

**Not OK Boomer! Exploring Socialization and Conflict  
within the Context of Intergenerational Co-Parenting  
Families**

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**Not OK Boomer! Exploring Socialization and Conflict within the Context of Intergenerational Co-Parenting Families**

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## Not OK Boomer! Exploring Socialization and Conflict within the Context of Intergenerational Co-Parenting Families

### Abstract

**Purpose** - Despite the growing importance of grandparents in the upbringing of children, limited research examines the interactions between grandparents and parents within the framework of intergenerational co-parenting. Focusing on the context of children's food consumption, we employ a conflict lens of socialization theory and a relational power perspective to investigate the dynamics and conflicts inherent in Chinese intergenerational co-parenting interactions.

**Design/methodology/approach**- We conducted 49 in-depth interviews with Chinese parents and grandparents engaged in co-parenting. Through thematic analysis, we identified crucial themes surrounding cultural nuances and conflict mitigation strategies related to intergenerational co-parenting interactions.

**Findings** - Our findings unpack the cultural insights and dynamics that shape the underlying reasons for conflicts and the strategies used to mitigate them. Accordingly, we present a 2x2 typology matrix for socialization in intergenerational co-parenting, emphasizing how parents and grandparents navigate conflicts. From this, we identify four categories of socialization: conflict, conformity, compromise, and congruence.

**Research limitations/implications**- We deliver comprehensive insights into intergenerational co-parenting interactions within a Chinese context, where this approach is recognized as a manifestation of filial piety. This establishes a strong foundation for further cross-cultural research opportunities.

**Practical implications**- This study provides marketers and policymakers with a nuanced understanding of the family dynamic interactions and conflicts that can arise during co-parenting, thus developing effective segmentation and market communication strategies.

**Originality/value**- While intergenerational co-parenting relationships can be conflictual, conflict is neither always negative nor an end state. Rather, conflict serves as a canvas to unfold different types of familial socialization. We highlight that acceptance of family counterparts and desire to change motivate the mitigation strategies used for maintaining familial ties.

**Keywords:** Socialization, Intergenerational co-parenting, Children's food consumption, Power influence, Conflict

Research Paper

## Not OK Boomer! Exploring Socialization and Conflict within the Context of Intergenerational Co-Parenting Families

### 1. Introduction

Despite the rising prevalence of micro-families, in both Western and Eastern societies (Li and Liu, 2020), familial and relational bonds between grandparents and grandchildren remain undeniably strong and poignant. COVID-19 demonstrated the influence of intergenerational interaction on the mental and physical well-being of family members,<sup>1</sup> while recent studies have highlighted the psychological and spiritual benefits of aging family members staying connected with their families, offering mutual support and companionship (Yen *et al.*, 2022). In the US alone, in 2023, 2.55 million children lived with grandparents in the same household.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the UK, 25% of children (between 0 to 4 years) receive informal childcare from grandparents, often due to increasing formal childcare costs.<sup>3</sup>

The involvement of grandparents in childcare has a rich tradition in Asian countries. Multigenerational cohabitation is common, and as of 2014, over 65% of Chinese grandparents were active participants in childcare (Bai *et al.*, 2023). Factors such as workplace demands and a commitment to traditional family structures often lead young parents to seek support from their parents, which in turn enhances grandparental engagement in parenting. This active involvement of grandparents in childcare is referred to as intergenerational co-parenting (Hoang *et al.*, 2020). While both parents and grandparents play vital roles in a child's balanced development, the significance of co-parenting is considerable from financial, familial, and well-being perspectives (Silverstein *et al.*, 2012).

The rise of intergenerational co-parenting has attracted scholarly interest in the involvement of grandparents within family practices, particularly in family research (Bai *et al.*, 2023; Hoang and Kirby, 2020) and consumer research (Harman *et al.*, 2022; Kastarinen *et al.*, 2023; Kerrane *et al.*, 2024). The dynamics within families, the role of grandparents in co-parenting, and the relationship between grandparents and parents are heavily influenced by cultural context. In Western countries, the level of grandparent involvement in childcare varies among families and has historically been

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<sup>1</sup> [Grandparents' support may lower risk of maternal depression, study says | CNN](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Children living with grandparents U.S. 2022 | Statista](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Childcare and early years survey of parents, reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

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3 more distant; however, this involvement has intensified in recent years (Kerrane *et al.*, 2024). In  
4 contrast, in many Asian societies, Confucian values regarding familial hierarchy necessitate a more  
5 obligatory involvement from grandparents, which is typically more intensive (Bai *et al.*, 2023;  
6 Hoang and Kirby, 2020).  
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10 The nature of intergenerational co-parenting also leads to intriguing family dynamics between  
11 parents and grandparents. For example, studies indicate that differing views on children's  
12 consumption practices can lead to conflicts. In Western societies, grandparents often find  
13 themselves in the position of "caring but not interfering" (Karanika and Hogg, 2016; Kastarinen  
14 *et al.*, 2023; Thomas, 1990), while in Asian cultures, the hierarchical structure empowers  
15 grandparents, normalizing their authoritative presence and guidance in child-rearing (Hoang and  
16 Kirby, 2020). Furthermore, cultural notions such as filial piety characterize the interaction between  
17 intergenerational family members, as conflicts are often deemed detrimental to familial harmony.  
18 While conflicts generally involve behavioral opposition, researchers argue that they should not  
19 inherently be seen as negative events. Instead, conflicts can facilitate the expression of concern  
20 and dissatisfaction, providing opportunities for individual growth and the ongoing renegotiation  
21 of relationships (García-Ruiz *et al.*, 2013; Apostolidis and Brown, 2022). Regardless of whether  
22 they are resolved, conflicts can influence future behaviors and dynamics within families (Olsen  
23 and Grunert, 2010). Consequently, these conflicts can affect the well-being of parents,  
24 grandparents, and the children involved (Baker *et al.*, 2010; Hoang and Kirby, 2020), which makes  
25 them a matter of considerable practical interest (Olsen and Grunert, 2010).  
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39 The concept of family well-being is inextricably connected with how food is perceived, negotiated  
40 and consumed within a family (Carrigan *et al.* 2023). Food consumption behavior offers a dynamic  
41 and multi-layered canvas through which to study family relationships and interactions, due to its  
42 symbolic nature as an expression of family care and well-being (Miller, 2013; Yau and Christidi,  
43 2018). Food consumption is also a situation where family roles and relations are performed and  
44 family dynamics are defined and displayed (Jackson, 2009; 2018). This is because the kitchen is a  
45 contested space (Scicluna, 2017), as food reveals power relations and imbalances (Counihan, 1999;  
46 Apostolidis *et al.*, 2021), playing a key role in maintaining hierarchies (Yau and Christidi, 2018).  
47 It is also a vehicle to display the desire for autonomy or dependence, which are susceptible to  
48 conflict (Barnhart and Peñaloza, 2013; Yau and Christidi, 2018). Thus, family food consumption  
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3 behavior is a way to reproduce the unique family identity while simultaneously expressing  
4 disagreements and discontent between family members (Epp and Price, 2008; 2018).  
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7 Food consumption also has salience and behavioral resonance in intergenerational co-parenting  
8 (Jingxiong *et al.*, 2007; Yang and Liu, 2020), as it denotes how family members care for each other  
9 and illustrates intergenerational variances between power and perceptions. Recent research into  
10 the effects of co-parenting on children's food behaviors has recognized the influence of  
11 intergenerational co-parenting units, reshaping food attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Kastarinen *et*  
12 *al.*, 2023). However, the extant research mostly focuses on the role of parents in these dynamics,  
13 ignoring interrelationships between parents' and grandparents' behaviors and values. Although  
14 parents mediate interactions between grandparents and children (May *et al.*, 2012) and are the  
15 main gatekeepers of values and practices for their children (Wijayaratne *et al.*, 2018), the lack of  
16 academic research in this area limits the expansion of theoretical and empirical understanding of  
17 family dynamics in general, and co-parenting in particular.  
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27 Therefore, this study explores this lacuna in the current domain of intergenerational co-parenting,  
28 focusing on the dynamics between grandparents and parents as the major stakeholders in co-  
29 parenting. By adopting a relational power and conflict lens within a socialization perspective, we  
30 seek to explore how grandparents and parents interact and negotiate co-parenting dynamics within  
31 the realm of co-parented children's food consumption in the Chinese cultural context. We have  
32 chosen China as our research context due to the paradoxical nature of Chinese family dynamics.  
33 On the one hand, there is a strong traditional influence of familial values such as filial piety, but  
34 on the other hand, rapid economic development necessitates changes in lifestyle, perceptions and  
35 opinions (Bedford and Yeh, 2021) which can create tension and conflict between parents and  
36 grandparents as co-parenting actors. We conducted 49 in-depth interviews with parents and  
37 grandparents from different Chinese regions. The findings provide a deep understanding of  
38 contextual characteristics that shape and define intergenerational co-parenting-related conflict and  
39 its mitigating strategies within Chinese society. Accordingly, we offer a novel typology of  
40 socialization for intergenerational co-parenting.  
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52 The paper is structured as follows: We critically engage with the existing scholarly works and  
53 power dynamics theories to build the conceptual foundation and ascertain the research gaps;  
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3 Subsequently, we explain the methodology and present findings; Finally, we synthesize the  
4 findings against existing literature, offering theoretical and managerial implications.  
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## 7 8 **2. Literature Review**

