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“Their happiness is my happiness”--- Chinese visiting grandparents grandparenting in the US

Mengxin(Christie) Zhu

Abstract

Purpose of the study: This article focuses on Chinese visiting grandparents who come to the US to help their adult children who are in graduate school care for the grandchild/ren. The aims were to determine: 1) what motivates them to come to the US, 2) what are the challenges and supports of life in the US, and 3) the implications of their experience in the US as caregivers for their well-being.

Design and Methods: The study uses a mixed-method design. Data were collected with quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. 35 grandparents living near Yale University, New Haven were surveyed and 13 of them completed in-depth interviews.

Results: The grandparents in this sample were motivated to come to the US by their sense of obligation and concern for the offspring’s well-being and success. The biggest challenges they face are demands from obligations, and isolation due to the language barrier, the built environment, and disconnection to social support. Spouses and the Chinese community are two main sources of support for grandparents. They enjoy living together with their offspring, however, they express “doing their time” in the US. Their happiness and hope for life is the happiness and bright future of the offspring.

Implications: Our findings suggest developing and implementing culturally sensitive ways that policy makers or relevant organizations could help to support the Chinese visiting grandparents and their offspring in the US.

Key Words: Chinese visiting grandparents, Familism, Well-being

Introduction

Chinese graduate students and fellows are increasingly coming to the US to pursue educational and career development opportunities (Okahana & Allum, 2015). Many bring their young children or give birth during their stay in the US. Thus, caring for children becomes a challenge because most of the couples have in common—academic demands, two-career marriages, and long hours at work (Shufro, 2015). Most of them invite their older adult parents to come to the US to help instead of using expensive daycare or sending babies back to China. Although grandparents’ active involvement undoubtedly brings numerous benefits to their adult children and grandchildren alike, its implications for grandparents’ well-being are far less clear. To our knowledge, there is no existing academic research on this population. Our study aims to fill this gap to explore what life is like for these Chinese visiting grandparents living in a foreign country, what are some possible challenges they face (e.g., loneliness, homesickness, cultural gaps) and what are some resources they could rely on (e.g. from family or from the society). Further, we look at the implications of their experiences in the US for their physical and psychological well-being.

Chinese Grandparents

For centuries, the family and kin system has functioned as the cornerstone of all types of support in China. Familism, a family-centered worldview (Rappa & Tan, 2003),

is rooted in the core of Confucian culture and provides a strong normative legitimacy for intergenerational ties (Chen & Liu, 2012). Filial piety is expected in familism. However, the concept of filial piety, which historically emphasized the responsibility of children for parents-upstream intergenerational support, is now balanced with reciprocal or unconditional support from aging parents-downstream intergenerational support (Chen, Liu, & Mair, 2011). Grandparents caring for grandchildren has become increasingly common in both urban and rural China, which reflects the strong tie between parents and adult children historically and a strong cultural emphasis on familism (Chen et al., 2011).

Chinese grandparents step in not only as a result of cultural expectation but also to provide instrumental support to their offspring in the current context of fierce competition and economic pressures. Statistics show that China has the highest female employment rate in Asia. Starting in the early 1980s, more and more young parents seek employment in better places and leave their children back home with grandparents (Silverstein, Cong, & Li, 2006). The one-child policy which began in the 1970s serves as another reason for the significant shift in family hierarchy in Chinese intergenerational households. A four-two-one structure (four grandparents, two parents, one child) extends parental indulgence, a combination of low demandingness and high emotional responsiveness, especially among the well-educated population (Chuang, 2009; Zhan, 2004). Parents nowadays are largely influenced by the one-child policy relying on grandparents to raise their grandchildren, prepare meals, and do house cleaning (Goh & Kuczynski, 2010; Goh, 2009).

Grandparenting is a way to participate in family happiness, maintain emotional closeness, and nurture a stronger sense of filial obligation in the family (Goh, 2009). But its influence on Chinese grandparents' well-being is inconclusive. Theorists indirectly suggest that engaging with a younger generation might help with older parents' sense of meaning in later life (Byers et al., 2008). However, Lo and Liu (2009) found that more than half of Chinese grandparent caregivers reported psychological distress (or caregiving burden), even though most received help from other family members. Another study showed Chinese grandparents experiencing childcare as mentally and physically exhausting (Goh, 2006). A recent study (Chen et al., 2011) using Chinese Health and Nutrition Survey 1991-2006 found that caregiving didn't have a universally beneficial or detrimental effect on grandparents' health. Its effect depended on the form and level of caregiving and was further shaped by individual characteristics, as well as normative and structural contexts. Co-residing grandparents experienced a slightly more rapid health decline than older adults who live independently, which may serve as an indication that there are tension between parents and grandparents. Among the co-residing grandparents, high intensity care for younger grandchildren accelerated health declines, whereas a lighter level of care had a protective effect.

