

Roles Changes and Life Strategies of Chinese Rural Migrant Grandparent Caregivers

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Abstract

The phenomenon of rural migrant grandparent caregivers has increased dramatically over the past several decades. Grandparent caregivers often face multiple challenges in their caregiving roles. This study attempts to understand the Chinese rural migrant grandparenthood and their roles changes and life strategies. Using a qualitative approach, thirty-two grandparents participated in five focus group interviews. The findings reveal that main activities of Chinese rural migrant grandparent caregivers are raising grandchildren and doing housework, their roles in urban life are characterized by one-dimensional. Meanwhile, their role cluster in rural life including caring roles, social roles and productive roles dissolve gradually. To cope with changing roles in their new lives, grandparent caregivers used strategies such as maintaining independence, acquiring new knowledge and developing new interests, making new friends and building new circles. Most caregiving grandparents are vulnerable to a host of problems, including physical disability; psychological stress; insufficient knowledge; decreased income; social isolation. As society looks more to grandparent caregivers to assume parental responsibilities as a preference to babysitter or institutional care, systems including government, non-profit organizations, communities, universities and families should develop innovative, comprehensive, and evidence-based methods to enhance grandparent caregivers' well-being.

Key words: Grandparent caregivers; Roles changes; Social networks; Grandchildren

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, an increasing number of college graduates with rural area origins as well as youngsters with no experience of high-education choose to build their career and seek jobs in urban areas. They settle down, start a family, and bear their children. Then, they are plagued by a common issue: they become too busy to take care of their children, forcing them to ask their parents to move into the city to help raise their grandchildren. After a large number of grandparents leave their hometown and stay in the urban areas, they are generally in a dilemma of how to raise their grandchildren, get along with their new families, reconstruct their social relationships, maintain their hometowns' original production approaches and abide by caring habits. However, up to date, Chinese local governments, social service systems, and academic circles have failed to make the necessary efforts to address their living conditions, unfulfilled needs, and the disadvantages that came from not being able to express themselves freely. There are three reasons for such an issue. First, the mobility of rural migrant grandparent caregivers is considerably high. They travel between urban and rural areas from time to time. After the children have grown older, they would return to their hometowns. Second, rural migrant grandparent caregivers displayed no significant patterns of spatial agglomeration, and there is no large-scale activity that is based on certain social relationships pertaining to these grandparent caregivers. Third, the rural migrant grandparent caregivers do not demonstrate any apparent group consciousness and unique demands of interest (Wu, 2014). Currently, China is in a period of continued implementation of the people-oriented policy

— a period of gradually exploring the establishment of an appropriate universal-type social welfare system, and a period that witnessed an unprecedented speed and scale of urbanization. In such a historical moment, it is of great importance to discuss this unique phenomenon of “migratory bird” immigration.

1. ROLES CHANGES OF GRANDPARENT CAREGIVERS

1.1 The One-Dimensional Role of Grandparents in Urban Life

With grandparents being invited to the urban areas to raise their grandchildren, the multi-dimensional roles they used to play are now reduced to one-dimensional role due to changes in space, the transition of intergenerational relationships in the new family, and the different task arrangements. This new attribute of the grandparent’s role is mainly embodied in three aspects: raising grandchildren and doing housework, the fading-out of elder authority, the disappearing roles of grandparents.

1.1.1 Raising Grandchildren and Doing Housework

“Family caregivers” are the most important role of rural migrant grandparent caregivers. Raising grandchildren is a direct reason why grandparents were invited to the urban areas. Since the parents are too occupied with their work and are unable to spare any time to do housework, doing housework has naturally become the accompanying reason for grandparents to live in the urban areas. Because of the differences between paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents in age, occupation, health status, family structure, distance between hometown and city, the duty of grandparenting is shouldered by different grandparents in different families. Considering the age and the number of children, the grandparents’ vitality, and the amount of housework, some families employ babysitters or hourly workers to provide assistance for childcare or housework chores. Matters related to grandparents raising children and doing housework include shopping, cooking, doing laundry, sending children to school, picking up children from school, playing with children, telling stories, taking a walk, buying clothes, snacks, and toys for children, and purchasing household items. Due to the heavy workload of the chores that occupies almost all their time, the time spent for taking the preschool children out for a stroll have been taken by these grandparents as their leisure time. The following are some of the statements stated during the focus group interviews:

