

Université catholique de Louvain

Cross Border *Dàigòu* Services
on Global Consumer Goods
An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese
Dàigòu Sell their Labor to Chinese Clients

Chenna Wang

Dissertation committee:

Prof. Olivier Servais (Supervisor, UCL, Doyen of ESPO)

Prof. Anne-Marie Vuilleminot (Co-supervisor, UCL, Co-director of LAAP)

Prof. Biao Xiang (External Committee Member, Professor of Oxford &
Director of Max Planck)

Prof. Paul Servais (Jury member, UCL, Meritus Professor)

Prof. Frédéric Laugrand (Jury member, UCL, Director of LAAP)

Version of _____.

To Anne-Marie Vuilleminot, Olivier Servais, and Biao Xiang,
who kept the door to the study of overseas Chinese open for me,
and to Nicole and my parents, who are the best companions
on the road of my research

Contents

Contents	iii
List of Figures	vii
1 Introduction	11
1.1 Looking for A New World	11
1.2 Clarification of the Chinese Word <i>Dàigòu</i> (代购)	20
1.2.1 Practitioners or Professional Shoppers	20
1.2.2 The Behavior of Purchase Overseas Products	23
1.2.3 Practical Concepts Related to <i>Dàigòu</i> Phenomenon	24
1.3 Literature Review	26
1.3.1 <i>Dàigòu</i> Research in Chinese Academia	26
1.3.2 Anthropology and <i>Dàigòu</i> Activity	30
1.3.3 <i>Dàigòu</i> in Virtual Communities	41
1.3.4 Globalization and Global Consumption	44
1.4 Research Methods	51
1.4.1 Take Web Data as a Research Device	51
1.4.2 From Overseas Ethnography to Auto-ethnography	56
1.4.3 Multi-sited Ethnography	67
1.4.4 In-depth Interviews	73
2 The Background of Overseas <i>Dàigòu</i> Phenomenon	75

2.1	Chinese Outbound Tourist Market	75
2.2	Purchasing Power of Chinese Tourists	79
2.3	Chinese International Students	81
2.4	Booming of Internet, E-commerce Market and Social Media	83
2.5	Anyone Can be A Potential <i>Dàigòu</i>	86
3	Belgium's Position in International <i>Dàigòu</i> Market	95
3.1	General Situation of Belgium	95
3.1.1	<i>Brief Introduction to Belgium's History</i>	95
3.1.2	<i>Brief Introduction to Belgium's Geographical Location</i>	98
3.2	Belgium's Position in <i>Dàigòu</i> Market	101
3.2.1	<i>Inherent Impression of Belgium</i>	101
3.2.2	<i>The Underestimated Position of Belgium</i>	102
3.3	Categories of Belgian <i>Dàigòu</i> Products	104
3.3.1	<i>First-line Luxury Goods</i>	105
3.3.2	<i>Entry Luxury</i>	106
3.3.3	<i>Infant Formula & Local Specialty</i>	106
3.3.4	<i>Belgium World Diamond Center and Antwerp Cut</i>	110
3.3.5	<i>Discounted Luxury Stores at Outlets</i>	112
3.3.6	<i>Summary</i>	117
3.4	Price Composition of <i>Dàigòu</i> Product	118
4	Chinese <i>Dàigòu</i> in Belgium	123
4.1	Number of Chinese <i>Dàigòu</i>	123
4.2	Composition of Chinese <i>Dàigòu</i>	125
4.2.1	<i>Dàigòu with Short-term Visa (C Visa)</i>	125
4.2.2	<i>Dàigòu with Long-term visa (D Visa)</i>	129
4.2.3	<i>Dàigòu with Permanent Residence Card (F Card/Orange Card)</i>	131
4.2.4	<i>Chinese Belgians (比利时华侨, 华人)</i>	132
4.2.5	<i>Dàigòu who Do not Need Belgium Identity</i>	133
4.3	How to Become A Qualified <i>Dàigòu</i>	136
4.3.1	<i>Stereotypes on <i>Dàigòu</i></i>	136

4.3.2	<i>As Smart as Businessman, as Capable as Handyman</i>	138
4.4	Development Stages of <i>Dàigòu</i> in Belgium	146
4.4.1	<i>Budding Stage</i>	146
4.4.2	<i>Forced Professionalization Stage</i>	149
4.4.3	<i>Prosperous Stage</i>	150
4.4.4	<i>Professionalization Stage</i>	152
5	Transportation of <i>Dàigòu</i>	155
5.1	From Accidentally <i>Rénròu</i> to Fixed Form of Transport	156
5.1.1	<i>The Concept and Connotation of <i>Rénròu</i></i>	157
5.1.2	<i>How Many Commodities One <i>Rénròu</i> can Take?</i>	161
5.1.3	<i>The Price Mechanism of <i>Rénròu</i></i>	163
5.2	Chinese International Express Companies in Belgium	166
5.2.1	<i>A Brief History of Chinese Express Companies in Belgium</i>	166
5.2.2	<i>Business Introduction of Four Chinese Express Companies</i>	169
5.2.3	<i>The Difference between Two Express Sites in Louvain-la-Neuve</i>	171
5.3	The Reverse Transportation of <i>Dàigòu</i> ?	174
6	Operation Logic of <i>Dàigòu</i>	191
6.1	Virtual Spaces of <i>Dàigòu</i>	191
6.1.1	<i>Business on Mobile Electronic Device</i>	191
6.1.2	<i>Business on Visual Community</i>	193
6.1.3	<i>The Digital Payment System</i>	197
6.2	Affectional Resources and Social Connections of <i>Dàigòu</i>	202
6.2.1	<i>Dàigòu Operates under the Chinese <i>Guānxi</i> System</i>	202
6.2.2	<i>Consumer Trust based on <i>Guānxi</i> Connection</i>	207
6.2.3	<i>Prepayment Rule between <i>Dàigòu</i> and Clients</i>	210
6.3	Extended Clients by Word-of-Mouth Recommendation	212
7	Irreplaceable Labor Service of <i>Dàigòu</i>	221
7.1	The Limited Purchase Policy in Infant Formula	222
7.2	Luxury Lipstick Working as the Substitute of Luxury	225

7.3	The Hunger Marketing at Louis Vuitton	230
7.4	The Unspoken Rule of Hermès (<i>Pèihuò guīzé</i> 配货规则)	240
7.5	From CBO Shopping to CBD Shopping	250
8	The Future of <i>Dàigòu</i>	261
8.1	“D2C” E-commerce Business Mode has been Formed	262
8.1.1	<i>Brief Introduction of Virtual Trade</i>	262
8.1.2	<i>Innovative Combination between C2C and M-Commerce</i>	264
8.2	<i>Dàigòu</i> Becomes New Form of Future Globalization	269
8.2.1	<i>Overseas Consumer Goods in Xiao Pu’s House</i>	269
8.2.2	<i>The Global Dàigòu Map and the Global Dàigòu System</i>	272
8.2.3	<i>How Far Can Dàigòu Go?</i>	278
8.3	Significance of <i>Dàigòu</i> to the World	286
8.3.1	<i>From Global Travel of Masks to New Consumer Culture</i>	286
8.3.2	<i>From Gray Market to Vital Part of Cross-border Business</i>	292
	Key Chinese Concepts	301
	References	306

List of Figures

1.1	Review of <i>dàigòu</i> in Chinese academia	27
1.2	Research related to the subject of overseas <i>dàigòu</i>	28
1.3	Functions on the WeChat homepage	55
1.4	Shopping scope of overseas <i>dàigòu</i>	71
2.1	Travel and tourism: economic impact 2019	76
2.2	Outbound tourism expenditure in different countries and re- gions (1995-2016)	91
2.3	Outbound travel from China by the purpose of trip	92
2.4	Chinese tourists spent a quarter of a trillion dollars abroad	92
2.5	Statistics number of Chinese international students (2000- 2013)	93
2.6	China's overseas <i>dàigòu</i> market scale	94
3.1	Map of Belgium with major cities	97
3.2	Three autonomous regions and four language communities	98
3.3	Transportation between Belgium and neighboring countries	99
3.4	Scope activities of the Chinese <i>dàigòu</i> in Belgium	100
3.5	The most popular global consumer products and brands in <i>dàigòu</i> market	105
3.6	Trappist Westvleteren 12	108
3.7	Unique Belgian beer and beer mug	109

3.8	A GIA-certified 10-carats diamond, E color, VVS2	111
3.9	Price composition of <i>dàigòu</i> products	119
4.1	Antiques at Tongeren flea market	144
5.1	Dialogue in Chinese <i>rénròu</i> group	178
5.2	Charging standard of <i>rénròu</i>	179
5.3	Six Chinese express companies in Belgium	180
5.4	Junan Express charge standard	181
5.5	The mini parcel route of STO Express	182
5.6	STO Express charge standard	183
5.7	20kg large luggage dedicated line(易程大行李专线) order form	184
5.8	Bpost charge standard (20kg as an example)	184
5.9	Junan Express WeChat group (LLN-Namur)	185
5.10	Junan Express charge standard (main aggregates)	186
5.11	Tracking record of Junan Express	187
5.12	STO Express WeChat group in Louvain-la-Neuve	188
5.13	Chinese snacks WeChat group	189
5.14	Chinese restaurant WeChat group	190
6.1	Purchasing goods through WeChat	215
6.2	<i>Dàigòu</i> communicated with buyers on WeChat	216
6.3	The homepage of mobile Alipay	217
6.4	Alipay currency exchange function	218
6.5	China's online payment user scale and utilization rate . . .	219
6.6	China's mobile payment user scale and utilization rate . . .	219
7.4	After the COVID-19, the price increase trend of luxury classic bags	237
7.1	Prices of YSL lipstick in three different channels	255
7.2	China is winning half of the luxury world	256
7.3	The price increase trend of Chanel 2.55 in the past ten years	257

7.5 Price of Kelly bracelet in rose gold with diamonds from the
 dàigòu channel and official website 258

7.6 Chinese gift giving culture in *daigou* business 259

8.1 The global *dàigòu* system 276

8.2 “Millions of Masks” Movement 287

8.3 Global travel of masks. 299

8.4 A new type of consumer culture 300

Acknowledgments

This thesis would have never been completed or even existed, without support of the People's Republic of China and the invitation in 2016 from Laboratory of Prospective Anthropology (LAAP) of the Université Catholique de Louvain in the first place. My first thanks are due, therefore, to my Government, Professor Dr. Anne-Marie Vuillemenot, the co-director of the LAAP; to Professor Dr. Olivier Servais, the Doyen (Dean) of Faculty of Economic, Social, Political, and Communication Sciences (ESPO) for the invitation; and also to the external committee supervisor, Dr. Biao Xiang, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford and Director of the Max Planck Institute, for their exceptional consideration, trustfulness, and patience.

It was considerate of the Dissertation Committee to let me choose my topic, to trustfully agree with the student I was, who had not even started to study, and to show patience to wait for the study to be sufficiently advanced, followed by a generous double dose of patience for my mid-term confirmation test –even by the winter of 2019. As my thesis instructors, who took the role of three caring midwives helping me give birth to this thesis and got to assume the role of therapists to the author of this thesis sometimes, they gave each version of my manuscript plenty of consideration for which I feel very grateful indeed. From Professor Dr. Olivier Servais, I learned how anthropologists do their fieldwork. In the beginning, I could hardly complete a qualified field report. As

the busiest person in the entire ESPO, he always managed to provide me some of his precious time when I needed help at every important stage of my thesis writing, exchange studying, project applying, and fieldwork. His passion for anthropology research and devotion to detail really inspired me and gave me a strong and valuable basis to build upon for a long time in the future. His careful reading and targeted comments, like rocket boosters, made me be more conscious and pay more effort into my research.

To gradually develop my original manuscript –which sometimes resembled more a news report than a study work –into a qualified doctoral thesis, my esteemed Professor Dr. Anne-Marie Vuilleminot devoted so many efforts that are hard to imagine and that fill my heart with gratitude for the rest of my life. Thanks to her, I was able to meet members of many different departments in LAAP and IACCHOS (Institut d’analyse du changement dans l’histoire et les sociétés contemporaines). Whenever I was stuck and lost in the quagmire of research and thesis writing, she always brought me support and encouragement, almost as a warm and caring family member. During the most difficult days of my thesis writing stage, she even invited me to her home to spend a few days taking a breath. I am deeply grateful to her and her kindly husband Mr. Alain Eraly, a successful sociologist, economist, and specialist in human resources management and decision-making in politics, for giving me the same warmth and encouragement as at home.

I would like to thank Professor Dr. Biao Xiang for providing me such generous assistance, the inexhaustible source of my *dàigòu* research. To ensure that I completed my thesis on time, Prof. Biao gave me a lot of instructive and practical suggestions. He helped me refine my analysis and the structure of the thesis. I am grateful to him endlessly for responding to my emails in the late night countless to answer my confusion and questions. As a professional anthropologist, he also gave me many suggestions in the selection of literature and thesis writing. I

benefited a lot from his valuable and decisive comments, helping me fill up the gaps and see the forest for the trees. If this research has become richer and more precisely written, it is all thanks to his endless guidance and instructions.

