

Grandparenting and “other” Children’s Support in Rural China

Zhen Cong
Human Development and Family Studies
Texas Tech University

Merril Silverstein

Davis School of Gerontology
University of Southern California

Shuzhuo Li

Xian Jiaotong University

Abstract

This investigation examines how siblings adjust their support to their older parents based on their parents' efforts to provide child care, not only for themselves, but also for other siblings in rural China. The data were from a two-wave (2001, 2003) longitudinal study of 4,531 parent-child dyads from 1,275 parents, aged 60 and older, living in rural areas of Anhui Province, China. Random effects regression analysis showed that providing child care increased financial support from daughters and emotional support from sons. Daughters reduced their financial support if their parents increased child care efforts for other siblings, whereas sons' financial contributions were not influenced. Emotional support from sons was strengthened when their parents provided more child care to other siblings, while emotional support from daughters was not influenced. We suggest taking a gendered extended family perspective in intergenerational relationship research.

Introduction

In rural China, elders in most areas did not have a formal support safety net and more than two thirds of them depended exclusively on their children for support (Joseph & Phillips, 1999; Lee & Xiao, 1998; Shi, 1993; Zimmer & Kwong, 2003). Both financial and emotional support from children is important for Chinese elders, particularly because of the cultural enthusiasm about filial piety. It was found that they reduce elders' depression, increase their morale and reduce their mortality (Chen & Silverstein, 2000; Silverstein, Cong, & Li, 2006). The support not only provides material relief, but also a sense of security and hope to get support when needs arises.

Elders are not only a receiver of support, they are also providers. It was found that financial support received based on the reciprocity brings higher level of psychological satisfaction (Cong & Silverstein, 2008a). The intergenerational relationships in current China resembled a bidirectional reciprocal relationship instead of a unidirectional upward flow of resources from children to older parents as endorsed by Confucianism (Sung, 1998). Important predictors for financial support from adult children were parents' recent and continuing assistance to children, including providing care for grandchildren and maintaining households to promote children's economic capacity, as well as providing financial resources when children were married or had other needs (Chen, 2001; Liang, Gu, & Krause, 1992; Yan, Chen, & Yang, 2003; Zhang, 2005).

Migration

This investigation examines how siblings adjust their financial transfers to their older parents based on their parents' efforts to provide child care, not only for themselves, but also for other siblings in rural China. Interactions between a parent and a child cannot be isolated from interactions between the parent and the siblings of that child (Checkovich & Stern, 2002; Engers

& Stern, 2002; Pezzin, Pollak, & Schone, 2006). Dyadic parent-child relationship is only one part of the network of interactions in an extended family. The current cohort of elders in rural China on average have 4 children (China Research Center on Aging, 2003). This brings great potential to study how children respond to parents' exchanges with other siblings.

Background

Grandchildren care and support to parents: financial and emotional

In China, particularly rural China, grandchildren care is a valuable resource that older parents can provide because of the scarcity and expenses of child care services in rural China (Secondi, 1997; Sun, 2002; Yang, 1996a). The large scale labor force migration from rural to urban China lead to increased reliance on grandparents providing child care (Silverstein et al., 2006). Rural migrants also had high demands for child care because they were faced with great barriers to bringing their children with them, which included their temporary status in cities caused by “Hukou” (i.e., household registration system, which separated rural and urban areas), and its related barriers such as temporary housing, segregated labor market and occupational opportunities, and difficulties in obtaining low cost child care (Bai & Song, 2002; Li & Zahniser, 2002; Wang & Fan, 2006). Consequently, about 20% of elders in rural areas with high migration rates lived in skipped-generation households, taking the full custody of grandchildren, even though grandparents in China traditionally were not obliged to take primary responsibilities for the care of grandchildren (Chao, 1983; Secondi, 1997; Silverstein et al., 2006).

It was found that financial support is provided in exchange for parents' efforts in child care (Lee & Xiao, 1998; Shi, 1993; Sun, 2002; Yang, 1996a), which is interpreted as the “time-for-money” exchanges that parents provided childcare to the families of their adult children, in exchange for transfers of money or food (Frankenberg, Lillard, & Willis, 2002).

Even with lack of empirical findings, more interactions, and gratitude usually suggest enhanced emotional closeness when parents are taking care of children's kids. However, no study has addressed how children's financial and emotional support to parents are influenced when parent providing child care to other children.