My granddaughter is 2 years old and I am busy from morning till night. I take her for a walk in the morning and spend most of the day walking around the neighborhood or the mall, except eating and resting at home at noon. After dinner I have to play with my granddaughter until she falls asleep at about 10:00 p.m. (grandmother, 55yo)

Although my grandson is in elementary school, there are still lots of daily chores at home. The whole family have supper together and it takes me 2 hours to prepare a big dinner. My house is quite big, nearly 200 square meters, and a thorough cleaning once a week makes my back ache. (grandmother, 63yo)

1.1.2 The Fading-out of Elder Authority

China is a country that is entering the industrial society and even the information society, and in so doing witnesses not only earth-shaking changes in the urban and rural economic landscape, but also the dramatic changes in family structure, culture, and relationships. The traditional production methods and social structure on which the authority of the elders depends have long declined in popularity. The younger generations with more knowledge, information, social networking resources and wealth have gradually become the backbones of their families, owning more discourse and decision-making power in the families. Rural migrant grandparent caregivers normally give up their traditional role of authoritative elders in the new families.

These new grandparent-parent relationships are characterized by the following three aspects: first, as grandparents are not familiar with the affairs, difficulties, and interpersonal relationships of their children’s work, they could not make judgments or propose suggestions, and could only act as pure listeners; second, grandparents loss some or all of their decision-making power in major economic events such as their children’s family investment and financing planning as they are short of relevant information, knowledge, or sufficient financial support; third, grandparents have weak influence on the spousal relationship of their children. Nowadays, spousal relationships of the younger generations depend more on their marriage quality, and are less affected by the decision of the elders.

My son and daughter-in-law both work in the government. They are busy and sometimes work overtime on weekends. They often talk about their work at dinner and I can’t get a word in. I can only listen. (grandmother, 62yo)

Chinese people are keen on real estate speculation. My son bought a house with a bank loan last year. Though I didn’t have money to support them, I thought my son as a visionary and he did the right thing. (grandmother, 58yo)

There were occasional conflicts between young couples but I don’t want to interfere in them. I am only responsible for taking care of the child and doing housework. (grandmother, 46yo)

1.1.3 The Disappearing Roles of Grandparents

The roles of grandparents in a traditional Chinese family are of great importance and diversity, each of which reflects the specific status and function of grandparents in the family and society. However, some of the roles played by these grandparent caregivers have gradually disappeared. The differences in the way of life, cognition, and rearing between the generations of grandparents

and parents have led to the rapid decline and even disappearance of some of the traditional roles of the former. This is illustrated in the following three typical styles of roles.

The first role is the family rule maker. Traditional Chinese families are mostly stem families or joint families, with elders holding the absolute authority over the family's decisions and the family's rules. Particularly the grandfathers, as both the master of family assets and the decision-makers of family property distribution, enjoy a highly respected status. However, in the past 30 years, the newly emerging nuclear families tend to emphasize the pursuit of equal dialogue and economic independence. The role of rule-makers of grandparents has been gradually negated in the multidimensional transition on the society, families, and among the people.

When I was a kid, about 60 years ago, my grandfather was an absolute authority at home and everyone had to obey him even if he was wrong. Now, unlike in the past, the family is up to my granddaughter's parents. I'm not in charge. (grandfather,65yo)

The second role is the transmitter of tradition value. When grandparents were born, that is, half a century or more ago, Chinese customs used to attach great importance to the concept of clan manners and collectivism, while contemporary China is focused more on nuclear families and individual values. It is difficult for grandparents to clarify and illustrate the complex relationships among the clan-based families, which their grandchildren have never seen, or to describe the secular rituals that were conceived in the relatively isolated rural community.