I particularly thank Dr. Paul Servais, emeritus Professor of modern and contemporary History. In the beginning, we only used to say hello to each other in the morning, walking by the street. I didn't know at that time that this amiable and elegant grandfather, a realistic version of Tintin with his faithful dog, would have such a deep connection with and would bring so many benefits to my future research. I really wish to thank him for always giving me great encouragement and self-confidence on my piecemeal and inadequate thesis during the past five years. Especially, when I realized that he was the founder of IACCHOS, and that he was also the father of my mentor Prof. Dr. Olivier, and that he would even become a member of my jury, I was happy beyond measure and greatly delighted. However, because I knew that my thesis would be evaluated by such eminent scientists I felt greatly delighted and honored on the one hand, but I also became more and more aware of the serious responsibility that laid upon me to do my utmost to deliver a thesis that would deserve their precious time and attention. This special situation and mindset caused my study efficiency for the whole week to be unbeatable. I do wish that all those who take up difficult and lonely research may receive the same top-notch guidance and warm support. Thank you very much indeed for illuminating my research life in Belgium.

During the 5 and a half years that I lived and studied in Belgium, my colleague Dr. Philippe Collet gave me great care and help. His sons even became my good friends. He gave me many books on China studies that he bought when he was young. This gave me the opportunity to witness what China and Chinese society looked like in the Belgian academic circles 30 to 40 years ago, which was a precious experience for

me that enhanced my knowledge about academic thinking in Western Europe. He also undertook the important task of correcting my thesis. From the end of 2018 on, he read each of my manuscripts carefully and gave me comments and suggestions from an anthropological perspective. His work even included modifying the punctuation and spaces, introducing the newest literature, adding hundreds of words of explanation on some incomplete concepts I wrote, and marking the source of these concepts. Later, by chance, I knew that he had been interviewed by Philippe Léopold Louis Marie, the King of Belgium when he was 18 years old, which appeared in the Belgian newspaper *Fm hebdomadaire militaire* in March 1971. After that, I always have a strong feeling that a “Belgian Hemingway” was helping and blessing my thesis.

I would also like to thank Clément Crucifix, another colleague at LAAP. When I first came to study in Belgium, Professor Dr. Olivier provided us with a valuable opportunity to study a course in economic anthropology in the United States. Unfortunately, because of my visa problem, I didn’t make it to the USA. Clément selflessly went through lots of troubles and shared with me his 10-week course materials like lectures, course PPT, reading lists, etc. Even after returning to UCLouvain, every time when he encountered books or articles related to my research, he always shared detailed information or a link with me. This special kindness and selfless spirit of sharing seem to be a tradition of LAAP and IACCHOS which deserves a lot of respect. In the past five years and a half of study, I have gained such help from Dr. Jérémie Piolet, Dr. Caroline Sappia, Editor-in-chief of Social Compass, Dr. Hélène Carmon, Dr. Lionel Simon, Dr. Thibault Fontanari, and Dr. Thérèse Claeys, Dr. Pengcheng XU; my fellow PhD candidates Silvia Mesturini, Meggie De Fruytier, Célestin Bamwiso, Benali Guenach, Bertrand Grimonprez, Gabrielle Vandepoortaele, Jacinthe Mazzocchetti, Antoine Laugrand (安东), etc. They always shared interesting newsletters, articles, books, information about grants, projects, and discussed Chinese

overseas study or luxury research, sometimes even their own research with me, from which I got a lot of inspiration for my thesis writing.

Prof. Dr. ZHANG Xiaojun, director of Anthropology and Ethnology Research Center in Tsinghua University, Prof. Dr. Liu Hong, director of World Ethnology Research Office in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); Prof. Dr. Chen Junjie, and Prof. Dr. Jianmin WANG, Prof. Dr. Jiao Pan, Prof. Dr. Chuke Wu, Dr. Dongxu Liu, Dr. Qiang Sun from Minzu University of China; Dr. Bingzhong Gao, Professor of Anthropology at Beijing University and Secretary-General of the Chinese Folklore Society who provided lots of critical reading and creative advice of my research proposal, the introduction, and some chapters. Dr. Yikai Zhang, Dr. Xuan Zhao, Drs. Gang Feng, Dr. Qifu Dai, Ph.D. candidate Yifan, Drs. Franklin Wagner, and Drs. Ludovic Bontemps kept reminding me many times that I ignored the fact that the Chinese word “*dàigòu*” (代购) can be used not only as a verb but also as a noun and adjective in the Chinese context. We redefined a series of special expressions for *dàigòu* in order to suit my research perspective and interpretation of the research content. To Dr. Barbara Barbosa Neves, professor Dr. H. Campbell, and professor Dr. M. Lövheim, I owe a great intellectual debt for their pioneering research and help through Email communicating for placing my research in the large context of digital technology research on modern society.

I want to dedicate my most sincere gratitude to my survey respondents, including my former roommate in Belgium Meng, and all the participants in Belgium, to thank them for sharing their hopes, joys, and struggles with me. To protect their privacy, I will continue to use their names in this article to express my gratitude. Foremost among those who helped shape this research are Jianya Zhou (Jianya), Jack LI (Jack), Xueyang LIU (Xueyang), Meiling LI (Meiling), Yuyu, Lin LIN (Lin), Xiao PU, Huang Dingding (Dingding), Songzi Du (Songzi), Menda WU (Menda), Xiaou WANG (Xiaou), Fei Yu, Bo, Yang, Jia-

jia ZHANG (Jiajia), Xiaoxiao, Xueer, Lily, sales representative Lutana, Laurent, and Josela; etc. Friends from the Belgian Chinese Christian Church at Brussels, such as Uncle Wen and his family, Sister Wu and her family, Kai brother and his family, Uncle Wei and his family, and Sister Xiaochun and her family who treated me like a real family member, and friends from Louvain-la-Neuve, such as Dr. Fangtao Yang and his wife, Sister Maoyi, Drs. Shuang, and Jiaqi Zhu who always invited me to eat with their family, shared with me enormous lore about Chinese overseas *dàigòu* in Europe, and explained me many times some detailed information about my research.

To foreign friends from the Belgium local society, such as Dr. Med-itrice Nkurunziza and her husband Drs. Lambert Ndyisenga, PhD candidate Yanis Nindorera and his wife Drs. Mugisha Gynelle, I am deeply grateful to all of whom for treating me like one of their family members, sharing their observations, experiences, and opinions with me on my research. Thanks, Bertrand Guinziemba, Cathy and her family, Anne-Sophie, and Jeremy Behiels, who are my partners for learning KWAN KI DO in Belgium. Thank them for giving me the opportunity to train my body, which offered a peaceful and beautiful world every time when I was exhausted and unable to write any words.

In the writing process of this paper, Drs. Franklin Wagner, Dr. Delphine Pouppez, and Drs. Ludovic Bontemps helped me so much to expurgate traces of my Chinglish from translations. They did their best to clear the manuscript of bad grammar and sloppy mistakes in the whole thesis. Dr. Qifu Dai, Chengyan Yuan, Drs. Nan Wang, Drs. XiaoMeng Zhang, Dr. Yikai Zhang, and Drs. Jie Ye undertook the proofreading and correction work for most of the chapters of this paper, for which I am very grateful. I want to thank all who contributed to this dissertation for their painstaking efforts to ensure the successful completion of this research at the end. Besides, Ph.D. candidate Yifan Fan and Drs. Ludovic Bontemps taught me how to use code (Latex)

to write a doctoral thesis with aesthetic significance. I admire their courage and patience because it is no mean feat to teach someone like me who is not good at the internet and electronic technology to write a thesis with code. I thank them for their unremitting efforts. In the end, I was beyond happiness that we did it!

I am grateful to the China Scholarship Council (CSC), which made it possible for me to study in Belgium for four years. During the thesis writing process, the China Foundation of Anthropology Doctoral Dissertation from Chongqing University, the Project of Beijing Research Base for Sino-foreign Cultural Exchange, and the foundation of FRS-FNRS of Belgium (Fonds de la recherche Scientifique, Belgium) gave me great support. Moreover, in 2018, in Italy, I attend the Summer Institute supported by the University of Windsor and the University of Trento. I learned much from Prof. Dr. Giuseppe Sciortino, Prof. Dr. Nicholas Harney, Prof. Dr. Peter Kivisto, Prof. Dr. Tanya Basok, Prof. Dr. Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal, as well as local NGO leaders, Rossana Apaza-Clavijo on migration, borders, and mobility in a comparative context and benefited from their kind hospitality and appropriate critical comments on my research.

Through the good offices of Prof. Dr. Giuseppe Sciortino and Prof. Dr. Nicholas Harney, I met Dr. Giacomo Orsini, Dr. Martina Cvajner, and Dr. Maline Holmlund, I had very fruitful discussions with them. From March to September 2019, under the support of FNRS and PSAD (Sciences Politiques et Sociales de Louvain), I took part in an exchange study at the University of Greenwich and did fieldwork in London. In London, in 2019, I was also lucky to be able to attend the seminar on the Interdisciplinary Approaches on Migration and Integration International. In September 2019, I made a short visit to the New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) and did the fieldwork in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. These visits turned out to be essential to my research. Thanks to Xianwei, JunJing, Yifeng, and Sisi (CC) in Dubai and NYUAD who

helped me a lot during the survey in this completely unfamiliar country. Without them, my thesis would not have been possible neither.

Astrid BAUDINE, Bérénice Goffin, Samia Patsalides, Isabelle Portzenheim, Jialing Lu, and Zongyou Zhang helped me complete a lot of administrative tasks. Sara Wilmet, Joël Groeneveld, Supervisor of Research Mobility and Senior Policy Officer European International Affairs at the F.R.S.-FNRS, Prof. Dr. Bingzhong Gao, Mr. Zhongcai Huang, Secretary-General of China Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (CUAES), and Prof. Dr. Yue Zhang, Secretary of the Institute for Ethnic Studies of Yunnan University, Deputy Dean of the Institute for Ethnic Studies of Yunnan Province and Xinbo Wang, President of Chinese Urban Rural Cultural Creative Development Association in Taiwan who always gave me timely and patient advising and suggestions when I applied for the research projects or research Grands.

Last but not the least, I am indebted to the colleagues and friends who brought me to the world of Anthropology. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Tongkai Yuan and Prof. Dr. Audunbilib (傲东白力格), without whose guidance I might never have enjoyed this intersection with anthropology. Thanks to Prof. Dr. He Ming, the director of the Southwest Frontier Minority Research Center (SFMRC) of Yunnan University, Prof. Dr. Hong Ying, my supervisor during my master study at Yunnan University, Prof. Dr. Lin Shi, the director of the World Ethnic Groups office of the Minzu University of China and my supervisor during my first Ph.D. study at Minzu University of China, and Prof. Mingxing LIU, University Librarian of Minzu University of China, for giving me such great courage to continue this research. Because initially, this topic was unanimously opposed by lots of people surrounding me, who asserted that research about shopping agents (*dàigòu*) was meaningless and far to be a genuine thesis topic. And thank my parents and family for their understanding and unconditional support for my studies.

These words will never show enough gratitude, but I still want to

extend my sincerest thanks to everyone who helped me throughout this long, passionate journey.

—————*Chenna Wang, Nov 11, 2021, Brussels*

1

Introduction

1.1 Looking for A New World

BEFORE I went to Belgium to pursue my Ph.D., I intended to write an ethnography about the Chinese people live in overseas societies. After discussion with my supervising Professor Anne-Marie Vuilleminot and Professor Olivier Servais, I knew that there have been quantities of scholars that focus on African studies, Muslim issues, European sociological topics, minority problems as well as the refugee crisis. But there have been very few scholars that pay attention to the overseas Chinese in our lab.

Therefore, I decided to do research on this topic. After selecting overseas Chinese-funded enterprises, overseas Chinese elderly groups, overseas Chinese young student groups, and overseas Chinese migrants, I decided to define my research object as a group of Chinese overseas purchasing agents, that are well known as *dàigòu* (代购).¹

¹The Chinese word *dàigòu* (代购) means purchasing on behalf of. The term *dài* (代) refers

At the beginning of my *dàigòu* research in Belgium, all of my friends and relatives were curious how the topic of *dàigòu* could turn into doctoral research. My parents even thought that I was joking or lost my mind. From my point of view, however, I realized that *dàigòu* is a serious phenomenon both in China and within the Chinese diaspora.

Being a female, I am also keen on shopping and wanted to explore why mainland consumers have indulged in buying foreign products through overseas purchasing agents in recent years. But the public opinion about the *dàigòu* phenomenon and about those that engage in this as brought by the media reports is too superficial and lacks in-depth research. It is obvious that these reports also gave too little consideration to the negative impact on different types of *dàigòu*. This research also aims to answer how does studying such *dàigòu* economy helps us to understand consumption transformations in contemporary China.

