

A COMPARATIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS IN INTERGENERATIONAL PARENTING RESEARCH BETWEEN CHINA AND RUSSIA

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Abstract

This study compares research on intergenerational parenting in China and Russia to address the underexplored logic of the East-Eurasian model beyond dominant Western theories. Using Nvivo, we thematically analyzed literature from 2000 to July 2025 and applied content analysis to compare theoretical (background, concepts, characteristics) and practical (meta-assumptions, methods, perspectives) dimensions. The results reveal systematic differences: Russia follows a state-led paradigm focused on national strategy and holistic policy tools, whereas China adopts a family-led approach centered on household coping mechanisms, intergenerational utility, and cultural ethics. These findings offer a novel theoretical framework and cross-cultural perspective for understanding family policy and behavior interactions.

Keywords: Intergenerational Parenting, Comparative Analysis, China, Russia

JEL Code: J13, J14, H31

Introduction

With factors such as extended human life expectancy, rising parenting costs, and maternal employment (Bagirova, 2021), intergenerational parenting has become a widespread phenomenon (Ariel 2021). It reflects a nation's aging status, family reproduction levels, and other demographic realities, and is considered a crucial component of family policy research (Daly, 2020). Over the years, academic research on intergenerational parenting has yielded substantial findings, yet cross-national comparisons remain scarce due to regional cultural and policy differences. Therefore, a cross-national review of intergenerational parenting research advances can help clarify the current state of this field and project future research trends.

This study comparatively analyzes intergenerational parenting research in China and Russia. Theoretically, while both countries share demographic pressures such as low fertility

and population aging, they have developed distinct policy and family models, offering a unique lens to examine policy-culture dynamics. Practically, despite their robust academic traditions in demography and family studies, research from both nations remains seldom integrated within a comparative framework. By systematically contrasting their findings, this study aims to elucidate convergences and divergences in the East-Eurasian context and derive non-Western insights for population policy development.

1 Literature Collection and Overview

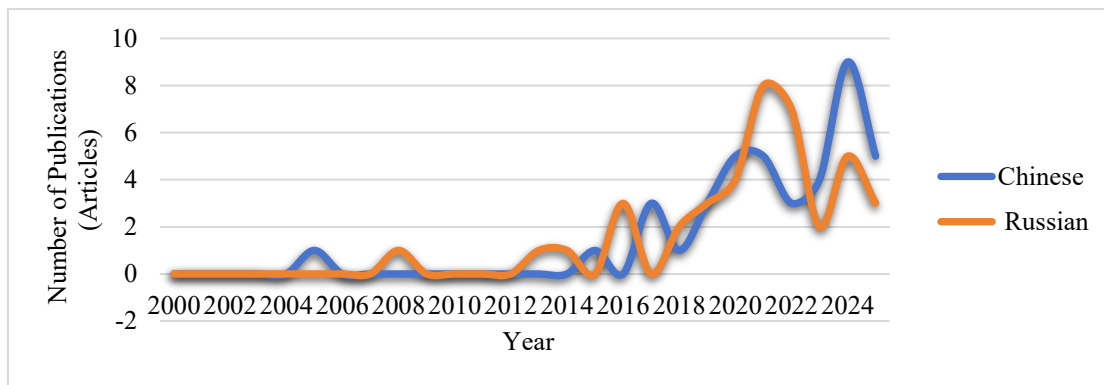
Research on Intergenerational parenting in China and Russia is abundant and spans multiple disciplines. Our study primarily retrieves core research findings published between 2000 and 2025 in the field of demography. This time frame encompasses critical periods of social transformation in both countries, the emergence and flourishing of related research, and provides access to the most timely and relevant scholarly outputs. Aligned with this study's objectives, literature selection includes both Chinese and Russian academic articles pertinent to intergenerational parenting. Authoritative and widely used paper repositories were thus chosen: China's CNKI and Russia's E-library. Analyzing the volume and thematic focus of research within a specific field enables deeper exploration of its development. The core drivers of intergenerational parenting—such as declining fertility rates, aging populations, migration patterns, and shifting family structures—along with its demographic consequences (e.g., impacts on reproductive decisions, labor supply, and eldercare models), constitute central topics in population studies.