One day when my granddaughter asked me why I stayed at my hometown which is nearly 2,000 kilometers away for so many days. I told her that I had returned to my hometown to worship my ancestors. "What does worshiping ancestors mean?" She asked. I explained to her the meaning in detail. My son heard what I said and told me the child could not understand that. I thought he was right. How can a child understand such an abstruse thing? (grandfather,60yo)

The third role is the guardian of the grandchildren. In traditional Chinese families, grandparents often play the role of guardians for their grandchildren. They had the power to formulate and explain family rules. If parents failed to give proper discipline, they will protect their grandchildren and rebuke their children. In the eyes of the grandparent caregivers, if parents use methods they do not approve to educate and punish their grandchildren, instead of adhering to the tit-for-tat philosophy, they will choose to play the role of peacemakers.

Decades ago when I was trying to punish my errant son, his grandparents always protected him and scolded me. Now my granddaughter is a primary school student. Sometimes her parents criticize her severely for her poor grades. This makes my heart ache but I won't interfere with them. Why I do not interfere with them? Firstly, I think children face intense learning competition. Secondly, my son and daughter-in-law

both graduated from universities and they know more about education than I do. (grandmother, 62yo)

1.2 Dissolution of Role Cluster of Grandparents in Rural Life

It is a long-term task for grandparents to take care of their grandchildren in cities. Usually, before the child is born, grandparents who are preparing for long-term care will become the caregivers to their daughters or daughters-in-law who are about to give birth. If a grandmother provides continuous care and no one else take her turn, she should at least stay in the city for three years until her grandchild attends kindergarten; but most grandparents return to their hometowns when their grandchildren graduate from primary school. If their children have multiple births or if the newborn grandchildren suffer from a special situation such as disability, the grandparents may stay in the city for a longer period of time. It should be noted that grandparents will temporarily return to their hometowns when the time has come for them to pay tribute to their ancestors, attend the weddings and funerals of their relatives and friends, participate in party organization activities, tend to the health problems of their families, or offer help during the busy farming seasons. The length of time varies depending on the round trip distance and the importance of the affairs, but it will never take too long.

Grandparent caregivers stay in cities for roughly 3 to 13 years. During this period, grandparents will stop handling their hometown affairs, and the related roles played by them will also change.

1.2.1 The Absence of the Role of Caring

In general, the rural migrant grandparent caregivers are unable to care for other family members living in their hometown. There may be three possible situations:

First, the grandparents cannot take care of their parents or parents-in-law. The great-grandparents of the grandchildren in this study are about 65 to 90 years old and live in the countryside. In a rural society that advocates filial piety, if one fails to show filial piety to his parents due to various reasons, he may be morally condemned. Also, he may feel uneasy if he leaves his parents in the care of his siblings or community organizations. Relatives and neighbors will also be critical of this decision, which may lead to conflicts. One observed comment clearly illustrates the impact on the grandparents.

My husband and I have been in town together for seven years, taking care of our three grandchildren. My parents have been taken care of by my brother. My father-in-law passed away several years ago and my mother-in-law has been living with my husband's brother. We feel awfully guilty for not taking care of our parents. (grandmother,55yo)

Second, the grandparents cannot take care of their spouses who stay in hometown. The reasons why only one grandparent comes to the city are as follows: the grandparent caregiver's spouse who stays in hometown

has to deal with agricultural or non-agricultural matters; the other one could not come to the city due to health issues or other factors; the urban family has limited space. In fact, most grandparents who stay in the countryside are grandfathers. This long-term separation often plagues these grandfathers to a larger extent. They have to take care of the family members, do housework, tend to their farming activities or businesses, endure long-term loneliness, and take care of themselves when struck by illnesses.

My husband runs a clinic in the town. He wants to work a few more years to save more money for our child. He is not good at cooking and also too busy to cook, so he often eats dumplings or noodles bought from the supermarket. Sometimes he even eats these for 4 or 5 days though he doesn't really like these. (grandmother,63yo)

My husband lives alone in our hometown. He is a septuagenarian with migraines, heart attacks and high blood pressure. When I call home and no one answers, I am always very worried. Once I made thirty or forty calls continuously until I heard his voice. (grandmother,63yo)

Third, the grandparents are unable to take care of other grandchildren. China implemented the national policy of family planning in the 1980s, but on the contrary to the strict implementation on some economically developed rural areas, a large number of families in underdeveloped rural areas still gave birth to multiple children. These "children", who were born at the 80s and the 90s are the main subjects to be taken as "parents" in this study. In the case of grandparenting required by several children at the same time, grandparents can only either support one of the children who need more help, or take turns to help each child for several months. Regardless of the approach taken, they are often complained about being absent.