Chinese Grandparents in the US

Studies conducted in China are informative but have limited applicability to Chinese grandparents in the US. The population addressed here faces unique challenges, including negative role status changes in employment, communication difficulties (language barrier), changes in environments and lifestyles from their home country, and dependency on their adult children to navigate within an English-speaking country (Segal, 2002). One qualitative study focused on Chinese grandparents who have stayed in the US for 4 years on average (Chen & Lewis, 2015). In this study, all participated grandparents and adult children reported grandparents' involvement in parenting practices as positive or

supportive, indicating a positive relationship between grandparents' involvement and their family-defined well-being. Other qualitative studies focused on Chinese immigrant grandparents who have stayed for a long time. For example, one study explored the influence of Chinese culture on grandparenting experiences (e.g. their interactions with grandchildren) among 17 Chinese American grandmothers (17 years' average stay in the US) (Nagata et al., 2010). No study has focused on the Chinese visiting grandparents who are new to the US and examined how grandparenting experience relates to their well-being.

Research questions

We explored what motivates Chinese visiting grandparents to come to the US and what their experiences in the US look like as caregivers (both challenges and sources of support). We expect that this population may have different challenges and support from grandparents in China. Furthermore, we identified the health implications of their experiences in the US. We used a mixed-methods design. Quantitative surveys allowed us to systematically examine various aspects of grandparents' life in the US through questions about childcare/housework intensity, perceived caregiving physical/emotional strains, relationship with adult children, social engagement, life satisfaction and depressive symptom. Qualitative interviews enabled us to dig deeper into more subtle questions (e.g., challenges and supports to live in the US).

Design and Methods

Participants

Between August 2015 and January 2016, 35 Chinese visiting grandparents (from 23 households) in New Haven, CT completed the in-person close ended survey. Of these 35 participants, 13 participated in in-depth qualitative interviews. All participants had at least one grandchild (0-3 years). Most participants lived in Prospect Garden, New Haven; only a few lived in downtown New Haven, in East Rock, New Haven and in West Haven (near Yale West Campus). Participants were mainly referred by a postdoctoral student and a mother living in Prospect Garden, who served as the bridge between the author and the community.

Data Collection Procedures

Contemporaneous quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Surveys were taken under the guidance of the author; the author read each question and then grandparents answered; the author explained the question when needed. All interviews were guided by the principles of active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). All interviews took place at the participants' homes and were scheduled in advance. Most grandparents chose to be interviewed during the middle of the day when their grandchildren took a nap and when the adult children were absent. The author conducted all interviews in Chinese language after obtaining the participants' permission to audiotape the interviews. Interviews lasted around 40 minutes on average. All transcriptions were then translated into English. Participants for both close ended surveys and in-depth interviews were recruited after written consent was obtained. All research materials were approved by the Human Investigation Committee of the Yale University, New Haven, CT. Each survey

participant was entered into a raffle for a \$20 reward. And each interviewee was given \$20 cash.

Qualitative interview questions

The investigator used a protocol as a guide to elicit participants' responses to set questions. Interviews began with a broad question: "Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?" Additional open-ended questions addressed: 1) motives to come to the US; 2) past experiences in China; 3) likes and dislikes in the US; 4) rewards and challenges of grandparenting in the US; and 5) intergenerational relationships. Probes were used to encourage participants to clarify and elaborate on their statements as necessary. Each interview flowed differently as the investigator and the participant dynamically co-constructed the interview. The investigator followed the flow of conversation, changing the order of questions and asking additional questions when it makes sense to do so. However, the same interview protocol was followed for all interviews.

