). The loss of freedom makes grandparents socially isolated and lacking in social support, especially for those with a heavy grandparenting workload. A leading grandmother who was grandparenting two young kids shared how caregiving work hinders her:

In the past, I danced with others occasionally. But now, with this little kid, I cannot dance anymore. Sometimes I find a chance to play with others for a while. But once he cried, I had to stop dancing. (T-13)

Also, it is common to hear complaints about how grandparenting tethers grandparents to the village:

Grandparenting constrains me a lot. I cannot leave the village; I cannot meet other people. I am restricted to this place to some extent. (R-16)

For grandparents who had migrated before and enjoyed the rich entertainment and cultural life in cities, being restricted to village life is tedious. However, as ending care is challenging and will result in guilt, rural grandparents have to tolerate their reduced freedom. As a result, grandparenting in rural China becomes a stressful and compulsory task that brings concerns, restricts freedom, and cannot end smoothly. But how does it impact physical health? The relationship between grandparenting and grandparents’ physical health is complex, and various factors play roles, as we shall see.

6.4 Physical health: a crucial moderator in grandparenting experience

As introduced earlier, grandparenting’s influence on physical health has been explored by several quantitative studies, with mixed results. Based on my observations and interviews, I argue that physical health can screen a potential caregiver in or out as it is a selection criterion for grandparent caregivers. Meanwhile, it is also a moderator for the grandparenting experience, and the impacts of grandparenting vary not only across grandparent types but also across their different physical health conditions. Grandparenting’s negative impacts on physical health are not prominent for grandparents with good or fair physical health.
However, for those with chronic diseases or poor health, grandparenting can further deteriorate their physical health and subjective well-being.

First of all, physical health is a selection criterion for grandparent caregivers; grandparents with poor health conditions are less likely to be caregivers. A villagers’ committee member in Tea-Garden Village introduced the grandparenting phenomenon to his village and said,

> Most grandparents would help their children to raise kids, except those very sick elders. They are too sick to look after others, so their task is to maintain their own lives and not bring additional work or burdens to their families. It is the same for those oldest old. (KI-09)

There are two main tasks in economic-growth-oriented families: maximising the family income and minimising or eliminating non-essential expenses. For grandparents with poor health, their main task is maintaining their health and not creating extra costs. Once their health worsens, the limited healthcare service in rural areas and the poor social welfare for people with agricultural hukou will lead to both high medical and care costs. Therefore, some seriously ill grandparents are not caregivers for their grandchildren.

Health status also influences the grandparents’ workload and intensity. Since getting healthcare is expensive and time-consuming, grandparents with poor health status maintain their health status by reducing their grandparenting workload and simplifying grandparenting activities, which leads to the low quality of childcare.

A sacrificial grandmother said,

> Sometimes I feel good and energetic; then, I do more work for those kids. When I feel unwell, I choose to let the older kids take care of the young. (T-05)

This also confirms one characteristic of economic-growth-oriented grandparenting, as grandparents are not concerned about the quality of childcare. Although decreasing the workload will inevitably reduce the quality of childrearing, it benefits the family economy in the short term and therefore fits the economic-growth orientation. A 72-year-old grandmother whose self-rated health is poor stated that,
I do what I can in grandparenting. But I also need to look after my health...I need to keep healthy, so my son can save some money. (T-14)

However, even with the workload reduction, grandparenting can still burden ill grandparents when they are the sole caregiver. The grandmother further said that,

Grandparenting is not complicated. I just cooked for grandchildren and washed their clothes. But it is still exhausting because I also need to farm. I need to plant rice and vegetables for the three of us...

I try very hard to maintain my health status. But to be honest, I think it is declining. (T-14)

Because many grandparents would modulate the workload and intensity of grandparenting to maintain their health status, in the field, only a few grandparents complained about grandparenting's negative impacts on physical health. But for those whose health status is already poor and who even need other people's care, grandparenting can be the final straw that breaks the camel's back. However, the stress caused by the inequality in intergenerational relationships and the guilt of not meeting family obligations still pushes some grandparents, especially those who believe in familism, to do grandparenting. In Tea-Garden Village, a leading grandmother (T-13) with a limp told me, "I would not stop grandparenting until I died." She has suffered from the bone disease for half her life, without formal treatment in hospitals and only using some herbal medicines she bought at the local market. Although grandparenting is a burden for her health, she refuses to stop it, as it is "for the family's good."

On the other hand, grandparents with no health issues did not treat grandparenting as a risk factor for their physical health. One reason for this is that if they do not look after their grandchildren, they also need to do other types of physical work. Meanwhile, many grandparents, except leading grandparents, did not focus on the quality of childrearing and would modulate the workload to fit their health status. A grandmother whose health status is good said,

Grandparenting is not a burden for my health. Especially now. I do not farm anymore, so I only need to look after those kids. (M-02)
This experience is the same as another grandmother who has fair health and only does grandparenting.

*People like me experienced those tough times. We worked hard and lived in poor material conditions in the past. Now I only need to look after my grandchildren; this is not tiring at all. I find no influence on my health.* (T-09)

However, things are different for grandparents who live with chronic diseases or other health issues. A leading grandmother who had a mastectomy one year before complained,

*It is a problem. I already suffered from diseases, and sometimes even walking can cause me pain. Frankly speaking, I don’t think grandparenting is a tiring job, but I am suffering to some extent. If I hold my grandchildren in my arm in the daytime, I feel pain at night. That is awful.* (R-16)

A grandfather uses a metaphor to show grandparenting’s impact:

*For our elders, no one has a perfect body anymore. Sometimes the legs go wrong. Sometimes it is the waist. It is the same as a machine. When it has worked for a long time, all those parts have small problems. At that time, every new work can bring trouble to the machine. Same with grandparenting.* (T-11)

Grandparents clearly know how grandparenting can impact their physical health. For grandparents with good health, the workload is lighter than farming or migrant work and will not burden them at all. However, with declining health, even the most essential caregiving activities can further deteriorate grandparents’ bodies. In this situation, grandparents also suffer from fatigue, annoyance, and sleep problems, according to my respondents. However, even though grandparenting becomes a burden, some sick grandparents continue working toward the family urbanisation goal, to meet the newly formed grandparenting responsibility and avoid or lessen guilt. Meanwhile, as discussed in Chapter 4, some grandparents give up getting treatment when sick to save money, which further accelerates the decline of their health. But how do grandparents cope with these concerns and stresses?

6.5 Coping strategies applied by grandparents

The difficulties of grandparenting are the results of the cumulative vulnerabilities of rural grandparents, related to the urban-rural gap, the inequality in intergenerational relationships, and the vulnerability of the
elderly. However, this does not imply that grandparents are powerless. In interviews, grandparents shared their coping strategies to dissolve the negative emotions of grandparenting: a belief in fatalism, a sense of contentment, and social support.

6.5.1 Fatalism (Ming)

Fatalism, a key concept in social psychology, is commonly defined as people believing they have no control over the course of their own lives (Shapro and Wu, 2011). Regarding the nature of fatalism, Durkheim believes this feeling of powerlessness, hopelessness, and vulnerability results from people’s social experience of oppressive regulation (Durkheim, 1963).

Arthur Smith, an early Christian missionary, observed in Empire China that “nothing is more common than to hear an especially unfortunate Chinese man or woman remark, 'it is my fate'” (1894, p.164). This phenomenon persists more than a century later. Fatalism is frequently mentioned in interviews when grandparents try to accept situations that they perceive to be unfair or unideal. To be more specific, fatalism has three functions for grandparents. Firstly, it is a way for grandparents to accept the unbalanced pay and return to family life. Secondly, it justifies the grandparents’ compromise and tolerance when facing oppression. Finally, it also legitimates their reduction of grandparental activities.

The current grandparent cohort in rural China, especially grandmothers, faces an embarrassing situation. When they were younger, family power was controlled by the old generation, and they were responsible for both farming and childrearing. At that time, they were told that young daughter-in-law should obey older generations and therefore dreamt of becoming mothers-in-law. When they eventually become the oldest in their family, their families are transformed, and the younger generation “assert their economic superiority and position of power in relation to the senior generations” through migrant work (Santos, 2016, p.95). As a result, many of today’s grandmothers rarely receive rewards for their familial contributions. As a grandmother stated,

*I was born in the 1960s. Females in my cohort have a miserable fate. When we were young, we had to raise our children alone while we did collective productive labour at the same time, and we were also responsible for caring for father- and mother-in-law. Now we finally become grandmothers, and grandparenting*
becomes a new job. It is tough. But this is our fate. I have no way to fight against it. Now, I am learning to accept my fate. (T-08)

With the tremendous rural-urban gap, it seems unreasonable to deny the significance of family urbanisation, especially in less advanced regions. Once a peasant family sets family urbanisation as its goal, elders will gradually become marginal and subordinate. Therefore, they are powerless to fight against the unfairness they face. Fatalism, in this situation, becomes a method to dissolve the perceived unfairness. As another grandmother said,

*It is unfair, so what? It is your fate. So, no matter it is fair or not, you have to accept it.* (T-14)

Originating from a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (Liu and Mencken, 2010), fatalism becomes an effective way for grandparents to accept their new subordinate role and maintain family peace. Believing the unfairness is predetermined allows them to cease resistance and complaining, which paints a harmonious portrait of the new multigenerational family in rural China.

Fatalism, from this perspective, is a mentality grandparents apply to achieve a compromise. As one grandmother said:

*It is meaningless to talk about grandparenting. What should I say? It is just my fate. Even if I am unsatisfied with it, I have to accept it because my family is poor.* (T-02)

Notably, belief in fatalism does not necessarily mean being indolent. Some grandparents believe in both fatalism and fatalistic voluntarism, accepting fate with a strong anti-fatalism and a belief in their ability to control fates. This belief encourages them to work actively and pursue the best result they can get (Lee, 1985). From this perspective, fatalism is a philosophy of life that allows grandparents to try what they think is worth trying and peacefully accept negative outcomes.

*Sometimes I think each person has a predetermined fate because I have to think in this way. However, even if you have a good fate, how can you make your good fate come true without effort? For our poor people, we do what we can do, and if we still cannot catch up to those rich people, then we have to accept our destiny.* (T-07)
I do grandparenting for my son, but if he still cannot earn enough money in urban areas, we must accept this reality. This is my understanding of fate. (T-12)

Through the belief in fatalism, grandparents in rural China increase their acceptance of the negative aspects of life, and they also diminish the urge to fight against the suppression they face.

Meanwhile, the belief in predetermined fate also provides legitimacy for the shrinking of grandparental activities. While grandparents continuously worry about grandchildren’s physical health, they are rarely concerned with the negative outcome of shrinking grandparental activities. This contradiction is explained by the grandparents’ belief that each child has a predetermined fate. Therefore, it is held that grandparenting quality will not determine the child’s development. There is no need for grandparents to worry about children’s school performance and future careers.

Those children have their own fates. Some of them are good at studying, so they can get higher scores without the guidance of parents and grandparents. Others just don’t have that good fate, so even if you spend the effort to help them, it is useless. Academic performance depends on the children themselves. Even if fate can be changed, it must be with their own efforts. Neither grandparents nor parents can help them. (M-02)

This opinion is echoed by many participants. Believing children have their predetermined future, many grandparents deny the necessity of family education and exclude it from grandparenting. This idea is popular in all three villages, particularly so in Tea-Garden Village. Even villagers’ committee members with high-school degrees used fatalism to defend the shrinking of grandparenting content and the lack of family education. Based on her observations in Ravine Village, Wen pointed out:

I think sometimes grandparents are trying to disconnect themselves from their grandchildren’s future development. They only focus on the basic needs of grandchildren and provide primary care. It is a way to protect themselves. By doing so, they feel more comfortable and less stressed. When I chat with grandparents, my feeling is that they do not think they can impact grandchildren’s academic performance even though they are their only caregivers (KI-01).
Although carrying the family’s hope, left-behind children have statistically poorer academic performance than their non-left-behind peers (Song et al., 2018). Many rural grandparents who only received a poor education due to the rural-urban gap and unrest when they were young are neither capable nor motivated to change this situation. Coping strategies can be distinguished between avoidance and approach coping (Roth and Cohen, 1986). From this perspective, fatalism is an example of avoidance coping because it helps grandparents avoid the stress caused by life's unfairness and worries about their grandchildren's development by denying the possibility of changing those situations.

In a casual chat, one grandfather told me that his 6-year-old granddaughter is not good at studying and, therefore, may have to repeat her parents’ life course and become a migrant worker in the future. When I replied that it might be too early to tell, the grandfather further said that it was the girl’s fate. Therefore, as a grandfather, he believed he could do nothing to change it. Fatalism allows acceptance, rather than resistance, to become the dominant attitude toward the negative outcomes of grandparenting. Regardless, this belief eases the grandparenting related stress and concerns to some extent.

An opposite coping strategy can be found in seeking contentment, to which we now turn.

6.5.2 Sense of contentment

The negative impacts of grandparenting, particularly those bearing on subjective well-being, are strongly related to the accumulation of grandparents’ vulnerabilities. Under the circumstances, grandparents use fatalism to accept the disadvantages; meanwhile, they also use the sense of contentment to emphasise the bright side of daily life and obtain relief.

The emphasis on contentment in Chinese culture can be traced back to the *Tao Te Ching*, one of the most influential philosophical texts in ancient China and the bible of Taoism. According to the *Tao*, stronger desire cultivates more trouble and suffering, while contentment has no cost (Cordaro et al., 2016). This Taoist idea developed into a common saying: ‘Knowing to be content is a perpetual feast’ (*zhì zu chāng le*) and is widely embraced by the Chinese. Meanwhile, people who do not know about being content will be criticised as insatiable.

According to Lu’s (2001, p. 8) cross-cultural review, the Chinese concept of contentment is accepting ‘whatever one has at the moment, and
naturally feeling moved and touched from the bottom of one’s heart’. In other words, it is being satisfied with what you already have and therefore, not looking for what you do not have. Based on this belief, grandparent caregivers should be content as they have grandchildren, even if grandparenting negatively influences their lives. Some narratives convey this understanding:

*Although it is tiring, I still feel happy. Because I have grandchildren, so it is joyful. I am satisfied with my grandparenting life. Having grandchildren to look after is a blessing. Therefore, I have no complaints.* (T-13)

Although tired and overwhelmed, emphasising whatever one has rather than not has leads grandparents to positively label their grandparenting experience. From this point of view, the sense of content is an example of "benefit finding," which is a common coping strategy in stressful situations and can lead to better results (Helgeson et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the current generation of grandparents, typically aged 50 and over, have gone through dramatic social unrest and experienced great hardship in the past. When evaluating their grandparenting life, grandparents can achieve contentment by comparing present-day challenges with previous adversity.