Given these circumstances, being a student with a keen interest in anthropology, I deeply feel that it is both urgent and necessary to carry out a comprehensive investigation and research on the *dàigòu* phenomenon and promote society's understanding of this special group. To this end, I selected the subject of Cross Border *Dàigòu* Services on Global Consumer Goods as the title of my thesis. I hope to show how these Chinese *dàigòu* agents who are active in overseas society provide their labor services for mainland Chinese consumers who are addicted to global consumer products.

There are three features of *dàigòu*.

1. *Dàigòu is an informal or part-time job;*
2. *Dàigòu refers to a personal shopper, who is selling his or her labor to the client;*

to helping, the term *gòu* (购) refers to buying. *Dàigòu* (代购) refers to a person helping friends or relatives to buy the global consumer products with good prices and high quality.

3. *Dàigòu supply the professional activities to help clients purchase overseas commodities.*

In order to better contextualize this specific Chinese term, we find some simple yet accurate descriptions:

“Dàigòu can be described as a Chinese overseas purchasing agent/agents. Typical dàigòu is individual, generally of Chinese or East Asian citizenship, living overseas.” (Hughes, Lucas, & Brown, 2019)

“Dàigòu purchase goods, usually belonging to the luxury segment, from sellers, such as retail boutiques, for their clients.” (Zappa, 2019)

“They are well-known as an individual outside China to purchase local and culture-specific products that the region is known, such as groceries, infant formulas, health and beauty products for the mainland Chinese clients.” (Sethi, 2019b)

“Dàigòu is becoming more and more common for the purchase of luxury goods, so that the Chinese clients could avoid China’s high import duties and benefit from a bigger variety of products.” (Bonetti, Perry, & Fernie, 2017)

“Dàigòu can be seen as an intermediary to facilitate individual cross-border transactions.” ²

²Nielsen.com (2017). Breaking Borders Exploring The Daigou Opportunity. Retrieved from <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/nielsen-daigou-report-oct17.pdf>, accessed 16 October 2017.

“Dàigòu can also be described the personalized purchasing service. They are defined as freelance retail consultant (Shi, Yao, & Ma, 2021; Shi, Tang, & Dong, 2021).”

An article by the BBC (Phil Mercer, 2016)³ documents this flourishing profession of *dàigòu* by interviewing some international Chinese students and new Chinese immigrants in Australia, such as a 24-year-old Chinese student, Rika:

“In Sydney, a multi-million US dollars export industry starts with a simple trip to the shops. Rika has worked part-time for the past two years as a dàigòu. She labours with tins of infant food, supplements and skin lotions from a discount chemist to sell to customers back home in China.”

“Rika glued to her phone and tablet, using the messaging app WeChat (微信)⁴ to build a network of 300 clients who aren’t afraid to pay premium prices for trustworthy Australian goods.”

Rika told to the BBC: “In the beginning I just helped my friends buy baby formula and some unique brands from Australia. But with the development of this purchasing business, I don’t want just to earn money, I hope also can provide quality products to my

³Shopping in Australia, while in China (2016). Retrieved 23 October 2016, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-37584730>.

⁴WeChat (微信) is the largest social network in China, which is China’s most popular social media app. WeChat functions not simply as a chatting tool allowing individuals to text and send voice or video calls, it also acts as a portal, platform, and even a mobile operating system enabling users to hail taxis, order fruits, pay for their groceries, purchase film tickets, check-in for flights and hotel, keep fit, book a COVID-19 test, share their location tag with their contacts, and even access government services like visa applications, transfer money to friends, etc. all without leaving the app. WeChat also allows for in-app payments, which is fast becoming the “everything app” for Chinese (Muhamamd Umair Akhtar: WeChat Ad Targeting Overseas). In 2021, WeChat has an estimated 762 million monthly active users out of a total of over 1.24 billion registered users, indicating that it has a large market behind it. It is considered to be the largest messaging platform internationally (Chan, 2015). Consequently, WeChat functionality provides an ideal platform facilitating *dàigòu* activity.

friends. Therefore, I wanted to build a reliable platform to show more products to them”.

From the discussions above, I realized that more and more Chinese live, travel, study or work in overseas societies actively or passively join the practice of *dàigòu* activity. Topics that were formerly regarded as private by the Chinese, such as “How to earn money through *dàigòu* activity”, “How to get a product hard to acquire in *dàigòu* market”, “How to find the clients to expend the *dàigòu* business”, “How to order a uncommon product before its releases”, etc. became public topics. Because for the newcomers of *dàigòu*, they need to know this kind of experience and gain support through those topics.

As a personalized service, the *dàigòu* channel based on acquaintances can meet with the various needs of consumers to the greatest extent. Consumption has entered an unprecedented consumption mode centered on consumer demand, such as the “single aristocratic consumer group”, the “fashionable male (metrosexual)”⁵ consumer group, “playful consumer group”, “silver-haired (senior) consumer group”, “experiential consumer group”, and “millennial consumer group”.

Now this multi-needs consumption mode centered on consumer demand is perhaps the most promising consumer market of the decade (John, 2003). All these groups continue to stimulate the diversification of the *dàigòu*. They constitute and promote the arrival of D2C (*dàigòu* to Consumer) consumption era .

In the era of D2C consumption mode, each Chinese customer has his or her own unique and differentiated consumption needs, hoping to obtain customized products, services, and a perfect after-sales experience.

⁵The term *metrosexual* was first introduced by the British author and columnist Mark Simpson in 1994 (Wickman, 2011), Simpson wrote, the metrosexual man is a single young man, living or working in the metropolis with a high disposable income. In the Eighties, they were only to be found inside fashion magazines such as *GQ*. In the Nineties, they were everywhere and could be found shopping. Until the early 2000s, this term became globally popular, because it described David Beckham as the biggest metrosexual in Britain.

Dàigòu just subdivided different customer groups to a certain extent and showed strong personal characteristics. Meng⁶ took the metrosexual consumer group as an example to show us the difference of these consumers under D2C consumption mode:

“ In the past, in the inherent concept, we always felt that male consumers were less likely to spend money on clothes, cosmetics, skin care products, and even luxury goods.”

“But it is quite different now. Most of them (i.e., the metrosexual consumers) were born in the 1980s and 1990s. They are very different from their parents’ generation. They read men’s fashion magazines and pay attention to their own image. They are willing to spend money on their clothes and hairstyles, and are familiar with the characteristics and values of different international brands. They not only pay attention to health and fashion but also pay attention to the discount information of skincare products and

⁶When I arrived in Belgium, I shared an apartment with Meng. As my roommate and a full of experience *dàigòu*, Meng deserves to be one of my key participants. Meng was born in the late 1980s, master of economics at Université catholique de Louvain. She had lived at Louvain-la-Neuve for four years (2012-2016). Meng had been on the road of part-time *dàigòu* for 4 years too (2012-2016).

She guided me to different field work sites and I learned how to purchase global consumer goods with her. Most of the interviews with Meng were mainly from April 2016 to November 2017 before she returned to China. Our interview locations were mainly in Louvain-la-Neuve, sometimes on the road to Maasmechelen Village or Roermond Village. The luxury stores in Brussels and Antwerp, the flea market in Tongeren, and the flea markets Antiekmarkt van de Zavel and Marolles in Brussels were also our fieldwork sites.

Meng stopped the *dàigòu* because she had graduated and returned to China. But after Meng returned to China, we still maintained very good contacts, and we often communicated with each other about our lives through WeChat both in the message and visual phone. When I began to write my thesis, Meng often helped me supplement the information through WeChat. I am grateful for her guidance, help, and company in the past 5 years (2016-2021).

Note: in order to protect the privacy of interviewees, all names in the article have been replaced by aliases. I am grateful for every *dàigòu* for their selfless sharing of their stories and personal *dàigòu* experiences with me. I am deeply grateful to each one of them for teaching me how to be a qualified *dàigòu* in my fieldwork in the past several years.

luxury products.

——Meng, Sep 19, 2016, Louvain-la-Neuve

This phenomenon was also confirmed in the report on *New Trends in Chinese Consumption: Three Driving Forces Shaping New Consumer Groups in China* jointly issued by Ali Research Institute (阿里研究院) and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). This report analysis pointed out that about 73% of male consumers in first-tier cities believe that personal appearance is very important for job-hunting and dating. 88% of male consumers in first-tier cities check beauty and fashion information online, while 83% of men aged 18-35 in first-tier cities say that skincare products are essential.⁷

The huge potential of the metrosexual market has attracted more and more brands to adopt marketing strategies designed for male consumers. Many international first-line cosmetics brands even use male idols as their master products such as lipstick, eye shadow, concealer, isolation, and perfume. On the way to search for the right product ambassador, the unexpected male ambassador received a very good market response and brought huge market sales.

The same situation also existed in the “playful consumer group”, “silver-haired (senior) consumer group”, “experiential consumer group”, “millennial consumer group”, etc. The Chinese overseas *dàigòu* supply for them the unique purchasing service, just as Meng said:

“The Chinese overseas dàigòu are multi-functional. They use advanced, personalized, service-conscious communication methods to serve their clients. The goal of their service is to give consumers high-quality overseas products with less money. Therefore, they

⁷https://image-src.bcg.com/Images/BCG-Five-Profiles-That-Explain-Chinas-Consumer-Economy-June-2017-CHN_cm55-163226.pdf. Retrieved 21 February 2021.

are welcomed by different consumer groups. ”

——Meng, Sep 19, 2016, Louvain-la-Neuve

This study focuses on the main characteristics of a particular type of Chinese cross-border *dàigòu* shopping, in which Chinese consumers purchase foreign goods through *guān xì*-oriented agents (*dàigòu*). Individual *dàigòu* agents scattered in different countries and regions around the world have developed a unique business channel to help domestic Chinese acquire global consumer goods. They also made this business channel into an industrial chain with independent systems and operational logic.

Through this industrial chain and global purchasing system, they are able to formalize the purchasing relationships, connect the different purchasing channels. It absorbs and transcends traditions and caters to young people’s needs for consumption, fashion, enjoyment, and expressing themselves. It is the inevitable result of “alienation” in consumer behavior under the premise of the rapid development of the market economy in the new era.

Nowadays, *dàigòu* has become a brand-new way of consumption and connecting people in a global context. *Dàigòu* agents do more than sell local products to the Chinese. They actually act as shopping consultants to have a primary influence on the mainland market and their clients. They work as professional product sales consultants, which means they have the power to recommend their clients to buy or not (Park, Kim, Jeong, & Minshall, 2020).

In the face of China’s various consumer markets with ever-increasing personalized demands, the purchasing channels with highly personalized *dàigòu* experience can provide differentiated services at the fastest speed. As a unique group that maintains its own cultural traditions, *dàigòu* are typical. They gradually formed a self-sufficient ecosystem.

This system provides the Chinese consumers a possibility to obtain global goods at relatively low prices. The occurrence and development of *dàigòu* is not only the delivery of global goods to domestic Chinese consumers, but also it exchanges favors, experiences the sharing of information, maintains social relations, constructs personal reputation, and transmits fashion information.

In this research, I also tried to explain in detail the configuration of social and technical elements in purchasing activities to explain the experience of individual purchasing agents. *Dàigòu* shoppers living overseas use digital technology to realize the borderless and fast interaction of pictures, videos, sounds, and images (James, 2000b). *Dàigòu* bridge the global consumer goods gaps by facilitating the travel of goods or information from one side to the other via the practice (Jin, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2020).

This research is not only a reflection of the overall situation of Chinese consumers' overseas consumption, but also a realistic basis for the continued, widespread, and large-scale presence of Chinese *dàigòu* economic in the future. Kerry Brown, director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Sydney, believes that modern people are living in an era of grand narrative, and the world has more possibilities. *Dàigòu* while inheriting the old consumption concept, it challenges people's cognition of new consumption behavior. Now more and more consumers are spending fragmented time, and fragmented consumption also accelerates the fragmentation of people's lives. As an important factor in this trend, *dàigòu* should be placed in a broader, Under the background of a broader and more sociological imagination, we can explore more realistic, lasting, and sustainable development opportunities, and use *dàigòu* as a banner for the world to understand China (Brown, 2019).

Therefore, the significance of this research is not only to correct the media's attitudes toward Chinese agents, to the *dàigòu* phenomenon,

and to Chinese people's overseas consumption behavior. More importantly, it explores how to correctly view the overseas Chinese and Chinese culture going out in the context of globalization, aiming to help overseas communities better understand China's current economic conditions and contemporary Chinese globalization. The way to live in harmony with the world improves their understanding of the Chinese people around them and helps the agent as a cultural intermediary to better promote economic and cultural exchanges between different countries and regions.