Quantitative questionnaire questions

Survey questions included 1) demographic characteristics for grandparents and their offspring; 2) grandparents' relationship satisfaction measured by the 5-item Bengtson Affective Solidarity index (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) where participants indicate how much they trust, understand, respect, feel affection toward, and feel the adult children are fair; 3) childcare/housework load using questions adapted from 2010 China Health and Nutrition Survey; 4) social engagement measured by asking a series of questions on frequency of participation in activities such as visits to public attractions; and 5) psychological well-being, which is indicated by (1) perceived caregiving physical and emotional strain (Monin, Levy, & Pietrzak, 2013), (2) life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), (3) depressive symptom using the 10-item version of Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). Survey questions that are not already available in Chinese were translated by the author who's bilingual.

Analysis

Survey data were summarized and used to supplement the interview data by allowing us to describe a larger sample of grandparents. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the author. We followed a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for our qualitative analysis. According to this approach, our analysis was an ongoing process that co-occurred with data collection. We wrote thematic summaries after each interview and wrote frequent memos about developing concepts throughout the data collection process. This allowed us to adapt our inquiries to incorporate emerging ideas. For example, specific questions about a community farm were added after it was repeatedly mentioned by the first few participants.

We used our memos and notes for preliminary open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and developed an initial code structure after in-depth review of the first few transcripts. And as additional transcripts were reviewed, we constantly compared sections with previously coded transcripts to ensure consistent assignment of codes to similar data. We continued the process of refining codes, and describing the properties and dimensions of each, until no new concepts emerged in subsequent transcripts. We then refined our initial code structure into a codebook that was used to code the remaining transcripts in

Microsoft. Coding was performed by the first author. All coded transcripts were reviewed by Keene and Monin.

The second phase of our analysis involved reviewing coded data to understand variation within categories and relationships between categories. Ultimately this process led to the development of a story about the Chinese grandparents' experience in U.S as caregivers.

Quantitative and qualitative data were compared only after the analysis was done for all participants. When the same questions were examined with the quantitative and qualitative data, divergence and convergence in the findings were explained. The mixed methods enable us to not only answer a broader range of research questions, but also answer questions more comprehensively.

Results

Characteristics of the sample

The characteristics of the 35 surveyed grandparents are shown in Table 1. Almost all grandchildren were born in the US. All adult children are Chinese and live in New Haven, except three fathers (One in Boston, MA, one in Washington, DC and one unknown because the grandparents did not know the name of the place). Adult children are mostly Yale graduate students, research assistants, and visiting scholars. 10 out of 23 mothers stay at home. Among them, 7 were primary care providers, the rest were preparing for further study. The average length of the parents' stay in the US was three years.

Findings

1. Motivations for grandparents to come and stay as caregivers

Although in contemporary China, it is common for grandparents to play a major caregiving role, going to a new country to help care for their grandchildren is still challenging. No grandparents in our study volunteered to come to the US but were asked by their children to come. Recurring quotes such as "I don't want to come. I have no choice" also suggested that their coming was a complicated decision. Our qualitative interviews suggest that sense of obligation and concern for the well-being of their offspring played an important role in ultimately motivating participants to come.

A sense of obligation. It is common for Chinese grandparents to share the idea that parents should provide substantial support for their adult children even after the children are married. The grandparents in this study felt obligated to provide child care (as well as housework) unless they had what they considered a legitimate excuse not to do so, such as their own employment or having major health problems. Relatively healthy, retired grandparents were not free from pressure to fulfill their child care responsibility even though it meant coming to a strange country and giving up their comfortable life back at home. As maternal grandmother B noted:

Yes, it is something you must do. It is a Chinese culture. We have a higher sense of responsibility for our offspring. I think Chinese old people care less about themselves.... There's no reason that we stay at home doing anything but to ease the burden of our hard-working kids.

Grandparents also described this pressure as related to social norms. Providing child care is something that expected from the family and society. Grandparents have to take on the responsibility, no matter how hard it can be, to fulfill their parental responsibility and to save face. It is a sense of obligation that grandparents feel both internally and from the outside world, like what's said by parental grandfather C:

...it's Chinese culture. Chinese people has a strong sense of family. And it's like a social norm. If you don't come to help care for the next generation, you will not only feel uncomfortable yourself, but also be gossiped by neighbors and other people.

No one wants to be the target of complaints or criticism. As suggested by maternal grandmother B: "Sometimes even if you want to have your own life, people will be talking behind your backs."