### 9 10 **2.1 Background: Intergenerational Co-Parenting**

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13 In sociology, co-parenting refers to a shared activity undertaken by adults (e.g., couples or former  
14 couples) responsible for the care and upbringing of children (McHale, 2007). Extant literature also  
15 acknowledges the involvement of grandparents in children's upbringing (Li and Liu, 2020;  
16 Timonen, 2020). It is increasingly evident that, in modern societies, the role of grandparents  
17 transitions from being that of an extended but close family member to a co-parent, where  
18 grandparents share parenting responsibilities and are considered a critical component of family life  
19 (Whitbeck *et al.*, 1993; Xu *et al.*, 2024). Following Hoang *et al.* (2020), this study defines  
20 "intergenerational co-parenting" as parents and grandparents collaborating in children's  
21 upbringing. When grandparents co-parent, they contribute emotional (e.g., caring, and inspiring),  
22 functional (e.g., childcare knowledge and skills), and physical (e.g., finance and sheltering)  
23 resources to a nuclear family (Silverstein *et al.*, 2012). Studies report that grandparents'  
24 involvement in parenting protects the well-being of mother and child (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2012)  
25 whilst also enriching grandparents emotionally and physically (Hayslip *et al.*, 2006) by providing  
26 meaning to their lives and increasing prosocial behavior.  
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38 Intergenerational co-parenting is a global phenomenon, yet the involvement of grandparents varies  
39 significantly across cultures. In many instances, particularly in Western contexts, the emergence  
40 of neoliberalism and shifts in socio-economic conditions have produced intergenerational  
41 differences in life experiences (e.g., Brown, 2025) and intensified economic pressures on parents,  
42 leading to a shortage of affordable, flexible, and high-quality childcare options. As a result,  
43 grandparents frequently step in to fill the gaps in formal childcare services (Airey *et al.*, 2021).  
44 This is particularly evident as grandparents are more likely to engage in co-parenting arrangements  
45 to address the specific needs of their family members or to support parents during temporary crises  
46 in their roles (Baker *et al.*, 2010; Moffatt *et al.*, 2019). Still, grandparents are generally positioned  
47 outside the immediate nuclear family structure, resulting in a passive grandparental style founded  
48 on self-reliance and decision-making based on individual needs (Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2018).  
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3 Intensive grandparenting is still rare and stems from ensuring the well-being and independence of  
4 the adult children (Airey *et al.*, 2021; Kerrane *et al.*, 2024).  
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8 Conversely, in Chinese culture, despite the evolving socio-economic landscape, characterized by  
9 more women entering the workforce and an aging population, the Confucian value system deeply  
10 influences intergenerational relationships and caregiving practices (Lo and Lindsay, 2020; Bai *et*  
11 *al.*, 2023). Upholding familial duties, including care for family members, remains a fundamental  
12 aspect of Confucian values and practices (Lo and Lindsay, 2020). Furthermore, in Chinese culture,  
13 grandparents have always been acknowledged as intensively involved and are considered “an  
14 additional set of parents” for the grandchild (Hossain *et al.*, 2018; Lo and Lindsay, 2022). Asian  
15 grandparents’ involvement in co-parenting often emerges from their sense of duty as the elders in  
16 the family (Hossain *et al.*, 2018; Bai *et al.*, 2023).  
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25 Consumer research scholars acknowledge the multi-identity assemblage of family, suggesting that  
26 childcare has become collectivized within many families and produces shared consumption  
27 relationships (Epp and Price, 2018). Grandparents and grandchildren participate in creating,  
28 protecting, and transmitting familial rituals, traditions and skills through consumption (Kastarinen  
29 *et al.*, 2023). Consumption practices constitute a major part of grandparents’ involvement in their  
30 relationships with grandchildren, including leisure and travel (Hunter-Jones, 2014), gift-giving,  
31 and everyday caregiving (Godefroit-Winkel *et al.*, 2019). Our research sheds light on food  
32 consumption, not least due to its strong and deep relationship with familial, social and cultural  
33 values (Dey *et al.*, 2023).  
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42 Food not only facilitates the creation of family identity and traditions but also enables the  
43 perpetuation of those traditions by transferring them to future generations. Food is also a medium  
44 for showing care. Grandparents use food as an emotional tool to express love and care towards  
45 grandchildren while caring for them, often impacting the development of food aptitude and feeding  
46 practices (Goh, 2013; Farrow, 2014). Through consumption-related interactions, grandparents can  
47 affect a child’s development and well-being. Therefore, intergenerational co-parenting can affect  
48 family identity, traditions, and well-being by directly or indirectly influencing food consumption  
49 practices (Block *et al.*, 2011; Moore *et al.*, 2017; Kharuhayothin and Kerrane, 2018). This deeper  
50 involvement and sharing of responsibility in the co-parenting role means that grandparents are also  
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3 expected to decide on a child's developmental process, thereby providing them with power in the  
4 relationship. As such, co-parenting-led interactions may cause power tussles between parents and  
5 grandparents, as documented in family research (Hoang and Kirby, 2020).  
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## 8 9 **2.2 Research gap: conflict and tensions in intergenerational co-parenting**

