DAIGOU

Transnational Flows, Relatedness, and the Reproduction of the Chinese Family

Meina Jia Sandal

PhD Dissertation in Global Studies (China Studies)

Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, 2023

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Meina Jia Sandal, November 2022

Contents

Introduction: Food, Mobilities, and Chinese Women

> With the slogan of "high price" and "high quality", the foreign milk powder *(yang naifen*) has won many Chinese parents' hearts. Overseas *daigou* (buying-on-behalf-of) has become a popular way for foreign milk powder to enter the Chinese market.
>
> — Li Dan, Luojie, and Wang Wei, *People. cn*, 2015

> "I want good nutrition from the whole world *(wo yao quanqiu hao yingyang)*."
>
> — An advertising slogan for children's milk from a Chinese dairy company, *Yili*, 2019

Produced in Denmark, Consumed in China

On a weekend in October 2017 in a supermarket in Aalborg, a city with 221,082 inhabitants in northern Denmark, Li Qin, [1] a young lady purchased all the *Arla* (a Danish dairy brand) infant formula on the supermarket shelf and she also asked the supermarket staff if they had more of the baby milk powder as well as other food products in the storage room. She pointed to some luggage and said to me with a smile, "This is going to be my pocket money for this month." What she meant was that she would package the products and resell them via social media platforms to consumers in China. She did this shopping trip two or three times per month depending on the number of customer orders. The profit was her main income source in Denmark as she did not have any regular employment. She had come to Denmark from China because of her husband who worked as a postdoctoral researcher at a Danish university. She started to resell Danish products to customers in China via social media. Most of Qin's clients were her friends, relatives, previous classmates, and people she knew via her friends' social network who wanted Danish products. Qin also traded other products, such as luxury bags, and skincare products, but reselling baby formula was her main service as it was in great demand

in China and the profit margin was bigger than for other types of products. WeChat [2] was the main platform she used to communicate with her clients. Qin could earn about 8,000 DKK (approx.1200 USD) per month through this small-scale business.

Li Qin's business is called *daigou* in Chinese. The term means "buying-on-behalf-of". The term originally and specifically refers to a cross-border form of exporting in which an individual or a group of people outside of China purchases foreign commodities for customers in mainland China. And this term refers to both the activities and the traders themselves in practice. The exact number of *daigou* operators is not clear as this business type involves both million-dollar-order-based trade as well as a "suitcase trade" that Qin performs. But the volume of this informal e-commerce is enormous, as it covers different types of *daigou* business. A brief development process of this business is normally like this: An overseas Chinese person starts the business by helping some of their friends in China to purchase local products without registering any licenses; gradually, they have more customers and may register an Import and Export Company to be a professional *daigou* operator; if they have more customer orders than they can manage, they will employ others to run the business and become a big *daigou* agent. According to the business scale, there are individual *daigou* operators and *daigou* companies.

From the existing statistics, it has been estimated that there are between 100,000 and 200,000 *daigou* shoppers in Australia alone who directly connect Chinese consumers with Australian goods (Nielsen 2017). According to the latest statistics, the number of immigrants with Chinese nationality in Denmark is 12,629 in 2022 (Statistics Denmark 2022). With the search string of "*daigou* in Denmark", a quick search on the most popular online shopping website in China – Taobao.com[3] – results in over 5,000 shops with diverse kinds of Danish products for sale online.[4] The number of domestic *daigou* users in China, according to statistics from *iResearch Consulting Group,*[5] was 15 million in 2014. This number reached 41 million in 2016 then increased to 138 million in 2021. When I did my fieldwork at the supermarkets in

Denmark in 2018, I saw there was a sign with "one client can only buy two cans of infant formula" (not in Danish but English) under the product shelves for infant formula in the local Føtex – a Danish supermarket chain – in Aalborg. A staff member at the supermarket told me that he saw many Asian women buying up all the infant formula from the shelves recently. The "two-can limit" was a temporary method to ensure the supply for other consumers, as the supermarket had received customer complaints because of the shortage of infant formula on the shelves. Similar situations also happened in other countries, such as Australia and Germany, where the spike in *daigou* exports led to a temporary shortage on the local supply side (Puddy and Burnie 2018).

The significant economic value and extensive participation of Chinese immigrants in *daigou* have attracted not only attention in business circles but also in the academic field, especially within anthropology, focusing on the women's role in the network business and exploring the change of public space for Chinese women in a global world (Zhang 2017; Martin 2022). This micro-entrepreneurial activity has developed into an important method for female immigrants all over the world to simultaneously gain income and realize ambitions of transnational mobility. Each region where Chinese immigrants live has some consumer items that are most popular in China. For example, in North America and western Europe, high-end luxury fashion and accessories dominate the market (Zhang 2017). In Korea and Japan, Chinese immigrants usually resell cosmetics and beauty products as the target group of consumers of these products – young Chinese women – think that Asian skin is different from European skin, and therefore the products from Asian countries are most likely more suitable for Chinese people compared with skin products from Europe. Looking at products from Australia and New Zealand, several consumer items are popular among Chinese consumers, such as health supplements, vitamins, personal healthcare products and pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and infant and toddler milk powder, as well as a whole range of basic supermarket

items, ranging from breakfast cereal to cookies, cake mix, and chocolate (Martin 2022, 143). Looking at Denmark, dairy products are most in demand for Chinese consumers, specifically infant formula, as Denmark has a good reputation for a pure and clean environment and high-standards for organic foods which are important factors for producing high-quality breastmilk substitutes. Arla Foods, a multinational cooperative based in Denmark, is the largest producer of dairy products in Scandinavia. China has become one of the biggest importing countries of dairy products from Denmark, and the export value increased from 312 million DKK in 2010 to 1,442 million DKK in 2020, according to the latest report from the Danish Agriculture and Food Council.[6]

I started to follow the case of *daigou* in Denmark when I did my Master's programme in Culture, Communication, and Globalization at Aalborg University. Originally, this was because my friends in China asked me to buy Danish infant formula for their babies. During my six-month experience of doing *daigou*, I found that this informal network business was very popular among Chinese women immigrants, such as international students and housewives whose partners worked in Denmark. I finished a thesis which focused on the *daigou* business in Denmark from the perspective of consumption and marketing. In September of 2018, I started my PhD project at Aarhus University and continued to work on the *daigou* case and moved deeper into the socio-economic changes behind the phenomenon. In mid-2019, I went back to my hometown in China, Tangshan, to do ethnographic research on the demand side of the network business, namely the consumers of foreign infant formula in China.

On 15 April 2019, I arrived in China for five months of fieldwork, focusing on Chinese consumers' strategies and practices to approach food safety issues, especially regarding children's food. When the aeroplane landed in Beijing from Copenhagen and I went through the hall of the airport to catch the shuttle to transfer to Tangshan city, my hometown, I saw a huge-sized advertisement for a type of children's milk from a domestic dairy company on the

giant billboard at the bus stop. In big Chinese characters, it said: "*Wo yao quanqiu hao yingyang* (I want good nutrition from all around the world)". It vividly depicted how Chinese kids enjoy the milk products with raspberries from Canada, blueberries from the United States, strawberries from Austria, probiotics from Denmark, Mangoes from India, and with milk sourced from New Zealand. Similarly, many other food companies use the "imported ingredient" as a selling point to attract the Chinese consumers' attention. Ironically, while domestic dairy companies spare no efforts to persuade the consumers to buy their "globally made" products, Chinese consumers doubt their authenticity. "They just claim that the milk is made of those imported ingredients. Who knows whether it is real or not?", a young Chinese mother told me when I asked her opinion on the difference between the imported food in the Chinese domestic market and the food imported through a *daigou* network.

The niche market of *daigou* emerged around the mid-2000s with the rise of Chinese purchasing power and international mobility. *Daigou* of infant formula boomed sharply after the baby milk scandal on Sanlu Group, a domestic dairy company based in Shijiazhuang in 2008. About 300,000 Chinese infants and young children were affected with kidney and urinary tract medical issues by consuming baby formula laced with melamine produced by Sanlu Group (Branigan 2008). Today, millions of Chinese parents draw upon social networks abroad to secure foreign infant formula. According to a recent Chinese consumer report from McKinsey, among 17 categories of products, infant milk powder has become the most popular product category, in which Chinese consumers prefer foreign brands over domestic brands (Baan et al. 2017, 18). The Chinese middle class has become the target consumer group for foreign infant formula sourced through *daigou* networks as they believe that formula bought directly in developed regions are untainted by contact with China's suspect markets and untrustworthy distribution channels (Hanser and Li 2015).

Starting with consumers of foreign infant formula in Tangshan, I got in touch with a

middle-class parent group in Wuqing District in Tianjin. I was introduced to this group by Yangyang, one of my friends who was also one of my clients when I was in the *daigou* business. From May to July 2019, I lived with Yang's family and entered her friend circle of parents whose children went to the same kindergarten as Yang's children did. My interlocutors in China included parents of two generations, shopping assistants, and product managers at food companies. Following the lives of Chinese middle-class parents, I entered a "Ladies' Club", [7] kindergarten, mother-and-baby shops, and their homes. In these spaces, a kind of common anxiety emerged from the ethnography among this group through conversations, narratives, and everyday life practices, not only regarding child-feeding but also transportation, education, daily safety, etc.

The two excerpts of *daigou* business in Denmark and its consumers in China illustrate the core subject of my dissertation: A multi-sited ethnographic study of the network business of infant formula between Denmark and China, and the change of relatedness and family reproduction modes among the Chinese middle class reflected by this business. This research explores and analyses two types of strategies for family reproduction revolving around the topic of chid-feeding, namely "gated consumption" and "international mobility". In this respect, this research investigates how relatedness (kin-based and non-kin-based relationships) is affected in both the vertical dimension of feeding and rearing patterns between generations and on the horizontal dimension of raising Chinese families overseas through the formation of network businesses based on transnational connections against the backdrop of global capital.

More specifically, the dissertation addresses the following interrelated questions: How does production, distribution, and consumption of infant formula reflect the change of family reproduction mode from an anthropological perspective? How does the infant formula become a kind of concern for the middle-class Chinese parents and how do they cope with the anxiety? How does the anxiety related to infant formula in the Chinese market connect to the emergence

of the transnational network business? As a female-dominated work venture, how do Chinese women immigrants establish the *daigou* business through their social networks and the characteristic of feminization to raise their families overseas? How can we interpret the transnational reselling network of infant formula in order to make sense of the changed modes of Chinese family reproduction?

I probe the above questions in the following ways. First, I take the infant formula as a substance representing care, gender, and kinship to review the issue of family reproduction, one that is revolving round raising new generations of persons as kin. I argue that the transition of child feeding patterns reflects the changes of risk in raising families in China as well as responsive family reproduction mode, an issue which is influenced by multiple social-cultural factors.

Second, this dissertation provides an ethnographic account of how this *daigou* business developed between two groups of Chinese middle-class families: consumers in China and resellers in Denmark. The main subjects of reselling and buying infant formula in this case are Chinese women and they are facing a common problem: how to raise the next generation facing uncertainties in a changing society? Here I use the term "transnationalism" to refer to the strategy to cope with new risks, challenges, and anxieties against the backdrop of global capitalism, embodied by a transnational food supply of infant formula and transnational immigration.

Third, this research taps into the discussion on complexity of relatedness involved in Chinese family reproduction by analysing the entanglement of gift exchange and commodity exchange, as well as unpaid labor and paid labor of women in the *daigou* business. In light of (post-) Bourdieusian capitals theory, I attempt to explain a derivative of gendered social capital which is highly connected to family reproductive activity – namely, *care*.

Fourth, the strategies of "buying-in" and "going out" to feed Chinese children further

situates the family reproduction mode of the Chinese middle-class family in the context of transnationalism. Social media development, personal network, immigration opportunities, etc. assist the import of foreign products from outside of China and the transnational mobility for affluent Chinese people.

This research investigates the intersections between market, relatedness, and reproduction in the network business of infant formula. The dominance of females in the business makes it necessary to consider the gender dimension. This research attempts to provide a mapping of the transnational network and characterizes the practices of the two groups of young women as two forms of strategies to raise their families and realize prosperity: buying-in and going-out. The internal resource is the personal relationship (social capital) while the external influence is the global capitalist system which is featured by the flows of resources, such as people, products, and information.

In what follows, I situate this dissertation in the research field of anthropology and sinology. In addition to briefly discussing how my insights on these topics has been shaped by relevant theoretical development, I propose how this study can further contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationships between market and relatedness and between global economy and private life.

Children's Food as a Lens

Foreign infant formula is the overt thread that structures this dissertation. Moving from the origin of infant formula as a kind of children's food to the demand for high-end foreign infant formula in China, I then turn to the supply side of this product outside China and the influence of the reselling business on overseas Chinese immigrants' lives. The dietary pattern of Chinese children has undergone a major transformation since the 1980s when the Maoist socialist system was replaced by a market-oriented economic system and a household responsibility system where risks grew alongside the prosperity of the commodity economy which also

emphasised individualized approaches to cope with the risks (Klein 2013; Yan 2012). Common anxiety, not only regarding food but also other aspects of life, especially among the middle class currently has grown as a consequence of greater choice and personal responsibility with the loosening of collective mechanisms and the greater role of the market. The notion of children's food (*ertong shipin*) as a distinct category of consumables did not exist in China before the 1960s. The emergence of infant formula as a representative children's food is worthy of discussion to investigate its cultural, political, and socioeconomic ramifications (Jing 2000; Patico and Lozada Jr 2019). Therefore, this research takes the reselling network business of infant formula as a lens to examine Chinese communities through two dimensions: external socioeconomic changes and internal relational changes.

Infant formula and Societal Changes

Infant formula is widely recognized as a breastmilk substitute even though there is some ambiguity between breast milk substitutes and complementary foods in official WHO documents (Forsyth 2018; Grummer-Strawn 2018). According to WHO, review of evidence has shown that on a population basis, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months is the optimal way of feeding infants (WHO/UNICEF 2018). As a special food for infants and young children, infant formula was introduced to China in the 1960s and became popular nationally in the 1980s. The change in feeding Chinese infants and young children has a wide range of influences from economic, political, and cultural aspects. By examining the difference in feeding patterns between generations, we can also see changes in these aspects in China. In the past 40 years, China has seen a general declining trend in the breastfeeding rate. Taking the breastfeeding development for an example, in 2019, the exclusive breastfeeding rate within 6 months was 29%, which is significantly lower than the world average of 43% and the average of 37% in low and middle-income countries (Wang et al. 2019). Besides the individual factors, such as mothers' physical and psychological conditions, and organizational factors, such as

public breastfeeding-friendly facilities, structural factors related to social-cultural backgrounds could be the main reasons for a low breastfeeding rate (Rollins et al. 2016). In the case of China, the penetration of commercialism and capitalism obstructed the effectiveness of the Chinese government's measures to promote breastfeeding in China (Gottschang 2000). The macro-politics of economic reform influenced micro-politics of family lives where feeding and eating constitute the main daily practices.

The history of infant formula in China is chiefly a history of commodification. Before the 1960s, infants and young children in China were normally fed on breastmilk or what the adults consumed when they were old enough. The traditional challenge for feeding infants and young children was starvation or malnutrition, while the modern challenge is the social risk that follows when you do not know whether the people who made the food are trustworthy or not in the long-distance distribution channels (Almas 1999). Compared with previous generations, these children are growing up in a highly developed consumer society characterized by consumer stratification. By any measure of living standards, they are far better off than the previous generations (Guo 2000). However, compared with their parents and grandparents, their childhood takes place in a risky society where food safety issues have aroused extensive attention (Yan 2012).

Children's health and safety have always been at the core not only for families but also for the country's future. From a marketing perspective, children's food is a segmented consumer market. It is also a field where issues of morality and trust tend to stand out. Trust, or social trust, is variously depicted as a necessity, especially in modern societies, as all social activities have a connection to trust, such as healthcare, economic transactions, happiness, development, and prosperity (Carey 2017; Fukuyama 1996; Luhmann 2017). The production and distribution of infant formula is closely tied to social trust as consumers cannot follow all the links from production until their children drink it. But consumers try their best to source trustworthy

products based on their resources, both the economic and the social. Facing an uncertain food market, more and more consumers tend to purchase food from channels which can be guaranteed by acquaintance or morality with an emphasis on personal trust (Klein 2013; Wang et al. 2015).

There are about 300 million children under the age of sixteen in the People's Republic of China, [8] representing one-fifth of the children in the world. After the *two-child policy* was introduced in 2013, the number of newborns among the population increased significantly in 2016 (17.86 million) and 2017 (17.23 million), followed by a slight decline in this trend in the three most recent years. Being the largest global consumer market, China has grasped many international companies' attention. Especially in the booming children's market, many big companies compete with each other to grab a share of the Chinese market. However, the same brand infant formula in China is much more expensive than that in other overseas markets.[9] There are complicated reasons for the big price difference, such as marketing cost and consumer psychology. After the infant formula scandal in 2008, consumers lost trust in products in the domestic market, especially on cheap products. As infant formula is about children's health, the quality of the product is paramount. Therefore, parents tend to buy high-priced products as they believe the more expensive a product is, the better the quality they (and their children) will receive (Geller and Li 2019).

The massive demand for infant formula in China has created a huge consumer market for both domestic and international food companies to compete to divide up the "big cake"; however, the prosperous product market with uncertainty made Chinese consumers anxious because of not only the tremendous options but also the potential risks of the food as toxic additives were ubiquitously used in food production, such as pesticides, food additives, and preservatives. The focus of this research is on the social meaning of infant formula, a matter that profoundly affects both children and parents in China, including the demand for breastmilk

substitutes, consumer psychology, the trust and relationships that are in play in *daigou* business and the gendered work of feeding.

Infant formula and Relational Changes

As mentioned previously, infant formula is widely used to replace or supplement breastmilk when feeding infants and young children. Breastmilk is not only a substantial food for infants; it also expresses a biological tie of kinship. Breastmilk is both a paradigmatic symbol of nurturance and in itself constitutive of relatedness/kinship (Lambert 2000). When infant formula is used to replace breastmilk, it also takes on similar socio-moral values as breastmilk is a substance that builds relatedness/kinship (Carsten 2000). In this research, the infant formula is taken as a substance of relatedness/kinship-building which is used by parents (mostly mothers) not only as a pattern to feed infants and young children but also as a means to offer care to infants when mothers cannot continue to breastfeed. I argue that in this vertical dimension of the family relationship, who feeds, how they feed, and what they feed the offspring indicate the degree of care and the relatedness. Therefore, choosing one brand of formula over another within the hierarchically segmented market can indicate the extent of care towards kin as well as the pecuniary means: it simultaneously shows form of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous care.

From the horizontal perspective, overseas Chinese families belong to a wider transnational network based on kinship and acquaintance both within and outside China. In the case of the *daigou* business of infant formula between Denmark and China, the transnational network is established along with the development of this business. The reselling network of infant formula combines the characteristics of both gift-giving and economic transactions which involve the principles of relational reciprocity and market. Besides economic profits, the network business may also help in establishing *guanxi* and *renqing* (relationship)(Yang 1994; Yan 1996). However, doing business with friends and relatives can undermine the friendly

relationship as the "resellers" may see it as a business transaction while the "customers" would like to see it as a friendly favor.

There are two central studies of Chinese social relationships: Mei-Hui Yang's, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets* in 1994 and Yan Yuanxiang's, *The Flow of Gifts* in 1996. Yang's research is based on a large urban network of connected individuals with various resources to trade but in an economy with a lack of sufficient legal or market mechanisms. Therefore, reciprocity and brokerage are the motivations behind favor exchanges (Bian 1997; Yang 1994). Yan's research case is a rural network which is small, densely knit, and community-based. Gift-exchange in Yan's case is more of a moral obligation and way of life than a strategy to obtain resources(Bian 1997; Yan 1996). The difference in the relationship examined in my research between that from the previous studies includes two aspects. The first aspect is related to the research object of infant formula: it is considered food, a commodity, a gift, and also a form of care (for the next generation). The trade of infant formula through networks involves not only the relationship between the sellers *(daigou)* and the buyers (parents) but also their relationship with the consumers (infants and young children). The second aspect is related to the entanglement of favor and profits (both economic and social forms) attached to the business. I will continue to discuss them in detail in the following sections and in Chapter 4.

The Middle Class as Consumers

"Consumers" of infant formula refer to two groups of people: the people buying the products who are usually parents or other adult guardians and the young children consuming the food. If we take the family as a unit to examine the consumer market of infant formula, consumers of foreign infant formula through the *daigou* networks are mainly from affluential middle-class families. In terms of the *daigou* network business of foreign infant formula, there are additional "consumers" of the products – *daigou* resellers, as they buy the products directly from foreign markets and resell them transnationally. Some scholars define this social media-based reselling

activity as "prosumption"[10] which involves both production and consumption rather than focusing on either one (production) or the other (consumption)(Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010).

I use the term here to refer to an emerging social group which is largely organized around consumption practices and lifestyle-based identities, and neither blue collar workers nor very rich (Hanser and Li 2015). However, one clear difficulty in using the term middle class to characterise the consumers is that the notion of class and the middle class have their specific historical backgrounds. Guided by Marxist class analysis of relations of production, the analysis of class status was used as an important tool to organize revolution and reform in China (Mao 1962; Marx and Engels 1998). The classification of classes in terms of relations of domination, structured inequalities, and shared consciousness under communism results in the emergence of "capitalists", "petty bourgeoisie" and "proletariat" but those terms have been abolished in post-socialist China (U 2016). Since the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy has shifted from the Maoist ideal of continuous revolution to one of economic development and wealth creation, and the Chinese social configuration has developed into a much more complex structure during this economic transformation. In Mao's China, the proletariat was claimed to be the most progressive force of history and the embodiment of the most advanced forces of production (Solinger 2002, 2004). Today, the key players in China's market economy are those who generate material wealth by producing, providing, and consuming goods and services (Yingjie Guo 2008). The influence of class categorization in socialist China makes it problematic to use the term "middle class" nowadays as the concept is a translation of "bourgeoisie" from Marx and Engels's work (Y. Liu and Wu 2006) – the class that represented the capitalist relations of production in China in the revolution (Mao 1962). The meaning of the middle class in China has changed tremendously since the Chinese revolution and reform. Alternative terms, such as middle strata (*zhongjian jieceng*), middle-income group (*zhongdeng shouru qunti*), and the new rich (*xinfu*) are also

used in Chinese news reports and articles (Li 2008).

Although the middle class is a contested concept, it is still widely used in academic research. Among all the indexes, income is the most essential index when classifying the middle class (Goodman 2008). The economic function of the middle class is more significant than their political role in current Chinese society. In other words, consumption has also become an important constitutive mechanism for the creation of middle-class identity and membership in China today (Hanser and Li 2015). In the process of commodification, consumption includes not only the purchase of consumer goods but also commodified services, education, accommodation, etc. In this research, when taking infant formula as a market product, the main consumers of high-end foreign infant formula are families from the middle and upper classes as they can afford the costs and have access to overseas markets through their networks.

Overseas Chinese *daigou* operators are also categorized as belonging to the middle class in terms of their economic situation, income, patterns of consumption, and lifestyle (Zhang 2017). The group of *daigou* operators is mainly constituted by young Chinese women, such as international students and stay-at-home partners of regularly employed men. Usually, middle- and upper-class families in China can afford to pay for members of their family to study abroad (Fong 2011).

Modern Chinese womanhood has been historically interweaved with consumerism (Weinbaum 2008). However, in socialist China, consumerism was abhorred as a lifestyle of bourgeois and it resisted the idea to realize female liberation with a typical image of the modern "iron girls" – the gender-neutral female model workers (Anagnost 1989). Compared with the communist female models, the current women *daigou* operators pursue transnational mobility, flexibility, and autonomy: values that are distinctive from what their mothers and grandmothers pursued when they were young.

The consumption of infant formula is connected to a gendered distinction, as it is usually the mothers who choose and buy the products for their children and the *daigou* operators, the "prosumers" of infant formula, are also usually women. In a competitive market of service-oriented social media sales, the gendered relationships between sellers and customers are the key to business success. Consumers tend to trust women, especially mothers, as experts in extending care. Some scholars regard the reconfiguration of the consumption skills as a "new source of economic power" and "workplace authority" for women, identifying the valorization of reproduction of labor power including mainly women's unpaid domestic and community work as well as homework for the market (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003). As a kind of prosuming economic activity, *daigou* blurs the boundaries between productive and reproductive labor and, as such, offers an ideal case to investigate the monetary value of women's unpaid labor, which is normally not calculated into the economy. From a feminist view point, this research shows not only a visible connection between middle-class women inside and outside China based on their relationship to the supply and demand of infant formula, but also solidarity in their negotiation of patriarchal economic structures. Chapter 3 focuses on examining the consumers' psychology and characteristics of the Chinese middle class, and Chapter 5 discusses the labor of women involved in this research.

Relatedness as Axes

Two types of relationships are interwoven in the *daigou* network business: vertical family relationships and horizontal transnational relations. Vertical family relationships are formed by the moral obligations and widespread expectations of the "generational contract" or "the cycle of *yang*" (Stafford 2000). whereby the birth, care, and protection that parents provide to their offspring should ultimately be reciprocated when they get old (Qi 2021; Rytter 2013). The feeding patterns of Chinese families reflect changes in the vertical family relationships as feeding is the central everyday practice of family reproduction. From the horizontal

perspective, Chinese immigrant families form part of wider transnational networks based on kinship and acquaintances, and the relationship with relatives, neighbours, classmates, and friends that Charles Stafford names "the cycle of *laiwang*" (Stafford 2000) constitute the main part of the business.

There are also two other pairs of relationships entangled in the network business of *daigou*: the commercial relationship between sellers and buyers in the transaction, and the friendly or affinitive relationship between friends or relatives which reaches beyond the transaction. The entanglement of monetary and sentimental relationships in the business determines the interplay of two types of morality in the commercial and non-commercial exchanges (Parry and Bloch 2000).

Child-Feeding and Family Relations

Intergenerational differences appear in the ethnography of child-feeding patterns in this research. For example, the current young parents born during the 1980s to the 1990s and their parents' generation born during the 1950s to the 1960s hold different attitudes towards food, child-feeding, and childrearing. This generation gap in terms of social values and personal aspirations is evident in their experiences and feelings about raising the next generation (Guo 2000). The hardship of raising families emerged multiple times in my fieldwork on child-feeding in China with the current parent generation. However, even though the grandparent generation has raised their children with previous sacrifices and hardships, they are still facing a moral obligation to be the people who are ready to help to take care of their grandchildren. The grandparents are "willing" to take the pain and provide care owing to their own experience of loss in the past and their hope for transcendence in the future (Bruckermann 2017). The core of child-feeding is care and caregiving which in contemporary China is not a task only for parents in a nuclear family but a cooperative work for the extended family including grandparents. The provision of public services for taking care of infants and young children

under three-years-old was gradually reduced and transferred to at-home care along with the economic reform after 1978 in urban China. Retired grandparents became the ideal choice for taking caring of grandchildren when both parents are working because of the trust based on kinship. To some extent, grandparents construct their subjectivities/moral selves through providing care to their grandchildren.

However, for Chinese immigrant families, the parents normally shoulder the responsibilities of child-feeding and child-rearing by themselves as it is difficult for the parents to receive direct help in taking care of children from their family members in China due to the difficulties of transnational mobility. However, it is very common for overseas families to receive indirect help from their families in China. In the case of *daigou*, the resellers normally ask their parents in China to help with distributing the packages to the customers, and their parents also play an important role in extending the reselling network. In this dimension, the network business works not only by making economic profits but also by helping to enhance relationships based on kin or acquaintances in return.

Morality and Trust in Food Supply in China

In traditional Chinese society, economic activity is immersed in a framework of morality and ethics (Fei 1980; Yan 1996). This moral order expresses itself in the distribution of family property and in family businesses, as well as in the allocation of collective resources in communities. "Sentiments (*renqing*) are more important than property (*caiwu*)", which is an ideal moral principle in Chinese traditional society. A huge change happened after the foundation of New China in 1949. Collective interest and state interest replaced relational ethics and sentiments and became the supreme value orientation (Stafford 2013). China started to develop a modern economy but the market played a limited role. Following Marxist theory, China attempted to establish a new country which was different from western capitalist countries. Generally, economic development was still under the moral framework with

distinctive features, such as permanent employment, state paternalism, and collective agriculture. Sharing some features with a traditional "moral economy" in a feudal society, some scholars called the economic mechanism of the 1950s to the 1960s "Maoist Moral Economy" (Perry 1999). This policy lasted from the initial period of *Reform and Opening-up* until the middle of the 1980s. After *Reform and Opening-up* in 1978, the guiding ideology changed to one of "development as the absolute principle". Domestic and foreign capital entered China and China shifted quickly from a moral economy-oriented society (including both traditional and state controls) to a market economy-oriented society. The collapse of morality and crises of trust aroused social attention afterwards. Food safety issues are one of those crises in post-socialist China which has become the main problem for Chinese commercial society arousing extensive anxiety among consumers.

Morality and trust are the core disputed concepts in the food safety crisis. We know from previous research that consumers tend to purchase food from producers who they trust will source safe food locally and from personal relations (Bunkenborg and Hansen 2019; Wang et al. 2015). Regarding the daily food supply, people prefer to buy fresh food from home-grown places rather than supermarkets as many people believe vegetables sold by individuals are fresher and less likely to be contaminated with chemical fertilizers. A commonly known phrase in China is "shorter transportation, better products", because as more agents join the food supply chain from production to consumption, the higher the potential risks will be. The best food is supposed to be that directly from the earth to the table.

However, the popularity of *daigou* networks contradicts this general picture, and shows us an opposite case where people prefer to purchase infant formula from a transnational network rather than the short-distance food supply. This leads us to think about the types of trust and priorities of standards when people choose food products. Even though the consumer preferences in terms of distribution channels for fresh food and for processed food are different,

we can still see some common characteristics between the two cases. Generally, Chinese consumers prefer to buy products from outside official channels if they have access to alternative channels, such as the private sellers of vegetables and imported products from outside of China. This is the case because a series of food safety scandals have created national panic, leading consumers to gradually lose confidence in the products on the conventional market. Facing uncertainty, they tend to choose other methods to get trustworthy products. The "opting-out" (Hanser and Li 2015) of formal channels reflects a distrust of state regulatory governance; the "opting-in" of informal channels is the response to this distrust. During my fieldwork, I was so curious about why Chinese consumers trust such far-away markets, like the United States, Europe, and Japan, rather than a market within a stone's throw. A group of parents told me: "Actually we don't know whether the European market or American market is trustworthy or not, but we know that the Chinese market is untrustworthy. Chinese people cheat Chinese people (*zhongguoren pian zhongguoren*)."

Two important factors influence Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions: first, they need to source safe and healthy products; second, they need to figure out a reliable channel to deliver the products. Both factors are determined by two forms of trust – system trust (ST) and personal trust (PT). ST represents trust in institutions or states. For example, many Chinese consumers believe that the food quality standard in developed regions, such as the European Union, Japan, and the United States, is higher than that in developing countries, to which they include China. PT refers to trust in private relations which is connected by kinship, friendship, etc. Through the trust framework, we can gain an understanding of Chinese consumers' choices of different types of food.

Gender as a Capital

As a main role in family reproduction, women are the main subject in this research with the majority of both the buyers and resellers of infant formula in the *daigou* business being women.

Taking the network in Denmark as an example, 90 per cent of the business is led by women, such as housewives, young mothers, and female international students. Sometimes when it is needed, their male partners may help them, such as by delivering the packages to the post office. There are a variety of factors discussed below contributing to this gendered professionalization.

First, the phenomenon is related to the traditional expectation of the woman's role in a patriarchal society. The traditional Chinese family model – men's work is centered outside of the home, while women's work is centered inside the home (*nv zhu nei, nan zhu wai)* – still has much sway over the division of labor within the family. Feminist development challenges traditional gender relationships and welcomes equal opportunities for women to realize personal value. In the *daigou* case in Denmark, even though the Chinese immigrant women are living in another country, the traditional value orientation to some extent still holds sway. Many of them come to Denmark because of marriage. Family reunification has become a main channel for Chinese women to settle down in Denmark. Facing difficulties in finding a formal job in another country and the need to earn money, these Chinese women started their *daigou* business to gain some income. Through this handy business, they can stay in Denmark to take care of the family on the one hand and realize financial autonomy on the other.

Second, feminization of *daigou* is related to the technological empowerment of women. Compared with traditional society, modern society offers more channels to realize autonomy. One significant change is the social-media-based virtual space. The development of information technology creates a second space (virtual space) to explore social relations. However, the main theme of equality in feminist research does not change significantly as the environmental change does, which is still focusing on the negotiation with patriarchal discourse and social relations of production. In Friedrich Engels's work, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1975), he argues that the expansion of the male-dominant realm of

social production outside the family led to the devaluation of the household and women's work in their families (Yang 1999). The importance of Engels's work, on this point, is that it marked the Marxist attempt to grasp one aspect of this complex totality – the matrix of class and gender relations – to propose a strategy for combating capitalism as a gendered and exploitative system as a whole. This argument seems to suppose a more pluralistic "dual systems" approach: "capitalist class exploitation on the one hand and the patriarchal oppression of women on the other as two distinct aspects of reality" (Blackledge 2018).

Following the instruction from Marxism, the exploration of feminism in China during this state-socialist time was limited to the class struggle and gender difference was neglected. A typical image of the modern women at the time was the "iron girl" who competes with their male counterparts in social production, such as in agriculture, construction, and industrial production. However, the masculinization of women's bodies neglected gender identity even though the revolution significantly liberated Chinese women from the traditional feudal lifestyle that expected women to devote themselves to the patrilineal family of their husbands.

Since China's reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, millions of Chinese women left the countryside and flooded into the labor-intensive manufacturing economy and the urban domestic-work industry. In contrast to the "iron girls" of socialist China, the new laboring women had no guarantee of permanent employment and had to enter the market to search for jobs in the reform era. The emergence of domestic workers in urban regions is a typical example of the feminization of labor during the reform era in China. To achieve both "economic profit" (*jingji xiaoyi*) and "social effect" (*shehui xiaoyi*), rural Chinese women were "encouraged" to leave the countryside and support the social construction of urban regions. For the Chinese women themselves, this was described as a way to gain "*suzhi*" (value) in the labor market. The ideology of *suzhi,* Yan Hairong argues, both facilitated exploitation and made it invisible, producing surplus value for employers, while ostensibly gaining personal "quality"

in the process (Yan 2003a).

Besides the emergence of domestic workers, another booming industry in the reform era was the sex service industry which was strictly banned during socialist China but developed quickly in the Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region [11] and then spread to the rest of the nation in Reform China. The porn industry aroused the attention of female sex workers in China. Many anthropologists entered those young girls' lives and proposed legal entitlements for sex workers (Huang and Pan 2014). Like workers in other service industries, sex workers are not those who are morally degenerated, but in fact normal people. The research on sex workers provides a lot of inspiration regarding the debate between economic profits and morality. Further, the research also expands the exploration of the capital from *Wage Labour* (Karl 1972) to the gender dimension. Researchers propose that *Sexual Capital* or *Erotic Capital* are independent forms of capital alongside the *Economic capital, Culture capital,* and *Social capital* (Bourdieu 1986). The accumulation of sexual capital is not directly connected to cultural identity, social status, or economic situation, but depends on social interaction and emotional connections (Michael 2004). Under certain conditions, sexual capital can be converted to other forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, and social capitals, and vice versa. Some scholars suggest that erotic capital is the fourth capital form besides economic, cultural, and social capitals (Hakim 2011). The significance of sexual capital is typically embodied in the market of courtship and it is distinctively related to emotional labor.

Besides sexual capital, Kate Huppatz also extends Bourdieu's theory of the capitals on gender dimension, and proposes another two post-Bourdieusian capitals – feminine capital and female capital – to examine women's movements across fields and gendered forms of advantage (Huppatz 2009). Feminine capital is the type of gender capital that is highly relevant to the women's work of *daigou,* as the specific *daigou* work of infant formula is closely connected with "care" – skills and aptitudes in particular activities that are associated with

femininity (Huppatz 2009). The recognition of values of feminine and female capitals is against the macro backdrop of discrimination in the gender dimension. This research takes Beverley Skeggs' proposal to regard femininity as a cultural resource (Skeggs 2004), and supports Huppatz's claims on feminine capital and female capital. Like other forms of capital, the main conversion of feminist capital is the transformation to economic capital, as the remaining forms of capital can be comparatively more easily derived from economic capital. The *daigou* work of infant formula demonstrates women's gendered competency connected to their advantage in giving care and therefore it can operate as a type of capital. This type of feminine capital is related to care, aligned with the empathy, resonance, and solidarity of being a woman – a daughter, a wife, and a mother.

The reiteration of values of women's labor, especially the reproductive labor, is connected to its important role in family and society. The interpretation of gendered work from the perspective of capital is related to the development of consumer society. Commercial society welcomes consumers because more wealth is accumulated the faster the process moves from production to consumption. In the consumer world, women account for half of the market. As women in families play a big role in caregiving and parenting, women consumer goods are much more varied ranging from luxury products to baby-care products. However, this part of family production is widely recognised as unpaid work and lacks economic value. In the specific case of *daigou* of infant formula, the value embodied in the subject of women is significantly connected with economic activities which are transferred from unpaid domestic work partly into paid caring work. *Daigou* operators are not only consumers themselves, but also resellers and therefore are important players in this commercial society. For this reason, Zhang Lin calls the *daigou* business "prosumer capitalism" (Zhang 2017). Specifically, the reselling network of infant formula is related to care and care-giving where women (especially mothers) play an important role in both social production and family reproduction but with

blurred boundaries. For example, if the *daigou* operator of infant formula is also a mother, she tends to be more "competent" (providing more valuable suggestions to customers) than the other *daigou* in the business as these mothers are "experts" on care-giving based on their personal experience. Their work of purchasing infant formula for customers and for their own children often takes place simultaneously.

Transnationalism as a Strategy

As a conclusion of this research revolving around the transnational reselling network of infant formula, I would like to tentatively summarize the strategies for raising Chinese families as "buying-in" and "going-out" by the middle-class families inside and outside of China. From a gender dimension, the research offers a dialogue for two groups of young women on the two ends of the reselling network – women *daigou* living in Denmark and mothers living in mainland China. The overseas Chinese ladies in Denmark take advantage of the "prosumption capital" to realize transnational mobility and financial autonomy, while their counterparts in mainland China choose the highly privatized consumer pattern of consuming foreign-made products to construct their superior social status and middle class identity. This research attempts to answer the question: How do the Chinese middle-class families cope with the challenges, anxieties, and new opportunities that come about not only in the field of food but also in other aspects of life in general, as a consequence of greater choice with the loosening of collective mechanisms and the greater role of the market?

For the affluent middle class within China, the original motivation for them to buy foreign infant formula is to avoid potential harm from consuming adulterated food. The personal channel of supplying trustworthy food is an example of the "gated" lifestyle that Hanser and Li find typical of the Chinese middle class's attempts to cope with the uncertainties in the market and society (Hanser and Li 2015). No longer seeking happiness and fulfilment through collective sacrifice and socialist ideals, middle-class Chinese citizens hope to find material

comfort and social distinction in newly constructed gated communities (Zhang 2012) and also through "gated" consumption styles. The "gated" and "buying–in" consumption strategy is also embodied in other aspects of life, such as education and transportation. These privatized, individualized strategies give the middle class little impetus to view the food safety risk as a collective problem, as their economic and social resources can help them cope with these risks as individual families.

In contrast, another group of the Chinese middle class decides to adopt a more aggressive way to avoid the uncertainties of the Chinese market or environment: transnational immigration to developed regions. However, facing practical problems, such as cultural differences, balance between family and career, language barriers, and an unfamiliar labor market, it is usually hard for women immigrants (usually students and housewives) to be employed in workplaces outside of China. The network in China becomes an important resource for the women immigrants to gain extra income for their overseas families. The narratives of *daigou* operators illustrate their aspiration toward a middle-class lifestyle similar to that of their western counterparts characterized by financial security, material comfort, social status, and pleasure (Liu 2008; Fong 2011; Martin 2022). In some cases, the *daigou* business may not bring the same sense of fulfilment as the work these women did in China as some of them had decent jobs before they immigrated to another country. However, they could gain the "sense of superiority" (Adler 1974) through the enjoyment of safe food, a clean environment, high-quality health care, etc. from the developed countries which is not accessible to their middle-class counterparts in China.

On the gender dimension, the consumers and resellers of the infant formula in this case have a common identity – women. They could be a daughter, mother, and wife. What they face not only the patriarchal structures but also the traditional impression of Chinese women. Culture, geography, society, tradition, and education – several factors that contribute to the

general perception of Chinese women. Their response to the perception, expectation, and judgment reflects these impacts from the perspective of the subjects.

From a historical comparative perspective, by comparing the differences in lifestyle between the current generation and previous generations before the state reform, I argue for the discontinuity in ideologic values before and after a market-orientated development in China. The change in young Chinese women's pursuits is supposed to be understood in a wider picture of the vicissitudes of social value and its relationship with state reform and the market economy. Therefore, the data include not only first-hand data from fieldwork in Denmark and China but also secondary data from historical material about the lifestyle of the Chinese youth before the market reform during the 1970s.

From a feminist point of view, the findings suggest that the two groups of women are not only visibly connected by the transnational commercial networks but also invisibly associated in the negotiation with the patriarchal structure. Women's preferences for mobility and stratification of consumption need to be understood not only in the context of state reform and modernity but also in the framework of gender politics. Even though the immigrant women may seek to use the autonomy gained by self-employment to shape the traditional image of women into a more gender-equal relationship and the female middle-class consumers may use customized consumption to express their social identities, they may still be influenced by a broader patriarchal discourse within Chinese society. On this point, the study taps into a further topic about the interplay between gender politics and modernity, and it attempts to expand the analytical framework beyond the dichotomy of tradition and modernity.

The Chapters that Follow

There are many more discrete themes involved in China's *daigou* phenomenon than I could put into this dissertation. Within just ten years, the "suitcase business" developed into a global billion-dollar industry. The range and kinds of reselling business have expanded rapidly and

the number of Chinese consumers for *daigou* is still growing. The *daigou* network between Denmark and China examined here, however, reflects multi-dimensioned issues, such as morality, trust, market, and gender. The phenomenon also reflects the social psychology and lifestyle of the middle class in urban China. With the aspiration to realise family prosperity, the middle-class Chinese citizens either "gate" their resources inside China or "leave" for more resources outside China. The case of the network business of infant formula illustrates the two types of strategies to raising families among the Chinese middle class.

I adopted a transnational anthropological multi-sited approach to investigate the connections between the two sides of the network business and their respective characteristics. Drawing on the two flows that make up the *daigou* business practice, namely the flow of products – in this case – from Denmark to China (Danish infant formula) and the flow of people from China to Denmark (Chinese immigrants), this research explores two types of strategies of family reproduction among two groups from the Chinese middle class in the context of globalization and immigration. This research suggests that the Chinese middle-class family is in a situation of transnational social formation, constituted by mobilities and networks of people and things across national boundaries where women play a key role in these changes.

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Besides the introductory chapter, the second chapter of methodology, and the final concluding chapter, there are four main chapters, two of which focus on fieldwork in China and two on fieldwork in Denmark.

The introduction chapter provides an overview of the research, including the background, research method, main concepts and arguments, and the structure of the dissertation. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 elaborates the methodology of this research, explaining the necessity to adopt a transnational multi-sited ethnography to study the flow of products and people between Denmark and China.

Chapter 2 examines the development and differences related to the theme of feeding infants between two generations of Chinese parents. Taking infant formula as the key substance of relatedness, I argue that the use of infant formula changes a natural biological relationship between children and mothers into a mediated one, as a substitute not just in nutritional but also in social terms. Therefore, the choice of different types of infant formula is hierarchized and can also be used to indicate the degrees of investment in care.

Chapter 3 explores the life of Chinese middle-class consumers further, focusing on their anxiety not only related to food but also other aspects of childrearing. To relieve their anxiety, they adopt a strategy of "gated consumption" to source safe food to feed their children, navigating a market full of uncertainties. The demand for high-quality children's food is established in my analysis of the Chinese fieldwork data, which paves the way for a discussion of the development of the transnational *daigou* commercial channel.

Chapter 4 shifts to the supply side of the *daigou* business, analysing how Chinese immigrants utilize their transnational kinship networks to establish their businesses and realize family prosperity in Denmark. I argue that the entanglement of relationships and profits constitutes an important part of business, which creates a dilemma for *daigou* operators between realizing the relational moral obligation and making money. Taking advantage of the connection to consumers in China and the access to products in Denmark, Chinese immigrants use *daigou* businesses to explore possibilities for raising their families outside China.

Chapter 5 focuses on the gender dimension, analysing how and why *daigou* develops into a female-dominated industry and how care and motherhood are used as a kind of capital to create economic value, thus providing new insights into our understanding of gendered capital.

The conclusion compares the strategies of raising families and realising family prosperity among the Chinese middle class inside and outside China. This research ends by discussing the

entanglement of kinship, relatedness, state, class, and gender in family reproduction which is reflected by the transnational network business of infant formula between Denmark and China.

1. Research Methods and Reflections

This chapter includes two main sections, namely the research method in detail and the methodological evaluation on aspects of ethics, reliability, validity, and reflexivity in this research. In the first part of the research method, this section elaborates on the specific steps of this research. For example, how did I establish the connection with my informants and get access to the fieldwork sites? How did I finally decide on the research questions after a back-and-forth process? How did I deal with the complicated relationship between *daigou* shoppers in China and consumers in China? In the second section, I focus on the two important criteria of reliability and validity for the evaluation of social research, explaining how my research conforms to the relevant disciplines. In addition, as an important part of the research, especially in anthropological research, this part also elaborates the ethical considerations and my reflections on the research.

Regarding the research method, I focus on explaining why I adopted a *transnational multi-sited ethnography* (Hannerz 2003; Marcus 1995) in this research, following the network business of infant formula from the consumer market in China to the producer market in Denmark. Therefore, the first section explains the necessity of the multi-sited ethnography applied in this research rather than the conventional ethnography in single sites and locations. This mobile ethnography adopts a "following" strategy to trace a cultural formation through the tread of, normally persons, objects and events, across and within multiple sites of activities (Marcus 1995). The emergence and popularity of multi-sited ethnography is in response to empirical changes in the world, such as the globalization and transnationality. In this research, I use the "follow the thing" technique – following the object of infant formula to discuss not the circulation of global capital based on the commodity(Appadurai 1986), but the *signified* (Bally, Saussure, and Sechehaye 1966) it refers to – the feeding and family reproduction.

However, the "following" strategy could be problematic and ethnographers maybe feel like being everywhere and nowhere, as Sarah Van Duijn argued in her research on the healthcare system in the Netherlands (Van Duijn 2020). When I was in the fieldwork sites, I encountered different types of challenges. Therefore, I also explain the strategies I used to deal with the challenges in the fieldwork in the first section.

Regarding the reflections on this research, I focus on explaining the research process in response to the criteria to assess social research – reliability and validity, and requirements stressed in anthropological research – ethics and reflexivity. In seminal work in the 1980s, Guba and Lincoln substituted the criteria of reliability and validity in quantitative research with the parallel concepts of "trustworthiness" and "authenticity" in qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln 1982; Lincoln 1995). After about forty years, there is still lively debate about the role and nature of reliability and validity in qualitative inquiry (Morse et al. 2002; Spiers et al. 2018). The main purpose for adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research and stressing its trustworthiness is to ensure *rigor* of the research. In this research, I still use the guidance proposed by Guba and Lincoln during the 1980s to design and evaluate the quality of research. The main question I try to answer in the second section of the chapter is: how the research is credible and trustworthy?

In terms of research ethics, I adopted the criteria proposed by Martyn Hammersley in his influential book *Ethnography: the principles in practice* to address the ethical considerations of this anthropological research, including informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation, and the consequences of future research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). In the fieldwork in Denmark, I paid attention to protecting my informants' private information and tried my best to avoid causing them any trouble, given the fact that *Daigou* business is still a comparatively grey and unclearly regulated market. In the fieldwork in China, I remained sensitive to the

feelings of the Chinese parents, and even though children were not my direct interviewees, as the topic of feeding related to them, I also kept an eye on the children's reactions in the research.