Concern for the offspring's well-being and success. Most grandparents perceived child care provision (and housework) in the US as a sacrifice motivated by love for the adult children. In the quantitative surveys, we used affective solidarity as the indicator of Grandparents' relationship satisfaction with adult children. Participants' high scores (how much they trust, understand, respect, feel affection toward, and feel the adult children are fair) indicated very positive sentiments. Recurring phrases throughout interviews such as "it's for the sake of my children" also indicated that the grandparents put a high priority on their adult children's needs. Maternal grandmother G share:

... I don't want to bother her (the granddaughter's) mom. I told her I'm not here to travel, I'm here to help care for the baby. I'm here to release their burden not to add more burden on them. So I told them not to worry about me, just take care of their own things, their study, their work, their small family, then I'm happy. Enough for me, you know.

The adult children were top students and they had left home working very hard honoring the family through social achievements. The adult parents, as foreign students/scholars, who haven't been in the US for a long time (3 years on average) have to navigate all the difficulties (e.g. cultural and language barriers) to find their position in the US. Seeing their children tired working makes the grandparents more willing to share the family burden, something that grandparents are able to do. Maternal grandmother B stated: "They've already been very tired. Helping them to raise their kids is the only thing we can do now as their parents." Maternal grandfather E also described:

It is very common for them to go to lab at weekends. On weekdays, they stay up until midnight. Both of them are like this. It is because that we see how busy and hardworking they are, we come to help them. If we didn't come, they can't handle all these, they have no one to turn to. If they have someone to turn to, we won't come.

Also, as top students in China, the adult children are always under the protection of their older parents. They only need to spent most of their time studying and their parents help them take care of everything else. As noted by maternal grandmother B:

... although my daughter doesn't have work, she has two kids and the older one is a little bit naughty, to be honest. So I'd rather figure out things by

myself and do the housework by myself. I never let her wash dishes or do other housework. You know, before coming here, she is always at school, being a student or a teacher. She's not used to do those things. Sometimes she's willing to help, but she can't do well. So, it's actually quicker and easier to do it by myself.

In addition to the concern for the adult children, participants described a very strong grandparental love for their grandchild/ren. Their narrative suggested that the distance between China and U.S. doesn't decrease the love, but instead make the love even more intense. Maternal grandmother G said:

When I'm back in China, I always feel sorry about this baby and her parents. They must be very lonely here without relatives. My poor baby, I always cry when I facetime with them from home.

2. Challenges for grandparents

Despite desire to help children and grandchildren, life in the US was not easy for Chinese visiting grandparents in this study. The major challenges identified from our interviews were 1) Demands associated with caregiving obligation 2) Isolation due to language barrier, the built environment and disconnection to the social support.

Demands from the obligation. Participants described caring for babies and doing housework as time consuming and difficult. As suggested by maternal grandmother I who came alone:

Every day from I get up until I go to sleep, it's all about the little kid. I have to keep an eye on him every minute, you know. I can only do housework or take shower when he sleeps or takes a nap.

Survey data also indicate that participants worked long hours in their roles as caretakers. Grandmothers spent 9.09h in childcare and 5.5h in housework per day, while grandfathers spent 4.92h and 3.55h, accordingly. The adult parents helped some with the child care while very little with the household chores due to their busy schedule. Grandmothers seemed to take on more childcare and housework responsibilities than grandfathers. But generally, grandparent participants of both genders cooked, cleaned, washed laundry, and provided childcare support.

Most grandparents in our study noted that they took direction from their children about caretaking even when this direction contradicted their own beliefs about child raising. As parental grandpa F said:

We don't have time to rest every day. Taking care of a baby nowadays is so tiring. When our son was little, we didn't feel so tiring. Everyone at that time takes care of baby in a simpler ways. I don't know why. Probably the standard is higher. People start to pay particular attention to every aspect of the baby. What can be eaten and what not by the baby, what is good for his development and what not. We didn't pay attention to these things at that time.

The fact that grandparents did not have full control over parenting practices added to their strain. One maternal grandfather J explained:

We are here to help them (adult children) take care of their kids. It's different from taking care of our own kids. You know, you have more responsibilities. You need to be more careful, make sure nothing goes wrong, you can never relax at least mentally for a moment.

Isolation due to language barrier. None of the grandparents we surveyed or interviewed spoke English. They spoke Mandarin or dialect Mandarin. The language barrier limits not only their communication with local people but also their mobility. Maternal grandmother A described:

Communication is definitely a big problem. I speak no English. I can't talk to people. I can only talk to my daughter, son-in-law, granddaughter or Chinese visiting grandparents like me. I can only go to the Hong Kong Market to buy food. When they take me to the big American supermarket, I can't read anything.