1.1 Analysis of Literature Quantity

In July 2025, searches on CNKI using the keywords 代际育儿(Intergenerational parenting), 隔代教养 (Grandparental caregiving), 代际抚育(Intergenerational child-rearing), and 代际抚养(Intergenerational upbringing) yielded 40 academic articles. On E-library, searches using the keywords Прародительский труд (Grandparental labor), Прародительство(Grandparenting), Межпоколенческое воспитание детей

(Intergenerational childrearing) and Уход за детьми со стороны бабушек и дедушек (Childcare by grandparents) yielded 40 academic articles (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Number of publications related to intergenerational parenting published from 2000 to 2025 in CNKI and E-library



Source: Author compilation

Figure 1 observes that China began focusing on this phenomenon earlier than Russia, with publication growth accelerating significantly after 2015 and surging particularly rapidly post-2020. This trend closely correlates with China's reproductive policy adjustments and the acceleration of population aging. In contrast, Russia's publication volume has grown steadily and consistently. This may be attributed to Russia's low fertility rate, high divorce rate, and the strengthened role of grandparents within families, which collectively drive deeper research exploration.

1.2 Literature Theme Analysis

Themes were organized from the retrieved Chinese and Russian literature to identify the top five keywords (Table 1).

Tab.1: Top Five Themes in Intergenerational Parenting Research in China and Russia (2000–2025)

China		Russia	
Theme	Frequency	Theme	Frequency
Fertility Policy	9	Grandparent-Led Parenting	12
Grandparent-led Parenting	11	Grandparent Labor	11
Delayed Retirement	5	Family	9
Fertility Intentions	4	Grandparents	6
Intergenerational Support	2	Older Generation	5

Source: Author’s compilation

Table 1 reveals distinct research orientations: China's demographic studies prioritize policy and institutional approaches, reflecting its tradition of strong government intervention and recent fertility policy adjustments. This focus also mirrors the growing reliance on grandparents amid rapid urbanization and the persistent tension between young people's fertility attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, Russian research concentrates more on intra-family dynamics—including roles, intergenerational labor patterns, and relationships—highlighting how intergenerational mutual support has emerged in response to relatively underdeveloped state welfare systems.

2 Coding and Analysis

We utilized Nvivo20, a professional qualitative research software, to facilitate rapid organization and analysis of relevant data while enabling efficient coding. Based on trends in the volume of intergenerational parenting-related literature and thematic analysis, we ultimately selected 23 core Chinese studies and 26 core Russian studies as our analytical sample. Based on the established theoretical framework and research practice, we manually coded the Chinese and Russian literature, resulting in 226 and 198 valid reference points, respectively (Table 2).

Tab.2: Coding of Chinese and Russian Intergenerational Childrearing Literature

Code			China	Russia
Primary Code	Secondary Code	Tier 3 Code	Reference Point	
Theory	Background	-	25	34
	Concept	-	11	40
	Characteristics	-	28	27
Practice	Meta assumption	Grandparents, Parents (Offspring), Children (Grandchildren)	22	16
	Method	Quantitative, Qualitative, MMR	70	25
	Perspective	Macro, Mero, Micro	66	25

Source: Author's compilation

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Research Context

The origins and core drivers of Chinese and Russian research differ markedly. Russian research exhibits a distinct national strategic orientation. Its emergence directly responds to the nation's persistent demographic crisis—marked by population decline, low fertility rates, and severe challenges of aging—as well as the critical challenge of population aging (Rostovskaya et al., 2021). Consequently, academic research in Russia is closely aligned with top-level policy frameworks like the National Project Demography, aiming to explore all possible fertility incentive tools. Grandparent labor is viewed as a key policy lever within this framework (Saitova, 2022). The research context is permeated by a sense of crisis and proactive state intervention. In contrast, Chinese research is rooted in the household, emerging from the tension between lacking public childcare support and high childrearing costs during rapid social transformation. Intergenerational parenting is viewed as a common, even unavoidable, adaptive strategy for most Chinese families navigating work-family conflicts within existing institutional constraints (Shi, 2024). Although national contexts like the three-child policy exist, research focuses more on tensions between policies—such as the contradiction between

delayed retirement and encouraging childbirth (Gu & Bian, 2022)—rather than directly serving a unified national strategy. China’s driving model resembles a pressure-response type.

3.1.2 Conceptual Definitions

Conceptual differences surrounding intergenerational parenting also reflect divergent academic and policy perspectives between the two countries. Russian academia has introduced the core concept of grandparental labor (Bagirova & Neshataev, 2021). This term carries sociological and economic connotations, explicitly defining it as a form of labor involving time investment, measurable outcomes, and tangible benefits. This conceptualization strips away its emotional trappings, inherently endowing it with measurable, compensable, and policy-intervenable attributes (Gurko, 2024), providing a theoretical foundation for state incentive measures. In contrast, China’s dominant concept is intergenerational parenting or grandparent-led upbringing (Deng, et al., 2024). This concept is rooted in China’s profound Confucian family-centered culture and the ethics of intergenerational reciprocity (Liu & Tan., 2024). It emphasizes its role as an ethical practice of intergenerational cooperation, reciprocity, and altruism within the family, rather than as labor. Its value lies in cultural legitimacy and emotional bonds, not economic measurability. Consequently, China’s concept reinforces its private, familial, and culturally ingrained nature, rather than its attributes as a public policy tool.