Although considering grandparenting work unfair, a grandmother compelled to provide care is still content with her present life:

*When I was young, I could not even imagine a good life like this. The transportation, the house we live in, the food we eat every day. All these things were unimaginable in the old days. The living conditions have improved a lot. I am satisfied with my life.* (T-08)

This narrative represents a cohort that experienced the Great Chinese Famine, the people’s commune, Cultural Revolution, and planned economy. Another grandmother commented that,

*This may sound rude, but nowadays, even pigs eat better than what we ate in the past.* (T-14)

Previous adversity increases grandparents’ tolerance and limits their material requirements to a basic level. From this perspective, the sense of contentment is similar to the social comparison effect. Festinger (1954) discovered that humans have a strong desire to evaluate their own opinions and abilities, and these evaluations are based on comparisons
with others. By comparing one's situation to that of others who are worse off, one can redefine his or her situation in a more positive way (Buunk et al., 2001) and feel more satisfied with his/her current circumstances (Van der Zee et al., 1995). Similarly, when comparing current life with a worse past, grandparents adjust the criteria for a good life and feel somewhat more satisfied.

However, a sense of contentment can only lead them to highlight the bright side of grandparenting. It cannot fundamentally assist grandparents in overcoming difficulties or dealing with the accumulation of vulnerability. Therefore, even though almost all participants use the sense of contentment to minimise or negate grievances, they still suffer.

Furthermore, while a sense of contentment and the comparison between the old days and current life somewhat diminishes the negative emotions, the value of contentment also impedes grandparents from complaining.

In Ravine Village, I interviewed a grandmother who reported experiencing depressive symptoms. She complained that:

*Sometimes I think that grandparenting is unfair. I raised my son alone, and now I have to raise children for my son alone too. When I think about this, I am distressed. But I cannot tell this to others. I should not complain about this. Others are satisfied with their grandparenting life, so my complaint seems unreasonable. People should learn to be content, right? (R-13)*

Unlike the belief in fatalism, which is more private and less related to judgement, contentment is a culturally approved and positively reinforced mindset in Chinese culture. Therefore, while contentment can mitigate grandparenting distress for some, it also blocks grandparents’ way of pouring out their grandparenting-related troubles.

### 6.5.3 Social supports

Social support is what it means to think or feel that you are loved and cared for by others, that you are important and valued, and that you are part of a social network of mutual help and obligation (Wills, 1991). Its benefits for caregivers in coping with challenges and improving well-being have been explored by many previous studies (e.g., Gerard et al., 2006; Taylor, 2011).

In interviews, participants mentioned how they established special support networks under constraints and without formal assistance. Village
hollowing caused by internal migration and the traditional clan system’s decline disrupted the old social support network in rural China. Meanwhile, resources from the government and social organisations have long tended to preferentially fund urban areas. Therefore, there is currently no systematic social support network for Chinese rural grandparents. Under the circumstances, caregiving grandparents gradually established informal social support networks based on villager groups and shared hobbies. While they are unfamiliar with the term "social support," they are well aware of the effectiveness of the social support network they created in reducing grandparenting stress.

Both Tea-Garden and Ravine Villages are located in mountainous areas. The residents are not located together in one district but are dispersed across the mountain in multiple villager groups. As He (2002) and Chen (2019) point out, evolving from the production team in the era of the people’s commune, villager groups still maintain some mutual aid functions and can be considered a society of acquaintance. Residents belonging to one villager group have known each other for decades, and the close physical distance is convenient for mutual assistance in an emergency. Therefore, it is unsurprising that grandparents in each villager group build their informal support networks with one another, which can provide them with both physical and emotional support.

A grandmother in Tea-Garden Village, who also ran a small business, introduced how her neighbours assisted her in grandparenting when she had to leave home:

> My neighbours help me a lot when I go to sell in the markets. On those market days, I will get up a little bit earlier and prepare food for my grandchildren. Then I ask my neighbours to look after the kids. People in our village groups know each other well. It is not a big deal. (T-02)

Similar cases are also found in other villages. While the official basic unit in rural China is the village, grandparents commonly organise themselves in villager groups, especially in mountainous regions. Although this social support network is informal, it follows the social rule in the society of acquaintance that emphasises reciprocity. Meanwhile, in clan-based villages, such as Ravine Village, many residents in one villagers’ group belong to the same clan and have the same family name. The kinship network combines with the concept of a villager group to increase the
reciprocity within this unit. Grandparents can receive instrumental support within the villager group, especially in an urgent situation.

Meanwhile, social support groups based on hobbies and entertainment provide more emotional support to grandparents in rural China, especially for grandmothers. Although entertainment in villages is relatively scarce, grandparents try to enjoy their leisure time with others. In Tea-Garden Village, grandmothers in the same and nearby village groups dance together every day. A leading grandmother, despite her limp, used to enjoy dancing with other grandmothers:

> When it is not raining, we will gather in the small square and dance. I cannot dance as well as others, but it is good to join them. We also chat and laugh together while dancing. (T-13)

For those grandparents, being good at dancing is not crucial as they joined the group mainly to communicate with others and relax. Hobby-based social groups play the same role as senior centres and allow grandparents to get emotional support from each other. However, only grandparents with leisure time are able to join this type of support group. For instance, the grandmother quoted above was looking after an infant when interviewed, and therefore she could not find a chance to dance anymore. As suggested above, the heavy grandparenting burden can restrict grandparents’ freedom and even prevent them from joining hobby-based support groups. Meanwhile, grandparents must actively seek hobby-based social support, and there is no requirement for hobby-based social support groups to accept all applicants, which means the effectiveness of this type of social support is affected by a variety of factors, including grandparents' personalities, previous interpersonal relationships, and even villagers' competing interests. In Ravine Village, for example, one grandmother (R-13) told me she was barred from the hobby-based social support group because her family did not "belong to their clan."

Therefore, this type of support group is less stable than that based on villager groups. This further indicates that the grandparenting experience is polarising. While multiple factors, such as grandparents’ health status, grandparent type and workload, moderate the grandparenting experience, they also affect access to protective factors. Grandparents with heavier caregiver burdens have less access to social support, further increasing their distress.
In Ravine Village, grandparents have other entertaining activities: making brooms with bamboo and collecting chestnuts. Ravine Village has excellent natural resources and is surrounded by bamboo forests. Peasants there are skilful at making bamboo products, including brooms. Each day, some grandparents are employed by a business owner to gather bamboo and make brooms. For making one broom, they can earn about 30 RMB (approximately £3), and while this is not a considerable income for some grandparents, they use the opportunity for socialising and entertainment. One grandmother told me:

*My son and daughter-in-law asked me not to do this. They said they could send enough money to me. But I am bored during the daytime. I am not concerned about money. I do this as entertainment. We gather and have chats; it is great.* (R-07)

Ravine Village also has an old, wild chestnut tree. Each autumn, grandparents will meet under the tree and gather chestnuts together. The chestnut tree is more crowded than the official seniors’ centre during this time. In interviews, participants also reported other types of collective entertainments, including playing cards and mah-jong. All these collective socialising entertainments help to psychologically support grandparent caregivers who are included in the group.

### 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the impacts of grandparenting on subjective well-being, and the coping strategies grandparents applied to deal with grandparenting negative influence.

In sum, grandparenting brings both positive and negative effects on grandparents' subjective well-being. By analysing participants’ narrations within the particular socio-cultural context of rural China, I argue that grandparenting’s positive influence is conditional, comparative, and compensatory. The joy of grandparenting is conditional upon the intensity of grandparenting and the family status of the grandparents and is altered by the grandparents' characteristics. Although it fosters grandparent-grandchild interaction, it is only a consolation prize for grandparents who are now estranged from their adult children. For grandparents, the positive effects of grandparenting are also costly. Facing the expansion of family obligation and inequality in intergenerational relationships, many grandparents have to experience over-exploitation to achieve self-fulfilment through grandparenting.
Meanwhile, grandparenting’s negative impacts are strongly related to the multi-level oppressions they suffer and their cumulative vulnerabilities.

![Diagram of multi-level oppressions faced by grandparents.]

Figure 6.2 The multi-level oppressions grandparents face.

Those negative impacts are structured, long-term and all-encompassing, leading to continual harm. While the main positive effects that are associated with grandparenting are intangible, limited to the individual and family level, and are conditional on the grandparents’ situations, the negative aspects of it are pervasive, associated with the nationwide urban-rural inequality and the less advanced social welfare system in most Chinese villages. Since a large proportion of grandparenting in rural China is now motivated by the family urbanisation goal, many grandparents also face inequality in intergenerational relationships and have been systematically devalued.

Therefore, I proposed that compared with the conditional and comparative benefits, grandparenting brings more negative effectivities to Chinese rural grandparents’ subjective well-being. Meanwhile, both grandparenting and grandparent caregivers in rural China are heterogeneous, which leads to a difference in grandparenting’s impacts. Villages vary a lot in terms of affluence, infrastructure, social service access and lifestyle. Villages located in the Yangtze and Pearl River
deltas have almost completed urbanisation, and grandparents have more access to both healthcare and childcare. Meanwhile, villages in central and Western regions are relatively disadvantaged. Among three villages in this study, Ravine Village is located near the Yangtze River delta. Compared with interviewees from the other two villages, grandparents from Ravine Village have a better living standard and infrastructure. While grandparents from all three villages expressed concerns about grandchildren’s health, their worries are not the same. Grandparents from Tea-Garden and Ma villages expressed their worries about finding qualified healthcare resources nearby, while grandparents in Ravine Village do not need to worry about finding resources but are concerned more about financial and the time-expenditures of going to hospitals and potential blame from the second-generation. Family structures and grandparents’ role in their families also influence their experience. With more power and motivation, grandparents in leading positions generally present better subjective well-being. In contrast, grandparents who are reluctant to provide care for their grandchildren experience more distress attributed to grandparenting. The more vulnerable grandparents and their families are, the more distress grandparents will experience. According to this perspective, prioritising support for the most vulnerable grandparents who provide primary care to their grandchildren may have the greatest marginal benefits.

Besides grandparents’ health status, their narrations also show that grandchildren’s situations, which influence grandparenting workload and the intergenerational relationship, can also moderate the impacts of grandparenting. Caring for younger or more kids usually mean a heavier workload and leads to a burden.

Understanding how grandparenting works and how it impacts the grandparents is the basis for better assistance and support. In a later chapter, I will discuss the findings’ implications and present a more practical perspective. Now, I would go to the discussion of the findings first.
Chapter 7: The operation, function, and position of grandparenting in social, family and individual systems

7.1 Introduction
In the previous three chapters, I looked into the economic, socio-cultural, and policy-related driving forces contributing to changing grandparenting patterns in rural China, established a typology of grandparenting, and examined the impacts of grandparenting on grandparents' subjective well-being. Based on the grandparents’ narratives and my observations, I explored grandparenting from a grandparent-centred perspective and expressed it through their lived experiences. However, this actor-centred approach has two limitations. First, since it explored different themes or aspects of grandparenting separately, some themes that permeated grandparenting throughout are mentioned but not discussed in depth. Second, although previous chapters also involve discussion of the vertical dimension with the "state-family-individual" system, they apply a micro-level horizontal perspective more, mainly focusing on individual grandparents and peasant families. In order to make up for it, this chapter will shift the perspective and look at grandparenting in a more macro way within the "state-family-and individual" system (see section 4.1 for its introduction).

The main foci of this chapter are on how rural grandparents and their families have been adapting to the changing material and ideological environment and the interaction between the state and its public policies, family transformation and new arrangements, and individuals’ experiences in this process. To do this, four main themes that have come up in the thesis so far will be more fully explored.

Before moving to these four themes, I first briefly summarise the story of grandparenting in rural China. The pursuit of family urbanisation and policy-driven difficulties in the family urbanisation process have together motivated or even given peasant families little choice but to rely more on grandparents for the upbringing of children. From the "state-family-individual" perspective, one could argue that the state uses its policies to force transformation in peasant families and push families to carry out both (paid) labour and (unpaid) caregiving in order to meet the state's rapid modernisation and urbanisation requirements.
Under the state’s policies, urban areas have constantly absorbed rural labour without providing matched social welfare and service to those migrant workers and their family members. Therefore, the caregiving burden of migrant workers’ children is transferred to the rural elderly who were also left behind in villages. Now, grandparenting plays a crucial role in rural Chinese society and contributes to not only the operation of multigenerational families but also other social development processes.

Grandfamilies coalesce on the rural grandparents’ beliefs in the traditional patrilineal system. However, with social and economic changes, both the structure of peasant families and grandparents’ beliefs about grandparenting responsibilities have been changing, creating what I have called various subtypes of grandparenting. Different grandparenting types have special traits. The commonality of grandfamilies is that they act as a buffer between the state and peasant families or individuals, and between urban and rural areas. However, since grandparenting is a temporary, urgent response to rapid social change and the dysfunctions caused by it, grandparents’ benefits and feelings are not a priority and have therefore largely been ignored by society, young peasants, and even grandparents themselves. While grandparents experience both positive and negative affect as a result of grandparenting, the study discovered that the negative effects are more profound and universal, even when grandparents employ multiple coping strategies.

The above brief summary covered the causes, types, experiences and impacts of grandparenting. In the subsequent section 7.2, I first examine how the state uses policy to lead the prevalence of grandparenting in rural China; how the grandfamily plays a crucial buffer role in filling the workforce gap in urban areas and filling the social welfare gap for peasants; how patriarchal and gender norms maintain the stability of peasant families but meanwhile cause inequality and long-term issues; and finally, how grandparents’ tolerance, resilience and sacrifice contribute to grandparenting.

7.2 Grandparenting and the society-family-individual system
Rooted in grandparents’ narratives, the previous findings chapters explore why and how grandparenting works and its mixed impacts on grandparents’ well-being. Now, after going through the entire storyline, I would like to pan out and discuss grandparenting from a more macro and general perspective, viewing grandparenting in the society-family-individual system to see its interactions and connections with different levels of institutions. In this process, the original sequence of findings
presented will be shuffled, and four key themes that have permeated the previous results chapters will be discussed.

7.2.1 Government-driven grandparenting and its contribution to the state

One common limitation in previous studies on grandparenting in rural China is the neglect of the interconnections and interactions between various other social dimensions. Since grandparenting happens within the family system, many studies explore this topic at the family and individual levels, ignoring the state and society's roles in this process. After searching with the keywords “skip-generation or grandparents” (ge dai or zu bei) in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Chen et al. (2021) identified 1,573 Chinese studies on grandparenting. The key themes of those studies are around the intergenerational relationship, the lived experiences of grandparents and grandchildren, and the individual level costs and benefits of grandparenting, while the roles of society and government are widely ignored.

Admittedly, extended families in rural China used to be closed, independent, and autonomous in dealing with family matters. The old saying, “even upright officials cannot adjudicate family affairs (qing guan nan duan jia wu shi),” indicates the public’s traditional attitudes towards interactions between family members: families belong to families. Yet, it does not mean the family arrangement has been out of the state's control. With the traditional isomorphism of state and family, the imperial state in ancient China was itself organised in a similar way in accordance with the premises of family culture and utilised the all-encompassing familial mode to maintain its governance (Yan, 2011).