They had to depend a lot on their adult children if they wanted to communicate with the outside world or find something or someplace. As maternal grandmother B noted:

Back in my hometown, I can still go out by myself and hang out with my friends. Here, if going out with my daughter or son-in-law, I will follow them very closely. If not with them, I'll not go far because I'm afraid I will get lost. Doing grocery shopping is hard for me because I can't read the English label. Even finding a restroom can be a problem for me. Kind of like an idiot, haha! Yeah, it's the most challenging thing.

Isolation due to the built environment in New Haven. In New Haven, supermarkets or shopping malls are always disconnected with residential areas. People mostly rely on automobiles instead of public transportations in their daily life. However, in China, commercial and residential areas are always mixed; there's an intimate network of roads to encourage walking and active street life; and public transit networks are easily accessed. Such difference in built environment together with the language barrier worsen the grandparents' mobility in the US. Parental grandfather F stated the following:

I can't understand anything here. My mobility is very much limited. I don't know how to say it but compared to home, being here is like living in a very rural area. There's nowhere to go. Almost empty in the street, only trees. Back home, we can easily walk to big supermarkets or parks. Here, there's nothing, supermarkets are all far away, and you have to drive there.

Parental grandfather C shared that they had to rely on the adult children:

Back in my hometown... I can easily go to park or buy fresh vegetable or fish every day. Here, we have to wait for the baby's parents to take us and drive a long way to buy a whole week's food, not fresh.

Isolation due to lack of social network. Chinese grandparents who have spent almost all their life in China have all their social network back home, relatives, colleagues, friends, and so on. Coming to a new country temporarily makes their social network almost non-existent. Parental grandfather F said:

You know, we are in our sixties. It is impossible for us to make any social connections with foreigners. Our relatives, friends and colleagues are all in China. Here, we have no one to talk to.

However, grandparents who have different demographic characteristics and previous life experience may have different levels of change in social network and respond differently to this change. Urban grandfathers tend to have better occupation and larger social network back home, consistent with past research showing that urban and male elderly in China have better economic situation, social participation/integration and social support (Feng, 2012). Thus, urban grandparents experience a sharper decrease in social connection in the US. Urban maternal grandfather E who worked for the local government before retirement shared:

Back home, I have a lot of friends, colleagues, and all kinds of acquaintance, a big social network. Being here, it's totally different. The information you get is different. Although US has the most advanced social media, I can only get a little of the updated information because of the language barrier. In China, you get all kinds of information very easily from books, TVs, radios and newspapers.

Urban parental grandfather C who worked for the local environmental protection bureau before retirement described feeling depressed and constrained by isolation in the US.

Back in my hometown, I have a lot of colleagues and friends to hang out with. Since I'm now taking a so-called long term leave, I can still go back to work sometimes when I want to... Nowhere to go and not too many varieties of food. Sometimes I feel constrained in this small house, somewhat depressed.

However, rural grandmothers who were used to family chores rarely saw the decreasing of social network as a problem. For example, rural maternal grandmother B, who used to be a worker, discussed:

You know, for some people like me, we're used to work, work and work, especially manual work. It's a kind of way to keep us energetic and healthy as well. If one day we're told to stop, relax, and spend some time by ourselves, we will instead feel sick. Of course, if you're not used to do things like washing, cooking and raising kids back in China, you might get into trouble here. But for us, it's the same whether we do these things in China or in the US.

Grandmothers only mentioned “no one can help” and they are “kind of alone”, which makes caregiving in the US harder than in China. Back home with more relatives living near each other, it is easier to find someone to talk to or give a hand. They can also easily buy things and go to places they want.

Disconnection to resources. Grandparents also described being isolated from resources, and in particular health care. No grandparents surveyed and interviewed had health insurance in the US and their health insurance in China can't be used in the US. Only one

survey participant had seen a doctor for an emergency while staying in the US. Without health coverage, some participants asked their adult children to buy medicine for them. Others brought regular medication from China. Maternal grandmother G noted,

To be honest, being here, we can't or can't afford to see a doctor if feeling ill here. I remember that last year when I was here, I had a very bad toothache... I told my daughter and she went to buy some medicines for me.