When it comes to reflexivity, there are a number of sub-meanings of this concept – the mechanical, the substantive, the methodological, the meta-theoretical, the interpretative, and the ethnomethodological, as argued by Michael Lynch (Lynch 2000). In this research, reflexivity is used as a principle which advocates a greater awareness and acknowledgement of the role of the researcher as part and parcel of the construction of knowledge. In this case, reflexivity is regarded as a kind of self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher (England 1994). Starting from my Master's programme in 2016, I spent about six years following the case of the *daigou* network business. Several influential events happened during my six-year research period: China's e-commerce law enacted in January 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe from the end of 2019, and I became a mother in 2021. Baby feeding became not only my research topic but also a practical issue for me. As my daughter, unfortunately, was diagnosed with a kind of rare disease, she could not be effectively breastfed and infant formula became the most important food for her from an early age. All those variables influenced this research, and also contributed to it. This chapter elaborates on the details of research from the methodological perspective.

Research Approach, Methods, and Data Analysis

The *daigou* case attracted my attention when I did my Master's programme in Culture, Communication and Globalization (CCG) at Aalborg University, Denmark in 2016. As I was on the research track of marketing studies, I found this network business to be interesting because the marketing in the *daigou* business was very different from the general marketing methods in E-commerce, such as beauty endorsement, advertising creativity, etc. When *daigou* shoppers advertised the products, they just took the picture of the products at the supermarket and posted those pictures directly on their social media usually without any editing. From the

perspective of marketing strategy, I found it was hard to evaluate or analyse the marketing methods with marketing expertise as they just posted the pictures of the products, sometimes even without any text. However, with this kind of "poor" marketing skills, *daigou* shoppers could get thousands of clients from the mainland and developed the reselling into a career where they got the main income in another country. Globally, there are millions of overseas Chinese running this business, and in some countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, *daigou* has become an important method to introduce foreign brands into the Chinese market.

Before starting my PhD programme in 2018, my knowledge and theoretical preparation on the *daigou* case were mainly from the discipline of communication, marketing and business. The existing literature on *daigou* focused on the two aspects depending on the inside and outside viewpoints. International literature on *daigou* focused mainly on its economic value to introduce foreign brands to the Chinese market, while Chinese literature mainly discussed the legality of this business and the prevention or regulation of the business. I found this research was hard to provide something new about *daigou* if it was just limited to the description of the business form. There are multiple layers overlapping in this case and it could be interpreted from hundreds of angles. Finally, I decided not to limit research to one aspect from the start, but to get into the fieldwork first and follow the empirical experience from the fieldwork, and then build up research questions. The starting point for my study of *daigou* was in Denmark, particularly looking at those who resell the product of Danish infant formula to mainland China as the main service: namely, the formation of this transnational network business. As a phenomenon, there are many influencing factors involved in this business, such as transnational mobility, gift-exchange culture, food safety, e-commerce, and relational trust. But we know very little about the deep cultural and social factors behind the phenomenon. The important value of anthropological research is the connection between the micro individual experience and the macro-historical and social background. The main preoccupations of qualitative

researchers are the experiences of the people being studied, description, and the emphasis on context and process. This is the background and the formative process of the current research project.

At the level of epistemology, this qualitative research is more influenced by *interpretivism* or *hermeneutic*, focusing on the individuals' interpretation in certain contexts (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). There are two important features of hermeneutics: the first is the central place held in it by the idea of *language* and by language-oriented notions such as meaning, intentionality, interpretation, and understanding; the second is its concern with methodology and philosophy of science. The hermeneutic philosophy defends the characteristics of the interpretative and understanding methods of the humanities (Wright 1971). This research follows the tradition of "understanding" rather than "explanation", by which I mean, the main purpose of this research is to provide one version of understanding/interpretation of the *daigou* business of infant formula, and its signified subject of feeding and reproduction, rather than explaining their causal relations.

Research in Global Studies

This research adopted a transnational multi-sited anthropological approach to follow the *daigou* business of infant formula between Denmark and China, analysing the flow of Chinese people in Denmark and the flow of products of infant formula from Denmark to China. This research casts light on seemingly unrelated connections that people are not often aware of, such as the link between the increasing middle-class anxiety in China and the stock shortage of infant formula at Danish supermarkets. There are hot debates on the definition and research boundaries of the discipline of global studies. Influential thinkers in global studies argue that the "four pillars of global studies" are: globalization, transdisciplinary, space and time, and critical thinking. Among the four pillars, globalization or *globality* is the first pillar, as the birth and development of Global Studies are inextricably connected to the emergence of

globalization as a prominent theme in the late twentieth-century public discourse. The term *globality* is adopted to signify a social condition characterized by extremely tight global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections across national borders and civilizational boundaries, while the term *globalization* implies a multidimensional set of social processes pushing towards globality (Steger 2018). The concept of "flows" is adopted to show the character of the *daigou* business which also illustrates the feature of globalization through everyday practice. The late twentieth-century societies are characterized by flows of capital, labor, commodities, information, and images (Hannerz 2019). Ulf Hannerz, an influential scholar in multi-sited ethnography, conducts research into the necessity of the *flows* against the backdrop of globalization in the mid-20th century, and the differences in practices and assumptions between such work and the classic model of single-sited fieldwork (Hannerz 2003). Arjun Appadurai, a distinguished anthropologist in globalization studies, proposes five dimensions to review current global flows: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990). My research embodies the formulation suggested by Appadurai to some extent, as there are people, machinery, money, images, and ideas following and attaching to the network business. The significant difference between my research and previous research on the flows in globalization studies is that it leads to the micro-anthropology, focusing on the subject of relatedness and family reproduction while the "flow" research typically points towards a macro-anthropology, a reasonably comprehensive view of the (relative) coherence and the dynamics of larger social and territorial entities (Lash and Urry 1996; Hannerz 2019).

This dissertation is piece of research located in anthropology, but it also benefits from sociological methods. Besides, I also use historical materials to show the early period of feeding situations in China. Consequently, the historical and social background of the beginning and development of the network business of *daigou* relies on archives and literature

on infant formula. The classic anthropological methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, are adopted to collect empirical data which are also the main data in this research to show the influence of the social transformation process on the individual level which is embodied in the *daigou* networks. The significant value of sociology is its social problem-based orientation in the research. As a social phenomenon, there are multiple layers of social problems interweaved here, and the transdisciplinary research method allows looking at the "big picture" of the *daigou* business. This current research targets the key problems of anxiety, trust, stratification, and gendered labor involved in the transnational network business through the lens of family reproduction. The research focuses on the transnational flows of products and people. Specifically, the flow of infant formula from Denmark to China directs the research theme to the family raising and feeding issue in China, while the flow of Chinese people from China to Denmark directs the research theme of the transnational immigration studies.

As this research is also positioned in the field of area studies, specifically China studies in Denmark, I would like to clarify the stance of "China as Method" in Sinological studies on this dimension. This stance was initiated by a pioneer scholar in Sinology in Japan, professor Yuzo Mizoguchi, who changed the way to look at China and Asia from intellectual history's point of view (Hamashita 2011). In Yuzo Mizoguchi's research work, he suggested we reverse the conventional approach in China studies to take the "world" as the method (reference point) to study China as the subject, using a "global standard" which often means particular European experiences in practice (Mizoguchi 2016; Xiang 2013). The position "China as a Method" advocated by Yuzo Migoguchi's differentiates the other scholars in Sinologial studies as it distinguishes between the previous Sino-centred perspective and a Euro-centered interpretation in the modern world history.

"China as Method", for Mizoguchi, means placing Europe as merely one of the components of the world and locating China herself within it (Hamashita 2011). This position is welcome and supported by many scholars in China or Asia Studies, especially those with Chinese and Asian backgrounds. Chen Kuan-Hsing discussed "Asia as Method" in his book of the same name: various regional mechanisms have gradually emerged to counter US imperialism and global hegemony, and there is a call for regional integration in Asia as a necessary mechanism. The "Asia as method" ceases to look at Asia as object of analysis standing the reference point of modern world history initiated by the West world, but actually a medium to transform knowledge production. Besides, there is also a dialogue between Xiang Biao and Chen Kuan-Hsing regarding the position of "China/Asia as Method". Xiang is one of the most influential scholars not only in China but also internationally who has proposed a series of concepts based on contemporary Chinese society, focusing on various types of migration (Xiang 2020; Yan 2011; Xiang 2005). He argues that taking Asia or China as a method is to take China or Asia as an analytical strategy, by developing new perspectives based on experiences in China or Asia. The advocacy is based on the reality that to a great extent, modern social research is a product of the practice of using Europe as the method (Xiang 2013; Chen 2010).

On this point, this research supports the pioneer anthropologists' advocacy to take China or Asia as a method rather than a case in global studies, explaining the logic of the formation of a certain social phenomenon, and specifically *daigou* in this study. This research is devoted to provide a picture of daily life within and outside of China, through an insider's eye. The adoption of "China as a method" was also influenced by the discussion on the "localization" process of social research in China, as it has become a tradition in academia in China to use the western theoretical framework to analyse China as a case due to the reality that social science was established as a modern scientific discipline in western countries.

Multi-sited Fieldwork

The reason for adopting multi-sited fieldwork in social science is that the research draws on some problems or some formulations of a topic, which are significantly *trans-local*, and not to be confined to single place. The keyword is the "linkages", which means, that multi-sited ethnography is advocated to address the trans-local or transnational linkages, especially in the background of globalization (Hannerz 2003, 2019). Getting down to my research, to study the network business which involves two ends, namely the supplier in Denmark and the consumer in China, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography, a method of data collection that brings the researcher to multiple field sites geographically and socially (Marcus 1995; Lan 2018; Duijn 2020). To show the dynamic of this network business and the interconnection between those two ends, I conducted in-depth interviews with Chinese *daigou* shoppers of infant formula in Denmark and Chinese parents who are the main consumer group of these products in mainland China.

Purposive Sampling was adopted as the main sampling method in this research. A common question for qualitative researchers is: how many qualitative interviews is enough for qualitative research? National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) published a review paper regarding the question of sampling in qualitative research. The paper gathers responses to the question of "how many" from 14 renowned social scientists and 5 early career researchers. The recurring answer to this question is "it depends". How many cases should be interviewed include epistemological and methodological questions about the nature and purpose of the research: whether the focus of the objectives and analysis is on commonality or difference or uniqueness or complexity or comparison or instances. Practical issues, such as the level of degree and the time available, and institutional committee requirements are also the main consideration (Baker and Edwards 2012).

My first interviewee of *daigou* reseller is Xiang Li, who I met when I went shopping in a supermarket in Aalborg in 2016. When I saw her, she was filming the products on the shelf,

communicating with her client in mandarin via video call. At first, she was suspicious of me because I observed her. She refused the invitation of doing the interview immediately after I asked her. After I explained the purpose of the research, she offered me about 20 minutes to do a short interview. I did not get so much "useful information" except for her basic background and her motivation and experiences in doing the business. Anyway, the experience of the first interview was not very enjoyable, and, based on this I decided to change my strategy to recruit informants.

Before I started my research, I already knew someone in Denmark doing *daigou* business as this small-scale business was very popular among Chinese immigrants in Denmark, especially among housewives, international students, and some immigrants whose partners worked in Denmark. I thought it could be easier to interview familiar people than strangers. I made a contact list of 25 potential interviewees from the WeChat contact who were working as *daigou* shoppers in Denmark. However, the majority of them refused my invitation. I only got 11 informants from my network. I also asked my informants if they could introduce me to more *daigou* shoppers to do the interview. Surprisingly, none of them was willing to do that, as they were competitors to some extent. For example, they met each other when they went to the same supermarket to purchase the same products. It was fine if there were enough products on the shelves. But if it was short of stock, they had to compete with each other to buy products. In another case, some *daigou* shoppers "stole" other shoppers' pictures from the WeChat friend circle, which also influenced their relationship badly. "Peers are enemies" (*tonghang shi yuanjia*), as my informants said. I had to go back to supermarkets or other retail shops to try my luck to recruit more informants. After several shoppers refused my invitation, I finally got five more informants of *daigou* shoppers from the supermarkets. Moreover, through one *daigou* shopper, I got a part-time job for a *daigou* company in Aalborg where my job was to pack products bought by shoppers from the supermarket. When I worked in the company, there

were no full-time employees. Besides me, there were other five international students and one housewife working for the owner who runs the *daigou* company.

Five years later, when I contacted the company owner again, I found out that she recruited two full-time employees after I left as the number of orders increased significantly from 2017 to 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she was planning to stop the *daigou* business and start an Asian restaurant with another partner. Interestingly, the partner was her biggest competitor once when both of them worked in the *daigou* industry in Denmark. I appreciated the part-time experience of working as a helper at the *daigou* company, which provided me with the opportunity to get a close look at how this business works. All in all, I got 20 *daigou* shopper informants in Denmark through different recruiting methods. For more details on the sample characteristics, see Appendix A1.

In April 2019, I went back to China to do the second phase of fieldwork focusing on the demand side of the network of reselling Danish infant formula. I started from my hometown where I lived for more than 20 years before I entered university. I chose my hometown as one fieldwork site because first, some of my classmates from high school asked me to buy infant formula for their babies when I came to Denmark for my studies; second, my main personal connections with China were in my hometown. If I could not get an ideal fieldwork site there, I could also probably access one through my network. Many earlier Chinese anthropologists in China studies started from their network to get access to the fieldwork. For example, Fei Xiaotong, a pioneering researcher finished his PhD dissertation, *Peasant Life in China* which was published as one of the most influential research works in China studies, based on his fieldwork in a village in Jiangsu where Fei came from. Similarly, Yan Yunxiang, published his prestigious research work in a village in northeast China where he worked as an ordinary farmer, influenced by the *Cultural Revolution* [1] in China during the 1970s, in the book: *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village, Love, Intimacy, and Family*

Change in a Chinese Village. The first interviewee in China was one of my classmates in high school, Qiaoqiao. She asked me to buy Danish infant formula for her in 2018 when she gave birth. I contacted six informants [2] in my hometown, who were either old acquaintances or someone I got to know through members of my family.

With my friend Yangyang's help, I had access to a high-end kindergarten in Wuqing, Tianjin city where the majority of the kids chose foreign infant formula as supplementary food. Therefore, I decided to choose that kindergarten as one of my main fieldwork sites in China. I did my fieldwork there from May to July 2019, organizing a focus group interview with four mothers whose kids attended the kindergarten, and interviewing about 20 people there at the fieldwork site. There were also "small talks" with some relevant people. All in all, about 50 people joined my research interview in China. In addition, I conducted observations on some household activities, children's school activities, and also consumer activities in supermarkets, and maternity and baby shops. For more details on the sample characteristics in China, see Appendix A2.

Following my fieldwork experience, other new themes caught my attention. These included, among others, the anxiety of the Chinese middle class, consumer stratification, relational obligation, work flexibility, and paid and unpaid female work. Besides, I found there was a significant difference between the description of their life by the current young generation of parents and the previous generation. I assumed the difference was related also to the macro-historical and social background. I purposively interviewed five people from the previous generation who were young parents in the 1980s. The comparison tried to show the connection between social transformation with individual life changes.

For analytic purposes, two chapters of the dissertation are based on fieldwork in China and another two chapters focus on the fieldwork in Denmark. Even though there is socio-economic diversity in my informants' backgrounds, the writing thread follows the shift of space rather

than the classification of class. The arrangement of this structure is based on the formation of the research question revolving around the flow of foreign infant formula from abroad to mainland China. The four main themes of the analytic chapters are feeding Chinese babies, middle-class anxiety of childrearing, relational obligation in the network business, and gendered work of caring. There are multiple dimensions and angles to analyse and interpret this research case of *daigou*. However, it is impossible to articulate all aspects of it. The main themes are selected based on the criteria of the main findings from the fieldwork, the disciplines' requirements and the time availability.

I chose to interview in Mandarin as all of the informants were native speakers of Mandarin, with two *daigou* shoppers having Danish passports. Two interview outlines were also applied in the interview with one targeting the Chinese *daigou* shoppers in Denmark (Appendix B1) and the other targeting the consumers of infant formula in mainland China (Appendix B2). The outlines were written in Chinese originally, and to disseminate the research finding to a wider audience, they were also translated into English. For more details, please refer to Appendices B1 and B2.

Challenges and Strategies in Fieldwork

During my search for fieldwork sites in both Denmark and China, many of my informants refused to take part in the research, and people involved in the network business were suspicious of me as this market is still unregulated. In other words, there are many unclear aspects of the business. For example, is this business a kind of smuggling or not? How should the legality of this activity be dealt with? Certainly, I appreciated that my informants accepted the invitation to participate in the interviews, as I know that it could be hard for them to share their experiences if this activity is framed as a grey market business. Therefore, I have the responsibility to protect their private information and to make sure that my research does not bring them any trouble.

When I did fieldwork in China, the question of "good motivation" recurred several times when I interviewed Chinese parents regarding their perception and strategy of baby feeding. It happened more than once that after expressing their anxiety or explaining the hardship of raising kids in China, the informants asked me, "do you think it will influence foreigners' impression of China? Should I say something good about our country?" Regarding the sense of loyalty to the home country by Chinese citizens, Vanessa Fong named it as "Filial Nationalism" in the book *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*. She commented that like their (Chinese youth) love for their parents, their love for their country was a matter of subjective loyalty that could not be nullified by what they believed was an objective understanding of China as a developing country (Fong 2011, 52). Fong also pointed out that this patriotic emotion is related to the Chinese civic education which was much more strongly focused on the responsibility to remain loyal to the Chinese state than the rights of the individual citizen (Fong and Murphy 2006). In my research, most of the Chinese informants also felt uncomfortable when we talked about the negative side of Chinese society, such as food safety, trust collapse, and inequality.

Besides the practical questions of accommodation, and establishing connections with informants, there were also questions related to the emotional side. I had an informant who was the mother of a four-year-old daughter. When we started the interview as planned, she could not help talking about how desperate she felt when she found out that her husband was diagnosed with lung cancer last year. We could not push forward to the interview questions about childrearing as I felt it was inappropriate to drag the talk back to the questions on the interview outline which I made before the interview. She was my interviewee, but she was also a mother, a wife, and a daughter to someone else. As a researcher, I tried not to disturb the lives of the interviewees. As I had to enter their lives to some extent, I needed to respect their opinions and feelings, rather than simply drag their life story into my research framework.

Based on my fieldwork experience, I summarized five strategies to cope with the challenges encountered in the fieldwork.

First, I needed to properly introduce the research purpose. One of the key and maybe the most difficult steps in ethnography is gaining access to a fieldwork site that is relevant to the research problem. Experienced international anthropologists in China studies have provided different tips and advice for students and scholars who are new to China (Heimer and Thøgersen 2006). In my fieldwork, I did not find it that difficult to access the fieldwork site, but I did feel unsure about my role – the overt versus the covert – in the research. In some cases, anthropologists do not disclose the fact that they are researchers when they enter the fieldwork sites or do the interviews, like Patrick's study of a violent Glasgow gang (Patrick 1973), Pearson's study of Blackpool football fans (Pearson 2009, 2012) in the open/public settings, Mattley's research on a sex fantasy phone line (Mattley 2005) and Sallaz's research in a Nevada Casino (Sallaz 2009). To some extent, the "covert" method makes it much easier to collect "real" data, as many researchers experienced the difference before and after turning on the recorder. However, from an ethical consideration standpoint, a "covert" approach to collecting data can be problematic and it has become unpopular in anthropological research. According to my experience, I think it is also possible to collect real and useful data if I properly introduce myself. For example, when I interviewed *daigou* shoppers in Denmark, they were concerned that I could be their potential competitor. In this situation, I needed to clearly state that their information would not be used for other business purposes and only for research. Another example is when I was in China: my identity as an overseas Chinese student attracted the interviewees' attention as they were worried that their comments would influence foreigners' impressions of China if I disseminate my research work outside of China. In this case, I needed to tell them the "good motivation" of my research, by which I mean the main purpose of the research is not to criticize the flaws of management and regulations in Chinese society, but to

provide new insights on China and Chinese society through the citizens' daily lives. My main intention is to let my informants feel that they are contributors in "telling real Chinese stories" from the inside of China, rather than "handing weapons" to the outsiders to attack China. In the introduction before the interview, I explicitly told them their opinions and descriptions would only be used for the research. Moreover, there were no right or wrong standards to evaluate their answers. The proper introduction includes not only a self-introduction but also an introduction to the research. When informants felt they were respected, they were happy to express their opinions. Sometimes the informants had the power as much as the researcher during the interview, as they could say "no" whenever they felt uncomfortable talking.

Second, I made friends while doing my research. Friendship played a big role in my research when I tried hard to source potential informants. And it was also much easier when I became friends with my informants. They are not only my informants but also mothers, wives, and daughters. I needed to "send the message" to them that: I appreciate their input and respect their life and attitudes towards life. Besides getting information from them, I also wanted to offer something to my informants that was more than a small gift. During the interview, sometimes I was also "interviewed" by my informants. Their questions ranged from my life stories to my experiences in Denmark. I could feel that some of them also hoped that someone could enter their life and listen to them. I felt glad that one of the informants told me that she also reflected on herself when I interviewed her.

Third, I understand now that different fieldwork sites mean different interview strategies. As I adopted a multi-sited ethnographic approach to do my research, I went to different places to collect data, such as supermarkets, *daigou* resellers' homes, kindergartens, educational institutions, etc. Sometimes I also did not want to miss the opportunities for small talks on the street. It was more than often that there was no time to finish all the questions from my interview outlines or the conversation was led in a different direction. For example, when I did

my fieldwork in a maternity and baby shop in China. The shop assistant accepted my invitation for a short interview at the beginning. But when many customers came in, we had to stop our conversation. The 15-minute interview was "interrupted" multiple times. I had to wait and restructure the following questions during the break because the main role of this person was a "shop assistant" rather than an informant for my research. In another example, I organized a focus-group interview with four young mothers when I did my fieldwork in Wuqing, Tianjian city. The interview was held in a luxury cafeteria and my friend arranged all the practical things, such as drinks, time, and place. Even though the gathering was organized because of my research, I did not take the leading role. This is because the mother's group was already established before I did my research, which means the members were familiar with each other and they had regular gatherings. In this case, I took the role of an "outsider". I asked my friend, also a member of the mother's group, to be the leader and to organize the focus-group interview. I talked as little as possible to provide a kind of casual atmosphere for the interviewees, like what they usually did before I came in. The main point here is that due to the diversity of fieldwork places, it was hard to use one method to collect data. I adjusted my interview plan to the specific research sites.

Fourth, I learnt how important it is to take note of the emotions and feelings arising from the fieldwork. One significant characteristic of humanities research, especially in fieldwork, is that it is easily interwoven with personal emotions and feelings in the research. For example, when I interviewed a mother who worked as a *daigou* reseller in Denmark, she told me about the flexibility of the reselling work which provided her with the opportunity to take care of her children as well as a method to make money. On the other hand, she also expressed her feelings of missing the time when she worked as a public servant in China. In the dilemma between a stable job and taking care of family abroad, she chose the latter. In another case, I interviewed another *daigou* shopper. She lost a friend because of the business as the friend was also a

daigou shopper in Denmark. But her friend often "stole" the pictures of products from her social media account to advertise products and also "stole" her clients. She told me that, "all the weakness of humans could be shown through doing this business." Besides, when the COVID-19 pandemic came, many *daigou* shoppers had to stop their business because of the increase in logistic costs and regulations. I planned to follow up with some of my informants to study the influence of the pandemic on their business. However, only one of them, Li, accepted a short interview, and the rest of them refused. Li told me that their feelings were similar to the mink farmers in Denmark.[3] They did not mind doing the interview when the business was good. But they were not in a positive mood to talk about it again as the pandemic most likely ruined the business, like what happened in other fields in the services industry, such as tourism and catering. Different kinds of feelings and emotions emerged from the fieldwork. As an observer, it was hard to resist or ignore the details of the feelings. Ethnographic data were "alive" and those feelings and emotions are important materials to show the vividness of ethnography.

Fifth, I understand the importance of combining offline and online data collection methods. With the development of social media, it has become a trend to do online ethnography to collect data in the disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities. Use of social media has become a big part of daily life for people, especially for those who run a business via social media. On the one hand, in the research case of the *daigou* network, social media is used as the main communicative channel for *daigou* resellers through which they post pictures of products and answered questions from their customers. As an important feature of the most popular Chinese social media, WeChat, the Payment function became the common payment method in the transaction. On the other hand, because I did multi-sited fieldwork, it was hard to travel back to the fieldwork sites to collect more data when new changes happened. So, I had to use social media to follow up on the development of some events which I did not finish the first time. For

example, when I left the RYB kindergarten, one of my important fieldwork sites in Tianjin, there was a suspicious scandal that happened in the kindergarten where it was said that one teacher in the kindergarten slapped a child. I did not know the final consequence for the teacher and the kindergarten before I went to Hong Kong to do my exchange research. However, I think the scandal was something important to show the reasons for the anxiety of the Chinese parents. I kept in contact with two parents in the kindergarten on WeChat to follow up on the development of the scandal. I think it is necessary for researchers, especially in anthropology, to combine offline fieldwork and online fieldwork to show the bigger picture or the development of ongoing events.

In Chinese, there is a proverb, "the benevolent see benevolence, the wise wisdom", which states that difference people hold different views on matters of taste. Björn Kjellgren used this Chinese saying to point out that "what we see largely depends on who we are" (Kjellgren 2011). Based on his experience in fieldwork in Shenzhen, he exemplified how self-imagined belonging to different categories such as age, race, nationality, gender, organizational background, and culture had an impact on the research. In this sense, I would like to add one point that the positionalities of the researcher also influence the difference of challenges in the fieldwork. And that the strategies I talked about in this section worked also because of my positionality as both an insider and outsider of China. I mean, I am a Chinese citizen who had lived in China for 28 years before studying abroad, and this background has provided me with the personal connection to China. But I gained the majority of my higher education and academical training in Denmark and married a Dane. Those experiences also influenced my fieldwork and research as an outsider.

Data Analysis

The classic approach for analysing qualitative data is *Grounded Theory*, and this was used in the current research. Originating from two founders, Glaser and Strass, *Grounded Theory* is

not a theory, but rather an inductive approach to the generation of concepts/theories out of data. The book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser and Strauss 1967) is the chief wellspring of the approach. Glaser and Strauss introduced the framework in the approach, including tools such as theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation, and constant comparison. Particularly, the process of coding is the most central process in grounded theory.

Since the sampling process for the current research has been clarified in the previous section in this chapter, here I will focus on the steps of data coding and theoretical saturation. The phase of constant comparison refers to a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualization, so that the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators is not lost (Bryman 2016). As it is an assistant tool to keep the rigor of the data analysis process, I will not use a separate section to elaborate this step. However, it should be noted that I remained sensitive to the connections between concepts, categories, and the main theories in the research.

I started with "open coding" (Strauss and Corbin 1990) by reading through the initial material and writing down the main themes from this material. By using themes which emerged from reviewing transcripts and field notes, I generated the codes that made the most analytical sense by using "focused coding" (Charmaz 2006). The final stage of coding, "theoretical coding" (Charmaz 2006), is to form the main topics based on the focused codes generated from the previous coding process, which is used as the main argument of the analytic chapter. Regarding the process of theoretical saturation, there are two main phases: the first phase is closely linked with the third-round coding process which turned the unstructured textual materials into a chapter which is based on the interpretation of the data, while the main purpose of the second-phase process of theorization is to form the main research subject or a main argument for the dissertation. The first phase is the base for the second-phase theorization. The

following section explains the data analysis in details, focusing on steps of data coding and theorization.

Data Coding. The coding process started as soon as the data collection. The data in this research include transcripts of interviews, field notes, documents. As I did fieldwork in several sites in two different countries, important preparatory work before the coding process began with the information from the data, such as the fieldwork site, the time, the informants, and significant events that happened in the fieldwork site. After reading through my initial set of data, I categorized the repetitive and similar descriptions into different *themes* (Ryan and Bernard 2003). I did not do the interpretation of data for the first-time coding. I focused on the themes that emerged from the data, mainly from the transcripts of interviews. For example, when I coded the transcripts of interviews with Chinese parents from the kindergarten, a significant big theme was "anxiety". This big theme, or in other words, a general feeling was embodied in several subthemes, such as education, food, peer pressure, safety, downwards mobility, etc. Under this theme, I tried to ask myself questions to search for a thread to explain the formation process of this general theme: What factors influenced their perception of insecurity or unsafety? Why or how do Chinese middle-class consumers differentiate themselves from people from other social classes? Do they trust the kindergarten or not regarding the installation of surveillance cameras in the kindergarten?

In the second phase of coding, I tried to construct some categories to show the connections and commonality of the themes and concepts which emerged from the first-time coding. In each chapter, the subtitles were also based on those main categories generated from the second-round coding process. Still, taking the example of Chapter 3, which focuses on the anxiety of middle-class Chinese consumers, the main research object is the infant formula, "consumption and shopping" was a theme emerging from the descriptions by many interviewees when they talked about how they targeted the specific products or brands. Within the theme of

consumption, including food consumption and educational investment, the middle-class consumers mentioned several times the differentiation from the other classes, by using descriptions, such as "others", "our group", and "those who go to public school". The term used to describe the style of the middle-class consumers in China was "Gated Consumption". This term was used as a subtitle of the section to explain the consumer psychology of Chinese parents in Chapter 3. Finally, I theorized the main idea of this chapter into the discussion on the anxiety of middle-class parents in China which is embodied in aspects of food consumption, education, and monitoring their children through the third-phase coding process. The last-phase of coding is closely connected to the first-phase of theoretical saturation, and I also use the term of "theorization" below to refer to the similar meaning.

Theoretical Saturation/Theorization. After I conducted the data coding, there were four main themes established that revolving around the *daigou* network of infant formula from Denmark to China: the need for infant formula in China, the consumer of foreign infant formula, the *daigou* resellers of infant formula in Denmark, and women's work in the network business. As a phenomenon, there are two flows in the network business – the flow of immigrants from China to Denmark and the flow of infant formula from Denmark to China. When I "zoom in" to get a closer look at network businesses, I find vivid pictures of individual hard-working Chinese people, both immigrants in Denmark and young middle-class parents, who are trying their best to gain more resources to raise their kids and develop their family. When I "zoom out" to view the phenomenon from a higher standpoint, I could see similar pictures in the profound history of raising Chinese families. What I mean is that family reproduction, as an everlasting theme in Chinese society, has its distinct characteristics in different areas. Explicitly, in this research about the Chinese resellers in Denmark, the majority of them were housewives or mothers, developed the handy business with the purpose of supporting the family financially and settling down in Denmark, while the Chinese parents sourced the trustworthy product in a

country far away from China to feed their kids safely and to prepare them for the future. Therefore, the main idea of the dissertation is theorized in the discussion on family reproduction from the dimension of food and feeding.

The main purpose of the theorization process is to investigate how the complicated factors influence the formation of the network business of infant formula on the one hand, and to understand the change in family reproduction in China on the other, revolving around the domain of feeding and eating. The basic concept in this dissertation is feeding which is a theme that is extended from the substance of infant formula in this case. Besides the main research object of food and feeding, this analytic theme of feeding is also closely related to a group of relevant themes, such as care, domestic work, relatedness, and kinship. In other words, there are "rich" social meanings behind the substance of food in the theme of feeding. On the household level, feeding is the main practice in a family. The understanding of feeding and eating involves a long process of becoming a person and participating in social relations. The process involves marriage, the birth of new children, and intergenerational relations (Carsten 1995). After the data processing of coding and theorization, through the thread of a special baby food of infant formula, I developed the concept of family reproduction to encompass the relevant themes such care and childrearing, intergenerational relationships, kinship and relatedness, women and gendered labor in this study, engaging in dialogue with existing research.

As stated earlier in this chapter, this research adopts a *hermeneutic* stance on the epistemological consideration (Wright 2004). This stance emphasizes the *understanding* of human behavior, a notion which was advocated by Max Weber (1864 – 1920) and referred to in his native German as *Verstehen* (Weber, Henderson, and Parsons 1964). Following the advocacy in the tradition of interpretivism, the research method of this dissertation was applied to understand four aspects involving the network business of infant formula: the demand, the

actor, the purpose, and the emotions. Specifically, the demand includes both material demand as well as social and cultural demands for the consumption of the safe foreign infant formula; the actor includes both the resellers and customers and the groups they represent; the purpose includes not only the motivation of running this kind of business but also the pursuit for family prosperity and upward social mobility; the emotions precipitated not only from the trade of baby food but also from the complexities in the macro perspective of raising families in a Chinese context.

Regarding the presentation of data, Chapters 2 to 5 present the four main analytic themes coded and theorised from the empirical materials: Feeding Chinese babies, the anxiety of the middle-class parents, relations and morality of *daigou* business, and paid and unpaid work of women. Each chapter shows a piece of the puzzle of Chinese society, regarding values, practices, cultures, moralities, trust, kinship, gender, and relatedness.

Reliability, Validity, Ethics, and Reflexivity

Two important prominent criteria for the evaluation of social research are reliability and validity. Besides, it is welcomed by more and more scholars in the social sciences and humanities that social research also requires researchers to remember ethics and reflexivity. Another way of putting this is to say that social research should embody not only academic values and social values but also humanistic values. To say that the goal of research is the production of knowledge means that this goal should not be pursued at all costs. There are ethical issues surrounding social research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Practically, the biggest ethical concern in social research is how to protect the research subjects during the research (Ferdinand et al. 2007). In the following sections, I will explain how this research addresses the criteria of reliability, validity, ethics, and reflexivity in detail.

Adapting Reliability and Validity for Qualitative Research

Reliability and validity are important criteria in evaluating social research. Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable; while validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from research. These criteria have formed a serious standard in quantitative research by using statistics to show the validity on internal and external levels. However, it is hard to evaluate the replication and validity of research by statistics. There has been a long discussion on how to assimilate the standard of reliability and validity of social research into qualitative research (Kvale 1995; Horsburgh 2003; Guba and Lincoln 1994).

The main point of Guba and Lincoln's ideas is that they are trying to search for criteria for appraising qualitative research which is a departure from those applied to quantitative research. The following sections introduce the representative alternative criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba, which adapt reliability and validity for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Lincoln 1985). They propose two elementary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness includes four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Authenticity includes criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. These criteria were proposed based on Guba and Lincoln's argument that there can be more than a single account of social reality. Therefore, some classic standards in quantitative research are not quite suitable for qualitative research, such as the standard of replication welcomed by positivist social science researchers. However, even for quantitative research itself, standard replication is hard to satisfy. It is quite rare to find a replicable research case in the social sciences. As Burawoy said, "In academia, the real reward comes not from replication but originality" (Burawoy 2003).

During the practical research work in the current study, it was hard to satisfy all the criteria specified. But there is no doubt that using the criteria as research guidance helps in building

trust and reliable arguments that act as a "self-correcting mechanism" to ensure the quality of the project. One influential article about the reflection on reliability and validity in qualitative research suggests the strategies of *verification* to attain the rigor of a qualitative study, which includes the processes of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain (Morse et al. 2002). The authors also claim that investigators may underlie different sessions during the research depending on the different emphases. The verification strategy focuses on five aspects: methodological coherence, sample must be appropriate, collecting and analysing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, and theory development. These aspects focus on the investigator's actions during the course of the research. On the other hand, some scholars also propose a strategy by including the people being studied to ensure rigor of the research. One representative technique is *respondent validation*, which is a process whereby the researcher provides the people whom he or she conducted research on with an account of his or her findings (Bryman 2016; Bloor 1978).

The nature of verification strategy actually places the focus on the *investigator responsiveness*. I used this strategy as a guideline to design the research and recognize problems during the research by self-correcting. Regarding the respondent validation, I would like to exemplify this through my experience during the research. When I did my fieldwork on the Chinese parents in a city in north China, I conducted a group discussion with four mothers having children at the similar ages from 2 to 4 years old. I did not send my writing draft to the group members because of language barriers, but I summarized the main points from the focus-group interview and paraphrased them for the informants the next I met them. I knew the respondent validation technique was questionable regarding whether research participants can validate a researcher's analysis or not. It is worth noting that my informants were not too interested in the theoretical analysis of the research even though it contained their narratives as important data to support the analysis. Twice I asked for the informants' opinions on my

research after telling them what and how I would use their interviews in the research. They asked me back: “Did I say something wrong?” I found that perhaps it was not that helpful to keep asking the respondents for their opinions on my research as it created an awkward atmosphere which prompted defensive reactions.

Thick description can be a strategy to meet the requirement of transferability in qualitative research, which is a method that can provide others with what is referred to as a database in research for making judgements on the transferability of findings to other conditions. The method of thick description is encouraged by Geertz and the notion is from Gilbert Ryle. The requirement of thick description in cultural analysis is that an anthropological researcher needs to provide rich accounts of the details of culture. This is based on the fact that anthropological research involves the ethnographers’ interpretation. Since ethnographers conduct research “against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers”, they are encouraged to provide more details of descriptions from the fieldwork (Geertz 1973).

Lincoln and Guba suggested the authenticity criteria based on certain social settings, such as organization studies. The similar standard mentioned in other research work is impact or utility (Morse et al. 2002). On this aspect, the relevant questions in my research include: Does the research fairly represent different viewpoints among members of the social setting, specifically the members of the network business of infant formula? Does the research help members involved to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu, for example, *daigou* shoppers and Chinese consumers' perceptions or reflections on their life? Does the research help members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting, such as the Danish understanding of the Chinese immigrants and the Chinese community in Denmark?

Reflections on Ethics and Self

Based on the specific characteristics of ethnographic research, there are five aspects that social researchers have to pay attention to in terms of ethical consideration: informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation, and the consequences for future research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). The following sections will elaborate on the details of these ethical considerations in this research.

Informed Consent. The principle of informed consent means that prospective research participants should be informed about the research comprehensively and accurately. On this point, covert participant observation violates this principle, but the use of covert methods to collect data can be justified in certain circumstances. For example, in Roger Homan's research on old-time pentecostalists, he adopted the covert research method as he argued that it could be justifiable in view of the right of subjects to be free from disturbance and inhibition (Homan and Bulmer 1980). The main challenge to implement the principle of informed consent comes from two aspects: first, it is extremely difficult to present prospective participants with absolutely all the information that may be required for them to make an informed decision about their involvement; second, the research is likely to come into contact with a wide spectrum of people, and ensuring that absolutely everyone has the opportunity for informed consent is not practicable because it would be extremely disruptive in everyday contexts (Homan 1991). Given the difficulties, I adopted the "end-justifies-the-means" principle to defend some of the covert participant observation used in the fieldwork. For each of the prospective participants, I tried my best to give them as much information as possible regarding the research.

The purpose of my work in the field was to describe and analyse the transnational reselling network of infant formula. The major research methods were observation and interviewing which took both overt and covert forms, based on the research subjects. The prospective research subjects, such as *daigou* resellers in Denmark and Chinese parents in China, were

fully informed of my identity, the purpose of the research and the interview, and how the research results would be disseminated. Of course, I let them know that all of their private information would be kept anonymized. They always had the right to say "no" to any questions and quit the research. I very much appreciated my informants' cooperation. Knowing that I would introduce Chinese society to those outside of China, some of them were reluctant to join the interview at the beginning. In this case, I asked them if they wanted to continue or stop. Even though I was refused many times, I finally established close connections with some of them.

The covert research methods were involved in the data collection in participant observation at research sites, such as supermarkets and the kindergarten. One time when I went to a supermarket in Denmark and ran across some *daigou* resellers taking pictures of products on shelves while talking with clients in Chinese via video call, I did not tell them I was a researcher and doing fieldwork and instead acted like a normal shopper; though, I still used the fieldwork notes in the research. In this case, I did not show my real identity and ask for the *daigou* shoppers' consent to use the fieldnotes because I predicted that they probably would change their behavior as they knew they were being studied. On the other hand, as I kept the anonymity of the research, I did not see any possibility of harm or negative influence on the people who were being observed. The main purpose of using the description of *daigou* resellers' work was to provide a picture of the practice.

All ethnography probably falls on a continuum between the completely covert and the completely open, as sometimes it is impossible to ensure that all members know exactly what the researcher is doing, why, and how it will affect them (Pearson 2012). For example, when I was doing observation in front of the kindergarten gate, I did not explain my research goals to or ask for consent from the people with whom I had a small chat with, even though I still used those small chats as a part of the data. This is a common problem for ethnographers, who are

likely to encounter people in the process of their research who form part of the social setting but whose involvement is fleeting and therefore are not given the opportunity for informed consent (Bryman 2016).

Harm and Privacy. I have placed the principles of harm and privacy together to discuss in this section because the two standards are closely connected. Harm to participants in the research is regarded as unacceptable, including many facets: physical harm, stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, harm to participants' development, etc (Diener, Crandall, and Diener 1978). Ethnographic research rarely involves these sorts of physical harm to participants. But it happens that informants feel stressed or anxious when they are asked inappropriate questions. This issue of harm is further addressed in ethical codes by the advocacy of ensuring the individuals mentioned in the study are not identified or identifiable. The issue of confidentiality emerged here which is a very important principle in social research.

Like informed consent, the concept of privacy is also complex, as the reality is that the public and the private are rarely clear-cut. For example, is a chat among people on the street in front of the kindergarten public or private? It is sometimes not easy to answer the question on the definition of privacy, not only for the researchers but also for the research subjects. Even though it is hard to notice the invasion of privacy by the researchers due to the complexity of this issue, there are two widely acknowledged research norms in social research: ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

In my fieldwork, I found that all the informants did not want to show their personal information, especially the *daigou* resellers in Denmark, such as their name, age, their company's name, and their income from the business. One important reason was that the network business of *daigou* was still a kind of unregulated market, where *daigou* resellers were not sure what the consequence would be if the business was widely known and their work was "discovered" by people outside of the Chinese community. The second reason was that as the

discussion on the *daigou* business focused on the legality of the business, many *daigou* resellers were afraid that the interview would bring troubles to them. To protect their private information, I used pseudonyms in the article. But I asked them if I could use their demographic characteristics in the research, and some of them said "yes" and some of them said "no". To respect their attitudes, I only use their gender, age ranges, marital status, and place where I interviewed them to provide a basic background for the interview.

There was an "interlude" during my research that *TV2.dk*, a national media outlet in Denmark, reported on my research in the "business section" of the newspaper in January 2021.[4] After the report, I received many readers' letters and most of them are from Denmark, but also some from other countries. Two of the letters were from founders of a start-up in Denmark which aimed at helping Danish companies to enter the Chinese market. They asked me if I could cooperate and recommend their company to the *daigou* resellers in Denmark and if I could also provide them with the information of my interviewees. Without a doubt, I refused their requests, as I knew it was banned in the research disciplines on ethical grounds. I thought that this interlude would stop after I refused their requests. However, I received another letter from this company one month later where another co-worker told me that one of the founders of this start-up, who wrote the first letter to me, had died two weeks previously. He also told me that it was hard to establish the company with just the three of them and it was a wish of the founder who had passed away that they could develop their business to a larger scale and the connection with the *daigou* resellers would help them immensely. I did not sleep the whole night after I read the letter. Around that time, my daughter was also very sick. As I held her in my arms and saw her sleeping peacefully, I was thinking a lot about the value of research and more practically, how could I reply to the reader. One thing was for sure: I could not give the list of names of my informants and their private information to him. But I wanted to help them, not only because of the sad and emotional news about the founder but also because I got a

feeling that this founder must have considered his career as one of the most important parts in his life given that he was still working two weeks before he died. How could I help them without transgressing the ethical principles in research? I told the sender of the letter about my hesitation, concerns, and my willingness to help them. Finally, I decided to publish their company's information in my account on WeChat friend circle which was public and anyone who added me as a friend could see the information, and I also wrote a text in the advertisement. My hope was that my *daigou* friends on WeChat could see this update and if they were interested in cooperating with the start-up, they were welcome to contact the founders directly. I did not follow up on this as I did not receive more letters from the company. I hoped, however, that some of my informants were interested in their business and maybe went on to work together.

Exploitation. The argument about the exploitative potential of ethnographic research leads to a variety of recommendations: that researchers should give something back in the way of services or payment; that participants should be empowered by becoming part of the research process; or that research should be directed towards studying the powerful and not the powerless (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). The main point of the principle of avoiding exploitation is to take the relationship of what is given and received into consideration when researchers are doing social research. As a researcher, I did not want my informants to feel that they just offered the information I would use in the research but got little or nothing in return. On this point, the exploitation is not only an issue from the perspective of ethical considerations in research, but it also violates the principle of reciprocity in universal value.

When I interviewed the *daigou* resellers in Denmark, I offered the first informant 100 Danish Kroner (approx. 13 USD) as a compensation for interrupting her work to do the interview with me. However, she was not quite happy with the interview since I did not explain the purpose of the research enough. Then, when I offered to pay her, she felt even more

confused as she wondered what I would ask her to do. I understood afterwards that payment was not quite welcome in this situation. Also, because some of the informants were my friends or someone introduced by my friends, it was embarrassing to pay friends to some extent. Therefore, I prepared some gifts when I interviewed them, such as red wine, toys for children, food, fruits, etc. Of course, I also expressed my gratitude for their help and promised to send them my article or dissertation when I finished the research if they wanted to read it.

Compared with the fieldwork in Denmark, the situation in China was different, as I spent about three months living with one of my friends and also one of my informants in Tianjin. I also organized a group interview with four mothers in an expensive cafeteria. As I was treated as a guest more than a researcher during my stay there, I did offer to pay for the cost of the drinks and refreshments, but I ended up not paying anything as my friend insisted on paying for everything. I hoped to offer something that they needed in return, but it turned out that they did not need me to pay for material gifts. Instead, they thought that it could be a good idea if I could introduce them to some experiences in Denmark and to teach their children English. So, I offered two English classes to their children as a way to pay them back for their help. There is a section in Chapter 3 describing the experience of teaching English and a responsive analysis based on the experience. However, I know that compared with what they had offered me, I gave too little back. I also promised them that if they needed any help in the future, for example, with sending their children to Denmark to study, I would offer more help when they need it. I tried my best to make myself "useful" in return for their generous help.

Consequences for Future Research. The principle of the consideration for future research means that as social researchers we have the responsibility to "protect" the access to research settings. Explicitly, if there is a generally negative reaction to the research from the people who are studied, it is likely that they will refuse to participate in the research next time. The negative reaction is mainly from the irreconcilable conflict between the interests of social science and

the interests of those studied. The strategy to avoid a negative reaction is to ensure the informant will not see the research as something that is in opposition to them and in contrast to the researcher's aims. (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019).

However, it is hard to decide how the informants will interpret the research and it is even harder to make sure they will think the same way as the researchers. As discussed in the previous section, I adopted the strategy of *verification* to be sensitive to any potential negative influence on my informants and the fieldwork sites that I entered. Besides, I also adopted the technique of *respondent validation* to improve the credibility of the research. I asked respondents about their interpretation to make sure they had a similar understanding to the one that I had. One thing was for sure: if anyone interpreted their identity as *daigou* shoppers negatively, the informants immediately felt uncomfortable and did not enjoy this interpretation of their business. For example, when I told one of my informants that the research article about the *daigou* business focused on the legality of the business and some scholars defined this business as illegal, I was given a clear "warning" – she told me: "if you interpret us also in this way, I think we have to stop here now." Even though the legality is not the main focus of my research, their reaction to the discussion on the issue still provoked my curiosity. However, after the "warning", I hesitated to ask the legality question later on in the interview. Other informants were reasonably open to a discussion on this topic. Few people thought *daigou* business could be an illegal business, as they followed the Danish law to establish companies and they also paid taxes if their earnings exceeded the limits required. They did not worry about the legality of the business in China either before the E-commerce Law was introduced on 1 January 2019. After the new law was enforced, many *daigou* shoppers adopted a "wait-and-see approach", which means they stopped their business for a while to see if there would be any consequences after the law was introduced, and then they decided whether to continue the business or did something else to make money. From these experiences, I realised that if I

posed the question in a respectful way, there was no need for the informant to react negatively. Moreover, I felt more confident in the interviews that followed the first conflict. Generally, my informants were friendly and enjoyed the conversation.

