

A Qualitative Study Based on Transcripts of Interviews

with Mothers from the Post-80s Generation in China

– Transformation in family functions and relationships surrounding
child-rearing in a 4-2-1 family structure –

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A one-child policy has been implemented in China for 35 years, with the end of such becoming a hot topic in 2015. The policy created a special family structure also known as the “4-2-1 phenomenon,” and this referred to an only child being cared for by his/her two parents and four grandparents. As play time with grandparents is an important part of child care in a Chinese family, this has led to conflict between the parents and grandparents.

The present study focused on extended families with children between one to three years old in urban areas of China. Through interviews with eight mothers and based on an analysis of the transcripts done using M-GTA, the current researcher found that there are four stages of transformation in family functions and in the relationships between family members. These are: 1) the preparatory stage, which explores the ideal pattern of parenting whereby mothers collaborate with other “allo-carers”; 2) the parallel progression stage, which shows both the grandparents’ and the mothers’ parenting methods being established; 3) two processes occurring in these stages (one focusing on the interpersonal transformation of the relationship level between the mother and the grandparents, with the other focusing on the intrapersonal integration of parenting experience at a personal level; and 4) throughout all parenting experiences, the generation of a specific essence that resulted in the transformation of the personalities involved and in the relationships between family members.

The results are discussed as an ongoing phenomenon in parenting in the post-“one-child period” in China. The implications of the study are also discussed from an evolutionary approach and family sociology perspective.