3. Sources of support grandparents rely on in the US

Support from spouse. Most of the time the adult parents were away and busy with school or work. As parental grandfather C suggested: *"They are really busy and hardworking. There's not much time to interact with them actually."*

Despite the fact that the adult parents were absent from the family responsibility, grandparents have the belief that they should not disturb the adult children and should let them focus on their study or work ("the real productive thing"). Therefore, they do not share unhappiness with their children. Grandparents who came to the US together as a couple always expressed that they supported each other not only by sharing responsibilities in doing housework and childcare, as suggested by parental grandmother H: *"Originally I was to come by myself. But I told them I can't care for the granddaughter while doing all the housework. You need to keep an eye on the kid all the time. So grandfather comes together. He can cook";* but also emotionally, as suggested by maternal grandfather E: *"At home, we old couple support each other...Some may think that stay here is boring. For me, coming here together with my wife and taking care of the grandson, I don't feel very boring."* So, spouse support becomes a very important buffer in their life in U.S.

Maternal grandmother G, who was widowed and came alone, expressed her wish to have her husband beside to help her and talk with her:

Yes, of course there are hard times, to be honest. If my husband is still alive, I can talk to him. But now I'm a widow, sometimes I can't express my unhappiness to my kids. So I have to battle any unhappiness alone.

Support from the community. Most grandparents live in Prospect Garden, a community full of Chinese families. Grandparents living there come from different parts of China but for the same reason. Participants describe drawing on this community for companionship. Parental grandfather C stated:

Of course, if we go out of this community, there's no way we can communicate with others. But within this community, we can talk freely with other Chinese grandparents, and we can only talk with them actually. There are 81 households in this small community, and 70 of them are Chinese family like us. So living here doesn't make communication that difficult. It's like living in a Chinese community.

Some participants attended regular gatherings at a place they called "Three trees", a big green space near Yale Farm with swings where kids can play and grandparents can chat and do some stretches. Another place that grandparents could gather and care for grandchildren together is the New Haven Public Library, where there are free toys, children's books, and storytelling classes every week. Parental grandfather D shared his experience as follows:

...Although the teacher speak English, there are still a lot of Chinese kids going there. I guess almost half of them are Chinese kids, they are cared by their grandparents like us. So we are not alone.

A communal farm near Prospect Garden, built voluntarily by visiting Chinese grandparents, also serves as an important source of community. Grandparents who were farmers in China often help those who have no farming experience. Farming gives grandparents not only chances to relax but also a sense of achievement. Maternal grandmother B noted:

I will go directly to the garden when that (unhappy things) happens. Seeing all the plants and vegetables make me relaxed. I have no farming experience before... I feel so excited to plant my own vegetables, harvest my own vegetables and use them to our dishes. And sometimes when I go to the garden, I lose track of time.

4. Implications for grandparents' well-being

Survey results showed that more than 80% of the grandparents rated their health as fair to good (participants were asked to describe their health compared to that of other people of their age). And they had very high life satisfaction and almost no depressive symptom. However, we found something more complicated from qualitative interviews where participants described a physical and psychological toll associated with their time in the US. Given care taking demands, grandparents didn't have time to care for themselves. Maternal grandma G said:

... I had a very bad toothache and I had to look after my granddaughter at the same time. I felt that I was not going to make it after being like that for several days. But I made it. I had no choice. No one can take care of the baby if I don't.

Parental grandfather F talked about how weight loss in the US and how tiring childcare worsened his previous eye problems:

Here, there's very little time I can take a rest. So it's getting worse... You know, taking care of a baby here is way harder than in our hometown. We want to take the baby back. But, they didn't allow us to take the baby back to China. We have no choice but to stay here. Both of us lost a lot of weight after coming here.

Parental grandfather C also noted his weight loss but attributed it more to the constrained life in the US:

Every time I come here I lose weight. Still not used to live here. Last time I came here, I lost 20 lbs. I don't know why, I eat a lot, and I exercise regularly. But life is still too simple here... Sometimes I feel constrained in this small house, somewhat depressed... Yes, yes (I actually feel healthier in China), I will gain weight back in China anyway.

