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# Studies on Trans-generational Rearing in Chinese Families from 2013-2019: A Systematic Literature Review

Shufen Huang<sup>1</sup>, Xuefeng Yan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign Language and Trade, Qingyuan Polytechnic, Qingyuan, China

<sup>2</sup> Qingxin District Fengxia High School, Qingyuan, China

Correspondence: Shufen Huang, School of Foreign Language and Trade, Qingyuan Polytechnic, Qingyuan, Guangdong, 511510, China. Tel: 0763-3936322. E-mail:hsfecho@163.com

## Abstract

As China opened up and reformed, China has experienced a rapid change in urbanization and economic growth. Therefore, more and more young couples try to find their fortune in the cities, leaving their young children behind in rural areas or under the rearing of their older generations. In such a case, trans-generational rearing and education have become a very common phenomenon in China. In the past seven years, quite a lot of Chinese scholars have looked into the problems and related aspects of trans-generational rearing in China. This article has reviewed forty-four articles related to the topic from CNKI database and found that the study trend of this topic has changed from previous cause and effect study to the strategical exploration on how to improve the quality of trans-generational rearing.

**Keywords:** Trans-generational Rearing, Chinese Families, 2012-2019, Literature Review

## 1. Introduction

According to the decision of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in October 2015, "in order to promote balanced population development, adhere to the basic state policy of family planning, improve population development strategy, we need to fully implement the policy of having two children for a couple, and actively carry out actions to address the aging of the population." This decision marks the formal implementation of the "comprehensive two-child" policy and the end of the 36-year one-child policy. The "comprehensive two-child" policy will have great influences on all aspects of the society, with family education bearing the brunt. "Grandparent education," also known as "trans-generational rearing or education," refers to the practices that grandparents share the rearing and education duties with their children for their grandchildren. This pattern of "trans-generational rearing" is an important part of family education.

In China, due to the intensified urbanization process, most of the young couples are under great work pressure and busy with professional life. Therefore, there is an increasing number of the elderly who have to share the rearing and education responsibilities with them and take care of their grandchildren. According to relevant statistics, about 40 percent of children in the country are mainly reared and supervised by their grandparents. The

younger the grandchildren are, the more their parents will entrust them to their grandparents to take care. Especially after China's opening up of the "second child" policy, the trans-generational participation in the upbringing of young grandchildren is even higher. To improve the quality of family education, it is quite important to improve the quality of grandparents' raising and rearing of their grandchildren.

## 2. Data Source and Basic Categories of Related Papers

Based on the domestic CNKI academic papers database, this paper retrieves the related research papers through the keywords of "grandparent education," "trans-generational education," "generational education," "trans-generational parenting" and so on from the years of 2013-2019, and obtains 44 academic papers related to the topic. According to the analysis and evaluation of the content of the articles, it is found that in the past 5 years, domestic scholars mainly studied the impacts of trans-generational education both on the children and their grandparents. Some of the scholars looked into the current situation of trans-generational education in some regions in China, exploring the regional differences for trans-generational parenting. Particular attention was paid to the problems of trans-generational education of children left behind in rural areas, and devotion was committed to finding improvement strategies. There was also a lot of micro-level research on how kindergartens can make good use of the advantages of the elderly to help their education of young children. The corresponding numbers and proportion of articles for each topic are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers and Proportion of Articles for Each Topic

Topic	Impacts	Improving Strategies	Current Situation Investigation	Rural Left-behind Children	Causes	Advantages and Disadvantages	inter-generational differences on Rearing	Others	In Total
Number of Article Published	11	11	6	5	3	1	2	5	44
Proportion	25%	25%	14%	11%	7%	2%	5%	11%	100%

The overall trend of papers published on related topics in the past 5 years is shown in Figure 1. Basically, researches on trans-generational rearing have remained relatively stable in the first six years, with an average of 4-5 research papers published each year, but in 2019 there was a blowout in papers on related topics, with 14 research articles produced.