Reflexivity

The research on the *daigou* network between Denmark and China constituted the majority of my life in Denmark starting in August 2016. Why do I say that? Ever since I arrived to Denmark, I had been asked by my friends, classmates, family members and friends of friends to buy Danish products for them. I was "pushed" to do the business at the beginning, and I did not expect I would research it one day. Because of the special communication and marketing methods of *daigou* business, I studied the case from the perspective of consumption and marketing when I did my master's degree in Aalborg and graduated with a grade 12, the top grade in the Danish 7-point grading scale.[5] Starting the PhD project, I observed more dimensions of the network business, especially when I got married in 2020 and became a mother in 2021. I experienced what it was like to be a wife and a mother. I found the "key" to go into the other wives' and mother's lives – the empathy with Chinese women immigrants. This is where Chapter 5 about the gender dimension comes from. After my daughter was diagnosed with a kind of rare disease, infant formula become the main food for her from when she was four months old until I was about to finish my PhD in the summer of 2022. I got a more emotional understanding of the product of infant formula. I understand its necessity for some families and it was unacceptable when Children got sick or even died when they consumed adulterated infant formula in 2008. Sharing the same feeling with the middle-class parents in mainland China and casting the spotlight on the child feeding issues, I established the main arguments on child feeding in Chapter 2 and middle-class anxiety in Chapter 3. After discussing with my supervisors and other professors, the main theme of the dissertation was decided on: family reproduction in China with two flows between Denmark and China, and

this idea opened the door for me to understand my role and also my life as a Chinese immigrant in Denmark.

Reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher (England 1994). The researchers' position and personal experiences can directly influence the fieldwork and the data interpretation, and the analysis process can influence the researchers' self-understanding. Therefore, this back-and-forth process is a two-way and mutually constructive process. Personally, the reflexivity process did not stop after I finished my research, and it will continue in the future not only from the research perspective but also in my own life. In other words, this research has become a part of my life, or I am a research subject myself as well. Like the experience of becoming a mother myself has contributed to the research on the other young Chinese mothers, revolving around the issue of child feeding, I believe my future personal experience will also influence the future research in some ways.

No matter how extensive the economic activities are, they still depend on and are still shaped by concrete human connections. Therefore, anthropologists have primarily been trying to understand the world by focusing on "embeddedness" – human connections in economic activities (Xiang 2007; Eriksen 2003). According to my research on the transnational reselling network business of infant formula between Denmark and China, I could see not only the research subjects of *daigou* resellers on one end, and the anxious Chinese parents on the other end, but also, I could see the figure of mothers, the women, the wives. What I mean is that I write this dissertation by way of thanks to all informants in the research, with the majority of them women. It is their lively stories that make up the subject of this research on reproduction of families in terms of feeding and caregiving, efforts to raise families. Each informant has her (his) unique life story and all of the informants' life stories show us one piece of the puzzle of the bigger picture of Chinese middle-class families. The research project must finish due to the

time limitation, but the research and the reflection for me will not or should not stop. The curiosity to get to know more about China and Chinese people and also more about myself is pushing me to get closer to the community. Of course, everyone who reads this dissertation will interpret it slightly differently. I hope I could use this piece of the puzzle of the Chinese community to attract more people in positions of relevance, including businessmen in Sino-Denmark commerce, Chinese immigrants in other countries, and mothers in various places around China or perhaps in other countries.

2. Chinese Mothers and Child Feeding Transition

"It is Hard to be a Mom"

I met Qiaoqiao, a new mom, and also her mom at her parents' home in April 2019. Qiaoqiao was one of my classmates in high school. She had been working as a public servant in my hometown after graduating from university before going on maternity leave. Her husband, Shen, is a dentist, who works in a public hospital on weekdays and also works part-time at his father's dental clinic on weekends. Even though Qiaoqiao and her husband have two apartments themselves, Qiaoqiao lives with her parents quite often as Shen is usually very busy with work and Qiaoqiao does not want to stay at home, taking care of their daughter by herself.

We were sitting on the bed in Qiaoqiao and her daughter's bedroom and talking casually about the old-times in high school up to our current lives. Qiaoqiao started by thanking me as I helped her to buy Arla infant formula, a Danish brand milk powder from Denmark for her daughter one year ago. Even back to the time when she was pregnant, I was so surprised that she already knew she probably would not have enough milk after giving birth, so she contacted me to source infant formula in Denmark. I asked her how she knew that her daughter would need infant formula even before giving birth. Qiaoqiao told me that she had already decided to give birth via a caesarean section, and the doctor said that it usually takes much longer for women who have a caesarean section to generate milk than those who choose a vaginal delivery. Also, Qiaoqiao knew her mom did not have enough milk when she was born, and therefore, she suspected that there would be a high chance that she could not produce enough milk. In case her daughter could not get enough breast milk after birth, Qiaoqiao brought infant formula with her when she was sent to the delivery room. When I asked her why she did not try a

vaginal delivery, because then it probably would be faster and easier to generate breast milk, she explained:

> The simple answer is I am afraid of natural birth. As caesarean section has become quite common in China, I just think it is easier for me. I heard a lot of moms who have to do emergency caesarean section after trying a vaginal delivery. I think a planned caesarean section is much better than an emergency one. The research showed I made the right decision. I did not experience a lot of pain after giving birth. Then I also had a very experienced *yue sao*[1] taking care of me and my baby during *yue zi.*[2] Actually, I pretty much enjoyed that period of time.

I asked Qiaoqiao what she felt about being a mom, and she told me that:

> It's a lot of work. I really hope there is some official guidance on how to take care of babies rather than those childrearing books written by different authors. It was really hard to decide what and which brand of products to buy. Even though I have been well taken care of after giving birth to Mumu (her daughter's name), I still feel very tired to be a mom. She is just eight months old. It is still a long way to go. After having a baby, you are not yourself anymore. You have to take responsibility for another life.

Qiaoqiao's mom, Aunt Zhang, came in with Mumu and responded to our conversation. She started to reflect on the past when she gave birth to Qiaoqiao and even before that time when she was young. Aunt Zhang was first a teacher and then was promoted to director in a public kindergarten after she worked there for more than twenty years. After she retired from the workplace, she had been helping with taking care of her granddaughter. She commented on the conversation between Qiaoqiao and me:

> I don't really understand why it still feels so hard to raise kids for your generation. Normally you only have one child, and you have parents and your parents-in-law. All of us will help you with taking care of children. Why do you still complain it is so hard? When I was young like you, I needed to work and take care of the whole family. My parents could not help us because they also

needed to work and I had two siblings. In my generation, nobody complained about the hardship. Your generation is just too squeamish (*jiaoqi).*

It was not the first time that I heard how the previous parent generation thought the current parent generation who were born between the 80s to the 90s were too "finicky". The majority of the current parent generation are growing up under the Chinese "one-child" policy,[3] which means normally they are the singletons with four grandparents and two parents pampering them. They are also called the "spoiled generation". Compared with their own parents' generation, they are growing up in the post-Mao transition to a market economy where they have been surrounded by economic prosperity and the culture of consumerism. For the generation of Aunt Zhang, who were born in the 1960s, they were influenced by the policies and programmes under Mao's design of state socialism in China with the character of collectivism. Yet, scholars usually categorize Aunt Zhang's generation also as the post-Mao generation because the significant socio-economic transformation started from the 1970s with the policy of "Reform and Opening-up" (Croll 1986). However, this generation were still under the influence of Mao's socialist policies as there was usually a delay between implementing the new policies and evaluating the consequences. One representative example is that under the old system which existed for four decades before the general reform in China, from the 1950s through the early 1990s, the great majority of urban employees were members of a work unit (*danwei*), and membership entailed lifetime employment (Andreas 2019a). In this case, Aunt Zhang's *danwei* is the public kindergarten.

During the talk with Qiaoqiao and her mom, many questions popped into my mind: Is it because the current generation never really experienced a hard time like their parents did that they feel being parents nowadays is *hard*? How hard was it for the previous parent generation to raise children in the 1980s? I guess it should be much harder than for the current young parents due to a lack of material resources. But then why does the older generation seem

satisfied with their life? As Aunt Zhang said, "we did not complain about the hardship". With those questions, I asked Aunt Zhang to share her life story.

> "I grew up in an intellectual family (*zhishi fenzi jiating*). Qiaoqiao's grandfather was also a teacher. But, you know, in the old days, it did not matter what position you were in, all the families were generally not rich. I remember my mom said that I drank goat's milk growing up as Qiaoqiao's grandma did not have enough milk for me. She got the fresh goat's milk and boiled it to sterilize it. After we had Qiaoqiao, we used *Sanlu*[4] milk powder to feed her. At that time, we did not know about any food scandals like nowadays. So, compared with our life, your generation is really lucky and should feel happy, and should feel satisfied (*zhizu*). I remember a product called Malted Milk (*mairujing*) was really popular when you were young (in the 1980s). It was kind of a very precious food that we served it for kids only when they cried for it.

Goat's milk, Malted Milk, Milk powder… Aunt Zhang's description of food to feed infants and young children provoked my curiosity to get into the child-feeding topic further by following the food thread. Qiaoqiao also mentioned that the decision-making process to feed her baby is the hardest work as a mom. Nowadays parents do not use the food mentioned by Aunt Zhang to feed their kids anymore. Why? Maybe the easy answers could be reasons about hygiene, health, science, culture, etc. As Chinese people become rich and there are hundreds of thousands of baby products on the market for sale, people do not need the food in the "backward" (*luohou*) period anymore. But if this is the reason for the food used to feed Chinese children becoming a thing of the past, how can we interpret the anxiety related to the continuing food scandals, especially in the baby food industry nowadays?

To answer those questions, I did more interviews revolving around the topic of child-feeding and searched for relevant material. Based on my extensive fieldwork in two cities, I will demonstrate an ironic picture: namely, that the prosperity of the economy and promotion of living status did not bring peace of mind and relief to current parents on child-feeding issues. On the contrary, young parents feel more anxious than their parent's generation in terms of

raising children. On one hand, the creation of breast milk substitutes eases the hard work of feeding babies for mothers; on the other hand, the "mediated" relation brings insecurity and anxieties for Chinese mothers. On this point, I suggest that infant formula is also regarded as a substance of "relatedness" (Carsten 1995) or "substantive vectors" (Hutchinson 1996) which plays a significant role in building relationships and kins, based on the argument that a breast milk substitute is not just a substitute in nutritional terms but also in social ones.

The commodity of infant formula was introduced to China around the 1960s. The emergence of infant formula in China changed the experiences of child-feeding of three generations of Chinese parents (especially mothers). As an important substitute for breastmilk, the change of feeding patterns also interweaves the change of relationships, especially on kin aspects (relatedness) in Chinese families. In this chapter, I will show the different experiences through individuals' life stories, revolving around the topic of feeding the next generation, and to explain the connection between changing child-feeding patterns and intergenerational relatedness.

The main purpose of this chapter is to understand the infant formula from the anthropological perspective, examining the connection between this special food and Chinese parents' lives, especially the mothers' lives. On this aspect, infant formula, or baby food is taken as a lens (physical media) to view the change of relationships based on kin in Chinese families. This anthropological approach to address feeding issues is not completely new. From 1993 to 1997, Fairbank for East Asian Research at Harvard University funded a research project "Food, Consumption Patterns, and Dietary Change in Chinese Society", and published a book *"Feeding China's Little Emperors"*(Guo 2000), which focuses on how the transformation of children's food habits, the result of China's transition to a market economy and its integration into the global economic arena, has changed the intimate relationship of childhood, parenthood, and family life mainly from an anthropological approach.

Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, this chapter is situated within the wider range of "relatedness" on the vertical dimension – intergenerational differences in the area of feeding and caring, the main practices in the "reproduction", which means to sustain future life by creating a new generation of persons as kin (Bruckermann 2017). Therefore, there are two threads in this chapter: the overt changes of infant/baby food and the covert vicissitude to the intergenerational relatedness. Following the development of baby food, the following section starts with the natural baby food of breast milk and then the substitute of breast milk and food for feeding small children, from the domestic to the international level, namely the development of domestic dairy industry to the foreign infant formula entering the Chinese market.

A Brief Review on Breastfeeding in China in the Past Half-century

Breastfeeding is recognised as the normal and natural method for feeding infants and it is one of the most effective ways to ensure child health and survival. WHO (World Health Organization) and UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) recommend "exclusive breastfeeding" for the first six months of life and continued up to two years of age or beyond after the introduction of complementary food (WHO 2001). According to the latest study, only 29.2% of infants aged six months and below are exclusively breastfed in China (2019), and this data is lower than the world's average rate of 43%. With the dramatic decline in breastfeeding, the promotion of breastfeeding has become a national priority for child development in China since the 1990s, and the importance of feeding infants with breast milk is being rediscovered.

There have been considerable changes in breastfeeding in China over the past half-century. In this section, I will briefly introduce these changes following the timeline from the 1960s to nowadays. Even though the focus of this chapter is the development of baby food or breast milk substitutes in China, a short review on breastfeeding is considered necessary as this

provides a macro social and political background of the emergence of breast milk substitutes. One thing that needs to be mentioned is that China is a big country, and there are huge differences in the rural and urban areas. The situation also varies from province to province. Besides the geographic and economic factors, the breastfeeding practice is also influenced by religious and cultural factors.

There are different definitions of breastfeeding which need to be clarified: "Exclusive breastfeeding" means feeding infants with only breast milk, no other food or liquid, except for drops of vitamins, mineral supplements or medicine. "Full breastfeeding" means feeding infants with breast milk and also small amounts of supplements-water, water-based drinks, fruit juice or ritualistic fluids. "Partial breastfeeding" means feeding infants with breast milk and other sources of energy and nutrients. "Any breastfeeding" means infants being fed by breast milk with or without other drinks, formula, or other infant food (WHO 2008). It should be noted that breastfeeding without any explanation refers to "any breastfeeding" in this chapter.

The breastfeeding rate in both urban and rural areas was over 80% in the 1950s and the 1960s. But the rate started to decline, especially in larger cities where milk substitutes came into being (Xu et al. 2009). According to research on the feeding patterns of children in China which is based on data from a series of national surveys which are implemented once every 10 years in China, the exclusive breastfeeding rates in infants under 6 months of age decreased between 1985 and 2005, especially in suburban areas where the number decreased by 17.7%; during the same decade, this number increased by 16% in urban areas and it increased by 5.9% between 2005 and 2015 (Wu et al. 2018).

To improve the breastfeeding rate and promote breastfeeding practices, the Chinese government, in cooperation with WHO and UNICEF, started to build Baby-friendly Hospitals (*aiying yiyuan*) on a national level in the 1990s. Almost at the same period, different types of breast milk substitutes became popular nationally. Domestic dairy companies introduced

production lines of infant formula and famous foreign food companies, such as Nestle and Borden, which have become market leaders in producing and selling baby food and breast milk substitutes in China. Ironically, commercial information on infant formula was found apparently in some hospitals in the 1990s. Suzanne Gottschang, a medical anthropologist, shows how commercialism in Chinese hospitals obstructed the effectiveness of the government's measures to promote breastfeeding (Gottschang 2000). Until 1998, there were about 5,550 hospitals recognized as Baby-friendly Hospitals nationally. This initiative worked to some extent in promoting breastfeeding, especially in urban areas. There were a series of reports by local hospitals showing the promotion of breastfeeding practice and an increase in the breastfeeding rate after the establishment of Baby-friendly Hospitals. For example, a study in 2002 shows that the full breastfeeding rate for 0 to 4-month-old infants reached 71.6% generally, with 65.5% in cities and 74.4% in rural regions (Nannan et al. 2021). A recent study on breastfeeding rates in the past decade in China shows that "any breastfeeding" has increased by up to two months and the breastfeeding rate at four months has increased from 78% to 83%.[5] Collectively, relevant research shows that the breastfeeding rate in China fell between 1985 and 2005, and the mixed and formula feeding rates increased. In the decade from 2005 to 2015, the breastfeeding rate in urban areas has increased more than that in suburbs, which is related to the higher awareness of scientific feeding information (Wu et al. 2018).

Even though breastfeeding rates have improved, the "exclusive breastfeeding" rate is still below the national goal. According to the Outline for the Development of Children (2011-2020), the "exclusive breastfeeding" rate for 0 to 6-month-old infants should be above 50% (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2011), while the latest report on this number is 29 % (Wang et al. 2019). Between 1979 and 2007, during the first thirty years after China's economic reform, the domestic formula milk industry has undergone a period of rapid expansion, and the consumption of formula milk increased along with the

increase of per capita income (Tang et al. 2014). Entering the millennium, international food companies came in and divide the "big cake" of the consumer market in China. It is reported that China has become the largest market for baby milk formula, valued at USD 17783 million in 2014 (Rollins et al. 2016).

Determinants of Breastfeeding

The Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group published a report on determinants of breastfeeding and interventions to promote breastfeeding practices in 2006. The determinants could be categorized into three key factors: structural determinants, setting determinants, and individual determinants. Structural determinants refer to sociocultural and market context; Setting determinants refer to health systems and services, family and community, and workplace and environment; Individual determinants refer to mother and infant attributes, and mother-infant relationship (Rollins et al. 2016).

Due to the general low breastfeeding rate, there are also a series of studies focusing on analysing the reasons for mothers ceasing breastfeeding in China. In 2019, China Development Research Foundation published a research report on influencing factors for breastfeeding based on the 10, 223 surveys from 12 cities in China. The report points out that on the individual level, the mothers' and children's health status, and the mother's own knowledge of breastfeeding are the main factors that influence the feeding patterns; on the institutional level, the guidance from care practitioners and institutions, support from workplaces and households, and suitable places for breastfeeding in public places, are the main factors influencing breastfeeding status; on the social level, the regulation of maternity leave and the regulation of advertisements on breastmilk substitutes are the main influencing factors (Wang et al. 2019). It is hard to evaluate the corresponding proportions of reasons for mothers who stop breastfeeding in this case, because there could be multiple reasons for ceasing breastfeeding. At this point, I would like to add a note regarding my experience in the fieldwork in China. I

interviewed a product manager of an international food company whose main products are infant formula and other children's foods in Guangzhou in June, 2019. The manager told me that the company had been producing over 200 different types of baby food only for the Chinese market to cater to Chinese consumers' demands on different levels. Besides the first-tier cities, such as Bejing and Shanghai, consumers from the second-tier cities had, such as Xi'an and Hangzhou, had developed into their core consumer groups, which means the consumers from the middle-size cities accounted for the biggest share of the company's consumers. From the manager's description, we can get at least two important pieces of information: first, there are multiple choices of children's foods for sale on the Chinese market as only one company has more than 200 kinds of products; second, many consumers are influenced by those food companies' promotion strategies. Ubiquitous commercial information could also influence a mother's decision to breastfeed. The impact of breast milk substitute on mothers' interpretation of whether to breastfeed or not has been widely studied (Parry et al. 2013; Wu et al. 2018).

Interventions to Improve Breastfeeding Practices

Based on the analysis of the specific factors influencing breastfeeding practice, corresponding measures are encouraged to intervene and promote breastfeeding practices. Besides the initiative of "Baby-friendly Hospital" from the end of the 1990s mentioned previously, the Chinese government also carried out a series of measures to improve breastfeeding practices on three levels. However, the breastfeeding rate is still far from the ultimate goal, and the improvement in breastfeeding rates still has a long way to go. For example, the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China (MOH) issued *Management Rules of Breast Milk Substitutes* [6] in 1995, which regulates the marketing of breast milk substitutes. But commercials of relevant baby food broadcast by both national and international food companies could still be seen on TV [7] and even in hospitals after the implementation of the rules. These management

rules were repealed in 2017. Lack of effective government programmes together with aggressive unchecked marketing of breastmilk substitutes make China a huge market for infant formula companies to compete within. The association between the formula marketing and mothers' breastfeeding practices has been investigated in previous research, showing that infant formula advertising appears to decrease mothers' confidence in their ability to breastfeed, especially when provided by health care practitioners and institutions (Parry et al. 2013).

When I did my fieldwork in China in the summer of 2019, some young Chinese mothers also told me that, however, the systematic courses for breastfeeding had become a "selling point" for many private postpartum care centres (*yuezi zhongxin*) to attract Chinese parents to buy their products rather than a national programme to improve breastfeeding practices generally. It means that some of the training programmes for breastfeeding developed into a "product" which is only available for consumers who can afford it. The cost for the postpartum caring ranged from 20,000 RMB (3000 USD) to 80,000 RMB (1,1145USD), depending on the economic development levels of the cities in China. The reports also point out that this caring service has developed into a billion-dollar industry in China according to *iiMedia Research Rroup*. [8] To summarise, the government's measures to promote more breastfeeding encountered challenges on different levels, and the effectiveness of those measures is rather limited against the influence of capital and capitalism.

According to the review of breastfeeding practice in China, we can see that even though the message that breast milk is the best for feeding infants spreads widely, there are still internal and external factors that force Chinese mothers to use other alternative food to feed their babies. In the following sections, I will introduce the alternative food to feed Chinese babies from the 1970s to nowadays. There is a paradox from the development of breast milk substitutes: Along with the development of more options for feeding babies, Chinese parents' anxiety is also accelerated during the past half-century. The anxiety is not from the insufficiency of food

supply, but the choice of buying and the uncertainty of the food market in China. The middle-class anxiety in China will also be addressed in other chapters.

"Milk Substitute Powder" and "Malted Milk"

When I did my fieldwork in the cities of Tianjian and Tangshan, I heard some names of food which was popular among small kids in China during the 1960s to the 1970s, but they have disappeared from the food market nowadays. For example, Milk Substitute Coupon (*dai ru fen piao*) and Malted Milk (*mai ru jing*) are two of those names. I searched for the relevant information on those food products, and I found one blog[9] and a news excerpt[10] about these two things which are written anonymously by someone raised in the 1970s. From the description, we can find some clues about the baby feeding situation a half-century ago.

> ***"Memory of Taste by One Yuan."***
>
> I could not remember where I got the wrapping bag of the Milk Substitute Powder (*dai ru fen*), which has been saved for fifty years. I remember it cost only one yuan. It was a kind of product from the 60s of the last century. Why did I keep just a piece of paper? It is because it records the memories of my childhood.
>
> I was born *8 jin 8 liang* (4.4 kg) in 1968. My parents have three kids and I am the youngest. To take care of her three kids, my mum worked hard every day. My mum did not have enough breast milk to feed me. So, I had to start to drink milk substitutes and porridge of solid food at an early age. In the middle of the 20th century, each newborn baby could get two bottles of milk with each less than half jin (500g) by milk coupon (*nai zheng*) And after the child turned one, each child could get only one bottle. However, not all families could afford milk or milk powder during the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Therefore, a kind of food named Milk Substitute Powder became popular. The Milk Substitute Powder is made of soybean powder, rice powder, and millet powder with some sugar and milk powder. Sugar was also supplied based on the food coupon programme. Each household could buy one jin (500g) milk substitute and two liang (100g) sugar (Cuba Sugar) per month. The taste of milk substitute powder was not too bad, but the amount of nutrition is much

less than milk and milk powder. In order not to leave babies to "starve", a lot of parents used this milk substitute powder to feed their kids. I had eaten this milk substitute powder until I was five or six years old. I could not get enough milk substitute powder. Even though I was very young, I knew that my mom worked hard and my family was not that rich to get enough food. I felt hungry quite often, but I never complained to my mom. I always envied our neighbour's kid, Shitou, who had enough food.

A few years later, there was still not enough milk on supply in Tianjin. An old woman remembered that her son had never tasted milk until he was a three-year-old. She used flour porridge to feed her kids to grow up. Milk substitute powder was regarded as "life-saving powder" in that era. At last, I knew that my mom sold her favourite coat to save money to buy milk substitute powder. This is why I saved the wrapping bag for many years.

"What is Malted Milk?"

During the 1970s and the 1980s, Malted Milk (*mai ru jing*) was a kind of "luxury food" in Chinese households. Malted milk was usually served to guests. Children loved the malted milk very much. But they were not allowed by their parents to drink as much they wanted. Some kids would "steal" malted milk when their parents were not at home. Some of them might "learn a lesson" when they were caught by their parents. What kind of food attracts children to "run such a big risk" to get?

Here is the ingredient description of Malted Milk: It contains condensed milk, milk powder, malt extract, egg powder, sugar and glucose. Following a scientific formula, the product provides protein, fat, sugar, vitamin A\B\D, phosphorus and calcium which are necessary for the human body. It is suitable for patients, old people, infants, and people who need concentrated nutrition.

The most famous brand of Malted Milk is Horlicks, which was established a century ago. A German chemist invented a kind of "infant soup" made of malt extract, wheat and milk, which is regarded as the earliest infant formula. At the same time, other food companies started to produce infant food, for example, the Horlick brothers from Britain. They founded "J&W Horlicks" food company which specializes in producing baby food. They invented the solid powder beverage in 1883 and

then named it Malted Milk in 1887 which went on the market for sale. Malted Milk developed from a kind of infant food to a popular beverage with nutrition. It also appeared among soldiers during World War I and World War II and served as an energy drink.

In China, it was the Shanghai Jiu Fu pharmaceutical factory that started to produce Malted Milk named *Lacovo (Le Kou Fu)* in the 1930s, which became one of the most popular beverages in Shanghai. Because of wars and reforms, the Jiu Fu factory went bankrupt in 1953. In the 1970s, Shanghai Coffee Factory reformed the formula and produced *Shanghai Qianghua Malted Milk* which was well known by Chinese consumers born in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, as different kinds of baby/children's food emerged in the Chinese market, consumers had more and more options. Malted Milk gradually disappeared from the market and became a common memory for Chinese people born during the 1970s and 1980s.

The second article also reminds me of the "happy old times" when I was a child. I remembered I liked to drink malted milk when I was about four or five years old. I also remembered that my mother always complained that I drank too much. As malted milk had a high proportion of sugar (approx. 30%), many parents were also worried that the large amount of sugar would damage their children's teeth. First, there were more food options as a food supplement for children emerging in the domestic market; second, people began to doubt whether the product's ingredients were healthy enough for children. Therefore, the popularity of malted milk has become a memory in the feeding history in China. Gradually, malted milk disappeared from the Chinese market.

The popularity of Milk Substitute Powder and Malted Milk depicted a portrait of Chinese life from the 1970s and 1980s. The lack of consumer products was a common phenomenon in both cities and rural areas. In terms of child feeding, milk substitute powder and malted milk which are supposed to be supplementary food were consumed as a main food or even "life-saving" food for infants and small children for a certain period of time in Chinese history. The main goal of infant and child feeding for the majority of Chinese families was to get enough

food in a period of scarcity. The nutritional well-being of infants and children was not and could not be the priority for Chinese parents in poor economic conditions. In terms of nutrition, milk substitute powder did not provide good nutrition as the plentiful supplementary baby food nowadays. However, such kinds of food provided basic nutrition for Chinese babies and small children to live and develop. It was simple and not that nutritious but at least non-toxic. In the era with lack of food and resources, it was a common concern for Chinese parents to worry about starvation, especially for small children, but it was not common for them to worry about hygiene or additives which are widely discussed nowadays.

Working Mothers and Infant Formula

In the previous two sections, we have reviewed the development of breastfeeding in China and alternative food to feed Chinese babies during the 1960s up the 1980s before infant formula became a normal infant food. Previous research shows that maternal perception of "insufficient milk supply", return to employment, influences from family and society, and the lack of truly understanding the health benefits of breastfeeding were found to be major reasons for Chinese mothers to use formula within the first six months in China (Zhang et al. 2015). On another aspect of raising children, this section continues to discuss the theme of child-feeding in China. I heard two versions about experiences about baby feeding against the background of the booming infant formula industry during the 1980s and 1990s in my fieldwork in Tangshan, in Northern China. In the section below, using these two pieces of life stories, I would like to show the changes before and after the national economic reform in China during the 1980s on the level of daily life – and on feeding practices specifically. Before presenting the narratives of the life stories of these two Chinese mothers from the fieldwork, I briefly introduce the Chinese economic reform to offer a macro social-political background to the stories of the two informants. There has been a plethora of literature, research reports, and news about the China's great transformation (Brandt and Rawski 2008; Hofman 2018; Meisner 1999). Therefore, I will

not elaborate on it in detail, but instead provide general information about it and its main impact on the lives of citizens.

The Chinese economic reform was launched in 1978 and then went into stagnation after the social movement in 1989. After Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour in 1992, reforms were revived and developed. Briefly, the result of economic reform was that the Communist Party leadership decided to turn to market-oriented reform to salvage the stagnant economy instead of the planned economy led by Mao Zedong (Brandt and Rawski 2008). Following the great economic reform policy, there were also multiple reform policies at the public level. For example, in Mao's socialist policy, the majority of Chinese workers worked in state-owned factories in the planned economy era. Many facilities including a nursery, school, canteen, theatre and other affiliated facilities were also located on the factory property. There is a documentary named North China Factory[11] that depicts the workers' lifestyle in a state-owned textile factory. In the documentary, we can see that the nursery facility shares the burden of taking care of small kids during the daytime for their parents who are workers in the factory. After 1878, the Chinese government started to focus on economic construction (*yi jingji jianshe wei zhongxin*). Actually, for a long time, there were only "economic policies" but no "social policies" (Wang 2008). Childcare is an important part of social policies which has been changed to coincide with economic reform. Especially with the reform policy of state-owned companies, childcare gradually became a part of the "family duty" instead of being provided as a "public service". The State Council's institutional reform abolished the National Nursery Leading Group and its offices that were responsible for coordinating and coordinating childcare services in 1982, which greatly impacted the development of childcare services (Yue and Fan 2018). In most of the state-owned companies, the service facilities, including nurseries, are separate from the factory property. *Regulations on Kindergartens* in 1989 regulated public kindergartens to provide childcare services for children above three years old. Caring for

younger children under three years old covertly became a "family duty" in the 1990s. In addition, as an important policy of self-financing for enterprises, many enterprises could not guarantee female employees' maternity leave and welfare. In the macro background of economic reform, the previous state-owned enterprises turned to private enterprises gradually. It is estimated that over 60 million workers were laid off (*xia gang*) by the end of the 1990s in China.[12]

Beginning in 1978, the family was reaffirmed as the basic social institution and its stability was the mainstay of social relations and social order in China. As a result, women were seen to be primarily responsible for the social welfare of family members, which lead to a re-evaluation of mothering roles (Croll 1986). The transformation raised up the debate on women's priority of production or reproduction, a topic that has been discussed until the present day. Ever since Croll commented on the interest of the family's role in childcare and socialization in her influential book on *Chinese Women since Mao*, this interest is a part of conservative politics all over the world; and it will broaden into a reassessment of parenting roles, if not perhaps narrowing the role of mothering (Croll 1986).

Another important influence on China's great transformation is the shift away from a collectivist and family-oriented ethics of personal responsibilities to an individualistic ethics of rights and self-development (Yan 2009). The new subject constituted in the social and cultural spaces of this shift appears in multiple "guises": like the consumption-oriented effect and the driver of the market's incitement to competition and personal success, and the selfish individual (Evans 2010; Ci 1994). In her influential article on the change of the mother – daughter relationship in China, Evans argues that the shift concerns the articulation of individual emotional needs and desires. In the following section, I argue that the different feelings about the experiences of raising the next generation are also associated with the socio-economic transformation and ethical shift.

When I did my fieldwork in my hometown, I met Aunt Dong and Xiao Li. Aunt Dong was an inspector in a state-owned paper factory before the wave of layoffs, and Aunt Li was a waitress in a restaurant who migrated from Anhui province of south China in 2012. Aunt Dong's daughter was born in 1987 and Xiao Li was also born in 1987 and her daughter was born in 2011. I put their life stories in the same section as I would like to show the differences between the two generations of women workers revolving around their baby-feeding experience. In addition, I noticed how both of them mentioned their work experience and the role of infant formula in their baby-feeding practices. Following their experience, we can also see the change in Chinese women's lives against the background of social-economic reform and transformation starting from the end of the 1970s until today.

"It Was Busy but It Was also 'Ok'"

I got to know Aunt Dong through my mom's network. Aunt Dong was one of mother's old colleagues *(gongyou)* when they worked in a paper factory called *Xinghai Zaozhichang* about twenty years ago. I remember my mom often brought me to her workplace when I was young, like five or six years old. When my mom finished her work, she also brought me to the canteen affiliated to the factory to have dinner. I tried to recall the life through the vague memories when my mom introduced Aunt Dong to me. Aunt Dong also mentioned things that happened in my childhood together with her daughter, but I could not remember these. She was very talkative. When I transcribed the recording, I found there were a lot of details which were not quite relevant to the topic. Therefore, I selected only a part of her narratives to depict the life of Chinese mothers in the collective era.

> I (Aunt Dong) worked in the paper factory that was state-owned before the reform. After the reform, most of the factories in the town are transformed into private sectors. I was laid off from the factory in 1998. After I gave birth to my daughter, Jiajia, I had maternity leave for about three months in 1987. After returning to work, I sent Jiajia to the nursery of a public kindergarten where my mom

worked. It was convenient that my mom could take care of Jiajia during her working time. When Jiajia was a little older and entered the older classes in the kindergarten, Jiajia's teacher would send her to my mom's class.

There were three shifts of my work, namely 08.00 to 16.00, 16.00 to 00.00, and 00.00 to 08.00. When I worked the daytime, I could go to the nursery to breastfeed Jiajia during the lunch break. I prepared some infant formula for her for the nursery in case I could not leave the workplace to feed her. They (the nursery) also provided food for babies. I preferred to bring infant formula from home as I always bought an expensive one. But Jiajia also had infant formula from the nursery. There was no big difference, as there were only several brands of infant formula for sale on the market thirty years ago, unlike nowadays. There are hundreds of different kinds of baby food for sale in the supermarkets now.

My work unit *(gongzuo danwei)* was also very helpful during my lactation. If there was not so much urgent work, my leader (*lingdao*) usually allowed me to go to the kindergarten. When I could not leave the factory, my mom could take care of Jiajia. I did not worry too much. Until Jiajia was six or seven months old, the nursery started to provide supplementary food, such as rice porridge and egg porridge. When she was about one year old, I stopped breastfeeding. I did feel very busy, but it was ok. Family and my work unit helped me a lot.

"I Have No Other Choices"

I met Xiao Li when I had dinner with my friend in the restaurant where she was working. I saw she was talking with her daughter via WeChat Video in a dialect I did not understand. After she hung up the call, I chatted with her. She told me that she came from Anhui province in Southern China, and that day was her daughter's birthday. Her sister stayed with her daughter that day and her daughter used Xiao Li's sister's phone to call Xiao Li. It was not quite often to have a video call with her daughter, as she was usually very busy. Xiao Li's parents took care of her daughter usually. Because Xiao Li's parents were not good at using smartphones,

Xiao Li could only chat with her daughter when her sister visited their parents, and then her sister helped with the video call.

I did not plan to take her as my informant, as I planned to focus on the local mothers' experience of feeding babies. But she said her younger sister gave birth to a boy two months ago. Her sister asked Xiao Li what kind of infant formula was popular in the place where Xiao Li was working. It provoked my interest in her life story and the role of infant formula in her family. Xiao Li told me she left her daughter when she was about ten months old after weaning off breastmilk (*duannai*). When being asked why she had to leave her daughter so early. She said, "I had no other choice". Xiao Li had two sisters and a brother, and she was the oldest. Before getting married, Xiao Li had been to Shanghai and Shenzhen to work (*da gong*) also as a waitress. Introduced by her family, Xiao Li knew her husband and got married. Xiao Li's husband was a construction worker recruited by a construction company and migrated to my hometown as there were many relevant projects in the coastal cities. Xiao Li said her husband was not there when she gave birth to their daughter. After stopping breastfeeding, Xiao Li came to the place where her husband was working, namely my hometown. As she had to earn money to support the small family with her daughter and her husband and the big family with her parents and her siblings financially, Xiao Li said, "the oldest has to shoulder the burden."

Infant formula became the connection between Xiao Li and her daughter in the first year after she migrated from her hometown. After the infant formula scandal in 2008, like other Chinese parents, Xiao Li did not trust infant formula sold in the kiosk in her village. "*Sanlu*, a famous domestic brand of infant formula was also connected to scandals. How can we trust unknown brands? So, I bought cans of infant formula from maternity and infant shops here and posted them to my daughter." Xiao Li also complained that the price of infant formula was too expensive, about 300 RMB (47 USD) per can. However, she insisted on buying the expensive infant formula even though she and her husband could earn only 6500 RMB (1,027USD) per

month around that time. Xiao Li regarded the infant formula as a "compensation" for her absence in her daughter's growing process.

The similar stories of Xiao Li also appear in one of the most influential pieces of research on migrant labor, *New Masters, New servants: Migration, development, and Women Workers in China* (Yan 2008). The author, Yan Hairiong, analyses how the domestic workers, mainly migrant women, are subjected to, make sense of, and reflect on a range of state and neoliberal discourses about development, modernity, consumption, self-worth, quality, and individual and collective longing and struggle through their daily life. In the chapter on consumption, Yan argues that the pursuit of modernity through consumption by domestic workers who migrate to cities turned to be a mirage, as it could not change their social status substantially but creates an illusion of achieving modernity. Similarly, when buying infant formula from Tangshan and posting it back to her hometown to feed her baby, she has the similar mindset as the counterparts from the middle-class families: products sold in more developed areas should be better than those in less developed areas.

Aunt Dong and Xiao Li's life stories show us two pictures of the lives of Chinese career mothers in the 1980s and nowadays, respectively. The great economic transformation started at the beginning of the 1980s in China. It took a long time for the citizens in towns and the countryside to *notice* the change. Aunt Dong's experience embodied a typical lifestyle for Chinese mothers who raised children in the collective era with the development of the market economy in China. Between 1978 and 1982, the amount earmarked for non-productive construction, such as residences, culture and education, health, scientific research and public utilities, increased from 20.9 to 45.5 per cent (China Spotlight Series 1984). In the period when Aunt Dong had Children, Chinese people earned both the "bonus" of the economic reform and the benefits from the collectivism in socialist China. After China implemented the economic reform policy, more consumer goods were for sale in the Chinese market. Children who grew

up in the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s were called "little emperors" as they were usually "only children" under the "one-child" birth control policy, and they were *spoiled* by two parents and four grandparents. However, about four decades after the reform we witnessed the prosperity of China's economy on the one hand, which has become the world's second-largest economy. On the other hand, like Xiao Li, more and more Chinese young parents feel that it is harder to raise children nowadays, as they can barely afford the premium consumer goods they wish.

More than 30 years after Aunt Dong's generation struggled to raise their young children, the richness of the consumer market and rapid growth of the economy did not improve the livelihood of Chinese mothers significantly nowadays. There are still some young Chinese mothers were *compelled* to leave her hometown and search for work opportunities continuously. She could not stop, because her whole family waited for the money that she transferred monthly from far away where she lived and worked. Xiao Li's work is called *da ling gong* in Chinese, which means the work is temporary without a long-term work contract. There is usually no insurance for this type of short-term work in China. Xiang Biao, an influential anthropologist on Chinese society, explains that this type of "casualized labour" constitutes the important part of a kind of *gyroscope-like economy* with several Chinese-specific characteristics, like the broad-based participation and the high growth rate coupled with low welfare provisions, competitiveness, and precariousness (Xiang 2020). One Chinese term "hands-stop-mouth-stop" *(shou ting kou ting)* vividly describes the status of these casualized workers, which means if one stops working, then they will have no money to survive.

Milk Scandal, Domestic Dairy Industry, and Foreign Infant Formula

Previous sections in this chapter have reviewed the change of the feeding patterns and children's diets during the past half-century as well as the different child-feeding experiences of Chinese mothers. Both Qiaoqiao and Xiao Li indicated the hardship of being a mom, even

though Qiaoqiao had a very supportive environment and a stable job. In this section, I will continue to examine the hardship and anxiety of Chinese young mothers to raise children in the current generation, following the thread of baby food, specifically infant formula.

During my fieldwork in China, many informants mentioned the milk scandal and food safety issues. As the food safety issue is about young children's health and a family's future, the scandal has reached the bottom line of morality. After those scandals were reported by the media, Chinese parents lost confidence in the domestic market and spared no effort to search for alternative channels to get trustworthy food for their babies. The milk scandal became a turning point for the popularity of imported children's/baby food to the Chinese market, and massive foreign-made children's/baby food flooded into China from different channels. Even though it has been more than ten years since the scandal, it remains difficult to eliminate consumer anxiety. The following section first introduces the history of the Chinese domestic dairy industry, and then reviews the representative milk sandals during the past twenty years, and last, it explains the boom of foreign baby food on the Chinese market.

Main Food Safety Scandals in the PRC

Xiaokang Journal publisher, a comprehensive news publication sponsored by *Qiushi* which is the leading official theoretical journal of the Chinese Communist Party, published a poll on Chinese citizens' feeling of safety in 2012 in cooperation with *Tsinghua University*. The result showed that 81.8% of participants indicated that they were worried about food safety issues. Compared with the number in 2011, it had decreased by 3.4 percentage points (Xiaokang Journal 2012). The food safety issue has become the most worrisome issue for Chinese people. This section reviews the food safety incidents of baby food reported by *People's Daily* which provides direct and official information on the policies and viewpoints of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As the largest newspaper group in China, *People's Daily* reports the most significant and influential news in China.

The first report of food safety on baby food was a letter from a reader, Tian Zuen, working at the medical school of *Peking University*. The title of his letter was *Condensed Milk Cannot Be Used as the Main Food for Babies*, published in *People's Daily* in 1953. In the letter, he criticized that "the producer of condensed milk advertised it as a kind of breast milk substitute. The false advertising would damage the baby's health because condensed milk was not a kind of good dairy product with a high proportion of sugar and a low proportion of protein and fat. If babies were fed with condensed milk on a long-term basis, they would get the disease of malnutrition". The letter received the attention of the Ministry of Health of the Central People's Government (MOH), and the newspaper also published its comments. MOH suggested State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC) should educate the producers of dairy products, and correct the false advertising (People's Daily 1953). Before the *Reform and Opening-up* in China, there were few reports about food safety issues in *People's Daily*. The main reason is that Chinese people were still struggling on the subsistence line (*wen bao xian*) after the foundation of the PRC, which means the priority for China was to get rid of poverty and starvation. Before the market economy, the food safety issues in China were generally about food hygiene and food security (Li 2013; Yan 2012). During the transformational period between 1978 and 2000, as the mouthpiece of the party (*dang de houshe*), the main function of a newspaper was to spread the important policies made by the *Chinese Communist Party* to the public. According to previous relevant research, the main food safety scandals reported by *People's Daily* included hepatitis A infected by contaminated food in Ning Bo and Shanghai from 1978 to 1988, food poisoning by fake alcohol, oil and rice. In addition, pesticide abuse provoked widespread concern after 46 students were poisoned by eating vegetables contaminated by pesticide residue in 1999.

In 2003, China was admitted to the WTO following reforms that included tariff reductions and the dismantling of most nontariff barriers, which brought economic opportunities for China.

China entered the fast-developing period in the 21st century. However, the first decade in the 21st century was also the period when enormous food safety incidents were exposed. Along with the fast economic development, different types of additives were invented to make food look nicer and decrease the costs for higher profits. According to research, 35 main food safety incidents happened during the past 20 years, including three scandals about infant formula. Among all the food scandals in China, the tainted baby formula scandal should be considered the most significant food safety incident. As the incidents of baby food are related to the health of the next generation, the consequences are more harmful and morally unacceptable than other food safety incidents. In the following section, I introduce these three main infant formula scandals: *Anhui Fuyang* milk powder scandal in 2004, *Sanlu* milk powder scandal in 2008, and *Beianmin* solid drink.

Anhui Fuyang Milk Powder. In 2004, it was reported that at least 13 infants died who were fed with a kind of fake formula of little nutritional value in Fuyang City, Anhui province in China. An investigation showed that 45 types of substandard powder were on sale in Fuyang. The fake milk powder only contained five to six per cent protein and the lowest contained only one per cent. According to official media, up to 200 babies who were raised on the fake formula in Anhui province in eastern China developed "big-head-disease"- a symptom of acute malnutrition. The doctor said the baby milk scandal is responsible for the worst malnourishment they have seen in 20 years. There were 28 reports about the scandal on *People's Daily*. After the scandal, such inferior milk powder was banned in Fuyang, but it was still sold in some rural areas of the city. Counterfeit goods are often on sale in rural areas, where supervision is slack and customers are poorly informed. Many parents, most of them impoverished farmers, were unaware that the problem was related to malnutrition. Experts said the counterfeiting issues were a consequence of China's economic policy, which had encouraged local provinces to pursue economic growth at all costs. Many provincial

governments protect pirate manufacturers as long as they generate profits and taxes (Watts 2004).

Milk Scandal in 2008. The most influential food safety scandal, which also shocked the world, was the infant formula scandal that happened in 2008. *People's Daily* used 76 reports to show the development of the incident. The scandal involved milk and infant formula also other dairy products being adulterated with melamine, a chemical which was used to increase the nitrogen content of diluted milk, giving it the appearance of higher protein content to pass quality control testing. Almost 300,000 babies were ill after consuming the contaminated milk powder and six babies died from kidney stones (News 2008). The tainted infant formula was produced by the Shijiazhuang-based Sanlu Group, one of the leading producers of infant formula in China. A further government inspection revealed that another 21 companies also produced contaminated baby milk powder, including famous infant formula brands, *Arla Foods-Mengniu, Yili*, and *Yashili* (People's Daily Online 2014). *Sanlu Group* was a state-owned dairy products company, which produced one of the oldest and most popular brands of infant formula in China, and 43% stake of *Sanlu* was owned by *Fonterra*, the largest company in 2006. *Fonterra* company denied advocating the use of melamine in the milk scandal (Ritchie 2009). As the incident was reported by official media nationally in China, including *Xinhua News* and *People's Daily*[13], it became the "earthquake" in the domestic dairy industry in China (G. Yang 2013). The incident provoked serious concerns about food safety issues in China and damaged the reputation of China's food exports. After the scandal, at least 11 foreign countries announced a ban on imports of Chinese dairy products. The *Sanlu* infant formula involved in the scandal was sold at about 18 RMB (3 USD). Because of its cheap price, it was very popular in the countryside and less-developed regions.

After the infant formula scandal in 2008, Chinese consumers lost trust in food quality in China, especially baby food. Millions of Chinese parents started to search for trustworthy baby

products outside of China. The Chinese domestic dairy industry experienced the darkest times during the following ten years. However, not all producers learned a lesson from the scandals. In 2020, "big-head babies" were reported again in Yongxing county, Hunan province. A couple who ran a baby shop in Yongxing county of Chenzhou claimed that the protein drink Beianmin was a formula for special medical purposes and it was suitable for infants who were allergic to milk. Five couples reported that their babies had developed abnormal symptoms after consuming Beianmin drinks. According to an assessment by medical experts, the five infants were malnourished, underweight and had insufficient vitamin D3. Even though there were no infant deaths in the incident, the scandal in recent years once again disappointed Chinese consumers, which made it even harder to rebuild consumer confidence.

The Domestic Dairy Industry and the "Big Three"

China's domestic dairy industry started very late compared with developed countries. In the first decade after the foundation of New China, there was scarcely any standard dairy companies in China. Nowadays, dairy products have become normal consumer products in daily life. Milk production stabilized at more than 30 million tons per year, and the annual per capita possession of milk has reached 34.3 kilograms while this number of 70 years ago was 0.4. Milk was a kind of "luxury product" during the last half-century. Nowadays, there are enough dairy products in supply for Chinese consumers. However, on the other side of the prosperous picture of the dairy industry, there is fierce competition between big companies. The three companies *Mengniu, Yili,* and *Guangming* currently almost monopolize the domestic dairy market.