Interactions in an extended family

Interactions between a parent and a child cannot be isolated from interactions between that parent and the siblings of that child, and the interactions among all the children; for example, Checkovich & Stern (2002) shows that the care provided by siblings is correlated with each other. Enger (2002) shows that when there are daughters providing care, siblings will reduce their provision of care, and Pezzin and his colleagues (2006) conceptualizes the decision of parents' living arrangements and the consequent care allocation as a two-stage game involving an elder parent and two children, and illustrates that the living arrangement and care provided by each child is a joint decision by family members with different preferences and facing different constraints.

In China, because of the strong filial expectation culture, every child is expected to provide for the parents. This expectation may vary based on children's gender, resources and their family situations. But the expectations from the parents and the felt obligations are widely observed as norm. Children's different status forms the basis for them to negotiate their responsibilities toward their parents. A recent study by Cong & Silverstein (2008) explains how children of different migration status respond to parents' help in different ways.

Relationship among different dimensions of support:

Children provide various kinds of support. The relationship of the support has not been clarified. Support may substitute each other, and support can reflect family norms. In the

substitution cases, children who provide higher level of support in one dimension will provide less support in other dimensions, as found by Bian (1998) that children who provide instrumental support will refrain from providing financial support. In the complement situation, children who provide higher level of support in one dimension will provide more support in another dimension. Intergenerational solidarity model predicts that various dimensions of support are positively related. The corporate model will argue for the opposite (Bian, 1998).

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is an important rule observed in Chinese families. Therefore, it is more likely for parents who provide more support receive more support.

Corporate group hypothesis:

The corporate group /mutual aid model explained the short and long term transfers between parents and children from the perspective of reciprocity (Lee and Xiao 1998). It explained intergenerational exchanges as motivated either by long-term arrangements that maximized the family's well-being, e.g. parents invested in children's education and children were expected to pay back in the future to provide for their parents' old age, or by short-term exchanges that benefited each side.

There are two competing hypotheses:

Support alienation:

Some studies show that grandparents who take care of grandchildren devote more time to caring for grandchildren and therefore may reluctantly reduce their social contact and alienate their friends because they may have less common things to share with those who do not take this responsibility (Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, & Merriwether-deVries, 1995; Jendrek, 1993).

In rural China, when grandparenting stimulates support from children who are parents of

grandchildren, it may emaciate support from other children.

First, adult children in China usually provide for their parents based on their parents' needs (Lee & Xiao, 1998; Li, Feldman, & Jin, 2004; Sun, 2002). When grandparents receive more financial support from grandchildren's parents, it is possible that other siblings refrain from providing more to their parents, based on the idea that their parents have received sufficient financial support, just like the "crowding out" effect of public transfers on private transfers (McGarry & Schoeni, 1995).

Second, adult children in China also provide for their parents following the principle of reciprocity, therefore grandchildren care would be an important leverage to shift commitments to parents among siblings (Lee & Xiao, 1998; Sun, 2004). Caring for grandchildren is an important part of intergenerational commitment, consequently children who do not receive that are less obliged to provide for their elder parents (Chen, 2001; Yang, 1996a).

Additionally, when grandparents have to devote more time to caring job, they have to refrain from providing household work or other help to their other children, which may reduce other children's financial support at the same time based on the principle of reciprocity (Shi, 1993; Yang, 1996a).

Support mobilization:

However, caring for grandchildren may also mobilize support. For instance, Szinovasz et al. (1999) have found that taking grandparenting role reduces grandparents' church attendance, but mobilizes support from friends and relatives. Chinese families are hypothesized to follow the corporate group model, which emphasizes each member's contributions to the prosperity of the whole family following the principle of reciprocity (Lee & Xiao, 1998). If the "corporate/mutual

aid” model was applicable within an extended family, children may increase their support when their parents are in need of resources when providing child care to other siblings.

In different cultures, whether the complement or substitute works is different. A study shows that sibling caregiver networks have different effects concerning how siblings coordinate their support to parents, for example, a bigger sibling caregiver network is associated with more IADL support and less financial support from each child in White families; whereas, it is associated with reduced IADL support from each child in African American families (White-Means, 2008). We suspect in Chinese culture, because of the patrilineal family practice, sons and daughters may follow different roles to either complement or substitute their siblings’ support.