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12 Family dynamics, as outlined by family research scholars, are made up of various interdependent  
13 subsystems, including marital, parental, and sibling systems (Cox and Paley, 2003). Family  
14 consumption is inherently relational, characterized by shared and collective goals, practices, and  
15 identities (Epp and Price, 2008; Epp *et al.*, 2014). Within families, these relational bundles may  
16 exhibit both shared and conflicting identities, goals, and consumption practices (Epp and Price,  
17 2008). Consequently, the family decision-making process and its outcomes are often influenced  
18 by the interactions and conflicts among family members (Hall, 1987; Qualls and Jaffe, 1992; Tang  
19 *et al.*, 2024). Such conflictual interactions within the family significantly shape behaviors (Olsen  
20 and Grunert, 2010).  
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30 In intergenerational co-parenting, the experience of grandparents providing childcare can be  
31 ambivalent for both grandparents and their adult children (parents) (Karanika and Hogg, 2016; Lo  
32 and Lindsay, 2022). Family-provided childcare fosters and strengthens familial, social, emotional,  
33 and functional bonds and relationships (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991). However, this  
34 intergenerational exchange can also give rise to conflict (Lo and Lindsay, 2022), which in a family  
35 context is defined as "disagreement between two or more persons" (Hall, 1987, p. 768). Variations  
36 in the established locus of power and authority within the relationship (i.e., whether the parent or  
37 grandparent holds the primary influence), shifts in roles (i.e., the paradox of being both a parent  
38 and a grandparent), and differing child-rearing practices often contribute to these conflicts (Bai *et al.*,  
39 2023; Hoang and Kirby, 2020).  
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48 Mason *et al.* (2007) highlight that in Western societies, conflicts can arise from the challenge of  
49 balancing one's role as a good grandparent with that of a good parent to adult children. While  
50 grandparents feel that they should refrain from interfering in how their children raise their  
51 grandchildren, they also bear a sense of responsibility toward their grandchildren and fear that  
52 their reluctance to intervene may be perceived as a lack of care (Breheny *et al.*, 2013). Conversely,  
53 Asian grandparents often view childcare responsibilities as an obligation rather than a choice  
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3 (Huou, 1991; Selin, 2014). In Confucian culture, the principles of hierarchy, seniority, respect, and  
4 filial piety are fundamental (Lo and Lindsay, 2022). This framework grants grandparents authority  
5 in co-parenting situations, leading them to naturally assume control and expect the right to  
6 intervene, comment on, or disapprove of parents' actions (Huou, 1991). This cultural dynamic  
7 stands in contrast to the predominantly Western ideal of "being there but not interfering", as  
8 suggested by Thomas (1990).  
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14 In examining family food practices, Yau and Christidi (2018) suggest that family dining life is  
15 often far from idyllic. Conflicts frequently arise due to differing food preferences and choices,  
16 challenging the idealized portrayals of harmonious gatherings between parents and children (Bove  
17 *et al.*, 2003; Wilk, 2010). Much of the existing literature has tended to focus on the dynamics  
18 between parents and younger children, highlighting the sources of conflict stemming from  
19 divergent food preferences (Bove *et al.*, 2003). These conflicts are explored through the tension  
20 between autonomy and dependence, which can lead to rebellious behaviors within parent-child  
21 relationships (Chitakunye and Maclaran, 2014; Wilk, 2010).  
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29 Conversely, research on tensions and conflicts within families that include adult children is limited.  
30 For example, Yau and Christidi (2018) examine narratives surrounding power struggles resulting  
31 from ongoing parental provision of food to their adult offspring. However, there is a noticeable  
32 lack of empirical evidence regarding multigenerational dynamics, particularly in the context of co-  
33 parenting, and specifically concerning the power dynamics inherent in these relationships. This  
34 unique scenario, where two generations share the responsibilities of childcare and food  
35 consumption, highlights how their interactions can lead to either cooperation or conflict, especially  
36 within the framework of cultural perceptions of familial relationships. Additionally, current  
37 research on conflict in intergenerational co-parenting does not explore the development of conflict  
38 mitigation strategies. Consequently, this paper aims to address these gaps in the existing literature  
39 by incorporating a cultural understanding of context, thereby enriching our comprehension of  
40 familial dynamics.  
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### 50 **2.3 Theoretical underpinning to address the research gap: Socialization and conflict**

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52 Ziegler and Child (1969, p. 474) defined socialization as "a broad term for the whole process by  
53 which an individual develops, through the transaction with other people, his specific patterns of  
54 socially relevant behaviors and experience." Most sociology discussions view socialization as a  
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3 continuous stabilizing process in which individuals internalize social norms and fit into their  
4 organized patterns, thereby helping to create solidarity and cohesion (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007). For  
5 example, food socialization refers to how parents influence children's food beliefs, attitudes,  
6 knowledge, preferences, and eating behaviors (Block *et al.*, 2011). To date, the focus has primarily  
7 been on socialization practices and the establishment of family traditions (Epp and Price, 2008;  
8 Moio *et al.*, 2004). Even though socialization is argued to be a lifelong process (Moschis, 2021;  
9 Moschis and Churchill, 1978), existing research on the concept focuses predominantly on parental  
10 influences on socialization within a nuclear family, with the exception of Kerrane and Hogg (2013)  
11 and Kerrane *et al.* (2015), who considered the influence of siblings on the socialization process.  
12 On the other hand, the influence of grandparents as socialization agents within multigenerational  
13 families has not yet received sufficient attention (Carrigan *et al.*, 2023; Godefroit-Winkel *et al.*,  
14 2023).

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17 Furthermore, as previously discussed, family food dynamics are not always linear and can often  
18 be inherently conflictual. Conflict theorists in the field of socialization argue that human behavior  
19 and social relationships arise from the underlying tensions between competing parties (Jackson,  
20 1993). While social conflict frequently plays a crucial role in the socialization process, it is also  
21 possible that successful socialization leads to social conflict rather than social harmony (Wasburn,  
22 1984). Consequently, conflicts can be beneficial for individuals or for society as a whole, or they  
23 can present challenges that may or may not require resolution.

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26 According to relational power theory, an individual's power influences their capacity to manage  
27 conflicts and exert control over decision outcomes (French and Raven, 1959; Falbo and Peplau,  
28 1980; Corfman, 1991). The sources of power within families can be diverse, including control over  
29 family resources, the ability to shape outcomes through rewards and coercion, recognized expertise,  
30 legitimate authority, and referent power derived from one's position and perceptions within the  
31 family (Bao *et al.*, 2007; Recchia *et al.*, 2010). The distribution of power in families is often deeply  
32 influenced by cultural contexts. For example, in many Asian cultures, the Confucian principle of  
33 filial piety emphasizes harmony, hierarchy, and conservatism. This principle underscores the  
34 importance of caring for, respecting, and obeying parents and elder family members (Dong and  
35 Xu, 2016). In this framework, parents are regarded as the ultimate authority figures within the  
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3 family, shaping children's attitudes and behaviors to prioritize parental well-being (Hoang *et al.*,  
4 2020).  
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8 On the other hand, filial piety plays a crucial role in fostering family continuity and uniting  
9 different generations, cultivating a deep sense of obligation among children to support their parents,  
10 show obedience, and honor elders, along with upholding family traditions (Dong and Xu, 2016).  
11 Yeh (2003) presents a dual model of filial piety: authoritarian filial piety, which involves  
12 suppressing one's own desires in favor of complying with parents' wishes due to their seniority;  
13 and reciprocal filial piety, which emphasizes the emotional and spiritual engagement with older  
14 parents driven by gratitude, love, and respect.  
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22 Confucian values in Chinese culture emphasize children's obligations to their parents, contrasting  
23 with the focus on children's rights in Western culture (Yeh and Bedford, 2004). This contrast  
24 determines the onus of responsibility of conflict: Western literature identifies parental factors as  
25 basis of conflict, whereas in Confucian culture, lack of filial piety and obedience from children are  
26 causes of conflict, and therefore children hold the responsibility to prevent/mitigate conflict as  
27 well (Yeh and Bedford, 2004). However, power dynamics within intergenerational family  
28 relationships are often asymmetrical and fluid, meaning that no single individual consistently holds  
29 a power advantage over the other (Recchia *et al.*, 2010). Transformative social changes in Asian  
30 societies, particularly in China, such as industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of more  
31 nuclear families following the One-Child Policy (1979–2015), alongside economic development  
32 and the globalization of Western individualism, have challenged these traditional collectivist  
33 values. This shift has notably affected the interpersonal relationships between young adults and  
34 their parents (Dong and Xu, 2016). Consequently, parents have experienced a decline in their  
35 influence over decisions affecting their children, including those involving financial matters.  
36 Nevertheless, while the expressions of Chinese familism may have evolved, the underlying  
37 cultural concepts surrounding family remain steadfast (Yang, 1988). Recent changes may have  
38 weakened the authority associated with filial piety, but the emotional bonds between parents and  
39 children continue to hold significant importance.  
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3 The contemporary familial dynamics in Asian culture also mean that the nature of conflict  
4 occurring in families and the way it is negotiated and mitigated has evolved. In contrast to the  
5 traditional Chinese dominant ideology of self-sacrifice by children being the ideal familial conflict  
6 mitigation strategy (Wu and Yeh, 2021), Yeh (1995) sets out five conflict mitigation strategies  
7 adopted by children: *Self-sacrifice* requires children to give in to parental demands whenever  
8 conflict with parents arises. *Egocentrism* is the direct opposite of self-sacrifice and denotes resolute  
9 children ignoring parental expectations to pursue their own goals; Filial virtues and duties are not  
10 the primary guides to behavior. *Escape* involves the child's attempt to either escape from the  
11 current conflict or do nothing because of a lack of ideas about how to resolve conflict.  
12 *Reframing/compatibility* can be used to recast conflict situations into a new context such that both  
13 sides attain their goals and neither party needs to sacrifice any demands. Finally, in *compromise*,  
14 the child seeks compromise where each side makes sacrifices to resolve conflict. Bao *et al.* (2007)  
15 discuss the nature of relationships as a differentiating characteristic affecting the nature of conflict  
16 mitigation. For example, a competitive relationship may generate more dominant/destructive  
17 strategies (like self-sacrifice, egocentrism or escape), but a cooperative relationship may generate  
18 problem-solving or constructive strategies (like reframing or compromise) (Deutsch, 1973;  
19 Recchia *et al.*, 2010).  
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34 Yau and Christidi (2018) identify four power-based struggles in family conflict: adult children  
35 facing parental interference, being subjected to imposed routines, feeling trapped in liminality, and  
36 experiencing feelings of inferiority instilled by their parents. They also outline four negotiation  
37 strategies: disengagement, conditional acceptance, normalization, and reciprocation. Moreover,  
38 they argue that the application of conflict mitigation strategies is not absolute or independent of  
39 context. Depending on relative power dynamics, situational factors, relational interdependence,  
40 and the goals of maintaining family harmony, individuals involved in conflict will select the most  
41 appropriate strategy to address the situation. Additionally, conflict is often linked to the tension  
42 between the desire for autonomy and the necessity of dependence, influenced by traditional power  
43 dynamics among the parties involved (e.g., Barnhart and Peñaloza, 2013; Yau and Christidi, 2018).  
44 In the context of intergenerational co-parenting, the two generations are likely to have inter-  
45 dependence due to the various reasons mentioned earlier in this paper. Therefore, the power  
46 struggle may transcend the desire for independence. Hence, cultural contexts and necessities can  
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3 lead to a transient redistribution of resources and power between parents and grandparents,  
4 resulting in fluid power relationships and nonlinear dynamics, which require further research  
5 attention.  
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10 The above discussion highlights two major research gaps. First, there is scant academic work that  
11 addresses intergenerational conflict by delving into the Chinese cultural context. Second, although  
12 the existing literature identifies various mitigation strategies for family conflicts, these studies tend  
13 to be fragmented and primarily focus on the dynamics between parents and children. This  
14 highlights a need for further investigation into the multigenerational interactions involving  
15 grandparents and parents. This paper addresses these two research gaps by adopting the conflict  
16 lens of socialization theory and relational power perspective.  
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### 23 **3. Research Method**