A critical review written with a pseudonym Wang Xiaoqi, *The Six Major Crimes of Mengniu and Yili that the Media Dare not say! Let Me Tell You*[14] spread rapidly on Internet and provoked extensive attention in 2020 which showed the *dirty sides* of the Chinese dairy industry. The review criticized *Mengniu* and *Yili,* two monopolizing giants, on six aspects. It

said “the gross profit of infant milk powder reaches 70 to 80 per cent, and the price of milk powder in China is the highest in the world.” The article revealed the founders of *Mengniu* and *Yili* came from the same company of Hohhot Islamist Dairy Product Factory in 1983. On the one hand, the two companies have competed with each other for about twenty years; on the other hand, they also cooperated to suppress small dairy companies and monopolized the dairy market in China. There was no *national* dairy company before 2000. Because of technological limitations, the majority of milk products on the market are pasteurized milk which could be preserved for only several days and it is difficult to deliver long distance. *Tetra Pak*, a Swedish-Swiss food packaging and processing company cooperated with *Mengniu* and started to produce room-temperate-milk which could be delivered long distance. *Mengniu* and *Yili* developed fast with the help of the new packaging technology and a mass of advertisements, and they soon occupied the domestic dairy market quickly. In the background of *Oligopoly,* other dairy companies started to join the vicious competition by reducing the product’s quality to reduce the cost to survive in the monopolized industry. During the following years, massive scandals about dairy products were reported in mainland China, including the melamine infant formula scandal of *Sanlu Group* in 2008 which shocked the world. However, melamine milk powder was not just a single case at *Sanlu*; it had been a “well-known secret” for the whole domestic dairy industry. After the melamine scandal, the Chinese government carried out a series of measurements to regulate the dairy industry, including *National Standard for Dairy Safety*. However, in the document, the government relaxed the national dairy products’ standards, increasing the higher limit of bacteria in raw milk from 500,000 to 2 million per millilitre and lowering the protein requirement from 2.95 grams to 2.80 grams per 100 grams of milk (Mude 2011). The reality is that 70 per cent of the dairy farmers in China have small-sized farms where they rear free-range milk cows, and the protein content in the milk is not stable. The top priority is to expand the scale and make sure the small farmers would not go

bankrupt to ensure the supply of enough raw milk. It is no wonder that Chinese consumers lost trust in domestic dairy companies. Cattle farmers, dairy companies, industry associations, and the government could not realise their responsibilities to improve the quality of milk. With the complicated relationships between the stakeholders, it is hard to break the vicious circle. The monopoly of big dairy companies results in the shrinking of small companies. To decrease costs and increase profits, dairy companies join the competition and use counterfeiting ingredients. The local government protected local companies as they are the main taxpayer. Monopoly companies cooperated with each other to control industry regulations and product prices. Chinese consumers are paying the highest prices, but drinking the lowest-quality milk. Without any effective regulations, the scandals will be endless, especially in rural areas. With this in mind, millions of Chinese parents have to figure out a way to make sure the food supply for their baby is safe and trustworthy. *Daigou*, a network to resell different kinds of products from foreign countries to China, has developed into a popular method for Chinese parents to get safe infant formula for their babies.

Foreign Infant Formula (Yang Naifen)

The largest population of newborn babies, the highest price of infant formula, and the strongest purchasing power of Chinese consumers have made China the best market for milk powder in the world. China has developed into the biggest battlefield for many international dairy companies (Lei 2020). The value of milk powder imported was 166 million USD and the product amount was 67,400 tons in 2001. After China entered WTO, the import tax decreased from 25% to 15%. After the milk powder scandal in 2008, the value of milk powder imported reached 1.18 billion USD, and the product amount reached 309,200 tons, an increase of 115.85% in 2009. This number tripled until 2014, reaching 1.0447 million tons. Infant formula is the main product of imported milk powder. Ireland, Australia and Denmark are the top 3 countries of exporting infant formula to China and the percentage of imported infant formula from these

three countries accounted for about 90% in 2001. From 2012 to 2020, The Netherlands was the biggest import source country of infant formula. There are 46 main import source counties of infant formula (data from 2020), including The Netherlands, New Zealand, and Ireland (Zheng 2021).

Along with the popularity of foreign infant formula in China, there were also relevant scandals exposed. Some adulterated "fake foreign infant formula" appeared on the market. As it is hard to tell "the fake" from the authentic high-quality milk powder, the milk powder trade was chaotic without any effective regulation. The main formats of fake foreign infant formula on the Chinese market have been exposed: Some domestic enterprises register overseas companies producing dairy products in China with foreign brands, and then sell "foreign infant formula" into China; some dairy companies register foreign brands (*yang pinpai*) overseas but use domestic milk to produce infant formula and sell in China; some companies import milk powder in "big bags" as raw milk to produce infant formula, then sell as "100% imported milk powder"(Lu and Ma 2014). Import channels of milk powder include E-commercial websites, private *daigou,* shopping while travelling, smuggling, etc. The transnational *daigou* business has developed into a huge grey market. In April 2021, officers from Guangzhou Customs detained 15 suspected smugglers after cracking down on a major milk powder smuggling case valued at more than 1 billion yuan (153.85 million USD)(China Daily 2021). It is hard to guarantee customers' interests and rights in a poorly regulated market.

Even though there were scandals of foreign milk powder in China, the majority of Chinese parents still think foreign milk powder is the safest option. According to a Chinese customer report in 2013 which is based on 100 questionnaires from new parents, 30% of them think the scandals on foreign infant formula are just several cases and they still trust foreign milk powder generally; 43% of them think foreign milk powder is not totally trustworthy but is better than the domestic product; while 27% of parents think the importing channel of foreign milk powder

is not trustworthy, so they prefer to buy the domestic. Regarding the main reason for Chinese parents to choose foreign infant formula, 38% of them think it is safer than the domestic product, and 30% of them think the ingredients of the imported milk powder are better than the domestic ones (Lu and Ma 2014). In other words, even though there are scandals concerning both domestic infant formula and foreign ones, the majority of Chinese parents still prefer to buy foreign milk powder.

According to my research result on consumers of dairy products in China in 2019, the consumers from the second-tier cities have gradually become the target consumer group of most expensive child food products rather than those from the first-tier big cities. There could be a lot of reasons for the phenomenon. One possibility is that there are more channels for consumers in big cities to buy foreign products, such as private *daigou*. Some consumers resort to the unofficial channel to get products directly from overseas. As the international company only can get statistics from the official channels, the statistics show that consumers from second-tier cities are the main buyers of premium milk powder sold by the official channel. In general, big cities are the main market for different types of foreign milk powder through different distributing channels, while the domestic brands have to retreat to the rural areas.

Child-Feeding Transition in China: Infant formula, Women and Mediated Relatedness

If I were to choose a word to describe the feeling when I did the fieldwork in mainland China in 2019, it would be “anxiety”. This feeling penetrated all walks of life: parents did not feel safe if there was no surveillance camera to monitor their kids in the kindergarten; new mothers downloaded five different types of apps to search for information about baby products and baby caring; even though there was only 100 meters between home and kindergarten, the majority of parents preferred to drive to pick up their children because they were worried about the traffic or that the strong sunshine might hurt their babies. Compared with the previous generation, the current parent generation should feel more relaxed being parents, as there are

normally four grandparents to help them to take care of their children and there are millions of baby products for sale on the market with multiple distribution channels.

Starting from the hardship of being a mom described by a young mother, this chapter explores the reasons for differences in the personal feelings of being mothers in China. Following the material substance of food to feed children, we can also see the change of relatedness, the social form of feeding, in Chinese families with the turning point of social-economic transformation from the end of the 1970s. As James L. Watson mentioned, food could be viewed as a lens to see the past, present, and future of family life in a society (Watson 2000), as it is an important and natural part of daily life.

Child feeding should be at the top of the list of issues to make Chinese parents worried. The food for children is particularly closely aligned with the production of persons and family reproduction. Kinship and reproduction are not restricted here to the biological, or even genetic, constitution of relatives, but include many persons, processes, practices, and acts that contribute to how a particular person develops and grows over the course of their life (Bruckermann 2020; Carsten 2000). Before the invention and popularity of infant formula, breastmilk was the main food for babies. Even after infant formula appeared on the market, breastfeeding should still be thought of as the main method to feed babies. However, through the review of breastfeeding in China, we can see there are multiple factors affecting breastfeeding practices, such as maternity policies, market development, women's work, etc. The Chinese government has responded by implementing measures on different levels to improve breastfeeding rates and practices. However, the development of the market economy and consumer society became the biggest challenges for breastfeeding with direct and indirect influences. It seems that economic reform and breastfeeding are two irrelated individual events. But through the stories of young mothers in the 1980s and nowadays, we can see how the state policy changed the daily life of Chinese mothers. After "weaning-off" from state-owned

institutions, Chinese citizens had to search for solutions by themselves (*zi mo sheng lu*). The pressure of returning to work or searching for job opportunities in big cities became a practical challenge to Chinese mothers after giving birth. At the same time, different types of infant formula became a popular alternative to breastmilk gradually in China. Domestic and international dairy companies joined in the fierce competition of seizing the milk powder market. China has become the biggest consumer supermarket and the biggest importing country for infant formula in the world. Infant formula is regarded as a kind of necessity rather than supplementary baby food for Chinese families. The challenge or anxieties revolving around the feeding issues in China come about as a result of greater choices with the loosening of collective/state institutions and the greater influence of the market including national and transnational food supplies. The anxiety is not only just related to the fear of unsafe children's food, but also a general sense related to feeding and raising the next generation.

Oligopoly in the Chinese dairy industry foreshadowed food safety scandals. Big dairy companies were both players and judges in the game who played important roles in setting product prices, controlling raw materials, and even making policies. Finally, a milk powder scandal in 2008 revealed the long-term structural problems in the Chinese dairy industry. However, the scandal hit only the tip of the iceberg. In the following decade after the scandal, there were still reports of scandals relating to infant formula. Chinese consumers lost confidence in baby food from domestic brands, and more and more parents sourced comparatively trustworthy food from developed countries or regions. When I finished my research, the lack of effective regulation to rebuild and the absence of corporate responsibility were still the main reasons for Chinese consumers' distrust of the domestic market. Chinese parents of babies fed by infant formula need to navigate the uncertain market to source secure food for their babies.

The decline in breastfeeding, domestic food safety risks, and a huge consumer market give great opportunities for international food companies to flood into China and divide up the big cake. Foreign milk powder became a kind of rigid demand for Chinese parents and its producer cashed in enormously. The following decade after the big milk powder scandal in 2008, international dairy companies seized the market of infant formula in first and second-tier cities in China. Domestic dairy companies had to retreat to small cities. To take a percentage of the big market of infant formula, domestic companies adopted various types of strategies to use the "halo effect"[15] of foreign milk powder, such as registering companies or brands overseas, selling shares to foreign companies. As food anxiety has become a deep-rooted issue in China, Chinese consumers still hold a sceptical attitude toward the domestic brand infant formula and even the foreign infant formula in the domestic market. Given this reality, there was another huge industry booming at the same period – *daigou*, which simply means transnational reselling. As a kind of comparatively new business, there have not been clear regulatory rules imposed in this field. Also because of the *greyscale*, many people joined in with the hope to earn a big fortune before regulations are implemented.

On this dimension, infant formula or special food for infants and small children in general are not only the nutritional substitute of breast milk to children but also a substance of kinship or relatedness on the vertical family level, specially between mothers and daughters. It is not hard to notice the absence of the male role in relation to child-feeding practices in this chapter. It is very common, if not natural, to pay attention to the association between women and attributes of care, emotionality, communicativeness and gentleness deriving from their role as reproducers and nurturers (Ortner 1972). Of course, we cannot restrict ourselves when raising the next generation and assigning the caring to women as a "natural duty". However, according to the fieldwork experience, women still share a bigger portion of feeding and raising children than their male counterparts in China. The discussion on gendered labour in relation with the

network business of infant formula will be raised in Chapter 5. Additionally, in this context, as a substance of care, the "hierarchies" of milk powder can be used to indicate degrees of care. Chapter 3 will continue to elaborate the "hierarchy" and "stratification" in terms of consumption among middle-class families.

Turning back to the stories of Qiaoqiao and her mom, Aunt Dong and Xiao Li, and so many similar stories of young Chinese parents and their parents, baby feeding has always been one of the most worrisome issues at the household level. For parents in the 1960s and 1970s, lack of baby food and avoiding starvation was the biggest challenge for households caring for babies. Before the popularity of infant formula, breastmilk was the main food and supplementary food based on solid food, such as porridge or egg custard, was also used as the important baby food when breastmilk was not enough. There was also milk substitute food that appeared during this period, such as milk substitute powder and malted milk. They were also made from normal solid food, such as milk powder, egg, wheat flour, and sugar. Although some of those products were reported as not suitable to feed babies in the long term because of problems of a low proportion of protein and a high proportion of sugar, this kind of product did not cause serious health problems compared to what the poisonous infant formula did after four decades. The arrival of infant formula changed the child-feeding pattern without much resistance, as it set mothers free from breastfeeding and allowed them to go back to work on the one hand and to create an emerging market on the other. However, after realizing the correlation between the popularity of infant formula and the low breastfeeding rate, the Chinese government put in the effort to save the situation. However, Capitalism came into play quickly after the post-socialist economic reform and the authority made way for the booming dairy industry.

Compared with the single challenge of starvation faced by Chinese parents in socialist China, young Chinese parents are facing a much more complicated situation nowadays. Food shortage is not a problem for Chinese people anymore. On the contrary, they are facing an

over-abundant market where there are thousands of varieties of baby food. As the manager in the international dairy company whom I interviewed said, just one company sells more than 200 kinds of baby food in China. It is no wonder that Chinese parents always feel anxious when it comes to feeding babies. The anxiety is not only related to the large-scale food safety issue in China but also the uncertainty of the raw materials used in the foods, the production technology, the distribution channel, the delivery process, etc. First, they need to pick a trustworthy brand among a wide variety of baby food brands. It also takes time and energy to decide which type of food is suitable for their babies. Targeting the *right* product, they also need to make sure the import channel is reliable. When the natural connection between baby and mother is mediated by other objects, Chinese parents spare no effort to make sure every link is safe and reliable. It is never an easy task to raise children in China.

3. Anxiety and Trust in a Middle-Class Community in Tianjin

"Peering" in the Car and the Chinese Middle Class

Yangyang, a thirty-year-old mom, has two kids. At the time of the interview, her daughter, Mitao, was three-years-old, and her son, Doudou, was six-years-old. They live in Wuqing District of Tianjin, a coastal city in north China. Yang has been one of my best friends for more than ten years. We were classmates at the university before I came to Denmark. Knowing that I was doing research about infant formula and childrearing in China, she said to me, "you need to come to our place. We are typical interviewees you are looking for". As I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is not unusual for anthropologists to select and get access to a fieldwork site through a personal network or starting from their hometown. Many influential books on China studies are closely connected with the authors' personal experience, such as Fei Xiaotong's PhD thesis based on fieldwork in Kaixianggong Village (Fei 1980), Yan Yunxiang's field work studies in Xiajia Village (Yan 2003, 2009), and Xiang Biao's research on Zhejiangcun in Beijing (Xiang 2005). Inspired by pioneer scholars' fieldwork experience, I thought maybe it would be a good idea to accept Yang's offer. I went to Wuqing in Tianjin two times before I took it as my main fieldwork site in 2014 and 2016 respectively. This time I planned to stay a couple of months if I could access the fieldwork site. With Yang's help, I established a connection with her kids' kindergarten and I also got to know a group of parents (about 20) who had small kids at two to five years old, and some of them had more than one kid.

I visited Yang and her family and friends in Tianjin from May to July 2019. Before I came to visit her, I planned to rent an apartment near Yang's home as I would stay there for a couple of months. Yang blamed me that "I treated myself as an outsider" (*jianwai*), which was not acceptable between intimate friends. She insisted that I should live at her home with her family

members. Therefore, Yang and her family became my first core informants in Tianjin. Yang's husband, Liu Shan, is a project manager of a state-owned company whose main aim is to maintain the highway from Tianjian to Baoding, another city in Hebei province of north China. Yang and I took care of their chidlren during the daytime. After sending their children to kindergarten, sometimes we went to mummy-and-baby shops to check infant products, and sometimes we visited other mothers whose kids were classmates with Mitao and Doudou in the same residential community. We did not often see or talk with Liu, as he was very busy at work. In 2013, Yang and Liu got married in their hometown of Renqiu, a minor city in Hebei province. As they planned to have kids and they thought there would be more work opportunities, better resources for healthcare and education in a bigger city, they moved from Renqiu to Tianjin. Yang's parents also moved with them to help them with taking care of the children. Tianjin is one of the four municipalities directly under the central government, and they expected that it would be the best choice to move to as it is the closest big city to their hometown. After their kids were born, they minded their children with help from the grandparents at home for first three years before the children were old enough to be sent to kindergarten. The tuition fee for each child in the kindergarten nearby was 3,000 RMB (approx. 412 USD), so for the two children, they paid about 6,000 RMB (approx. 824 USD) per month. Yang was planning to send Doudou, the older kid, to an international primary school in the summer after graduating from kindergarten, and the annual fee would be 80,000 RMB (approx. 11,000 USD) per child. As Yang told me, the tuition fee will be a big burden for the family. In addition, as Yang's family could not register their household residence in Tianjin (*meiyou hukou*), they also needed to pay "sponsorship" *(zan zhu fei)* to the primary school. For these reasons, while Yang's parents were supposed to retire, they had decided to work for a couple of years longer to earn more money for their grandchildren. When I asked Yang, "why don't you send Doudou and Mitao to the public school? Then you do not have to pay such a big

amount of money." She uttered a snorting laugh. "Nobody wants to send kids to the public school as long as there is a way to send kids to the private school." Yang explained that as teachers' salaries were much higher in private schools than in public schools, many excellent teachers chose to work in private schools. Even though it was much cheaper to study in the public school, parents still preferred to send their kids to private school if they could afford the fees. The Chinese government implemented "the nine-year compulsory education" policy from 1986, which established the requirements for attaining a universal education and guaranteed school-age children the right to receive at least nine years of education, including six years of primary education and three years of secondary education. During the nine-year compulsory education, public schools do not charge tuition fees. But students need to pay for the cost for other items, such as supplementary books, uniforms, food, and other activity fees.[1] In Yang's case, the public school nearby was just 100 meters from Yang's home. But she preferred to drive 12 kilometres every day and pay ten times the cost to send her kids to the private international school.[2] Yang told me that in the community where they were living, the families with children chose either to send the kids to private schools or to buy a property in the high-quality public school district *(xue qu fang).* Both options meant "money".

"Let's drive to the kindergarten to pick up the kids. It is hot and there are a lot of cars outside." This is what Yangyang suggested one day when I planned to walk to the kindergarten to pick up Doudou and Mitao. It was early summer 2019, and it was around 28 degrees outside. It took only 10 minutes to walk from Yangyang's home to Red Yellow Blue (RYB) kindergarten [3] where her children attended pre-school. I asked Yang why she always wanted to drive the car to kindergarten since it was such a short distance. Yang answered, "for safety reasons". But I was very confused and responded: "Only 10 minutes walking? What could be unsafe?" She responded: "You have been abroad too long time. It is full of known and unknown risks nowadays". Therefore, Yang insisted on driving to the kindergarten, claiming that it was

safer than walking there. When we arrived there, there were about twenty cars parked closely together in front of the gates of the kindergarten. I was not sure whether "safety" was the common reason for all of them choosing to drive cars to pick up their children. I did not think it was safer either, as more cars meant more risk of a crash.

"Do you think this is safer?" I couldn't hide my curiosity anymore when we moved forward very slowly in the car, like 20 meters in 5 minutes, as there was a lot of traffic on the road. "You will know". Yang did not answer my question, but it seemed she was planning something else. "Ok. Now starts the show (*biaoyan kaishile*)". Yang parked the car under a big tree where we could easily watch children when they came out and we could also observe how other parents picked up their children. What I mean to say is: we could see which brand of car they were driving. "He is coming," Yang drew my attention to a shiny black *Mercedes-Benz* slowly arriving and stopping just in front of the gate. I could not see the driver's face. Unlike other parents, the man did not get out of the car to pick up the child. He was just waiting in the car. A few minutes later, two teachers came out of the kindergarten, and one of them held a boy in her arms. Another teacher opened the door to the backseat of the *Benz* car, and they handed over the boy to someone inside. After a short conversation, the two teachers bent down and waved to the driver and the boy.

"Shocked, right?" Yang asked me when she saw my confused face. "Why do the teachers send the boy out? Why do his parents not even have to get out of the car? Who are they?" I was indeed shocked and asked Yang to explain the situation. She said "aristocrat" (*guizu*). The boy brought out by the two teachers had a nickname, Wangzi (*Prince*). His father, the owner of the *Mercedes-Benz*, was a senior government official in Tianjin. He never gets out of the car to pick up the kid as far as Yang could see. Yang and other parents gossiped about Wangzi and his family, calling them "aristocrats" as it was rare to see their faces, similar to how it is not easy for a civilian to meet royalty. Regarding the reason for the two teachers' "protection" of

Wangzi, it was because Wangzi's father had helped the kindergarten a lot previously through providing an abundance of resources. For example, he paid for all the staff at the kindergarten to travel last summer under the pretence of "professional training (*zhuanye peixun*)". All the staff, including the head of the kindergarten, expressed gratitude to Wangzi's father. Every day Wangzi was protected by two teachers and brought outside to his parents. "It is a privilege that not everyone, like us the civilian *(pingmin),* can have," Yang was teasing with an "envious" eye. She continued to say that she had also given gifts to teachers when it was a festival or holiday. But she suspected other kids' parents gave more expensive gifts, so she did not "feel" any "special care" (*tebie guanzhao*) for her kids from the kindergarten.

Yang always complained to me about the "politics" at the kindergarten. When holidays or festivals came, especially the Teachers' Day, the 10th of September, all the parents would be "in competition" with each other to show their gratitude to the teachers. "It is better not to give flowers or handmade gifts to teachers because they will throw those away directly after you leave. They want real gifts." The real gifts meant "money", as far as I understood. As there was a campaign to stop the "red pocket" *(hong bao)* [4] nationally in all educational or official institutions because it was a kind of bribery, few parents dared to give money directly to staff in the kindergarten. But they found other options, such as gift cards to shopping malls, coupons for expensive restaurants, and group travel. Parents believed that teachers would give more attention to their children if they gave gifts to them. If some parents gave gifts to teachers and some parents did not, teachers would of course give more care to the kids from whom they received gifts as a principle of reciprocity *(hu hui).* Researcher Mei-Hui Yang elaborates this "gift economy" using her rich and varied ethnographic example of *guanxi* stemming from her fieldwork in China in the 1980s and 1990s. Obtaining and changing job assignments, buying certain foods and consumer products, getting into good hospitals, buying train tickets, obtaining housing, also doing business – all the daily affairs call for the skilful and strategic

giving of gifts and cultivating of obligation, indebtedness, and reciprocity (Yang 1994). In the case of "politics" in the kindergarten in Tianjin, maintaining *guanxi* through gifts to teachers became a kind of "competition" between parents; they would not let other parents know what they gave to the teachers, in case others would copy their ideas or talk about them behind their backs. It was true that one of the hot topics of the parents' gossiping sessions was the gifts teachers received recently and who gave them. I had no idea how the parents knew which presents were given to the teachers. It seemed that the children were probably the "spy", as that day I heard Yang's son, Doudou, tell his mom that he saw his teacher receiving a new handbag from either Dongdong's (one of his classmates) or Taotao's (another classmate) mother.

During the three-month stay in Wuqing, I entered a community which was different from the families I visited at my hometown in Tangshan. People from this community had stable incomes and could afford private houses and cars, also education and holidays for domestic or outbound travelling. This group was regarded as the "middle class" or "new rich" in China by some scholars in China studies. Practically, the two terms refer to an overlapping group of people who have differentiated themselves from upper and low-lower classes regarding economic status, income, patterns of consumption, value concerns and lifestyles. However, because of the difference on historical backgrounds between the two notions, some scholars have complained about the ambiguous categorization when applying them into analysing social structures in China (Tsai 2005). Regarding the concept of the middle class, one representative middle class was the early capitalists of the early industrial revolution in Northwest Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoise between the aristocracy and the townspeople. Another has been the state and capitalist enterprise sponsored managers and professionals of the managerial revolution during the first half of the twentieth century, between the capitalists and the workers. More recently, this term has been used to refer to the vast majority of consumers in late capitalist industrialised societies, between the rich and the

poor. Different from the emphasis on the social function of the concept of class, the idea of new rich points to the importance of wealth and highlights the impact of economic growth on other aspects of social, political, and cultural change (Chen 2002; Goodman 2008). Regarding the concept of the new rich, differentiated from the "old rich" before the socialist process under Mao's rule in China, this group is the beneficiaries of economic growth after the state socialist China since 1978. As another ambiguous category, the new rich is also an unstable and contested group which is constituted by the practices and performances of a diverse group of entrepreneurs, professionals, artists, and government officials (Osburg 2013).

I adopt the concept of the middle-class here for my informants in Tianjin, as this term has been widely used to refer to this group of people who shape their status around a new set of collective interests, especially in their modes of consumption and access to resources (Tomba 2004). Who is the middle-class in China? And why do I focus on this group of Chinese people? It is difficult to count the middle-class members if there are no clear criteria. Even though experts and scholars have different opinions on the size of the middle class in China, recent data show that the number of Chinese people in the middle class is considerable. The statistics on the middle class from Credit Suisse Research Institute in 2015 is widely used in academia as the official number for the number of middle-class citizens so far. According to their global wealth report in 2015, China had the largest middle-class population in the world with the number at 109 million but the share of middle class is comparatively much lower than that in western countries (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2015). There are also other sources regarding the number of middle classes in China. During the same year of 2015, one of the most famous Chinese entrepreneurs Jack Ma claimed that there were 300 million middle-class members in China, and that this number would reach 500 million in the next 10 to 20 years (Rapoza 2015). From those statistics, we can see that the criteria for categorizing class is the

economic wealth status, identified as much by their consumption. The most important influence of the middle class is their purchasing power and their contribution to the economy.

However, David S.G. Goodman, an influential scholar on Chinese middle-class argues that the definition and categorization of middle class based on wealth can be problematic and he argues that China has no new middle class even though there are a great number of new rich, such as entrepreneurs, in China (Goodman 2008). The middle class is not a simple concept but is made up of different elements and the group is also regarded as stratified. Originally, the new middle class in a European context emerged as the process of industrialisation, represented by the bourgeoisie and the managers of the modern state in the early nineteenth century, who were neither the landed aristocracy nor ordinary townspeople. The industrialisation deepened during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries and produced managerial and professional classes who neither owned capital nor controlled the state. They derived their income and status from service and management (Goodman 2008; Burnham 1962). An important background or condition for the emergence and development of this new middle class was the emergence of liberal democracy during the first half of the nineteenth century in Northwest Europe. However, Goodman argues that the emerging new rich in the post-1978 era, represented by the entrepreneurs, could not be identified as the equivalent middle class because of their close relationships with the political system and the ownership of production. On the one hand the new entrepreneurs in China are not a middle class of the same kind as the long established professional and managerial class; on the other hand, as the PRC remains a Communist Party-state, the new entrepreneurs are not excluded from but targeted for incorporation into the political establishment. Those significant characteristics of the new entrepreneurs in China are what differentiate them from the middle class with its original definition from Europe.

Based on the discussion on the concept of the Chinese middle class, the main controversy exists in the criteria of the middle class with two different perspectives. The first perspective is from the "stratum" standard through which society is built into a socio-political order based on how many resources the group has. The so-called middle class is the stratum that is located in the middle of society. The difference between the middle class and other classes is mainly in the number of social resources they have occupied. Under this perspective, educational level, profession, income, etc, are usually used as the standard to define people's social status. Some scholars choose one index to define social status, while some choose multiple indexes to define it. The "middle-income stratum" is widely used as the key criterion to categorize the middle class. Another perspective is regarded as the "class" perspective or "relationship" perspective, which is different from the term "stratum", and it focuses on the relationship between different groups. This perspective follows the theories on class analysis founded by Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels 1975). The class perspective focuses on the inequality of social relationships. This perspective helps understand the relationship of conflict or dependence between the middle class and the other classes (Zhu 2017). And due to the shift from continuous revolution under Mao to economic development and wealth creation in the reform era, dramatic transformations in social relations and change of the status order in China also occurred. In the new social blueprint in the post-socialist China, the middle class, between the super-rich and the lower classes, such as working class and farmers, is recognized as the backbone instead of the working class in the socialist China (Guo 2008).

Despite the debate, one thing is for sure: the middle class is not so much a uniform or unproblematic concept of intermediate groups, but rather a consensus among Chinese elites that the middle class or stratum can only be a good thing. The consensus has been embodied in the development policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The aim of "controlling the growth of the upper stratum of society, expanding the middle, and reducing the bottom" was

written into the 16th national conference in 2002 (The People's Daily 2002). In this chapter, the concept of the middle class describes the group of people differentiated from the richest and the lowest classes in terms of their economic position, income, patterns of consumption, value concern, and lifestyles, focusing on analysing the characteristics of the middle class in China based on their daily life. However, their social function is not the main theme.

Regarding the question of why I chose to focus on the middle class of China, one important reason is that they are the main consumer group of premium infant formula in China. In my fieldwork in China, I talked with about 50 parents whose kids went to RYB kindergarten, including in-depth interviews and informal chats. All of their children drank foreign infant formula, and five of them drank Arla infant formula originating in Denmark. Facing an uncertain market with potential hazards of adulterated food, substituted ingredients or products and counterfeit goods, Chinese consumer strategies for confronting these threats, perceived or real, vary enormously, depending upon the economic, cultural, and social resources that individuals can bring to bear (Klein 2013; Hanser 2010; Hanser and Li 2015). The case of infant formula is typical evidence of this. First, the more privileged Chinese have superior economic resources; second, they pay more attention to their children's development as they are normally well-educated and have access to adequate information; third, they usually have social networks, such as friends or relatives living abroad who can help them to source products they need directly from outsides of China, namely the access to the supply of high-quality children's food.

Before I entered the fieldwork site in China, my only expectation was to find consumers of foreign infant formula through the *daigou* network and to investigate the reasons for them choosing the transnational long-distance grey commercial channel to get children's food to feed their babies. However, when I came into their life, I found out that consumption of high-quality baby food was only the tip of the iceberg. Consumption was only one piece of the

puzzle of the Chinese middle-class life. Yang's way to compare the public school near her home with the private international school indicated the way that the middle-class think of themselves and also the other classes – "we are different." The Chinese middle class itself attracted my attention as more than just consumers.

Therefore, through the lens of the special food, specifically the infant formula, this chapter aims to show the lifestyle of the middle class in China and their strategies to cope with the food market with uncertainty in China. Based on this descriptive analysis, this chapter further discusses how the consumption pattern is used as a way to recognize the class identity. Following the argument that infant formula is a substance of relatedness (care) in Chapter 2, this Chapter further argues that as a form of conspicuous consumption (Mason 1999, 1981), the choices of infant formula can be used to indicate degrees of conspicuous care.

I use the concept of middle class mainly based on the objective social-economic status, in other words, their material living conditions. However, many theories emphasize that class recognition, cultural ideology, social interaction, etc. are also important factors in forming a class, as those factors are determining factors informing the collective action of a class. Thompson argues in his book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, that Class is not just "existence", but the progress of "formation". This means that class does not exist by itself from the start but it is formed in historical development (Thompson 1974). In light of the theories of class and class formation, scholars of China have evaluated the political economy of social structural change and the emergence of new social forces in reform and post-reform China (Goodman and Hooper 1994). Focused on the research subject of the middle-class as consumers, this chapter explores the characteristics of the middle class in a Chinese context through the lens of their lifestyle and daily practices revolving around the field of child-feeding and childrearing. Their life is full of anxiety which is different from that for the upper class or the lower class. It is a kind of "intermediary anxiety" between the hardness of moving upward

and the worries of falling downward. This type of anxiety is particularly evident in the way the next generation is being raised, including topics such as feeding, education, consumption, care, etc. There are similarities here with Bourdieu's analysis on the three different forms of taste dynamics and his assertion that the culture of the middle class (or petit-bourgeoisie) is actually an "intermediary" between the "legitimate" taste or "high culture" and the "popular" aesthetics of the working class (Bourdieu 1989).

Afternoon Tea and Anxious Chinese Mothers

I told Yang my research plan and asked her help to "recruit" some parents to talk about their experiences and practices of childrearing. Yang introduced me to the "mother group" whose children were at the same kindergarten. There were four mothers in the mother group, including Yang. Cheng Yun was a teacher at a local college in Tianjin and her husband was a manager at an IT company. Their daughter, Xiao Puti, was six years old and in the same class as Doudou, Yang's son. Doctor Li, also in the mother group, was a gynaecologist in Tianjin Third Central Hospital and her husband was also a doctor at the same hospital. Their son, Xiao Shitou, had left kindergarten and entered the international school where Yang was planning to send her children. The last member in the mother group was Ying Dong. She had two kids as well, a daughter, Taotao, and a son, Dada. Ying was a housewife, and her husband was the CEO of a big international company. According to Yang, Ying was the "rich beautiful young lady" in the mother group, as her husband was 10 years old than her and her family was the only one in the mother group that had a nanny.

I met the mother group at a luxury Ladies' Club (*nüxing huisuo*) which provides comprehensive services, including a conference venue, coffee bar, hot springs, restaurant, accommodation, etc. Young invited the other three mothers to meet in the coffee bar of the guildhall where they used to often gather. We planned to meet at two o'clock in the afternoon. Yang and I arrived there a little bit earlier than planned, as I thought that since I had asked for

help from the others, it would not be polite to let the others wait for me. Before the other mothers came, I told Yang that I would pay the bill for drinks and cakes for everyone that afternoon. Yang smiled and said, "Oh, don't be silly. You are still a student and you are the guest. All of us have families here (Tianjin). You just concentrate on the questions you want to ask. We will take care of the other stuff." During the three months in Tianjin, I always felt a little bit embarrassed as Yang and her family and friend treated me so well. As a principle of reciprocity, I did not know how I could "pay back" their hospitality. This is considered a typical problem for anthropologists when doing ethnography research that "studies up" where the researchers are placed among more "powerful" people than themselves. The power-relations could be related to economic, political, and cultural factors. When John Osburg did his fieldwork about the elite networks in Chengdu, he was also faced with the similar dilemma between "being treated well" on the one hand, while on the other hand hanging out with wealthy businessmen in different types of sites of entertainment – karaoke clubs, saunas, and massage parlors, and exposing the complicated relationships between money, authority, and sex in the post-Mao Chinese society (Osburg 2013).

The other three mothers came one after another after 2pm. After a short introduction of myself, Yang asked me to pose questions, and then they could talk about their own experience. Doctor Li said that she would like to talk first because she was in a hurry to go to work at 3 pm. Suddenly, I noticed all the mothers looking at me, waiting for the questions. I knew I needed to say something but just did not know how to start. As the main research "thread" was the product of infant formula, I started off talking about the diet of their children on an everyday basis. All of their children drank foreign infant formula from birth until when I conducted the interviews. Introduced by Yang, Xiao Shitou, Dr Li's son, also drank Arla infant formula, following the same pattern as Yang's children. They bought baby food from a *daigou* shopper in Denmark who I had recommended to Yang three years earlier when I had just arrived in

Denmark for my Master's studies. Xiao Puti drank Aptamil infant formula from Germany as they had a relative living in Germany. Taotao and Dada's infant formula and other children's products were from American supermarkets as their father had colleagues in the US. In the following question, I asked them why they did not buy baby food locally. After a short silence, everyone unanimously agreed that insecurity was the main concern for them. Following their answers, we briefly reviewed some food scandals which had happened. It seems that those scandals happened usually in underdeveloped regions and not in the big cities. I pressed the topic and asked them why they were worried about food safety if the food scandals happened in underdeveloped areas rather than well-developed cities, like Tianjin. Doctor Li explained her anxiety about the situation of food safety and the reason for buying infant formula from developed countries:

> Indeed, we do not hear a lot about food scandals locally in Tianjin. But there are a lot of aspects behind which we could not see. Taking the example of infant formula: do you know how the cows are fed? And what is added to the product? No, we do not see it, so we do not know. We cannot see the process of producing foreign products, either. But they (developed countries) have higher food standards and strict regulations, which guarantee the quality of food. We can compromise on other food, like fresh vegetables, meat and food from the restaurant, but infant formula and children's food are foods that we prefer to buy from developed countries.

After Li, Ying started to talk about her experience of food management in their daily life. She said:

> Even with fresh vegetables and meat, we prefer organic rather than conventional food. We usually ask our nanny (*baomu*) to drive to the supermarket where people can buy organic food. But sometimes if there is no time for long-distance driving, we also ask her to buy vegetables from the street market near the residential community (*xiaoqu*). It is impossible to avoid all the risks, but at least we need to do something to protect our family and our kids.

The focus group discussion that afternoon lasted about one and a half hours. Even though I prepared some questions about childrearing and concerns about food safety issues for the mothers, I did not ask all the questions because I found mothers were just good at directing the discussion to other topics. In addition, compared to the "boring" questions, such as the regulations and policies they knew, or their attitudes towards middle-class anxiety, they preferred to talk about which brands of products they were interested in and gossip about the affairs in the kindergarten, like who sent what kind of gifts to the teacher.

After the afternoon tea, Li went to work, and Cheng and Ying went shopping in the nearby shopping mall. After the others left, Yang and I sat down on the leather sofa. She paid the bill for drinks and snacks and threw away the receipt immediately into the bin. I picked it up: it was 550 RMB (approx. 76 USD). I insisted on transferring the money to Yang. But she tapped my shoulder and said, "it was just small money (*xiao qian*). Never mind". She asked me about my impression of the other mothers. I told her that they (including Yang) were the same kind of people who have common topics to talk about. It felt so "natural" and active when moms talked about which brand of products they buy. They were "experts" in shopping. And another feeling was "it is too hard to raise kids in China". Why did I say that? Because I felt there were thousands of things mothers needed to take care of to make sure the environment in which the children grow up is enough safe. On the one hand, the middle-class mothers enjoyed high income and superior material conditions; on the other, they were not satisfied with the social welfare and public services in China. When I asked whether they were planning to emigrate abroad, none of them showed any interest in emigrating, even though all of them had travelled abroad before. The main reason was that they could not leave the life they had in China, even though they thought the "macro environment" was better in developed countries, such as the natural environment and welfare. But the "micro environment" was better in China where they had family members, they could go to restaurants they like and have afternoon tea with friends

like we did that day. Osburg named his book “anxious wealth” for the research about the elite networks in China’s upper class as their wealth is generated through a complex *guanxi* network with blurred boundaries of legality and illegality (Osburg 2013). In the case of the Chinese mothers in Tianjin, they are also comparatively rich, but they are also experiencing “anxiety” in another way.

According to the statistics of the Chinese Social Survey [5] in 2013, 72.8% of the Chinese middle class felt insecure about “food safety”, as did 54.6% about “personal information and privacy”, 48.3% about “ecological and environmental security”, 39.8% about “transportation safety”, 28.5% about “health care” and 22.5% about “labor security”, while only 11.7% and 13.8 % of the middle class felt insecure about “personal safety” or “individual and household property safety” (Li 2020). The strong desire for a better life and the discontent with the present is the main reason for the insecurity of the middle class in China. The rapid development of a consumer society in China produces more temptation for Chinese consumers that bring them more desires, such as high material life standards, as well as superior welfare and public services. From what I have observed in the mother group’s gathering, they showed a great interest in discussing consumption, the brands of products and the consumer experience of new baby products. However, they also complained about a general insecurity of food, environment, etc. Even though the middle class are not quite satisfied with their living situation concerning uncertainties and insecurities in China, they do not have any motivation to change the situation by collective actions in political participation, like the working class did in the state socialist revolution, or by leaving China as they are reluctant to give up the newfound privileges. In a situation where it is neither “fighting” nor “leaving”, the middle-class, if it is suitable to call them that, try to safeguard securities for their families by a “conversative” approach, specifically “gated consumption” in this case. On this note, as discussed in the previous section, even though the term “middle class” has been applied widely to refer to the emerging new

group between the super-rich and the poor, it is still problematic to identify them as a "class" in the Marxist analysis framework which focuses on exploring the driving force for the social development and investigating the social functions of different classes. It seems unlikely for this group mentioned here to form a real "class" pushing forward the political reform by collective participation except for their economic contribution.

Like the mother group I talked with, the middle-class members usually establish their closed and exclusive small status groups based on common habits, similar lifestyles and social activities. There are few possibilities for them to share solidarities with other members to establish an extensive and collective identity of this group. Their sense of "superiority" mainly comes from the similar lifestyles, especially relating to consumption, and excluding other classes. Therefore, in the Chinese context, the discussion on the middle class mainly focuses on its economic values rather than its social-political values, like Jack Ma referred to the Chinese middle class as a huge consumer market. It means that the current research on the middle class emphasizes their purchasing power and economic contribution rather than the potential for collective action for social change (Zhou 2005). As the main players in a *consumer society* (Baudrillard 1998), they spare no effort to buy premium products, as a sign to show their superior identity. On another aspect, the Chinese government launched a series of proposals to stimulate consumption, which can be regarded as a way to alleviate the conflicts caused by the state's failure to protect citizens' basic rights of feeding infants safely. Facing an unregulated market which is full of uncertainty, the duty and responsibilities to safeguard families transfer from the state to the individuals (consumers). When I did the fieldwork in China, I seldom heard the informants complaining about the failures of the government to regulate the market, but I heard very often that the consumers "blamed" themselves that they were not rich enough to buy more premium products. For the members in the middle classes, they wished to move forwards to the upper class as a super-rich but they also knew that it was

very hard for them to move from the middle to the top stratum. Meanwhile, the risks of falling into the lower class are comparatively high, such as bankruptcy of small companies and huge healthcare bills. In other words, membership of the middle class is unstable. In this situation, middle-class members tend to confirm their identity by consumer behavior. They tend to exclude the lower-class members and compare themselves with the other members in the same class to show their identity. This type of "keeping-up-with-the Joneses" [6] consumer behavior emerged several times during my fieldwork in Tianjin, from buying infant formula to choosing schools. The most important and obvious index to compare is consumption, as it is visible in daily life, and there were clear examples of this during my talk with mothers during the afternoon tea gathering. When talking about domestic infant formula (*guochan naifen*), all the mothers agreed that it could be safe, but it was not the products that they were "supposed to" consume. The domestic milk powder with cheap prices could be safe and the "right" option for the middle-class mothers, but it is not the "the right option for the likes of them", which means that if it is not popular among others in the group, then it is not "right" for them to buy the product. Since they had the channel to buy foreign infant formula (*yang naifen*) and they could afford the price, they preferred the "best" product. With the stress of "three new burdens" – education, healthcare, and housing, the Chinese middle class put more attention on realising "self-liberation" (*ziwo jiefang*), which means if they can live in a high-end community, send their kids to high-quality private schools, and have business insurance to cover their healthcare bills, they are recognized as successful people. This is the best reason for them to invest their wealth wisely in housing which is a consumption "of the right type", putting them in close social contact with other middle-class people in the neighbourhood, and it helps counteract some insecurities since housing is a financial safety. As a consequence, few people in the closed middle-class group question the root cause of their insecurities related to food or other aspects. The state is not working towards lowering people's insecurities, by focusing on higher food

standards, for example, and all the while, more people are joining the consumption race to "keep up with the Joneses". As Yan Hairong, an anthropologist in China studies, argues in her research work on migrant workers from the countryside to big cities, "For the post-Mao reform, commodity consumption functions as a strategic site that stimulates and captivates the imagination and desire for modernity, progress, and recognition among elites and masses alike" (Yan 2008).

Children's Day and "Silence" among the Parents

The 1st of June is International Children's Day. On that day, all kindergartens and primary schools organize artistic performances where children have been preparing shows for two months to half a year before and when Children's Day comes, they perform on stage. Their parents and grandparents are usually invited to come see the show. As it is an important moment to show their performance in kindergarten, many children in RYB Kindergarten were in competition to get the "starring role" of the show in their class.

When I arrived in Tianjin in May, the children had prepared the shows for Children's Day. Yang's children and their playmates were busy with the rehearsal every day. Kids were usually free at 16.30 according to the daily schedule. However, during the performance preparation period, they came home late two days per week at 19.00 as they were rehearsing the show. On the rehearsal days, parents were allowed to bring some food for their kids at 17.30. I followed Yang to bring food to her children sometimes. The gate of the kindergarten was still closed when the parents came to deliver food. Therefore, the parents had to deliver the food through the gaps between the fences to their kids' teachers. Yang was joking with me, "did it seem like delivering prison food (*song laofan*)?" I asked her why they did not open the gate and let her come in. Yang said again for safety. The kindergarten thought the short break between school time and rehearsal time could be risky and unsafe if some kids were to run out of the kindergarten. Fearing an accident might occur, the head of the kindergarten decided to keep

the gate closed when parents came to hand over the food. Surprisingly, according to Yang, it seemed all the parents were not satisfied with the rule as it was inconvenient, but no one told the head of the kindergarten. Yang said it was the "important period" when all the kids competed for the "starring role", so all parents kept silent as they thought if they "doubted" the kindergarten's regulations, it would influence the chance of their children getting the "starring role". "They (the kindergarten) do not like *chu tou niao*", Yang explained. The Chinese term *chu tou niao* refers to someone standing out from the group.

It was interesting that parents hoped their kids would stand out from the group (of kindergarten children) (*chu lei ba cui*), and be in the starring role of the show, while they did not want to stand out themselves by raising questions with the kindergarten. Something similar happened when it came to selecting the parents' representative to do the keynote speech before the performance on Children's Day. The parent who was selected by the kindergarten would hold a speech to evaluate the work of the kindergarten and also wish the children the best for the future. It was a great honour to be the parents' representative as it was usually the parent who had contributed the most or the kid who performed the best in the kindergarten during the past year could be selected as the representative. Of course, the parent representative would be the "hot" topic for the parent group to discuss. Before the announcement, Yang discussed with me the potential candidates for the parents' representative. She thought it wouldn't be Wangzi's father, even though he was famous in the kindergarten as the only governmental official. The party discipline of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regulated that party members could not use their public identity to seek benefits for their relatives, including spouses, children, parents, and relatives. However, it was not a secret at all in the kindergarten that Wangzi's father had often sponsored the kindergarten and made sure it received plenty of social resources. Using Yang's words, it was too "conspicuous" (*zhang yang*) for an official to do a public speech under the identity of a parents' representative, which would bring negative social

influence (*shehui yingxiang buhao*). Besides, as Yang said, being named parents' representative was too trivial for Wangzi's father to take as an honor. The parent representative is seemingly a trivial thing, but also an important thing, at least in the middle-class parent group in the community. It turned out to be a good opportunity to look into the psychological characters of the parents through this symbolic and ritual event, in aspects such as emotional investment, interactions, and attitudes.

One day Yang came home with her kids, and she asked me to guess who was selected as the parents' representative. I had no clue and randomly said two parents I knew of. Finally, it was Cheng Yun, Xiao Puti's mother. Yang thought the reasons for the selection could be Cheng was a teacher at college and she had a good education. I asked Yang whether she thought herself could be the parents' representative next time. Yang laughed and said, "never think about that. Who will choose a housewife to be the representative?" "Why not? Your kids are smart and doing well in kindergarten." I was a little surprised about Yang's low self-esteem as she was usually one of the most confident people I knew. Yang became quiet suddenly and started to explain her dilemma after a short break:

> Our life seems happy and rich, with a nice apartment, luxury products, relaxed lifestyle. But we (housewives) are too far away from the public space. Our job is to take care of kids and families. What could we talk about in the speech? How to be a housewife? Sometimes we also admire career mothers who have a break from the domestic chaos, like Xiao Puti's mom. It is little wonder that she was chosen as the parents' representative. She has a career as a college teacher and Xiao Puti is pretty and smart. I have been a housewife since I got married. And this is how it will be for the rest of my life.

Yang's disappointment reminds me of a talk I had with my cousin, a 23-year-old young lady, who had just graduated from college in my hometown. Before I visited Yang, I met my cousin once and talked about her future plans at home. She told me she had no interest in getting a job as the usual salary was comparatively low in my home town and she did not think the salary

matched her work. When asked about her plans, she said she wanted to get married as soon as possible and became a housewife, taking care of the family and her husband could be the breadwinner. Yang's complaint about her life reminded me of my cousin's plan as I thought it sounded exactly like Yang's life.

In the interaction with the middle-class mothers in my fieldwork, I noticed the paradoxes they felt: they hoped their children could stand out from their peers while they were also envious of others' talents and privileges; they cared about the affairs in the public fields, such as education and healthcare, while they did not want to be the ones to initiate the movement to change the problem. Instead of criticizing an irrational practice – I am referring to the closed gates at RYB kindergarten – the middle class thought that it could be more beneficial to be silent and follow the rules even though the rules could be unreasonable. They hoped their children could realize upward mobility through education while they also believed that "class stabilization" (*jieji guhua*) was a reality and they had little motivation to fight for more rights in the future, like the security of food standards. Those paradoxes experienced by the middle class provoked my interest, as the characteristics of the middle class could be not only the key to understanding their consumer behaviors of buying foreign infant formula but also the window to look into the social psychology behind the phenomena.