Gender

In rural China, the patrilineal tradition have distinguished sons and daughters as different sources of support (Cong & Silverstein, 2008b). The emphasis on the family name reproduction is an important reason for son preference in patrilineal family system (Feldman, Tuljapurkar, Li, Jin, & Li, 2007). Because sons are more likely to regard their brothers’ children (their nephew/niece) as a part of their own family, we can expect that sons will devote more resources to their brothers’ children when called upon (Chao, 1983). Grandchildren care itself has an implied meaning for fostering intergenerational bonds and extending the heritage (Chen, Short, & Entwistle, 2000). Particularly because grandparenting care usually is oriented toward sons’ children, the care for grandchildren may become part of the extended family obligations for sons instead of daughters (Yang, 2004).

Studies on Chinese elders and U.S. elders show consistently that sons tend to provide based on obligations, and daughters are more likely to provide based on love, attachment and parents’ needs (Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995). When parents get compensation from the parents

of those grandchildren, daughters may feel less motivation to provide support, particularly financial support.

In addition, it was suggested that in China daughters' support to parents usually are more prone to short-term exchanges because theoretically they are not defined as family members in traditional patrilineal families; while sons' support to parents are more likely to be long-term exchanges based on filial piety and family obligations (Yang, 1996).

Therefore, we asked two research questions in this paper:

1. How will financial and emotional support from children change when their parents change the contributions to their other children in child care?
2. How do sons and daughters differ in this process?

Methods:

Sample

The sample for this investigation was derived from the Anhui Province of China, a mostly rural province and the fifth most populous province in China. Currently, 12% of the rural population is 60 years of age and older (compared to only 8.5% of the nation) making it one of the most elderly provinces in China. This region was chosen specifically for its relatively high density of older adults and high levels of out-migration of working age adults. Between 1995 and 2000, Anhui Province had the third highest rate of out-migration among all provinces in China, and a higher than average rate of labor-related migration. Data were collected from a sample of adults age 60 and over living in rural townships within Chaohu, a city of 4.5 million people located on the north bank of the Yangtze River in the central part of Anhui Province. This rural area of the province is generally known for its high rates of labor migration to the cities of Hefei,

Nanjing, and Shanghai.

The sample was identified using a stratified multistage method to randomly select 1,800 potential respondents. First, 12 rural townships were randomly selected from all 126 townships in Chaohu. Second, 6 administrative villages were randomly selected in each township. Third, within each selected village, all people aged 60 and older were stratified to form two sampling frames based on age: (1) those aged 60-74, and (2) those 75 and above, providing an intentional over-sample of the 75+ population. Of 1,800 individuals randomly selected for the study, 1,715 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 95.3%. In October 2003 the follow-up survey was conducted with 1,368 respondents, or 79.8% of the original participants. Mortality is the major reason for attrition. After deleting those with missing values in relevant variables, we have 1,275 elderly who participated in both wave of interviews and had at least one living child. Altogether, these elders have 4,531 corresponding children in the working sample.

Dependent variable

Financial transfers from children in the second wave were based on the total amount of money that the parent received from each child during the past 12 months. Respondents (parents) were asked to provide the exact amount of money first, and if they could not give a exact number, they were asked to choose among the following categories based on Chinese RMB currency (100 RMB = \$12US): 0= “none”, 1= “less than 50”, 2= “50-99”, 3= “100 -199”, 4= “200-499”, 5= “500-999”, 6= “1000-2999”, 7= “3000- 4999”, 8= “5000 to 9999”, 9= “More than 10,000”. In the analysis, we took the actual amount if it was available and then used the median amount of the category if the exact amount was not supplied. Then each category correspond to 0=0, 1=25, 2=75, 3=150, 4=350, 5=750, 6=2000, 7=4000, 8=7500, 9=10,000. Then we its log transformation ($\log+1$) to adjust its distribution. To minimizing the risk of endogeneity, we

controlled for first wave financial support from children, which was measured in the same way as second wave financial support from children. In this way, coefficients of other variables in the model indicated their effects on residualized change in financial changes from children between waves.

Independent variables

The variable measuring the frequency of providing care for grandchildren in both waves ranges from 0 to 6. The values of these variables were defined as follows: 0= “not taking care of grandchildren”, 1= “seldom”, 2= “about once a month”, 3= “several times a month”, 4= “at least once a week”, 5= “A period of a day (not the whole day)”, 6= “The whole day, from morning to evening.” We included variables representing baseline level grandchildren care and change in care for grandchildren between the two waves. This approach minimized the risk of endogeneity in the event that financial support from children encouraged parents to provide grandchildren care.