Grandparents enjoyed living together with their families and seeing their grandchild/ren growing. Maternal grandmother B said: "...my grandchildren bring me so much happiness. Especially the little one, she is almost 9 months. She is so good at making

me laugh.” However, they discussed they have no choice and they are only doing their time in the US. For example, maternal grandmother B noted: *“Of course, all human beings miss home. But if you keep yourself busy, then you may be able to forget about that. Time flies and I just live everyday happy and busy.”* Parental grandpa D shared the same feeling: *“Just taking care of the kids, preparing meals for them, keep yourself busy.”*

Grandparents’ strong sense of love for their offspring and strong sense of family have altered their definitions of life satisfaction and happiness. Such altered definitions contribute to their self-contradiction in expressing happiness and unhappiness. For them, their happiness is the happiness of the offspring, and their hope of life is the offspring’s bright future. Parental grandfather C said:

Happy, yes. For our son, for daughter-in-law and for our granddaughter, those small unhappiness for us can be neglected and forgotten. No matter where they are, we have to help them, care for them, so it’s the same for us. I hope they can go back to China soon and start a good career. At that time, we may feel our efforts now is worthy.

Maternal grandmother G also said: *“We’re from rural areas and farmers, we are useless. So the hope is for the next generation, hope that they live an easier and healthy life, nothing more.”*

Discussion

Our findings suggested that grandparents’ agreement to come to US was culturally influenced. It may not necessarily reflect individual choices, but a family adaptive strategy to maximize the well-being of the whole family (Chen et al., 2011), by alleviating adult children’s burden and enabling them to pursue economic opportunities. However, life in the US was not easy for this sample of Chinese grandparents. Many grandparents expressed that it is harder to care for their grandchildren in the US than in China. They worked long hours, longer than grandparents in China. For example, one large Chinese study showed that the average weekly hours of childcare was about 24h and 8h for co-residential grandmother and grandfathers separately (Chen et al., 2011), compared to 9h and 5.5h per day reported in this study. One possible reason is the grandchildren in our study are all very young. Caring for younger grandchildren could be quite demanding and accelerate grandparents’ health declines (Chen & Liu, 2011). Also, Chinese grandparents in the US have no one to help them. Even the adult children helped very little due to their busy schedule. Our grandparents also retreated from their position of power when dealing with differences in parenting grandchildren. Finally, our grandparents face migration-related challenges parallel those observed in other research with immigrant Asian elders (Yoon, 2005). But grandparents who came together as a couple support each other physically and mentally, consistent with the past research (Chen & Lewis, 2015).

Our study has some differences from previous literature which demonstrated a relatively more cohesive and positive picture (Chen & Lewis, 2015). First, our target population is Chinese visiting grandparents, whose average stay is relatively short compared to the samples of past studies. Adaptation may be more challenging at the initial stage. Second, Chen and Lewis (2015) focused on the influence of grandparents’ involvement on the family defined well-being, not the grandparents’ own well-being. The positive relationship found in the previous research is actually replicated in our study as grandparents expressed that they came for the well-being of the whole family and they

enjoyed being together with the family. However, our study found more complicated results. We found that grandparents were faced with difficulties and tend to sacrifice self-happiness for family happiness. In addition, their expressing of psychological issues may reflect other cultural influences, such as Chinese people's reluctance to disclose their feelings and thoughts, somatizing psychological problems (Parker et. al, 2005), Chinese traditions of withstanding hardship and accepting fate and destiny. Third, past research included both generations in the interview. When family members overheard each other or engaged in collaborative conversations, they were less likely to disclose their true feeling, especially for Chinese population who values family cohesion and saving face. Our data, however, were collected without the presence of the adult children, grandparents were therefore more likely to share their own feeling in an unpressured way.

Limitations and future directions

Our analysis is based on a small sample of grandparents in one US city. Their experiences may not be transferable to those of grandparents beyond the sample or in other settings. It is possible that Chinese visiting grandparents in New York or San Francisco may have different experiences because of the large Chinese community there. Future studies that examine the experiences of Chinese grandparents in other US settings will be an important addition to the literature. Future studies can also extend to grandparents who are from other countries with a strong collectivist value of family, such as Korea and Japan, to compare their motivations and experiences in the US as caregivers.

This study is based on grandparents' perspectives. Future studies can incorporate the adult children to learn more about their thoughts of having grandparents coming as caregivers, the dynamics between the two generations and to identify gaps or similarities in thoughts between the two generations.

However, we used several strategies to improve the credibility of the data, including using a community leader to help approach the participants to create trust, a race-concordant interviewer speaking Chinese to facilitate open and candid participant responses, consistent use of the interview protocol with open-ended, neutral and non-leading questions.