1.2 Clarification of the Chinese Word *Dàigòu* (代购)

Considering the complexity, flexibility, and richness of the Chinese, the explicit definitions and the plethora of implicit of the word *dàigòu* challenge researchers. The Chinese word *dàigòu* is not just involved a new profession or a new form of shopping, but also is a concept that covers a wide range of very different implications. With the growth of the *dàigòu* business, the term *dàigòu* has become a solid concept to present the *dàigòu* phenomenon. It refers to when the concept name can be used directly as a word, or even several words, and the users know what it means. Through searching the existing literature and combining related reports, the usage of the term *dàigòu* is classified into three categories.

1.2.1 Practitioners or Professional Shoppers

The Chinese term “*dàigòu*” can refer to practitioners or professional shoppers, who engage in *dàigòu* activity. They buy sought-after products overseas and resell them in China (Zappa, 2019; Sosnovskikh, 2020). In Xie's research, *dàigòu* refers to an agent shopper who lives in a different place (usually overseas) to help others buy overseas products for a small profit (Z. Xie, 2018, 2019).

We can see many similar titles in the research of different scholars such as *dàigòu* (Park et al., 2020), purchasing agent (S. Wang, 2017), intermediary sales agent (S. Wang, 2017), *dàigòu* shopper (Xiao & Mantesso, 2019), China's overseas shopper (Shannon, 2016), (Chinese) personal shopper (Cai et al., n.d.; Fan, 2019), cross-border shopper (J. Zhang, 2019), intermediate shopper (Bofulin & Coates, 2017), surrogate shopper,⁸ etc.

It also refers to the participants who sustain the cross-border shopping service, who play roles as carriers, online sales agents, consultants, on-site shoppers, wholesalers, etc., which divides the *dàigòu* practices into multiple manual and technical brokerage procedures (Z. Xie, 2019). In this condition, all these different social roles can all be named as *dàigòu*.

Moreover, the name like “fashion buyer”,⁹ “luxury shoppers” (LIU, 2018; Rovai, 2016; Sethi, 2019c; Derval, 2018), “luxury buyer” (Sethi, 2019c) are usually used in purchasing the luxury products. But they are often collectively referred to as “luxury *dàigòu*” or just “*dàigòu*”.

There are also some articles using global shopper, middleman, Chinese shopper, etc. interchangeably, referring to *dàigòu*. In other words, in these contexts, the Chinese term “*dàigòu*” can be used to refer to all of those people who provide different shopping services. Because they all provide shopping services related to global consumer goods for customers in Mainland China.

According to Nielsen report, it refers *dàigòu* are the persons who facilitate buying and selling of international products on behalf of a customer in mainland China.¹⁰ This word also describes the person

⁸Inkstone. 2020. Why Chinese people use “surrogate shoppers” to buy stuff from abroad. [online] Available at: <<https://www.inkstonenews.com/society/inkstone-explains-why-chinese-people-use-surrogate-shoppers-buy-stuff-abroad/article/3107112>> [Accessed 4 June 2021].

⁹Jing Daily. 2015. From Daigou To Digital: Luxury Executives Weigh in On Biggest China Challenges | Jing Daily. Retrieved from <https://jingdaily.com/from-daigou-to-digital-luxury-executives-weigh-in-on-biggest-china-challenges>. accessed 1 July 2015.

¹⁰<https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/nielsen-daigou-report-oct17.pdf>

who tries to enter purchasing business as a job. In article published on oxford analytica indicates that *dàigòu* are typically Chinese living abroad who buy products from overseas retail outlets and send them back to buyers in China (Analytica, n.d.).

In the process of Latinization of this word, Fujie Rao, Martin used the Chinglish name “*dàigòuer*” to describe this unique identity directly (Rao, 2020; MARTIN, 2017). Simeng Wang uses the Chinglish name “*dàigòu*” to describe the intermediary sales agent between French producers and Chinese consumers (S. Wang, 2017).

In many literature and news reports, *dàigòu*, *dàigòuer*, *dàigòus*, *dàigòuers* are also very common. For example,

“Dàigòu(s), dàigòu(er), dàigòu(ers) in Paris.

”The Chinese dàigòu, dàigòu(s), dàigòu(er), dàigòu(ers) in Belgium.”

In this context, it is quite often to hear that “*if you cannot buy the limited goods, try to find a dàigòu to help you*”, “*the dàigòu in Paris can buy the limited products on the fashion show as the clients want*”. or “*dàigòu can help the Chinese clients get genuine global consumer goods with good price and fast speed.*” Therefore, the *dàigòu* play a role like shopping assistants, who bring customers’ eyes to help them shop globally. But in many interviews, lots of *dàigòu* said that they did not like the name *dàigòu*, because this title did not reflect any value of their work. BBC’s reporter Phil Mercer (2016) uses the word “*freelance retail consultant*” to describe *dàigòu*’s job. This term fully shows *dàigòu*’s professional characteristics. In this description, *dàigòu* always act as a consultants, their services include consulting, off-line shopping trips, live streaming, and the delivery of goods safety back, etc (Z. Xie, 2018). There are also some scholars (Lucock, Old, Woodford, & Lucock, 2019; Mudditt, 2018; Fung, 2021) who called *dàigòu* the key opinion leader

(abbrev. KOL).¹¹ *dàigòu* are good at spot which products sell well and why. They are price sensitivities and often know valuable discount information about popular products. They can tailor each sale to suit the client's needs.

With the development of the global *dàigòu*, in western media, the pinyin romanization of this Chinese word became more and more widely used. In commercial contexts, being a *dàigòu* practitioner means acting in an informal or part-time job, in which someone acts as a personal shopper (*dàigòu*) and sells his or her labor to clients in a regular business (Z. Xie, 2018, 2019). In this case, no matter living, traveling, or purchasing overseas, the concept of the word *dàigòu* is clear to all involved. It means the persons that the Chinese consumer trust scattered around different countries of the world and that can help you buy the local and culture-specific products that the region is known for as well as discounted outlet products (Sethi, 2019b).

In order to distinguish them, this article refers to people who are engaged in *dàigòu* activities as *dàigòu*. But sometimes, for special circumstances, the terms like purchasing agent, *dàigòu* shopper, *dàigòu* agent, agent, the purchaser are also used. It should also be pointed out that when the word *dàigòu* refers to people, it can refer to either the singular or plural. Sometimes it also refers to this professional group according to different contexts. Therefore, in the writing of this research, except for special circumstances, the Latinization form of *dàigòu* will be used uniformly to refer to (1) the purchasing agent in singular form, (2) the purchasing agent in plural form, (3) the purchasing group or community, (4) the purchasing business.

1.2.2 The Behavior of Purchase Overseas Products

Dàigòu can describe the behavior or the act to purchase overseas products for their friends or clients in China (X. Zhao, 2020), which is

¹¹The specific definition of KOL will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

used as a verb. For example, they *dàigòu* (buy) one pairs of Gucci shoes for their Chinese clients. In this case, the literal meaning of *dàigòu* in Chinese is “buying on behalf of others and meanwhile make some profit for themselves” (de Seta, 2015; Hughes et al., 2019). It refers to the act of “helping” to purchase.

This research retains the meaning of *dàigòu* as a verb, i.e., “buying when referring to purchasing behavior and related practical action, behavior or movement”.

1.2.3 Practical Concepts Related to *Dàigòu* Phenomenon

Scholars(E. Zhang & Noakes, 2019; Yu, n.d.; Sethi, 2019a; Zheng, 2017; W. Y. Wang, Zhao, Chen, & Yang, 2019) pointed out that the Chinese word “*dàigòu*” could use to describe all practical concepts that are closely related to the *dàigòu* phenomenon and the *dàigòu* activity. For example, in this sentence, *dàigòu* refers to *dàigòu* industry or *dàigòu* shopping approach.

“Dàigòu is a new channel of an e-commerce way of shopping between mainland Chinese clients and overseas dàigòu shoppers.”

After entering the professionalization stage, *dàigòu* specifically refers to the professional purchasing activities to help clients purchase overseas commodities with charge. *Dàigòu* buy back the overseas goods needed by domestic consumers and then deliver them through international express, or other methods like *rénròu* (人肉),¹² etc. (Brown, 2019).

For the Chinese term *dàigòu*, there are many other usages like this, such as *dàigòu* industry, *dàigòu* profession, *dàigòu* system, *dàigòu* mode, *dàigòu* activity, *dàigòu guānxi* (代购关系),¹³ *dàigòu* experience, *dàigòu*

¹²The specific definition of *rénròu* (人肉), the connotation and extension of this concept, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

¹³The term “*guānxi* (关系)” has been used in a multitude of ways to mean a number of

economy, *dàigòu* channel, *dàigòu* approach, etc.

In Xie's article, *dàigòu* is described as cross-border shopping services (Z. Xie, 2019). Researcher (E. Zhang & Noakes, 2019) indicated emphatically that as a result of the flourishing of cross-border commerce based on social media, *dàigòu* helped Chinese housewives living in overseas countries gain more opportunities to expand their economic activities at the international market.

By classifying and summarizing the usage habits of the word *dàigòu* in different contexts, we found that the word *dàigòu* has been referred to, separately or simultaneously, as both a verb, a noun, and sometimes it can also be used as an adjective. For instance, we always hear this sentence in the fieldwork:

*“Dàigòu is a perfect way to acquire the global consumer products.
For dàigòu the overseas products, dàigòu is indispensable”.*

In this sentence, the first *dàigòu* is used as a noun, which refers to the event about *dàigòu* phenomenon or *dàigòu* activity. The second *dàigòu* is used as a verb, which refers to the behavior or action of helping someone buy overseas products. The third *dàigòu* is used as a noun, but this refers to the executor of acting as a *dàigòu* (purchaser), i.e., the *dàigòu* shopper.

Therefore, on the basis of personal fieldwork experiences as a researcher and personal perception working as a *dàigòu*, I would like to

different things (Fan, 2002; Gold, Guthrie & Wank, 2002) and it is difficult to be precise about its meaning. Wikipedia offers for *guānxi* (关系) several meanings: connections and relationships, as neither of those terms sufficiently reflects the wide cultural implications. In the business context, in China, a country where business relations are highly socially embedded, *guānxi* plays a central role in the shaping and development of day-to-day business transactions. Therefore, the term *dàigòu guānxi* here refers to the connection between consumers and purchasers based on the Chinese *guānxi* culture. For more explanation, please see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guanxi>, Retrieved on September 17, 2021.

describe the characteristics of the word *dàigòu* as follows:

- 1. The term *dàigòu* has become a solid concept of the behavioral representative buying overseas goods on behalf of clients.*
- 2. It refers to when the concept name can be used directly as a word, which can present as a verb, a noun, or sometimes be used as an adjective. Even if this term contains different complex meanings, the users know what it means very well.*
- 3. *Dàigòu* becomes a new economic choice and career possibility that promotes Chinese new migrants, especially the housewives who live in overseas countries have gained more opportunities to expand their economic activities in the international market. They find their position in the social media-based transnational reselling Western luxury (L. Zhang, 2017).*

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 *Dàigòu* Research in Chinese Academia

In recent years, terms such as *dàigòu*, *dàigòu* have gradually appeared in academic journals and periodicals in mainland China. This research was used to search the keywords, research tides, and abstracts of scholarly studies in academic journals in the past forty years at the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI database). It started to search with the terms like *dàigòu*, freelance retail consultant, global shopper, middleman, Chinese shopper China, luxury shoppers (buyers), luxury *dàigòu* (agent), *dàigòu*, etc. Through the analysis of the CNKI database, it reviews the research on *dàigòu* to identify the major perspectives, theories, and methodology used in *dàigòu* research at micro and macro levels. According to the trend analysis of *dàigòu* research in

① 数据来源：文献总数：2995 篇；检索条件：（主题%='代购' or 题名%='代购' or title=xls('代购') or v_subject=xls('代购')）；检索范围：总库。
Data source: Total number: 2995; Retrieval conditions: (subject%='Daigou' or title%='Daigou' or title=xls('Daigou') or v_subject=xls('Daigou')); Search scope: Library

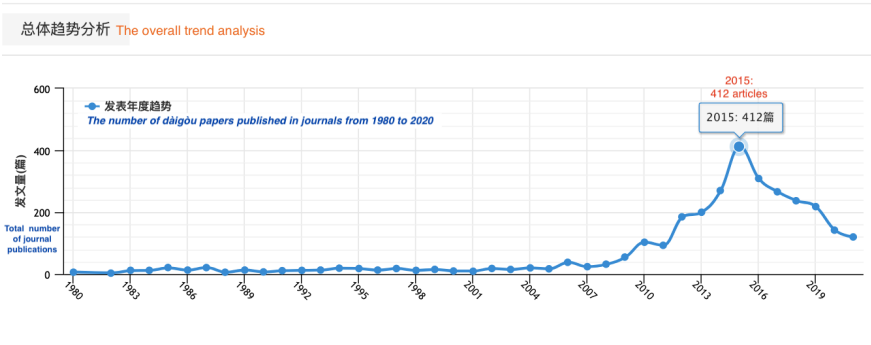


Fig. 1.1 Review of *dàigòu* in Chinese academia

Sources: <https://kns.cnki.net/KNS8/Visual/Center>
Accessed Jan 30, 2021. Figure translated and created by the author.

the CNKI database, we found that the annual publication and statistics trends of *dàigòu* research in China are shown in Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2 shows the distribution of journal publications of *dàigòu* per year between 1980 and 2020. It can be seen that there have been researches on *dàigòu* in 1990; since 2000, there have been researches on the topic of overseas *dàigòu*; since 2006, a great number of research have begun to focus on overseas *dàigòu*; since 2007, there have been researches specifically targeting online *dàigòu*; in 2009, some scholars began to pay attention to online overseas *dàigòu* activities; around 2010, scholars began to pay attention to purchase overseas milk powder through overseas *dàigòu* (agents) approach, etc.