Focusing on the connection between economic life and social psychology, this chapter is supported by the research from Michael B. Griffiths. His work on Chinese consumers in Anshan, a third-tier city in northeast China, is based on a massive ethnography study of migrants, workers and professionals in China. Griffiths engages in meticulous discussions of psychological activities of different social classes, for example, the workers making moralistic judgements about those who do not work and who themselves make contributions to society which are done in the continuing effort to maintain and raise one's social status. Griffiths argues that the social distinction is formed from the social interaction in Chinese society with

discussion on virtues such as authenticity, knowledge, civility, sociable character, moral proprietary, and self-cultivation (Griffiths 2012).

English Class and Collective Anxiety on Education

After the afternoon tea gathering with the young mothers, I told them that I would like to help if they needed help in return. I planned to ask my *daigou* friends in Denmark to post me some Danish snacks as thank you gifts for their kids. But Cheng Yun suggested that since I was studying abroad and good at speaking English, I could be the English teacher for their kids. Moreover, she also suggested that it could be even better if I could introduce Danish primary education to them. In return, I promised to teach their children for two classes during the following weekends and prepared a talk about my understanding of the Danish primary education system.

I planned for the first class to take place at Yang's home to teach children how to ask questions and some words to describe products in English, and then in the second class, I planned to go to the supermarket with the kids and let them practice what we learnt in the first class. But the proposal was declined by the other mothers because they thought it could be dangerous if I went to the supermarket with five or six kids. They were worried that I could not take good care of so many small children. Finally, we decided to hold both English classes at Yang's home. As some parents were also interested in how I would teach the children, Yang together with two other mothers were also at the class.

In the first class, I prepared some flashcards to test the kids' vocabulary. Surprisingly, they already knew 80 % of the vocabulary I prepared from the standard English textbook of the first grade in primary school. I asked the mothers how the children knew the vocabulary of the primary school students as they were just in kindergarten. Ying explained:

> Unlike our generation, nowadays kids have to learn much more in advance. It will be too late to follow the learning instruction when they go to primary school. There are a lot of educational

institutions where kids in kindergarten can learn all the subjects in primary school. Then it will feel much easier to learn the subjects and gain knowledge when they go to primary school since they have already learnt it.

In addition to the anxiety about food, another important aspect that Chinese parents tend to be worried about is education. There is a Chinese term to describe the Chinese way of child-rearing, "tiger parenting" (*ji wa*), which is a strict parenting method whereby parents are highly invested in ensuring their children's success and it also embodies the anxiety of the Chinese middle-class parents. Economists Zilibotti and Fabrizio write in their book, *Love, Money and Parenting*, that parents are more likely to be Tiger Parents in countries with a high degree of inequality in education and a high rate of return to education (Doepke and Zilibotti 2019). China is experiencing accelerating inequality in the recent decades after the economic reform of the 1990s. In economics, the Gini Coefficient is one of the most frequent measures used to evaluate income inequality or wealth inequality within a nation or a social group. A coefficient of zero indicates a perfectly equal distribution of income or wealth while a coefficient of one represents the complete inequality of one person in a population receiving all the income while other people earn nothing. In mainland China, The Gini Index was 0.322 in 1990, and this number increased to 0.387 in 1999, and then reached 0.437 in 2010. The latest Gini Index in 2020 was 0.468[7]. 0.4 is the warning level set by the United Nations (Eagle 2014). In other words, China has witnessed a high-degree inequality during the past thirty years. Besides, with the "one-child" policy, education investment at the household level also increased significantly due to the "falling birth rate". Parents tend to have higher expectations for their single children (Xiong 2020).

The entrance examination to higher education (*gaokao*) was the most important competition in my generation ten years ago, when about 10 million Chinese students from high schools took the examination and competed with each other to gain admission to go to

university. However, in the past decade, the competition has intensified which shows in the examination to enter high school from primary school (*xiao sheng chu)* and even the examination to enter primary school from kindergarten *(you shen xiao)*, which is exactly what Yang's kids were experiencing.

In primary education in China, there is an obvious paradox: on the one hand, in the public education system, the Ministry of Education (MOE) keeps announcing a serious policy to "reduce student's burden" (*jian fu*) at primary education[8]; on the other hand, more and more parents send their kids to different after-school classes or other private educational institutions. Like other countries with a huge population, Chinese parents pay a lot of attention to childrearing and education, especially among the middle class. Children from the middle class are facing more stress compared with their counterparts from other classes. In the upper elite class, children may also face the stress of realising parents' expectations, but as they avail of more resources, they have more options than children from other lower classes. The lower class also wish for their kids to change their lives through education, but due to the economic limitation and lack of social resources, parents cannot invest that much time and energy into childrearing. Therefore, the investment in education accounts for a reasonably big proportion of household expenditure in middle-class families.

The motivation of "alleviating the burden" is positive, but the regulated reduction of burden at school time provides more time after school which becomes a new battlefield for Chinese parents. They take advantage of the time "saved" from the standard school time to send their kids to other educational institutions to learn the subject knowledge for higher grades in advance. As a result, the policy could not substantially change Chinese children's lives. Probably, they may even be busier than before because of the pressure from parents. The reduction in students' burden could not change the reality of fierce competition in China or their parents' anxiety.

The image of anxious parents is not unique to mainland China. The term of "Chinese mother" has become a label to describe the Chinese strict parenting style generally in Chinese families all over the world. Based on her rich fieldwork in Taiwan and the US, Pei-chia Lan unfolded Chinese parents' childrearing strategies into different social classes. Even though the practical and concrete strategies to realise upward mobility for Chinese children were different due to the unequal chances to access power and resources, one thing is for sure: the anxiety is "equal", namely Chinese parents are experiencing a kind of general anxiety (Lan 2018). However, as the middle class is facing hardship to realize upward mobility to the upper elite class and the risk of falling from the middle class to the lower class, their anxiety is more significant.

Yan Yunxiang, a representative anthropologist in China studies, names this kind of anxiety as "the drive for success" or "the ethics of the striving individual", a condition whereby the individual is driven by the urge to succeed or the fear of failure or a combination of both (Yan 2013). As Anders Sybrandt Hansen persuasively argues, the ethics for striving has become evident in the "studying abroad" surge in recent years which is now written into the script of youthful striving (Hansen 2015). Like the temporal striving experienced by the elite students in the exchange study abroad, the middle-class parents can never "lie flat" (*tang ping*)[9] because of the urge for their own success or their offspring's success.

Eating and learning are the two main activities that children are doing in everyday life so these two aspects are also the main activities for raising children. Growing up in a culture normally means inheriting a body of knowledge from the past and learning to replicate existing behavioral norms (Guo 2000). Children are usually influenced by the family members' psychological conditions and behaviors at an early age. In the case of the middle-class families in Tianjin, when I did my fieldwork there, I heard the children, at about four or five years old, complain that they thought the holidays were busier than during school time as their parents

arranged different kinds of after-school activities during the holidays. I was also shocked when Puti, the six-year-old girl, told me that it was very important for her to become champion of a singing contest in Tianjin as her mother told her that the award could help her gain entry into a high-quality primary school. I asked her whether she felt happy about the singing training involved. She told me that it was kind of boring if she had to practice the same song hundreds of times, but she did feel happy if it meant that she became champion of the contest as her mother told her it was a "big thing".

I was asked several times when I was in Tianjin how children could get happy (*kuai le*) and have a meaningful *(you yiyi)* childhood at the same time? At first, I did not really understand the question, as I thought the happy childhood is most meaningful. How could it be a dilemma for parents to have to choose one of them? A parent explained the reality they and their children were facing:

> If we want the children happy, we just let them do what they want to do, which means playing all the time, without any learning or training. But that is a waste of time for sure. The other children *(bie ren jia de hai zi)* learn different subjects during the holidays, such as English, Mathematics, Writing. Then they (the other children) will probably perform better in the application for a good primary school. If they enter a good primary school, they will probably enter a good high school, then a good university. This is a "meaningful" childhood, preparing for the good future. If you are one step behind, then you fall many steps behind *(yi bu luo hou, bu bu luo hou)*.

According to the parent's explanation, children's happiness was usually built on instant gratification, and it is hard work to teach small children to learn how to "defer gratification" for the pleasure in future. For example, when children eat junk food, they feel happy, but junk food is not good for their health in the long term; similar things also existed in the usage of after-school time. They felt happier when playing with playmates than going to educational institutions. Facing an environment full of uncertainty and competition, it was a challenging

job for Chinese parents to raise children in ways that provided their children with a "happy" childhood, as parents knew that long-term "happiness" was built on daily efforts. Therefore, Chinese parents spared no effort to source healthy food and good education for their children to build the foundation for their children's happiness. On the other side of the reality, I could see the transmission of anxiety from parents to children in the community in everyday life through one meal, one class, one trip. I was so surprised how "mature" those small children were when they talked about their life and their future. For example, when I asked another five-year-old girl in the English class, "how did you learn so many words in English", she replied, "mom told me that if I could remember all the words then I could go to an elite primary school in Yinghua".[10]

Video Surveillance and Trust in the Middle-Class Community

When I did my research in Tianjian with Yang's family, I found that Yang and the other parents frequently used a kind of surveillance App to monitor their children in kindergarten. In the RYB kindergarten, there was a camera in each classroom to record the situation and it could show the real-time video on the App which parents used. Besides the camera in the classroom, there were also video cameras in the canteen, playground, corridor, and at the front gate. Parents could also use the App to monitor the situation when their children were eating or playing. According to parents, the majority of private kindergartens in urban China had installed surveillance cameras in order to show the daily life of children to their parents. The main reason for the installation was for safety reasons. For example, in the introductory brochure of the kindergarten, it was written that "surveillance cameras cover the whole kindergarten. Parents can rest assured (*fang xin*)".

The kindergarten's publicity materials focusing on safety were not without reason. The past few years witnessed an increase in child abuse in day-care and kindergartens in China. Especially, in 2017, some parents of children who attend the RYB kindergarten in Beijing's

Chaoyang District, said that they found needle marks on their children. Some parents also told the press that their children had been given unidentified pills, brown syrup, and were sometimes forced to stand still or locked inside a dark room as punishment. As important supporting evidence, relevant surveillance footage and equipment were handed to the police for investigation. Finally, the teacher involved was sentenced to prison (Echo 2017). In 2015, a similar child-abuse case happened in another RYB branch in Jilin province. According to a Chinese official report, there have been around 60 child-abuse incidents in kindergartens in China since 2010 (Chen, Wang, and Zhu 2017). In child-abuse cases, the surveillance materials played an important role in the process of investigation. As parents have lost trust in the regulations at kindergartens in general, they want to real-time monitor their children's everyday life, especially about the activities and the food served. On this point, Sheng Zou, a scholar in trust study, argues that the digital Social Credit System (SCS) where digital technologies of surveillance used to build trust society in China currently actually reduces the moral and relational dimension of trust in social interactions. This point coincides with what is going on in the kindergarten where I did my research (Sheng 2021).

When Yang and other parents talked about children-abuse cases, many of them said "kindergartens have to install surveillance cameras", as they thought the "real-time monitoring" could help supervise teachers' behaviors and prevent child-abuse cases. I was confused by these claims and asked the parents a follow up question: "But the child-abuse cases still happened with the surveillance camera present in those kindergartens, didn't they?' They replied to me that "in the worst cases, namely if any child-abuse cases occurred, the video materials could be used as the evidence to prove their illegal behaviors". I interpreted their words as that the parents had accepted the possibility that child-abuse incidents could happen. Even though they paid about six times the tuition fee as their counterparts in the public kindergartens, they did not enjoy the "expected" high-end service. Taking the kindergarten's

tuition fee as an example, it costs around 3,000 RMB (412 USD) a month for a kid in RYB kindergarten – about half of the city's average monthly salary (China Daily 2016). A public kindergarten in Beijing charges around 550 yuan (86 USD) per month. According to my informants, their concerns were mainly the reality that they had paid a "premium fee", but they had not received the high-quality services or products that matched what they had paid for.

The "seeing" approach is also adopted in the catering industry in China. In her studies in Zhejiang and Beijing, Caroline Merrifield shows that in Zhejiang, under the policy of "Sunshine Kitchen", cameras were also placed in food preparation areas to allow customers to watch their food being made in real-time on monitors in dining areas of a high-end restaurant (Merrifield 2019). Similarly, in the case of the kindergarten surveillance in Tianjin, the method of "to-see-is-to-believe" was welcomed by Chinese parents and it became a prioritized item when they selected a kindergarten for their kids. Even though many parents thought that the surveillance camera could not 100% prevent any child abuse or food safety accidents, it was still better than without them. So, even though some parents complained that the services did not match their payment, they would not consider sending their children to the public kindergarten, as they thought the education and food would be even worse and unsafe.

According to the kindergarten, the video surveillance was a "selling point" to attract more parents to send children to their kindergarten. When I picked up Yang's children from kindergarten one day, I heard a parent asking about her child's performance at kindergarten. The teacher told the parent to check the surveillance video to see what had happened at kindergarten. Yang told me that whenever there were parents who suspect that their children were subject to physical punishment, the head of the kindergarten would reply that, "there should be nothing wrong as the cameras show the situation at the kindergarten clearly". However, even though some parents were suspicious that their children's reluctance to go to kindergarten was related to the teacher's punishment, they would not argue with the

kindergarten as they had no *hard evidence* of the surveillance video of the teachers' wrongdoing. I asked Yang, "what if the kindergarten show the parents what they want to see? Maybe the cameras cannot show all the situations at kindergarten. So, the kindergarten can just install the cameras where they want. Then how can you trust the surveillance video?" Yang said, "then you never know. The surveillance can you can only prevent the law-abiding villain, never the real villain *(fang junzi, bufang xiaoren)*". Yang meant that even though there were cameras in the kindergarten, they could only prevent the wrongdoings of those who abide by the rules. If the villain intended to hurt the children, you could not prevent them from doing so as they would find a way to reach their goal anyway even with the camera surveillance in place.

Yang's explanation really confused me. From my understanding, both the parents and the kindergarten like the surveillance cameras. Parents use the surveillance cameras as an approach to supervise the teachers' behaviors and their children's performance at kindergarten, while the kindergarten uses the surveillance cameras as important tools to be seen as trustworthy, because if parents do not see any wrongdoings through the cameras, then it means that the kindergarten is trustworthy. However, parents do not trust the kindergarten even though there are cameras, as there is still the possibility of wrongdoing if teachers so intend. Therefore, the cameras cannot prevent incidents. Even though the technological support could not establish trust between the kindergarten and the parents, they still welcome it as it is better than nothing. The parents, to some extent, believe that the use of a surveillance camera plays a role somehow in decreasing the possibility of wrongdoings at the kindergarten.

I asked Yang whether she trusted the kindergarten or not. She told me that she trusts neither the kindergarten nor the surveillance. She only trusted the facts that she saw. If her children came back home with bruises on, she would go to the kindergarten and talk with the teachers, even if she did not see anything happen via the surveillance cameras. As parents could not follow their children all the time, they had to trust the kindergarten that they could take good

care of their children as they did not have other feasible options. Of course, they could transfer their children from one kindergarten to another kindergarten. But there was no big difference between different kindergartens at the same level in terms of facilities, food, and time spent on caring for the children. As long as parents decided to send their children to kindergarten rather than home school them, they had to accept the reality that there could be a variety of unpredictable risks. The technology could help decrease the uncertainty, but it could not cure the problem of distrust or build up trust in the community either, as far as I could see from the cases of surveillance in the kindergartens.

When I talk about trust, I follow Seligman's comparison of trust and its synonym "confidence". Inspired by Luhmann, Seligman points out that confidence hinges on one's perception of the reliability of a social system and its enforcement of role expectations. Seligman, and also Luhmann, locate trust in the field of interpersonal and social connections, recognizing the moral autonomy (Seligman 2000; Luhmann 1988). On this point, the community-based relational trust is crudely reduced by the calculative trust supported by the technologies (Sheng 2021), such as surveillance cameras in this case.

In my fieldwork, many parents thought that they could not trust anyone to take care of their kids except for their close relatives. Therefore, it was grandparents who usually shouldered the responsibility of taking care of grandchildren when they were not in kindergarten. The distrust that exists between non-kin limits the ability of strangers to take over the responsibilities of childrearing as this is one of the most important aspects of household affairs. Chinese wage-earners have to choose between the demands of their children and the expectations of their retired parents (Watson 2000). However, not all the grandparents from the middle class in China would like to take on the burden of childcare and domestic labor from their kids. Instead, they are willing to pay for the expense of hiring a nanny for the grandchild to relieve themselves of the obligation (Yan 2008). As a result, childcare has become a prominent focus of conflict

between young mothers and their parents-in-law. During my fieldwork, one mother told me that she could hire a nanny and the payment was not a problem. The problem was she could not hire a nanny as trustworthy as the grandparents. Because her parents-in-law refused to help with childcare after a lifetime of work, her relationship with her family-in-law was not very good. In the book *Chinese Women since Mao*, Elizabeth Croll queries "whether future generations of grandmothers will be quite so ready to undertake the childcare and domestic labour after a lifetime in production", compared with the previous generation of grandmothers who had spent much of their life in domestic service and were called on to continue helping their daughters-in-law (Yan 2008; Croll 1986). In other words, if the current generation of parents can fully trust strangers to take care of their kids, such as teachers in day-care, kindergartens, and nannies, it could relieve the grandparents from the obligation and relieve themselves from the worries.

However, it is not that easy for Chinese parents to trust strangers. In Chinese society, there is a big difference between moral commitments to relatives and strangers, which is rooted in Chinese culture. The difference of relational morality between kinship-based relationships and non-kinship-based ones (Fei, Hamilton, and Zheng 1992) has been referred to by scholars in China studies, explaining the everyday ethics nowadays in particular communities (Stafford 2006; Klein 2013). The absence of public morality can also be seen in contemporary China in the scandals of food safety and child abuse in kindergartens. Scholars in the fields of morality and trust of food in China have pointed out that there is a strong family value and morality in interpersonal relations but no obligation towards strangers in China. This kind of moral mode could be a possible explanation for the production of unsafe food in the Chinese market (Yan 2012; Bunkenborg and Hansen 2019). Similarly, in "kindergarten politics", parents do not think teachers are as trustworthy as grandparents to take care of their children as strangers have no moral obligation to treat other kids in the same way as family members do; however, parents

try to “bribe” teachers and leaders of the kindergarten in the hope that teachers – in a non-kinship-based relation with the children – will take good care of the kids under the rule of reciprocity.

Middle-class Anxiety and the “Large Private” Strategy

As a conclusion to this chapter, I focus on the consumer psychology of the Chinese middle-class parents who are the main consumer of foreign infant formula, discussing their identity recognition, collective anxiety, and morality through the ethnographic excerpts revolving around their children’s life in kindergarten. The keyword “anxiety” emerged again among the middle-class families with the young parents sparing no effort to raise the next generation, with a focus on feeding and rearing as the most import aspects. Even though I adopt the term of “middle-class” to refer to the consumer group of foreign infant formula, this term is still problematic by itself. It is difficult to define the middle class in China as there are different criteria. The chapter focused on the economic factor which means my interlocutors are from the intermediate class, mainly regarding wealth, situated between the upper and the lower classes in Chinese society. One reason for adopting wealth as a criterion to define the middle class is based on the reality that the economic contribution of the middle class in China is stressed in the academic research, compared with political and social contribution of their counterparts in Europe throughout history (Goodman 2008a). Another reason for focusing on their economic condition is because they are the main consumers of the infant formula as well as the main actors of raising families. Economic conditions play an import role in feeding and rearing affairs.

Through the experience of “peering” at the entrance to the kindergarten, Yang was able to give a clear description of the psychological activity of the members of the middle class when they interact with the upper social class: they envy the privilege that the upper class enjoy, such as special care and attention for their kids from the kindergarten. They also find it difficult to

move from the middle class to the upper class. The anxiety of the middle class is not just from the difficulty in the upward mobility but also from the risk of downward mobility to the lower class (Yan 2013). To keep their status in the middle class, they have to work hard themselves and maybe their parents will also have to work to either earn more household income or shoulder the burden of taking care of their grandchildren or domestic chores. Pursuit for high-end consumption becomes a main type of motivation for their handwork to maintain the ability to afford the middle-class lifestyle and the identity as members of the middle class.

The mothers in the afternoon tea gathering showed great interest in talking about how to choose safe children's products. As a small group from the middle class in China, group members had similar tastes in consumption, similar purchasing powder, and similar attitudes toward childrearing. Regarding the consumption of infant formula, mothers exclusively chose foreign infant formula sourced directly from developed regions rather than domestic products. Uncertainty of the domestic market and distrust of domestic products were the main reasons for Chinese parents to "opt out" of the domestic market. This kind of lifestyle was called "gated consumption" or "inverted quarantine" by Amy Hanser and Jialin Camille Li in their research work on urban consumers in China. They argued that with the reliance on social networks for information about and material access to foreign infant formula, the middle class developed their strategy of "large private" to source safe infant formula for their babies. Unlike the "tiny public" which might lead to larger forms of collective action, the strategy of "large private" works in the stratified strata such as mothers' groups, co-workers and work-related contacts, former classmates or family members to gain access to trustworthy products (Hanser and Li 2015; Osburg 2013).

Another feature of the "large private" strategy is the exclusion of the lower class and confirmation of the status of the middle class with symbolic consumer behavior. According to psychological characteristics of the middle class, we can assume that there is no ground for the

collective action of the middle class to deal with the uncertainty and risks in domestic market as they lack of collective identity and also are engaged in upwards social movement. However, one thing for sure is that they thought themselves as different from "other classes": those who send their children to the public schools and buy products from the domestic market. Even though the middle class feels hopeless to change the situation of food safety issues on a wider level, they have compromised to at least protect their small families from the hazards and insecurities through their social resources.

Besides the anxiety about food safety, education is another important field that Chinese parents are worried about and compete with other classes, even with their peers in the same class. "Tiger childrearing" happens more easily among the middle class than in the other classes, as children from the upper classes can inherit their parents' wealth and the lower classes do not set aside much attention to childrearing due to the economic limitations (Lan 2018). Education becomes an important approach for people to maintain their status or realize upward mobility in the next generation. As a result, education investment has become one of the biggest shares of household expenditure for middle-class families in China. Previously, the fierce competition started from the entrance examination to go to university (*gaokao)*, but the competition has been brought forward to the primary school stage and even in kindergarten nowadays as the Chinese terms describe "the tide lifts all the boats". Kipnis has depicted the school life of Chinese students in detail including both intellectual education and moral training (Kipnis 2011). And the influence of education patterns on a national level showed up not only in the childrearing pattern but also the way in which the parents themselves dealt with the unreasonable regulations from the kindergarten as well as the selection of the parent representative. On the one hand, Chinese parents hope their children can stand out from their peers with good performance in kindergarten; on the other hand, they tend to keep silent when they are treated unfairly or inappropriately, as they are worried that opposition to the rules or

regulations would leave their children with a label of 'trouble-maker'. This then might influence the leaders and teachers in how they treat the children, and it could possibly make them treat their children negatively.

The suspicion of Chinese parents towards kindergartens could also be seen in their attitudes toward the surveillance in the kindergarten. They know for a fact that video surveillance is not completely trustworthy, but they still prefer the kindergarten to install cameras as it is still the most intuitive approach to protect their kids from any potential harm, under the logic of "to-see-is-to-believe". However, parents could still not "put their heart to rest" (*fang xin*), as the teachers were non-kin strangers who did not have the same obligation to protect their kids as family members. The childcare responsibility was readily transferred to grandparents if both parents worked. The question of "what is trust" emerged from the complex relationship between the parents and the kindergarten revolving around the surveillance issue. Trust scholars have systematically investigated the influence and the importance of trust in a society, Gert Tinggaard Svendsen, a Danish scholar, elaborated on how trust works in Danish society and argued for the efficiency of trust. He said that "control is good, but trust is cheaper"(Svendsen 2014). The Chinese case also supports the argument, to some extent, as China has invested billions in the construction of a surveillance system. It has been reported that, by 2020, China will have installed 300 million surveillance cameras (Meng 2018). On the other side, as Fukuyama said, in societies with low social trust and high family values, it is hard for strangers to cooperate in economic activity. As a consequence, the exclusion of strangers due to distrust results in an inefficient market economy where the public trust is supposed to play a big role (Fukuyama 1996).

In conclusion, through the consumer practices of Chinese parents from the middle class, we can understand the motivation and an explanation of their preference for foreign infant formula. In a wide sense, it is not hard to understand why the middle class could not be the

ruling class or resistant power to initiate the movement to solve the social problems, such as food safety and stressful education in China. As they could figure out their ways to navigate in the uncertain and competitive society through gated consumption, such as sourcing safe food from developed regions and sending their children to elite schools, there is little motivation for collective action to change the situation on a general level to create a wide-ranging trustworthy environment for the next generation. On the contrary, they welcome the social stratification and enjoy the exclusive consumption from the outsiders of their class as a way to show their group identity and class status. As Chinese society has already become highly stratified, the middle class is enmeshed in the anxiety of the difficulty of upward mobility and in the risk of downward mobility.

4. Morality and Money among Chinese Immigrants in Denmark

Making "Trust" Visible

On 14 October 2017 in Bilka, one of the famous supermarket chains in Aalborg, a city in the northwest of Denmark, a young Chinese girl is getting Arla[1] baby formula cans from the shelves, drawing on the bottom of the can, taking videos and pictures, and putting the formula cans in the shopping cart. Talking with someone in mandarin through the video call on WeChat, the girl is showing the phone call recipient around the supermarket, while introducing different kinds of Danish products with the camera shooting. After a while, the person on the other end of the call asks the girl to show how the local Danish people do their shopping in the supermarket. The girl refuses the request and tells the person that it is impolite to take a picture or videos of local people without asking first.

I observed the shopper's unusual way of buying mainly because the conversation caught my attention. I was pretty sure that she was a *daigou* operator. I did not want to disturb her, but I really hoped that she could tell me about herself. I asked the girl if I could ask her some questions. She refused my request immediately and looked at me suspiciously. I guess she probably thought that I could be another *daigou* operator that planned to "fight" with her for the infant formula on the shelves. Before she replied, I clearly told her that I would not be buying the formula and not to worry. She told me that she was a *daigou* specialist in a company and what she was doing was to show the "authenticity" of Danish infant formula. "Just telling them (Chinese consumers) that the food originates from Denmark is not enough, you need to prove it" – this is the reason she gave me for why she needed to video and photograph the products on the shelves. She also told me that her boss, the owner of the *daigou* company, emphasized that these pictures and videos needed to be carefully stored as proof in case of any complaint about the product's authenticity.

I have seen this "old-fashioned" way of demonstrating product authenticity by the *daigou* resellers several times when I did my fieldwork in local supermarkets in Denmark. After the milk scandal in China in 2008 where an estimated 300,000 babies became sick from contaminated milk, with six babies dying from kidney damage, many Chinese parents lost the confidence in Chinese domestic dairy products and they tried to source safe dairy products from outside of China. To confirm that the products are exactly the ones purchased from the foreign supermarket, many consumers often ask those who buy products on behalf of them to sign their names at the bottom of the infant formula and take pictures or videos of the products to prove the authenticity of the products. When the consumers receive the products and see their names, they can confirm that the products are the ones bought originally from the Danish supermarket by the *daigou* operator. The excerpt of *daigou* working processes unveiled a generalized perception that "seeing-is-believing" as Caroline Merrifield argued in her research on approaches to address food safety issues in Chinese catering industry (Merrifield 2019). The overseas *daigou* network can help Chinese consumers to reach trustworthy foreign-made products, while the visual evidence can prove the credibility. The transaction process seems time-consuming and unbelievable. However, it works in relieving consumers' anxiety. As some *daigou* operators said, "The process is annoying, but I have to take the trouble to do this (sign and take pictures) to make sure there won't be any problems and the products are exactly those that I bought in Denmark."

This "seeing-is-believing" also works in transaction between family members. Xianxian, one of my friends in Denmark, was an international student at Aalborg University. She had been asked by her cousin to buy Arla infant formula and she told me that she put a lot of effort into making sure that the formula which was posted to her cousin was exactly the one she bought from the Danish supermarket. This included: videoing the product shelves, taking video calls when she was buying the formula, and writing down her cousin's name on the package

when she posted it to China. However, she forgot to write names on the bottom of the formula can as she was in a rash to send the package to the post office. Her cousin called Xianxian immediately when she received the formula and questioned her how she could forget the signature as it was the most important evidence to prove the authenticity of the infant formula. Xianxian felt very aggrieved about this, as she put a lot effort into helping her cousin but her cousin noticed only the little mistakes.

These pictures of *daigou* operators' daily practices illustrate how this network business caters for the middle-class consumers' needs in China. Extending the focus of the previous two chapters on the demand side of the network business of infant formula in mainland China, the following two chapters examine the supply side of this business, analysing complex relationships of mobility, kinship, trust and morality through the ethnography on *daigou* operators' work practices in Denmark. What cultural and economic conditions gave rise to the long-distance petty trade of *daigou* between Denmark and China? In what kinds of ways did Chinese immigrants maintain relatedness with people in their home country? How did these immigrants raise their family in Denmark? To answer these questions, my ethnographic lens zooms in on the lives and struggles of Chinese immigrants and their community in Denmark.

Facing the difficulties in getting stable jobs in another country, such as taking care of family, language barriers, and cultural differences, Chinese female immigrants utilize their transnational networks in China to establish their businesses and realize family prosperity in Denmark. The entanglement of relationships and profits constitutes an important part of business, which creates a dilemma for *daigou* operators between realizing the relational moral obligation and making money. Taking advantage of the connection to consumers in China and the access to products in Denmark, Chinese immigrants use *daigou* businesses to explore possibilities for raising their families outside of China. I was captivated by what seemed like a paradox: on the one hand the *daigou* started the "informal economy" through the network based

on kinship or acquaintances in China; on the other hand, the relational morality limited the development of the businesses as it is perhaps "immoral" to earn money from members of the family or acquaintances. However, these *daigou* operators also faced challenges in raising families or themselves overseas. They needed money in other words. This chapter focuses on the entanglement of business (*shengyi*), morality (*daode*), and sentiments (*renqing*) faced by the *daigou* operators.

Trust emerged as an important factor from the work practices of *daigou* operators, which is also the main reason for the establishment of this network-based transnational commercial channel. However, even though "seeing-is-believing" is taken for granted by both the consumer and resellers as an effective method to guarantee the authenticity of products, this practice violates the principle of trust proposed by Luhmann (Luhmann 1988) and Seligman (Seligman 2000), two representative scholars in trust studies. We will come back to trust theories in the following sections. The main purpose of this chapter is not to define the concept of trust, but to use the concept to understand the complexity of the relationships intertwined in the network business of children's food and the importance of trust in economic transactions.

The Chinese immigrants in Denmark face the entanglement of making money to raise a family in Denmark and realizing relational obligations based on kinship or acquaintances in China. I shall analyze the change and usage of relationships on two dimensions: one, the function of transnational horizontal relationships based on sentiments in realizing the relational moralities in the vertical family relationships; two, the consistency and incompatibility between instrumental relationships (business relationships) and sentimental relationships (relationships based on kinship, friendship, or acquaintances) in the monetary transactions involved in the network business. Based on the discussion about relationships on these two dimensions, I hope that this research will contribute to the understanding of morality in the context of China on both social and individual levels. There are two kinds of morality within each of these two

groups of relationships in the network business: in the group of horizontal transnational relationship and vertical family relationship, the moral principles of reciprocity and family prosperity play equally prominent roles; in the group of instrumental relationship and sentimental relationship, the moral principles of self-love (self-interest) and obligation stand out respectively.

My analysis of the network business operated by Chinese immigrants in Denmark draws from classic theoretical insights into the dialectical relationship between economy and morality which goes back to Adam Smith and Karl Marx in the Western discourse (J. Parry and Bloch 2000; Mauss 1980; Simmel 1978; Bloch and Parry 1982; Hirschman 1981; Roberts and Stephenson 1973; Frankel 1977), and also anthropological research on social relationships (*guanxi)* in the Chinese context (Yang 1994; Yan 1996; Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002; Kipnis 1996). Marxism and Smithism represent two radially opposed views of the market exchange (commercial exchange) in the western intellectual tradition. For example, according to Marxist writers, market exchange begins with the exchange of surpluses between communities. But when the objects become commodities in external transactions, they inevitably tend to become commodities within the community and to corrode the bonds of personal dependence (Roberts and Stephenson 1973). However, the liberalist scholars regard money and commercial exchanges as representations of the spirit of freedom which has a revolutionary and determinate impact on social relationships (Simmel 1978) which encourages rational calculation in social life in modern society (Frankel 1977). We have to admit the point that the interaction between market and morality carries quite different meanings in different cultures. Rather than supporting one camp regarding how the market produces specific changes in our world view, the emphasis of this chapter is on the way in which existing culture and social-economic conditions give rise to particular ways of interpreting market exchange.

This chapter also benefits from the research on social relationships in the Chinese context, namely *guanxi* studies. *Guanxi,* is originally a Chinese word, but today it is also used by the world outside of China. The direct translation of this term is social relationships which is a neutral phrase. However, critics view it negatively in China as it fuels the country's rampant corruption which is an obstacle for China to develop into a rational modern society based on the rule of law (Osburg 2013; Yang 1994), while the scholars who recognise the positive sides of *guanxi* argue its cultural values in humanities in comparison with other transactions and the phrase comes to the rescue in the absence of state regulations or guidelines for social conduct (Kipnis 1997; Yan 1996). Most recently, Charles Stafford recognizes the different moral norms in the two different relational circles based on immediate close kinships and the extended social personal ties such as neighbours, friends, and acquaintances in Chinese rural communities (Stafford 2000).

Compared with ordinary commodity exchange, I tentatively summarize three characteristics of this informal small enterprise: informality, highly-relationship-based, and feminization. The informality has been described through the ethnography on the work practice, and I will not take this characteristic as an analytical dimension as it is a feature on a descriptive level that is not highly relevant to the main research interest in the anthropology of infant formula. The feature of feminization will be elaborated in Chapter 5. This chapter focuses on the complexity of the relationships intertwined in the informal business between the *daigou* operators and the customers in mainland China. Specific questions include: How do they interpret the trade with their relatives, friends, acquaintances? Do they think of *daigou* as work or friendly favors? How do they deal with the dilemma between economic profit and relationship maintenance? On this point, the entanglements, conflicts, and dilemmas the *daigou* operators experienced in the business indicate the complexity of relationships for overseas

Chinese families who are influenced by the Chinese ethical principles and connections but who are living physically in a western society.

Along with the technological revolution and the flow of global capital, there have been structural changes among the Chinese immigrants not only in Denmark but also elsewhere in the world. The ethnic network has also changed its function from bringing Chinese immigrants to the ethnic niche of catering outside of China (Thunø 1998) to introducing foreign products into the Chinese consumer market. This research on the network business shows one piece of the picture of the lives of overseas Chinese families, particularly the dimension of relationship changes in everyday life.

Focusing on the interaction between *guanxi* (personal relationships) and market, I examine both the characteristics of commodity and gift exchanges embodied in the network business of infant formula and argue for the utility of *guanxi* in transnational family reproductions and the transformation of *guanxi* alongside the development of the business. In what follows, I will first present an overview of the situation of Chinese immigrants in Denmark and the scale of *daigou* business among Chinese immigrants. Then I will describe the challenges and dilemmas that Chinese female immigrants face in settling down in Denmark and their strategies to raise a family by the way of "informal economy" of *daigou* to illustrate the interplay of horizontal transnational relationships and vertical family relationships, and the entanglement of instrumental relationships and sentimental relationships between the *daigou* operators and their customers in the network business of *daigou*. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will return to a more general question of money and morality in the network business. I should perhaps emphasize at the outset that the analysis presented here is mainly based on ethnography of *daigou* business in Denmark during October 2016 to March 2019, and it does not include the changes of the business and the *daigou* operators' lives after COVID-19 swept across the world at the end of 2019. I would state that my argument is supported by existing ethnography before

the breakout of COVID-19 in Denmark. The pandemic changed the *daigou* operators' lives significantly and many operators gave up their petty trade afterwards as a result of the extra logistics fees, regulations on transportation, increase in costs, etc. In other words, their change in lifestyle and earnings after the pandemic is not the focus of this chapter.

Daigou in Denmark and an Overview of Chinese Immigrants

In Denmark, there are 12,629 immigrants with origins in mainland China according to Statistics Denmark.[2] I joined ten WeChat Chinese groups in Denmark with each group containing 350 – 450 members. From the group members' information on WeChat, I estimate that at least one-third of the group members were involved in the *daigou* business to varying degrees. Furthermore, using the search string "*daigou* in Denmark", a quick search on the most popular online shopping website in China, Taobao.com, results in more than 5,000 shops with diverse kinds of Danish products for sale online. During my fieldwork in Denmark, I frequently heard those personal shoppers describe the situation as "nine in ten Chinese immigrants are *daigou*" (*shige yimin jiuge daigou*). The majority of the professional *daigou* operators are housewives who have no normal job in Denmark. These operators also described the situation as "nine in ten *daigou* are mothers" (*shige daigou jiuge baoma*). Usually, the *daigou* operators do not register a company if they are just running a "pocket business" casually for some extra income for themselves or their families. If a small informal business develops into a real business, meaning that they run the business as a main income source and earn more than 50,000 Danish Krone (approx. 6.875 USD) annually, according to the Danish law, they have to pay taxes.[3] *Daigou* are active in local supermarkets where they purchase different kinds of groceries. However, after a ten-year development, the business also shows a "merging tendency" with the monopolization of some of the big *daigou* companies. Some individual *daigou* operators become agents for *daigou* companies, transferring orders from their customers to these companies and receiving commission from them.

The pattern of Chinese immigration in Denmark has gone through structural changes since the foundation of New China in 1949. The first and second generation of immigrants who arrived before the 1980s can be generally divided into two groups, with one group running Chinese restaurants and doing relevant work in Chinese communities in Denmark and another group married inside the community or intermarried with Danes. After the Reform and Opening-up in China and along with the economic recession in Denmark, the 1980s witnessed a boom of Chinese immigrants coming to Denmark. Intermarriages with Danes, great variations in educational achievement, occupational differences, generational gaps, and class diversification are all factors contributing to a more diversified Chinese community. The new Chinese immigrants during the 1980s and 1990s had no strong ethnic networks like previous immigrants and they faced severe difficulties in finding employment (Thunø 1998).

The next generation of immigrants after the 2000s broke out of the ethnic economic niche in catering sector through learning Danish, obtaining a Danish education, being employed, or doing export-import businesses. Nowadays, *daigou* business has developed in one of the most popular works that Chinese immigrants are engaged in, which plays a similar role as the catering sector did in offering opportunities for Chinese people to immigrant to other countries in previous generations (Martin 2022; Zhang 2017; Thunø 1998). Going in almost the opposite direction to the expansion of Chinese restaurants all over the world, a *daigou* business connects China, one of the biggest consumer markets, to the rest of the world. Many international companies also target the Chinese market and design products, especially for Chinese consumers. The formation of the huge demand and the consumer psychology that drives the demand for foreign infant formula has been analyzed in the previous two chapters on the development of infant formula in Chapter 2 and the middle-class consumers in mainland China in Chapter 3.

In the ethnography on *daigou* operators and their families in Denmark during 2016 to 2019, I found that a typical division of labor in overseas Chinese families that engaged in *daigou* business was the following: the male spouse or partner had a stable job at a company or a university in Denmark while the female spouse or partner worked part-time or was unemployed and took care of family members in Denmark. There was also a great number of individual *daigou* operators who were international students. However, this group of *daigou* operators was less likely to run the *daigou* business long term as they would likely leave Denmark and move to another county or go back to China after finishing their studies. Moreover, they typically travelled alone and therefore had no family dependents in Denmark. Compared with the housewife *daigou* operators, the international students would run the informal business to earn some pocket money for daily expenses or travel costs. They hoped to get "formal work" (*zhengdang gongzuo*) in Denmark which was linked to their programmes of study where they could establish a local network, gain a stable income, and improve their language skills to settle down in Denmark. The housewives, to some extent, had similar aspirations to settle down in Denmark with formal employment. However, the housewives faced more challenges than the international students in regard to finding an ideal job in Denmark as they typically had no Danish educational background or enough information about the local job market. They came to Denmark on a visa for family reunification of spouses and their spouse (partner) were the main provider for the family. To support their family financially, the housewives usually either got a casual job in an unskilled field, for example in a restaurant, at the Asian market, at Sushi shops, etc, or ran a *daigou* business to earn money from China. Compared with underpaid casual jobs, *daigou* business was a much better option as it was more flexible and usually better paid, meaning that they had more time to take care of family members.

My main concern is the commercial life and the small enterprises in the Chinese community in Denmark, in which operators used their networks in China and the access to local products

in Denmark to resell commodities from Denmark to China. We should consider a more extended topic than commodity exchange – the ordinary business of buying and selling – in these small enterprises. Most *daigou* resellers in Denmark are women, while large-scale transnational e-commercial companies are usually owned by men. The monthly income from the informal business varies with the scale of business. For example, one informant who ran a *daigou* business with about a hundred clients in China told me that the income from the business was similar to the hourly wage of unskilled workers in Denmark. According to recent statistics, the minimum income is about 130 Danish Kroner (approx. 17 USD) per hour working as an unskilled worker.[4]

Relatedness and Ethics in an Overseas Chinese Family

I have presented an overview of the current general situation for Chinese immigrants in Denmark. A typical immigrant family is involved in both vertical intergenerational relations and horizontal transnational relations (Rytter 2013). The concept of relatedness is adopted in this research as an alternative to the previous, more biological and functionalist perceptions of family and kinship; it proposes indigenous idioms of relatedness in local statements and practices (Carsten 2000, 2007). In addition, notions of relatedness constitute a specific relationship between people and places; therefore we need to analyze the family not only on a "biological" level but also on the "social" level including the factor of space (Rytter 2013).

Following the thread of relatedness, there are also responsive moral codes based on different types of relationships. Yan Yunxiang, a famous anthropologist of Chinese society, has investigated the transformation of the ethical codes of generations in rural China (Yan 2003, 2009). He points out that "the drive for success" has developed into a new moral code or anxiety for the current Chinese young generation producing striving individuals who are self-driven, calculating, and determined subjects with the aspiration to better his or her life in accordance with individual plans (Yan 2013).

The following ethnography focuses on a Chinese immigrant family in Denmark in which the husband, Liu Hui, was an employee in a school and the wife, Li Ping, as a *daigou* operator. Li Ping's story reveals two main points about the *daigou* phenomenon from the perspective of relatedness. First, as a business based on social networks, *daigou* creates not only commercial values but also relational values in identifying, expressing, and maintaining relationships; second, the boundaries between public and private, virtual and physical, and work and life are blurred in the *daigou* business; however, the distinction between the relationship circles of the inner social world (mostly parent-child relationships) and the outer social world (mostly relationships between friends, neighbours, and acquaintances) is clear. I have divided the ethnography of Li Ping's life into two parts – one connected to her public identity (productive sphere), and the other connected to her personal identity (reproductive sphere).

Calligraphy Teacher, Sushi Restaurant Assistant, and Daigou Operator

I first met Li Ping in a calligraphy club in Aarhus in the autumn of 2018. She was the calligraphy teacher in the club and I was a student there to learn calligraphy. It was interesting though that she seemingly did not know how to write calligraphy, and I did not see her demonstrating how to write calligraphy as in ordinary calligraphy classes. When I asked Ping to demonstrate calligraphy, she told me with embarrassment, "I am not a professional calligraphy teacher and I did not expect there would be so many adult students coming for calligraphy. My husband knows how to write calligraphy. I am just interested in it but I can't write. If you want to see how to write calligraphy, I can lend you some books." Then she passed me some calligraphy books. But why then did she show up here as a teacher if she did not know how to write calligraphy?

I took the same bus as Ping after the calligraphy class. We introduced ourselves to each other and started to chat. Ping told me that she came to Denmark six months previously (February 2018) with the family reunification visa as her husband was employed in a school in

Aarhus, Denmark. She was a doctor in China before she came to Denmark. Compared with the busy work as a doctor, she loved the peaceful life in Denmark. However, she also felt kind of bored as she had plenty of free time but no stable income. Ping felt embarrassed because she did not have an income source in Denmark, and therefore still received some financial help from her parents in the beginning. This was because she did not want her husband to be stressed as the only one earning money. The part-time job as calligraphy teacher was recommended by one of her Chinese friends in Aarhus who was an organizer of a Chinese Culture Club in Aarhus. Even though she was not a professional calligraphy teacher, she still accepted the offer as she thought it could be a good way to kill time and build a network, and also to earn some money.

Besides the part-time job as a calligraphy teacher, Ping also ran her own *daigou* business reselling Danish products to her relatives, friends, and old classmates in China. She communicated and received orders via social media, and then bought the products from local supermarkets in Denmark and packaged them. Her husband usually sent the packages from the post office after work. When the packages arrived in China, the delivery men would deliver the package to the customers' doors. Sometimes the customers needed to pay customs to get their packages. If they were "lucky" enough, they could get their packages without paying custom fees. Sometimes it was the case that the customers did not want the products anymore or the packages were broken. In these cases, Ping would ask the customers to post the packages to her parents' home. When other customers ordered the same products, her parents would resend the products to the next customer.

I invited Ping to be one of my informants after we became friends. She compared the life in China and the life in Denmark based on her own experiences. Ping had a really strong motivation to settle down in Denmark even though she had a comparatively decent job as a doctor in a public hospital in China before she came to Denmark. The main attractions to her were the clean environment, the casual lifestyle, the health-care system, the education system,

and the organic food in Denmark. Even though she felt embarrassed to tell her friends and relatives in China that she was unemployed in Denmark, she still thought the Danish lifestyle was worth the sacrifice of her previous job as a doctor job in China. She was happy with the decision to quit the job and come to Denmark with her husband. Ping planned to learn Danish and apply for a career educational programme, and hoped this would lead to a "real job" in Denmark afterwards. During the interview, I tried my best to focus the conversation on her *daigou* business. However, she did not have a big interest in talking about it as she said "it is a just a side-job to earn some pocket money". Her main interest focused on the success that her husband had achieved and their future plans. Her husband gained a PhD degree successfully in China and worked in Germany for a short time before moving to Denmark. He was smart enough to have learnt to speak German, English, and Danish fluently. In the future, they planned to have a child, buy a house, and enjoy life in Denmark.

Regarding the *daigou* business, Ping mentioned that the customers were mainly from her network, her husband's network, and her parents' network. She commented on the small business that:

> My family members and friends know that I do not have a job here in Denmark. Of course, they want to help me. It is embarrassing for me and also for my parents to give money directly to me to support me. As you know, I am already an adult and have gotten married. It is not appropriate to ask for money from my parents (*niang jia*). They hope to help me, to some extent, by extending the *daigou* network business. I take the *daigou* as a win-win business as I help them (relatives and friends) to get Danish products and they can support me financially. But the business is not stable work, and it cannot offer me a stable income, either. I still need to find a "real" job in the future.

Eighteen months later in May 2020, Ping invited my family to visit them at their home. She made delicious Chinese dishes for us. I noticed that there was some special flavor in one dish and I asked Ping what was in the dish. She told me that it was salmon fish oil. She had started

to work in a sushi restaurant recently and she brought the left-over salmon back to make some oil to add special flavor to dishes. Besides the job as a part-time teacher, *daigou* operator, and sushi restaurant assistant, Ping also searched for other work opportunities to earn money to support the family. She also learned Danish after work as she had planned. She was very proud of herself that she passed the Danish language test and became eligible to apply for an educational programme in Denmark. However, as an important part of the educational programme, Ping was required to finish an internship at a nursing home. She did not feel very happy with the arrangement of an internship organized by the college as she planned to have a child, and the news of COVID-19 had already reached Denmark, and as a result she thought there would be a high risk that she could be infected by a virus from taking care of old people. After talking with her husband, she decided to put her studies on hold.