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26 To understand intergenerational co-parenting in China, we conducted qualitative research. Ethical  
27 approval was obtained from a UK higher education institution, informed consent secured, and  
28 participant anonymity provided. Participants were demographically and geographically  
29 representative of the Chinese population. We recruited participants through the first author's  
30 personal network, followed by snowball sampling, as per Gummesson (2005). Parents were aged  
31 28–43 and grandparents were above 58 (see Appendix). Children were excluded. We conducted  
32 49 in-depth interviews over four months at participants' homes, recording and transcribing them.  
33 Interview responses were translated and coded using rigorous academic methods to ensure the  
34 reliability and validity of our analysis.  
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43 Following Goulding (1999), we created an interview guide (see Table 1). The primary researcher  
44 conducted narrative interviews in Mandarin to capture accounts of family consumption  
45 (McCormack, 2004; Kastarinen *et al.*, 2023; Tang *et al.*, 2024) and experiences of food-related  
46 activities in participants' intergenerational co-parenting dynamics. Opening questions focused on  
47 family characteristics (e.g., age, education, occupation, marital and family status, and childcare  
48 budget), and subsequent questions explored food consumption habits and communication patterns  
49 within interactions between children and their parents or grandparents. The interview duration  
50 averaged approximately one hour.  
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Please insert Table 1 here

We developed questions specifically to investigate the dynamics between family members during children's food socialization. For each question or theme, we asked participants to describe personal experiences, providing examples and insights. We reached theoretical saturation after interview 39, conducting five additional interviews each with parents and grandparents to ensure that no fresh insights emerged, thereby confirming saturation (Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

### 3.1 Data Analysis

We adopted thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), achieving analytical validity by ensuring the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the data and its contribution to theory development (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2013), and by applying rigor in the collection and analysis of data (Srivastava and Chandra, 2018). In our analysis, we systematically outlined the key stages of the analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Magnani and Gioia, 2023), first by developing a coding template in which themes and corresponding codes were identified and categorized. Subsequently, two researchers independently conducted coding to avoid subjective interpretation, using both *a priori* and data-driven codes on family conflict (Dey *et al.*, 2023), as presented in Table 2. Next, two researchers collaborated to decide on second-order codes through screening, synthesis, and summarization of the first-order codes, as per Srivastava and Chandra (2018) and Muhammad *et al.* (2024).

The theoretical framework gradually developed, drawing upon the concepts of relational power and conflict. In cases where no *a priori* codes were present, we identified appropriate terminologies from extant literature which categorized intergenerational socialization strategies, following other qualitative studies (e.g. Singh *et al.*, 2020; Muhammad *et al.*, 2024). Subsequently, through a constant comparison method, we established a typology identifying interconnections

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3 between various themes and constructs.  
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## 15 **4. Findings**

### 16 **4.1 Intergenerational co-parenting - dynamics and conflict**

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19 Our findings illustrate the emergence of intergenerational conflict stemming from disparities in  
20 food attitudes, norms, and values in the co-parenting dynamics of parents and grandparents, as  
21 well as how they navigate and resolve this conflict. The findings emphasize that intergenerational  
22 co-parenting interactions in the context of food consumption practices are dynamic and bi-  
23 directional, rather than linear and passed on, as mentioned in existing literature (e.g., Carrigan *et*  
24 *al.*, 2023). Specifically, in a multi-generational co-parenting household, parents and grandparents  
25 continuously interact, influence, and learn from each other regarding children's eating habits,  
26 which also impacts and shapes family dynamics.  
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36 We found that intergenerational co-parenting can lead to conflicts due to power struggles, with  
37 parents and grandparents using different strategies to resolve these conflicts. They tended to have  
38 varying levels of acceptance regarding each other's influence on food consumption practices,  
39 categorized as high or low acceptance. That said, the level of acceptance did not always result in  
40 changes in behavior or decisions. Even with low acceptance of each other's opinions and practices,  
41 parents and grandparents might still change their behaviors. This shows that they may have a high  
42 or low desire to change their own decisions when approaching co-parenting differently. Therefore,  
43 two dimensions simultaneously create tension and influence the behaviors of parents and  
44 grandparents: level of acceptance and desire for change. Accordingly, we developed a 2x2 matrix  
45 that identifies four types of socialization for intergenerational co-parenting: conformity, conflict,  
46 congruence, and compromise (4Cs) (refer to Table 3). In the following section, we provide a more  
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3 detailed discussion of the 2x2 matrix, along with additional information, empirical evidence, and  
4 illustrative quotes for each of the four types of intergenerational co-parenting socialization.  
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10 *Please insert Table 3 here*  
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## 14 15 **4.2 Typology of socialization for intergenerational co-parenting** 16