The earliest article mentioned *dàigòu* appeared in the research of “*dàigòu* medicine” (侍苏华, 1996; 翟崇文, 1996; 潘少华 & 李向东, 1997; 梁民馥, 1999; 万祝元 & 万红松, 2000). The concept of using the word *dàigòu* to refer to helping purchase airline tickets, helping the clients purchase stocks, etc., are also very common in the research of this period, such as “*dàigòu* stock (郑延荣, 2001)”, and “*dàigòu* airline ticket” (顾江平, 蔡东辉, et al., 2002). One news report, which published in

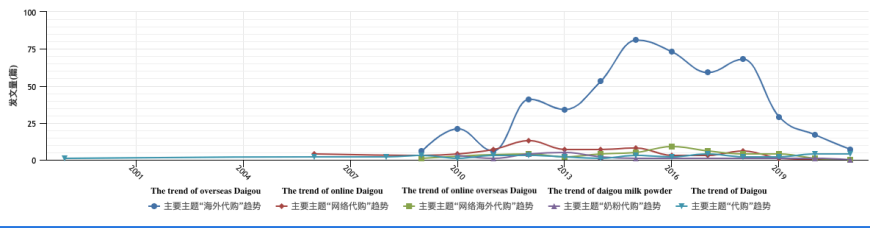


Fig. 1.2 Research related to the subject of overseas *dàigòu*
Sources: <https://kns.cnki.net/KNS8/Visual/Center>
Accessed Jan 18, 2021. Figure translated and created by the author.

1997, reported a deceived incident of *dàigòu* motorbike (王普 & 罗裕秋, 1997). From the narratives of these articles, we can see that in the 1990s, the use of the term *dàigòu* to refer to the behavior of helping others to purchase goods has been widely used in the Chinese consumer market.

However, these articles on the topic of *dàigòu* mostly were focused upon China’s domestic market, and the research on “overseas *dàigòu*” first appeared in 2006 (李鸢, 2006; 史勤波, 2006a, 2006c, 2006b; 蓝冰, 2006). 2007 (童敏, 2007; 孙艳兰, 2007; 安雅, 2007), 2008 (于彤 & 窦媛媛, 2008), 2009 (江玮 & 江源, 2009; 张樊, 2009; 张东亮 & 戴雨, 2009), etc. Since 2007, some articles have used professional *dàigòu*, overseas *dàigòu* and other terms to specifically refer to some Chinese who have lived overseas for a long time or have the opportunity to go abroad to help Chinese consumers buy overseas consumer goods. At this point, we can see how the term *dàigòu* that is used has been transformed from a verb to a noun.

Offer (1997) argues that traditional impersonal markets cannot satisfy all of an individual’s need of global consumer products, but the *dàigòu* channel building on the personal *guānxi* exist to fill that void (Offer, 1997). From this research trend, precisely, we can see that the earliest concept of *dàigòu* (代购) refers to the entrusted person using

one's geographical advantage to help people buy overseas products with price, quality, or supply advantages.

Usually, this kind of *dàigòu* relationship is built on *shúrén guānxi* (熟人关系), i.e., the acquaintance's relationship, such as relatives, families, friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmate, bosom buddies, playmates, etc. In the acquaintance's relationship, the entrusting parties exchange mutual trust and social capital in the *dàigòu* process. The *shúrén guānxi* is a non-economic connection, the party receiving the help is not in a hurry to pay the remuneration in cash immediately, but the beneficiary party will receive trust, support and help from others when they need it in the future.

Since around 2010, the research on *dàigòu* related topics has entered a growth period, it can be seen that the number reached its peak in 2015. This year, a total of 412 articles related to studies were included in CNKI database this year. To this pool, Anya's research pointed out that *dàigòu* is a new shopping method in new age (安雅, 2007). Chinese customers only pay a very small amount of running errands, then they can get their favorite products with the help of *dàigòu* from any part of the world without leaving home.

In Jiang's article (江玮 & 江源, 2009), the author, for the first time, paid attention to the 50% off cosmetics brand Lancôme suits obtained through overseas purchasing channels, and the 10% off trendy brand GUESS watches from the perspective of scholars, which also paid attention to the group of overseas purchasing agents composed mainly of overseas students.

In Zhang's article (张东亮 & 戴雨, 2009), Zhang pointed out that affected by the financial crisis, the regional difference in pricing and the international exchange currency rates, brand-name products such as Louis Vuitton (LV) handbags, Chanel perfumes, and Omega watches purchased in overseas markets have a huge price advantage over buying in the domestic market. In this process, even two people don't know

each other, they also can add friends on social platforms like WeChat through mutual friend's recommendation, and then get the products' details and bargain online, complete the transaction and achieve a win-win situation finally.

1.3.2 Anthropology and *Dàigòu* Activity

From Practical Purposes to Culture Purpose

Dàigòu is not simply about acquiring the global consumer goods, it is a cultural act informed at a particular historical moment and location. In consumer behavior research, it refers to all activities related to the purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services (Schiffman, Kanuk, et al., 2009), including consumer emotional, psychological, and behavioral reactions that occurred before or after these activities (Kardes, Cline, & Cronley, 2011). The research on consumer behavior covers all the elements involved in the whole consumption process from purchasing to using products. Such as the way to understand the commodity, the method of obtaining it, consumption habits, the key influencing factors of consumption decision, etc. The purchase behavior itself is also producing culture, identity, power, and value identity (Shiau & Luo, 2012; De Mooij, 2019).

Campbell, in marketing, defines consumption as the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair, and disposal of any good or service (Campbell, 1987). Peter H. Kenning and Hilke Plassmann¹⁴ pointed out that as interdisciplinary research, consumer behavior research integrates psychology, sociology, anthropology, marketing, neurology, and behavioral economics (Kenning & Plassmann, 2008).

In the field of traditional economics, people tend to think that consumer behavior is based on purely practical purposes, obtaining desired goods or services through equivalent exchanges (Nicosia, 1973). The

¹⁴We refer to Peter H. Kenning or P. H. Kenning (Kenning P. H.), Hilke Plassmann or H. Plassmann (Plassmann H.) according to the quoted paper even it is probably the same individuals.

transaction is considered to be the earliest and most basic consumer behavior of mankind. Contemporary Western economics mainly focuses on the relationship between economic variables, while the Marxist political economy pays more attention to the study of production relations or economic relations. However, scholars who have been engaged in consumer research for decades have discovered that they have never directly recorded the true mechanism of the internal operation of consumer behavior, so some researchers try to introduce research methods such as anthropology and consumer neuroscience (Peter H. Kenning and Hilke Plassmann. 2008:12).

For a long time, anthropologists have tried to explain human economic behavior from the broadest historical, geographical and cultural perspectives in exotic societies. The research of Kula ring by Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski, the father of anthropology, and the research on the gift by French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (Uberoi, 1962; Mauss, 2002) both reflect the concern about non-economic behavior. Marshall Sahlins believed that it is not enough to proclaim the confusion of the meanings of economy, he summarized two directly opposed strategies of understanding the contrasting issues from the identity of the economic subject to the historic status of the economic process. In the formal sense, the economy is an activity of people as such, in the substantive sense of culture (Sahlins, 1969).

Lionel Robbins, generally believes that the economic subject is people, it is something individuals do, and how they go about their business. But the Arunta economy invokes a culture, not the individuals. In this substantive sense, the economy is a subdivision of the social-cultural order or a category of culture (Sahlins, 1969).

The resulting economic anthropology combines economics with cultural factors to point out that consumption is not a purely economic behavior, and it cannot exist independently of people and society (Dalton, 1969; Jiangang, Tian, & Guang, 2018). Economic anthropology at-

tempts to answer the non-economic factors that influence human purchasing behavior from the cultural perspectives of consumers' emotions, attitudes and preferences (C. Xie, Bagozzi, & Grønhaug, 2019; Asshidin, Abidin, & Borhan, 2016). As a new form of consumption, *dàigòu* enables the cultivation, experience, and purchase of particular global consumer goods. Through the distinct streams related to studies of anthropology, this research tried to find some fragments to best reflect the cultural meaning of Chinese consumers' *dàigòu* economic.

From the Ritual Consumption to Reciprocity Consumption

Ritual consumption occurs in a specific cultural scene with a certain sacredness and is a way and expression for people to pursue social honor and achieve their goals in life (Kranton, 1996; Douglas & Isherwood, 2003). Malinowski's research points out that in the closed-loop of Kula ring exchange, necklaces and bracelets circulate in different directions, and exchanges consolidate or gain their social status and prestige through the exchange of items.

In response to Malinowski's Kula circle research, Marcel Mauss points out that in non-economic exchanges with barter, gifts are not realized through the exchange of goods, services with money or some other clearly marked price (Mirowski, 2001). Thus, he advanced moral, spiritual and religious aesthetic, economic motives of gift exchange (Brusadin, 2016). In his research, Mauss showed that gifts are circulated with the certainty that they will be reciprocated (Mauss, 2002; Elder-Vass, 2015). He Further notes that in most pre-modern societies, the gift, apparently free and disinterested, was in fact underpinned by coercive logic, in particular by the triple obligation to give, receive and give back. Society is presenting as a comprehensive system by gift exchanging (Mauss, 2002). Mauss insists that gift exchange was defined as the process of reciprocity and mutual promotion in social relations (Mauss, 1970).

The debate between Malinowski and Marcel Mauss quickly established the non-economic characteristics of gift exchange from an anthropological perspective. French anthropologist Maurice Godelier returns to the analysis of donation (1923-1924) developed by anthropologist Marcel Mauss, he mentions that Mauss has not succeeded in explaining the origin or the presence of the enigmatic force (*hau*) of the gift. He calls for a counter-gift to work in the gift exchange systems (Rouchier & Bousquet, 1998; Godelier, 2000). Godelier simultaneously establishes a double relationship between the one who gives and the one who receives.

In his book *L'Énigme du Don* (《礼物之谜》), Godelier explains the non-agonistic exchanges by his observations in the Baruyas of New Guinea. In the practice of “ginamaré”,¹⁵ marriage is a direct exchange of two women between two men from two distinct lineages (Godelier, 2014). But, due to the inalienability of the marriage exchanged (women), whose ownership is shared by the two lineages. Therefore the counter-gift of marriage does not cancel the debt, because the thing which had been given was just simply transferred, it did not cease to belong to its original lineage (Godelier, 2000). The accumulation of these inequalities introduces a powerful dynamic of gifts and counter-gifts between the two lineages during a generation (Widlok, 2016). That is to say, at the end of the reciprocal exchanges between the two men and the two lineages are in an equivalent social situation without there being either creditor or debtor (Godelier, 2014).

As a paradoxical inheritor, Bourdieu, notes in his book *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) that the gift is expressed in the language of obligation (Chanial, 2010). From Bourdieu's perspective, its hidden interest is as its objective truth (Ungureanu, 2013). He (2001) notes that gift exchange is collective hypocrisy. Society pays homage to its dream of virtues and disinterestedness through it (Ungureanu, 2013). From a sociology theoretical standpoint, Bourdieu believes that gratuitous gift-

¹⁵The ginamaré means marriage with payment of the price of the wife.

giving is economic exchanges (Chanial, 2010).

Bourdieu insists that gratuity veils the objective truth of gift-giving, yet ethically and politically it can be instrumental to enhancing civic virtue and solidarity (Ungureanu, 2013). There is an alternative way to understand gratuitous gifts as a kind of communicative act (“语言交流经济学”, n.d.). It is not easily reducible to an economic calculation or circle. But from this standpoint, a gratuitous gift can be exchanged by certain forms of emotions, recognition, or convictions (Murray, 1987). Such as people receiving some kind of prestige, respect, or status.

Alain Caillé, a French sociologist, explored the topic like “Why do we give?” and “Do we still give first?” in his book *L'esprit du don* (*The spirit of the gift*). In his research, Alain Caillé pointed out that the giving experience is not limited to Christmas presents or alms. On the contrary, the gift is observed everywhere. For example, in the family, in organizations and companies, in the art market, etc. But gifts of all kinds and services rendered need this “grace” to maintain life in its networks. Therefore, Alain Caillé believes that outside the laws of the market and the rules of the state. We will always need to make things circulate differently, to make things “pass” through the donation (Godbout & Caillé, 1992; Caillé, 2020).