I am here to raise my son's son. My daughter lives in Nanjing. Last month she gave birth to a second child and asked me to help her take care of the kid. What could I do? My son needed me. I could only vaguely tell my daughter that I would go to Nanjing after some time. This is not a trivial matter. If I do not handle it well, I will be blamed not only by my son but also by my daughter. In addition it will also lead to sibling discord. (grandmother, 66yo)

1.2.2 Withdrawing From the Social Networks

If grandparents leave their hometowns for a long time, they will withdraw from the previous rural social networks to some extent. These situations include:

First, the grandparent caregivers leave the networks of neighborhoods. There is a folk proverb that can accurately depict the neighborhood in a Chinese-style village — a good neighbor is better than a brother situated far off. Living adjacent to each other for a long time, neighbors will form a harmonious and close relationship. The long-term "absence" after the grandparents' leave for the city causes this network to lose a part of its sustainable social environment.

Basically I have no contact with the old neighbors. I am usually busy and have no time to contact them. Even if I want to contact them, I don't know what to say. (grandmother,57yo)

Second, the grandparent caregivers withdraw from the networks of friends and relatives. A prominent feature in Chinese rural areas is that friends and families will send a red envelope to express their congratulations or condolences when someone holds a wedding or funeral respectively. When guests visit to offer their money or presents, the hosts will return the favor by holding a feast to entertain these guests. During such interactions, they identify each other as "families" and hope to share both their happiness and woes in the future. However, after staying in the city for a long time and getting used to the urban lifestyle, grandparent caregivers have no time to return to their hometowns, and gradually alienate these traditional customs. Some grandparents regard monetary gifts as an extra burden due to their shortage of sufficient income and even see such methods of socializing as backward mode. Most of the respondents gave up their return to their hometowns to participate in weddings or funerals of distant relatives and normal friends.

Last year I spent a total of 60,000 yuan on various monetary gifts in my hometown, which is too heavy for the elderly like us, who are getting older and living on only retirement salary. I'll gradually break off with my ordinary friends on the grounds that I am too busy raising kids in the city. In fact, some people now regard accepting monetary gifts as a means of making money. (grandmother,61yo)

Third, the grandparent caregivers leave the networks of group members. Since the implementation of reform and opening up in China in the 1980s, the occupation types in rural areas have become increasingly diverse. Multiple rural residents were no longer individualized peasants. Some grandparents often participated in various activities organized by enterprises, institutions, and party-based organizations before coming to the city. Later, except for grandparents who are members of the Communist Party of China, and are compelled to return to their hometowns when their party organizations organize activities, other grandparents basically withdraw from group activities and rarely connect with other group members.

I retired from the post office. Last year I neither went to Beidaihe for recuperation organized by the company for veteran cadres in summer nor took part in the annual physical examination in October because I had to raise my grandchild. (grandmother, 58yo)

1.2.3 Suspension From Grandparents' Roles in Production

There are roughly three types of production roles that grandparents are forced to suspend as they should come to the city to raise their grandchildren: farming, working and doing business.

Farming runs through the whole life of Chinese farmers. Unless they are completely unable to work due

to old age or illness, Chinese farmers will never give up working in the fields. Income from individual farming in China today is extremely low, and it exists more as a way of life. When children with better income need their parents to help in the city, it is common for rural migrant grandparent caregivers to let the spouse who stays in the hometown to do the farm work, or give the right to use the farmland to neighbors, or rent the land to outlanders or even abandon the land.

After I entered the city, my family's responsibility field was farmed free to my cousin's father-in-law's family. From then on they would send us some food after the harvest so that both families were happy. (grandmother,52yo)

Nonnatives rent my responsibility fields and they give me hundreds of yuan per mu per year. I don't need to care about anything else. (grandmother,66yo)

Working is of unparalleled significance to the family of grandparents. It is often the key to maintaining or raising the level of spending and economic freedom. Giving up the wages from working to take care of grandchildren is normally a dilemma for grandparents who are in their middle age, and are willing to work with their special skills. They will be plagued by anxiety for a long time and may rearrange the grandparenting method in the future.