### 17 18 **4.2.1 Conflict** 19

20 Concurring with the existing literature (e.g., Goh, 2013; Goh and Kuczynski, 2010), we define the  
21 initial co-parenting socialization category as one characterized by conflict. Conflict arises from  
22 differences in beliefs, norms, and values, resulting in misunderstandings, disputes, and even the  
23 cessation of co-parenting. Misunderstandings and disputes may stem from specific incidents  
24 attributed to a caregiver's perceived or alleged misbehavior, such as relating to the dietary practices  
25 of the children. In certain instances, this type of misbehavior (e.g., grandparents giving the child  
26 something expressly prohibited by the parents) was seen as a potential (or actual) safety concern  
27 for the children. One such situation was explained by a mother:  
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36 *I used to mention to my mother-in-law [the person responsible for cooking for the family] that*  
37 *we should not buy little fish but bigger ones, because it will be too risky to pick out small*  
38 *fishbones when the child is eating. However, my mother-in-law believed that bigger fish were*  
39 *farmed with unhealthy feed and that we should buy little ones when making soup. As a result,*  
40 *my child choked on a fishbone when eating... I freaked out at the time. (Participant 11, Mother)*  
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45 The excerpt above suggests that the perceptions and attitudes of family caregivers toward health,  
46 well-being, and food consumption, as well as their differences in food-related knowledge and  
47 practices, can lead to conflict (Block *et al.*, 2011; Bublitz *et al.*, 2019). This is especially pertinent  
48 in countries like China, where customers often purchase unprocessed, unprepared food from the  
49 market, making them responsible for the safety of the food during cooking and preparation,  
50 particularly when feeding young children. Consequently, caregivers' concerns about food safety  
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3 impact their decisions on food purchases, emphasizing the need for knowledge during purchase  
4 and preparation of certain types of food.  
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8 In addition, biases related to food and differing levels of nutritional knowledge can lead to discord  
9 and impact the dynamics between parents and grandparents. Some participants expressed that child  
10 nutrition is now perceived as more intricate, stringent, and rooted in science in comparison with  
11 previous generations. A grandfather's reflection exemplifies this shift:  
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15 *We [the participant and his wife] did not find things so complicated when we raised our child*  
16 *in the past. We would feed our child whatever we ate with no differentiation. [...] But now*  
17 *feeding our grandchild is more scientific and complex. I was surprised to see what my daughter*  
18 *and her husband did. They are too paranoid. We have had several serious arguments. On one*  
19 *occasion, they took my grandchild away, fearing that we were not able to take good care.*  
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21 (Participant 37, Grandfather)  
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27 A lack of willingness to accept changes can be driven by many reasons, not least the  
28 intergenerational biases and differences in perceptions regarding children's food consumption.  
29 Our participants attributed these differences to the rapid social change, due to changes in policies  
30 (e.g., changes in family structure due to the one-child policy), education, lifestyle and economic  
31 development in China. For instance, one mother argued:  
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37 *We [nuclear family] used to live with my parents-in-law. They felt annoyed because of the long*  
38 *time spent on childcare, which deprived them of their leisure time [...] I disagreed with their*  
39 *lifestyle, such as cooking with expired ingredients due to being frugal. Therefore, we moved*  
40 *out and lived with my parents for childcare.* (Participant 31, Mother)  
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44 The above quote highlights a significant paradox related to what food is considered suitable for  
45 family consumption. Traditional views reflect the older generation's perceptions, while the  
46 younger generation tends to embrace modern food practices, such as fast-food consumption or  
47 following scientific guidelines. This difference can lead to conflict in co-parenting between  
48 generations. Additionally, long-term childcare responsibilities, including food-related ones, can  
49 cause stress for family caregivers such as grandparents, due to the sacrifice of their time and  
50 resources, potentially leading to strained relationships and conflict within the family.  
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3 Grandparents involved in conflict situations are resistant to changing their perspectives on healthy  
4 eating and food habits. This dynamic showcases a parenting style that allows both parents and  
5 grandparents to independently enforce their own approaches, as opposed to adopting a more  
6 collaborative co-parenting model. As a result, the child is exposed to conflicting dietary behaviors,  
7 leading to disagreements when transitioning between parental and grandparental caregiving. It  
8 seems that both sets of caregivers are unwilling to compromise or negotiate on food practices and  
9 authority.  
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17 Conflict, as a co-parenting socialization type, stands apart from the other three types identified in  
18 our 2x2 matrix, such as conformity, due to some key distinguishing factors. These include the  
19 independence of both parents and grandparents and the presence of strong opinions from both sides.  
20 Additionally, family caregivers may experience conflict due to incompatible attitudes and  
21 communication issues inherent in co-parenting. This conflict can ultimately lead to the termination  
22 of co-parenting arrangements due to disagreements about the dietary practices applied to children.  
23 For instance, in the scenario mentioned above, a participant chose to distance herself from her in-  
24 laws and sought to establish an alternative co-parenting relationship with her own parents.  
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#### 32 **4.2.2 Conformity**

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35 Conformity, the second category of the intergenerational co-parenting socialization typology, has  
36 over the years garnered interest from a wide spectrum of social psychology scholars (Willis, 1965;  
37 Sweet *et al.*, 2023). It is argued that individuals' conformity is driven by normative or  
38 informational influence (Wijenayake *et al.*, 2020): as such, parents/grandparents within this  
39 typology are more likely to accept the group norms and avoid change. Reflecting on the extant  
40 literature, we posit conformity as an individual's low desire to change but also a strong intent to  
41 be a part of and fit within a group. The Consumer Studies literature extensively explores the  
42 concept of conformity and how societies vary in their approaches to conformity (Liang and He,  
43 2012; He *et al.*, 2022).  
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51 In East Asian culture, there is a strong inclination to conform, demonstrated by adhering to societal  
52 expectations and group norms when obtaining, using, and disposing of consumer products, all to  
53 uphold harmony within the community (Liang and He, 2012). Culturally, Chinese people tend to  
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3 avoid confrontation and prefer social and familial cohesion. Furthermore, there is inherent respect  
4 toward social and familial hierarchy, which was reflected among some of the parents:  
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8 *I grew up within very tightly knit social and family relationships. I feel it is not socially*  
9 *appreciated if I revolt against my parents. I would prefer to avoid confrontation with my*  
10 *parents as much as I can. (Participant 15, Father)*  
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14 Participants in this category exhibited atypical behaviors in their interactions with co-parenting  
15 counterparts, such as parents or grandparents. Rather than being forthright and expressing their  
16 concerns openly, they chose to acquiesce not because they felt that they should compromise their  
17 values, opinions, or behaviors, but to avoid conflict. According to academic literature, the level of  
18 conformity is influenced by an individual's usual degree of independence and the resources  
19 available to them to make independent decisions (Gong *et al.*, 2021). Some participants in our  
20 study shared that they tried to comply with the suggestions or advice of their co-parenting  
21 counterparts to preserve family harmony. This was necessary for them, as both parents and  
22 grandparents were mutually dependent on each other. One of the parents explained:  
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30 *Childcare can often be expensive. Furthermore, it is neither convenient, nor often safe. I would*  
31 *prefer my children to be looked after by my parents. I do not agree with everything they say or*  
32 *do, but on balance, it is safer and cheaper. Hence, I try to agree with what they say. (Participant*  
33 *8, Mother)*  
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39 Peer conformity is a frequently used conflict resolution strategy (Essiz and Mandrik, 2022). Some  
40 participants in our research engaged in secret talks with similarly inclined peers to sidestep  
41 conflicts. For instance, one participant shared her approach to handling situations in which she  
42 disagreed with excessive consumption patterns and food waste but chose to conform to her son  
43 and daughter-in-law's preferences rather than confront behaviors that promoted overconsumption  
44 and wastefulness.  
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50 *It was too wasteful to throw them away [i.e., fruits and duck meat] but we could not eat them*  
51 *all by the sell-by date either. I used to tell my son and ask my daughter-in-law to buy less, but*  
52 *my son said it was from a company which does business with my daughter-in-law [...] so just*  
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3 *leave what you don't want. I get their point to some extent, although in an ideal scenario, I*  
4 *wouldn't have done the same. (Participant 7, Grandmother)*  
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8 In another situation, parents or grandparents would exert an alternative food consumption practice  
9 for children when there was disagreement between carers. For example, a grandfather reflected on  
10 his method of responding to what he considered undesirable food consumption due to his adult  
11 child's social life:  
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15 *Sometimes they [their adult children] need to socialize and meet friends, which we understand.*  
16 *Therefore, our grandchild would also eat out with them, but it is not healthy because of the*  
17 *food cooking method [e.g., high fat and more salt] and hygiene issues [...] Whenever they*  
18 *returned, I would make some porridge for them to clear their system. I understand their parents*  
19 *would like to take them out for meals, but I still have to look after my grandchildren's health.*  
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24 (Participant 13, Grandfather)  
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27 This highlights both external (i.e., the relationship between parent and grandparent) and internal  
28 (i.e., the grandparent's personal conflict) dynamics in co-parenting, which our study often reflects  
29 as a struggle between conformity and genuine feelings for the other party involved. Grandparents  
30 frequently experienced ambivalence regarding their concerns for their grandchildren's nutritional  
31 well-being while being hesitant to intervene in parental decisions (and vice versa) (e.g., Karanika  
32 and Hogg, 2016; Feinberg, 2002). Instead of simply "letting go," a grandfather, for instance, might  
33 seek to compensate (Landau *et al.*, 2015) and resolve his internal conflict by adopting alternative  
34 strategies for his grandchild, influenced by traditional norms regarding the roles and  
35 responsibilities of parents and grandparents in childcare (Wijenayake *et al.*, 2020). We have  
36 thoroughly explored the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of conformity, leading to a  
37 profound and nuanced understanding of this conflict resolution strategy among our participants. It  
38 is deeply rooted in cultural ethos, governed by social norms, and propelled by psychological  
39 attributes.  
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#### 51 **4.2.3 Compromise**