The non-economic gift exchange is paradoxical. It appears to be gratuitous or disinterested, but it creates some kind of non-economic obligations that have to be reciprocated (Sohaib, Hui, Akram, Akram, & Bilal, 2018). From this perspective, this kind of gratuitous exchanging thought constituted the cornerstone of the operation of the early purchasing relationship. *Dàigòu* is not a purely economic behavior, as a new form of consumption to acquire the global consumer goods, it presents a certain honor, social status, and prestige in life.

Through interviews, we found that most of the *dàigòu* in early-stage who were strongly affected by acquaintances relationship and engaged in the purchasing business for free, most of them think that the free

dàigòu service is an alternative way to maintain the relationships, and at the same time it exists as a communicative act between relatives.

It is not easily reducible to an economic calculation or circle. But gratuitous purchasing can be exchanged by certain forms of emotions, recognition, or social support. This non-economic purchasing behavior sometimes is also paradoxical. It appears to be gratuitous, but it also creates some kind of non-economic obligations that acquaintance consumers have to offer the reciprocation. For example, to provide help to the families of *dàigòu*, or to provide free verbal customer expansion services for their *dàigòu* business if they need or ask. The difference is that most of this kind of gratuitous reciprocated support is voluntarily provided by consumers who have accepted the free purchasing service before.

From Conspicuous and Symbolic Consumption to Self-extension Consumption

According to Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, the "leisure class", i.e., the wealthy upper class, demonstrates their personal competitive advantage through the amount of wealth and conspicuous leisure, individuals emulate the consumption patterns of other individuals situated at higher points in the hierarchy. This has become the main motivation behind the pursuit of fame and fortune. Veblen believes that people show their economic strength by purchasing luxury goods or good services. This means of publicly displaying their economic strength has become a way to obtain or maintain established social status. Early Chinese *dàigòu* consumers formed a concept to think that *dàigòu* can get some scarce specific brand or associated overseas goods which allow Chinese consumers to create, transform, and express their self-identity (Dittmar, 2007).

In recent years, however, the theory of conspicuous consumption

has been criticized from outside of the mainstream. First, it has been argued that Veblen's theory is too restrictively relying on the consumption patterns from the top of the social hierarchy. Because the pacesetters for consumption may also be those at the bottom of the hierarchy (Nisbett, 2007). From this perspective that conspicuous consumption lacks generality as a theory of consumption since it applies only to luxury goods to show the self-fulfillment goals (Senol, Levi, & Aslanbay, n.d.; Warde, 2005). Especially, for those writing in the postmodern tradition, consumer behavior is no longer shaped by positions of social class but by lifestyles and their shopping behavior (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, et al., 2010). Other studies show how different consumption objects embody links to different lifestyles.

Symbolic consumption refers to people communicating their social identities or culture code through the work they do, the way they talk, the clothes they wear, their eating habits, domestic environments and possessions, and use of leisure time (Lury, 1996; Campbell, 2005). The term reminds us of the socially assigned meaning to goods, which is often tied to desirable attributes for certain identifiable features of a group in specific contexts (Krogman, 2019). G. McCracken says that consumer goods are regarded as externalized representations of different classes, and society relies on symbols to distinguish each other's identity and status (G. McCracken, 1986; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013). For example, symbolic consumption could refer to a woman's wardrobe, where she "dresses for success" and displays an identifiable business attire style on the city streets of New York (Krogman, 2019).

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) indicates that goods are consumed for utilitarian value and as an ideal weapon, consumption symbols define and reflect the similarities and differences of classes to a certain extent (Bourdieu, 1984). However, this research finds that through the *dàigòu*' approach to acquiring global consumer goods, especially expensive luxury brands, becoming more and more popular, it has been argued that

consumers no longer display their wealth conspicuously.

An Individual's social status is conveyed in more sophisticated and subtle ways (Hawkins et al., 2010; Thøgersen, 2005). And consumption the high-value global consumer goods become a way to evaluate the investment. This change in individual identity, status, psychological identity, and the meaning of consumption in global consumer goods is brought about by the usefulness and of items (Ekinici et al., 2013). This interesting change is like a magic key, guiding me to explore the deep reasons for *dàigòu*'s existence and its impact upon the Chinese consumer culture.

In the last two decades, with the increase in Chinese consumers' spending power and the popularization of *dàigòu*, the secularization of global consumer goods is gradually becoming widespread. There are a number of research from socio-anthropological studies, which analyze the link between consumption and economic anthropology. It is well-known that the consumption of overseas goods plays an important role in Chinese consumers, such as establishing relationships, communication, and creating identity. But what is less well-understood is that the pattern of the global goods flowing shapes the individuals' consumption mode and the flow patterns of the global commodity in fundamental ways.

Anthropologist, Mary Douglas, and economist Baron Isherwood overturn arguments about consumption that rely on received economic and psychological explanations. They tried to answer the old questions in their book *The World of Goods* about why people want goods, why people save, the uses of goods, why people spend, and what people buy, in new angles (Douglas & Isherwood, 2021). They analyzed the function of consumption issues that consumption reflects the structure of society, the value of goods (Douglas & Isherwood, 2003). Consuming global consumer goods as a way to create, experience, and maintain a consumer self has gained renewed attention (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci,

2007). It shows how goods are a vital information system, used by human beings to fulfill their intentions towards one another (Douglas & Isherwood, 2021).

As a daily practice to maintain social relations, consumption not only embodies signs, symbolism but also embodies communicative meaning (Holt, 1998; G. D. McCracken, 1990).¹⁶ Levy (Levy, 1999), Clarke (Clarke III, Micken, & Hart, 2002), Elliott (Elliott, 1999) argue consumers engage in consumption activities for both symbolic properties and functional benefits. Gentry, Belk explained consumption from another angle, that is how possessions embody an important role in creating the self, expression of the individual's achievement, personal history, demonstration of cultural values, representation of interpersonal ties, and exhibition of social status. In interviews, many Chinese consumers regard the possession of expensive luxury bags or other small luxury items as a reward for personal achievements or a goal to work hard.

In the field of traditional economics, people tend to think that trade is conducted for purely practical purposes to obtain the desired goods or services (William A. Havilland, 2006; Zhang Yantao, 2017; Marc Abélès, 2018). In the history of *dàigòu* research, the focus has always been that the overseas goods bought on behalf of overseas customers are sold in China for profit. Though popular, this definition is not comprehensive enough to capture recent developments in this new and revolutionary business phenomenon. Moreover, the prevalence of the *dàigòu* initiative cannot simply be attributed to acquiring profits only. There are several stands of discussion which offer complementary explanations for the existence of *dàigòu*:

“Dàigòu is named as a reliable channel, which can help relatives purchase genuine overseas products (X. Zhao, 2020).”

¹⁶We refer to G. D. McCracken or to G. McCracken according to the quoted paper even it is probably the same individual.

“As a new economic form, dàigòu promotes the rapid flow of global commodities (Park et al., 2020).”

“As a kind of guānxi, dàigòu acts as an intermediary in the global market place (Hughes et al., 2019). They deliver global consumer goods in real life and communicate through the Internet or social media with their clients.”

“Dàigòu presents the process of digital consumption in social networks as well as the personalized assistant shopping service and dàigòu economic style (Sue Mitchell, Dec 08, 2017).”

SOURCE: Australian Financial Review. 2017. Australian companies urged to harness daigou power. Available at: <<https://www.afr.com/companies/retail/australian-companies-urged-to-harness-daigou-power-20171128-gzum6m>> [Accessed 27 October 2021].

Through interviews, it is found that nowadays, Chinese overseas shopping consumers in mounting numbers are not fascinated in the consumption of conspicuous consumption when purchasing overseas brands. Instead, they pay more attention to the value of the brand, the quality of the products, the global or lifetime after-sales service, etc. During this period, the original intention of shopping gradually changed from pursuing material to pursuing the spirit.

In China's consumer culture, it is very common for consumers to save money in order to obtain a certain expensive product. This may be one of the reasons why many Western scholars do not understand and feel confused when studying China's dàigòu economy. Because in

Chinese consumption philosophy, saving is regarded as a good personality feature, which is also one way of consumption postponed and an investment (Kuijs, 2005). In this philosophy, it is quite often to see Chinese consumers carrying Louis Vuitton bags but squeezing in the subway. For acquiring this valuable LV bag, this consumer is likely to have sacrificed entertainment, consumption, and party opportunities for several months. However, when she gets the bag she dream of, all the sacrifices will be swept away.

By the same token, other researchers (Elms & Tinson, 2012; Moulding, Kings, & Knight, 2021) even pointed out that shopping has also been identified as a form of therapy to help individuals reassemble a sense of self. Stacey Menzel Baker analyzed how consumers realize their self and consumption aspirations by understanding the symbolic and experiential value of shopping (Baker, 2006). In other words, peoples' notions of self can be linked to the products they buy, the services they use, and the lifestyle they create (Gentry, Baker, & Kraft, 1995; Belk, 2010; Baker, 2006).

Researchers (Friedman & Ostrov, 2008; Clingingsmith & Sheremeta, 2018; Basmann, Molina, & Slottje, 1988) who advocate conspicuous consumption have always believed that all goods to some extent emanate messages about rank. But through this research we found, more and more Chinese contemporary young consumers believe that this kind of rank classification from the social evaluation system is becoming less and less important (Hung, Ren, & Qiu, 2021; L. Y. Jiang & Kungel, n.d.). Because they are more beginning to obtain consumer satisfaction in self-comparison. The embryonic form of the D2C shopping mode is gradually taking shape. It embodies the common characteristics and focuses of these theoretical lines we mentioned above, even though it is evident that there is a striking division amongst them in terms of theoretical foundations, perspectives, and methodologies. But we could not deny that the meaning of the D2C business mode, as a practice

of self-extension consumption, enables the cultivation, experience, and purchase of particular global consumer goods (Hung et al., 2021).

Through the previous research on the *dàigòu*, we found that today high-value luxury goods have fewer characteristics of distinguishing identity and conspicuous consumption (Gad Saad, 2015; Sann Ryu, 2020). People who buy luxury goods do so not only for conspicuous consumption but more importantly to enhance the consumption experience and passion (Zhang Wenfu, 2012; Victoria K. Wells, 2014; Duan Silan, Hu Jingyu, 2011; Jia Xuejing, 2016). In the early days of *dàigòu* thriving, people living abroad did the *dàigòu* activity free of charge for their relatives or friends who lived in China (W. Y. Wang et al., 2019; Z. Xie, 2018, 2019). The overseas Chinese *dàigòu*'s shopping approach increases the importance of psychological ownership of luxury or overseas products, reduces the importance of conspicuous consumption, and meanwhile reduces the risk of counterfeiting luxury (Jochen Wirtz et al., 2020).

This research tries to extend our understanding of the symbolic and experiential value of *dàigòu*. It tries to extend an integrative review on *dàigòu* phenomenon at the micro (the individual and interpersonal), and macro (the groups and societal) levels by paying attention to (1) various conceptualizations of *dàigòu* in different contexts and social environments; (2) major theoretical perspectives on *dàigòu*'s functions, no matter as a behavior, or an individual agent; and (3) an appropriate evaluation of *dàigòu*'s current situation and the assumptions about the future of *dàigòu*.

1.3.3 *Dàigòu* in Virtual Communities

The term “virtual community” was first introduced by Howard Rheingold in his book *The virtual community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* in 1993. Rheingold pointed out that the virtual community system is a social network of individuals who originated

from cyberspace constructed by specific social media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests or goals (Rheingold, 1993, 2000). It occurs from the long-term development of enough people, enough emotions, and interpersonal relationships in the virtual space (Plotkin, 1995).

Virtual worlds are not just considered as a set of socio-technical innovations, it also inspired the participants to consider the possibilities of social communication, novel cultural exchanging, new economic form, etc. virtual worlds might offer (Bainbridge, 2011). The process of *dàigòu* formed just like Rheingold (2000) mentioned in his research, that is a group of people engaged in some common topic discussions on the Internet, mainly communicate on WeChat, and after a period of time, they have enough emotions and understanding for each other, then they create a purchasing network based on interpersonal relationships together.

In virtual communities, the members are allowed to interact over a shared passion through various means, such as chat applications, chat rooms, group messages, message boards, social networking, World Wide Web sites, or virtual worlds (Jones, 1997). Overseas Chinese *dàigòu* and their Chinese clients use internet technology, social media, and digital devices, to publish and share articles, logs, photos, videos, etc. related to global consumer products on social media. They mainly communicate on WeChat, and in the process, they influence each other's thoughts, consciousness, culture, consumer decisions, and purchase choices.

Virtual communities are not the original definition of communities, because usually, they are dispersed geographically (Pears, 1999). Even though some WeChat communities have some level links geographically and are worked under the Chinese offline social connections. However, most of the communication, consulting, after-sell service, and word-of-mouth recommendations between the *dàigòu* and their Chinese clients have happened online. Therefore, we consider the WeChat virtual com-

munity as certainly a social community, it is defined as a “pattern of friendship, advice, communication or support between individual members or groups of members within a social media (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997; Katona, Zubcsek, & Sarvary, 2011).