Contemporary grandparenting in rural China is not a natural and spontaneous product of modernisation. It is led and deeply shaped by the state and its policies. According to functionalists, the family is a basic unit of society and performs crucial functions for it. Functionalists argue that industrialisation leads to the evolution of family structures from extended families to nuclear families (Parsons, 1949). Influenced by functionalism, researchers (e.g., Tang, 2010) have also indicated the modernising tendency of Chinese families. It is argued that the nuclear family will gradually become the dominant family type, and the family’s functions will weaken, accompanied by the withering of the extended family (Liu, 2009; Wang, 2007). Previous studies have also confirmed
this argument, as peasant families in regions south of the Yangtze River, China’s richest rural area, have gradually transformed into nuclear families since the 1930s. By the 1960s, peasant families were largely nuclearised (Wang, 2007). This nuclearisation tendency was maintained until the 1990s.

However, in the 2000s, researchers noticed the declining number of nuclear families in rural China (Wang, 2007), and the 2010 Census Data further demonstrated a rise in the rate of three-generation families in rural China (Wang, 2014). This tendency is related to multiple factors, including the state’s policies, such as the birth control policy. Meanwhile, researchers point out that the increasing need for grandparenting also contributes to this new tendency of family transformation (Wang, 2014).

The scattering of migrant workers’ nuclear families and the crucial role families play in caring for family members rendered three-generational families a necessity in rural China, which can carry a crucial new function, grandparenting, when the middle generation is absent. As a result, the large internal migration of young peasants is followed by the prevalence of three-generation families. Grandparenting in rural China, therefore, is not a result of natural family evolution. Instead, the state's policies on internal migration, the gap in social welfare between urban and rural areas, and deliberate social changes have led to its rise in popularity.

Society as a whole system is composed of multiple interrelated parts. In society, “the whole and a part (or parts), a part and the whole, and one part and another part had to be seen as interdependent” (Pope, 1975, p.362). According to structural-functionalists, the structure, functions, and ethical values the family follows are all related to the requirements of society. When China underwent a drastic socio-cultural shift, Chinese families were inevitably influenced and transformed to fit the shift. Before industrialisation, traditional peasant families were driven by certain ethical values, and family functions related more to family reproduction than economic development and upward mobility (Li, 2018). They were typically economically self-sufficient, which usually did not require the exploitation, let alone over-exploitation, of labour.

After the establishment of the PRC, the collective economy in rural China and the people’s commune system restricted peasants to the land and deprived them of their economic autonomy, resulting in low motivation and a common “free-rider” phenomenon among peasant families (Nee,
For a long period, the economic function of peasant families was to attain self-sufficiency and maintain social stability, rather than seeking maximising family income and accelerating economic development.

After the Chinese economic reforms in the late 1970s, however, Chinese society’s shared norms and values started to substantially change. On the Chinese National Day in 1985, for example, millions of Chinese people saw the slogan “time is money and efficiency is life” in the parade on televisions in a neighbour’s home or work unit. At that time, television represented modernity and richness, which was costly for most Chinese. No longer feeling ashamed and guilty, Chinese people started to enjoy life with commodities that symbolised a Western lifestyle and capitalism. “Money talks” gradually became a guide for social behaviours and interpersonal relationships (Bai, 1998).

The economic reforms spurred growth and employment to new heights, especially in urban areas and the southeastern coastal area. After the employment reform of the late 1990s that aimed to improve efficiency, a market-based labour market gradually took shape in those areas, attracting and requiring a cheap labour supply from rural areas. Compared with their urban counterparts, rural labourers are cheaper, more diligent and willing to take the “3D” (Dirty, Dangerous, and Demeaning) jobs that urban residents despise (Meng, 2012).

During this time of transition, the PRC government played an active role in promoting the mobility of rural labourers and facilitated internal migration through policy changes. The hukou system, which was created to restrict peasant mobility, was gradually eased to promote labour flow. In November 1984, the State Council issued a circular to allow peasants who run a business or are employed with accommodation to have a new type of urban hukou, called “self-supplied food grain” (zili kouliang) hukou (Chan and Zhang, 1999). To facilitate peasant labourers finding jobs in factories, many local governments from different provinces even set up labour management offices in Shenzhen, one of the Special Economic Zones. From this perspective, the internal migration of peasants and rising labour market in urban areas were being deliberately driven by the PRC government (Pun, 2016). The policy reforms assigned peasant families the new task of providing endless, cheap labour to factories, and these policy changes and the transformation of ideology together contributed to peasant families’ structural and value transformations.
However, the easing of the hukou system is selective. The government deliberately encouraged the migration of young peasants and the separation of their families. While the government allowed and even encouraged rural labourers to dedicate themselves to urban economic development, they and their families were excluded from the urban social welfare system and therefore impeded from forming permanent roots.

Migrant workers and their families, therefore, cannot receive protection and complete the reproduction of the next generation in urban areas. As Pun (2016) argues, society “needs the labour of the rural population but does not need the city-based survival of that population once market demand for rural-to-urban migrants’ labour-power shifts in either location or industry” (p.31). Moreover, “reproduction of the next generation of labour is left to the rural villages. The cost of reproducing the labour force includes the costs of bearing, rearing, and educating children; healthcare; and eldercare” (Pun, 2008. p.244). As a result, peasant families and rural China are functioning as labour producers for urban areas, not only for the current generation but also for the next. As migrants’ nuclear families are scattered and cannot complete the labour reproduction function, multigenerational families resurge and become prevalent.

Grandparenting, therefore, is a response to the requirements of socio-economic and policy shifts. It is heavily led and shaped by government policy, urban developmental needs, and socio-cultural factors. When masses of peasants become the labour pool for urbanisation and modernisation, the traditional intergenerational division of labour no longer fits the scattered family structure. To contribute to the functionality of society in the new market economy era, many grandparents replace their adult children and become primary caregivers of grandchildren. Grandparenting is never a simple intergenerational activity that happens within the family system alone. It is an outcome of societal shifts and also contributes to the functionality of society. Without grandparenting, the new three-generational families could not function, urban areas could not have endless, cheap labour, and China’s development miracle could never have materialised.

In the grand narrative of the “China Miracle”, grandparents in rural China are invisible subjects. As economic growth has been heavily emphasised, elderly people have accordingly been gradually marginalised in society. The public and researchers have neglected the contribution of grandparenting in both urban and rural China to some degree. Although
even grandparents themselves cannot always relate their caregiving work to the wider picture of society’s advance, their efforts in maintaining family function meet the multiple needs of this transitioning society. This section now looks at three major aspects of grandparents’ contributions: labour, their economic contribution, and making up for the deficiency of preschool education in rural China.

Grandparenting plays a crucial role in releasing young working parents from childcare and therefore increasing the labour supply, especially in peasant families. In some Western countries, such as the U.S, there is a trade-off between grandparents and young parents regarding the labour supply as the grandparent population are also a major working force in the labour market (Rupert and Zanella, 2018; Zanella, 2017). The same issue is not severe in rural China, as the bulk of migrant workers are young and middle-aged peasants. Migrants aged over 50 only accounts for 26.4 percent of the total (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Meanwhile, grandparents who went back home for caregiving did not withdraw from the industrial or formal labour market as many of them farm and do odd jobs, acting as a crucial labour force in villages. Paid occupations among interviewed grandparents include postman, carpenter, stonemason, Chinese medicine or vegetable vendor, and farmer.

Grandparenting and other types of grandparental investments, such as financial assistance to migrant parents, increase fertility intentions. Population ageing and decreasing fertility have already become two serious social issues in China, a country that used to be famous for its endless cheap labour. To deal with this issue, the government abolished the one-child policy. Now, since 2021, the state encourages couples to have three children. Compared with their counterparts who stay in villages, migrant workers show lower fertility intentions due to the influence of modernity and the challenges they face in adapting to urban life (Liang, 2019). Since internal migration is a prevalent tendency among peasants that cannot be reversed in a short period, decreasing parenting stress is a potential way to increase peasants’ planned fertility. In these circumstances, grandparenting effectively lowers the cost of childrearing and increases family income by enabling parents to work. Since many grandparents also farm, it further reduces the daily expense of their families.

During fieldwork, I met two mothers who were looking after their children by themselves. Both of them told me that they would not have another child since the family already had a heavy burden:
We are not rich. Now we have four persons in our family, and all of us depend on my husband. One person earns money for the entire family! Another child? How difficult to afford another child? It is even a challenge to cover the current living expenses. (KI-03)

In Tea-Garden Village, a young mother complained to me, saying her fate is not as good as others and she has no parents-in-law to share childcare. Without the support of grandparents, young peasant couples are easily overwhelmed by the financial and childrearing burden and reduce their fertility intentions.

Meanwhile, some grandparents, particularly those who believe in familism, encourage young parents to have more kids and guarantee childcare. Grandparents’ encouragement, their guarantee of childrearing, and other types of support effectively alleviate young parents’ tangible and intangible burdens. Previous studies also confirm that grandparenting can improve the younger generation’s fertility (Wang, 2016; Yu and Gong, 2021). As a mother told me, “My mother-in-law’s (grandmother's) support gives you the confidence to have a child. You give birth to their family, and they help you raise the child.”

Grandparenting also makes an economic contribution to society. For example, in London, based on the grandparenting hours and the median child-minder wage, estimates indicate that grandparents provide approximately 0.6 billion pounds of childcare services each year, although London’s grandparenting rate is comparatively low compared to other places in England (Barrett, 2013). In the field, most grandparents were primary caregivers and carried the entire childcare burden for their adult children. Their daily caregiving hours depended on their grandchildren’s school schedules, and many of them looked after more than one child. Chinese New Year is the only vacation for those grandparents as during this period, migrant parents will return home. But in some families, grandparents are primary caregivers even when migrant parents come back, since the grandchildren have an intimate relationship only with them. From this view, the number of childcare hours provided by rural grandparents should be substantial. The population of grandparents is also large. Among the 6.97 million left-behind children in 2018, 96 percent of them were cared for by grandparents (Xinhua Net, 2018). Based on a nationwide sample, 45 percent of people aged 45 or above provide childcare, and more than half of them spend more than 24 hours per week on grandparenting (Yue et al., 2020). The number of
grandparent caregivers and total caregiving hours they provide are considerable, representing a tremendous economic contribution.

Grandparenting also effectively makes up for the deficiency of preschool childcare in rural China. According to the Third National Agricultural Census, only 32.3 percent of villages had a kindergarten in 2017, which means children from more than 400,000 villages cannot access preschool childcare nearby. Grandparenting compensates for the inadequacy of preschool childcare and eases pressure on the social welfare system temporarily. All three villages in this study have neither a kindergarten nor a primary school. Many grandparents look after grandchildren 24 hours a day, seven days a week until they are five years old and enter the pre-primary class. Because Ravine Village is far away from the nearby primary and middle schools, many grandparents rent a room near the school to look after their grandchildren on weekdays.

Moreover, following related regulations, all primary and middle schools in China need to end the school day before 16:45. Children from the visited villages usually left school before 16:00, and on Tuesdays, they had to leave school at 14:30. While students in urban China have various after-school programmes to choose from, children in villages have no choice but to go back home to their grandparents. Due to the inadequacy of education services, grandparents in rural China need to look after grandchildren for a longer time than caregivers in urban areas. When rural grandparents help adult children by making the family economically functional, their work also makes up for the underdeveloped education system, therefore increasing society’s functionality. Since developed areas currently have a larger proportion of funds for the preschool education system (Zhang and Liu, 2017), grandparents’ functions are more prominent in impoverished areas.

When chatting with grandparents in villages, none of them recognised their work as great and lofty. As introduced earlier, they are motivated by economic considerations, cultural expectations and family cohesion. They never connect their work with the modernity of cities and the country’s rapid development. In fact, grandparenting’s contributions are often ignored in China, especially at the macro and meso-levels. In addition to the left-behind grandparents in this study, China now has a large number of migrant grandparents, also known as floating grandparents (Qi, 2021). Those grandparents travel to unfamiliar cities with their migrant adult children to care for their grandchildren. Besides, many urban grandparents also continue childrearing after retirement. Until now, the
government has not issued any targeted policy or regulation relating to this prevalent phenomenon, neither in urban nor rural areas. Grandparents are only incidentally mentioned when discussing the left-behind. When discussing grandparenting, the public more commonly does so from the parent’s perspective, focusing more on the grandchildren, and grandparents are commonly seen as poor and pathetic people who play an instrumental role. Despite their efforts, achievements, and sacrifices, the grandparents are marginalised in the story due to the ignorance of their subjectivities, lived experiences, and contributions to society. They are not only the footnotes of China’s development miracle. Instead, they play a crucial supporting, if not a major, role in the story.

7.2.2 The buffering role of grandfamilies and grandparents - between society and individuals, and between urban and rural areas

Seated at the centre of the “society-family-individual” system, the grandfamily endows meaning and ethical value to grandparenting, motivating and encouraging grandparents. It provides material and spiritual shelter for peasants in this uncertain era. Furthermore, it is a buffer between urban and rural China that mobilises the labour force for urban areas and provides care in rural areas. In this sub-section, I view the grandfamily as an institution assisting social development. For urban areas, it helps to avoid a shortage of cheap labour and mitigate constraints to economic development. For rural areas, it alleviates the negative consequences of the weak social welfare system. For individual peasants, the family, especially the extended family, plays a more complicated role. On the one hand, familism and reliance on a family drive many grandparents to engage in grandparenting and to face exploitation in old age. On the other hand, the family is a material, spiritual, and emotional shelter for peasants. The belief in family continuity and recognition of the collective familial goal motivates many migrant peasants to work hard in cities and encourage grandparents, particularly leading and sacrificial grandparents, to gain a sense of self-fulfilment during grandparenting. Meanwhile, grandparents play a central role in the grandfamily as they maintain its operation through grandparenting—childrearing provided by grandparents ties grandchildren with their migrant parents and preserves the socialisation of children.

The family is the material and ideological setting which enables today’s grandparenting. The intergenerational division of labour within the family
makes the migration of peasant parents possible, and their migration is at least claimed to be for the collective family good. Using the concept "new three-generation families", Yang and Wang (2018) explain grandparenting in rural China as exploitative cooperation between elders and their adult children to cope with external pressures. They argue that the new family type "has in fact overemphasised instrumentalist rationality" (ibid, p.1), as it aims to maximise the utilisation of family resources and judges the value of family members by their earning capacity. My discussion of the economic-growth-oriented peasant family partially confirms this statement. Grandparents are marginalised due to their limited income, and all costs not related to the family urbanisation goal are reduced, including eldercare and grandchildren’s education.