I am 48 years old and my granddaughter is 39 months old. Before my daughter-in-law had a baby, I had worked in a textile factory and earned 1,800 yuan a month. Since I left my job to raise my grandchild in the city, I have no income or pension and all my expenses are in the hands of my son and daughter-in-law. You know these are bad days. I plan to let my son's mother-in-law come to Nantong to take care of my granddaughter next month. I will go back to my hometown to find a job to earn some money. (grandmother,48yo)

As to doing business, some grandparents may open stores or even run a small and medium-sized enterprise in their hometowns. Such production role is far more complex than the prior two scenarios. If grandparents quit this production role, they should not only consider the changes in their primary income, but also interests of diverse groups including partners, employees and customers, entailing them to make comprehensive decisions after taking into account all the factors. Normally, one of the grandparents will stay to run the business. However, in the face of multiplying pressure, they may transfer their stores, shrink business or find someone reliable and capable to join the company. As for the grandparent who is responsible for grandparenting, it is difficult for him/her to pay more attention to the business.

My daughter-in-law is an orphan, so my grandson has only one grandpa and one grandma. My home is more than 20 kilometers away from Nantong. My family runs a carton factory with more than a dozen workers. Before I entered the city I was in charge of the factory with my husband. Now I can only go home for a day or two at the weekend. I was relieved that my nephew came to the factory to help us after he graduated from university last year. (grandmother,55yo)

2. LIFE STRATEGIES OF GRANDPARENT CAREGIVERS

After coming to the city, grandparents will be busy with the complicated affairs of raising and caring, communicate with their children and grandchildren in a way they expect, and build their own new life in the city. In the process of adapting to the new role, grandparents gradually develop a series of survival strategies inside and outside the family.

2.1 Maintaining Independence

2.1.1 Economic Independence

Whether rich or poor, grandparents try to maintain economic independence. For various reasons, some children have never expressed their willingness to subsidize grandparents, and some are accepted or rejected by grandparents after they propose the subsidy. In either case, grandparents will weigh the assets and future income of themselves to determine their consumption in the city. They make sure that they can spend more freely without external support, such as purchasing small items to the city's home, buying clothes and toys for their grandchildren, and giving rewards to their grandchildren during festivals or when they achieve excellent grades. Grandparents know deeply that economic independence is the core element of family status.

I pay the food every day...My grandson's blue shoes broke down last week and I took him to the mall to buy a pair of adidas shoes which he loved very much. My son intended to give me tens of thousands of yuan for the Spring Festival last year. He explained, "mom, you work hard all year round and spend a lot of money." I refused. It's natural for me to raise my grandchild and it's hard to feel comfortable to take my son's money. I am also afraid that some people will gossip in the future. (grandmother,55yo)

2.1.2 Freedom of Returning to Grandparents' Hometowns

Although grandparents should continuously raise grandchildren in the city, they do not completely lose the freedom to return to their hometown at certain moments. These are occasions in which grandparents cannot be absent. For example, birthdays of round decades, serious diseases of a family member, and activities of the Communist Party of China, etc. Although grandparent caregivers have largely withdrawn from the social network of their hometown, their nostalgia, responsibility, and identity are still important bonds connecting themselves in different time and space of "rural area-urban area" and "past-now-future".

My mother is 85 years old and has Alzheimer's disease. She has been taken care of by my brother since I entered the city. At the end of last year she was hospitalized for stomach surgery. If I hadn't gone back, everyone including my brother would say that I had no conscience. I stayed with my mother in the hospital and my hometown for 20 days. (grandmother,55yo)

I have been a member of the Communist Party of China for 40 years. I used to go back to my hometown when the party branch held a meeting. My hometown is very close to Nantong and I usually go back and forth within two days. (grandmother,58yo)

2.1.3 The Application of Conflict Strategies

In the stem family, conflicts between grandparents and parents range diversely: Ways of raising and educating children, living habits, and differences in returning home. Most grandparents do not take the initiative to provoke conflicts or seek the status of victory in the conflict, but they will not be silent in the conflict. They use less intense expressions, language, actions and other conflict strategies to express dissatisfaction and defend their status. Except for a handful of grandparents who would unite their children to fight against spouses of children, most grandparents will not adopt the way of splitting their families to gain support. In extreme cases, some grandparents will choose to return home for a few days after the conflict to ease their opposition and show their value in the city, but the time will be shorter.