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53 This category represents co-parents' approach of accepting their counterparts' opinions,  
54 perceptions, and practices, and is similar to conformity. In this situation, the individuals involved  
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3 are not only committed to avoiding conflict but are also open to making adjustments. While  
4 existing literature views compromise as a method for resolving conflicts, the concept of  
5 compromise in philosophy is met with mixed feelings (Day, 1989). On one hand, labeling someone  
6 as ‘uncompromising’ is considered synonymous with being inflexible, which is generally viewed  
7 negatively. On the other hand, there is debate among researchers regarding the ethical implications  
8 of compromise, as it can imply sacrificing one’s moral values. Consequently, sociologists often  
9 perceive compromise as a subjective and temporary solution (Nyberg and Wright, 2013).  
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17 In the field of marketing, the concept of compromise is often examined in decision-making  
18 scenarios (Chuang *et al.*, 2013). The compromise effect denotes individuals’ tendency to favor  
19 middle-of-the-road options that steer clear of extremes (Cova *et al.*, 2015; Koles *et al.*, 2018). As  
20 such, we define compromise as a means of conflict resolution, where one party embraces the  
21 viewpoints, perspectives, and evidence presented by another (e.g., based on expertise, mass/social  
22 media influence, or word of mouth) to avert discord. For instance, one participant mentioned a  
23 scenario where a child developed a gastrointestinal ailment due to his parents’ permissive feeding  
24 practices despite the warnings issued by the grandparents. The grandfather reflected:  
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32 *My grandson used to eat a lot before he started school. We [grandfather and grandmother]*  
33 *thought we should control his overeating, as the child lacks willpower, but they [the child’s*  
34 *parents] did not take it seriously and felt that he should eat as much as he wanted. One day,*  
35 *my grandson had a digestive problem caused by overeating [...] after that, the parents started*  
36 *to pay attention to his eating. It took time to take our advice on board. My wife and I do not*  
37 *like this approach to parenting. However, we do not want to get into trouble either. (Participant*  
38 *22, Grandfather)*  
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46 In the above situation, the grandfather cited his grandchild’s health issue as a basis for judging the  
47 parents’ behavior. However, he fell short of articulating his concerns to prevent conflict. Following  
48 the incident, family members adjusted by seeking advice on dietary practices and reaching  
49 compromises on food-related boundaries. They aimed to uphold autonomy in their food choices  
50 while also considering the grandfather’s thoughts on product intake and frequency control.  
51 Another participant, a father, reflected:  
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3 *My parents would not buy any junk food for my child: only three meals a day with some fruit.*  
4 *But my wife would sometimes take him to KFC. We feel it is okay to have KFC just once a*  
5 *week. (Participant 12, Father)*  
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9 On the other hand, parents would also compromise with grandparents' opinions and views  
10 regarding certain food behaviors exerted on children, despite their dissatisfaction.  
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14 *My father-in-law would like to feed my child with more rice than vegetables during the meal*  
15 *(as he wants to make sure the child can eat well and will not get hungry easily). Now, the child*  
16 *does not like to eat when dinner is ready; nor does he like to eat vegetables, which is unhealthy*  
17 *in the long run. I cannot say anything, but have to follow their approach, since they are seniors*  
18 *[grandparents], and we [the young couple] rely on them to look after the child, saving our*  
19 *time and money, without needing to find a babysitter. I am already grateful for this and (cannot*  
20 *ask for more). (Participant 18, Father)*  
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27 Parents or grandparents may show a tolerant attitude when they are aware of their level of authority  
28 (i.e., legitimate power, as discussed by French and Raven, 1959) and the limitations they or their  
29 co-parents have. This aligns with the argument put forth by Epp and Price (2018) regarding the  
30 role of food consumption in shaping family identity. Hence, individuals modify their behaviors  
31 despite not fully accepting their co-parents' viewpoints. Once again, this can be viewed as a way  
32 to prevent or reduce conflicts.  
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39 The compromise often involves grandparents taking on the majority of the childcare  
40 responsibilities. This could balance any bias towards the grandparents' food practices with the  
41 parents' acceptance. However, tolerating the grandparents' food practices without attempting to  
42 correct any harmful behavior could negatively impact the children's health, as in the case of the  
43 father's comments about his child's fussy eating mentioned earlier.  
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#### 49 **4.2.4 Congruence**

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51 We define congruence as a state of mindful self-awareness and self-acceptance in the context of  
52 co-parenting partners' food consumption practices. It entails a willingness to engage and tactfully  
53 share perceptions (Kolden *et al.*, 2011). Intergenerational congruence with collective identity can  
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3 contribute to maintaining family harmony, acceptance, and cooperative planning. Existing  
4 literature emphasizes intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991; Silverstein and  
5 Giarrusso, 2010) as mutual support, cooperation, and cohesion between family members. However,  
6 we find that the term does not fully capture the dichotomy of acceptance and desire to change.  
7 Therefore, we use the term “congruence” to denote a clearer conceptual positioning. We have  
8 observed that positive attitudes and behaviors in co-parenting can result in positive outcomes, such  
9 as improving children’s healthy eating habits. Embracing another family member’s suggested  
10 practices with belief and confidence is typically based on evidence from past experiences, which  
11 can lead to a convincing argument promoting a healthy diet. As one father described:

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20 *My mother has been taking charge of cooking since the child was born. My partner and I would*  
21 *take advice from my parents, such as cooking bland food and fresh vegetables for children,*  
22 *which is healthy according to their years of wisdom. (Participant 39, Father)*  
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26  
27 Parents and grandparents often communicate about their children’s eating habits and well-being  
28 by sharing advice and feedback. Some participants mentioned using external sources such as social  
29 media, peer groups, and news to persuade their family members to adopt new eating habits,  
30 leveraging both expert and referential influence (see French and Raven, 1959). For example, a  
31 parent might share a food list from their child’s kindergarten with the grandparent to assist in  
32 selecting appropriate foods for the child.  
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39 *I would print out the food list sent by my child’s kindergarten and share it with my mother-in-*  
40 *law [who cooks for the family] so that she knows what sort of food to prepare for the child that*  
41 *week, such as seafood for lunch and beef or lamb for dinner. (Participant 43, Mother)*  
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45 Therefore, sharing values helps families to plan collaboratively to complete the task. This became  
46 evident when a mother reflected:

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49 *In the beginning, we [young parents and grandparents] would discuss instructions, such as*  
50 *how best to make the formula milk for my child – how many spoons should be used to make*  
51 *the flavor lighter or heavier. (Participant 3, Mother)*  
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3 Parents and grandparents would often share practices through mutual learning, such as  
4 intergenerational transmission and reverse socialization. They would come to understand and  
5 adopt new food consumption practices together, whether from another socialization agent like an  
6 institution or social media or through word-of-mouth. For example, family members frequently  
7 merged multiple food traditions when they believed it would benefit the health of their children.  
8 Both generations were inclined to compromise, as evidenced by a comment from a mother:  
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15 *In the past, in the 1980s, we focused more on providing children with three square meals a*  
16 *day, but now the conversation is more about nutrition. Apart from daily meals, we also buy*  
17 *supplement products such as calcium and zinc, which we have learned from Western diets.*  
18 *Also, we are combining the feeding styles of the 1960s and 1980s and adopting things that we*  
19 *believe suit the child. (Participant 26, Mother)*  
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26 This passage highlights the evolving perspectives of parents and grandparents on the role of food,  
27 transitioning from a basic necessity to a complex nutritional resource within the context of  
28 reciprocal socialization. Through intergenerational interactions and adjustments in childcare  
29 practices, mutual acceptance and solidarity emerge in food consumption patterns. This shift seems  
30 to stem from the comparison of the older generation's upbringing with the current needs of  
31 youngsters. Grandparents had fewer options in their youth, including limited access to foreign  
32 brands, snacks, children's product information, and shopping channels. Consequently, they viewed  
33 food primarily as functional rather than for enjoyment, adopting an "eat to live" rather than a "live  
34 to eat" mentality. This acknowledgment of expert influence and the power of socialization agents  
35 helps to bridge intergenerational disparities in values and fosters shared learning, allowing for  
36 adaptations in contemporary food consumption practices for children.  
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46 The concept of congruence is believed to reduce the likelihood of relationship and task conflicts  
47 by minimizing differences in beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes (Jehn *et al.*, 1997). Congruence  
48 signifies a shift in perceptions and knowledge, leading to changes in behavior. This transformation  
49 is seen as more natural and volitional compared to compromise, which can occur without  
50 fundamental changes in one's beliefs and attitudes. It is argued that in product categories where  
51 no congruent value is present, consumers tend to make normative decisions through compromises  
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(Schliwa and Ciornea, 2020). Therefore, compromise typically arises from a lack of congruence. As a result, congruence and compromise can be both complementary and mutually exclusive.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Reflection on findings and theoretical contributions

By employing a conflict lens through the framework of socialization theory, this paper examines the nature of conflictual relationships and their resultant outcomes. Our findings uncover distinct patterns in the socialization processes of intergenerational co-parenting, illustrating how parents and grandparents either challenge or accommodate one another's opinions and behaviors. We present two significant contributions by contrasting our findings with existing literature: 1) the cultural dynamics of intergenerational co-parenting within Chinese society, and 2) a typology for understanding the socialization practices involved in intergenerational co-parenting.