Daughter, Wife, and Mother

For my research purposes, Li Ping's story represents the lifestyle of housewives whose husbands are employees in Denmark. They were doctors, teachers, public servants and so forth when they lived in China. However, after they quit their work and emigrated to another country as spouses/partners, they also dropped the sense of fulfilment and social status brought by the previous job as people would usually know them only as someone's wife or partner if they did not have a formal job before arriving, and if they came to Denmark on the family reunification visa. Unsatisfied with the subordinate status affiliated with the single identity of a housewife/partner, they devoted their time to searching for formal employment or establishing their own businesses.

Compared with other kinds of jobs, a significant difference for the *daigou* operators is that the instrumental relationships based on business and sentimental relationship based on kinships or acquaintance overlap. This section continues Li Ping's life story by focusing on the circle

of kinship-based relatedness which centers mostly on parent-child and husband-wife relationships, and their entanglement with the commercial relationships in the *daigou* business.

Because of the difficulties in transnational mobility, Chinese immigrant families face a common dilemma between fulfilling the moral obligation to take care their parents (filial piety) and raising descendants overseas. Ping is one of those who experienced this dilemma and she told me about her worries:

> I want to stay close to my parents, but I want my kids to grow up in Denmark. I have to make a choice. My parents think it is more important for the next generation to receive better education and healthcare. They have already experienced the hardship when they were young, and they do not want their children and grandchildren to experience any hardship. I feel I am being "spoiled" by my parents sometimes as they still give me "pocket money" now as they usually did when I was in school. If they were here, they could help me with practical things, such as taking care of grandchildren, as other Chinese grandparents do. However, I do not know how I can take care of them when they are sick or getting old.

Money transfer between parents and children is very common in immigrant families to compensate for the absence of taking care of their parents or children. For example, for some big events for immigrant families, such as having children, getting married, and buying a house, the immediate family in China usually transfers money either to support the overseas family or to contribute to the celebrations. In the case of the *daigou* business, I suggest it offeres another way for transnational immigrant families to fulfill moral obligation based on kinship: Participation. When I interviewed the *daigou* operators, most of them told me that their parents had joined their business in different ways, ranging from promoting the business through their networks, to communicating with customers, and to storing and sending the packages to consumers. The grandparents in China usually felt happy that they could help their children in developing the business, as they know the business earnings can support their children and grandchildren. As Ping indicated in the interview, this "indirect help" from parents made her

feel better than direct monetary help as she is a grown-up (*cheng ren*) and married, which meant – to her mind – that she was supposed to be financially independent.

As a wife, Ping was very proud of her husband. Even though she felt it was a pity that she could not find formal employment, she thought that the family reunification and transnational mobility were "worth" the sacrifice of leaving her job in China. I met Ping four times in her first year in Denmark. When we met, she seemed very excited to update me on her situation and her plan to settle down in Denmark. She was confident that her marital relationship was very stable and that she could be in Denmark with a family reunification visa as long as her husband had a job. However, Ping did worry that her husband would lose his job before he got permanent residence rights in Denmark, since then her "Danish dream" would be shattered as they would have to move to another place if they did not have legal residence rights. Therefore, their goal was to spare no effort in getting permanent residence rights to settle down in Denmark.

Ping cared meticulously for her husband, ranging from taking care of three meals every day to buying groceries. Besides the housework, she also looked for part-time jobs to support the family financially. Ping spared no effort in being a "good" wife, taking care of the family and searching for career opportunities. But she still felt somewhat embarrassed as the main household income was from her husband's salary. She also expressed that every time she heard of other Chinese housewives getting job offers, she felt a little bit jealous and wished she could get one as well. However, the practical obstacles, such as the language barrier, lack of work experience, and cultural differences frustrated Ping, and the long-term livelihood strategy (Rytter 2013) of gaining formal employment turned out to be a failure until the research is finished in 2022. .

Maybe Ping's *daigou* business cannot count as a success either in terms of business scale or profits. She did not trade regularly and earned only small amounts of "pocket money" as she

said. However, the business was successful in allowing Ping to accumulate reasonable knowledges of Danish products, especially children's products. As she and her husband also planned to have children, Ping was very devoted to the *daigou* business which offered not only extra household income but also expertise in selecting the right products for their babies in future.

In 2022, Ping gave birth in Aarhus to a girl. She and her family were very happy with the new family member's arrival, particularly as Ping and her husband had been married for eight years and had been trying to have a child for a long time. They were both single-children due to the family planning policies[5] in China during the 1980s. It had been more stressful for them to have a child than for peers who have siblings they felt, as it is a kind of filial obligation (*xiao*) in Chinese families (Chan and Tan 2004; Stafford 2000; Du 2022) to have descendants. Like other mothers, Ping posted her daughter's photos and shared her happiness of being a mom in the friend circle on WeChat.

After Ping had a daughter, she quit all of her part-time jobs except for the *daigou* business as she wanted to pay more attention to taking care of her baby. Unlike the other part-time jobs, there was more flexibility in the *daigou* network business. And since she had become a mother, she found that her product recommendations for children was becoming more convincing as she gained more experience of taking care of small children. Therefore, she still ran the network business after giving birth, and her husband helped more than before in purchasing products, packaging, delivering, etc. However, Ping planned to exclusively breastfeed her daughter for as long as possible and not to use infant formula if she could generate enough milk. Having worked as a doctor previously, Ping knew very well that breastmilk was the best for babies.

The "friend circle" of Ping's WeChat account was her main marketing channel for updating product information as well as the main platform for sharing the status of her private life. For example, she wrote information such as "Arla 3 (Danish infant formula) is being sold out in

Bilka and Føtex (two Danish supermarket chains)" with a photo of her putting formula cans in the trunk of a car. When she was pregnant, she updated her information: "to ensure the authenticity of products, I still buy the products myself even though I am pregnant". After she had a child, she wrote "thanks for all the care and support from friends, family members, and customers. I will provide more professional service in the future after a break as I became a mom myself". For the *daigou* operators, there were no clear boundaries between the commercial and private life – at least in the friend circle on social media.

However, Li Ping's story shows that there are two distinctive circles of relatedness revolving around her identities as a part-time worker and a *daigou* operator, as well as a daughter, a wife, and a mother. First, in the circle of relatedness based on immediate kin (mostly between parents and children), money-transfers and gift-giving are the most common methods to express affection in immigrant families due to the geographical obstacles. I suggest that the case of *daigou* business show us another mode to express kinship: participation. For the immigrant families, they are facing the dilemma of taking care of the grandparent generation within China and raising offspring outside of China. As they have decided to settle down in another country, this means that they have chosen to prioritize their own nuclear family development for reasons of education, healthcare, the growing-up environment, etc. However, the grandparents in China also hope to participate in the practices of raising the next offspring. Their help in the informal business of *daigou* can be regarded as a practical way for grandparents to contribute to raising overseas families, besides direct money transfers and greetings via social media, which compensates for the absence of taking care of the grandchildren in their daily life.

Second, in the circle of relatedness based on remote kinship and acquaintance (mostly between neighbors, friends, and distant relatives), immigrant families maintain their relationships also through monetary support and greetings on occasions, such as festivals,

wedding, birthdays, etc. In the case of *daigou* of infant formula, the overseas Chinese gain an income based on the relationships in this circle and also fulfil the moral obligation to source trustworthy infant formula to the offspring of their friends, distant relatives and acquaintances. In distinctive from the circle based on immediate kinship, instrumental value constitutes an important part in the circle of acquaintance. For instance, in Li Ping's story, even though she endorses and resells Danish infant formula in her friend circle, she still insists on breastfeeding her daughter. She utilized the horizontal transnational relationship to establish the business in order to financially support her unclear overseas family, raising the offspring (reproducing the vertical family relationship). There are both differences and similarities between these two circles of relationships which are manifested in the *daigou* business. Moral obligations emerge in both groups of relationships but with different contents: participatory caring in family reproduction, and trust-based transactions within the friend circle.

Transformation of Moralities alongside the Development of daigou Business

The previous section analyzed the network of an immigrant family in Denmark including vertical family relationships and transnational horizontal relationships. These two circles of relationships constitute the main social axes of the *daigou* business. This section analyzes how relationships change alongside the development of the network business to evaluate the entanglement between sentimental and instrumental relationships involved in the business. For purposes of analysis, I divide the development of business into three phases: start-up, development, and maturity. One thing that needs mentioning is that the process is not linear but a general development trend. The "start-up" phase refers to a period when *daigou* operators are trying to establish connections with a group of customers; in the stage of development, they already have their first group of regular customers (usually less than 50 people), and they usually plan to develop this casual work into a full-time job and register a company in the future; the maturity phase refers to a time when the *daigou* companies offer professional

reselling services to different kinds of customers, ranging from individuals to institutions. There is obviously more entanglement of personal and impersonal relationships in the start-up phase and the development phase than in the maturity phase of *daigou* business. As Simmel argues, the characteristics of the *mature* business are impersonality and anonymity (Simmel 1978). The following analysis, therefore, focuses on the change of relationships in the start-up stage and the development phase of *daigou* business.

Motivations to Become Daigou

Many people might think that profit would be the first motivation for immigrants to do *daigou* business. However, surprisingly, during fieldwork, few *daigou* spoke of making-money as their original motivation. For most individual *daigou* operators, "relational" profits were more important than economic profits, especially in the initial phase of the business. Regarding the motivations to become *daigou*, I use two examples from the ethnography.

First, taking myself as an example, just one and half months after I started my life in Denmark in 2016, some friends and acquaintances asked me to buy Danish baby formula for their babies. These included my personal friends, old classmates, distant relatives and also friends of family members. I didn't really want to do *daigou* because I needed to get used to my new life in Denmark and I thought it would be too time-consuming. But I felt I could not say "no" to them. One of them was my best friend and I spent almost every day with her when we were at university. Another one was my mother's friend who asked me to buy infant formula for her grandson. I told my mother that I was reluctant to do the business. She was not happy with my refusal and asked me, "Why don't you just help your Aunt Liu? Don't you remember she held you in her arms when you were a little baby? And she also gave you *hongbao* (gift money) when you left for Denmark." I know it would be embarrassing for my mother to tell her friend that I was unwilling to help them to buy infant formula, as she said, Aunt Liu had given me gifts before. As a principle of reciprocity, I needed to return the favor.

Some of my informants had similar experiences. In the beginning of the *daigou* business, few of them had planned to run the business as a channel to earn an income and settle down in Denmark. Most of them indicated that they did the business to help their friends or family members to get trustworthy products. The economic profit was not significant when there were fewer than fifty customers, and the work was reasonable in terms of the amount of time and energy spent. According to one informant: "it was a loss-leader business (*pei ben zhuan yao he*) at the beginning", meaning that the *daigou* operators might sacrifice profits to fulfil the moral obligation to help friends and family members. Even though the small business might not bring significant financial profit, it could yield other benefits. For instance, Dong Fang, a housewife who ran *daigou* as a part-time job for a group of relatives and friends to gain some income for the family, told me that:

> I never thought to run the business for money. The majority of my "clients" are my distant relatives, previous colleagues, and some friends. I have a customer who is my father's doctor. When my father was sick and sent to the hospital, he was in charge of taking care of my father. These days the government is serious about the corruption in all areas of work. It is hard to give *hongbao* (red pocket) to doctors. They (doctors) are also reluctant to receive money directly. He knew from my family that I am living in Denmark and he just had a kid. He asked me to *daigou* baby formula for his baby, which was a perfect opportunity to show our gratitude to him, I think. Then maybe he will pay more attention to my father if he has to see the doctor again.

As the above exemplifies, a characteristic of *daigou* business compared with other formal businesses is that this network business is closely connected to *guanxi* (social relationships), and the product (infant formula in this case) takes on both gift and commodity values. Normally, gift exchange and commodity exchange are two different types of exchanges with radically opposed principles. Gregory argues that gift exchange establishes a relation between the transactors, while commodity exchange establishes a relation between the objects transacted (Gregory 1982, 2009). As the case of *daigou* involves both types of exchanges, there are also

two types of relations established. Especially at the beginning of the business, the *daigou* operators' desires are mainly the personal relationship that the exchange of gifts (products) creates or maintains, and not the profits brought in by the transaction.

Regarding the principle of gift-exchange and its influence on relationships, Marcel Mauss, in his foundational research on gift economy, argued that gift-giving places the debtor in a subordinated position, and "the person who cannot return a loan…loses his rank and even his status of a free man" (Mauss 1980, 37). In the specific case of Chinese society, the fascinating work of Mei-Hui Yang and Yunxiang Yan has carefully analyzed the function, the cultivation, and the rule of *guanxi* in Chinese communities. Yang suggests that the morality which is found among ordinary people in China contributes to creating a more rather than a less ethical society even though it may undermine state interests, for example, the connection between arts of *guanxi* and pervasive corruption (Stafford 2006; Yang 1994). On the private level, the moral relationships which are portrayed as above economic interests, in fact, still follow the rules of reciprocity where the "currency" is not visible money but sentiment (*renqing*). In Yan's research on rural China, he discussed the "obligatory gift-giving and the cultivation of *guanxi*" among the villagers living in the same community. Even though there are no written or oral principles in the communities, the villagers still feel social pressure to attend their neighbours' and friends' important ceremonies and offer gifts (Yan 1996, 123-133). Similarly, if we understand the principles governing the reselling of infant formula as gifts, we may understand the social pressure and moral obligation of doing this network business.

Besides the utilitarian use of sentiment, another characteristic of this business is the "extensibility". Apart from the direct moral obligations from sentimental relationships between friends and acquaintances, an obligation may be extended to *indirect* relationships. For example, some informants (and myself) felt the "pressure" of doing *daigou* for their parents' friends as they expected a refusal would negatively influence their parents' relationships in

their friend circles. The extension of the network and of relational obligations stretches like an invisible net that connects the people in the same cultural context.

The third feature of morality in Chinese society reflected in the *daigou* case is its ambiguity, which is typically embodied in the blurred boundaries between ethics and legality. Moral judgement is more often than not based on human sentiment, particularly in a sentiment-based society like China. From 1 January 2019, the Chinese government implemented the E-Commerce Law focusing on regulating the transnational *daigou* business. Without a legal license to operate a business in other countries, *daigou* is regarded as illegal and the operators may be fined.[6] However, in my fieldwork among *daigou* operators, none of my informants thought the business was immoral even though some of them had heard about the new law and some informants were cautious about the legality of their business. When asked about the intention of implementing the E-commerce Law, my informants indicated that they thought the main purpose of the law was to protect the domestic Chinese market, and to gain the tax for the state rather than to protect consumers' rights. On the contrary, my informants thought the *daigou* business followed the moral rules of fulfilling relational obligations and helping Chinese consumers to source safe products. In this sense, the network business was "regulated" by the private morals of kinship, friendship, or acquaintance rather than by state regulations.

The Embarrassment of Making Money from Friends

As mentioned previously, the majority of *daigou* operators were unemployed in Denmark or they did *daigou* business as a part-time job to earn some *pocket money.* Without any other economic resources in a foreign country, the small business of reselling local products to China seemed a reasonably "handy" way to gain some income. As many informants mentioned during interviews, "the business is not as profitable as others think, but it at least earns some money to support the family". However, when the business developed to the size that the owner has to register a company licence and pay tax to the Danish government, the operators started to

think more seriously about making money. “You need to care about the profit when you have your own company as you are self-employed”, one *daigou* informant indicated in an interview. I interpret this remark as being related to the “development” or “maturity” stages, since in the pre-company (start-up) phase of *daigou* business, it is not suitable to prioritize profits as the personal relationships and relational obligations dominate in this period; and alongside the development of the business, commercial values gradually overtake the relational values involved, and the driving force of doing the business shifts from maintaining relationships to earning economic profits.

When talking about the beginning of *daigou*, many of my informants showed a slight embarrassment about the “job”. Some of them were reluctant to admit that they were doing business with friends. Yoyo is a Chinese mother of two children and her husband worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the university. As her husband was the only provider for the family, Yoyo planned to run *daigou* business to gain some extra income for the family. However, she told me that it was embarrassing to ask for money from friends: “It is easier that they (Yoyo’s customers) pay me immediately after they order the products. Otherwise, it is hard to ask for payment between friends. I remember the first time I asked friends for money, and I felt the trade was destroying our relationship.” Yoyo’s dilemma was not an isolated incident. All my informants indicated that they encountered different types of embarrassment when running the business. I summarize this embarrassment as an example of the incompatibility between the morality involved in personal relationships and the self-interest centered in commercial relationships.

Previously, I mentioned the contradiction between the morality and legality involved of this business. Few *daigou* operators thought the network business was immoral even if it was, to some extent, against the law. However, most of them thought it would be morally problematic if their sentiment-based friends refused to pay for the reselling service and vice

versa: if they sold fake Danish products to their customers. Wang Xin, a *daigou* operator in Aarhus, commented on the moral issues involved in the business, according to her experience:

> Everyone (in my friend circle) knows that my husband is the main breadwinner in my family in Denmark and I do *daigou* to support the family financially. It is understandable if only a few of my very good friends and family members asked me to buy some products without paying a service fee before I established a company. If they (customers) still take my work as a "friendly favor" and refuse to pay the service, I do not think they are "really friends", as friends always care about each other's situation and want to offer help.

I asked Xin how she coped with the complex relationship between friends and transactors in the business. She answered "doing business can test whether the friendship is real or not. If they treat you as a friend, they will care about your effort and will not bargain with you, as they know how friends should treat each other. If they do not treat you as a friend, and make trouble in every transaction, I do not think this is real friendship." Xin also told me that she lost several so-called friends because of unhappy experiences doing this business.

Besides the embarrassment of charging friends for the service, "how much to charge for the product" is also a headache to *daigou* operators. Usually, the price of product is influenced by factors, such as cost of production, demand of product, price of competing firms, purchasing power of customers, government regulation, marketing, etc. In the case of *daigou*, the price of products is also influenced by the social relationships between the seller and the buyer. For example, many *daigou* operators indicated that they would charge different prices to different clients. For close family members and best friends, they would charge much less than what they charge other customers. However, this could be a problem if the customers know each other and they find out that they paid different prices for the same product. Gong Qin is one of those *daigou* operators who experienced the embarrassment of one of her customers asking her

why she sold the same infant formula product at a higher price to her than to another customer who was Qin's friend. Qin told me about her dilemma:

> Even the same products in different supermarkets could have different prices. There are a lot of reasons for the price difference. But it is hard to explain to customers as they just think you charge them higher prices. It happened indeed that I charged different clients different prices in the beginning (of doing *daigou*), as I wanted to earn more money on the one hand, but I also wanted to offer kindness to my friends (with low service fees). However, I found out if I charged all the customers the same low price, I could not earn money. I then started to raise the price for new customers. As the business is built on a network, it often happened that the customers knew each other. It became very complicated to explain the price difference to those who cared about it. Now, I just set the same price for all my customers, even for my cousins. And I gave some gifts to close friends or regular customers as compensation for the price increase.

In *daigou* business, there is a consensus among consumers that it is immoral to prioritize profits in business between friends. However, resellers are also motivated to earn as much as possible with the prerequisite that it does not negatively influence their relationships. As I mentioned previously, some big *daigou* companies may sell products at a reasonable low price as they can get discounts from the suppliers when buying in bulk, which seems to be a difficult privilege to get for individual *daigou* operators who do not have such a big consumer base. If the consumers find that the price of products bought from relatives or friends is higher than that of other online businesses, they will doubt whether their relatives or friends follow the relational moral principles of placing the relationship above economic profits. The moral complexity of such relationships makes it difficult for *daigou* operators to set a price which can both satisfy the consumers' expectations and allow the resellers to make reasonable profits.

Getting Rid of "Guanxi Hu"

The entanglement of friendly favor and commercial transactions follows all the development phases of the network business. In the start-up phase, expressions of kindness dominate the

business and economic profits are not a priority; alongside business development, the conflict between economic relationships and sentimental relationships becomes obvious. The awkwardness is rooted in the fact that money and monetary transaction signifies a kind of "calculating" economic relationship which is opposed to altruism or generosity in sentimental relationships (J. Parry and Bloch 2000). When the reselling network, an informal business, has developed into a formal business with a reasonable number of customers and the majority of the customers are strangers, *daigou* operators begin to think about the future of their business, this is especially the case for those who start the business as an important channel for settling down in Denmark.

In 2020, I paid for legal advice about the immigrant channel to Denmark for Chinese people. The lawyer analyzed the usual methods for immigration – working and marriage. She mentioned that there was also a "popular" method especially among Chinese immigrants in recent years: "Self-employed" work. What the lawyer meant was that many Chinese immigrants registered companies (mainly *daigou* companies) and were then self-employed in order to settle down in Denmark. [7] Compared with previous generations, the new generation of Chinese immigrants has more channels open for settling legally in other countries than before when they often entered the catering industry. This is despite the fact that they may not have a Danish education or be able to speak the local language. *Daigou* business seems like the best business to embark upon as it only takes up some time and energy to purchase products from a local supermarket in Denmark and post or deliver them back to China by suitcase when travelling to China. "As long as you plan to run it as a career, you can make it", one young Chinese woman told me when she had just registered the company license in Denmark.

In contrast to those *daigou* operators who start the business as just a way to earn some pocket money, Chinese people who do it as a career and think about developing the business into a legal way to settle down in Denmark will spare no effort in running the business. Except

for the time spent with family members, they appeared to spend all of their free time purchasing products, promoting the business, delivering the goods, etc. As one full-time *daigou* operator said, "It seems very easy to make money by *daigou*. Actually, it is a 24-hour job. You always have to be online." Facing both the pressure of competing with other *daigou* operators in Denmark and gaining more consumers in China, these *daigou* shoppers have to think about different promotional methods to stand out in the industry and develop the business into a formal one which could help them to obtain legal residency permits in Denmark.

Xiangxiang, had six years of *daigou* experience and had already registered a transnational *daigou* company when I interviewed her. She was planning to apply for the Danish permanent residence permit as a self-employed person. She commented on the social relationships intertwined in the business:

> It depends on your purpose for running the business. If you just want to help friends, you should not complain that the income does not match the effort and time you put in the business. However, if you want to run the business like a real one, listen to me, you better give up those "*guanxi hu*" (clients based on personal relationships). You won't earn a lot of money from them. And they will give you a lot of additional work. For example, it is usual that you give some special offers to your close friends, such as lower prices, gifts, etc. But if other consumers know that you give different offers to different clients depending on how close the relationship is, they may stop ordering products from you and it will gain you a bad reputation. You will lose both the profits and the *renqing* (personal relationships). Those *guanxi hu* are the hardest to deal with as they normally have more requirements than the other customers (customers as strangers), and you cannot refuse them as they are either your friends or your friends' friends. It is much easier to do business with normal customers. They pay you money, you give them products.

After I asked her about the different feeling of doing *daigou* for strangers (unacquainted customers) and for *guanxi hu* (friends or relatives), she continued by stating that:

> I appreciate the relationship built on just business, not on acquaintance. It is much easier to do business with strangers. You set a price for your products. If they accept it, they buy it. If they don't, then they will find another *daigou*. Well, when you do business with *shuren* (people you know) and they are not satisfied with the price, they will either bargain with you or criticise you behind your back, saying that you do not care about *renqing* (personal relationships). Strangers, on the other hand, do not know you beforehand. You offer them trustworthy Danish products. They always appreciate your help. So, I enjoy doing business with strangers more.

Even though "consumers" within the network based on kinship, friendship, or acquaintance may be the main clients at the very beginning of a *daigou* business, the social relationship could become a barrier when the operator plans to develop a formal business. Conversely, the business can help establish a kind of sympathetic personal relationship that differs from the moral relationship based on intimacy. In some ways, the business could also influence intimate relationships negatively as there are more sentiments involved. Xiangxiang's interpretation reminds us of the debate about the influence of the market on intimate relationships between 18-century Scottish enlightenment thinkers and the anticapitalistic Left. Adam Smith and other Scottish enlightenment thinkers proposed that commercial society is necessary for the spread of personal relations based on sympathy and sentiments (Smith 1976). However, Marxist thinkers argue that commodification renders personal relations alienated and morally corrupt (Silver 1990). I interpret Xiangxiang's comments as suggesting that the sympathy and sentiments of personal relations could somehow promote the establishment of business; however, they can also inhibit the development of business. The point here is that since sympathy and sentiments are often characterized by altruism and commercial relationships are characterized by self-interest, the two types of *guanxi* show both complementarity and incongruity. Therefore, it is not hard to understand why personal relationships may promote the business in the beginning, while they may later on work in opposition to the goals of the business.

In the initial phase of a *daigou* business, few operators start one just for money. Their motivation and purposes are to help their friends, relatives, or previous colleagues to get safe Danish products. Connected by moral ties, people tend to use *daigou* fulfil their relational obligations. Even though the economic activities may not be recommended by law and regulations, *daigou* operators are still running the risk to run their business. What needs to be mentioned is that this does not mean that the operators run the business only because of their relational obligations. As they also need to earn an income, self-interest is also a motivation.

Gradually, these operators have gained more customers via their network in China, which means they have to make more of an effort and allocate more time to the business. They begin to calculate the costs involved and the income earned. In this phase, one significant change is that these *daigou* shoppers have started to consider that having close relations with the customers (e.g., related to intimacy, family, and acquaintances) is problematic. Unlike the initial phase, there is more work when the business becomes bigger due to a larger customer base. In other words, these shoppers have to consider the business as a job and think about whether they still want to do the business as a "friendly favor" for their friends or develop it into a profitable business which could also provide a method to help them to settle down in Denmark. Facing the dilemma of earning money as well as maintaining intimate relationships, some *daigou* operators gave up their small business and tried to find a formal job in Denmark, while others decided to register for a company license and continue the business as a formal company. When they decided to continue the business and develop it on a bigger scale, some of them also announced to their customers that the *daigou* business had been established as a formal company. This announcement was sent to both *guanxi kehu* and new clients: "I have to let *guanxi kehu* know that payment in arrears, bargaining, paying cash on delivery, etc., needed to stop", one owner of a *daigou* company told me in relation to her struggles in the development of the business. More conflicts between acquaintances tend to happen in this phase.

An interesting thing that surfaced in my fieldwork is that the topics raised by *daigou* company owners and by individual *daigou* shoppers were different. With *daigou* shoppers, the interview revolved around their feelings about doing business with friends, daily work, future plans, etc. However, the company owners, or businessmen, always led the interview to the discussion about the quality of the Danish product, Chinese consumer psychology, the vision of e-commerce, etc. Besides, I could feel that these *daigou* company owners did not want me to call them *daigou* and when they talked about their business, they often referred to the company as "the Chinese enterprise". When I did the interview, I found it is hard to discuss about personal relationships, sentiment-based society, and the dilemma between money and friendship with those company owners as a majority of their clients are not *guanxi kehu* but Chinese consumers as strangers. One of their orders could be millions of dollars, which is a very different story from transporting a filled suitcase or sending a package as part of the *daigou* business run by an individual shopper. Even though these large companies start out as tiny businesses similar to the small-scale shoppers, the owners' attitudes towards *daigou* and their self-identity were clearly different. It will not help us to understand the transformational progress if we use a fixed theory to examine both of their situations. It seems to me, in the enterprise phase of *daigou* business, market rules overtake moral rules in prominence, which means that the influence of intimacy-based relationships diminishes. However, the transformation cultivates another form of relationship which is different from the moral relationships of kinship, friendship, or other forms of intimacy, but which also shares certain similarities.

Commodities and Gifts, Money and Morality

I have argued that there are two cohorts of relationships intertwined in the *daigou* business among Chinese immigrant families in Denmark. First, *daigou* business combines and differentiates the cohort of the vertical transnational family relationship and the horizontal

transnational relationship, and *daigou* operators' family members based on immediate kinships often help with developing the business through extending horizontal relationships to participate in the reproduction of Chinese immigrant families. This is to say, they add their network to the reach of the individual *daigou* operators. On the one hand, in terms of *family reproduction*, even though the grandparents in China cannot provide direct childcare and other reproductive work due to the difficulty in mobility, they compensate for the absence of care by direct or indirect financial support. Parents usually raise children in Denmark through direct unpaid reproductive work, such as childcare, housework, feeding, and cooking, but also turn this unpaid work into paid work – buying children's food for both their own children and for reselling to China through a transnational network. On the other hand, even though there are similarities in expressing and maintaining the two circles of relationships, for example, through gift-exchange and monetary support, we can distinguish the different moral principles that *daigou* operators follow in the business.

Second, there is another cohort of relationships entangled in the network business: the commercial relationship based on the characteristics of commodity-exchange and the sentimental relationship based on gift-exchange. Sociological theory prevailingly holds the idea that the exclusion of instrumental orientations from expressive orientations. For example, preeminent social theorists, such as Simmel and Marx, have argued that the characteristics of impersonality and anonymity of commercial exchange influences wider social relationships (Simmel 1978; Roberts and Stephenson 1973). Studies of social relationships in China have depicted the difference between the inside and the outside social world in rural social relations. Fei Xiaotong distinguished the "private" *(si)* sphere from the "public" *(gong)* sphere, and intra-village relations from market relations reaching beyond the village (Fei, Hamilton, and Zheng 1992). Following Fei, Yunxiang Yan analyzed the difference between expressive and instrumental gift-giving activities (Yan 1996). Unlike the widespread insights on the

dichotomy between norm-based exchange and instrumental exchanges, *guanxi* researchers recently argued for a fluid boundary between expressive and instrumental exchanges (Wilson 2002), as the norm-base exchanges function as long-term investments in social capital that may produce delayed material benefits. On this point, the case of relationships involved in *daigou* is in line with the characteristic of "fluidity".

From the transformation process of *daigou* businesses, we see the incompatibility between intimate relationships and market rationality. However, beneath this antagonism, we can still observe the congruity between the two radical opposites, as it is equally true that interactions based on commercial exchange may generate another type of sympathetic relationship that is different from traditional moral relations. On this point, the influence of market economy and commercial exchange on private morality also shows the characteristic of "fluidity".

5. Moving between "Female Entrepreneurs" and "Housewives"

A Chinese Woman's Danish Dream

> Now I am in one of the happiest countries in the world, Denmark. I quit my stable job as a public servant in China and came to Denmark the first time with my ex-husband in August 2014. A half year later we went to Holland and then we came back to Denmark. My daughter Emma was born in April 2017 and my ex-husband abandoned us and moved out at the end of 2018. I became a single mother after the divorce and started to take care of my daughter by myself. I was very frustrated and nervous around that time. I needed to take care of everything, such as driving, applying for a visa, house moving, sending my daughter to kindergarten…
>
> You do not know how hard it is for a Chinese single mom to raise a family in Denmark. My English was not very good, and neither was my Danish. I did not understand the name of the shops. I felt like an "idiot" when I asked local Danish people questions as I could not express myself clearly and the local people did not understand me, either…
>
> You have to rely on yourself when there is no one to rely on *(kao ziji*). I started to do everything by myself. I could travel with my two-year-old daughter to another city. I could buy a bed for my daughter from IKEA and carry it back home and install it by myself…
>
> I know it is very hard but I will persist at living in Denmark. I will do the best for my daughter. Never give up! Fight!
>
> (WeChat Channel video post, October 22, 2020; author's transcription)

I found Xiaoyu's video channel by coincidence when I searched for information about *daigou* operators in Denmark in December 2020. I followed her on WeChat Channel[1] and checked her daily updates. In her profile, she introduced herself as "a Chinese single mom in Denmark born after 1980, sharing knowledge about Danish culture and experience in childrearing". Xiaoyu's video content can be divided into two categories. First, she shares her

private life in Denmark, including travel videos with her daughter, her life with her new Danish boyfriend, and her interpretation of life in Denmark; second, she posts videos about different types of products she is selling, ranging from skincare products to infant formula. Another video shows her writing the customer's name at the bottom of the Arla infant formula can and packaging the formula into boxes to be ready to send to China. Xiaoyu wrote: "I have been reselling *Arla Baby and Me* infant formula for eight years. I believe the Danish infant formula is the best, not one of the best formulas." Even though she does not have a lot of followers on her WeChat Channel, Xiaoyu must have a reasonable number of customers as she established a *daigou* company and she gains enough incomes from her *daigou* business to live in Denmark, as she explained in another video. She also explained the reasons why she wanted to settle down in Denmark after she got divorced from her ex-husband:

> I felt happy with the divorce, as there is no one to fight with me every day, and I save more money as I supported my ex-husband during his study and when he was unemployed before we divorced. Therefore, after we divorced, I decided to settle down with my daughter in Denmark and my ex-husband went back to China. I am economically independent and I have my career as a *daigou.* If I go back to China, I need to start everything from scratch…The most important reason that I do not want to go back to China is because of my daughter. I hope she can grow up in Denmark as Danish primary education is very advanced in the world. Nurses come to every household with newborn babies to teach new parents how to take care of small children and daycare centers and kindergartens offer very professional care and education for small children. I devote myself to communicating insights on Danish advanced primary education to Chinese parents. I think Denmark is the best place to raise children with safe food, advanced education, and the value of equality. So, it does not matter how hard it is, I will try my best to raise my daughter in Denmark. It is my dream…
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> (WeChat Channel video post, August 2021; author's transcription)

When I commenced my life in Denmark in 2016, I soon noticed the prevalence of advertisements for Danish products in their Moments (Friends' Circles *pengyou quan*)[2] on WeChat. Before the popularity of using short videos as marketing platform for e-commerce, such as *Tik Tok* and *Kuaishou,*[3] WeChat was the main platform for *daigou* operators to post product information. Normally, the DIY advertisements done by *daigou* operators were similar: pictures of products and of their work practice with text to introduce the products. Unlike other *daigou* resellers who concentrate on posting product information, Xiaoyu's video impressed me as she focused on sharing her life in Denmark rather than just advertising the products. Xiaoyu established the *daigou* business as her career in Denmark as she said in her video. The Business is her main channel to gain income, and also a method to gain a residence permit. In another video, she is planning on buying a house in Denmark and recording the process of how to choose a house.

Xiaoyu's Danish dream illustrates and highlights the dilemmas and strategies for women immigrants: How do they settle down in another country and raise families while facing practical problems, such as language barriers, lack of a local network, no local work experience, and lack of familiarity with the local culture? The new digital economy represented by *daigou* businesses empowers female immigrants who are subordinated to their male partners to establish enterprises. Feminization of labour is the main feature of the *daigou* shopping network – this business is dominated by women – but this work is feminized in distinctive ways compared to other female-dominated work, such as waitresses, nurses, and shop-assistants. The significant difference is that there are no clear boundaries between the workplace and home, between unpaid domestic labor and paid productive labor. The majority of *daigou* operators shoulder both the burden of reproduction and production for a family without clear boundaries between the two types of labor.

This chapter extends the exploration of *daigou* operators' social relationships in Chapter 4 by focusing more sharply on the gender dimension. I analyze the feminization of *daigou* business with reference to (post-) Bourdieusian capital theories and asks the question: How does *care* – the central labor in family reproduction – develop into a kind of feminine capital and that can be converted into economic capital? Combining capital theories with a feminist political economy perspective, my analysis on gendered labor asks the further question: How has the success of the *daigou* business impacted the evolving gender politics and public sphere for Chinese women in Denmark?

The emergence of *daigou* business has brought to our attention that Chinese women immigrants are important contributors to the global economy as active consumers and producers of e-commerce products and services. The studies of Chinese overseas, however, have paid little attention to the gender dimension of immigration issues before 2000. Only in the new global economy did feminist-inspired scholars begin to address gender issues in transnational immigration (Lan 2006; F. Martin 2022). Inspired by previous feminist research, this research examines the gendered engagement with e-commerce productive activities at the individual level for self-empowerment, transnational mobility, and personal gratification. Existing studies of e-commerce and gender politics in China have questioned the empowerment of technology in facilitating women's participation in production on the feminist political dimension, and have criticised the digital capitalist exploitation of women's cheap, flexible, and docile labor (Yu and Cui 2019; Liao 2016). However, what is particularly interesting to me is how to understand women's labor involved in the booming e-commerce in China nowadays.

In this chapter, I focus on the gendered experience of running a *daigou* business at the individual level, analyzing women's productive and reproductive labor. Doing so, I hope to provide an alternative way of thinking about capital and gender beyond the traditional binary

framework which assumes fixed boundaries between private and public spheres. My specific case on resellers of infant formula extends the insights on gender following Bourdieu's formulation of capitals – economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. With blurred boundaries between domestic and productive labor, my research on the gendered business of *daigou* develops the understanding of feminine capital in the field of family reproduction which is usually not incorporated in the capital subjects.

Capital and Gender

I chose the term *capital* as the keyword to explain the motivations for why these Chinese women immigrants established their *daigou* business. Derived from Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) framework of capital formation, feminist theorists have expanded the capital analytical field to the dimension of gender (Adkins and Skeggs 2006). However, there is no consensus among Bourdieusian feminist scholars on the categorization of gender in Bourdieu's capital framework. For example, Lovell proposes "femininity as cultural capital" (Lovell 2000) while Brenda O'Neill and Elisabeth Gidengil "examine the theories of social capital through a gendered lens" (O'Neill and Gidengil 2013). According to Pierre Bourdieu, *cultural capital* "can exist in three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state" while *social capital* "is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986). The concept of *field*, for Bourdieu, explains regularities in individual action by recourse to position vis-à-vis others. Social actors construct different social fields where their positions are located. The power and class relations in different fields are related to the capital that individuals occupy, which determines their positions (Bourdieu 1969, 1993; Martin 2003). The different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question (Bourdieu 1986,

24). Gender is related to both types of capitals, but Bourdieu did not consider gender to be a form of capital. For Bourdieu, capital was originally gender neutral and just shaped by gender in the "reconversion process" (McCall 1992; Huppatz 2009).

Even though there is controversy regarding the categorization of gender in the capital framework, feminist and Bourdiesian scholars recognize the value of gender in a capital form and have therefore developed a series of capital terms to cover this (Adkins and Skeggs 2006; Boutang 2011; Huppatz 2009; Michael 2004; Urry 2007). For example, Beverley Skeggs and other Bourdieusian feminist scholars apply Bourdieu's capital theories to establish a theoretical analytic framework to exploring how gendered dispositions may act as capital (Adkins and Skeggs 2006). Similarly, Diane Reay (Reay 2004) explores the possibility of emotions becoming a form of capital that is "all about investments in others rather than the self". And this *emotional capital* is argued to be both gendered and classed, which has to do with the emotional investment of women in the working class and the middle class. Huppatz draws on another gendered capital form – *feminine capital* – and recognizes women as capital-wielding subjects through in her research case on paid care workers (Huppatz 2009). Recently, Lin Zhang has proposed a kind of *prosumer capital* in her research case on the gendered service industry of luxury product reselling (Zhang 2017), and, lastly, Fran Martin has argued for a specific *feminine network capital* among Chinese women immigrants in Australia (Martin 2022).

Following the *generalization* of thinking in terms of capital, there may be thousands of capital terms depending on the properties. However, I think the main purpose of research on capital should not be to create an endless amount of capital terms, but to understand the contemporary practices and relationships in different fields in light of capital theory. Based on my research case of a network business of infant formula, I do not intend to develop another

concept of *care capital*, but I do think that capital theory is particularly useful in analyzing the labor practices of Chinese immigrant women and the gender practices involved in the business.

We can benefit from using three specific points from Bourdieu's capital theory to examine the practices in the reselling business of infant formula. First, Bourdieu emphasizes that "capital is accumulated labor which can be both a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures and a principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world" (Bourdieu 1986, 15); second, capital, in its objectified or embodied form, is the potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form; third, the value of capital is realized from the exchange in noneconomic or economic forms and different forms of capitals can be converted (Bourdieu 1986).

In light of the research on forms of capital inspired by Bourdieu and drawing on the specific research case of child feeding, I develop three main interrelated claims in this chapter to interpret the work of *daigou* operators. First, housewives, especially stay-at-home mothers, are the main protagonists in the *daigou* business of infant formula and they are more likely than others to establish this sort of enterprises, which is closely related to their domestic labor of taking care of small children. Second, the mercantile exchange in the *daigou* business is entangled with the exchange of sentiments *(renqing)*, in which this practice with two dimensions produces both economic profit and expanded forms of capital (e.g., social capital or *guanxi*); third, care which is the main labor in family reproduction, plays an import role in reselling infant formula, and it may be converted to economic capital to generate profits. As it the case with *emotional capital* (Reay 2004), care is gendered and classed, and it is specifically dominated by mothers who are the main provider of reproductive labor.

Particularly, the third claim is related to another research question in this chapter: What could be the public space for contemporary Chinese women (mothers) in the global capitalist system? This question is raised from the practical and also global reality that it is hard for

working mothers to juggle between career and family life. How can we make motherhood work, managing both careers and caregiving (Collins 2019)? In the case of *daigou,* Chinese immigrant mothers offer the answer through their own experiences of establishing businesses and raising families in another country with multiple challenges.

Modern Women and Public Space in China

Women's labor is the core inquiry of the *daigou* business on the gender dimension. I connect the analysis on women's labor with the discussion on women's role in the public realm which is in contrast to the private realm. I should note here that the conception of the public I am after here, is that of public recognition of the value of women's work, and not (necessarily) related to participation in civil society or the political life of the polity. In China, for a long time, the idea of women in the public sphere carried negative connotations, and was regarded as a challenge to the social order. This negative perception is closely connected to the construction of social roles according to sex, and the division of public and private space is along these lines. "The terms of "public" and "private" have served to reveal the subordinated position of women" is how Selda Tuncer puts it (Tuncer 2018, 12-13). In the context of the division between public and private realms of social space, women are associated with the private while men are identified with the public. Those women who challenged this traditional social order are recognized as modern women and their images have been diversified with the state development.

The transnational *daigou* business of infant formula illustrates the emergence of a women's public space in China today, which diverges both from the "sexy modern girl icon" in the early days of capitalism in the 1920s and 1930s and from the "iron women" in the socialist state in the 1950s and 1960s. More specifically, this chapter examines a new image of the modern Chinese woman, analyzing the characteristic of women's work with blurred boundaries between the private and the public and questions the public/private dichotomy in social space.

To understand the discontinuity of Chinese "modern women" in three different historical phases – the pre-socialist, the socialist, and the post-socialist, I compare and analyze the vicissitudes of lifestyle, female images, and social values in three different periods: the 1920s and 1930s, the 1950s and 1960s, and after the 2000s. The distinct difference between the three phases is shaped by different projects of social development with the turning points being developing state socialism after the 1950s and the market economy after the 1980s, respectively. Before socialism, the "Modern Girl" (*modeng nülang*) emerged in big Chinese cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century. The Modern Girl was sometimes portrayed as flashy, but always as having a fashionable appearance in city streets and cafes, in films, advertisements and in illustrated magazines (Weinbaum 2008). After the foundation of new China in 1949 and the establishment of state socialism, these modern girls were criticized as belonging to the "petty bourgeoisie" (*xiao zichanjieji*). Especially in the Maoist era, gender was not addressed in terms of sexuality, this discourse only returned in the 1980s (H. Wu 2010). After the economic reform, market logic was widely applied in all walks of life in China. Exploration and accumulation of capital is not seen as shameful anymore; quite the opposite – society welcomes capital. Everything is potential capital; and gender is not an exception.

The Early Modern Girl and Feminists in China

The answer to the lofty question "Who is a Modern Girl?" is changing and must be addressed historically alongside changing social conditions. The early modern girl in China emerged with the development of international commerce in places, such as Shanghai, where western products flowed inland and wealth flowed out of China (Fei, Redfield, and Chow 1980). With the development of capitalism in the western world, the huge potential consumer market attracted the attention of capitalist countries, and this consumer market was eager to accumulate wealth through export, accelerating the circulation of capital. Young Chinese girls who endorsed western consumer products (*yang huo*) were depicted as the early modern girl in

China from the 1920s to the 1930s, which also shared great similarities with their western counterparts. Tani Barlow's "Modern Girl" research group recognized that "a particular bundle of commodities including lipstick, nail polish, face creams and powders, skin lighteners, tanning lotions, shampoos, hair styling products, fancy soaps, perfumes, deodorants, toothpaste, cigarettes, high-heel shoes, cloche hats, and fashionable, sexy clothes were advertised globally in the first half of the twentieth century" (Weinbaum 2008). The modern girl commodities appeared not only in the capitalist core but also in communist and fascist states. The flow of trade and commodities enabled the early modern girl in China to connect materially and symbolically with different parts of the world. The early modern girl used consumption as a means to participate in the global modernization process.

In contrast to the Modern Girl, and alongside the national revolution process, another group of early feminists emerged, who disregarded the prescribed roles of dutiful daughter, wife, and mother in traditional Chinese society, but also differed from early modern girls who were looking for sexual and economic emancipation within the emerging global culture of commodities. What they pursued was the liberation of all the Chinese females against the traditional etiquettes of a feudal society. For example, Autumn Gem (1875-1907) was one early Chinese feminist, who defied tradition and become the leader of a revolutionary army. The emerging feminists grew up with mass social movements, such as the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and 1920s, and their life was closely bonded with the fate of the nation. The majority of the early feminists in China were students who accepted modern education and western knowledge and values – science and democracy. Later, these early feminists grew into an influential group in supporting and promoting the national revolution.

"Half the Sky", "Iron Girls", and State Socialism

After the foundation of socialist China, Chinese women were described as holding up "half the sky" and as "iron girls", representing them as equal to men. Regarding female liberation and modernity, Eisenstein has argued that women's status will be lowest in those societies where there is a firm differentiation between the domestic and public sphere of activity (Eisenstein 1994). This idea was initially indicated in Fredrich Engels's influential work *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1975), in which he argued that the enlargement of the male-dominated realm of social production outside the family resulted in the devaluation of the domestic work done by women, and that the solution was to encourage women to leave the domestic scene and enter into the public arena of social production. Chinese women in the 1950s were encouraged to do whatever men did in all walks of life – heavy physical labor on the farm or in factories, truck driving, construction work, military training, professional work, or academic work (Wu 2010; Zhang and Liu 2015). The "iron girl" is a typical gender-neutral female model worker image in socialist China. Having been liberated from the traditional production relationship, the modern women in socialist China were those who entered male-dominated fields and competed with their male counterparts for the right to *sameness*. "Same labor, same salary" (*tonggong tongchou*) was one of the most popular slogans in the feminist movement during the 1950s. In the state socialist era, Maoist women's liberation project denied sexual identity and the emergence of "iron girls" is based on the idea that men and women were inherently equal, which is regarded controversial and criticized by some feminists (Honig 2000). In the collective era, gender equality was pursued through the masculinization of women and through "gender erasure", and Maoist femininity was mainly constituted by women's work and participation in socialist construction (Hanser 2008). Doubly liberated from the economic exploitation of feudalism and patriarchy, women's bodies were placed in service of the grand socialist project (Anagnost 1989). However, this entrance into the sphere of "male work" did not bring full equality to women. In the discourse of "equality", the male gender was the

standard to which women had to conform (Eisenstein 1994). The fragility and limitation of gendered equality in the collective era have been revisited in a more explicit patriarchal structure in the returning trend of privatization and capitalization in the reform era of China.

To understand the relationship between gender and capital in China, it is necessary to explain the revolution and reform before, in, and after socialist China. Modern development is the main theme in Chinese history after dynastic times. Regarding the exploration of modernity in China, Wang Hui concludes that China has completely conformed to the dictates of capital and the activities of the market in all of its economic, political, and cultural behaviors, which illustrates the discourse of modernity in contemporary post-socialist China (Wang and Karl 1998).

When it comes to the question of modernity in China, we have to understand two different interpretations with two distinctive approaches to address this issue in relation to the history of contemporary China. First, there is the Maoist version of modernity theory which is based on the Marxist ideological critique of capitalism; while the second is characterized by the market economy and reform and opening up since the Deng Xiaoping era. In an influential book about 20th century China, historian Maurice Jerome Meisner states that under the leadership of the communist party, China's social praxis has finally resulted in capitalism rather than socialism (Meisner 1999). Meisner comments that Chinese Communists made a flawed but remarkable effort to reconcile the imperatives of modernization with socialist ends during the Mao era, while his followers steered towards the capitalist direction in the post-Mao era. Besides the political difference between the socialist and the capitalist systems, the two systems also imply two wholly different sets of values, respectively.