Policy implications

Because of the nature of their work, our grandparents in are often socially invisible, any connection to the community may help alleviate the stress and loneliness of living in a place where they could not understand the language and had limited mobility around town. In our cases, the local Chinese community and the farm plays an important role in the lives of our participants. Further efforts are needed to help improve and sustain the community. In addition, weekend activities targeted for this group of seniors, such as Tai-chi and health education workshops, may also provide them with chances to socialize, take a break from regular child care chores and maintain good health. Local programs for kids can also be a win-win situation for both kids and their caregivers. For example, in our cases, the large numbers of Chinese families using New Haven Public Library services and their positive feedbacks indicate a need to continue and expand such local programs.

Our findings also suggest a lack of social connection and welfare benefits. Gaps in health insurance coverage is the biggest problem. A lot of universities in the US already have family health plans to cover dependents (partners and children) of students and employees. Based on our findings, we suggest universities extending their family health

plan into affiliated family members who come as caregivers, such as the Chinese visiting grandparents.

Conclusion

This study provides a useful starting point for understanding what life looks like for Chinese visiting grandparents who leave their home and come as caregivers in the US, and how different factors shape the nature of their living in the US, as well as their perception of happiness and life satisfaction. Our results indicated that they put their offsprings on top of everything and view family happiness as their own happiness. Childcare/housework demands and migration-related grandparenting challenges (isolation and disconnection from the society) were detected, thus calling for more attention paid to this population and more social support given to this overlooked population in the US. More community or social activities can be created to engage these old grandparents. And access to social benefits, such as health insurance, are also urgently needed.

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Table 1. *Characteristics of Grandparents Interviewed*

Grandparents (<i>N</i> =35)	<i>M (SD) or n (%)</i>
Relationship with child	
Parental grandmothers	14(40.00)
Maternal grandmothers	9(25.71)
Parental grandfathers	9(25.71)
Maternal grandfathers	3(8.57)
Age (range: 51-66)	59.51(3.67)
Education	
No schooling	4(11.43)
Elementary	3(8.57)
Middle school	7(20.00)
High school	15(42.86)
College or more	6(17.14)
Annual family income	
<5,000RMB	4(11.43)
5,000-15,000RMB	5(14.29)
15,000-30,000RMB	0
30,000-50,000RMB	11(31.43)
50,000-100,000RMB	9(25.71)
>100,000RMB	6(17.14)
Marital status	
Married	34(97.14)
Divorced	0
Widowed	1(2.86)
From Urban or rural China	
Urban	20(57.14)
Rural	15(42.86)
Retired	33(94.29)
Prior/most recent occupation	
Farmer	7(20.00)
Teacher	4(11.43)
Treasurer	4(11.43)
Worker*	12(34.29)
Small business	3(8.57)
Office/ local government job	5(14.29)
Came alone or with spouse	
Alone	9(25.71)
With spouse	26(74.29)
Prior visit to U.S.	
Yes	17(48.57)
No	18(51.43)
Months stayed in U.S. when interviewed (range: 1-24)	6.51(5.66)
Age of child cared for (months)** (range: 2-30)	15.26(7.22)
Self-rated health	
Very good	5(14.29)
Good	12(34.29)
Fair	17(48.57)
Poor	1(2.86)

Average hours of childcare per day	7.66(3.38)
Grandmothers	9.09(2.97)
Grandfathers	4.92(2.27)
Average hours of housework per day	4.89(2.29)
Grandmothers	5.50(2.15)
Grandfathers	3.55(2.18)
Perceived caregiving physical strain	
No strain	14(40.00)
Some strain	20(57.14)
A lot of strain	1(2.86)
Perceived caregiving emotional strain	
No strain	16(45.71)
Some strain	16(45.71)
A lot of strain	3(8.57)
Life satisfaction (range: 23-35; scale range: 5-35)	30.69(3.22)
Grandmothers	30.43(3.40)
Grandfathers	31.17(2.92)
Depressive symptom (range: 0-11; scale range: 0-30)	2.47(3.15)
Grandmothers	2.43(2.81)
Grandfathers	2.58(3.85)
Grandparents' relationship satisfaction with adult children (range: 4.2-5; scale range: 1-5 higher scores indicate better quality)	4.93(0.21)

*Industries include clothing factory, textile mill, power station, etc.

**5 grandparents had two grandchildren to care for. However, the older one were all above 3 years old and went to kindergarten during the day. Thus, the older ones were excluded here.