Based on her fieldwork and previous studies on the application of modernisation theory to Chinese peasant families, Li (2018) describes contemporary peasant families as functional families and explains grandparenting as the expansion of older people’s family responsibilities due to liquid modernity. My study contributes to this idea by demonstrating how grandparenting in rural China is motivated and shaped by peasant families' desire for economic growth. Economic-growth-oriented grandparenting and its disregard for an individual's quality of life express the instrumental rationality and functionality of migrant worker families. Grandparenting and the grandfamily’s existence is for a so-called family goal (see especially Chapter 4), and grandparents who believe more in the family goal or rely more on the family are more likely to be engaged in grandparenting.

As a social institution, the grandfamily also serves state and societal functions. Firstly, the grandfamily is a powerful mobiliser and stabiliser as it provides millions of peasant labourers to urban China and maintains the stability and sustainability of the left-behind population. For the middle generation, the collective family interests, especially family urbanisation, motivate them to leave home and become migrant workers. According to Lin’s (2012) ethnographic research, many Chinese internal male migrant workers did not see themselves as primarily individual subjects, but rather valued their familial relationships and roles more. The concept of family aids migrant workers in identifying themselves and discovering the meaning of their migrant work. Meanwhile, the state has purposefully transformed the peasant family into a stabiliser in rural China in order to achieve its political, economic, and cultural development goals (Chen, 2010). A key idea for developing the social
welfare system in PRC is to reduce the state’s burden while increasing the caring responsibilities of families (Peng and Hu, 2015). Grandparenting is an expression of this tendency, demonstrating how families share the burden of the social welfare system by transforming themselves.

Secondly, the idea of the traditional, collective familism works as an effective magnet in attracting grandparents to adult sons’ nuclear families. Leading and sacrificial grandparents account for most participants of this study (see Chapter 5), and their stories show the power of collective familism. Leading grandparents, motivated by familial interests, proactively continue grandparenting with patience and passion no matter its difficulty. Sacrificial grandparents who have already lost power and become marginalised still sacrifice themselves to maintain the family’s function. The family effectively mobilises grandparents to exploit themselves and reduce the state’s burdens, legitimised by the ideology of traditional, collective familism. Due to such beliefs, this exploitation is usually long-term and normalised. As introduced in Chapter 4, leading and sacrificial grandparents commonly look after grandchildren until they are adults, and it is comparatively difficult for sacrificial grandparents to withdraw from grandparenting before then. The family is like a pump that can move peasant labour to urban areas for the family good and move elders to caregiving jobs, for the same goal. As long as the natural growth of the urban-born labour force cannot meet the growing demands of the labour market in urban China (Knight et al., 2011), this pump becomes a powerful machine for filling the labour market shortfall.

Notably, since traditional extended families provide support to family members, many peasants take for granted that childrearing and care of the elderly are family responsibilities. Therefore, when the state excludes migrant workers’ children and parents from the urban welfare system, few peasants express visible chagrin. In interviews, some grandparents complain about their unfair destinies and express dissatisfaction with their lives. These complaints, as explored in Chapter 6, are ways to relieve stress and manage uncertainty. By blaming something that people cannot control, grandparents find an excuse for all difficulties in their lives. In fact, none of my 38 interviewees connected that dissatisfaction with the policy-led welfare inequalities between urban and rural China or the underdeveloped welfare system in general. The remarkable resilience and great power of families alleviate individuals’ expectations towards society and therefore decrease the discontent caused by the welfare system.
On the other hand, the family is an emotional shelter for peasants, and familism provides religious support to peasants who work hard for family goals. Individual peasants are weak and unorganised when facing the uncertainty caused by drastic social shifts, global capitalism, and urban areas' demands. Multigenerational peasant families then become an intermediary, a buffer, the basic protective organisations. The sense of mission and belonging gives grandparents the strength to confront grandparenting’s difficulties and build a connection between themselves and their families’ long-term future. Even though they do not dream of family urbanisation and do not expect to experience it while they are alive, the idea that it is beneficial for the family is enough to encourage and conciliate them. This function is particularly obvious for leading grandparents.

Remember the grandmother with a limp in Tea-Garden Village (T-13)? The first half of her life was a microcosm of the traditional, diligent peasant woman. She was forced to leave school when eight years old due to poverty and since then undertook all the housework in her natal family. Then, after marriage, she worked hard for the Commune and looked after the children and elders in her family. After the economic reforms, the Commune no longer provided work and income to peasants. So she worked in the nearby mine for a while and then became a migrant worker when her children became partially independent. During this time as a migrant worker, she had gone back home for two years to build a house and look after her elderly parents-in-law. In recent years, she has returned home again to look after three grandchildren for her son and daughter. She has dedicated almost her entire life to the family, even though she has a disability and has suffered from domestic violence since getting married. During the interview, this grandmother constantly repeated, "I have no complaint. No complaint."

Why would this woman not have complaints? The answer was on the wall behind her. There hung a piece of embroidery, with a common Chinese idiom, "harmony at home brings prosperity" (jia he wan shi xing). "It is my favourite saying," the grandmother told me, "If my family is harmonious, then everything goes well." "Did you embroider it yourself?" I asked her. "Yes, I like to embroider." She said, with a smile. Then she paused for a while, "but now I do not have time to do it. I have to look after those kids."

224
In Tea-Garden and Ma villages, decorations with the saying “harmony at home brings prosperity” are very common in peasants’ houses, expressing their values and desires. While “harmony at home brings prosperity” is not popular in Ravine Village, another common object highlights the crucial role of families. The spirit tablet with “Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Ancestors, Masters” (Tian Di Jun Qin Shi) is for the worship of the five most sacred entities in the world. Ancestors, representing the family line, are included. Familism becomes, to some degree, a religious belief for grandparents, and even individualistic grandparents are not wholly immune.

Without resilient peasant families and the prevalent grandparenting, in the last four decades Chinese society would not have enjoyed the benefits of substantial cheap labour resources and therefore not experienced such rapid economic development. Without the protective power of the family, Chinese people, especially peasants, might not have been strong enough to undergo the profound social transformations which have taken place in China. The grandfamily buffers the conflicts between:

a) the demands of the urban labour market and the exclusionary welfare system in urban China, and

b) parents’ migration and the very limited childcare system in rural areas.

Within the grandfamily, grandparents also play a buffering role, as grandparenting lightens the heavy burden on the second-generation and provides a comparatively stable and safe environment for growing grandchildren. They are the protector of and foreign aid to the second-generation’s nuclear family. When I worked in Tea-Garden Village for poverty reduction in 2017, I met a young couple who did pig farming there. The mother told me that they had spent their savings on pig farming because they did not want to leave their children alone. Two years later, when I came back to the village for the fieldwork, I found that the father had migrated again, while the mother had stayed to be with their two kids. What had happened? The mother explained that there was an outbreak of swine fever in the first half of 2019, and the fragile family pig farming business could not resist that crisis. As a result, her husband had to become a migrant worker again. She further complained,

_We are unlucky. Neither of us has parents who are alive to do childrearing. Even in the most challenging time, only one of us, usually it was my husband, could go to the pigpen. When swine fever broke out, we had a heavy loss. Then when we decided to do migrant_
work again, we also could not work in cities together. We earn less, and our families are fragile.

Compared with the grandfamily, this mother found that the nuclear family was more fragile and more sensitive to risks and crises. By providing childcare, grandparents increase peasant families’ livelihood opportunities, stability, and risk resistance, reducing the burden on young peasants. Grandparents, even those do not provide childcare, are reserve forces for the second-generation’s emergent needs. In the field, there are grandparents who started caregiving work after adult children’s family crises, whether proactively or passively (see Chapter 4).

Grandparenting also reduces the potential risks of the second-generation’s marriage failing. One benefit of grandparenting that grandparents recognise is that it can prevent the separation of young couples. In recent years, rural China has experienced a surge in the divorce rate, and studies indicate it is related to peasants’ migration (Mo and Shi, 2015). As getting sons married is a crucial and also expensive task, many grandparents enable their daughters-in-law to migrate together with their sons deliberately, by providing childcare. From this perspective, grandparents are buffers in the grandfamily, protecting its unity, stability and operation. They are also backup for and foreign aid to adult childrens’ nuclear families, assisting them in crises.

A question arises: What makes the grandfamily coherent, resilient and stable enough that it can buffer the conflicts between urban and rural China, between the needs of economic development and social welfare provision? The answer is in that piece of embroidery, in grandparents’ recognition of family and the emphasis on family continuity. Or to be more specific, the patriarchal family system and patrilineal family line.

7.2.3 Patriarchy and gender norms: a toxic adhesion

Chinese families have traditionally been described as patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. Although they have undergone many transformations, today’s Chinese families have “continued to be shaped by deep-seated gender and generational hierarchies” (Santos, 2017, p.4). This study suggests that the influence of patriarchy can be found in many different aspects of peasant grandfamilies. Two particular themes throughout grandparents’ narratives merit further discussion: patrilineal and patrilocal norms and the gender norms around grandparenting.
As a key representation of patriarchy, the patrilineal family system prominently shaped grandparenting. Traditionally, the patrilineal system defined the boundary of families, as the unbroken male lineage was viewed as a symbol of family reproduction and continuity, while married daughters were excluded from natal families and became new members of their husbands’ families (Baker and Clammer, 1979). Being influenced by this patrilineal family boundary, grandparenting in rural China is generally patrilineal and patrilocal: the vast majority of grandparent caregivers are paternal, and multigenerational grandfamilies are most commonly patrilocal. Unlike in English, where they are all called grandchildren, in Chinese, there is a clear distinction between the children of one's sons (Sun) and of one's daughters (Wai Sun). "Sun" means grandchildren, and the "Wai" that is added before "Sun" for children of one's daughters means "outside." The children of one’s daughters are called “outside grandchildren” because they are traditionally excluded from the patrilineal family line and are identified as outsiders. Within a patrilineal family, its economic and spiritual inheritances are also regulated by patrilineality. Grandparents with familistic beliefs saw sons and their children as the continuation of the family line and also the extension of their own lives and therefore felt a strong sense of responsibility to engage in grandparenting.

This patrilineal system lets people recognise, emphasise, and spiritually benefit from achieving family goals, no matter whether they can get a tangible return. The patrilineal system and the belief in family patrilineality are powerful norms and values that inspire individuals to dedicate themselves to the family's collective interests. This sense of identity with the patrilineal family can cross many generations and is a powerful, cohesive force that unites family members no matter their age and gender.

When exploring the driving forces of grandparenting in Chapter 4, I demonstrated the role of linear family continuity in motivating grandparents, especially for leading and sacrificial grandparents. While grandparenting is more distantly state-driven and economic-growth related, the emphasis on linear family continuity is a direct dynamic for many familistic grandparents’ involvement. As I quoted in section 4.4.1, grandparents believe that “having grandchildren, especially having a grandson, means the family has an heir. It is a blessing” (T-12). Patrilineality and the derivative patrilineal family values endow grandparenting with an ethical and spiritual value. That is why long-term
maternal grandparents were relatively rare during my fieldwork - females are excluded from their natal families after the marriage, and maternal grandchildren are not “real family members” of maternal grandparents.

In section 4.4.1, I also introduced a special matrilocal residence marriage, ruzhui. In ruzhui marriage, the groom does not need to pay the bride price and will “marry into” the bride’s natal family. The children will take their mother’s surname and be considered the maternal parents’ heirs since they have the same surname as the maternal grandfather. In this ruzhui system, maternal grandchildren are transformed into paternal grandchildren and therefore receive care from maternal grandparents. From the grandparents’ narratives, I summed up two additional common situations for maternal grandparenting. One is that the son-in-law links and ‘gives’ a child to his wife’s family by letting a child have the mother’s surname. Then the maternal grandparents, who in most cases have no son, will be willing to look after and pay for this child. Second, some maternal grandparents will become long-term caregivers when grandchildren have no living paternal grandparents. One maternal grandmother in this situation told me that “[the children] don’t have paternal grandparents, so if I look after them now, they will treat me as their paternal grandparents and provide eldercare when I am no longer independent” (T-13).

In the above three situations, grandparents either transform maternal grandchildren to paternal grandchildren and then consider them family members or adopt the (deceased) paternal grandparents’ role and become the first and only target of family eldercare. By transforming into paternal grandparents, maternal grandparents find the necessity, value and incentives to provide long-term childcare. From this perspective, the patrilineal family system and the sense of identity for the patrilineal family line are bonds between grandparents and their adult children’s nuclear family and generate cohesion for a grandfamily.

Although patrilineality has a critical role in forming grandfamilies, it also brings hidden problems: the high bride prices which have to be paid and son preference. In section 4.3.2, I explained how competition within villages imposes heavy financial burdens on peasants. One cause for that competition is the rising bride price. Because letting all sons get married and having grandchildren means large expenditures for familistic peasants, middle-aged peasant couples have to maximise family incomes through rearranging the division of labour. Many families even borrow money to get their sons married. The high bride price accelerates the
family transformation towards being more economically oriented and exploits grandparents’ labour for the middle generation. The bride's family, on the other hand, wants to raise the bride price to earn more money for their adult sons' marriages and family urbanisation. Son preference also continues because of patrilineality. Since the son is the only one who “keeps incense at the ancestral altar burning” (quoted in Murphy et al., 2011, p.665) in the patrilineal system, many peasants still hold a son preference. Son preference in rural areas even influenced the one-child policy in the past. The one-and-half-child policy replaced the one-child policy in rural areas of 19 provinces, allowing couples to have another child if the first child was female. It also leads to discriminatory behaviours in childrearing, as boys are valued more than girls.

Migrant parents who can bring a limited number of children with them to urban areas prefer to take sons, leaving girls behind with grandparents. Girls also do more housework and sometimes need to look after their younger brothers (Wang and Hu, 2020). In the field, I found that grandparents held fewer expectations towards granddaughters’ academic performance and development. They are more likely to provide essential daily care and limited interventions, compared with grandsons. This does not mean that grandparents did not like their granddaughters. They just care less about the girls’ development and future since the girls will not influence the patrilineal family’s fate.