My son and daughter-in-law are both university teachers. There is some contradiction between the daughter-in-law and me. I stopped cooking dinner last September. They sometimes buy their own food after work and sometimes they take their children out to eat. I usually eat very simple food at home. If I feel unhappy in the city, I will go back to my hometown. I returned to my hometown last year for a total of 4 months. My grandson is a grade 3 primary student and his parents can take good care of him without me. (grandmother,62yo)

2.2 Acquiring New Knowledge and Developing New Interests

Grandparents' willingness and ability to learn in the urban environment far exceeds the imagination of themselves and others.

2.2.1 New Grandparenting Skills

Starting from raising infants, many grandparents have gradually learned advanced grandparenting skills in order to change the traditional way and adapt to modern concepts as soon as possible.

When my daughter was a child, I chewed foods up and fed her mouth-to-mouth. It's impossible now. The grandchildren have their own special bowls and spoons and they eat rice flour and vegetable powder purchased from the maternal and infant shops. In order to judge the temperature of the milk in the bottle, I use the method of dripping the milk to the inside of the wrist instead of using my mouth. My daughter often says hygiene is very important. (grandmother,46yo)

2.2.2 New Knowledge and Interests

When children attend kindergartens and elementary schools, grandparents will have more leisure time, which allows them to extensively experience different aspects of urban life in an in-depth manner. They learn to chat, play cards, shop, and browse news with computers, IPADs or smartphones by asking their children and grandchildren or leaning in the community computer training classes provided by nonprofit organizations. Some also learn

to make appointments for hospital clinics and travel through navigation; some participate in dance or aerobics organized by community entertainment groups, and some with higher education background go to the library. Three grandmothers said:

My grandson taught me how to use the IPAD and I found it much more convenient to watch anti-Japanese dramas on my IPAD than on TV. (grandmother,58yo)

Three generations of my family often chat in a WeChat group. My granddaughter taught me how to make an appointment for an outpatient registration on my mobile phone. It's so advanced. (grandmother,62yo)

As long as it doesn't rain, I will dance with the elderly in the community square in the evening. This is good for the body and mind and it's more meaningful than playing mahjong in the countryside before. (grandmother,61yo)

2.2.3 New Images of Grandparenthood

From the time when grandchildren go to kindergartens, some grandparents will more consciously change their traditional authoritative and arbitrary image, interact with their grandchildren in an equal and democratic way, and even contact and learn things related to their grandchildren's interests and activities. These common topics and activities are seen as bridges and bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. Two examples of this can be seen in the following narrative:

My grandson is 9 years old and I never discipline him. He knows a lot and can easily talk with American teachers in English in VIPKID's one-to-one online video courses. Some of his ideas are very reasonable and often enlighten me... My grandson and I have an equal and friendly relationship. (grandfather,63yo)

I accompany my granddaughter to the badminton training class at 3:30 p.m. every Monday and Wednesday. Her parents are busy and have no time to play with her. I am happy to play badminton with her on weekends. (grandfather,60yo)

At the beginning of taking care of their grandchildren, as rural traditions are dispelled by urban modernity, grandparents will have more or less discomfort in life, social activities, leisure activities, etc. But most grandparents can gradually accept and acquire some new ideas and new knowledge needed to live in the city. Through these socialization processes, grandparents not only adapt to urban life, but also establish new relationships featuring equality and mutual assistance with their children and grandchildren, and relationship networks with neighbors, community organizations, and virtual space interaction objects. Thus, they obtain diverse social capital as "newcomers in the city" to varying degrees.

2.3 Making New Friends and Building New Circles

2.3.1 Making Friends

When grandchildren go to kindergartens or elementary schools, grandparents will have more leisure time to enrich their lives with new social relationships and satisfy their long-suppressed social needs. In the eyes of most grandparents, neighbors or friends they meet

in a strange and narrow urban community are not only subjects to talk about grandparenting, household affairs and happy life, but also reliable partners for them to gain a sense of belonging and to alleviate the pressure of life. Philbald and Adams (1972) note that an elderly person's satisfaction with life is linked to interaction with friends rather than to interaction with relatives.