#### *The cultural dynamics of inter-generational co-parenting in the Chinese society*

Despite numerous studies examining various forms of intergenerational familial relationships (Epp and Price, 2008, 2018; Harman *et al.*, 2022; Kerrane *et al.*, 2024), a significant gap persists in research specifically addressing parent–grandparent co-parenting. While there is an increasing body of literature focusing on the role of grandparents in childcare, much of this work has primarily concentrated on familial relationships (Hoang and Kirby, 2020; Bai *et al.*, 2023) rather than on consumption practices (e.g., Yau and Christidi, 2018; Kerrane *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the existing literature has often prioritized the roles and motivations of co-parenting, overlooking the interactional dynamics involved. This study has attempted to address this oversight by contributing to the understanding of intergenerational co-parenting through an examination of the interactional dynamics between parents and grandparents. These dynamics are essential for shaping familial identity and influencing children's attitudes. Utilizing a theoretical framework centered on power relationships alongside a contextual perspective of filial piety, we sought to explore and analyze how parents and grandparents negotiate, balance, and respond to the varying and fluid distributions of power in the co-parenting process.

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3 Our study enhances the existing body of knowledge by exploring intergenerational co-parenting  
4 dynamics within a non-Western cultural context. In contrast to Western countries, where  
5 grandparents' involvement in childcare is often voluntary and based on personal choice (Breheny  
6 *et al.*, 2013; Airey *et al.*, 2020), many Asian nations, including China, uphold a strong tradition of  
7 multi-generational cohabitation. In these cultures, grandparents are expected and often obligated  
8 to engage in childcare responsibilities (Hoang and Kirby, 2020). This expectation is deeply rooted  
9 in the Confucian principle of filial piety, which designates grandparents as authoritative figures  
10 within the family hierarchy. Consequently, younger family members, particularly parents, are  
11 anticipated to respect and consider the perspectives of their elders, which allows grandparents to  
12 exert considerable influence over childcare philosophies and practices. Therefore, findings from  
13 research on intergenerational co-parenting in Western contexts may not fully capture the cultural  
14 complexities inherent in Asian family dynamics. By highlighting these nuanced cultural  
15 differences, our paper makes a valuable contribution to consumer research literature, which has  
16 yet to comprehensively examine the nature of intergenerational dynamics within a Confucian  
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31 In Confucian culture, filial piety emphasizes the importance of obedience from the younger  
32 generation, which is expected to minimize conflict in parent–child relationships. When conflicts  
33 do arise, children are generally expected to take on the responsibility of mitigation (Yeh and  
34 Bedford, 2004). However, our findings indicate that in co-parenting situations where conflicts stem  
35 from interactions between parents and grandparents, mitigation efforts are undertaken by both  
36 parties, rather than solely by the younger generation. Our findings further suggest that in parent–  
37 grandparent co-parenting, power differentials are not always linear and do not necessarily provide  
38 a clear advantage to one party, as expected in the authoritarian view of filial piety (Yeh, 1995).  
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46 Existing literature suggests that power imbalances among stakeholders significantly contribute to  
47 conflict (Recchia *et al.*, 2010; Goh, 2013; Yau and Christidi, 2018). Our findings reveal that the  
48 relational dynamics in intergenerational co-parenting are considerably more complex and fluid.  
49 For example, while working parents may hold a financial advantage over grandparents, they often  
50 acknowledge the contributions of the grandparents out of respect for tradition and familial bonds.  
51 Moreover, we discovered that tensions and conflicts do not arise solely from the autonomy–  
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3 dependence paradoxes identified in previous research (e.g., Yau and Christidi, 2018). Instead,  
4 mutual dependence between parents and grandparents emerged as a central theme in our study.  
5 This observation aligns with Confucian values, emphasizing familial continuity and  
6 interdependence, which can effectively reduce, if not completely eliminate, the power differentials  
7 between the parties involved.  
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13 Conflict may arise not only from an unequal distribution of power but also from varying levels of  
14 acceptance regarding one another's power and the desire for change among individuals. This  
15 nuanced perspective significantly enhances our understanding of family dynamics and the  
16 relationships involved in power conflicts. It asserts that in intergenerational co-parenting situations,  
17 both parties possess agency, irrespective of any existing power imbalance. This agentic perspective  
18 offers a fresh interpretation of contemporary filial piety. Unlike traditional authoritarian filial piety,  
19 which demands obedience solely to grandparents as the family elders, today's reciprocal filial piety  
20 emphasizes mutual respect and recognition of agency across generations (Yeh, 1995; Wu and Yeh,  
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31 We note that, influenced by Eastern cultural values emphasizing close relationships with parents,  
32 the continuation of the family line, and the importance of bringing honor to the family name (Ho,  
33 1994; Mehta and Thang, 2011), both parents and grandparents engage in a mutually beneficial and  
34 symbiotic co-parenting relationship. Parents gain childcare support, fostering a traditional  
35 upbringing for their children, while grandparents fulfil their familial expectations and desire to be  
36 actively involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren (Cox and Paley, 2003; Goh and  
37 Kuczynski, 2010; Karanika and Hogg, 2016). Consequently, even in instances of conflict where  
38 tensions and disagreements arise, a complete cessation of or escape from co-parenting is not  
39 viewed as a desirable outcome. This contrasts with findings regarding Western families, where, in  
40 highly conflictual situations, parents or grandparents may choose to sever ties to maintain their  
41 independence and autonomy (Breheny *et al.*, 2013).  
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### *A typology of the socialization of intergenerational co-parenting*

The study further enhances existing knowledge by examining how conflicts influence family dynamics, aligning with the notion that conflict plays a crucial role in shaping a family's future behavior (Olsen and Grunert, 2010). The findings identify three strategies for conflict mitigation—conformity, compromise, and congruence—utilized by both parents and grandparents to navigate intergenerational co-parenting dynamics. Adopting a power-relational perspective, we argue that the ultimate objective of parents and grandparents is the development and well-being of their children, as well as the preservation of family solidarity. As a result, they opt to mitigate conflicts and foster harmony, emphasizing constructive or problem-solving strategies, as supported by other scholars (e.g., Recchia *et al.*, 2010; García-Ruiz *et al.*, 2013). This restates the notion that self-sacrifice is not the only means to uphold filial piety (Wu and Yeh, 2021).

Additionally, we advance our understanding by analyzing how the dynamics and processes of selecting the aforementioned strategies unfold. These strategies are not rigid; rather, they depend on the extent of acceptance regarding the power influence of others and the desire for change. This indicates that the approach adopted to resolve co-parenting conflicts within the same household may vary based on situational and contextual factors affecting the acceptance of power dynamics and the willingness for change among family members involved in co-parenting. This unique contribution posits that the level of power relations within familial dynamics does not always result in uniform behavioral responses from parents and grandparents. Our typology encapsulates the degree of acceptance influenced by knowledge, experience, and the desire to maintain co-parenting, along with other contextual variables, thereby highlighting the agency of both parents and grandparents.

One key takeaway from this typology is the understanding that even when parents and grandparents accept the influence of power, it does not necessarily indicate a strong desire to change their behavior. Consequently, power influence may not always result in lasting behavioral change, although the dynamics within the relationships may evolve. Among the three strategies identified, it becomes clear that the desire to maintain harmony and respect, as associated with reciprocal filial piety (Yeh and Bedford, 2004), plays a significant role in mitigating conflict.