Patrilineality is the core vertical cohesive force that bonds various generations in grandfamilies. It also drives gender structures that create gender inequalities within conjugal relationships. In China, household affairs have historically been socially constructed as inner and outer: males are responsible for the outer realm – productive work, and females for the inner realm – domestic or housework, giving birth, childcare, and other caregiving (*nan zhu wai nv zhu nei*). Although with recent changes to family structures, the traditional gender-based division of labour is being reconfigured and grandparents take their daughters-in-law’s role in childrearing, the new intergenerational division of labour is still influenced by gender norms. Though all grandparents are facing pressures, grandmothers are the first choice for caregiving since females are traditionally responsible for the inner realm. Meanwhile, due to China’s economic-growth orientation, peasant children’s childcare becomes marginal and is usually carried out by more vulnerable groups: people in urban areas have left this work to the rural population, and young peasants in turn passed this work to vulnerable elders.
In the grandparent group, grandfathers who benefit from patriarchy are more powerful and less likely to become primary caregivers. While many grandfathers cannot find an ideal job in urban areas due to their age, they prefer to farm or do odd jobs near home rather than looking after grandchildren with their wives. These decisions are influenced by both economic considerations and gender norms. Regarding the grandparenting type (see Chapter 5), grandfather caregivers have more power and voice within families, making them more likely to be leading grandparents. Among all seven interviewed grandfathers: six are leading grandparents; four are doing complementary caregiving work while their wives carry out more of the caring work; and only three are primary caregivers – a widowed grandfather, a grandfather whose wife was seriously sick, and a grandfather whose wife had a stable job in a local company. They are either the only grandparent who has the capacity to provide childrearing or make less income than the grandmother. Although with these three, the traditional gender-seniority based division of labour had been broken, in most cases, patriarchy and gender norm is still prominent.

Grandmothers are subordinated within families both vertically and conjugally and carry more caregiving work and bear heavier grandparenting stress. Being rural, old, and female means that they have to suffer multiple intersectional oppressions. Unlike their husbands, who are at least used to having more power within the family, peasant females have been constantly subordinated since birth. Traditionally, Confucianism requires women to follow the “three obediences” (san cong) – obey the father before the marriage, obey the husband after the marriage, and obey the oldest son if the husband is dead. As females, grandmothers are expected to carry “inner realm” work, including childcare, and they are also expected to be subordinate, following the son and husband’s orders. Due to the traditional gender division of labour and the subordinate role of females, many grandmothers, such as the one I quoted in section 5.3.2 (R-06), come to view grandparenting as their duty even though they were initially unwilling to do it. Some of them further identify sacrificial grandparenting as their fate and use it to get a bit of relief.

1 Here, the word “intersectional” emphasises how the overlapping nature of identities leads to the oppressions of those grandmothers. As Warner (2008) indicated, a black person is not only black; that individual may also experience stigma caused by other personal identities such as gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. It is the intersection of those identities that modifies the actual experience of being black. The situation is the same for grandmothers in rural China. Their rural resident identity, age, gender, and other identities together form their experience.
The gender norms and differences in grandparenting are widely mentioned in previous studies. However, quantitative studies focused on the gender difference with grandparenting impacts have found inconsistent results. One study found that high-intensity grandparenting protected grandfathers’ cognitive function with the ageing process but negatively influenced that of grandmothers (Song et al., 2008). Another study shows that grandparenting has more significant benefits to grandmothers’ mental and physical health (Wu, 2018). There are also studies that find no significant differences in the impact of grandparenting for grandmothers and grandfathers.

In general, the findings of this study suggest that grandmothers and grandfathers carry different childcare workloads. Even if involved in childcare, many grandfathers are not responsible for primary daily care, and their roles are comparatively traditional, as a leader, role model, and teacher. Childrearing is not their main job as they commonly do odd jobs, such as farming, in the daytime, and are responsible for representing the family in intra-village social interactions. In interviews, some grandfathers identified themselves as caregivers. But when I asked them for more details about their grandparenting activity, they admitted they were only occasionally involved in it, and that their wives do most of the caregiving work. In section 5.3.4, I quoted a reluctant grandmother who said,

*All my family members assume grandparenting is an easy job, but I bet none of them can do this work for more than five minutes.*

Her husband, a leading grandparent, expressed different opinions towards grandparenting,

*it is our grandson. How can we not look after him? I believe we complete it well. I told my wife that you do not need to worry about other things, only looking after our grandson. I also assist her and spend time with my grandson when I am free.*

The grandfather seldom provided essential care and therefore knew little about the stress caused by daily caregiving work.

The above grandparents are typical of many couples. And notably, the gender norms for the inner and outer realms in family affairs are much more prominent between grandparents than in the younger generation, which means grandmothers are more negatively influenced by grandparenting. While grandmothers are troubled by grandparenting
stresses, concerns, a sense of guilt and the loss of freedom (see section 6.3), many of them said their husbands are not worried about those things. The belief in patrilineality and the emphasis on the family continuation let many grandfathers consider grandparenting as their duty but then assign the work to their wives. Interviewed grandfathers also showed more concerns about the family’s economic situation rather than about grandparenting details.

For the “society-family-individual” system, patriarchy and its byproducts effectively cohere individuals to their families and operate as powerful, cohesive forces. Patriarchy also endows grandparenting an ethical value and legitimacy. However, this legitimacy is based on gender and generational inequalities - on the oppression and exploitation of grandmothers and the ignorance and discriminatory behaviour towards granddaughters. It also brings a heavy financial burden because almost all peasant families are worried about high bride prices. As an adhesive, it is useful but also toxic. The heavy grandparenting stresses on grandmothers, the rise in bride price and the development problems for young girls will bring further problems to peasants and cause a vicious cycle.

7.2.4 The traits of rural grandparents and their transformation

In addition to the state's policies, the family's buffering role, and the cohesive effect of patriarchy, the grandparents' characteristics are also crucial for understanding today's grandparenting in rural China. This section focuses on rural grandparents and discusses how their traits gained from the peasant identity, the mixture of tradition and modernity, and the life events they experienced influenced their grandparenting.

Today’s grandparenting in China is a product of dramatic socio-economic and political changes and represents a mixture of traditional and modern characteristics. When I use the words tradition and modernity, I am neither assuming there is a static, never-changing past traditional culture and an entirely new and modern society, nor am I saying there is a clear boundary between tradition and modernity. Instead, I want to highlight the dramatic socio-cultural changes in the past half-century and the changes in some social institutions, including family and kinship. While still retaining many traditional kinship and family system characteristics, such as being patriarchal, setting collective family goals, and endowing values to family continuity, today’s grandparenting also indicates prominent characteristics of modernity and the market economy. This
mixture makes today’s grandparenting resilient, effective and partially necessary in rural China, and distinguishes it from traditional and also futural grandparenting.

As a cohort, today’s grandparents are also a group of people caught between tradition and modernity, and they show special characteristics due to their life experiences. Many grandparents had very traditional and Confucian natal families, which influenced their family values. The tough experience in the Great Leap Forward, Great Chinese Famine, and Cultural Revolution makes them tolerant, resilient, and easily satisfied. The economic reform and modernisation let them believe in, at least partially, a market economy and emphasise efficiency and efficacy. It is the mixture of those characteristics that make the prevalence of grandparenting and the over-exploitation of grandparents possible. The mixture of distinct characteristics also contributes to the heterogeneity of rural grandparents. As explored in Chapter 5, the belief in traditional familism or an individualism that is influenced by modernity is a crucial factor for grandparent’s types. Notably, all those characteristics are not mutually exclusive. Grandparents who believe in individualism are also inevitably influenced by familism to some extent. This explains why some rural grandparents are ambivalent about looking after their grandchildren.

Here, the term “cohort” refers to the concept used in life course theory and is defined as “a group of individuals who experienced an event of interest at the same time.” (Elder and George, 2016, p.60). The rural grandparent cohort includes today’s grandparent caregivers in rural China who are generally between 50 to 70 years old. Although people of this cohort can be further categorised into various sub-cohorts, most of them have witnessed and have been involved in the social, cultural and economic transformations in the past half-century and therefore have common experiences and characteristics. Just as Ryder (1965, p.844-845) indicates, “each cohort has a distinctive composition and character, reflecting the circumstances of its unique origination and history...if change does occur, it differentiates cohorts of individuals from one another”.

In this study, I have often referred to the traditional Chinese family structure and values. Although this older system has been eroded, its influence is still prominent in this rural grandparent cohort and their families. Particularly, many of today’s grandparents were taught traditional family values when they were young and experienced them
earlier. It makes them believe in the collective family goal and emphasise the interests of the patrilineal family line, and therefore provide childcare proactively. It lets them follow the cultural expectations of their grandparenting role within the family, be involved in offspring’s families, and assist when they need help. They also care a lot about other villagers’ opinions, as they learned from the traditional society of acquaintance. All those traditional traits constitute the cohesion of grandfamilies and make the intergenerational division of labour possible.

As a cohort of people who have witnessed drastic socio-cultural changes, rural grandparents also learn from their experiences in earlier historical periods. In Chapter 6, I explored some of the coping strategies used by grandparents, one of which is developing a sense of contentment. In addition to cultural advocacy for contentment, grandparents’ adversity when younger, including extreme poverty, famine, and constant political upheavals, also lets them better tolerate difficulties and cherish today’s life. Grandparents in my study were generally satisfied with the improvement of their lives, as they now have a peaceful country, a quickly developing society, steady subsistence, some social welfare assistance, and a vision of family urbanisation. Those factors are enough to please or at least console them in grandparenting.

Grandparents in this cohort have a resilience that is gained from their experiences and beliefs. When asked to rate their lives from 1 to 7, most grandparents marked it a 4. They knew theirs were not the best-quality lives, but meanwhile, they were satisfied with their life and rarely demanded more. Although their families are competing with others fiercely, and eager for family urbanisation, many grandparents lived with low personal wants or desires. Also, this cohort of grandparents had a strong emotional attachment to their villages and land despite the comprehensive urban-rural gap. Many grandparents told me that compared with cities, they would personally prefer to stay in villages. In Ravine Village, some grandparents lived in a nearby county town on weekdays, and when I asked if they would go back to villages on weekends, they said, “We go home every weekend.” For those grandparents, their villages are home even though they have apartments in the town. They were born in rural China, grew up there, and expect to be buried there. Urban life may look fantastic to them, but they do not think it suits them. They are content to stay in villages with grandchildren and are satisfied with the rural lifestyle.
Grandparenting is driven by the modernisation and urbanisation needs of the state, and many grandfamilies are now focused on the family’s income growth. However, contemporary grandparenting is still based on earlier or traditional aspects of grandparenting. Because the economic growth of families relates to family reputation and son’s marriage, familistic grandparents recognise economic growth and family urbanisation as their family goal, and because grandparenting connects to the continuity of the patrilineal family line, many grandparents are involved in caregiving and have to self-exploit if needed, either proactively or passively. Meanwhile, traditional values and the attachment to villages leads some grandparents to feel discarded in this modern age. They are rooted in villages though their family’s goal has shifted to family urbanisation. When grandparents sigh and say, “we are old”, it is also self-deprecation for their old-fashioned ideas or ways. Even though they are key contributors to a social function, both they and others identify them as out of date to some degree.

“Peasant” is another label for this rural grandparent cohort. In or about rural China, a common discourse is that peasants are known for their diligence and frugality. A common theme that the People’s Daily, one of the largest official media sources, reports about peasants is how their frugality and diligence help them to rise to fame and fortune (Fang and Jia, 2005). Similarly, rural grandparents are known for their hard work, sacrifice and collectivism. Those characteristics are commonly identified as virtues and are praised by the media. However, for rural grandparents, those are just what they have learned and also had to learn from their lives.

When I just entered the field, I frequently expressed my respect to grandparents for those characteristics. Then one grandmother replied, "That is not a big deal. We are farm people." At that moment, I did not understand. What did she mean, "we are farm people"? Then, one day, while reading a study on Chinese peasant families and rural development, a possible explanation occurred to me: as peasants, they have grown accustomed to long-term oppression and "growth without development," or involution¹. For a very long period, Chinese peasants were accustomed to a situation where "the total output expands, but at the cost of

¹ The term “involution” was created by anthropologist Alexander Goldenweiser (1936) to describe a culture that cannot (or does not) adapt and or expand its economy. Later, Philip Huang (1990) applied and expanded this concept in his “The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988”, to explain the durability of subsistence farming and limited economic transformation in China for more than six centuries.
diminished marginal returns per workday” (Huang, 1990, p10) when farming and planting. Grandparents know from experience that intensification of labour may not bring promotion in the quality of life, but life can deteriorate without those efforts. Being diligent even if one cannot get an equal return may be a virtue for others, but regarding this cohort of grandparents who have experienced traditional agriculture, it is only a neutral characteristic they learned from the past and a necessary trait for Chinese peasants. Some interviewed grandparents did not take my appreciation for their sacrifice and hard work because those characteristics may not be noble in this case. They are not saints but are only forced to live that way.

However, with the ongoing modernisation of rural China, peasants are constantly changing their minds. Now, traditional family values or ethics are gradually being eroded. In Chapter 5, I categorised grandparents across the dichotomy between familism and individualism. Although currently more grandparents still believe in familism, many researchers have already noticed the individualisation of peasants, especially for the next generation (Yan, 2011). With this tendency, a new question arises: will more grandparents believe in individualism in the future? To go further, what will happen when today’s migrant parents become grandparents?

The self-identity of peasants is also changing. Many of today’s migrant parents are second-generation migrants who were born after the Chinese economic reforms in the late 70s. Unlike the grandparents’ generation, who have strong emotional links to rural China, this generation of migrants has less farming experience and is labelled as "farmers who do not know to farm" (Wang, 2001). Besides economic factors, the admiration for urban life and the boredom of living in rural areas also motivates them to migrate, distinguishing them from grandparents rooted in villages (Wang, 2001). The traditional side, although it exists, is not obvious to them. Without a strong belief in familism, a deep love for the village, and the resilience gained at an earlier age, will these future grandparents go back to the villages and look after their grandchildren in the next ten years?

Although grandparenting is prevalent in rural China now, it should not be taken for granted. It is based on grandparents’ diligence, resilience and love for their families and villages. Furthermore, it makes grandparents’ lack of power and subordination into its costs. Their earlier harsh experiences, and beliefs based on earlier norms, obligations, and values
of familism, endow today’s grandparents with particular traits, making long-term grandparenting possible. In the grand narrative of the Chinese miracle, grandparents in rural China seem tiny and marginal. When people wander through the glamorous skylines of Beijing and Shanghai, enjoying the most modern, convenient, and high-tech lifestyles in those metropolises, few of them will connect all those crystals of modernisation with old caregivers in remote villages. But without those grandparents, the miracle might not have occurred. The prevalence of grandparenting in rural China is a sophisticated outcome of the society-family-individual system. The ageing of this grandparent cohort and the changing ideology of the coming generation will challenge the sustainability of the current intergenerational division of labour and influence the entire system. To maintain the entire system’s function, the state needs to reconsider its policies, and more interventions to provide more childcare and educational services, as well as social protection, should be given to support grandparents in rural China.