I had a fight with my son and I cried a few times. But what can be done? I can't leave my two grandchildren behind. When Children in grade one and two of primary school leave school at 3:30 p.m., more than 1,000 grandparents stay at the school gate to wait for their grandchildren. While waiting, I will talk to several familiar grandparents about our daily lives and we often mention the difficulties. You know it makes elderly person feel better to complain about the pains and unhappiness in life when talking to others. Many families have skeletons in the closet. (grandfather,57yo)

Grandparents often talk about their children's jobs while taking their grandchildren for walks around the neighborhood. I often mention two things that make me proud. One is that my son and daughter-in-law both have decent jobs and the other is that they are filial to the elderly. It's hard to raise a grandchild, but I think it's worth it. (grandmother,52yo)

2.3.2 Joining Groups

A small number of extroverted and energetic grandparents actively join different types of community groups. Groups have far richer meanings to members than individual interactions. Grandparents gain a sense of belonging, cultivate a sense of responsibility and develop their potential.

I joined the block dance team last year and sometimes rehearsed at the city's Senior Citizens Activity Center. Our team has a total of more than 20 members and the relationship is very harmonious. I like them. We are very popular and perform in the surrounding areas of Nantong. I feel more and more generous and cheerful. Although these activities sometimes affect raising my granddaughter and doing housework, the whole family support me. (grandfather,63yo)

2.3.3 Building a Living Circle

Whether it is walking, shopping, entertainment or social activities, grandparents basically choose the same venue such as familiar parks, shopping malls, community room, etc. The geography-based life circle constructed in this way also has certain psychological implications. Some grandparents in the village are more willing to contact familiar people and things and rarely walk out of villages. After coming to the city, they also construct a "village" for themselves, and acting freely and safely in such a small "psychological safety zone".

My grandson is almost 3 years old this year. Apart from my son taking the whole family out for dinner or playing, I only bring my grandson wander around in the neighborhood or the supermarket and park nearby. I dare not go far because I do not know the way and it is not safe. (grandmother,58yo)

CONCLUSION

Grandparenting has greatly changed individual life course and family life trajectory of rural grandparents. Some

people hold that Chinese grandparents have always been willing to raise their grandchildren. Such fixed behavioral pattern is rooted in the blood of Chinese people. The reality of this view is questionable in today's China. In the multitude of different quantitative and qualitative researches conducted on grandparent caregivers in Nantong, Wu (2014,2017a,2017b) found the disintegration of tradition of grandparenting. The different economic levels, family structure, lifestyle, occupation type, future planning and role orientation of contemporary Chinese rural grandparents make their understanding of their role and grandparenting show certain heterogeneity, which is a common social phenomenon in different countries, races, and cultures (Neugarten & Weinstein,1964; Johnson,1983; Storm & Storm, 1993) .

In this regard, we have to change some deeply-rooted ideas. For example, Chinese rural grandparents are happy to come to the city to raise grandchildren for years or even more than ten years. In fact, almost all of the respondents express their attachment and guilty to families in the hometown, and their inadaptation to the city's new life, interpersonal relationships, and grandparenting styles. Some suffer from chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes for a long time, or are plagued by the negative psychological state of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. However, grandparents cannot easily withdraw from such a task. They are full of endless love and responsibility for their children and grandchildren, and are afraid that their departure would give rise to family discord and ethical condemnation. The change of roles of grandparent caregivers is not a comfortable and enjoyable process. On the contrary, they have to undergo long-term tests in their physical, psychological and social aspects. They try to develop some life strategies to adapt to changes in roles and environment, but the effects of efforts of varying methods and degrees are mingled hope and fear. In particular, the period of their grandparenting is roughly at the age of 45-75 years old. Thus, the aging body and multiple diseases will undoubtedly be extra challenges.

As China's urbanization process will last for a long time, children-rearing of hundreds of millions of youth from rural to urban areas is not only a micro topic at the household level, but a macro subject at the national and social levels. As a developing country, China should make great efforts to guarantee a more secure and dignified life of these rural migrant grandparents, who assume primary responsibilities of caregiving; this is the ultimate goal of this research.