In fact, as early as 1983, Benedict Anderson put forward the concept of “imagined communities” in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Here, Benedict (1983) described how different technologies promoted the development of national and regional consciousness (Communities, 1983). Some authors base their theories on Anderson’s imagined communities that have been critical of the concept. They claimed that all communities are based on communication and the virtual/real dichotomy is disintegrating, which makes the word virtual communities obsolete (Prodnik, 2012).

But this concept is still widely considered influential in political sciences and sociology (Mylonas & Tudor, 2021). For example, in the WeChat virtual community whose main purpose is to purchase overseas consumer goods, Chinese consumers and overseas Chinese *dàigòu* have jointly created a new type of consumption mode and novel way of social organization. It has the following four characteristics:

1. *Chinese consumers consult through virtual communities, Ordering, payment, purchase, and transportation of global consumer goods are not restricted by time and space;*
2. *There are many pairs between consumers and agents, consumers and consumers, agents and agents, consumer acquaintances and agents More information dissemination;*
3. *Members in the virtual community join or withdraw from vol-*

untary behavior;

4. The purchase transaction is mainly carried out through the virtual community, and its specific operation process is affected by social relations.

In *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom* (2006), the author Yochai Benkler suggests that virtual communities would come to represent a new style of human communal existence, which will provide the new scope for building a shared experience of human interaction (Mill, 2006).

In *dàigòu* research, it is found that the working logic of *dàigòu* activities in the virtual community is just like Benkler mentioned in his research. Namely, the thickening of preexisting relations with family, relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues will be laid a solid foundation to the beginnings of the emergence of greater scope for limited-purpose, loose relationships in online *dàigòu* activity (Mill, 2006). Despite this connection being acknowledged as virtual and loose relationships, but it remains powerful meaning.

1.3.4 Globalization and Global Consumption

The Research of Globalization

Globalization is a multi-dimensional concept, which describes the various network processes established between participants that transcend distance and generate connections (Gygli, Haelg, Potrafke, & Sturm, 2019; Appadurai, 2014, 1996). Arjun Appadurai realized in many ways that modernization was an attempt to grapple with change on a planetary scale (Appadurai, 2014). Its power is gradually extending to all aspects of social life. In contrast, the academic discussion on the theory of globalization has moved towards multiple dimensions.

The theory of the world system represented by Immanuel Wallerstein, from the perspective of economic globalization, points out that globalization embodies the internal production logic of the bourgeoisie and is an integrated framework for the capitalist world system to deal with international affairs and state behavior (Robinson, 2011). Subsequently, it presents the characteristics of “core-periphery-semi-periphery” (Burhanuddin, 2018).

Scholars represented by Morten Ougaard and George Modelski put forward political globalization based on the rationalist world order (Ougaard, 2004). The theory advocates going to the borders of countries and nations and establishing an integrated global political system and global governance system (Modelski, Devezas, & Thompson, 2007). In order to create a supranational form of border-less organizations and institutions (such as the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, the WHO, etc.) to enhance global governance capabilities and the ability to solve global problems (Wolf, 2008).

Tomlinson John, Paul Hoppe and the research of Martin Albrow *et al.* advocated behavioral interaction and mutual respect between various cultural subjects, thus proposing the concept of “cultural globalization” (Tomlinson, 1997, 2012). Advocating to shape and strengthen the “global consciousness” of the coexistence of differences and reconstruct the cultural identity of human society (Robertson, 2011). Tomlinson John pointed out in his research on globalization that globalization is a multidimensional process. This process is not only embodied in the fields of economy, politics, culture, and modernity, but also in the fields of science and technology, media communications, climate and environmental change, and global governance (Tomlinson, 1997, 2012).

A group of scholars represented by Anthony Giddens regard globalization as a product of the spread of “modernity” worldwide, proposed modernization globalization and pointed out that modernization globalization is actually the inevitable result of the continuous manifestation

of modernity in the historical process (Giddens, 2003). On this basis, Giddens further pointed out that modernization has cross-regional restrictions, and globalization covers the four basic institutional dimensions, namely, the nation-state system, the world economic system, the world military order, and the international division of labor (Giddens, 2013; Robinson, 1998).

At present, the impact of globalization has penetrated into all aspects of people's daily life, impacting, changing, and shaping people's thoughts, concepts, behaviors (Giddens, 2003). Under the influence of globalization, economic, political, social, knowledge, population, investment, consulting, ideas, capital, technology, commodities, risks, and other elements have achieved the characteristics of high-speed flow and high integration beyond national boundaries (Dreher, Gassebner, & Siemers, 2012).

Globalization is therefore regarded as not only a process of flow beyond the borders of certain countries, but also a process of shortening global distances and increasing communication between people and items (James, 2000b). A tendency towards globalization is observed, an increasing short-term flexibilization in people's use of time and space is a more important driving force behind the *dàigòu* mobility, than is the geographical extension of more enduring social relations (Frändberg & Vilhelmson, 2003).

Globalization and Global Consumption

Out of the above theory, one of the widely accepted consequences of globalization is the development of individual outlooks, behaviours and feelings of global consumption that transcend local and national boundaries (Lahoti, Jayadev, & Reddy, 2015; Arditi et al., 2000; James, 2000a). Transnational consumption starting from online shopping is obviously an important expression dimension of the globalization in new

era (Aneesh, 2006; Sivakumar & Amsaveni, 2013).

The globalization of consumption has become a necessary choice in the process of globalization (Stafford, Turan, & Raisinghani, 2004). In this context, distance and borders are no longer an obstacle. In the process of transforming a production society into a consumer society, consumer behavior is no longer a purely economic activity, but a social and cultural expression (Holt, 1997; J. J. Li & Su, 2007). Globalization has brought convenient mobility and unlimited consumption possibilities (W. Ma, 2016). It makes individual's mobility and consumption exceed the restrictions of national borders (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

Multinational consumption based on the *dàigòu*¹⁷ help reflects the changes in the consumption field, and consumption has become an expression process involving culture, symbols, symbolic meaning, self-value realization, and lifestyle changes (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). It carries rich value connotations.

The diversification of consumption patterns, consumer goods, and consumption channels has shaped, characterized, and defined consumers' self-selection, individual positions, values, and cultural tastes. The *dàigòu*-oriented consumption shift reflects the abundant material products and the high level of social commodity flow. At the same time, purchasing-style consumption also reveals the development, sustainability, and self-molding characteristics of transnational consumption behavior.

In the *dàigòu* transnational consumption logic relying on science and technology, buying the best goods with the best resource integration plan is no longer restricted by time and space (Su, Akin, Brossard, Scheufele, & Xenos, 2015). Consumers construct their lives in this way. As a social-cultural experience and an emerging form of consumption, individual consumers use the global *dàigòu* network to share information, exchange *rénqíng* capital (*rénqíng zībēn* 人情资本),¹⁷ conduct busi-

¹⁷ *Rénqíng* (人情) is the most important moral obligation social capital to maintain a good

ness and provide social support (Strate, 1999), etc.

In the *Great Transformation* (Polanyi & MacIver, 1944), Karl Polanyi analyzed the transition in modern European history from traditional societies to fully-fledged market societies (G. McCracken, 1987). This great transformation led European societies to become the first to re-structure social institutions around the price regulation mechanism needs of markets. The final outcome was a disembedded market economy (Schwarzkopf, 2015; Brooker, 1976). Polanyi's analysis focused entirely on the world of production, market-related exchange processes, and work, which meant that the realms of consumer behavior and value creation through consumption were ignored to some extent (Schwarzkopf, 2015).

I argue that *dàigòu*'s activity was characterized by a similar process of disembedding as described by Polanyi. At present, there are three different topics in the research on globalization and consumer behavior: the disembedding process of consumer products, the re-embedding process of disembedding items, and the role and influence of disembedding items in the re-embedding process (Langthaler & Schüßler, 2019).

Through investigating the disembedding and re-embedding of global consumer goods in the *dàigòu* industry, since the 2000s, we gain insights regarding the commodification of transnational commodities in the context of transnational commodity chains. The disembedding process of commodities reflects the global homogeneity of consumer products. The enhancement of global mobility, the awakening of individual identity awareness, and the emergence of new consumption patterns have given individual consumers the opportunity to disembedding from traditional consumption patterns and consumer markets and personally participate in shaping the characteristics of the global consumer market (R. L. Lee,

social connection in Chinese society. It is a relational orientation as measured by face and *rénqíng* (Leung, Chen, Zhou, & Lim, 2014). Under the game of giving and returning *rénqíng*, one important principle is that the givers potentially expect the receivers to pay back *rénqíng* (Lu, 2012).

2011).

Consumers in China and overseas consumers consume homogenized products together and have a common value identity for the same brands and consumer symbols (N. Zhou & Belk, 2004). When overseas consumer goods are shipped to the consumer market and consumers in mainland China through the agent, the re-embedding process of disembedding products in China is realized, which is the so-called cultural mixing process.

During the operation of the *dàigòu* consumption mode, consumers and *dàigòu* agents have built a global high-speed flow of commodity purchasing system (Sethi, 2018; Hoontrakul, 2017). They trust and depend on each other. The re-embedding process of disembedding objects reflects the characteristics of uneven globalization and global cultural diversity (Eade, 2003). The embedded framework provides us with a holistic perspective for studying the globalization of consumption and helps us to organically integrate the different levels of the globalization of consumption.

Anyway, however, just like Ernest Dichter (1907-1991) indicated that consumer behavior was submerged in social relationships and cultural patterns, and human beings across the whole spectrum of cultures, social classes, and races had the same innate drive to consume and express their individual needs through the acquisition of material goods (Mariampolski, 2006).

As a part of modern life, *dàigòu*'s transnational consumption shapes compose, and influences people's lives. Overseas purchasing agents emphasize the return to the nature of the material, that is, using "things" as the core and carrier to explore the contextual relationship between global consumption practices and individual consumers and agents.

From the perspective of the cultural economy, the global *dàigòu* system embodies the consumption process of *dàigòu* products as a commodity and the economic activity is always embedded in and shaped by

interpersonal relationships (Hannerz & Ulf Hannerz, 1996). The socio-economic and cultural characteristics reflected behind *dàigòu*, construct the value behind its consumption process (Lai, 1995; Fine, 2002).

Marc Abélès proposed that global consumption is a very important theme in the development of anthropology, and it involves a comprehensive questioning of anthropological issues and methods (Abélès, 2018a). When dealing with the behavior and attitude of purchasing luxury goods across the world, Marc Abélès pointed out that the concept of luxury goods should be handled in a positivistic way, such as luxury is a fashion (Abélès, 2018a, 2018b). Marc Abélès (2018a, 2018b) also put forward the concept of “the life of objects”, which makes people have a new “pricing latitude” for expensive luxury goods, that is, the life value, appreciation space, and investment potential of a luxury item. This new evaluation dimension also makes the global goods obtained through the *dàigòu* channel not only have the meaning of saving money, good quality, good brand but also have the meaning of investment, storage of capital, and appreciation of return.

The degree of globalization of the *dàigòu* is an important prerequisite for the development and growth of the *dàigòu* business. The *dàigòu* service of a single agent is not easy to complete the globalization process of the entire *dàigòu* industry, but they have influenced and constituted the globalization of the entire *dàigòu* system to a certain extent. This research emphasizes investigating the flow of people (*dàigòu*), objects (global consumer goods), and information as the processes of communication, and then reflecting on how the mobilities are socially formed, intersected, and differentiated. *Dàigòu* have existed as mediators of social and economic relationships of different parties long before modern society (Z. Xie, 2019). It is not only because the *dàigòu* act as the facilitator of buyer-seller relations in the conventional sense but fabricates intricate interactions in the contemporary digital contexts (Z. Xie, 2019).

In this research, I attempt to elaborate on the configuration of social and technological components in *dàigòu* activities to explain the empirical puzzles of individual *dàigòu*. *Dàigòu* influences facilitate the transaction of overseas commodities to extract a direct reward in commerce. The practitioners and organizations relevant to *dàigòu* businesses are seen as *dàigòu*, who bridge a gap in social structure and help goods, information, opportunities, or knowledge flow across that gap to flow/shopping globally(Stovel & Shaw, 2012).

1.4 Research Methods

1.4.1 Take Web Data as a Research Device

Literature analysis is the most important research method used in the preliminary data collection process of this study. In this regard, this study mainly collected domestic and foreign journal materials related to the *dàigòu* Research. As the research on the *dàigòu* issue is still in its infancy, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *dàigòu* phenomenon, in order to fully demonstrate the economic scale, development trend, distribution, and development trend of *dàigòu* phenomenon in different countries. Consequently, in addition to documents from the Chinese and Western academic world, news reports from different countries, as well as research reports from different research institutions, some statistical data, statistical bulletins provided by various industry associations, and data analysis on the phenomenon and development of *dàigòu*, are also sorted out by this research.