7.3 Conclusion
Grandparenting in rural China is not an independent phenomenon. Its driving force, typologies and impacts are all related to the large system, and the role grandfamilies and grandparents play in this system. This chapter interprets the findings, discussing grandparenting in the state-family-individual system. It explains grandparenting’s function and operation with four key themes, indicating how the state has encouraged and influenced the growth of grandparenting; how grandfamilies and grandparents contribute to society; why and how grandfamilies become coherent but patriarchal; how grandparents’ characters meet their role and the potential instability of the system. While previous results chapters explored grandparenting horizontally, focusing on grandparents and grandfamilies, this chapter applied a vertical perspective and discussed grandparenting within the context of the whole society.
Chapter 8 Conclusion and implications

8.1 Policy sets the tune, and the elders dance: Economically-oriented grandparenting and the state

Researching "grandparents in rural China" has been a privilege and an opportunity – a process that afforded critical reflection, allowing me to change my preconceived images. Before I went into the field and started observing, talking to, and living with them, the phrase "grandparents in rural China" meant a distant group of people with a simple lifestyle. I did not know who they were or what they looked like, but I had an impression of their sacrifice, hard work, and the love they have for their families, much of which I gained from the media and other scholars’ work. Then, this general notion became more specific as I gradually became familiar with the elderly in villages. On their home turf, grandparents are not targets for observation but protagonists, although the play is not written by them. The grandparents’ faces and names, as well as their diverse life stories and caregiving experiences, then replace the general picture. When talking about grandparents in rural China, I could list a series of names and introduce their interesting stories or difficulties. And then, when I left the field and dove deeply into my data, those vivid but fragmented impressions gradually became general again. Unlike the original general picture, this new emergent one is based on various lived experiences and, therefore, more complex and comprehensive, presenting the real life of those grandparents. It indicates the crucial role grandparenting plays in society and connects grandparents’ daily routine with one leading narrative of this shifting era.

The study argues that grandparenting in rural China is deliberately led by the state and is driven by the economic-growth orientation. Although grandparent groups and grandparenting phenomena are widely ignored by the state and the public and are commonly considered within the scope of the family, they are deeply influenced by and have profound impacts on the "state-family-individual" system. In this mutual impact process, grandparenting also demonstrates heterogeneity, as some grandfamilies and grandparents are more deeply influenced by modernity and the economic-growth orientation. This heterogeneity influences both the grandparenting style and experience. Generally speaking, grandparenting benefits the functioning and development of the entire society, but it also has more profound and long-term negative impacts on grandparents' subjective well-being. Grandparents’ contributions on both the macro and
micro levels, as well as the multiple oppressions they suffer caused by the state-driven rural-urban gap, descending family power, ageism, and other factors, all call for more attention and assistance to this invisible group who are vulnerable but also resilient.

8.2 Theoretical and empirical contributions of the present study

In the introduction of the study, I raised three major research questions:

1) What is the main driving force behind contemporary grandparents' activities in rural China?

2) What are the grandparenting patterns in rural China and how do they relate to the socio-cultural context?

3) What are the consequences of grandparenting for grandparents and the broader society?

These three questions focused on the cause, contours, and outcome of grandparenting and are raised based on research gaps in previous literature works. Chapters 4 to 6 address these concerns and investigate the operation of grandparenting from a horizontal standpoint.

Chapter 4 elucidates the driving force of grandparenting in today’s rural China and identifies the economic factor as the major direct cause. Although Chinese grandparents are traditionally expected to engage in their grandchildren's upbringing, the study points out that grandparents are not supposed to shoulder the majority of the workload and be the primary caregivers. It is modernisation, the state’s policies on accelerating urban development at the cost of rural areas, and the transformation of peasant families that corporately result in prevalent grandparenting. This finding challenges the traditional explanatory models, such as the "altruistic model" (Jiang, 2005; Shen, 2001; Sun and Zhang, 2013) and the "time-for-money exchange model" (Cong and Silverstein, 2008; Frankenberg et al., 2002). It is not limited to the intergenerational dynamic but explains grandparenting within the larger socio-cultural context and demonstrates the inner motivation of grandparenting: family urbanisation. Peasant families deeply desire to become urban residents as soon as possible. The widening urban-rural gap, policy-made urban-rural division, and the massive amount of labour required in urban areas together form a pull force, while low profits in agriculture and fierce competition in villages create push factors. By pointing out the major driving forces of grandparenting and defining it as
economic-growth-oriented grandparenting, the study contributes to studies on Chinese peasant families and family transformation.

When examining the pattern of grandparenting, the study concludes that it is neither static nor singular. Instead, it captures its diversity and transformation trends. Constant social change transforms peasant families and peasants' perceptions of family and family goals. These transformations occurred asynchronously and had varying degrees of impact on peasants, resulting in the heterogeneity of grandparent groups. Chapter 5 proposes a new method to describe and understand the grandparenting pattern based on grandparents' proactivity in grandparenting (which represents grandparents' role and status within grandfamilies) and their beliefs. This categorisation approach captures grandparents' status, power, and beliefs, and it explains the diversity of and inconsistent findings regarding grandparents and grandparenting in rural China. The study also shows that the types of grandparents are changing. Grandparents/grandparenting can shift from one group to another depending on family structure and an individual's ideas. The study expands on existing categories of grandparents and provides a new tool for researching grandparents, particularly in rural China.

The study sprang from one simple question: is it beneficial for grandparents to look after grandchildren? When I brought this question to the field, I found it was not a question that could be answered with a simple yes or no. Therefore, the study looks into the context, driving forces, and grandparenting types before studying its impacts. Chapter 6 argues that grandparenting brings both positive and negative affectivities into grandparents' subjective well-being. However, the positive effects are conditional, comparative, and compensatory, while the negative effects are profound, universal, and long-term. Those impacts also vary by grandparent type and some other factors. Therefore, the study argues that overall, grandparenting has more negative impacts on grandparents' well-being than positive. These negative effects are not only a common result of ageing and caregiving stress, but they are also closely related to the multiple oppressions of Chinese rural grandparents caused by policy-driven unequal urban-rural division, the economic-growth-oriented familial hierarchy and ageing, all of which contribute to the labour exploitation of grandparents.

From the grandparents' narrative, the study offers a vivid picture of how grandparenting impacts grandparents’ daily lives and well-being, which:

1) provides a more concrete and detailed explanation for grandparents’
experience and shows how multiple oppressions make grandparents, especially grandmothers, vulnerable in grandparenting; 2) connects the research findings to grandparents’ daily lives and indicates the real difficulties they face that lead to negative outcomes; and 3) directs the possible solution for alleviating negative impacts, regarding welfare, assistance, and interventions. Chapter 6 also discusses three spontaneous coping approaches grandparents used in daily life, which have rarely been mentioned in previous studies.

When answering the research questions, the study not only focuses on the grandparenting activity itself, but it constantly connects grandparents in rural China to a broad socio-cultural background, and the shift occurs throughout the entire "state-family-individual" system. It investigates how modernisation and urbanisation alter peasant families' goals and lead to grandparenting, what different types of grandparents exist as a result of ideological and family structure transformation, and how grandparenting influences grandparents' subjective well-being. With all these findings, the study discusses grandparenting in Chapter 7 from a vertical perspective, viewing it in the "society-family-individual" system. It investigates grandparenting beyond the scope of family studies and demonstrates its critical role in the development of urban China. It liberated a massive labour force and enabled and continues to enable the so-called "Chinese miracle." By recovering the operation and inner logic of grandparenting in rural China through discussing the interaction and interdependency of the state, grandfamily, and individual peasants, the study:
1) answers the why and how questions about grandparenting at the macro level,
2) demonstrates the necessity and insufficiency of assisting grandparents, and
3) indicates the potential instability and unsustainability of the current system and raises questions for the coming study.

All in all, the study provides detailed pictures of rural grandparents’ daily life and grandparenting experience. But it is not restricted in scope to individuals and families. Instead, it studies grandparenting from its causes to its impacts, discussing its operation and function in the more extensive “society-family-individual” system. It highlights the interconnection between grandparenting and the widespread, systematic transformation, and the mutual impacts between grandparenting and the entire society. By
doing so, the study adds a comprehensive description and explanation of why and how grandparenting occur, provides a tool to categorise and better study grandparents, offers an answer to the contentious question of grandparenting’s impacts, and discusses grandparenting in the larger picture to show grandparents’ struggles and contributions.

8.3 Implications
This study focuses more on grandparenting itself than supportive policies and any practical interventions grandparents in rural China received. How the state does or might support them is rarely mentioned in the previous chapters. Also, until now, China has had few official policies and organised interventions targeting rural grandparent caregivers.

Meanwhile, kinship care, including grandparenting, is a worldwide phenomenon, occurring in diverse cultural, ethical, and social contexts. Many Western countries have been concerned about this issue since the last century and have experience in supporting grandparent caregivers and other types of kinship caregivers on multiple levels. Take the U.S. as an example. In the late 1990s, the AARP, the largest non-profit organisation dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and over, established a grandparent information centre and issued reports and guidance to support grandparent caregivers (AARP, 1995; AARP, 1997; AARP, 1999). In 2003, the U.S. Congress issued the Living Equitably: Grandparents Aiding Children and Youth legislation to alleviate the housing crisis grandparents faced. In 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act became federal law, and it acknowledges the crucial role grandparents play in children’s lives. In 2018, the Administration for Community Living in the U.S. pushed for the implementation of the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act, forming an advisory council and in 2020 issued final recommendations to Congress and the public. European countries, including the U.K, also have policies aiming to assist caregivers. For instance, grandparents who provide childcare to grandchildren under 12 when their parents are working can apply for Specified Adult Childcare credits to their National Insurance credit and receive more in pension and other benefits. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 provides statutory guidance to deliver better carer support. There are also organisations that aim to help grandparents and other kin caregivers, such as Kinship (formerly called "Grandparents Plus") in the U.K. and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren in New Zealand.
Grandparents in this study, no matter what grandparent type they belong to, face universal challenges and difficulties. Their vulnerability, caused by ageing, rural identity, and lack of financial income, calls for more supporting policies and assistance to this group. Based on my findings and the previous experiences of other countries, here I propose four policy, practice, and research implications that may improve conditions for grandparent-caregivers:

1) Increasing awareness,
2) Improving the social welfare net in rural China,
3) Mobilising non-profit organisations, and
4) Increase the application of professional social work in the field.

8.3.1 Increasing awareness

To deal with an issue, one must first recognise it. To assist a group of people, one must first identify them. To better protect and serve grandparents, increasing policymakers’ and the public's awareness of their existence, significance, contributions, and needs is vital. Chinese people traditionally have a clear boundary between family and public affairs, which leads to limited public attention to informal family caregiving. According to the China Family Development Report 2016 (National Health and Family Planning Commission of the PRC), almost 90 percent of Chinese families require caregiving. The report further indicates that grandparents are crucial resources to the extended family, as they provide a large amount of childrearing. Even though informal caregiving is prevalent in China, both the public and government somewhat neglect support for caregivers, considering it a family affair.

In some advanced cities, such as Shanghai and Hangzhou, urban governments issue local policies to support informal caregivers. However, nationwide support is lacking, especially for caregivers in rural areas. The multiple roles of grandparents further contribute to the inadequacy of awareness of this group. In the public's minds, the elderly are more commonly identified as care recipients rather than providers. Despite the fact that many grandparents are left behind in rural areas, receive no eldercare, and instead become primary caregivers for their grandchildren, their caregiver identity is partially obscured. Furthermore, the new intergenerational division of labour assigns many grandparents multiple caregiving roles. In economic-growth-oriented families, the utilisation of labour is maximised. Grandparents who withdraw from the urban labour market tend to carry out all “inner realm” affairs, including different
types of caregiving. Grandparents who have living parents may become the "sandwich" generation that should provide care to both their old parents and grandchildren. Some grandparents also need to look after their dependent spouses. The internal migration of young peasants makes the elderly the main source of informal care. Policymakers should consider providing caregiving-related assistance to grandparents, beginning with a nationwide investigation into the basic information (e.g., demographic profile), socio-cultural situation (e.g., social-economic index), and their needs.

Prioritising the young generation further reduces attention on grandparents, making grandparents an appendix to the left-behind children’s stories. Changing this mindset and identifying grandparent caregivers as an independent target group is a prerequisite for further assistance. In the past several years, the Ministry of Civil Affairs conducted surveys and issued suggestions on protecting left-behind children, left-behind elders and left-behind women, which is beneficial for grandfamilies. But it is also important to view grandparent caregivers as an independent group, a group that suffer from multiple oppressions, play multiple functions and have multiple roles. While rural grandparents are caregivers of their grandchildren, many of them also need to be cared for due to disease or ageing-related issues.

Besides policymakers, the public should also be aware that grandparents contribute to peasant families’ stability, the labour supply in urban China, and reduce the state’s social welfare workload. Increasing public awareness of grandparents’ contributions and difficulties can encourage public participation in providing psychological support, technical guidance, and community-based interventions for grandparents. It can also raise grandparents’ status in society and within their multigenerational families, positively influencing their treatment. Notably, grandparents’ limited access to the internet and their marginal position on social media impede them from getting public attention. To cope with this, the government, media, and scholars need to cooperate, making grandparents’ voices and stories heard. Chinese studies on grandparenting and grandparent caregivers have had a slight boom since 2015 (Chen et al., 2021), and hopefully, researchers’ increasing attention can wake policymakers and the public to grandparents’ situations.
8.3.2 Strengthening the social welfare system in rural China

One function of grandparenting is to alleviate pressure on the social welfare system in both urban and rural areas. Because of grandparents’ work, urban China can enjoy the benefits of cheap labour without worrying about the provision of matching social welfare services, and children in rural China can have essential security even with a limited childcare system. However, the grandparents’ narration reveals that the deficiency of the health and education systems, the two largest and most crucial components of the entire social welfare system, is the source of their grandparenting stress (see Chapter 6), demonstrating the urgent need for strengthening the social welfare system.

Children in rural areas are more likely to be ill than their urban peers, partially due to grandparents’ inadequate knowledge of nutrition and comparatively unsanitary conditions (Li et al., 2015; Man et al., 2019). Although China has a three-tier medical service network that includes the county hospital, the township hospital, and village clinics, its implementation is not ideal. In fact, I stayed in Tea-Garden Village for eight months in 2017, and the place I lived was the abandoned village clinic. In the entire village, residents found no place to get medical care. Many grandparents also don't trust the township hospital because it doesn't have many facilities and has a lot of complicated rules. Instead, they prefer to see quacks and buy cheap, uncertified medicines from markets. Although the newly-built road network better connects remote villages, bringing sick grandchildren to hospitals in nearby counties or cities is still difficult for many grandparents, especially those who have limited migrant experience or are illiterate. Communicating with doctors and making medical decisions for grandchildren is also challenging, leaving aside the financial costs. Getting healthcare is a nightmare for grandparents, which calls for further reform and expansion of the current rural healthcare system.