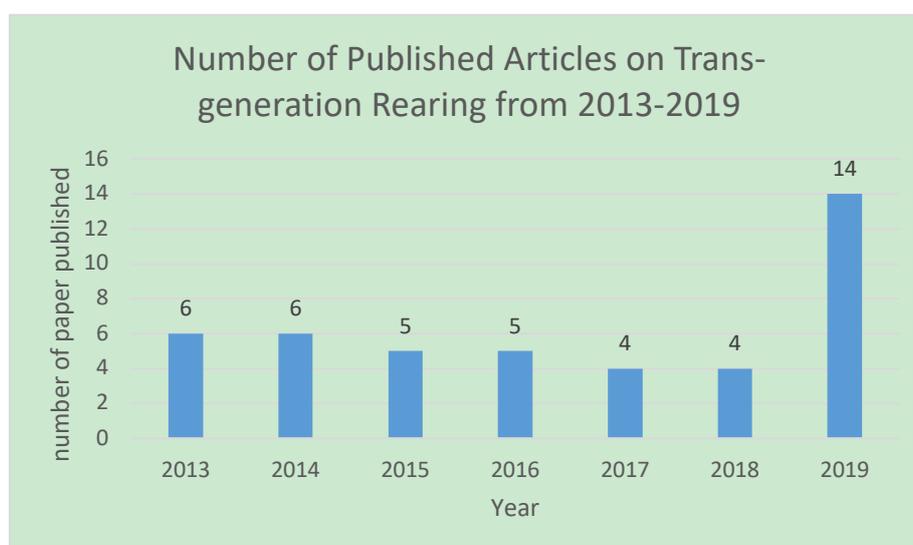


Figure 1. Number of Published Paper on Trans-generational Rearing from 2013-2019

### 3. The Studies on the Impacts of Trans-generational Rearing

The research on the impacts of trans-generational rearing and education on young children and their grandparents is the most extensive, of which the quality of the study is relatively high. Yu Pan and Xiong Feng (2016) study the effects of trans-generational education on the psychological and behavioral aspects of the elderly. They point out that the elderly need to adapt to the role of rearing grandchildren and most of them are able to accept their new roles. Though in the process of raising their grandchildren, they can obtain emotional satisfaction, they are lack of confidence in educating their grandchildren for they can not keep up with the time. In terms of parenting behaviors, grandparents tend to take their grandchildren as their daily center, so most of their grandchildren get spoiled, being selfish and self-centered (Pan & Feng, 2016).

He Yin and Zhao Jiaxu (2016) had interviewed 19 retirees between the ages of 60 and 75 who spend more than eight hours with their children before their grandchildren went to kindergarten. Using interview content analysis, they find that the learning attitudes of the grandparents can be divided into three types: proactive, passive, and negative. More than half of the elderly are passive in learning how to rear and raise children, but those elderly who were engaged in administrative, teaching and other occupations before retirement are more proactive and active in learning new things and changing their own rearing patterns. Those grandparents who were self-employed or worked as farmers are generally more passive and negative in learning how to educate their grandchildren. Therefore, most of the elderly have adapted lying, compromising, and other negative ways to solve the plight of raising young children because they think the young children sometimes are very troublesome, and this is the fastest way to solve the problem. Some of them feel powerless in dealing with naughty children (Yin & Jiaxu, 2016).

With the focus on the lives of the elderly in the countryside in a new era, Wu Qi (2017) finds that the elderly who have to take care of their grandchildren tend to be younger on average, and enjoy a more stable financial life. trans-generational rearing has a positive impact on the life of the elderly for they have received spiritual satisfaction with family unity and more financial support from their children because they have taken good care of their grandchildren. Meanwhile, negative effects also work in their life due to the fact that they are more responsible for the quality of raising the grandchildren and some of them can not afford it physically and psychologically (Qi, 2017).

Li Xiaoqing (2019) proposes a generational exchange model between grandparents and grandchildren. She believes that trans-generational education impacts are not always negative. The grandparents and the grandchildren are inter-dependent, taking care for each other, finding emotional fulfillment from each other (Xiaoqing, 2019).

### 4. Current Situation Survey of Trans-generational Education

The current situation survey is very important for understanding the phenomenon of trans-generational education, so many scholars in China have conducted related survey of different regions and cities. Among them, Malik Abezi (2014) took the grandparents rearing young children who were respectively studying in five kindergartens in Urumqi City as the study group, and randomly selected 500 grandparents for further investigation. The study points out that young children spend much more time with their grandparents than their parents. More than 60% of the grandparents are very willing and happy to support their children by sharing the nurturing responsibilities. Generally speaking, the grandparents have admitted that their rearing patterns sometimes were not suitable in helping young children to form good habits. It is suggested that the grandparents should pay attention to the emotional and psychological needs of the young children (Abezi, 2014).

Yan Hongbo (2014) has taken 156 children aged 3-6 years from kindergarten in Wangqing County, Jilin Province for the survey. He discovers that the grandparents have a strong desire to learn how to education their grandchildren better, but they find no support in doing so. It is suggested that kindergarten should help

grandparents in rearing and educating young children. Yan suggests that the first thing grandparents can do was to play games with young children using home resources. Second, kindergartens can open up for grandparents for 2-3 days per month, therefore their grandparents can observe how teachers organize their children's daily life and study, so as they will be able to maintain consistency in educating the children. The third way is to open courses for both grandparents and grandchildren to learn and play together. Fourth, concerning the characteristics of the elderly, we can rely on the elderly university, the association of the elderly and other local groups to share knowledge for raising grandchildren among them (Hongbo, 2014).