Changes in the amount of child care that other siblings’ received from the parent was measured as the differences in the total amount of child care other siblings received at baseline and in the second wave.

We controlled for important parents’ characteristics and children’s characteristics, which were shown to influence financial transfers between them (Li et al., 2004; Liu & Reilly, 2004; Shi, 1993). Parents’ characteristics at baseline included age in chronological years, number of children, and dummy variables for gender (1 = female), marital status (1 = married), education (1 = some formal education), and occupation (1 = agricultural work). In addition, parents’ health status was measured as the extent of functional impairments, calculated as the sum of 15 items reflecting difficulties in performing personal activities of daily living, instrumental activities of daily living and activities requiring physical strength, mobility, and flexibility. Respondents

indicated the level of difficulty performing each task: 0 (no difficulty), 1 (some difficulty), or 2 (cannot do it without help). Because these items had high reliability ($\alpha = .96$), we calculated a summed scale that ranged from 0 (no difficulties) to 30 (unable to perform all tasks). Income was measured as the logged RMB value of the total annual income of respondent and spouse from work or pension (+1).

Children's characteristics at baseline included their age, gender, education, and marital status. Age was represented as age in years at the time the survey was carried out. Gender was coded as 1 = "female"; marital status as 1 = "currently married"; education as 0 = "no education", 1 = "primary school", 2 = "junior middle school", 3 = "senior middle school, vocational training, college, university or above".

We also controlled for the baseline instrumental support to children since parents' instrumental support had also shown to induce financial pay back from children (Li et al., 2004; Sun, 2002). Parents' instrumental support to each child was measured by a dummy variable with 1 meaning that the parent gave this child and/or the spouse of this child any help during the past 12 months in two areas: (1) household tasks, such as cleaning the house and washing clothes, and (2) personal care tasks such as bathing and dressing. Similarly we controlled for financial transfers to children at baseline, which was measured similarly as financial transfers to children.

In addition, we controlled for children's help to parents in farm labor and instrumental support in the second wave to avoid the confounding effects that might result when parents' previous help was reciprocated by children in farm labor and instrumental help, and when children who gave money were also those who gave time because they had stronger instilled filial piety norms (Altonji, Hayashi, & Kotlikoff, 2000; Lee, Netzer, & Coward, 1994).

Children's instrumental support to their parents was measured in a similar dummy variable with

1 meaning that the parent received any of the two dimensions of help from a child and the spouse of this child during the past 12 months. Children's farm labor help was measured also as a dummy variable with 1 meaning this child gave any farm labor help to the parent during the past 12 months.

Model

We used Stata to estimate the random effects model with parents' characteristics as well as children's characteristics in the model to examine children's financial support to their parents conditional on parents' help in providing grandchildren care to themselves and to other siblings. We did the analysis for sons and daughters separately.

Results

As shown in Table 1, we showed 4 models for financial and emotional support to parents conditioned on the amount of grandchildren care parents provided. We found that providing child care increased financial support from daughters and emotional support from sons.

Concerning the influence of parents' changes in child care efforts for other siblings, we found that sons' financial contributions to their parents were not influenced by their parents' changes in child care efforts for other siblings; whereas daughters reduced their financial support if their parents increased child care efforts for other siblings. We also found that emotional support from sons was strengthened when their parents provided more grandchild care to other siblings, and emotional support from daughters were not influenced.

Discussion

This study examines how grandchildren are influence financial and emotional support from sons and daughters. Our findings of sons and daughters' different responses to their parents'

help in child care are consistent with previous findings that sons did not, while daughters did reciprocate their parents' efforts in child care, possibly because daughters' exchanges with parents were more short-term oriented (Yang, 1996b).

We also find that various dimensions of support are positively related. This brings some doubt about the substitution perspective. The reason for this positive relationship may come from the focus children practice in Chinese families, where a child is expected to be the major person to take care of elder parents. Although other children also contribute, not everyone has equal relationship with their parents. Within extended families, there is always deviation in their financial contributions and emotional closeness (Silverstein et al., 2006). Despite of this, siblings' support is interdependent of each other. This is not to deny the existence of any of them. Just to reveal how different mechanism in the extended family will function to form the observed financial distribution.