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5 The conformity strategy reflects a situation where parties recognize the legitimate power of their  
6 counterparts but still engage in coalition formation. In this case, they may express passive  
7 disagreement or employ alternative methods to bypass the more powerful party. The compromise  
8 strategy occurs when parents and grandparents acknowledge each other's expert authority while  
9 demonstrating a lower level of acceptance. Nevertheless, they exhibit pragmatism in addressing  
10 situational needs and strive to find a middle ground to alleviate or prevent conflicts. In terms of  
11 the congruence strategy, parents and grandparents recognize the imbalance in their relationship  
12 dynamics. To achieve the shared objective of the child's well-being, they collaborate to co-create  
13 food practices, as outlined by Epp and Price (2008; 2018) in their exploration of collective identity  
14 ideology.  
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24 Our typology makes a substantial theoretical contribution by enhancing the current understanding  
25 of intergenerational socialization in the context of food consumption behavior. While conflict is a  
26 natural occurrence, evidence suggests that constructive mitigation strategies are generally  
27 preferred. We further refine these strategies by providing a nuanced and detailed understanding  
28 that can assist future research and practice in analyzing the behaviors of various groups of parents  
29 and grandparents within an intergenerational family setting.  
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## 36 **5.2 Managerial implications**

37 Beyond the theoretical contributions of our study, our typology is particularly valuable for crafting  
38 more inclusive marketing strategies and policies that cater to various types of co-parenting carers.  
39 For example, the controversial Kellogg's slogan "Loved by kids, approved by mums" faced  
40 criticism for overlooking the roles of diverse co-parenting figures, including grandparents, and  
41 was ultimately removed from use. As co-parenting becomes increasingly significant and complex,  
42 our study can provide essential insights for businesses and marketing professionals, helping them  
43 to avoid similar pitfalls. By gaining a deeper understanding of the different types of co-parenting  
44 relationships, they can develop more effective promotional strategies and campaigns.  
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53 Tide advertisements, for instance, often highlight intergenerational ethos and family values. This  
54 embodiment of values and opinions shared between parents and grandparents within a brand is  
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3 consistent with the congruence strategy, as family members of different generations accept each  
4 other's opinions and are willing to adapt their behaviors accordingly. On the other hand, one of  
5 the McArabia television commercials in Saudi Arabia depicts everyone in the family waiting for  
6 the grandfather to unwrap his food and start eating before they join in. This reflects conformity,  
7 where the intergenerational family hierarchy is respected and there is no evident desire to change  
8 the status quo. In an example of the compromise typology, Procter and Gamble's "Wrinkles Send  
9 the Wrong Message" campaign displays how grandparents compromise and change their ways to  
10 fit the younger generation's way of life.  
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19 Finally, conflict situations have been depicted in multiple South Asian and Chinese television  
20 commercials for food products, which portray tussles between mothers and grandmothers in a  
21 humorous manner. This highlights that marketing communications do not need to hide conflict,  
22 presenting an imaginary, perfect co-parenting relationship, but can demonstrate how a more  
23 realistic scenario, which includes a level of conflict, can offer a platform for opinion exchange and  
24 intergenerational learning, strengthening (instead of compromising) family bonds. Marketers may  
25 consider employing one or several strategies to effectively target relevant market segments and  
26 create more inclusive approaches. However, our findings suggest that it is crucial for them to  
27 identify which groups' values and behaviors align more closely with their brand image and  
28 positioning.  
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### 38 **5.3 Limitations and Future Research**

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40 As an exploratory study, our research illuminates several key factors influencing intergenerational  
41 interactions, such as cultural values and filial piety. We propose a typology of socialization that  
42 lays the groundwork for future research. Building on these exploratory findings, subsequent  
43 studies could develop and test hypotheses that link our identified factors and typology to specific  
44 consumer- or market-level outcomes, such as consumer attitudes or preferences for particular  
45 products. Future studies could resort to ethnographic inquiries with multiple qualitative tools (e.g.,  
46 observations, photo and video elicitation) to get a deeper understanding of the dynamics within  
47 intergenerational co-parenting. Moreover, a longitudinal study could offer a more nuanced  
48 understanding of how conflict arises and impacts these relationships. Such research could also  
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3 explore how our typology may help to manage these conflicts, fostering a more constructive and  
4 meaningful exchange of ideas and information.  
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8 Given the strong connections between intergenerational dynamics and cultural values highlighted  
9 in our research, we encourage future scholars to conduct similar investigations in cross-country  
10 contexts. This will allow for a comparison of our findings and typology with insights from other  
11 cultures, ultimately leading to more generalizable outcomes. Furthermore, we believe that it is  
12 essential for future studies on intergenerational co-parenting to include children, single parents,  
13 and other extended family members and caregivers. With global life expectancies on the rise,  
14 exploring the relationships between grandparents and adult grandchildren is becoming  
15 increasingly relevant.  
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## Appendix A

Table A1 Respondent Profile

Informant	Family role	Age	Occupation	Informant	Family role	Age	Occupation
1	Grandmother	53	Retired	26	Mother	30	Accountant
2	Mother	31	Customer service	27	Father	30	Sales manager
3	Mother	31	Finance manager	28	Mother	33	Pharmacist
4	Grandmother	58	Retired	29	Father	38	Accountant
5	Father	31	Procurement	30	Grandfather	69	Retired
6	Father	31	Manager	31	Mother	28	HR manager
7	Grandmother	62	Retired	32	Father	30	Underground driver
8	Mother	34	Aircraft Inspector	33	Grandmother	62	Retired
9	Father	38	Engineer	34	Grandmother	58	Retired
10	Grandmother	64	Retired	35	Mother	30	Accountant
11	Mother	28	Administration staff	36	Mother	34	Programmer
12	Father	31	Sales manager	37	Grandfather	59	Retired
13	Grandfather	68	Retired	38	Grandmother	62	Retired
14	Mother	28	Bank clerk	39	Father	33	Programmer
15	Father	29	Engineer	40	Mother	29	Manager
16	Grandmother	65	Retried	41	Grandfather	65	Retired
17	Mother	35	Finance manager	42	Grandmother	50	Retired
18	Father	38	Restaurant chief	43	Mother	30	Manager
19	Grandmother	60	Retired	44	Grandfather	58	Retired
20	Mother	35	Accountant	45	Grandmother	55	Retired
21	Father	43	Manager	46	Grandfather	60	Retired
22	Grandfather	59	Retired	47	Grandfather	62	Retired
23	Mother	32	Fashion Designer	48	Grandmother	58	Insurance salesforce
24	Father	36	Manager	49	Grandfather	57	Manager
25	Grandmother	68	Retired				

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**Interview questions**

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*Why did you consider co-parenting for the children? What reasons were crucial in making this decision?*

*How would you define your experience? Please share some examples.*

*What is your role as a co-parent in relation to the children's food consumption?*

*What are the food consumption practices that you have learned from your parents/adult children?*

*What are the food consumption practices that you have shared with your parents/adult children?*

*Please share your experience relating to accepting or rejecting your co-parenting counterparts' advice/suggestions*

*What kind of disagreements did you normally have?*

*In case of disagreement, what did you do to avoid conflict?*

*Have you ever thought about terminating co-parenting? How did you manage to sustain?*

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**Table 1: Interview Protocol (source: authors' own work)**

Themes	<i>a priori</i> codes	1 <sup>st</sup> order codes	2 <sup>nd</sup> order codes	Final constructs
Situations where parents and grandparents do not wish to resolve conflicts	Conflict	Conflict	Conflict	Conflict
Situations where parents and grandparents wish to resolve conflicts although they do not accept with their counterparts.	N/A	Transformative	Compromise	Compromise
		Compromise		
		Accommodate	Accommodate	
Situations where parents and grandparents wish to resolve conflicts although they do not wish to change	N/A	Reluctant	Reluctant	Conformity
		Conformity	Conformity	
		Status quo		
Situations where parents and grandparents' desire to change is also driven by their willingness to accept their counterparts.	N/A	Cooperative	Cooperative	Congruence
		Congruence	Congruence	

*Table 1: Sample Coding (source: authors' own work)*

	Low desire to change	High desire to change
Low level of acceptance with the counterpart	Conflict	Compromise
High level of acceptance with the counterpart	Conformity	Congruence

*Table 1: 2x2 matrix demonstrating the typology of socialization for intergenerational co-parenting (source: authors' own work)*

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