Luo Feng et al. (2014) pay attention to the situation of urban trans-generational education, because the city has distinct characteristics in its social life environment, family organization form, and so on. In particular, more young parents in cities are the only children for their families, and the family structure is gradually transformed into the 4-2-1 model, which consists of three generations under the same roof. Such a family structure, on the one hand, is conducive to promoting the integration of parent-child education and trans-generational education, but such a model also makes the burden of the young couple heavier and heavier. The author suggests looking for effective ways for society, government and schools, as well as families to work together to solve problems, starting from the unique advantages and disadvantages of urban trans-generational education (Feng, Yuanfang & Guangwen, 2014).

Drawing conclusions from their empirical survey in Guangzhou, Luo Feng and Yu Yanhua (2014) pointed out that though the age gap between the elderly and their grandchildren is large, and the elderly' educational ideas are quite old, as long as they are willing to learn, trans-generational education can still be healthy and productive. They suggest that the grandparents should coordinate with the young parents--their children--to share the responsibility of family education, and it is better for them to take the lead in promoting the traditional Chinese family virtues in order to build a harmonious family (Feng & Yanhua, 2014).

Using empirical data from four junior high schools in Guangdong since 2013, Luo Feng and Cai Jinhua (2015) analyze the education background, lifestyle, interpersonal relationship, and rearing ideology of family members from the sample cases. They argue that trans-generational education has become the "new normal" of family life for urban and rural residents in Guangdong, and it is urgent for the government to provide support and guidance to make sure that the trans-generational rearing can be healthy for growth of young children (Feng & Jinhua, 2015).

## **5. Studies on the Strategies for Improving Trans-generational Education**

A number of scholars in recent years try to find out the best ways for kindergarten to optimize the trans-generational education in particular. Because most young kids spend most of their time with their grandparents before they enter the compulsory education stage. Grandparents involve highly in caring and upbringing the children during their childhood. Among the scholars, Wang Huiying (2013) believes that teaching staffs in the kindergarten should build up good relationship with the grandparents of the children so that they can feel being respected and honored. She argues that grandparents can do better in learning new things if they feel respected and honored. Kindergartens also need to mobilize the grandparents in display their advantages and provide opportunities for them to help teaching the children (Huiying, 2013).

Wang Lei (2015) believes that kindergartens can try to set up a "trans-generational education information station," which can regularly update new information and rearing tips for the grandparents and provide counseling for those families in need. Kindergartens can also help to organize parents' associations, where families can help each other mutually (Lei, 2015).

Ma Lan (2015) observes that there is an inconsistency between the educational ideas of kindergarten and the rearing patterns of grandparents. There is a lack of effective communication, and efficient cooperation between

the two, so he suggests that kindergartens should understand the inconsistency and try all means to make the two become more consistent in rearing and teaching children (Lan, 2015).

Cao Wen (2019) thinks that the basic strategies for kindergartens to help more grandparents to improve their rearing of children include targeted strategies, emotional strategies, local strategies and indirect communication strategies. The guiding methods for them should be varied, including menu-based guidance, off-level interactive guidance, parent-child interaction guidance and so on (Wen, 2019).

Tang Chunhua (2019) believes that schools should provide a platform for grandparents to participate in the practice of school education, including inviting some experienced grandparents to serve as teaching assistants, course counselors, campus security guard and so on. Schools can carry out some home-based curriculum with the help of the grandparents, including traditional handcraft making, folk games playing, etc., so that the trans-generational education at home can be consistent with the teaching activities at school (Chunhua, 2019).

Chen Ling (2019) also thinks that inviting grandparents to be teaching assistants for kindergartens is a very practical way to improve trans-generational education. In order to maintain good effects, certain regulations and supporting facilities are needed. It is recommended that the kindergartens can enforce a selective and evaluation system to ensure the quality of the grandparents' performance (Ling, 2019).

## **6. Analysis of the Trans-generational Education for Rural Left-behind Children**

By the end of August 2018, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has conducted another mapping survey of children left behind in rural areas across the country. It was found that the total number of rural left-behind children reached 6.97 million in 2018. According to the survey, 96% of the rural left-behind children are in the custody of their grandparents or relatives, so the trans-generational education in the rural areas has become the research focus of many scholars.

Duan Qiaoyu (2017) holds the opinion that the new generation of rural left-behind children is facing the dilemma of parent-child separation, family education disorder, the weakening of parental authority, the serious phenomenon of irrational indulgence and so on. And the grandparents, who share the rearing and teaching responsibilities, often feel powerless and insufficient in dealing with the problems of left-behind children. The author suggests that "left-behind" children should be transformed into "mobile" children, which means that young children should follow their parents to migration from the countryside into town. But this can only be done with the modification of the Chinese household system (Qianyu, 2017).