Improving the effectiveness of local hospitals and the accessibility and convenience of county hospitals can definitely alleviate grandparents’ stress. Meanwhile, based on the age structure of rural residents, rural hospitals need to think about developing targeted paediatric and geriatric departments. Considering the prevalence of grandparenting and the average education level of grandparents, local and county hospitals should also provide additional assistance to grandparents to decrease the communication costs. Medical social workers could effectively cope with this issue.
Strengthening the childcare and education systems is another possible way to alleviate grandparents’ stress. Current childcare policy focuses more on assistance to children in difficulty (kun jing er tong), defined as those who grow up in poverty and have hardships in daily life, medical care, education, and children with disabilities (The State Council of the PRC, 2016). While children who have difficulty in custody also belong to the group, it refers more to abandoned or abused youths. The large number of grandfamilies in rural China is not the primary target of that assistance, and therefore, they receive limited childcare assistance from the state. According to grandparents, taking care of young children, especially those with diseases, is the most difficult part. The universal deficiency of early childhood and preschool care leads many grandparents to be the only caregivers of children younger than six, which greatly increases their caregiving intensity and stress. Meanwhile, the short supply of centre-based childcare services and the low preschool attendance negatively impact the cognitive ability of children in rural China (Zhang et al., 2019). Developing affordable and accessible childcare services for young children in rural China can benefit the growth of those children, alleviate stress on grandparent caregivers, and increase fertility.

Thirdly, my findings reveal that social support and group activities reduce the negative impacts of grandparenting to some extent, which is also confirmed by other research (e.g., Hayslip et al., 2019). For grandparents, their village is a society of acquaintance, and the interaction with other villagers is an important part of their lives. Grandparents in the field form informal support groups based on common hobbies and use them to relieve grandparenting stress (see Chapter 6). However, the lack of organisers and a suitable location left those informal support groups unstable. It is necessary to get some official forces, such as the village committees, to play a leading role in promoting grandparents’ quality of life and organising peer support groups for them, similar to the role village committees play in protecting children in difficulty. In recent years, many villages have built villagers' or senior residents' activity centres, although the utilisation of those commons is sometimes insufficient. Letting village committees organise formal group activities can also help with this issue.

Finally, it is necessary to identify grandparents and grandfamilies in difficulty and provide targeted assistance, including policy supports and a
parental allowance. In targeted poverty alleviation\(^1\), the state created systematic methods to identify poor households with concrete measurements. A similar programme can be implemented to identify grandfamilies in difficulty. The existing programmatic assistance to grandparents in other countries mainly focus on five aspects: 1) grandparents’ physical and mental health, 2) grandparents’ income maintenance, 3) employment assistance, 4) housing assistance, and 5) health and medical care support (Hao, 2020).

In the long term, the state may need to draw on that experience and issue targeted assistance to support grandparent caregivers and other kinship carers. In particular, considering the common financial challenges in kinship care families (including grandfamilies), the Scottish government provides a kinship allowance to certain kinship carers, including grandparents. It also published the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016 to support kinship carers. Although at this stage, supporting kinship caregiving is still a marginal topic for the Chinese social welfare system, this issue should be highlighted. I also hope this study can let more policy-makers and researchers in China take notice of this topic and learn from other countries’ experiences.

**8.3.3 Mobilising non-profit organisations**

In addition to the state's social welfare system, non-profit organisations (NPOs) can be another service provider for grandparents in rural China, especially considering the flexibility and expertness of many NPOs. The state also emphasises the role of social forces, including NPOs, in protecting left-behind groups. However, NPOs and collaboration between the government and non-profits in the provision of social services are relatively new in China (Tu, 2021). Besides, kinship-caregiver support and eldercare are not popular fields for NPOs, as caregiving is considered more the state's and families’ responsibility.

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\(^1\) Targeted poverty alleviation (TPA) was implemented by the PRC government since 2013. It requires local governments to identify poor areas and poor households and to build up the electronic archives for each of them. The archive includes details about the family members, available resources, income resources, daily expenses and the reasons of poverty.
This study finds that rural grandparents have some urgent needs that NPOs can help with. Despite having raised their own children, many grandparents admit they feel unconfident in grandparenting. In Tea-Garden Village, one grandparent asked me, "What can you do for us? Can you train us to be good grandparents? Can you help us live better? " In addition to the spontaneous coping strategies introduced in Chapter 6, rural grandparents are eager to receive systematic and professional training regarding child- and self-care. In this situation, NPOs can empower grandparents through training and community-based interventions.

Based on their narrations, I further summarised three aspects of the training that grandparents require the most. The first is the need for grandparental knowledge and skills on children’s education, nutrition, and security. The lack of that knowledge brings risks and vulnerabilities to both grandparents and grandchildren. For instance, having experienced the Great Chinese Famine at young ages, grandparents preferred to provide more starchy foods to grandchildren, which therefore caused a higher risk of malnutrition (Zhang et al., 2015). In terms of security education, the evolution and application of high-tech in crime endanger the personal and property safety of grandfamilies, necessitating specialised training for grandparents. While some local governments already noticed this need and posted bulletins in villages, it is less effective as many grandparents have difficulty reading it—professional training and courses provided by NPOs may be more valuable under the circumstances.

Second, while there are resources available to grandparents and their families, many rural grandparents are unaware of them or lack the ability to access them. Many rural grandparents are being left behind, not only physically, but also technologically and informationally, in the age of the internet and big data. They are not familiar with smartphones and are unable to use a variety of apps. When I was in Tea-Garden Village for poverty reduction work, the government created an app to help with poverty reduction programmes, which required all poor households to register. Many poor households, however, only had grandparents and grandchildren left in the village, and few of them knew how to download this app. While resources exist somewhere in the world, grandparents must be taught how to access them.

Thirdly, many grandparents have struggled with inequal intergenerational relationships, especially relationships with daughters-in-law. As a by-
product of the economic-growth-oriented family transformation, the inequality in intergenerational relationships is entirely new to rural grandparents. The potential conflicts with the second-generation and the uncertainty and insecurity caused by the intergenerational conflicts chronically tortured rural grandparents. Training and counselling can help them make their families better places to be and alleviate the negative impacts of the inequal intergenerational relationship.

In addition to training, community-based programmes and the interventions of local NPO officials can provide significant benefits to vulnerable groups, including grandparents, in rural China.

In the past four years, Wen, one of my gatekeepers, lived and worked in Ravine Village as an NPO official. She has organised left-behind grandparents to build mutual support groups and assisted them in holding regular group events. Although those events are not directly related to grandparenting, Wen told me that those events could connect isolated grandparents with each other, stimulate grandparents’ passion for life, and energise them in grandparenting. Last year, Wen and her friends mobilised villagers to hold an online ceremony for the Chinese New Year, and she believes that its positive impacts for grandparents can be maintained for the entire year. Through those activities, grandparents who are devalued in the family and even society gain self-acceptance and other people’s recognition. Modernisation and the migration of young peasants broke the traditional society of acquaintance in villages and reduced the links between the elderly and people outside their families. Wen's work helps grandparents reset themselves in the community and creates a support network for them.

Currently, when searching for "family caregiver support" or "grandparent caregiver support" in an English-language search engine, thousands of results come up, providing resources from various organisations. There are also many studies that introduce and evaluate NPO programmes and interventions geared towards grandparent caregivers. However, those resources and related research are still relatively rare in China, calling for further work for the state and NPOs. What role might social workers play in improving the situation?
8.3.4 Increase the application of professional social work in the field

Social work as a profession had been suspended for 40 years in China and relaunched in the late 1980s (Wang, 2011; Meng et al., 2020). Compared with other majors, it is identified as a "relatively new subject in Chinese universities" (Chan and Lei, 2017, p.1344). Yet, social work practice has continued even during the suspension of social work education as many government officers carried out the work, although unprofessionally (Wang, 2011).

With the relaunch of social work education and the political goal of maintaining social stability and achieving social harmony, social work in China has experienced fast development over the past two decades. However, as a profession that highlights diversity and inclusion, social work in China does "not address the specificity of particular axes of difference, such as rural vs. urban development" (Tsang et al., 2008, p.73). With advanced cities that benefit from cheap peasant labour forces now having more public funding to develop social work services, "social work services are better equipped in urban rather than rural areas, and richer coastal cities are moving faster than the rest of the country" (Leung et al., 2012).

Grandparent caregivers in rural China are increasingly marginalised in Chinese society. This is also shown by the fact that this group does not get as much attention or money from the government or public as other groups. Even social work practice and social work theories are uncommon in this field. As this study indicates, grandparents in rural China face multiple oppressions related to their residential, age, and gender (for grandmothers) characteristics, and their coping strategies are spontaneous and unsystematic. Increasing the application of social work in assisting this vulnerable population, therefore, is necessary. Here, the word "social work" mainly refers to social work theories, values, and professional social work practice. The service providers are not restricted to professional social workers but can also be officers from the government and NPOs.

The study indicates rural grandparents’ challenges, difficulties, strengths, and coping strategies, thus implying pathways to empowerment through practice. Page and Czuba (1999, p.1) define empowerment as "a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives." It is a process that "fosters power (that is, the capacity to
implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important”. Empowerment provides a crucial framework for social work practice and is already applied in interventions directed toward grandfamilies and grandparent caregivers in many countries. Focusing on empowering grandparent caregivers and communities, Cox ran curriculums and empowerment group training (Cox, 2000, 2008, 2014) to improve grandparents’ strength and reduce their stress. Those programmes increase grandparents’ parental skills, sense of competency, and ability to advocate for themselves (Cox, 2008).

One prominent advantage of empowerment is that it identifies grandparents as experts in their lives and emphasises their strengths (Piper, 2020). Despite all vulnerabilities and challenges they suffered, grandparents in rural China are resilient, experienced and have a sense of purpose. They have expertise in village life, experience in childrearing, and know how to collaborate with others in a society of acquaintance or half-acquaintance. Assisting grandparents does not necessarily mean bringing a large number of new theories and skills to them. Instead, programmes and services designed with an empowerment framework can assist grandparents in recognising, exploring, and improving the power they already have and maximising the use of that power in their daily life. Now there are many programmes that use empowerment to assist grandparents in Western countries. Social service providers in China, including the government and NPOs, need to think about empowering grandparents by drawing on the Western experience and modifying it to fit with Chinese grandparents’ circumstances.

The crucial role grandparents play, and their great contributions indicate this group’s high productivity. Despite being stereotyped as weak, poor, and out-of-date, the Chinese miracle would not have been possible without their efforts. Grandparenting is a representation of productive ageing and active ageing, and it also calls for the implementation of an active ageing strategy in policymaking and service delivery. Active ageing is defined by WHO as "the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age," and is a strategy and a framework that applied in many social work practices (WHO, 2014, p.12). From the active ageing perspective, the elderly are not simply in a position that requires support and assistance. Instead, the ageing process can go in a positive direction,
with health, independence, and productivity for the elderly (Walker, 2002).

Active ageing emphasises the elderly's social and family engagements and identifies grandparenting as one type of it. As this study indicates, grandparenting is a high priority for Chinese peasants. Once they have grandchildren (usually their sons’ children), many rural grandparents choose to return to the villages for grandparenting even if they have satisfying jobs in urban areas. It demonstrates that grandparenting is their major social engagement and reduces their opportunities for engaging in other activities. As Chapter 6 has shown, grandparenting can largely squeeze grandparents' leisure time, even though the peer support and social activities they gain in that time can positively influence their well-being. Under these circumstances, figuring out how to maximise the positive impacts of grandparenting and also increase grandparents’ other social engagements becomes a crucial task. The active ageing framework encourages the elderly to actively participate in daily activities, being both proactive and productive. This first implies the autonomy and independence of the elderly, as it emphasises their "ability to control, cope with, and make personal decisions about how one lives on a day-to-day basis, according to one’s own rules and preferences” (WHO, 2002, p.13). Additionally, it recognises the capacity, productivity, and also contributions of the elderly, which further energises them and encourages them to be even more active.

Because of the high prevalence of grandparenting in China, an active ageing strategy at both the macro and micro levels is required to create an age-friendly social environment. When the elderly are constantly contributing to society, it is also necessary to create a society that is full of opportunities for them, promoting their engagement, increasing productivity, maintaining their dignity, and allowing them to live positively.

While a large proportion of grandparents in this study do childrearing to help achieve the family urbanisation goal, there are also cases related to a family crisis. Divorce, diseases, imprisonment, gambling, accidents, and other crises in the second-generation also trigger grandparenting in rural China. According to Hill (1958), crises in the family may lead to flux and shifting expectations regarding role patterns and cause the decline of affectional and emotional satisfaction. Those grandparents who start grandparenting suddenly without preparation also need to deal with the outcome of a family crisis, which inevitably leads to heavier stress,
negative impacts on well-being, and a decline in quality of life. Until now, family crisis intervention has been rare in China, let alone in rural areas. Individual, family, and community-based crisis prevention, intervention, and management for those in need are desperately needed. In particular, divorce within the second-generation is the most common family crisis grandfamilies experience in this study. Separation caused by migration of the husband or wife, unaccompanied migration of the couple and the greater socialising opportunities in urban areas are all related to the higher marital instability and divorce rate (Li, 2018; Bhargava and Tan, 2018). Therefore, prevention of migrant workers' divorce and post-divorce intervention are crucial not only for the couple themselves but also for grandparents.

Until the beginning of the 2020s, the government still played a major role in leading social work practices and professional social workers’ services in rural China. Some advanced provinces, such as Guangdong, have already issued local legislation and policies to establish social work centres in rural communities. The study advocates for more social work values, theories, and practices to be applied to grandparents in rural China. Meanwhile, it highlights the need for more professional social workers in the field to provide casework, family work, programme assessment, and evaluation. While social work centres and community-based social workers remain "luxuries" found only in advanced areas, this study advocates for more social work practice and professional social workers to assist grandparents in rural China, particularly in developing areas.

8.4 Reflections-limitations
This study has explored and answered questions on the driving forces, operation, characteristics, categories, and impacts of grandparenting in rural China with observations and grandparents’ narrations. However, considering the large population, multiple varieties, and constant changes in grandparenting, many more questions remain unanswered. During the research process, unexpected and less-than-ideal situations occasionally emerge, limiting the study.

A question that puzzled me throughout the study was how to balance describing and explaining grandparenting with vivid pictures and constructing a macro-theoretical framework. Contemporary grandparenting in rural China has its own unique socio-cultural context and is closely related to broader societal trends. Meanwhile, studies on this phenomenon, although increasing in recent years, are still limited. To my knowledge, grandparenting studies based on qualitative data from
rural China are rare now, and there is a gap in descriptive and explanatory studies in the field. Therefore, it is necessary to describe the background and operation of grandparenting, explain its driving force, and categorise grandparents at present. However, the emphasis on description and explanation unconsciously decreases the length of theoretical exploration in this study. Although I borrowed ideas from structural-functionalism and discussed the function and operation of grandparenting in the "state-family-individual" system, which establishes a theoretical framework to understand and explore grandparenting, there is still a large space for further theoretical research.