METHODS SUMMARY

This article is based on qualitative study of China migrant grandparent caregivers from rural to urban. Fieldwork took place between March and June 2018 and drew its sample from Nantong, Jiangsu province. The author

contacted the grandparents in two ways. One was to go to several residential areas and public green areas in the morning and dusk to find the grandparents walking with their grandchildren. The other was to go to several kindergartens and primary schools before and after school to find grandparents waiting for their grandchildren. In order to make the sample cover the families with different socioeconomic status, the author chose different levels of communities, kindergartens with different tuition fees and different prestige primary schools. The final participants were all grandparents who had been assuming primary caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren for more than half a year. The participants included 32 grandparents separated into 5 focus groups. The demographic characteristics of rural migrant grandparent caregivers in this study are presented in Table 1. The primary means of collecting qualitative data in this study was the focus group interviewing approach. The author acted as a moderator in all focus groups. Detailed questions are focused on the roles changes and life strategies of the grandparent caregivers. Each interview was approximately 120 min, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded and filed.

Table 1
Characteristics of Rural Migrant Grandparent Caregivers in the Study (N=32)

	Characteristics	N	Percentage
Age	40-49	5	15.6
	50-59	11	34.4
	60-69	15	46.9
	70+	1	3.1
Gender	Male	7	21.9
	Female	25	78.1
Marital status	Widowed/divorced	5	15.6
	Married	27	84.4
Education level	No schooling	3	9.4
	Primary school	9	28.1
	Junior high school	12	37.5
	Senior high school/technical senior high school	7	21.9
	Junior college or higher	1	3.1
Profession	Cadre	3	9.4
	Teacher	2	6.3
	Medical staff	2	6.3
	Entrepreneur/self-employed/manager	8	25
	Farmer	7	21.9
	Worker	5	15.6
	Waiter	1	3.1
	Other professionals	2	6.3
	Unemployed	2	6.3
Hometown	Nantong	14	43.8
	Other cities in Jiangsu province/Shanghai	12	37.5
	Other provinces	6	18.8
Duration of primary caregiving	Less than one year	2	6.3
	One-three years	12	37.5
	Four-six years	7	21.9
	Seven-twelve years	10	31.3
	Thirteen or more years	1	3.1

METHODS

Participants

This article is based on qualitative study of China migrant grandparent caregivers from rural to urban. Fieldwork took place between March and June 2018 and drew its sample from Nantong, Jiangsu province. The author contacted the grandparents in two ways. One was to go to several residential areas and public green areas in the morning and dusk to find the grandparents walking with their grandchildren. The other was to go to several kindergartens and primary schools before and after school to find grandparents waiting for their grandchildren. In order to make the sample cover the families with different socioeconomic status, the author chose different levels of communities, kindergartens with different tuition fees and different prestige primary schools. The author indicated his identity as a college teacher and introduced his family to be similar to the interviewee's family. Through communication, the author eliminated the psychological defense of the interviewees and established trust relationships with the interviewees. Finally, the author exchanged contact information with interviewees and agreed that the time and location of the interview would be determined in the near future according to the principle of convenience of interviewees. The final participants were all grandparents who had been assuming primary caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren for more than half a year. The participants included 32 grandparents separated into 5 focus groups. The demographic characteristics of rural migrant grandparent caregivers in this study are presented in Table 1.

Data Collection

The primary means of collecting qualitative data in this study was the focus group interviewing approach. Before the formal interview, the author informed the participants of the purpose, content and recording methods of this study and also explained the processing method of interview materials and privacy protection principles. The author strictly followed the informed consent procedures in accordance with relevant provisions of social investigation. The author acted as a moderator in all focus groups. Detailed questions focusing on the roles changes and life strategies of the grandparent caregivers from the semi-structured interview guidelines included the following:

What do you usually do in your child's home?

What is your influence on your child's family? How is the grandparent-parent relationship different today from that of decades ago? How is the grandparent-grandchild relationship different today from that of decades ago?

How has your role in your hometown changed since you moved to the city?

What have you done to adapt to the new environment and new roles in the city?

Each interview was approximately 120 min, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded and filed.

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