Zhang Yue and Zhang Aiqin (2019) look into the problems of trans-generational education in the background of China's new policy of "targeted measures in poverty alleviation." They suggest that the situation of the rural left-behind children should be accurately identified, and that "emotional poverty alleviation," "moral poverty alleviation" and "economic poverty alleviation" should be realized. To this end, they suggest that the government should set up observers, who are responsible for dealing with the problems of rural left-behind children and organizing communities to help those children in need (Yue & Aiqin, 2019).

Studying 365 rural left-behind and non-left-behind children in Guangxi Autonomous Region with the Zhuang minority group living there, Hou Limin et al. (2019) find that the behavioral problems of left-behind children are more prominent than that of non-left-behind children, and that the behavioral problems of the left-behind children in the countryside has a strong correlation with the style of their grandparents' rearing and educational patterns. The study shows that democratic practice in parenting behavior is the protective factor for the left-behind children, and verbally hostile parenting behavior is the risk factor for the left-behind children. The increase in the intimacy of kindergarten teacher-child relationship will improve the behavior of young children, and the positive teacher-student relationship will enhance the child's sense of security and self-confidence (Limin, Lanlan & Huiyuan, 2019).

Xiong Xiulan and Liu Zhaoyang (2019), taking Huning County in Anhui Province as an example, find that grandparents are more concerned with the physically needs of their grandparents than other needs, particularly overlooking their emotional and psychological needs. Based on the strategic opportunity of "rural revitalization" in China, the author puts forward the composite education model of "grandparents- exotic helps- schools," in which "exotic helps" refer to the state-supported teaching volunteers and resources (Xiulan & Xhaoyang, 2019).

### **7. The Studies on the Inter-generational Differences of Rearing Children**

Compared with the previous decade's research on trans-generational education, the research in the last seven years is less about the cause and effects or type study, but more about the differences of rearing beliefs and behaviors between grandparents and parents.

Regarding the inter-generational differences in rearing children, Luo Feng (2015) conducts a survey on the parent-child education and trans-generational education of students in four primary secondary schools in Henan and Guangdong provinces. The study finds young parents score higher on kinship relations, educational concepts, educational content and educational methods, and are better than their older generation on the whole. However, for the aspect of the educational goals, they are quite close. The existence of educational differences between parents and grandparents is inevitable, so it is suggested that we had better coordinate these two and carry forward the excellent family virtues of the Chinese nation (Feng, 2015).

Chen Hong et al. (2019) believe that the parents and grandparents differ greatly in their ideas about rearing and education, but they are quite the same in performance of controlling their emotions and dealing with conflicts. Therefore, it is suggested that both these two rearing generations should learn how to control their emotions and increase their capabilities in dealing with interpersonal conflicts (Hong & Ting, 2019).

### **8. Other Topics**

Other studies are more microscopic, focusing on a particular aspect of young children related to trans-generational education. Wu Xiaofei (2013) is interested in the role of Chinese traditional folk games in helping grandparents to rear the young children. The author believes that some traditional folk games, such as "itching," "scratching bag game," "chicken fighting game" and so on, can reduce the burden of the grandparents to look after the children, enhance the physical quality of both young children and grandparents, and moderate the relationship between the grandparents and the grandchildren (Xiaofei, 2013).

Agreeing with Wu's conclusion, Qian Xiaohong (2013) also thinks some traditional Chinese art forms and handicrafts, taking paper-cutting as the example, if introduced into the trans-generational rearing and education, can achieve the goals of training young children to be more creative, more curious for knowledge and more agile (Xiaohong, 2013).

Hong Jijia (2013) holds the opinion that in early childhood education, it is a very effective educational strategy to provide children pastoral life experiences. The author thinks that most of the grandparents in the countryside have rich experiences in pastoral life and they can help the young children to honor nature and build up a sense of awe for nature, which is important in building up their character of humility (Jijia, 2013).

Zhang Lan (2015) specially studies the problem of feeding young children in trans-generational rearing families. She believes that feeding is an very important part of a young child's daily life. The feeding directly affects the physical development of young children; however, most children under the care of grandparents have the problem of weak hands-on ability and high reliance on their grandparents in eating. The author suggests that schools and communities should help the elderly to teach children how to sit and use spoon for food properly so that they can cultivate a good eating habit, which will have a life-long impact on them (Lan, 2015).

## 9. Conclusion

According to the literature review done by Duan Feiyan et al. (2012), the research on trans-generational education during the years of 2002 to 2012 was mainly about the causes and effects of trans-generational education, the different types and expressions of trans-generational education, and the pros and cons of trans-generational education. (Feiyan & Jing, 2012) Quite different from the previous research and studies, the trans-generational rearing and education research for the past 7 years are centralized on the strategies and methods to improve the quality of trans-generational rearing and education. More attention is also attached to the left-behind children from rural areas. But from the above review, we can see that more detailed and practical studies on dealing with the problems of trans-generational rearing and education are needed in the coming future.

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