In addition, the most important contribution of this investigation is to bring up the importance of taking a gendered extended family perspective when studying intergenerational exchanges in rural China. Support from sons and daughters were influenced by elder parents' child care efforts provided to other siblings. However, sons and daughters respond in different ways. Although daughters reduced their money support as a consequence of parent's increased child care support to other siblings, sons strengthened their emotional bonds with their parents under this circumstance. Grandchildren in rural China are more likely to receive care from their paternal grandparents. The efforts to maintain the family lineage may also involve male members in the family to show their concerns about the well-being of his nephew/niece. Silverstein et al. (2006) has shown that grandparents receive money as a compensation for their effort in taking care of grandchildren. Consequently, they may in a better financial situation which requires less

contribution from daughters.

The motivation of children's providing financial support is another important topic. It is possible that daughters provide based on parents' need, which is sensitive to the support parents received from other siblings; whereas sons are more obligation oriented, consequently their support is less sensitive to the support their parents received from other siblings. Their obligations to their natal family strengthen their emotional attachment to their parents, possibly because of their increased involvement in the grandparenting efforts.

Whether the rule of substitution or extended cooperate model applies is conditional on the gender of the children. When labor force migration from rural to urban area increased demand of grandparents to provide child care for their migrant children (Silverstein et al., 2006), how the whole family respond to it is an important but ignored topic.

Recently, more and more researchers have addressed the importance of taking a network family perspective, e.g., Ward (2008) brought up the complexity of how support from multiple children contributes to parents' well-being. When global aging has brought many challenges to continuing reliable support for the elderly, the family support has become more and more important (Bengtson, Lowerstein, Putney, & Gans, 2003). Consequently, the cooperation and coordination among siblings to provide for their elder parents would be an important policy related question.

Although we acknowledge the importance of taking a network approach to study extended families, our data lacked measures of direct exchanges and negotiations among male siblings that might have structured the geographic distribution of siblings; for example, migrant sons may have provided compensation to their brothers to stay in their villages and assume responsibility

to take care of their parents. Examining side-transfers among siblings will likely expand the explanatory purview of our conclusions.

In China, as well as in other rapidly developing nations with traditional values toward filial responsibility, intergenerational exchanges are carried out within extended families. Moving from a dyadic to a more extended-family approach will increase our understanding of how older parents and their adult children make residential choices and coordinate their activities in ways that are isomorphic with current economic imperatives, adjust to new demographic realities, and fit comfortably within cultural constraints.

Table 1 *Random Effects Models Predicting T2 Financial Transfers and Emotional Support from Adult Children to Their Older Parents*

	Financial support		Emotional support	
	Model 1 2072/1010 (Sons)	Model 2 1949/959 (Daughters)	Model 3 2072/1010 (Sons)	Model 4 1949/959 (Daughters)
Constant	1.159	2.595***	1.406*	3.309***
Baseline emotional support			0.226***	0.163***
Baseline financial transfers from children (ln+1)	0.298***	0.259***		
Parents' characteristics				
Age	0.001	-0.006	0.007	-0.003
Female	-0.099	-0.053	0.223*	0.196*
Married	-0.100	0.060	-0.119	-0.029
Education	0.036	-0.064	0.273*	0.277**
Income	-0.033	-0.032*	0.036*	-0.009
Occupation	-0.223	-0.121	0.210	-0.046
Functional limitations	-0.001	-0.006	0.003	-0.009
Number of children	0.069+	-0.014	0.034	0.003
Children's characteristics				
Age	0.004	-0.009	-0.001	0.002
Married	0.177	0.291+	-0.122	-0.227+
Education	0.177***	0.085+	0.022	0.060+
<i>Support to parents</i>				
Emotional support (T2)	0.359***	0.342***		
Financial support (T2)			0.154***	0.174***
Farm labor help (T2)	0.015	-0.069	-0.007	0.196**
Instrumental help (T2)	0.326**	0.085	0.510***	0.397***
<i>Support from parents</i>				
Instrumental help (T1)	0.144	0.180	0.094	0.087
Financial support (ln+1)	0.016	-0.003	0.036*	0.016
Child care (T1)	0.043	0.080*	0.043*	-0.020
Change in child care	0.012	0.141***	0.048**	-0.017
<i>Parents' changes in child care for other siblings</i>	-0.006	-0.029*	0.029**	0.008
Wald chi2	526.290***	397.490***	495.500***	328.49***
Level 2 variance	2.146	0.925	1.145	1.014

Intra class correlation	0.484***	0.360***	0.551***	0.610***
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+p < 0.1 *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001

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