3.1.3 Research Characteristics

Russia’s intergenerational parenting practices exhibit contextualized complexities. First, matrilineal dominance is evident. This manifests as a pronounced matrilineal pattern in maternal involvement, with maternal grandparents participating significantly more than paternal grandparents (Bagirova, 2021). Their core function centers on communication and companionship, supplemented by material and organizational support (Bagirova & Blednova, 2022). Second, it is emotionally driven altruism. The driving force is rooted in emotion and altruism, with grandparents’ own experiences of participation typically more positive than parents’ evaluations (Bagirova, 2021). Third, socioeconomic heterogeneity. This practice exhibits significant regional and socioeconomic variations, with stark differences in daily

participation rates across regions (Bagirova & Shubat, 2021). Economic capacity, rather than age, is the key determinant of an individual's ability to provide assistance. In contrast, meta-assumptions in Chinese research more frequently reflect utilitarian considerations centered on the nuclear family of the younger generation. Research focus exhibits the following characteristics: First, high prevalence. Data from the 2014 China Aging Center Survey indicates that grandparents care for 66.47% of children aged 0-2 (with approximately 30% cared for exclusively by grandparents), and approximately 40% of children aged 3 and above. Intergenerational parenting has become a significant parenting model in Chinese families, significantly influencing fertility intentions and family decisions (Zhong & Guo, 2017). Second, cultural endogeneity. Deeply influenced by Confucian family-centered ideology and the tradition of intergenerational reciprocity, grandparents often view caring for grandchildren as both a duty and an emotional return, embodying the concept of family bliss and intergenerational ethical responsibility.

3.2 Practice

3.2.1 Meta-Assumptions

Significant divergences also exist between the two countries in their fundamental research assumptions and problem inquiries. Russian research meta-assumptions tend to construct a comprehensive framework emphasizing multigenerational mutual benefits. It highlights the positive effects of intergenerational parenting for three generations: grandparents (promoting health, enhancing well-being, achieving active aging), parents (freeing time, facilitating employment, coping with crises), and grandchildren (accumulating human capital, transmitting values) (Bagirova & Shubat, 2021; Saitova, 2022). This ultimately aims to achieve national demographic goals and enhance overall family well-being (Bagirova & Neshatayev, 2021), reflecting a holistic perspective. In contrast, meta-assumptions in Chinese research predominantly reflect utilitarian considerations centered on the offspring generation (nuclear family). Research focus remains highly concentrated on the efficacy of grandparent caregiving in boosting offspring fertility intentions and liberating female labor force participation (Wang & Squires., 2024). The sacrifices and well-being of grandparents are often overshadowed in

these studies, reflecting a predominant emphasis on intergenerational parenting's instrumental role in supporting the younger generation.

3.2.2 Research Methods

The two countries exhibit distinct developmental stages and priorities. Russian approaches demonstrate stronger pragmatism and descriptive orientation. While also predominantly quantitative, they rely more heavily on regional surveys and official secondary data from Rosstat. Analytical approaches emphasize descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and nonparametric tests, aiming to rapidly outline current conditions and assess regional disparities to inform policy evaluation. Consequently, rigor in causal inference is relatively limited. Chinese research exhibits high maturity and sophistication in quantitative methods. Scholars extensively utilize large-scale national longitudinal databases like CFPS and CHARLS, commonly employing advanced econometric models such as propensity score matching (PSM), double difference (DID), and instrumental variables (IV) for causal identification and robustness testing. Research designs are specifically crafted to precisely identify net effects.

3.2.3 Research Perspectives

Russian research features a clear macro-meso-micro hierarchy: the macro level (national policy) dominates agenda-setting, the meso level (regional disparities, community support initiatives like grandparent schools) functions as the crucial implementation link, while micro-level analysis elucidates individual behavioral motivations. In contrast, Chinese research exhibits a micro-macro disjunction: both micro perspectives (intra-family interactions, intergenerational relationships) and macro perspectives (linkages to national population policies, retirement systems) are active, yet the connecting meso perspective (community, social organizations, local support systems) remains systematically underdeveloped - directly mirroring the absence of such support systems in China's parenting reality.

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical approaches to intergenerational parenting research in China and Russia are fundamentally distinct. Russian research is state-led, serving national demographic strategies with a policy-instrumental focus. Conversely, Chinese research is family-driven, shaped by a lack of public support and traditional ethics, emphasizing intergenerational utility and structurally lacking meso-level perspectives. Recognizing this divergence is crucial for mutual academic and policy learning.

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