The second limitation of the study is the lack of diversity of data sources. Rural China is a very large and diverse area. Although the three villages mentioned in the study are different regarding ethnicity, province, and economic situation, they cannot represent all villages in China. Grandparenting in the north plain area, Western China, and southeastern clan villages may differ due to their demographic, geographic and socioeconomic traits. For instance, in a model village in Zhejiang province, one of the most developed areas in China, I observed an alternative lifestyle among local grandparents. That model village has great tourism resources and social welfare services, and locals’ income is far higher than migrant workers. Peasants, therefore, have no need to exhaust themselves for economic growth and family urbanisation, and grandparents are more commonly assistant caregivers, playing with and teaching their grandchildren. This type of grandparenting life is different from what I described and explored in this study. The better economic conditions and decreased desire for urbanisation allow those families to find a balance between ethical- and economic-growth-orientations, reducing the exploitation of grandparents. Although this study did not explore all kinds of grandparenting in rural China, grasping the transformation of family orientation and grandparents’ beliefs is beneficial for understanding them. Another limitation of data sources is a lack of quantitative data and measurement scales. Quantitative data analysis with variables measured by standard scales is a common way of studying grandparenting’s impacts. However, I did not use scales to measure grandparents’ mental and physical health status for multiple reasons. Many rural grandparents cannot understand some questions of those scales, and they are also impatient with pages of questions. Therefore, I applied interviews and single-item measures in the study.
Finally, there are some themes that are touched but not explored further in this study, due to the consideration of the limited resources, length limits, and the cohesion of the thesis, including but not limited to:

1) financial transfers between grandparents and their adult children,
2) intimacy between grandparents and grandchildren and its impacts on grandchildren, and
3) second-generation divorce and its influence on grandfamilies.

These and many other subthemes await further research.

8.5 Future research agenda

After the turn of this century, grandparenting in China has gradually entered researchers’ agendas. When I proposed this study, there were only a few scholars and scattered studies in the English world that focused on grandparents, particularly rural grandparents in China. Chinese studies on this topic were also rare at that time. While studies are still limited considering the large grandparent caregiver population in China, the field has grown. A review of the studies in Chinese finds a steady increase in the last two decades and a sharp rise since 2015 (Chen et al., 2021). I am glad to see the increasing attention on this important issue. In addition to contributing to the existing literature and providing implications for practice, this study can also help us set a future research agenda.

The increasing prevalence of grandparenting in rural China is a result of the changing society. It is influenced by and also influences the functioning of peasant families and society. Meanwhile, social changes, policy shifts, and family transformation will also influence grandparenting’s operation, pattern, and grandparents’ experiences. So, where will grandparenting go in the future, considering the changes in society, policies, and intergenerational differences?

In the 2020s, China continues its urbanisation and modernisation, but in the meantime, it is starting to face ageing issues. Under these circumstances, the state adjusted its birth control policy, from the one-child policy in urban areas and the one-and-a-half child policy in rural China to the current three-child policy. Although the state is working on improving childcare services, it is foreseeable that the family’s childcare burden will also increase with more births. How will this policy-related
family change impact grandparenting? As I was writing this final chapter, the government of the PRC adopted its first family education law, which "stipulates that parents or other guardians of minors shall be responsible for family education, while the state, school, and society provide guidance, support, and services for family education" and further "strengthens regulations regarding off-campus institutions, stopping approval of new off-campus, curriculum subject-tutoring institutions for students receiving compulsory education" (Xinhua, 2021). The new law sets a higher requirement for family education and inevitably increases the childcare burden. What changes will the new law bring to rural grandfamilies in which parents are long-term migrants and grandparents have limited capacity to educate grandchildren?

The intergenerational difference also raises questions for future study. In the previous section, I discussed how today’s parents are different from today’s grandparents. When those more individualistic and modern parents become grandparents and face more grandchildren, can they take over the grandparent caregiver role from their parents and exploit themselves for the family? Although grandparenting has been normalised among the current grandparent cohort, it may not have become internalised in today’s parents' group yet. Furthermore, when today’s migrant parents become grandparents, some three-generation families will become four-generation families. Will this transformation influence the eldercare quality of today’s grandparents? The transformation of peasant families and peasants’ ideology not only leads to the diversity of grandparenting but also results in the uncertainty of the present intergenerational division of labour, leading to many questions for future studies.

The tendency to family urbanisation and the transformation of village life are the other two crucial factors that researchers need to consider. For the state, grandparenting is a beneficial arrangement for its modernisation and development, and for peasant families, grandparenting in villages is an early step toward family urbanisation. In the next step, those left-behind grandparents and grandchildren will all move to cities. There are two further possibilities. If the second-generation members have a decent income, the grandparents and grandchildren may join them, and the multigenerational family reunites. For families that cannot afford the living expenses of all members in the second-generation’s city, grandparents are more likely to bring grandchildren to a city near their village and let them enter schools in that city for educational reasons.
Until 2020, the developed eastern areas were still the most popular destination for migrant workers (National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC, 2020), where living expenses and housing prices are expensive for entire multigenerational families. Therefore, the second situation will be more common. In Ravine Village, many peasant families find it almost impossible to buy apartments in the city where the second-generation works, so they buy apartments in the nearby county for their grandchildren’s education. Many elderly people then become "floating grandparents" and independently rear their grandchildren in an unfamiliar place. This newly emerged group of independent, floating grandparents and their experiences are also worthy of future study. Meanwhile, for those grandparents who can finally reunite with adult children in urban areas, there are new challenges waiting for them. The entirely strange space, new urban lifestyle, and the potential conflicts in co-residents living arrangements may bring new worries to them.

Grandparenting is a fluid phenomenon that responds to societal and familial change. Meanwhile, the researchers, government and public should realise the necessity, responsibility, and potential efficacy of assisting grandparents, particularly in rural China.
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The Doctor Degree of Public Administration, Nanjing Agricultural University.


# Appendix A: Basic information about participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (In 2019)</th>
<th>The number of raised grandchildren</th>
<th>The length of grandparenting experience</th>
<th>Brief notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tea-garden Village</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-01</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>After his wife’s death, T-01 became the caregiver of his three grandchildren proactively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-02</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>T-02 ran a small Chinese medicine business with her husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-03</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>T-02 has two sons, both of whom are divorced. Her husband was weak and could not do much work. Her older son was in prison, and she had raised two children for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-04</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>One of T-04’s sons lived in the village but did not live with her. However, T-04’s grandchildren lived with her, even though their parents were still in the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-05</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>T-05’s husband used to be a member of the village committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-06</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>T-06 and her husband also plant and sell vegetables to raise the children of their youngest son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-07</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-08</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>T-08 has a high-school degree and is a member of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the village committee.

| T-09 | Female | 57 | 2 | 5 | T-09 operated a small grocery shop. When T-09 was being interviewed, T-09's daughter-in-law was nearby, looking after a newborn baby. |
| T-10 | Male   | 57 | 2 | 5 | T-10's son found a job in a nearby town and can go back home frequently. Besides looking after two grandchildren, T-10 and his wife were also responsible for taking care of the father of T-10. |
| T-11 | Female | 65 | 4 | 10+ | The old couple were interviewed together. T-11's husband (69-year-old) added a lot of information during the interview. |
| T-12 | Male   | 65 | 3 | 5 | The primary caregiver of the grandchildren is T-12's wife (a 60-year-old). However, she was very sick and could not attend the interview at that time. T-12 was really willing to assist with my research. Therefore, I invited him to talk about the grandparenting experience he and his wife have had. |
| T-13 | Female | 51 | 3 | 6 | T-13 has been limping for a long time and is suffering from severe lower back pain. She has a bad relationship with her husband and has experienced domestic violence. |
T-14 | Female | 72 | 5 | 15 | T-14 lost her husband when she was in her 30s, and since then she has raised her three children alone. Then, when she had grandchildren, she became a grandparent caregiver.

T-15 | Female | Around 70 | Unclear | 7+ | T-15 came to T-14's house when I was interviewing T-14. With T-14's permission, T-15 joined the interview and shared her grandparenting experience.

Ma Village

| M-01 | Female | 63 | 1 | 2 | M-01 lost her husband and after her youngest son got divorced, she started to look after her grandson alone.

| M-02 | Female | 62 | 2 | 9 | M-02's husband died four years ago of cancer, leaving their family with a debt.

| M-03 | Female | 62 | 3 | 6 | M-03's husband died seven years ago of cancer, leaving their family with a debt. The family still lived in the old mud house, which was rare in the village.

| M-04 | Female | 76 | 3 | 20 | M-04 was a member of the village committee, and her husband, who died many years ago, was a teacher at the local primary school. Two of M-04's grandchildren have undergraduate degrees, which is uncommon in the village. M-04 planted many
flowers in front of her house, which are rare in the village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Years of Care</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-05</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>For 20 years, M-05 and M-06 have looked after three grandchildren cooperatively. When I interviewed them, they were taking care of their youngest grandchild (10 years old).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-06</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nearly 80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ravine Village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ravine Village**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R-01</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>55</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>R-01's wife works in a nearby factory and has a stable income. Therefore, R-01 carried out the childrearing work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R-02</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-03</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>On and off for 3 years</td>
<td>R-03 also needed to look after her 91-year-old father. Therefore, she does grandparenting on and off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-04</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>R-04 has a complicated relationship with her daughter-in-law. When talking about this, she dropped her voice and took me into another room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-05</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>R-05 and her husband, who passed away from lung cancer six years ago, only have two daughters. They asked one of their daughters to have a matrilocal marriage (ruzhui) to maintain the family continuity. After her husband's death, R-05 had to look after the grandchildren alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-06</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>R-06 suffered from severe rheumatism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-07</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>R-07 was no longer a grandparent caregiver since she recalled her son and daughter-in-law back home to better raise the children when they got to middle school. Compared with other participants, R-07 was very satisfied with her life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-08</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>R-08 lost her husband 12 years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-09</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>R-09 and her husband only have two daughters. They asked their oldest daughter to do a matrilocal marriage and looked after their daughter's child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>R-10 and his wife looked after two grandchildren. R-10 also did some woodwork to increase the family income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>R-12 lost her husband five years ago. She suffered from a severe anal fistula but insisted on looking after her two grandchildren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>R-13 had a bad relationship with her husband. She looks older than her real age. Many of her teeth haven fallen out, even though she is only 54 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>R-14's family used all their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
money to buy a small apartment in the capital of their province “for the grandson.” However, the mortgage forces the family to be apart physically, which "leads to the teenage rebellion" of her grandson, says R-14.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R-15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet
(English/Chinese)

Study Title
Looking after the grandchildren: Ageing, caring, and the impact of intergenerational engagements on grandparents in rural China

Researcher
Ye Wang, PhD Student, Department of Social Work, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

About the study
Hi! My name is Ye Wang and I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, UK. This study is for my PhD thesis and is about grandparenting in rural China. The aim of the study is to explore the grandparenting phenomenon and also the grandparenting experience of grandparent caregivers in rural China. To achieve this goal, I need to interview some grandparents in rural China about their life, their grandparenting experience and their feelings and attitudes towards grandparenting. Here, I would like to invite you to take part in the research.

Participation
The interview is one hundred per cent voluntary. You can refuse my invitation or withdraw the study at any stage without giving a reason.

Confidentiality and Anonymous
All the personal information and the data I collect during our interviews will be kept confidential. In the study, I will use pseudonyms and no identifying factors of participants will be present in the final work. All information that you share with me will only be used for academic use. The information you provide will not be shared with any other people or agency including the local authority.

What will happen next
If you decide to take part in the research, I will conduct an interview with you. We can have the interview at your home or another place you feel comfortable in the village. The interview may take one and a half to two hours, depending on how it goes. I will tape our conversation so that I can analyse them later. The information you and other participants share with me will help me to conduct this study and finish my thesis for the degree.

If you have any questions or want to know more about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My Chinese mobile phone number is: 158xxxx7847, my Wechat account is: xxxxxxxxxxxx.
受访者知情书；

研究项目：
隔代抚养——中国农村祖父母的经历与代际互动带来的影响

研究者：
英国爱丁堡大学社会与政治科学学院社会工作博士生，王也

尊敬的被访人，您好：

我是英国爱丁堡大学的博士生王也。我现在正在为自己的博士研究项目收集一些数据。我的研究项目是关于农村祖父母抚养孙辈的，具体来说，我希望能够研究农村祖父母抚养孙辈的现象，并了解祖父母们在照顾孙辈时的经历和他们对于照顾孙子女的一些感受与看法。为了能够完成这个研究，我需要采访一些居住在农村的祖父母。在这里，我邀请您参与到我的研究中，成为我的访谈对象。

这个研究采访是完全自愿的，换句话说，您可以拒绝参与参访。如果您刚开始同意参与研究，但之后改变了主意，您可以在任何时候联系我要求退出研究，并且您不需要提供任何理由。

您本人的所有信息（比如姓名，住址和其他能够让别人认出你的信息）以及参访时我们的原始对话都会被严格保存。基本上说，研究的读者是不会认出您，也不能找到您的。研究中不会出现您的姓名和其他能够确定您身份的信息，您和我分享的内容也只会用于学术研究，包括政府在内的其他机构和个人都无法知道您跟我分享的具体内容。我手机的所有材料都会被放在有密码的电脑里，除了我意外没有人能够看到我们访谈的原始资料和您的信息。

如果您同意接受采访，我们可以一起约定参访的地点。您可以选择在家中接受参访，也可以选择在村子里别的地方。我们的采访大概会有一个半小时到两个小时左右。您在参访中提供的内容会帮助我完成我的博士研究。

如果您还有别的任何问题，欢迎您随时联系我，我的手机是 158xxxx7847，我的微信号是 xxxxxxxxxxxx。

非常感谢的您的支持，祝好！
Appendix C: Consent Form (English/Chinese)

Looking after grandchildren: the motivation, pattern and the impact of intergenerational engagements on grandparents in rural China

Please tick the boxes if you agree

☐ I confirm that I understand the information sheet for this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that this is a voluntary interview and I am free to withdraw at any time.

☐ I agree to take part in this study.

☐ I agree that my data gathered in this study will be stored and used for future research.

☐ I consent the researcher to tape our conversation.

Participant’s name ___________________________    Researcher’s name ___________________________

Signature/Finger print    Signature/Finger print

Date____________________    Date____________________
受访人同意表
研究项目：
隔代抚养——中国农村祖父母的经历与代际互动带来的影响
研究者：
英国爱丁堡大学社会与政治科学院社会工作博士生，王也

如果你同意下面的条目，请在方框（□）内打勾。

□ 我确认我已经明白了项目知情书中的内容，并且有机会向研究者提出我关心的问题。
□ 我知道这项访谈是完全自愿的，并且我可以在任何时候退出研究项目。
□ 我同意接受访谈，参加这项研究。
□ 我同意研究者把从我这里收集的数据保存，并用于之后的研究。
□ 我同意研究者将我们的对话录音。

受访人姓名______________________________________
研究者姓名______________________________________
受访人签名/指印 研究者签名

日期____________________ 日期____________________