In the collective era, the Chinese ideological discourse on modernization was different from the mainstream modernization theory because it tended toward socialist ideological content and values. For instance, Mao Zedong was engaged in eliminating the "three great divides"

(*san da chabie*) – between workers and peasants, between cities and countryside, and between mental and manual labour by the way of revolutionary and aggressive methods of the Great Leap Forward movement to push Chinese society on the socialist modernization track. The feminist wave represented by "half the sky" and "iron girls", to some extents, could be interpreted as a kind of attempt to eliminate the division in the gender dimension. In reality, gender equality in the socialist phase took the form of gender erasure, which meant instilling sameness between women and men. The socialist modernity project liberated Chinese women from the domestic scene to contribute to public social production as guided by Marxism (Engels 2000). However, on the other side, the egalitarian approach discouraged individuality and the development of personalities.

During the Mao era from 1949 to 1976, market exchange was tightly restricted. The rural population became members of collective production brigades, and the urban population became members of work units (*gongzuo danwei*), which included government offices, intuitions such as hospitals and schools, and both state-owned and collective enterprises. Workers in work units were permanent employees. Labor power was not a freely traded commodity and the work unit could not fire its members. Moreover, the work unit played a significant role in all walks of life, including not only in organizing production but also in providing consumption (Andreas 2008). Large Chinese factories supplied housing, cafeterias, culture, and recreational facilities. The cellular and insular nature of work unit communities and the significance of the boundaries that separated workers fostered a sense of collective identity, loyalty, pride, and entitlement within local work units(Andreas 2019b). With lifetime employment, workers had no fear of losing their jobs or peer pressure from other workers who worked faster. And they had ample time to get to know each other very well through the years of their contract. During the early post-Mao era, the period which Joel Andreas called a non-capitalist market economy, urban China continued to be dominated by the public sector, and

although small-scale private enterprises were permitted after 1978, they played only a marginal role in cities. After 1984, market exchange gradually replaced the planned economy. Motivated by the "city dream", millions of rural migrants, whose only resource for entering the market economy was their labor power, flooded into cities every year, searching for low-wage work. Female migrant workers, such as domestic workers (*dagongmei*), came from the rural areas to search for opportunities in the urban regions with the hope to share the achievements of modernization following economic reforms. However, for many of them, this turned out to be a broken dream as a consequence of the changed rural-urban relationship with their labor being exploited in the name of state and neoliberal discourses about development, modernity, consumption, self-worth, quality (*suzhi)* (Yan 2003b). Reform era China has witnessed the simultaneous production of unprecedented economic development and increasing socioeconomic inequality (Anagnost 2008).

In the current market economic era, womanhood has been returned to Chinese women, and the Modern Girl has re-entered the consumer society. The urban middle-class women in the network business represent a new image that differs from the modern girls in previous generations and from their working class and rural counterparts. However, as mothers, all of them are facing a similar long-lasting theme: family reproduction. Shouldering dual responsibilities of managing careers and giving care, *daigou* women explore a new public space, taking advantage of the new communication and transportation technologies and of opportunities for transnational mobility.

More than Making Money: Chinese Women in Denmark

My ethnographic material is mainly based on fieldwork done before the COVID-19[4] pandemic which set in early 2020. The pandemic has seriously impacted almost all industries on a global level, and e-commerce is no exception. The lives of the *daigou* operators have also been changed by the pandemic. I was captivated by the efforts the Chinese women immigrants had

gone to raise their families in Denmark and touched by their devotion to succeeding in a foreign country. In the following section, my main concern is the women's role in their families and the changes to their lives in Denmark before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I attempt to understand the deep reasons why these women immigrants run *daigou* businesses, which involves more than just making money.

A Space between Domestic Work and Career

In my interviews with *daigou* operators, I came to understand that they generally had strong motivations for settling down in Denmark for as long as they could. However, there were many challenges to their long-term immigration plan. The most common reason for leaving Denmark was the termination of their partners' employment contract. When the contract ended and their partners could not get a new one, they usually followed their partners to another country or back to China. When I started to write my dissertation, seven of my informants had moved from Denmark to a different country. Liu Qin, a 33-year-old mother whom I met in Aalborg in February 2018, was one of them and she moved to Finland in 2019 because her husband got a new employment contract there.

Liu Qin lived with Li Dong and their daughter Xiaoxiao in a one-room apartment which was rented through the housing department of the university where Dong worked. Before starting her self-employed *daigou* business, Qin said the only thing she could do was to provide domestic support to her family, such as cleaning the room, sending her child to kindergarten, and cooking, so that her husband could fully concentrate on his job. Without any professional skills or excellent language competency, Qin never expected to find a formal job in Denmark: "To put it straight forward, being a good domestic worker (*baomu*) in the family or a good housewife (*jiating zhufu*) is my job here (in Denmark)", is how Qin summarized her living conditions when I asked about her life in Denmark.

Three months after they moved from Beijing to Aalborg in 2016, Qin started to help her friends, relatives, previous colleagues, and classmates in China to buy Danish products, hereby earning "pocket money". The mini-business not only provided some extra income for the family but also a "flavour" to life. She said that she had more things to do apart from housework and providing care to the family: Promoting Danish products on social media, communicating with "customers" in China, buying products in the supermarket, and posting them back to China. "It feels good as I do not have to just stay at home and take care of my husband and the kids", Qin smiled when she told me about the changes before and after her *daigou* business began.

Qin had different jobs before leaving China. She worked for three different companies for about ten years before she came to Denmark to take care of her husband and daughter. Regarding whether she regretted quitting her job and going back into the domestic field, she said "no". In the following excerpt she explained the reasons why she preferred to live in Denmark:

> Even though I have worked in China for about ten years, we still cannot afford an apartment in the big cities in China. Dong (Qin's husband) has just graduated from the PhD program and got a Post-doctoral position here. We didn't save so much money, and we didn't get an apartment from our parents in China. If you were me, would you like to go back? You know the situation in China: no housing, no future. Well, it is a different story in Denmark. Seldom do people buy their own houses, and nobody discusses or cares whether you have or do not have your own house. Dong's salary is also much higher than what he got in China and I can earn a little bit extra by doing *daigou* to support the family. I didn't know why people wanted to go abroad until I came to Denmark. Fewer people, less competition, less pressure. I have gotten used to life here. At least, the life of being a housewife here is easier than my life in Beijing when I had to work day and night.

Qin's eyes were shimmering when she spoke about her life in Denmark. She saw herself in the main role of a housewife. And the mini-business of *daigou* opened a space where she could

leave the domestic field for a moment and socialize with old friends or relatives through a special way of trading. Running *daigou* was never her original motivation for starting a business, but mobility is. What attracted her most to Denmark was not the opportunity and income of reselling Danish products, but the fact of living abroad and experiencing a new form of life different to that in China. Most of *daigou* operators regard the economic profits of the business as simply a bonus. For someone like Qin, compared with the small profits from the business, the immigrant life itself was the most attractive aspect of running a *daigou* operation. However, facing both the enjoyment and disappointment of the shift from career women to housewives, the women immigrants hoped to take good care of family overseas and also maintain their value to the family through economic contributions. The *daigou* business seems an ideal choice for them as they could take advantage of their network in China, while simultaneously offering them a kind of work in Denmark besides being housewives singularly devoted to caring for the family.

We cannot interpret women in China leaving careers to become housewives in Denmark as simply self-sacrifice (*ziwo xisheng*), which is usually used to describe women who sacrifice a career for taking care of their family in China. Another informant, Wang Wei, who was also a mother, explained the feeling of being both a housewife and a *daigou* operator in Denmark:

> I do not feel aggrieved (*wei qu)* about quitting my job in China and coming to Denmark. You have to choose between family and career, especially when your husband works abroad. Indeed, I could not work as I did before in China, I am enjoying peace and leisure in Denmark. Now the *daigou* business can offer some extra income for the family. I feel this is much better than before when my husband was in Denmark while my daughter and I were in China. If the *daigou* business goes well and can help in getting me a work permit, that will be even better. Then even if my husband cannot get a new contract after the current one, we can still live in Denmark.

Qin and Wei's life stories represent a general situation of housewife *daigou* operators who enjoy their family life in Denmark but also hope to contribute more to the family than only within the domestic field. Besides the direct economic profits from the business, the potential *profit* in other forms is more attractive to them, such as family reunification, transnational mobility, and the change of life environment. On the other hand, they are reluctant to fully give up their career and become stay-at-home housewives. The handy *daigou* business offers a space between traditional formal work in an office and full-time domestic work, which makes their transnational mobility and personal network economically valuable. Compared with the previous generation and their rural and working-class peers, middle-class Chinese women have more access to national and transnational resources. But they are still facing the dilemma of juggling career and family. They attempt to create a space for themselves outside the domestic field where they usually participate as spouses to their male partners.

Gaining Confidence through Daigou

The above section analyzed the emotional need for space outside the domestic field for Chinese housewives who run the *daigou* businesses. This section examines the tangible consequences of the business for Chinese women immigrants in negotiation with their male partners. These young *daigou* love shopping. When I asked them about the function or the special characteristics of the products they resell, all of them could give me comprehensive product information. As one of the *daigou* operators said, "I am the boss, also the marketing specialist, the driver, and the purchasing specialist. Of course, I have to obtain comprehensive knowledge about the business." Even though my research project focused on the *daigou* business, I had no idea about the popularity of different brands or of product information in detail. When I was asked by my *daigou* informants about the knowledge of some specific brands of products, some of them joked with me: "Seriously? Don't you know that brand? I cannot imagine you have lived in Denmark for two years and you don't know such a famous Danish brand. All my

customers even know more about it than you." When the *daigou* operators talk about the products, they sound very confident and seem like experts. They gained this professional expertise through long-term shopping experiences.

Being both the main objects of consumption in commercials and the main intended subjects for consumer products, women's "consumer citizenship" is encouraged by the post-socialist market economy to seek self-worth in the public realm which is usually dominated by men (Wang 2003). However, female underemployment and gender discrimination in traditional industrial and service industries in China increased after the post-socialist economic reform (Ong 2006). The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) after the turn of the millennium opened new doors for Chinese women to seek work opportunities in the e-commerce industry to establish their own enterprises. In Yu and Cui's research on Taobao villages[5] in rural China, they argue that the economic enablement of e-commerce does not transfer into cultural and political empowerment for Chinese rural women as the potential of female entrepreneurship is tempered by patriarchal resistance and digital capitalist exploitation (Yu and Cui 2019). In the present research case on middle-class Chinese women immigrants, the influence of *daigou* business shows different characteristics. These middle-class women immigrants generally come from affluent families in China and do not face the same economic pressure as their rural peers. As mentioned previously, their original motivation to do *daigou* business is usually not for economic gain. There are other factors related to their motivation of running these businesses and this is the focus of my research.

In the early phase of a *daigou* business, some operators complained that they could not earn enough money through such a small-scale business. Wang Ting, a 26-year-old young Chinese woman, told me that the costs overtook the income for the first half of a year after she started her *daigou* business. Why? "When I *zhongcao*[6] (recommend) products to customers, I am also being *zhongcao* at the same time. I also want the products myself. When I save enough money

from doing *daigou* business, I will use the income to buy the expensive products I want. So, it is hard to save much money". "How long does it take you to buy this handbag by doing *daigou*?" I pointed at the fancy luxury handbag she had with her when we met each other in a café. "Er… About two months." "Do you think it is worth it? The handbag seems very expensive." "Yes, it is. More or less, I need to resell 200 cans of milk powder to buy it. But I think it is worth it. I spend my own money my way." Ting's Danish boyfriend did not know of her *daigou* business even though he sometimes wondered why Ting bought so many cans of baby formula as they had no children. Ting always said the products were for friends or relatives in China. "I never ask him how much money he has, and he never ask me, either. Unlike the Chinese, people don't like to ask about financial circumstances in Denmark." Ting also indicated that she did not want to ask her boyfriend for money even though this was a quite common thing in China. As she was living in Denmark, she said, she was supposed to follow the local customs.

According to China Luxury Report 2019 published by McKinsey, the Chinese market accounts for half of global luxury spending and the post-1980s/1990s generations are the driving power of the Chinese market (Luan, Kim, and Zipser 2019). The report shows that rich family is the main financial source for the young generation to afford luxury products in mainland China. Some young people like Ting do not believe that spending their parents' money is a decent thing to do as they are already adults and have already gained financial support from their families for, such as living costs, tuition fees, travelling costs, etc. As Ting said, "spending-own-money" sounds more decent compared to asking for money from her partner or parents. The purchasing power of young Chinese consumers has raised international attention. Unlike their parents' or grandparents' generation, they are more likely to consume on impulse and less likely to plan long-term consumption. However, they are highly welcome in a *consumer society (Baudrillard 1998)*. The post-1980s/1990s generation has become the consumption mainstay. Many companies target these growing consumer groups in a business

battle for future retail since the consumer behaviors and habits of the current young generation will also influence the consumption patterns of the next generation regarding, for example, feeding habits and consumer tastes. In the specific case of young Chinese immigrant *daigou* operators, they may feel proud of themselves for buying luxuries and consuming the way they desire to through their own labor and efforts via *daigou*, or in their own words, by "spending-own-money".

I interpret the stance of "spending-own-money" of the middle-class young Chinese women as a kind of resistance to the subordinate status of women within the patriarchal structure. For these young middle-class women, the *daigou* business itself maybe cannot change their economic status but the business brings them confidence in making purchasing decisions. As Ding Ling, another informant said, "I do not have to be embarrassed when I look at my husband's facial expression (*kan lianse*) when I ask him to buy me a luxury handbag as I can buy it for myself after running the business".

Making Motherhood Work through Daigou Business

In a *daigou* family overseas in Denmark, the father is usually employed formally in a local company and is the main provider for the family, while the mother is mainly responsible for the domestic field and the *daigou* business is established to provide an extra household income. As purchasing activities are always mixed with daily shopping activities, we may understand that this business is partly an expansion of domestic work for women. This section examines the Chinese immigrant women's self-analysis of competency in doing *daigou* business. Compared with other traditional service industries, the emerging e-commerce represented by *daigou* has a series of different characteristics which provide entry into a public space for stay-at-home women.

With no work experience to compete in the local job market, how do immigrant Chinese women realize their dream of settling down in Denmark? This core question is the main focus

of this chapter. This question is closely connected to these immigrant women and their families' futures. Xiangxiang Lee, who had run a *daigou* business for four years and had married a Danish man in 2013, proudly shared her experiences with me when we met in Aarhus in the winter of 2018:

> It is great to have a *daigou* company on this scale in just four years, isn't it? Marrying a Danish guy is never the stop to my life. My husband treats me well but he cannot financially support me (*yang wo*) for my whole life, there is no such tradition here in Denmark. Transnational marriage only provides an opportunity to move out of China but it cannot guarantee richness and wealth for the whole life. The next steps you take is up to yourself (*lu zen me zou shi ni ziji de shiqing*). What do I have? I have no education in Denmark, and cannot speak Danish, either. My English is just so-so. What I have is the connection in both China and Denmark, and I work hard as well. I graduated with a degree in physical education from a university in China, so my health condition is good and I am strong. Doing *daigou* is very tiring, you know. Good health is a must. Some *daigou* operators cannot persist in running the business because they are not healthy enough. That is the truth. These are my resources. Before I recruited employees, (I did *daigou*) all by myself, ranging from buying, to promoting, and to distributing. After only two years, I registered my own company. I pay taxes to the government. And I have two lovely mixed-race babies. They are models for endorsing products in my online shops. A lot of consumers think my babies are beautiful. I also tend to be more trustworthy than the other *daigou*, I think, because I am raising babies myself and I am an experienced mother. I can provide customers with more practical advice when they buy baby products.

Xiangxiang's business is the biggest among the female *daigou* informants in my research. During the four years, she developed it from a "suitcase business" to a regular transnational company with four full-time employees and several part-time employees most of whom are university students. Xiangxiang's life story exemplifies feminine capital in at least three aspects. First, marriage is taken as a way of realising transnational mobility and this seldom

happens for their male counterparts. She has a clear understanding of her situation, that marriage cannot guarantee everything, and that she needs to find another way to settle down. Second, she applies her body as a potential capital, analysing her advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes she also live broadcasts the products with her image in the video. Third, and finally, showing her babies on her online shop to endorse the products, to some extents, is to show her maternal profession. The reseller's image as a "good mother" promotes the selling of the products. The strategy works especially well when the consumers are also young mothers. It is quite common for *daigou* operators to post pictures of their daily life in their online shops to attract the consumers' attention.

The preference for *immigrant-mother-daigou* is confirmed by the main consumer group, namely Chinese mothers in China. When I did fieldwork, I asked most of the parent informants there how to choose a trustworthy *daigou* and many of them indicated that they prefer to choose experienced immigrant mothers as their infant formula supplier. They believed that mothers share sympathy with other mothers, so if the *daigou* operator is a mother herself, she would understand better the parents' feelings and therefore would pay more attention to product quality. Additionally, they believed that the *mother daigou* could provide more professional advice on child feeding and childrearing according to their own experiences in developed countries.

However, there is no clear boundary between social production and domestic work in the *daigou* business. And in the traditional patriarchal structure of division of labor, the work performed by women is defined as "inside (*nei*)" and the work performed by men is defined as "outside" (*outside*) (Jacka 1997). In my fieldwork in Denmark, *daigou* labor was devalued in the family especially when the business could not provide a significant income. For example, Jing Liu told me what she experienced after she quit her job in China and came to Denmark:

> Neither my family nor my family-in-law supported me to quit my job and come to Denmark. I told them I can do *daigou* which can earn as much or more than I can get as an office worker if I spare no effort to do it. Well, they just could not accept it as they don't think it is a real job. You know, I was a public servant in China, which was regarded as a stable and decent occupation. I understood why they cannot accept it. In my opinion, *daigou* really cannot be counted as a career or job. It is just a kind of "domestic sidelines" (*jiating fuye*). Even though I can earn almost as much as what my husband earns now from the *daigou* business, my family still think my daughter and I came to Denmark because of my husband. And the reason I am in Denmark is to take care of my family. Anyway, as long as we can settle down in Denmark, I do not care about whether others recognize the work or not.

Despite immigrant Chinese women contributing both to the family income and the domestic field in overseas families, their work in the *daigou* business is still deemed less productive and secondary. There are deep reasons for the devaluation of the *daigou* business, and I assume it is closely related to the cultural conception of the space in which work is performed and the dichotomy of public and private of social space. As Zhang Li argues in her research case of migrant women workers in Beijing, "this value transformation (of women's work) serves as a critical component of gender exploitation and is central to the production of the patriarchal order" (Zhang 2001). We will come back to the labor analysis later in this chapter.

Employed and Self-employed Spouses

To examine the gender politics involved in the *daigou* business, I use "household" as the analytic unit. Regarding the distinction between the terms of family and household, anthropologists argue that the referent of the family is kinship while that of the household is geographical propinquity or common residence (Yanagisako 1979). In Chapter 4, I analyse the complexity of relationships involved in the *daigou* business using the analytic structure of the family as the main theme is (non-) kinship/relatedness. In this chapter, I turn to the household

unit as gender dynamics emerging from the daily interaction between women and men sharing a common residence. According to the ethnographic result, I found that the perception of *daigou* business and gendered labor involved in this business is also influenced by social and cultural factors. The following cases of Dong Li and Zhao Qi, two *daigou* operators, illustrate the complexity of gender politics at the household level.

Dong Li moved to Denmark in 2011 after marrying a Danish man, Jens. After staying at home for the first two years to take care of her family, she started to do *daigou* business professionally in 2013. She told me that before she registered a company licence, she had already been helping friends in China to buy different kinds of Danish products as a friendly favor. After talking with her husband, she decided to turn the business as a career. Li never expected that the business would significantly change their life.

In the first year of the business, it was mainly Li who was in charge of searching for more customers, advertising products, packaging, and delivering products. Her husband helped her occasionally to deliver packages to the post office after he returned from work. She started to feel under pressure as there were more and more orders. Later on, she hired a student helper, Xiao Chen, a Chinese international student at a local university, to help her with packing. But Xiao Chen did not have a Danish driving licence, so she could not help Li with other practical issues, like delivering packages and purchasing products. In 2015, Li was pregnant and the *daigou* business was developing on a big scale. She did not want to give up the business, so she rented a storehouse near the post office. The business had begun to take shape after two years of development. Following failed attempts to find a trustworthy helper to manage the business, Li decided to train her husband to take over the main part of the *daigou* business and she was in charge of the communication with the Chinese customers as her husband could not speak Chinese. After half a year, they found out that the income from the *daigou* business had already overtaken Jens' salary. Around that time, Jens was not very satisfied with his formal

work but the *daigou* business developed very well. Finally, Jens quit his job at the company and became "employed" by his wife, Li. When I met Li and Jens in Aarhus in 2019, both of them worked full-time in the *daigou* business. Li told me about her understanding of the business:

> I never expected that I could be a *daigou* and that the business would change my life and my family's life. I did experience a change in my husband's attitude from the beginning I started to do business. In the beginning, he thought it (*daigou* business) was my way of killing time as I had just come to Denmark and had plenty of leisure time. Now, he puts more effort and energy into the business than I do. More people are coming to this industry and there are also more regulations on e-commerce. I think it will become harder and harder to do the business in the future. Out next step is that we need to think about other business opportunities.

Li's story stands out from other *daigou* families in Denmark in terms of the significant shift of identity and status between Li and her husband. When Li had just arrived in Denmark, she gained a Danish visa for family reunification. Along with the expansion of her *daigou* business, her husband's help in the business changed from a part-time driver to a full-time staff. As the company was registered in Li's name, Li's husband was employed by her. I asked Li whether they considered changing the name of their company. Li told me that: "we could do that. But it is not necessary." Li also thought that it was maybe because her husband was Danish that he did not care about who was the boss of the company. If her husband had been Chinese, she reflected, he would have wanted to be boss.

I cannot statistically confirm Li's assumption with my limited data. But it is true that generally in a Chinese *daigou* household, self-employed women are more likely to follow their male partners who are formally employed in a company to move to another country and end their small-scale business. I cannot use individual cases, like Li's, to argue that the emerging e-commerce has empowered Chinese women to challenge the entrenched patriarchal structure

of Chines society, either. However, Li's case shows the value of the informal care economy which is expanding from the domestic sphere to the productive economic field.

As mentioned previously, *the daigou* business is highly feminized and the majority of operators are women. But there are still several Chinese men who work as *daigou* in Denmark, and Zhao Qi is one of them. Zhao Qi's wife, Sophie, is a Danish woman and they met each other in China when Sophie studied in Beijing in 2009. After getting married, they moved to Denmark with their daughter, Danni. Similar to Dong Li, Zhao Qi started his *daigou* business after being a stay-at-home father for one year while his wife was employed in a Danish company. I never meet Zhao Qi's family in person; I interviewed him via WeChat briefly when I bought a stamp from his company to post a package from China to Denmark. Qi runs two Danish companies, one of which is a *daigou* company reselling Danish products to China, and the other is a logistics company that transports goods between Denmark and China. I asked Qi how and why he decided to enter a women-dominated industry, and he replied that:

> I think this is a problematic question. The majority of *daigou* are indeed women but it does not mean that only women can do this business. E-commerce provides opportunities to everyone, both men and women. Men can also be entrepreneurs in E-commerce. My career is also going well. I am the main provider for my family here in Denmark.

According to Dong Li's and Zhao Qi's stories, it seems like that the social recognition of *daigou* work is influenced by several factors: the structure of family, the operator's gender, and the social, political and economic environment. Dong Li thought the reason that her husband was a Danish and the Danish cultural environment contributed to the success of her business. Zhao Qi's story shows some similarities with other female *daigou* operators. For example, all of them run the business with the hope of settling down in Denmark. However, compared with their female counterparts, the value of these male *daigou* operators' labor is more easily recognized by the public as well as by themselves. Even though Chinese immigrant women

make a significant contribution to this emerging economy, their work is still not fully acknowledged as much as that of their male counterparts.

Daigou and Online Food Market in Overseas Chinese Communities after COVID-19

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak a pandemic.[7] Depending on the situation, all industries globally were affected by on travel restrictions, lockdowns, quarantines, etc. to different degrees.[8] There was no exception for the e-commerce industry closely which is connected to the logistics industry which is seriously influenced by new transportation regulations. The *daigou* business in Denmark was suspended during the pandemic as the operators could not go to the supermarket to purchase products as they usually did and there were new regulations on transportation. During the pandemic, how did parents in China deal with the feeding issue if they could not buy infant formula through the *daigou* network? How did *daigou* operators go through the pandemic crisis in Denmark? With these questions, I tried to contact my informants again to follow their situation. Even though I had already finished my fieldwork both in China and in Denmark before the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, I hoped to re-interview some of my informants as I was curious about how the pandemic changed their life and business.

After the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe, I contacted some of my informants in China. Some parents told me that they stopped buying infant formula from their previous *daigou* and they were trying other brands of infant formula from the domestic market to feed their children. They also complained about the difficulty of changing to another brand of milk powder to feed their children as they preferred the one that they usually had. Against my expectation, according to the Chinese parents, the main reason they stopped buying infant formula from outside China was not the increase in cost or the much longer shipping times. It was because it had been consistently reported in Chinese state media that the COVID-19 virus had been detected in China in imported food products and packaging.[9] Afraid of being infected by the

virus through imported food, parents had to search for other channels than overseas *daigou* to get safe baby food.

For the overseas *daigou* operators, the difficulties of doing the transnational business included not only regulations on transportation and increasing costs, but also the cancellation of orders from customers in China. I tried to contact some previous *daigou* informants to talk about their situation during the pandemic. However, none of them wanted to do an interview. One informant told me: "I do not think any *daigou* are in mood to talk with you. The business is stopped now and my feeling is the same as the mink farmers."

I did not get a chance to talk with my previous *daigou* informants about their life changes during the pandemic, but I noticed the change in their WeChat posts. Some previous *daigou* operators started to do another type of small business when Danish society reopened during the pandemic – selling homemade food online. I also started to order the food via WeChat and got some opportunities to chat with the producers. Cai Ping, a *daigou* operator, started to sell her homemade cakes and Chinese cuisine through WeChat. The target consumer group for her new small network business was the Chinese community in Denmark. I ordered some food from her and asked her how and why she started the new business:

> My *daigou* business stopped because of the COVID-19 crisis. I found it was very boring at home without work. I started to try new recipes to make new dishes for my family. My children and husband loved the dishes. When some friends visited us, they also liked the dishes, such as braised duck necks, chicken feet, and stewed beef. Some friends suggested I try to sell dishes on WeChat. I enjoy cooking and sharing food. So, then I started to sell homemade food online. You know, Danish people do not like to eat duck necks, chicken and pig feet, etc. So, it is very cheap to buy those things. But Chinese people like this kind of food a lot. Now there are more and more orders for homemade food. I need to cook for my family anyway. I just cook more portions when I make it. Some are saved for ourselves and the rest is for sale.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Denmark, I soon noticed that more Chinese immigrant women joined the "online food market". On my WeChat account, there are around ten Chinese housewives in Jutland [10] who started to do the business of reselling homemade food via WeChat platform, such as cakes, dumplings, Chinese dishes, and sausages. When the local Danish policies allowed people to gather in public again, these vendors also organized a small weekend food market in the parking area of some big shopping malls where many Chinese people would come and buy different kinds of Chinese cuisine.

As a consumer, I personally enjoy this emerging small businesses within the Chinese community in my residential region as I miss the "Chinese taste" while living in Denmark and it is hard to travel during the pandemic. Besides the food supply of Chines cuisine, the small businesses also have a social function, and I have gotten to know many more Chinese immigrants from the food market online. Some food vendors travel to other cities to deliver food. For example, I got to know Li Jie in 2017 when she did *daigou* business in Aalborg, a city in the north of Denmark, and she became a homemade food vendor during the pandemic. She sold dumplings, buns, and other homemade dishes on WeChat. During the weekdays she advertised food-selling information and delivered the food to other cities along the road to Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city in the eastern Jutland.

I mention the emerging network business of the online food market in the Chinese community in this section not to argue that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed *daigou* operators' work. Rather, what is interesting to me is that these two types of network businesses share certain similarities: first, the subject of both small businesses is Chinese women immigrants; second, there are no clear boundaries between the productive labor of earning an income and the reproductive labor of giving care in either kind of business; third, both groups of Chinese women utilise the resource of a personal network and their gendered capacities in establishing the business. In this type of feminized network business among the

Chinese community in Denmark, women's labor is valorized and devalorized at the same time. The main issue is how to perceive their labor and an extended question is how this new phenomenon in the overseas Chinese community helps us to understand the feminine economy and the feminine capital (Orser et al. 2015; Aguirre 2009) where women play a dominant role, and further helps us to understand women in the public realm (Yang 1999).

Gendered Empowerment and Disempowerment

The fast development of information and communication technology promotes the transformation of e-commerce, which has provided a comparatively open environment and opportunities for individuals to establish enterprises. Compared to earlier generations of entrepreneurial women in the traditional industries, the current female entrepreneurs have more resources to start their business. Immigrant Chinese women discover business opportunities in their daily life and develop this idea from scratch into a family business, and even employ and encourage other family members to participate in their businesses which field was once regarded as the "outside" work and dominated by men in the traditional patriarchal structure. Immigrant Chinese women transformed domesticity into productivity and broken down the division between "inside" work and "outside" work, a situation similar to their rural sisters who play a significant role in developing rural e-commerce (Yu and Cui 2019). Compared with the rural women's participation in digital economic activities, there are both similarities and differences in the empowerment and disempowerment by e-commerce of transnational immigrant women.

On the positive side, women's participation in e-commerce has proven to be a useful route to overcome their economic and social subordination in the traditionally patriarchal and patrilineal family and village society for rural women, as Yu and Cui have argued in their case study of Taobao Village (Yu and Cui 2019). Immigrant Chinese women are also under pressure to search for jobs and earn an income but the economic pressure is normally not the main reason

to start a network business. The emotional and mental need for engagement in work is more significant than the economic pressure for middle-class immigrant women, especially housewives. For the majority of my *daigou* informants, the final goal of running a *daigou* business was to raise an overseas family and settle down in Denmark. Similar to the middle-class parents in China (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), overseas Chinese parents in Denmark are also searching for accesses to quality resources in education, healthcare, culture, etc. to raise the next generation. With factors such as low start-up risks and costs, as well as the flexibility of work, autonomy and control over their time and labor, the *daigou* business, like e-commerce in rural China, has enabled overseas Chinese women to participate in productive activity with limited negative influence on their reproductive work, such as caregiving. Facing practical barriers to find formal employment in Denmark, the handy *daigou* network business and similar small businesses that are extend from domesticity (for example, selling homemade food) have become a popular solution for immigrant Chinese women (mainly housewives) to realize the personal gratification through the valorisation of their labor. Here, I think the concept of feminine capital help us to recognize the productive value of women's reproductive labor, for example, care.

On the negative side, there are also gender inequality issues involved in the case of transnational immigrant Chinese women. Similar to the feminized rural e-commerce, the labor in the *daigou* business is devalued and underrecognized compared with the work of their male counterparts. In this case, I argue that the de-valorisation of women's labor should be understood in relation to the traditional understanding of the space where the work is performed, and in relation to the ambiguity between productive and reproductive labor involved in the network business.[11] The big difference in comparison with the situation of feminized rural e-commerce is the cultural and political environment. As immigrant families, the Chinese families in Denmark are influenced by both Chinese and Danish cultural norms and social

environments. With 77.4 out of 100 points on the Gender Equality Index, Denmark ranks second in the EU, according to an official report published by European Institute for Gender Equality in 2020.[12] I argue that, the social environment and the comparatively equal gender relationships in Denmark influence the *daigou* operators' perception of the labor involved in the business. In transnational families where one spouse is a citizen with a different nationality than Chinese (in this case, usually a Danish citizen), it appears that the value of the productivity of *daigou* operators is more easily recognized by other family members, and immigrant Chinese women are more likely to gain social self-affirmation. I assume that this situation is influenced by the cultural and political factors in Denmark, especially those relating to gender equality.

Feminization of labor, is a main feature of the *daigou* and the main theme of this chapter. The concept of feminization is intended to not only emphasize the role women play within today's economy with a quantitative increase of female population in the form of paid work, but also address characteristics of the gendered labor from a qualitative analytic perspective (Morini 2007). By analysing the characteristics of labor in *daigou* and other similar network businesses, this chapter shows the consequences of entrepreneurship for immigrant Chinese women and how they achieve self-realization by exploring and recognizing the productivity of their reproductive labor. Enlighted by capital theories, I develop the concept of feminine capital (Huppatz 2009) with respect to the dimension of reproductive labor. Finally, the discussion of feminine capital points towards the topic of alternative perception of the public space for middle-class Chinese women in the global capitalist economy.

Care, Capital, and the Chinese Immigrant Women

In this chapter, I examined the meaning of *daigou* business for Chinese immigrant women. I first reviewed the development of modern Chinese women's images from a historical perspective and analyzed the female modernity as reflected in the *daigou* business and other

similar forms of work that combine reproductive and productive labor. With low risk and low costs to start up, the *daigou* business has become a popular channel for Chinese housewives in Denmark, as elsewhere, to take advantage of their transnational mobility, expertise in household consumption, and personal network in China to gain an income and participate in productive activities. With their dreams of raising families in Denmark, immigrant Chinese women, like their rural counterpart, make both reproductive and productive contributions.

For immigrant Chinese women, the empowerment of participation in productive work is embodied not only in tangible economic profits, but also importantly in self-affirmation and in benefits in other forms, such as the balance between career and family. Given the blurred boundaries between the reproductive and productive labor in *daigou* business and other similar small-scale businesses based on domesticity, women's work is often under-valorised or devalued. Influenced by a cultural and political environment of comparative gender equality in Denmark, women's labor tends to be comparatively more appropriately recognized, both in terms of state regulation of the labor market and by way of the practical support of family members. This situation provides prerequisites to discuss gender politics and the public space for modern women.

On the micro-level, this chapter provides the ethnographic narratives of a specific group of female immigrant *daigou* operators; on the macro level, these female stories and the change in the perception of capital need to be placed into the bigger picture of state reform of Chian and historical change. During the 1920s and 1930s, dressed in provocative attire and in hot pursuit of romantic love, modern girls appeared on the surface to disregard the prescribed roles of dutiful daughter, wife, and mother (Weinbaum 2008). In the Mao era, the modern female image was closely connected with the process of state modernization (Zhong, Wang, and Di 2001). In post-socialist China, the commodification of women's bodies returned to the public view. The booming sex industry in China during the late 1990s is widely researched as a typical case

to examine the influence of state economic-political transformation of gender in Chinese society (Zheng 2009; Osburg 2013).

Compared with the previous gender regimes in China's history, the current generation of transnational middle-class women enjoy more opportunities to expand mobility, to gain autonomy, and to realize personal gratification against the backdrop of the global capitalist system. The Chinese immigrant women have creatively developed reproductive work into a productive field, generating value both for society and for themselves. The femininity involved in the *daigou* business illustrates the characteristics of a gendered capital that differs from the feminine capital in paid caring work (Huppatz 2009) and the erotic capital in the porn industry (Hakim 2011). The satisfaction gained by the immigrant women in my research derived from the monetization and valorisation of "reproductive labor", such as shopping and cooking, which is usually unpaid and devalued in the domestic field. The social recognition of their labor boosts their self-affirmation.

Following the capital theories of Pierre Bourdieu and post-Bourdieusian scholars, the gendered capital illustrated by the feminized business among immigrant Chinese families embodies the capital characteristics of an accumulation of gendered labor, the possibility of economic conversion, and the potential capacity for reproduction (Bourdieu 1986). This chapter goes some way in answering the question "why do Chinese immigrant women participate in *daigou* business or similar businesses extending from the domestic field"? Facing practical difficulties in finding formal employment in Denmark, these women gain a reasonable income by capitalizing on their reproductive labor within these businesses. Besides the direct economic profits, other forms of capital are also circulating and converted in this business. For example, they also realize transnational mobility (social capital). These capitals (in both objectified and embodied forms) can potentially produce profits and thereby reproduce.

Conclusion

The case of *daigou* business between China and Denmark illustrates multiple facets of Chinese middle-class life, which make it particularly challenging to conclude this ethnography. The emergence, development, and transformation of *daigou* business have been closely and deeply entangled with China's political, economic, and cultural environment. Even though it is hard to predict the future of *daigou* business, I attempt to highlight the core issues reflected by the current situation of the *daigou* business of infant formula and discuss their relevance for rethinking the notions of gender, class, relatedness, and capital involved in the extensive topic of Chinese family reproduction.

Focusing on the two flows that make up the *daigou* business practice, namely the flow of products – in this case – from Denmark to China (Danish infant formula) and the flow of people from China to Denmark (Chinese immigrants), this research examines how the Chinese middle class navigate the uncertainty and risks of the global capitalist economy and how they realize family reproduction and prosperity. The consumers and resellers of *daigou* infant formula share one thing in common – they face the challenges, anxieties, and new opportunities that come about as a result of greater choice with the loosening of collective mechanisms and the greater role of the market. The feeding issues reflected in the transnational *daigou* business of reselling infant formula represents one kind of uncertainty that has emerged with China's inclusion in the global market economy.

This research takes the child feeding issue reflected in the reselling and consumption of infant formula as a central theme in family reproduction understood as a set of practices that sustain future life by creating a new generation of persons as kin (Bruckermann 2017). The infant and child feeding transition from breastfeeding to infant formula has not only happened among Chinese families but also has become a global concern (Theurich et al. 2018; Berg et al. 2005). The relevant issues include (but are not limited to) the regulation of using breastmilk

substitutes, gender inequality in reproductive work, food security, and social trust. I locate the strategy of transnationalism used by Chinese middle-class families to cope with the anxiety and challenges of family reproduction within the bigger picture of globalization and capitalization.

In this dissertation, I have reviewed the development of child feeding and relevant risks (Chapter 2), and analyzed the approach of "global buying" to source food supplies and relieve anxieties (Chapter 3) by way of an ethnography of consumers in China. Following the transnational network, I then turned to examine the influence of the infant formula reselling business on the lives of Chinese immigrants in Denmark from the perspectives of relationship analysis (Chapter 4) and gender analysis (Chapter 5).

Similar to their middle-class peers within China, overseas Chinese immigrants are facing the same issue of raising families, and in particular, raising the next generation. Without having members of their extended family close by to help with practical reproductive work, overseas Chinese parents encounter other challenges besides feeding their children, such as searching for jobs in the local market, communicating with locals, and finding a career-family balance. Under these circumstances, the *daigou* business has developed into the most popular channel of employment for Chinese immigrant women without formal jobs to gain an income to raise overseas families. The overseas *daigou* operators take advantage of their transnational network between China and Denmark as well as their acquired gendered capacity for caring in the domestic field to establish their businesses and contribute significantly to both reproductive and productive work. Gaining economic independence by way of e-commerce, many immigrant women managed to realize their big dreams of settling down in a developed country and raising Chinese families overseas. The root cause for the efforts made by Chinese immigrants to settle down in Denmark, I find, springs from a general anxiety that is growing in the Chinese middle class, as I describe in Chapters 3 and 4.

Feminization is a significant characteristic of the *daigou* business. The gendered engagement in e-commerce provides the space for us to discuss the technological empowerment of women and the public space for Chinese women, especially for these stay-at-home housewives. Among the overseas Chinese immigrant families, female immigrants usually face more pressure than their male counterparts as they tend to bear a double burden of production and reproduction. With low risks and start up costs, as well as the flexibility of work and the relative balance between career and family, the *daigou* business has become the most popular work for overseas Chinese housewives. However, the informal work, such as *daigou* business, with blurred boundaries between productive and reproductive labor is often undervalued by the public. This dissertation attempts to raise the public attention on the productive value of women's reproductive labor illustrated by the *daigou* case. This research is less concerned about how many Chinese immigrant women have been included in the *daigou* business (as consumers and resellers), but focuses on their self-understanding with this informal business in the intersections of state, community, and family.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I proposed that the two forms of flow (Danish infant formula to China and Chinese immigrants to Denmark) are involved in two strategies of family reproduction ("buying in" and "going out") that take place against the backdrop of the uncertain domestic market in China and the process of globalization. Both of these strategies can be summarized by the term *transnationalism* as they are based on transnational purchasing and on immigration.

This research excludes the working class and upper class, and focuses on middle-class families as these are the main players (consumers and resellers) in the *daigou* business. The strategies adopted by the families with other class backgrounds to cope with the anxiety and challenges of raising children may be very different. Even though a class analysis is not the focus of this research, the fieldwork data does reflect class stratification within the consumption

of children's food. By this, I mean that class stratification involves not only the circulation of economic capital possessed by certain classes but also other forms of capital, such as social capital (mainly network) reflected by the *daigou* business.

In this concluding chapter, I review the main arguments of the previous chapters and discuss the theoretical and practical contribution of this research for multidisciplinary studies (anthropology, China Studies and global studies).

Feeding Chinese Babies

This research starts from a daily practice of family reproduction – feeding. From an anthropological perspective, food is often regarded as the main substance to examine social bindings as the feeding practice usually happens within the circle of kinship (Sharon Elaine Hutchinson 2000). In this research, the feeding issue involves the analysis on three connected levels: the micro level, which includes the vertical family relationships and horizontal social relationships; the meso level, which involves the relationship between different social classes and groups; and the macro level, which encompasses the influence of international and national policies on individual families. I have focused on the micro level relationships involved in the network business of reselling infant formula as manifested during the development of the state market economy and the process of globalization. But my research is also concerned with the meso level social relationships between the Chinese middle class and other classes (upper classes and working classes), namely with social stratification, and with the relationship between genders. We have also seen the significant influence of the state transformation from socialism to post-socialism on individual feeding practices. For example, the reform of the social provision of caring directly affected women's participation in social production and family reproduction after the 1990s. In other words, the boom of the *daigou* network of infant formula is not simply a direct result of the food safety crisis in the Chinese domestic market but influenced by multiple economic, political, and cultural factors (Guldan 2000).

Infant formula is widely recognized as the main substitute for the breastmilk generated by mothers after giving birth. The substance of breastmilk is usually seen to represent the immediate relationship between mothers and children connected by kinship. Because of breastmilk's social significance, the substitute of breastmilk (mainly infant formula) also bears social meaning that goes beyond being simply substantive food. When the parent-child relationship is *mediated* by the product of infant formula, the symbolic hierarchy between the products is easily read as this is reflected by the degree of effort and care that parents put into their children. By the same logic, the commercial exchange of infant formula also involves social-relational exchange. Trust in kinship, acquaintance, or other moral relationships is the foundation for consumer trust in the infant formula products purchased within the *daigou* business. The way in which *daigou* operators run their businesses also reflects the way they perceive and maintain their social relationships. Their relational trust constitutes an important, unwritten quality guarantee of the formula that functions alongside other institutional forms of guarantee, such as the organic certification of products. In the *daigou* business of infant formula, the commercial relationship is intertwined with personal relationships based on sentiment. The effort and care that the *daigou* operators put into the products they resell is also intertwined with their feelings for their social relationships with consumers as well as with the consumers' children. The resellers of infant formula feel a moral obligation to offer trustworthy products to their friends, relatives, and acquaintances based on sentiment; on the other hand, they also take advantage of these horizontal social relationships as a source of income to fulfil the vertical relational obligation of raising their family.

The development from relying on natural foods to processed foods to feed children is accompanied by a disconnection between consumers and the sources of their food, which is the reason why the question of social trust is entangled with the issue of feeding. Vileisis sources the development of modern food – processed, packaged and distributed over wide

spatial and social distances – in the USA and argues that the rise of the industrial food system has resulted in the loss of "kitchen literacy" and attendant health risks and environment problems (Vileisis 2008). The history of using infant formula as the main infant food in China also illustrates the risk and uncertainty that is the characteristic of the process of modernization influenced by the global market economy, capitalization, and industrialization. Generally, when consumption is linked to care for children, moral issues emerge as feeding issues profoundly impact gender roles, the family, and society.

How does the transnational infant formula business connect overseas Chinese middle-class families with middle-class families within China? Anthropologists have been interested in the social and symbolic properties of food: the way which food in works as a medium of social and cognitive organization (Patico and Lozada Jr 2019; Lévi-Strauss 1997). Anthropological research recognizes food as a means to define social identities, categories, and relationships. Therefore, food and foodways may also be a way to examine the characteristics of consumers. Even though the direct consumers of infant formula are, of course, the children themselves, the main actors are parents and other persons who take care of children. By examining the feeding patterns among Chinese middle-class families, this research investigates the social status of this class as well as the anxieties they are currently facing.

My research highlights how mothers' food-related labor is reflected in the *daigou* business of infant formula. This gendered labor is not only located within the domestic field but also holds value in social production outside the households. Recognizing the productive and reproductive value of *daigou* operators' labor, this dissertation discusses the opening up of a potential public space for Chinese women, especially housewives.

The Chinese Middle Class

I have used the term "Chinese middle class" to refer to both the affluent consumers of foreign infant formula and the overseas Chinese immigrants running daigou businesses. However, the

term “middle class” itself is problematic and controversial as there are different criteria to define this group of people, including income standards, cultural characteristics, social status, and political engagement. David Goodman (2008), an influential scholar on contemporary China, even argues that “China has no new middle class”. He claims that the professions of state cadres, managers and entrepreneurs do not belong to the “managerial and professional classes”, according to the definition of the middle class in its European origin, because of their close connection to capital and political power (Goodman 2008). Despite such disputes, the term has been widely used by academic and media commentators inside and outside China to refer to a group of people with a reasonable amount of economic, cultural, and social capital, which are located between the majority of working people and the very rich (Zheng 2004; Chen 2002). For the purpose of my research, it is not necessary to strictly define the category of the Chinese middle class but rather to understand the characteristics of the group of people who are the main players in the emerging *daigou* business through their daily practice within the business. Based on my ethnography, the following section summarizes the commonality of the two groups of Chinese middle-class families, namely the affluent consumers and the overseas immigrants involved in the *daigou* business.

Anxiety exists both among middle-class families in China and among overseas Chinese families in Denmark, even though they possess more economic, cultural, and social resources than their working-class peers. Chinese parents have achieved their middle-class status through their efforts in pursuing education and high-salaried work. They expend much attention on their children’s upbring and development with the hope that they will come to lead happier and better lives than the parents themselve. However, they still have to face general uncertainty and risk, such as air pollution, food safety, expensive healthcare and housing, even though they have realized financial independence and have made their way into the middle class. With the fear of being squeezed out of the middle class, they are facing “involution” in all walks of life

and competing for resources to maintain their middle-class status. The concept of "involution" was first introduced by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1963) in his research on Indonesian agriculture to describe how increasing labor inputs in agriculture increased total production, but at the same time, both per capita food consumption and the average size of land holdings were dwindling (Geertz 1963). Chinese scholars and commentators have developed this term in the contemporary Chinese context and use "involution" (*neijuan*) to describe a social striving that curls inward, ensnaring its participants in what the anthropologist Xiang Biao has described as an "endless cycle of self-flagellation" (Wang and Ge 2020; Liu 2021). Facing the pressure to navigate the competitive and uncertain social system in China, middle-class families either spare no effort to join in the game to gain more resources for themselves or their children, for example, to keep up with rising housing prices, or jump out of this cycle and emigrate to another country to search for opportunities there.

According to one recent report, China ranked third among countries with high emigration in 2020 and the main migration destinations are North America and Europe (Center for China and Globalization 2020). Based on my ethnographic data on Chinese immigrants in Denmark, the pressure of raising children in China was the main reason for them to emigrate to Denmark. Many informants indicated that the general environment in China is too "involuted" (*tai juan le*) and believed that the Danish economic and cultural environment is better for raising children. I have found that, having the opportunity to move away from the "involution" in China has been the main motivation for Chinese parents to settle down long-term in Denmark. To realize their "Danish dream", the overseas middle class take advantage of their resources to seek the possibility of raising the next generation in Denmark. Against this background, the *daigou* business developed quickly among Chinese immigrants, especially among overseas Chinese women, as an important method to earn an income and emigrate to another country through self-employment. Therefore, besides the direct economic profits from the *daigou*

business, there are deep reasons for the popularity of this business among overseas Chinese families, which can be traced to their unsatisfaction and anxiety about the domestic environment in China before they decided to emigrate, and to their hope of providing a better environment for the next generation.

Even though my research is mainly concerned with the middle class, there are, at least, two points to highlight regarding the interaction between classes: First, working-class families adopt similar strategies to cope with the risk of uncertainty in feeding issues. For example, some of them either purchase infant formula from the developed regions where they work to feed their children in their underdeveloped hometowns or bring their children from their hometowns to their work regions. However, because of the household registration system, education is a big challenge for migrant workers in China. Working-class parents usually leave their children with the grandparents when they migrate to bigger cities to earn money to raise their families. Second, the middle class recognizes their status as "middle class" by differentiating themselves from their working-class peers. For example, during my fieldwork among middle-class families in Tianjin, they attempted to distinguish themselves from "the others", which shows in their reluctance to send their children to public school or to feed them with domestic brand infant formula. Based on the characteristics of the interaction between the middle class and the working class, we may assume that it would be hard to form a collective alliance across classes to cope with their shared uncertainty and risks, as the middle class is engaged with keeping their status, and the working class is struggling with their hardship of raising families and devoted to helping their children to realize upward mobility. With their class privilege in economic, political, and cultural terms, the middle class seeks individualized strategies to deal with the risk, insecurity, and uncertainty that has emerged in the Chinese domestic market – namely, the strategies of transnational purchasing and emigration.

Gender and Family Reproduction

When I presented my research proposal to my Danish colleagues, some of them asked "why do Chinese mothers not want to breastfeed?" This kind of question demonstrates that it is often taken for granted that child-feeding issues are related to normative ideas about motherhood. Feminist anthropology has illustrated the gender inequalities within the gendered labor of caregiving represented by food-related labor (DeVault 1994; Szabo 2011; Cook 2009). Drawing on interviews with a diverse group of households in the USA in 1982-1983, DeVault reveals the effort and skills that wives and mothers expend in the "invisible" work of feeding as well as the oppression of women are constrained in their subordinate position in the household life (DeVault 1994). Daniel Thomas Cook examines how consumer culture, sentiment, care, and children's subjectivities are interweaved in the mothering practice in his ethnography of food-related work in the American context (Cook 2009). In my research on the *daigou* business of reselling foreign infant formula, the majority of the buyers and resellers are also mothers. Focusing on the characteristic of feminization of the *daigou* business, my research points out the productive value of reproductive labor which is often ignored in the public view, but which is embodied in the *daigou* business as it is extended from the daily domestic work.

In the gender dimension, this research focuses on how gender makes a difference to the research subjects' experiences, and I attempt to align this perspective with macro-sociological theories of late modernity, including capital theories, theories of globalization, and their interaction with feminist theory. From an anthropological perspective, I have examined how overseas Chinese women raise families by obscuring the boundaries between reproductive and productive labor.

We cannot understand the influence of *daigou* business on the operators without analyzing their involved labor. There are both objective and subjective reasons for the popularity of

daigou business among the overseas Chinese community. Regarding consumer demand and Chinese food safety issues, Chapter 2 of this dissertation has analyzed the objective conditions for the boom of this business within China. Regarding the subjective reasons, we need to enter the *daigou* operators' lives to understand their motivations. This type of business is a response to the challenges faced by overseas Chinese immigrants, especially by housewives who come to Denmark for family reunification and have problems gaining formal employment in the local job market due to challenges such as a language barrier, a lack of experience, and an unfamiliarity with the local environment. With low risks and startup costs, a small-scale business reselling Danish products to Chinese consumers is a handy, feasible, and possible method for these immigrant women to gain an income for the family, and also gain some social space outside the domestic field. Therefore, the *daigou* business is welcomed by these housewives, especially by these who have children, as they have the freedom and flexibility to manage their own working time and balance work and family life. Besides, as the *daigou* business itself is often entangled with friendly favors and relational obligations, many operators also take the business as a way to establish, maintain, and develop their relationships in China. From a practical perspective, the *daigou* business looks like the best choice for these overseas Chinese women as they have access to both the product market in Denmark and the consumer market in China.

Previous relevant research on the feminization of rural e-commerce shows that the enablement of female entrepreneurship does not necessarily translate into cultural and political empowerment for Chinese rural women, and that this business results in the digital capitalist exploitation of cheap, flexible, and docile labor (Yu and Cui 2019). Comparing the gendered labor involved in the transnational *daigou* business with the labor in rural e-commerce for Chinese women, I fing there are similarities as well as differences.

First, both the overseas Chinese women and their rural peers are facing the challenge to establish a business with practical barriers but in different situations. Whereas rural Chinese women, according to Yu and Cui, take economic profit as the main motivation to do rural e-commerce, overseas Chinese women have other reasons to run the business, such as maintaining relationships, creating a space outside the domestic field, and gaining resident permits in another country. In light of Pierre Bourdieu's theories of capital, the circulation of social capital (resources based on social network) may be regarded to dominate the *daigou* business, while the role of economic capital is more central in rural e-commerce.

Second, as there is, in both cases, no clear boundary between productive labor and reproductive labor in these family-based businesses, and women's work often unrecognized or underestimated. However, the situation for overseas Chinese women, I find, is much easier than their rural counterparts as the influence of patriarchal authority is much less in Denmark than in rural China. Nonetheless, women's key role in social relations, their financial contribution to families and caregiving based on *daigou* work is still deemed less *formal* and less productive, and therefore secondary in the overseas families in Denmark, even though they are living in a country that has a reputation of high gender equality. As Li Zhang argues in her research on the floating population in Beijing, "the absence of spatial boundaries between work and residence has created the domestication of production in the gender division of labor" (Zhang 2001, 120) and domestic work is seen as less productive than paid work in public (Mann 2000). Enjoying more resources and privileges than women from the working class and rural regions, overseas Chinese women are still facing similar structural constraints under patriarchy.

Third, the feminization of rural e-commerce and the *daigou* business is located in the rhetoric surrounding "she economy" called by Silverstein and Sayre, in which women play an important role in economic growth as consumers and entrepreneurs (Silverstein and Sayre 2009). The ambiguous division between productive and reproductive work involved in such

work is often understood by feminist critics as the reason for the devaluation of women's labor. My main purpose in analysing the *daigou* business from the perspective of gender is not to illustrate a new form of exploitation of women under the global capitalist system, but rather to understand the conversion between women's labor and capital, and to discuss further Chinese women's participation in the public sphere. Mei-Hui Yang has done excellent work in analyzing the tension of the political and economic transformation from a socialist state to a commercial society within the gender dimension from a feminist perspective. Yang argues that in the socialist state, women's labor gained public recognition through the erasure of gender difference, whereas in the later commercial society, women are mainly offered public recognition through the commodification of their gender(women's bodies and sexuality) (Yang 1999). Recent socio-environmental change, such as the development of information communication technology, growth in economic participation online, and globalization, have brought back the discussion of the public recognition of the value of women's work. The case of *daigou* business and similar forms of "she economy" extended from the domestic field illustrate the productive value of the reproductive labor that is typically dominated by women.

Compared with previous research on gendered capital (Huppatz 2009; Orser et al. 2015; Zhang 2017; Martin 2022), my research explores not only the direct economic capital accumulated via gendered labor but also the circulation of other forms of capital. For example, the *daigou* operators expand their social network and obtain emotional gratification through this business, and some of them realize transnational emigration. These social resources may not be directly manifested as monetary income, but they have the potential to convert into other forms of capital.

Transnationalism and Family Reproduction

One of the central findings of this dissertation is that Chinese middle-class families tend to use transnational strategies to deal with the anxiety caused by the uncertainty in the Chinese market.

Transnational contexts are prominent not only in the immigrants' search for development and security abroad but also in the customers' pursuit of identity and quality within the market economy. This research examines two types of transnational flows – of Danish infant formula and of Chinese immigrants, investigating the connections between relational ethics, business, gender, and family reproduction. The theme of family reproduction comes about from the ethnography in both countries, and I locate it as the central purpose of the emergence of the *daigou* business of infant formula, not only as a food supply channel for Chinese babies, but also as a source of income for Chinese immigrants to raise their overseas families.

Pei-Chia Lan uses "the concept of global security strategy to describe a multitude of class-specific and location-sensitive modes of childrearing where parents navigate transnational mobility and negotiate cultural boundaries in response to the insecurities in a global context" (Lan 2018, 15). In my research on the feeding issues faced by Chinese parents, the core discussion is located in the basic issue of food safety and the extended topic of family reproduction. I use the term *transnational strategy* to describe the approaches that middle-class Chinese families adopt to handle food risks and other forms of insecurity in contemporary China. Middle-class parents can gain access to and buy foreign products through their personal networks, or they can immigrate to other countries to get rid of the insecurity of the domestic market. They adopt these approaches, I argue, to relieve the anxiety caused by the domestic environment in China. Compared with Chinese fathers, Chinese mothers, in particular, struggle with feelings of anxiety at the household level, as they usually dominate in the reproductive labor of domestic work and caregiving, especially in the case of housewives.

Consumption should be regarded as the most important constitutive mechanism for the formation of middle-class identity and membership in China today (Zhang 2012; Tomba 2004). In the Chinese consumer society, Luigi Tomba argues that the understanding of social stratification is based more on the social actors' ability to access resources than their relations

to the means of production (Tomba 2004). Exposed to daily information about risk and uncertainty, a desire for "secure" spaces with safe food, housing, and transportation has become a priority for Chinese middle-class consumers. If they feel unable to purchase trustworthy products, especially food, from domestic suppliers, they tend to source safe products from outside China through their middle-class network. There are also *open* channels to buy foreign products, such as online shops, but consumers prefer the *closed* channels of their network, as the result of a high level of general public distrust and also the psychological characteristics of middle-class consumers.

Amy Hanser and Jialin Camille Li use the term "gated consumption" to describe the consumer behavior of affluent urban Chinese consumers (Hanser and Li 2015). I use the concept in this research to summarize the characteristics of the *daigou* channel and to analyze the consumer psychology of Chinese middle-class consumers. In the middle-class communities in Tianjin where I did fieldwork, drinking original foreign infant formula is not only a daily practice for the children from affluent urban families but also a *sign* of their class membership and transnational network resources, which differentiates them from lower social classes. A similar logic applies for education in private kindergartens (and schools) rather than public ones. I interpret "gated consumption" as a private, closed, and individual consumer pattern that mirrors a corresponding psychology in the Chinese middle class. Transnational connections here function not only to source safe food for children but also as important identification of their middle-class status in the dimension of social capital.

Domestic insecurity is also the main issue that discourages overseas Chinese immigrant parents from returning to their home country. They have achieved middle-class status in fierce competition and realized transnational mobility, living in a developed welfare society abroad. To avoid the anxiety experienced by their peers in China, the immigrant Chinese parents spare no effort to settle down in Denmark to raise the next generation. However, raising families in

a new country is not as easy as they expected. Besides the economic pressure, loneliness, homesickness, cultural shock, language barriers, ambivalence, and racial discrimination are also challenges faced by overseas immigrants. With limited resources in the guest country, the connection with their home country tends to be the option used to search for solutions to these challenges.

The small-scale transnational business of *daigou* brings not only tangible economic income but also alleviates the loneliness and humdrum of everyday life for Chinese housewives. Importantly, the business also offers possibilities for long-term residence permits in a friendly entrepreneurial environment in Denmark. The *daigou* business may not bring a reasonable amount of economic income for overseas families, but it brings resources in different forms that are potentially reproduced or converted to economic capital. Compared with the transnational strategy to source safe products from abroad adopted by the middle class in China, their overseas counterparts explore more resources outside of China through transnational mobility. Therefore, the *daigou* business to overseas Chinese families is not only an approach to earn money but a strategy to get rid of domestic uncertainty and gain access to premium resources outside China to raise families and realize family prosperity. Spatial mobility does not necessarily mean relational alienation from the home country. On the contrary, the transnational network is the foundation for establishing the transnational business relationship that allows *daigou* operators to raise their overseas Chinese families.

Ending Remarks: The Future of Daigou

This research begins with the boom of a transnational network business of reselling infant formula to feed Chinese babies after the 2000s, and examines the intensifying flows of people, money, products, knowledge, and technology from an anthropological perspective. As a billion-dollar industry, the economic value of *daigou* is often highlighted by the media (Luo 2018; Xiao and Mantesso 2019). However, the social processes and life stories of both

consumers and *daigou* operators involved in the business has attracted less public attention. This research has demonstrated the relevance of this network business for multiple themes in sociology and the humanities – family, relationship, morality, trust, gender, and class. The *daigou* business itself is thus a social setting.

I finished my fieldwork at the end of 2019 and I completed this conclusion in October 2022. In this period, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the *daigou* industry and on resellers. The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, originated in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and then spread to more than 200 countries and territories around the world. Until October 2022, the World Health Organization has reported more than 6.5 million deaths related to the disease. Travel restrictions, shipping delays, lower consumer confidence, and cost increases have had a great influence on the *daigou* industry and the operators. I followed up with some *daigou* informants during the pandemic and they told me that some operators, especially small-scale business owners, had already quit the business and started to search for alternatives. They may start their businesses again when the negative effects of COVID-19 have passed. The pandemic has brought a lot of uncertainty to industries to differing degrees, and it still continues to do so to some extent, and the *daigou* business is no exception.

Starting from 1 January 2019, the promulgation of the Chinese E-commerce Law also dealt a blow to the *daigou* industry. The law requires natural persons, legal persons and unincorporated organizations engaged in the economic activities of selling goods or providing services through the Internet and other information networks to register as market entities and pay taxes in China. As e-commerce operators, *daigou* resellers confront new challenges in doing this business due to the Chinese state's attention to this booming grey market. In short, the past two decades have witnessed the *daigou* business developing from a Chinese shopper's suitcase business into a billion-dollar industry, bringing opportunities to both Chinese consumers to buy authentic foreign products, and to overseas immigrants to establish their

careers abroad. However, these opportunities may prove to be temporary in the current changing global environment. The bigger the industry is, the more attention it will get. The more state attention is focused on the grey market, the less space there is for the players. The *daigou* business is expected to be a temporary and "opportunistic exploitation of gaps in the transnational supply chain" (F. Martin 2022, 157).

Given the different risks and uncertainties of the industry environment, the network business of *daigou* might fade from the public view. Yet, the phenomenon directs our attention to the discussion of some relevant perennial themes relating to society and humanity. This dissertation has used three terms: "transnational flows", "relatedness", and "family reproduction" in describing the *daigou* business. "Flow" indicates the format of the business with its spatial mobility of products and people. "Relatedness" is the main difference between the *daigou* business and other business forms. The entanglement of market and sentiment in the business is the analytic core of this research. The development of modern technology has brought revolutionary changes to traditional business and accelerated different forms of flows both locally and internationally. Despite the technological changes and attendant social changes, relatedness remains the core theme of family life, and indeed of human social history. The format of the *daigou* business may change alongside technological, economic, and social conditions, but the individuals' daily life still revolves around dealing with different kinds of social relationships. Specifically, the *daigou* operators use their horizontal relationships to establish their businesses and to benefit their vertical family relationships. Similarly, middle-class consumers in China spare no effort to buy trustworthy products by utilizing their network to access the *daigou* channel with the hope of providing premium care for their children. Finally, the theme of family reproduction connects all the elements of the business chain – the middle-class anxiety, the gendered work, the social stratification, and the morality of striving for family prosperity.

This dissertation should not be read as a research report which supports or resists the grey market like the *daigou* business. As long as the structural problems of social mistrust and class stratification persist, stricter regulations of the grey business may intensify both Chinese consumers' motivation to source trustworthy products through unofficial channels and the operators' pressure to explore alternatives to their raise families overseas. Tightening regulations may also depreciate the value of women's labor, as the work is already commonly understood as a kind of family sideline business with a subordinate status. The space for *daigou* business is constantly shrinking due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and relevant regulations. For China, it is imperative to lift the burden from anxious parents, to regulate the domestic market, and to rebuild consumers' confidence and social trust as these are the root causes of the boom of the private transnational network business.

Appendix A 1: Sample Characteristics (Denmark)

Table 1. Participating Informants of *Daigou* Operators in Denmark

	Female	Male
Number of Informants	18	2
Age Ranges		
21 – 25 years	1	0
26 – 30 years	8	0
31 – 35 years	7	1
36 – 40 years	1	1
Above 40 years	1	0
Scales of Business		
0 – 1 employee	15	0
2 – 5 employees	2	1
6 – 10 employees	1	0
More than 10 employees	0	1
Fieldwork Sites		
Aarhus	8	1
Aalborg	7	1
Sønderborg	3	0
Marital Status		
Married	14	1
Unmarried	3	0
Divorced	1	1
Children		
None	5	0
1 child	10	1
2 children	2	1
3 children	1	0
Employment Status		
Unemployed	8	0
Employed	1	0
Self-employed	7	2
Student	2	0

Appendix A 2: Sample Characteristics (China)

Table 2. Participating Informants of Chinese Parents in China

	Female	Male
Number of Informants	30	2
Age Ranges		
21 – 25 years	1	0
26 – 30 years	5	1
31 – 35 years	18	1
36 – 40 years	1	0
Above 40 years	5	0
Channels of Purchasing Infant Formula[1]		
Daigou	24	2
Online Shops	3	0
Offline Shops	3	0
Fieldwork Sites		
Tangshan	9	1
Tianjin	21	1
Marital Status		
Married	29	2
Unmarried	0	0
Divorced	1	0
Children		
1 child	25	1
2 children	4	1
3 children	1	0
Employment Status		
Unemployed	9	0
Employed	17	0
Self-employed	4	2

1. Five of the informants of Chinese parents bought infant formula through more than one channel. In this case, they are categorized by the main channel that they used to buy infant formula.

Appendix B 1: The Interview Guide for Informants of *Daigou* (Denmark)

The Interview Guide for Informants of Daigou (Denmark)

代购网络采访提纲（丹麦）

Institution: Aarhus University　　Name: Meina Jia Sandal

机构：奥胡斯大学　　姓名：贾美娜

Hello, I am a PhD student at the Depart of Global Studies at Aarhus University. Thank you so much for accepting the interview which is used for my research on *daigou* network in Denmark. You can refuse to response to the questions you do not want to answer. The information you offer will only be used for my research. I will use pseudonym in the research to protect your personal information.

Thank you again for your paticipation.

您好，我是丹麦奥胡斯大学全球研究系的博士生，感谢您参加本次关于“海外代购网络”的采访。以下是本次采访提纲，针对具体问题，您可以回答也可以拒绝回答。您所提供的信息仅用于学术研究。我将在采访和写作中使用假名，以保护您的个人信息。

再次感谢您的参与。

1. Status in Denmark 在丹生活状况

1.1 When did you come to Denmark and why?

何时来丹麦？为什么选择来丹麦？

1.2 Do you have family in Denmark? (If applicable)

您在丹麦是否有家庭？（如果适用）

1.3 How do you usually spend one day in Denmark?

您典型的一天生活是什样的？

1.4 What are the challenges for you to live in Denmark?

在丹麦生活有哪些困难？

1.5 Are there any special experiences in Denmark?

在丹麦生活有哪些特别的经历？

2. Experiences of *Daigou* 代购经历

2.1 When did you start to do *daigou* business?

您是什么时候开始代购的？

2.2 How did you develop your *daigou* network?

您是如何发展您的代购网络的？

2.3 Does your partner help with the *daigou* business? (If applicable)

您的伴侣是否帮助您经营代购？（如果适用）

2.4 What is your work content in *daigou*?

您代购的工作内容包括哪些？

2.5 How do you manage your *daigou* business in China?

您如何打理在中国的业务？

2.6 Do you think you are employed as *daigou*? (If applicable)

您是被雇佣的代购吗？（如果适用）

2.7 Did the enforcement of E-commerce Law influence your business?

电商法的实施给您的代购生意带来了影响吗？

2.8 Is there any impressive experience related your *daigou* business?

您是否有一个关于代购特别的经历？

2.9 How did the *daigou* business change your life?

代购生意给您的生活带来了什么样的变化？

3. Future Plan 未来计划

3.1 Are you considering to do *daigou* as a long-term career?

您计划把代购作为一项长期事业吗？

3.2 Have you considered to go back to China?

您考虑过回中国发展吗？

3.3 How do you communicate with your customers if you do not do *daigou* in future?

如果您未来不做代购了，如何与您的客户沟通？

3.4 Could you share with me about your customers' reviews on your business?

您方便分享一下，您客户对您的代购服务的评价吗？

4. Opinions on Relevant Topics about "*Daigou*" "代购" 相关问题的看法

4.1 Do you have contact with other *daigou* operators?

您是否与其他代购有联系？

4.2 What do you think about the local impression on *daigou* in Denmark?

您认为在丹麦当地人对中国代购现象印象如何？

4.3 Why do you think Chinese consumers buy products from *daigou* channel?

您觉得为什么中国消费者选择从代购渠道购买商品？

4.4 How do you evaluate your life in Denmark and in China?

您如何评价您在丹麦和之前在中国的生活？

Appendix B 2: The Interview Guide for Informants of Chinese Parents (China)

The Interview Guide for Informants of Chinese Parents (China)
中国父母采访提纲（中国）

Institution: Aarhus University　　Name: Meina Jia Sandal
机构：奥胡斯大学　　姓名：贾美娜

Hello, I am a PhD student at the Depart of Global Studies at Aarhus University. Thank you so much for accepting the interview which is used for my research on *daigou* network of infant formula. You can refuse to response to the questions you do not want to answer. The information you offer will only be used for my research. I will use pseudonym in the research to protect your personal information.
Thank you again for your participation.

您好，我是丹麦奥胡斯大学全球研究系的博士生，感谢您参加本次关于“奶粉代购”的采访。以下是本次采访提纲，针对具体问题，您可以回答也可以拒绝回答。您所提供的信息仅用于学术研究。我将在采访和写作中使用假名，以保护您的个人信息。
再次感谢您的参与。

1. **Status in China 家庭情况**

1.1 How many people at your family?
您家有几口人？

1.2 How do you usually spend one day?
您通常怎样度过一天？

1.3 How do you divide domestic work at home?
在家里，家务事如何分工的？

1.4 Do your parents take care of your children?

您的父母是否照顾您的孩子？

2. Child Feeding 儿童喂养情况

2.1 Who is in charge of children's food at your home?

在家里谁主要负责孩子的饮食？

2.2 Is (are) your child (children) breastfed?

您的孩子是母乳喂养吗？

2.3 What kinds of food do your children usually have?

您通常给您的孩子喂养什么食物？

2.4 Where do you usually buy food for your children?

您通常在什么地方给孩子采购食物？

2.5 Have you ever calculated how much you pay for children's food monthly?

您计算过每个月孩子的饮食费用大概是多少钱吗？

3. Opinions on "*daigou*" 关于代购渠道的看法

3.1 Have you purchased children's products through "*daigou*" channel?

您是否通过“代购”渠道采购过婴幼儿产品？

3.2 Why do you choose "*daigou*" channel rather than other channels? (If applicable)

为什么您选择“代购”渠道而不是其他渠道采购？（如果适用）

3.3 How did you search for trustworthy "*daigou*" resellers?

您是如何找到值得信任的“代购”买手的？

3.4 Do you have any special experiences related to "*daigou*"?

您有什么特别的代购经历吗？

3.5 How do you evaluate your relationship with "*daigou"* operators?

您如何看待您和“代购”买手之间的关系的？

3.6 Have you heard about E-commerce Law? How do you interpret the law?

您是否听说过电商法？您如何理解这项法案？

4. Other Relevant Topics on Child Feeding and Childrearing 育儿相关问题

4.1 Are you worried about the food safety issues in your community?

在您所生活的区域，您是否担心过食品安全问题？

4.2 Do you have other issues that you are worried about in daily life besides food safety?

在您的日常生活中，除了食品安全问题，您还有其他担心的问题吗？

4.3 How to you manage the concerns you mentioned?

您是如何应对这些担心的问题的？

4.4 Are you influenced by other people or factors when you buy children's products?

在您为孩子选择商品时，您是否会收到他人或者其他因素的影响？

4.5 Are you satisfied with the kindergarten where you send your children?

您对孩子入托的幼儿园是否满意？

4.6 How did you choose the kindergarten or school for your children?

您是如何为您的孩子选择幼儿园或者学校的？

Note

Introduction

1. For ethical research purposes, all informants' names are pseudonyms, and I also changed some significant biographical and geographical details.
2. WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent. By 2018, it was one of the world's largest standalone mobile apps by monthly active users. It is known as China's "app for everything" and a "super app" because of its wide range of functions and platforms.
3. Taobao is a Chinese online shopping website. It is the world's biggest e-commerce website, facilitating consumer-to-consumer (C2C) retail by providing a platform for small businesses and individual entrepreneurs to open online stores that mainly cater to consumers in mainland China.
4. It could happen that one *daigou* operator registers several shops online on *Taobao* to increase exposure to potential consumers. Therefore, even though there are about 5,000 shops online to sell Danish products, the number of *daigou* operators could be less than 5,000.
5. *iResearch Consulting Group* is a professional market research and consulting company, supplying online business services in China. For the details about the report on the Transnational *daigou* Industry Report 2021, refer to https://pdf.dfcfw.com/pdf/H3_AP202106151498097680_1.pdf
6. For details about the report, see Danish Agriculture and Food Council, Annual Statistics, Dairy Statistics 2020, https://agricultureandfood.dk/prices-and-statistics/annual-statistics
7. Inspired by the idea of a Gentlemen's Club, which is a private social club of a type originally set up by men from Britain's upper classes in the 18th century and succeeding centuries, a lot of high-end hotels or restaurants are named as "Club" (*huisuo*) to attract different types of clients from the middle or upper classes in China, such as a ladies' club, a business club, a private club, etc.
8. UNICEF, Development Indicators of Chinese children, 2019, https://www.unicef.cn/sites/unicef.org.china/files/2019-02/CN%20Atlas%202018-FINAL.pdf

9. For example, the price of one 1kg tin of infant formula purchased from the Chinese market is about 480 RMB (70 USD) while that of the same brand formula in the Danish market costs about 90 DKK (15 USD), according to the research in 2018-2019.
10. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) introduced terms of "prosumer/presumption" to refer to the intensified blurring between consumption and production in a Web 2.0 technologies environment in light of Alvin Toffler's (1980) futurist research.
11. The Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region (PRD) is one of the most densely urbanized regions in the world and it is now the wealthiest region in South China. PRD has been one of the most economically dynamic regions of China since the launch of China's reform in 1979.

Chapter 1

1. The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement in China from 1966, launched by Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China (PRC). With the goal to preserve Chinese communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, millions of Chinese people were accused of being members of the Five Black Categories, suffering public humiliation, imprisonment, torture, hard labor, and seizure of property. Yan was categorized as a family member in this group and fled to *Xia Jia Village* in Northeast China.
2. The actual number of interviewees was ten, because when I did the interviews, some of interviewees' family members also joined in the conversation.
3. Denmark used to be the largest producer of mink skins in the world. In November 2020, the Danish Government ordered the culling of 17 million minks in order to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, thus ending the mink industry in Denmark.
4. *TV 2 news,* "Chinese people send Danish infant formula by post to China," January 12, 2021. https://nyheder.tv2.dk/business/2021-01-12-kinesere-sender-dansk-modermaelkserstatning-med-posten-til-kina
5. The description of each grade from -3 points to 12 points in the grading system in Denmark can be found via the link: https://ufm.dk/en/education/the-danish-education-system/grading-system

Chapter 2

1. Women hired to take care of a newborn child and its mother in the month after childbirth.
2. Traditional one-month confinement period following childbirth puerperium.
3. A family planning initiative in China imposed in 1980 that limits many families to having a single child to curb the population growth.
4. A state-owned Chinese dairy company was based in Shijiazhuang, the capital city of Hebei. It produced one of the oldest and most popular brands of infant formula in China. Sanlu Group went bankrupt after the melamine infant scandal in 2008 when an estimated 300,000 babies became ill, and six cases resulted in death after drinking Sanlu infant formula.
5. It is common to use "exclusive breastfeeding rate" to evaluate breastfeeding situations, for example, in documents published by WHO. However, only few research works track the progress of breastfeeding through the 'exclusive breastfeeding rate' in China. Usually, a mixed usage of different levels of breastfeeding rates is adopted to show the progress of breastfeeding status in China. An official report from WHO in 2021 pointed out that "only 42% of countries have collected data on exclusive breastfeeding in the last five years." This report can be downloaded from https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HEP-NFS-21.45
6. *Muru daiyongpin xiaoshou guanli banfa* (Management Rules of Breast Milk Substitutes) http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-08/23/content_25511.htm
7. *naifen dianshi zuo guanggao weigui shangbai jia naifen changshang "mingzhigufan"* (infant formula advertising is a violation, more than a hundred infant formula manufactures "commit the mistake on purpose")
8. http://www.ce.cn/cysc/sp/info/201006/04/t20100604_20406096.shtml
9. *iiMedia* is a world-renowned third-party data mining and analysis organization for new economic industries. The full report can be downloaded from https://report.iimedia.cn/repo12-0/39318.html?acPlatCode=sohu&acFrom=bg39318
10. *Memory of Taste by one Yuan.* https://www.financialnews.com.cn/cul/tzsc/202101/t20210129_210940.html
    Where is the Luxury Product "Malted Milk". https://www.163.com/dy/article/EOCR8EJE0522D0R5.html
11. North China Factory, Tony Lanzelo and Boyce Richardson, 1980. https://www.nfb.ca/film/north_china_factory/#:~:text=Tony%20Ianzelo%20%26%20Boyce%20Richardson,high%2Dquality%20cloth%20per%20year

12. Yearly Statistics on workers in China can refer to *Zhongguo Laodong Tongji Nianjian (the Year Book on Labour statistics in China*)
    https://www.yearbookchina.com/navibooklist-N2006010415-1.html
13. For example, Xinhua News and China Daily used series to report the development of the *Sanlu* milk powder scandal
    http://www.he.xinhuanet.com/zhuanti/slwtn/jiaodian.htm
    https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cj/cyzh/news/2008/10-10/1407336.shtml
14. The article spread rapidly on Internet but it was deleted by the author after it aroused extensive attention. China Dairy Industry Association (CDIA) criticized the author publicly by official documents.
15. The halo effect is the tendency for positive impressions of a person, company, brand or product in one area to positively influence one's opinion or feelings in other areas.

Chapter 3

1. *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China* (1986, 2006) http://www.gov.cn/flfg/2006-06/30/content_323302.htm
2. According to the regulation on "admission nearby" which means children are required to attend schools that are located nearby, many Chinese parents also pay a lot of money to buy a property in the school district where the high-quality public schools located in order to send their kids to those schools.
3. RYB Kindergarten is one preschool-educational brand under RYB Education, a publicly listed company for preschool education in China. As measured by annual total revenues in 2016, the company is the largest provider of early childhood education service in China.
4. Hong Bao (Red Pocket) has a long history in China which is originally a way to express wishes and gratitude between friends and family members. For example, grandparents give Hong Bao to grandchildren during the Chinese New Year and the relatives give Hong Bao to new married couples. As there is usually money in the Red Pocket, it developed into a way to bribe someone with other purposes. Chinese Communist Party has established disciplines on bribery in the public sector.
5. "Chinese Social Survey" (CSS) is a nationwide large-scale continuous sampling survey project initiated by the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2005. This survey is a long-term longitudinal survey on China's social changes, family and social

life, and social attitudes, etc. which is organized to obtain data on China's social changes during the transition period so as to provide detailed and scientific information for social science research and government decision-making.

6. "Keeping up with the Jonese" is an idiom in the English-speaking world referring to a type of activity of comparing to one's neighbor as a benchmark for certain social class. To fail to "keep up with the Joneses" is perceived as demonstrating socio-economic or cultural inferiority. So, people also tend to want to invest in cultural capital to be able to give the impression that they are cultured and as such belong to these circles.
7. The World Bank, Gini Index-China, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?end=2019&locations=CN&start=2007&view=chart
8. From 1955 until 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has released 12 guidelines and suggestions on alleviating academic burdens. For more details, refer to the official website of the Ministry of Education. http://www.moe.gov.cn/
9. *Tang Ping* is a latest social buzzword in China, directly translated into "lying flat". The expression reflects a new attitude toward work and life among some young people in a world of rapid change and expanding possibilities. It describes status that people just lie down and do nothing. For the more details, see Xinhua News: With enough to get by, are young people "lying flat?" http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-06/06/c_139992192.htm
10. Tianjin Yinghua International School is a prestigious private school in Wuqing District in Tianjin. It has excellent quality and good reputation. For more information about this school, see its official website: https://www.isacteach.com/school/tianjin-yinghua-international-school/

Chapter 4

1. Arla Foods is a Scandinavian multinational cooperative in Denmark which is also the largest producer of dairy products in Scandinavia.
2. Statistics Denmark. (2022). Population on the first day of the quarter by municipality, sex, age, marital status, ancestry, country of origin and citizenship. Retrieved from https://www.statbank.dk/
3. For information about tax, see the Danish tax system website: https://skat.dk/

4. For information about hourly earnings in different sectors, see Workplace Denmark https://workplacedenmark.dk/
5. The one-child policy was a program in China that limited most Chinese families to one child each. It was implemented nationwide by the Chinese government in 1980, and it ended in 2016.
6. *The E-Commerce Law of the People's Republic of China* came into force on 1 January, 2019. For the full text of the law, see https://www.jetro.go.jp/ext_images/world/asia/cn/ip/law/pdf/regulation/regulation20190101.pdf
7. The majority of my informants of *daigou* had residence permit of family reunification. A few of them got residence permit of work by the busines, following the Pay Limit Scheme, which means they could earn a yearly salary of at least 448,000 Danish Kroner (approxi. 60,182 USD). For more information, please refer to the website of New-to-Denmark https://nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/You-want-to-apply/Work.

Chapter 5

1. WeChat Channel is a video app within WeChat. Users of WeChat can use this feature to create the post short video content and distribute them through WeChat. This feature could help brands raise brand awareness in Chinese social e-commerce and Chinese social media marketing.
2. *Moments* is a function of the smartphone app WeChat. The Chinese translation of *Moments* is known as “Friends' Circle”, which means users can share and get access to accepted WeChat friends' information, creating an intimate and private communicating circle within the users' choice of close friends.
3. The short video market in China developed quickly along with the *stay-at-home economy* especially during the coronavirus crisis. For example, founded in 2016, *Douyin* (Tik Tok in China) has already 486 million active users in China in 2019. Source: https://daxueconsulting.com/short-video-market-china/
4. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020.

5. A Taobao Village by Chinese definition is a village with at least 50 households operating their own shops on Tabao. These clusters of rural online entrepreneurs have become a significant force behind the development of "rural e-commerce" in China (Fan, 2019).
6. *Zhong Cao*, literally means planting seeds, which is an internet slang describing the feeling of eagerly buying something. To "Zhong Cao" something to others means to recommend something to others, a term which is frequently used in on-live shopping.
7. For more information on the COVID-19 pandemic, see WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. (2022). https://covid19.who.int/
8. For more information on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, see UNICEF Data. (2022).https://data.unicef.org/resources/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-world-a-statistical-perspective/
9. For example, Xinhua News reported the COVID-19 virus was detected on imported pork from Brazil and beef from Uruguay on 6 December 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-12/06/c_1126828703.htm.
10. Geographically, Denmark consists of Jutland Peninsula, three big islands: Sjælland, Fyn, and Bornholm as well as 403 small islands. There are about 2.2 million inhabitants living in Jutland in Denmark.
11. This point is more evident in the "online food market" than the *daigou* business, both run by Chinese women in Denmark.
12. European Institute for Gender Equality, October 2020, Gender Equality Index 2020: Denmark. https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2020-denmark

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English Summary

Daigou: Transnational Flows, Relatedness, and the Reproduction of the Chinese Family is an ethnography of a transnational network business form known as *"daigou"* which unfolds between China and Denmark. *Daigou* is arguably a Chinese practice whereby an individual or a group of exporters living outside China purchases commodities for customers in China. As a strategy for dealing with food-safety concerns, *daigou* has turned into a massive global business, a largely unregulated grey market that trades virtually all kinds of consumer goods to China, especially luxury products and infant formula. Specifically, this research examines the *daigou* network business of Danish infant formula to China from an anthropological perspective.

The dissertation's empirical basis is a multi-sited ethnography, following the object of foreign infant formula from the demand side in China to the supply side in Denmark. I collected data in multiple field sites, including in a high-end kindergarten in Tianjin city and with families in Tangshan city in China, as well as in three supermarkets and in *daigou* operators' homes in Denmark. I adopted a transnational anthropological approach to investigate the connections between the two sides of the network business and their respective characteristics.

Drawing on the two flows that make up the *daigou* business practice, namely the flow of products – in this case – from Denmark to China (Danish infant formula) and the flow of people from China to Denmark (Chinese immigrants), this research explores two types of transnational strategies of family reproduction among two groups from the Chinese middle-class in the context of globalization and immigration. These two groups of Chinese families share one thing in common – they all face the challenges, anxieties and new opportunities that come about as a result of greater choice with the loosening of collective mechanisms and the greater role of the market.

The dissertation is divided into seven sections. Besides the introductory chapter, the first chapter on methodology, and the final concluding chapter, there are four main chapters, two of which focus on fieldwork in China and two on fieldwork in Denmark. At the center of my inquiry stands the question of how middle-class Chinese navigate the uncertain domestic market and raise the next generation under the background of globalization. I examine this issue through four main themes within the *daigou* business of infant formula between Denmark and China: Child feeding transition in China, middle-class anxiety, morality and money, and gendered work.

The history review of child feeding transition examines the development and differences related to the theme of feeding infants between two generations of Chinese parents. Taking infant formula as the key substance of relatedness, in light of Janet Carsten's theories on kinship, I argue that the use of infant formula changes a natural biological relationship between children and mothers into a mediated one, as a substitute not just in nutritional but also in social terms. Therefore, the choice of different types of infant formula is hierarchized and can also be used to indicate the degrees of investment of care. The transition of child feeding from breastfeeding to the popularity of breastmilk substitute is closely related to the socioeconomic change of the state. Compared with the conventional risks, such as food shortage and hygiene issues, faced by the grandparent generation, the current young Chinese parents are facing a more complicated situation with uncertainty which is the main reason for Chinese parents' anxiety.

The ethnography of the high-end kindergarten shows that Chinese middle-class anxiety is related not only to feeding but also generally to other aspects of childrearing. In order to relieve their anxiety, they adopt a strategy of "gated consumption" to source safe food to feed their children, navigating a market full of uncertainties. The demand for high-quality children's food is established in my analysis of the Chinese fieldwork data, which paves the way for a

discussion of the development of the transnational *daigou* commercial channel. The "large private" strategy adopted by the Chinese middle class further shows their relationships with other classes and the state, and their collective anxiety may be alleviated through the private and individualized strategy but could not be solved. As the middle class could figure out their ways to navigate in the uncertain and competitive society, there is little possibility for collective action to change the situation on a general level to create a wide-ranging trustworthy environment for the next generation.

On the supply side of the *daigou* business, this research examines how Chinese immigrants utilize their transnational kinship networks to establish their businesses and realize family prosperity in Denmark. I use the word of "fluidity" to describe the characteristics of the morality involved in the relationships entangled in the network business through analysing relational interactions via two groups of axes: Vertical relationship and horizontal relationship, sentimental relationship and instrumental relationship. I argue that the entanglement of relationships and profits constitutes an important part of business, which creates a dilemma for *daigou* operators between realizing the relational moral obligation and making money. Taking advantage of the connection to consumers in China and the access to products in Denmark, Chinese immigrants use *daigou* businesses to explore possibilities for raising their families outside China.

The characteristic of feminization of the *daigou* network business directs the research to the gender dimension. Because of the blurred boundary between the reproductive labor and productive labor involved in the *daigou* business, this feminized work is often devalued. In light of Pierre Bourdieu's capital theories, this research examines how and why *daigou* develop into a female-dominated industry and how care and motherhood are used as a kind of capital to create economic value, thus providing new insights into our understanding of gendered capital. The *daigou* business and other similar feminized inform work manifest not only the

conversion from the gendered social capital to economic capital but also the reproduction of social capital. Specifically, in the case of *daigou* business between Denmark and China, the social and cultural resource in Denmark is more attractive to the Chinese immigrants than the economic profits from doing the business. The ethnography on *daigou* operators in Denmark illustrates the other strategy adopted by the Chinese middle class to deal with the uncertainty in the domestic market in China: Transnational mobility.

I use the term *transnational strategy* to summarize the approaches that middle-class Chinese families adopt to handle anxiety about the insecurity related to food and other aspects of family reproduction. *Daigou* business may disappear or transform into other forms due to regulations and other unpredictable influences, such as COVID-19, but broad questions manifested from the business about class, gender, relationship, market economy, and globalization will be longstanding topics in China and also in other societies, which should be addressed in future research.

Dansk Resume

Daigou: Transnational Flows, Relatedness, and the Reproduction of the Chinese Family er en etnografi af en transnational netværksforretningsform kendt som "*daigou*", som udspiller sig mellem Kina og Danmark. *Daigou* er en kinesisk praksis, hvor en person eller en gruppe af eksportører, der bor uden for Kina, køber varer til kunder i Kina. Som en strategi til håndtering af fødevaresikkerhedsproblemer er *daigou* blevet til en massiv global forretning, et stort set ureguleret gråt marked, der forhandler stort set alle slags forbrugsvarer til Kina, især luksusprodukter og modermælkserstatning. Konkret undersøger denne forskning *daigou*-netværksvirksomheden af dansk modermælkserstatning til Kina fra et antropologisk perspektiv.

Afhandlingens empiriske grundlag er en *multi-sited* etnografi, der følger genstanden for udenlandsk modermælkserstatning fra efterspørgselssiden i Kina til udbudssiden i Danmark. Jeg indsamlede data på flere feltsteder, herunder i en privatbørnehave i byen Tianjin og hos familier i byen Tangshan i Kina, samt i tre supermarkeder og i daigou-operatørers hjem i Danmark. Jeg valgte en transnational antropologisk tilgang til at undersøge sammenhængen mellem de to sider af netværksvirksomheden og deres respektive karakteristika.

Med udgangspunkt i de to strømme, der udgør daigou-forretningspraksis, nemlig strømmen af produkter – i dette tilfælde – fra Danmark til Kina (dansk modermælkserstatning) og strømmen af mennesker fra Kina til Danmark (kinesiske immigranter), undersøger denne forskning to typer af transnationale strategier for familiereproduktion blandt to grupper fra den kinesiske middelklasse i forbindelse med globalisering og immigration. Disse to grupper af kinesiske familier har én ting til fælles – de står alle over for de udfordringer, bekymringer og nye muligheder, der opstår som et resultat af større valgmuligheder med løsningen af de kollektive mekanismer og markedets større rolle.

Afhandlingen er opdelt i syv sektioner. Udover det indledende kapitel, den første metodekapitel og det sidste afsluttende kapitel er der fire hovedkapitler, hvoraf to fokuserer på feltarbejde i Kina og to om feltarbejde i Danmark. I centrum af min undersøgelse står spørgsmålet om, hvordan middelklassekinesere navigerer i et usikkert hjemmemarked og opdrager den næste generation med globalisering i baggrunden. Jeg undersøger denne problemstilling gennem fire hovedtemaer inden for *daigou*-forretningen med modermælkserstatning mellem Danmark og Kina: Overgang til børns fodring i Kina, middelklasseangst, moral og penge og kønsbestemt arbejde.

Historiegennemgangen af børns ernæringsovergang undersøger udviklingen og forskellene relateret til temaet for madning af spædbørn mellem to generationer af kinesiske forældre. I lyset af Janet Carstens teorier om slægtskab argumenterer jeg for, at brugen af modermælkserstatning ændrer et naturligt biologisk forhold mellem børn og mødre til et medieret forhold, som en erstatning ikke kun i ernæringsmæssigt, men også i social henseende. Derfor er valget af forskellige typer modermælkserstatning hierarkiseret og kan også bruges til at angive graden af investering af omsorg. Overgangen af børnemadning fra amning til populariteten af modermælkserstatninger er tæt forbundet med den socioøkonomiske forandring af staten. Sammenlignet med de konventionelle risici, såsom fødevaremangel og hygiejneproblemer, som bedsteforældregenerationen står over for, står de nuværende unge kinesiske forældre over for en mere kompliceret situation med usikkerhed, som er hovedårsagen til kinesiske forældres angst.

Etnografien af privatbørnehaven viser, at den kinesiske middelklasses angst ikke kun er relateret til fodring, men også generelt til andre aspekter af børneopdragelse. For at lindre deres angst, vedtager de en strategi med "indlukket forbrug" for at skaffe sikker mad til at brødføde deres børn og navigere på et marked fuld af usikkerhed. Efterspørgslen efter højkvalitets børnemad er etableret i min analyse af de kinesiske feltarbejdedata, som baner vejen for en

diskussion af udviklingen af den transnationale *daigou* kommercielle kanal. Den "store privat" strategi, der blev vedtaget af den kinesiske middelklasse, viser yderligere deres forhold til andre klasser og staten, og deres kollektive angst kan lindres gennem den private og individualiserede strategi, men kunne ikke løses. Da middelklassen har fundet ud af, hvordan de kunne navigere i det usikre og konkurrenceprægede samfund, er der ringe mulighed for kollektiv handling for at ændre situationen på et generelt plan for at skabe et bredt troværdigt miljø for den næste generation.

På udbudssiden af *daigou*-virksomheden undersøger denne forskning, hvordan kinesiske immigranter udnytter deres transnationale slægtskabsnetværk til at etablere deres virksomheder og realisere familievelstand i Danmark. Jeg bruger ordet "fluiditet" til at beskrive karakteristikaene for den moral, der er involveret i de relationer, der er viklet ind i netværksvirksomheden gennem at analysere relationelle interaktioner via to grupper af akser: Vertikal relation og horisontal relation, sentimental relation og instrumentel relation. Jeg hævder, at sammenfiltringen af relationer og overskud udgør en vigtig del af forretningen, hvilket skaber et dilemma for *daigou*-operatører mellem at realisere den relationelle moralske forpligtelse og tjene penge. Ved at udnytte forbindelsen til forbrugerne i Kina og adgangen til produkter i Danmark, bruger kinesiske immigranter *daigou*-virksomheder til at udforske mulighederne for at etablere deres familier uden for Kina.

Det karakteristiske ved feminisering af *daigou*-netværksvirksomheden retter forskningen mod kønsdimensionen. På grund af den slørede grænse mellem det reproduktive arbejde og det produktive arbejde, der er involveret i *daigou*-virksomheden, bliver dette feminiserede arbejde ofte devalueret. I lyset af Pierre Bourdieus kapitalteorier undersøger denne forskning, hvordan og hvorfor *daigou* udvikler sig til en kvindedomineret industri, og hvordan omsorg og moderskab bruges som en slags kapital til at skabe økonomisk værdi og dermed give ny indsigt i vores forståelse af kønsbestemt kapital. *Daigou*-forretningen og andet lignende feminiseret

informationsarbejde manifesterer ikke kun konverteringen fra den kønnede sociale kapital til økonomisk kapital, men også reproduktionen af social kapital. Specifikt i tilfældet med *daigou*-forretninger mellem Danmark og Kina, er den sociale og kulturelle ressource i Danmark mere attraktiv for de kinesiske immigranter end det økonomiske overskud ved at drive forretning. Etnografien om *daigou*-operatører i Danmark illustrerer en anden strategi, som den kinesiske middelklasse har valgt for at håndtere usikkerheden på hjemmemarkedet i Kina: Transnational mobilitet.

Jeg bruger udtrykket *transnational strategi* til at opsummere de tilgange, som kinesiske middelklassefamilier anvender til at håndtere angsten for usikkerhed relateret til mad og andre aspekter af familiereproduktion. *Daigou*-virksomhed kan forsvinde eller forvandle sig til andre former på grund af reguleringer og andre uforudsigelige påvirkninger, såsom COVID-19, men brede spørgsmål manifesteret fra forretningen om klasse, køn, forhold, markedsøkonomi og globalisering vil være mangeårige emner i Kina og også i andre samfund, hvilket bør behandles i fremtidig forskning.

This dissertation is an ethnography of a transnational network business form known as “daigou” which unfolds between China and Denmark. Daigou is arguably a Chinese practice whereby an individual or a group of exporters living outside China purchases commodities for customers in China. Specifically, this research examines the daigou network business of Danish infant formula to China from an anthropological perspective. Drawing on the two flows that make up the daigou business practice, namely the flow of products (Danish infant formula) and the flow of people (Chinese immigrants), this research explores two types of transnational strategies of family reproduction among two groups from the Chinese middle-class in the context of globalization and immigration.