For instance, by mid-to-late 2000, a host of newspapers, magazines in China had taken up the *dàigòu* issues. Most of these publications were continued to proliferate the public's attention on the *dàigòu* issue. The overseas news reports and research reports draw on the periodical press, journals books conducted from 2006 to 2020. Discussion about *dàigòu*'s issues began around 2006 in overseas publications, chief among them

BBC.com, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Irish Times, Business of Fashion, and CNN.com, etc.

Moreover, such as China Network Television (*Yangshi Xinwen* 央视新闻), Xinhua Net (*Xinhua Wang* 新华网), CCTV.com (*Yangshi Wang* 央视网), China Youth Daily (*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* 中国青年报), South China Morning Post (*Nanhua Zaobao* 南华早报), were all directed reported specifically the *dàigòu* issue. Unlike the complicated, detailed academic research, these press missives were usually simple formulaic reports, but in most cases, such reports have been shown the true development status of *dàigòu*. These press missives were useful in identifying the *dàigòu* phenomenon that national and local authorities considered as a hot issue.

In addition to analyzing and collating related research results using traditional literature analysis methods, the author discovered during fieldwork and data collection that Web data cannot be ignored. Because of the particularity of the *dàigòu* operating environment. Therefore, this research also draws on new research methods which were introduced and used in a series of research results of Olivier Servais on the Internet, digital society, and the game world (Servais, 2015, 2012; Servais & Liogier, 2017; Servais, 2019; Servais, Douyere, & Catellani, 2020).

Due to the internet, we have a vast new data bank in this area (Bainbridge, 2010, 2011). This new approach takes the online database regarding the analysis of Internet technology and related resources as a heuristic device and regards virtual communities as a kind of network link of social relations and an online social space for participants to show themselves (Wilson & Peterson, 2002; Servais, 2015).

From this perspective, the internet appears as a device capable of supplying research data on current *dàigòu* research. This salient presence has led some researchers to believe that it will toward new sociability (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011) and the premise of new sociability emerging in these spaces (Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005; Servais,

2015). It is therefore primarily as a heuristic device that the web is now analyzed by scholars of anthropology (Servais, 2015).

Others, who see social media as an extension of our lives (Oliveira, 2020; Hunter, 2016). The world's first-ever public, live, collective, open-ended writing place, where would allow us to post our daily life and form the new identities freed from the limits of our everyday lives (Seymour, 2020). For example, the lives of our contemporaries are displayed out on Twitter, Google, and Facebook in overseas societies, and WeChat (微信),¹⁸ Sina Weibo (微博),¹⁹ Xiaohongshu (小红书)²⁰ in Chinese society.

For almost two decades, communication tools and social networks have played an increasing role in our lifestyles, which embodied the crucial communication conditions of transmission various information, on the other hand, it provides the users of experiencing the high levels of geographical mobility, trans-local communications (Urry, 2003). Over the past twenty years, the web constitutes, perhaps above all, a source of information about current *dàigòu* shopping mode. All of these have constituted part of the daily life and social activities of the *dàigòu*.

These materials subsequently together constitute the data sources of this research. For example, the data from WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Weibo, Dianxiu (店秀),²¹ and other social media/platforms related to

¹⁸For a detailed explanation of WeChat (微信), please refer to the first section of Chapter 1.

¹⁹Weibo (微博) is a social media website, which launched by Sina.com for information sharing, dissemination, and information acquisition based on user relationships. It was established in 2009 and is one of the most visited websites in mainland China. Weibo users can post updates through web pages and mobile phone programs. Users can also upload pictures, videos, and stream live videos on the client. Weibo is also known as the Chinese version of Twitter. According to its official financial report for the first quarter of 2020, Weibo had approximately 550 million monthly active users at the end of the first quarter of 2020, and its revenue reached 2.27 billion yuan during the same period.

²⁰The Xiaohongshu (小红书) App is online shopping and social networking platform in mainland China. It was established in 2013. It has 200 million users as of January 2019. Some media have compared Xiaohongshu with Instagram. In the community of Xiaohongshu, users can share and introduce products. Through the recommend notes (种草笔记) function, celebrities and consumers can share user's experiences and make recommendations to others. Some users' accounts also have purchase links to enable real-time sharing and shopping.

²¹Dianxiu is an online company focused on overseas shopping. It was established in 2014 and allows buyers and *dàigòu* to connect easily. The users (sellers) of Dianxiu are all Chinese who have lived overseas for a long time, and registration requires strict identity and credit verification. Users (buyers) communicate with overseas sellers through the store show App

dàigòu have also become the important device of Web data sources of this research.

It is undeniable that in my research, WeChat has undoubtedly become the vital research device or the observation channel, in which I tried to explore the function of social media and present the new way to acquire global consumer goods. It's estimated that approximately 100-250 million WeChat users live outside China (Jodie Manners, 2021). With advanced "all in one app" features, the WeChat users (*dàigòu* and their clients) were empowered to take advantage of this affluent overseas market. The screenshot (Figure 1.3) is the author's WeChat homepage, we can see the things that can do on WeChat.

This is not a manual to introduce the functions of WeChat. But through WeChat, I had the chance to connections with *dàigòu* in overseas societies, the salespersons in overseas specialty stores, the consumers addicted to *dàigòu* shopping mode, etc. And I also carried out my fieldwork research on this mobile application program.²² I mean I worked and acted as a real *dàigòu* and chatted with my "clients" on WeChat. For example, I used text messaging, hold-to-talk voice and video messaging, used group messaging to communicate with my clients, and broadcasted messaging (one-to-one or one-to-many), posted photo and video through WeChat Moments, and video conferencing (live shopping video calls) to share the product and purchasing information.

The group messaging function on WeChat works similarly to one-to-one chat but engages more people than one client. Customers' shopping behavior may be influenced by other customers in the group. The use of WeChat Moments enables *dàigòu*'s real life in overseas societies, which exposes the *dàigòu*'s personal life, as well as recommend and disseminate various overseas products to the customers, i.e., WeChat friends. Live

and can find or purchase overseas products through the product information (link) provided by the seller on the store (show platform).

²²Mobile application program, abbrev. app narrowly refers to third-party applications for smartphones, broadly refers to all mobile software or mobile applications.

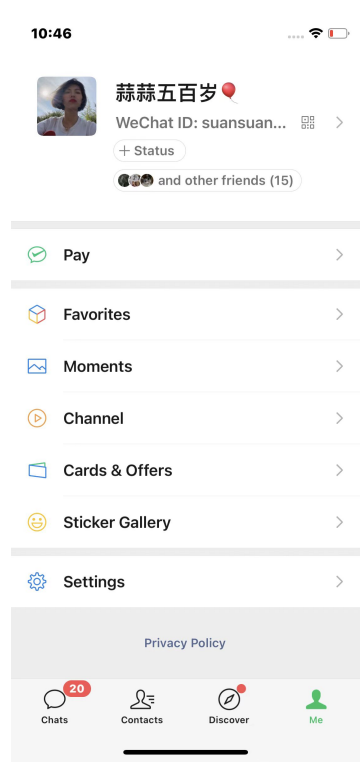


Fig. 1.3 Functions on the WeChat homepage

Source: The author’s WeChat homepage, consulted: Oct 21, 2021.

shopping video call integrated with WeChat, is a net/virtual place for *dàigòu* to publish and display the details of global consumer goods they purchased, as well as for the customers to place orders. Last but not the least, WeChat Pay then provides a safe and convenient way for accomplishing this cross-border *dàigòu* shopping (L. Y. Jiang & Kungel, n.d.).

Siddiqui, M. Mannion, and R. Marciniak (2019) explore the behaviors and impact of consumer engagement with luxury clothing brands on the WeChat social media platform, which presents an investigation into how young Chinese fashion consumers use WeChat to understand

and engage with luxury fashion brands and how they engage with other consumers and interested stakeholders during their shopping experience (Siddiqui, Mannion, & Marciniak, 2019). Peng W. and Wang W.Y. (2020) examine the social-commercial activity of micro commerce based on WeChat and contend that micro commerce embodies WeChat structural (political economy) and cultural (social lives and norms) features in China. They contend that micro commerce has emerged from WeChat's ecosystem, which is defined by corporate interest and the government's regulatory power. But the practice of micro commerce is embedded within the traditional Chinese notion of *guānxi* networks (familiar, non-stranger social-connection) (Weiyang & Wang, 2020). Also, it was found that the social factor played a more important role than the consumers' attitudes in determining apparel purchasing in the market.

The rapid rise of the mobile Internet has led to the rapid development of mobile applications. A smartphone with various applications installed becomes a bridge to the world, which has also become a prerequisite for a *dàigòu* to make cross-border global shopping. Most of my clients on WeChat come from my offline acquaintance's relationships, such as families, relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. A few of clients come from acquaintance's relationships 'recommended. Therefore, WeChat no doubt is the most important place, channel, device, social community of this research. Due to time and energy constraints, I did not additionally register Weibo, shop show, and other social accounts that can attract consumers for this research. Therefore, WeChat and its circle of friends have become an important source of my online data. At the same time, it is also called an important heuristic device and virtual community of this research.

1.4.2 From Overseas Ethnography to Auto-ethnography

During the research process of this article, I was fortunate to receive a 4-year scholarship from the China Scholarship Council to Belgium to

do overseas ethnography. This ensures that I can completely put myself into an overseas society and participate in the observation of my research objects. Social science research in China has always advocated “going out” (*zǒuchūqù zhànlüè* 走出去战略). In fact, it should be “going out” in terms of research methods, research ideas and researchers.²³ Overseas ethnography is just such a way of presenting fieldwork methods that can connect domestic and foreign fields (Bingzhong, 2021).

Chinese anthropology initially emphasized local research, and after the reform and opening up, overseas ethnography began to thrive (郝国强, 2014; A. B. Kipnis, 2021). The term *Overseas Ethnography* (*hǎiwài mínzúzhì* 海外民族志) aims to describe and analyze overseas societies and culture in Chinese academic language (王铭铭, 2011). A large-scale ethnographic study of overseas fieldwork was carried out only after 21 century. This is not only a reflection of China’s relationship with the world entering a new pattern but also a manifestation of China’s development of its new ability to “write culture” (高丙中, 2010, 2014; 高丙中 & 熊志颖, 2020).

The development of Chinese overseas ethnographic research marks a new beginning of Chinese ethnology and anthropology in the new era. It takes ethnic, societies, and cultures in various regions of the world as the research objects, and through field investigations and theoretical analysis, it is for the social sciences and the government in China. Decision-making departments and the public provide fresh knowledge about the world today (王延中, 2014; Bingzhong, 2021). Under such a circumstance, Chinese anthropologists, especially doctoral students who are interested in Chinese anthropology, go to foreign communities to carry out standardized fieldwork and complete ethnographic works with questions that are of interest to Chinese society, thus accumulat-

²³ “Go out”, the full name is “go out policy”, also referred to as “go global strategy”, namely, *zǒuchūqù zhànlüè* (走出去战略), is China’s current strategy to encourage Chinese enterprises to invest overseas. It was an effort initiated in 1999. In recent years, more and more Chinese scholars have begun to advocate that the research methods, research ideas, and researchers also need to go out. This is the background of the era in which this research can exist.

ing Chinese people's daily life and practical experience knowledge in the global society (高丙中, 2010, 2014).

If overseas ethnography is my methodological background for this research, then participant observation is the weapon that guides me into the field, which is a very important qualitative research method in anthropology research. The most basic feature of this research method is that the researcher must go deep into the field, live with the researched groups in close proximity for a long time.

But when I submitted my research report after the face-to-face, participant observations, and unstructured interviews to Professor Olivier in the early stage, he always commented that my description was too superficial, instead of making the matter of purchasing agent clear. For example, I can't say much about the daily schedule them. Although I can describe some details through interviews and participant observations, these fragmented details cannot be logically justified. For another example, I can often explain one thing clearly, but when Professor Olivier further asked me about the transaction details of the *dàigòu* event, the price composition of the *dàigòu* items, and the specific classification of the *dàigòu* items, or the easy question like why you choose Belgium to do your research, I often could not say any words.

And this dilemma lasted almost 1-2 years or even longer. With the encouragement and "persecution" of Professor Olivier, I instinctively but not so willingly comforted myself:

"I must go deep into the fieldwork, and I must not only participate in observing the dàigòu activities but also try to act as a real dàigòu. If not, I will never graduate."

Therefore, this research tried to use auto-ethnography as a new qualitative research method(Ellis, 2009). Nowadays, auto-ethnography has emerged as an important method in the social sciences for contribut-

ing to understanding human actions (Roth, 2009), in which research represents individuals and their cultures (Roth, 2005). But the auto-ethnography is not just telling one's own story in-depth (Hanson, 2004; 徐新建, 2018), it is not a static observation on a point, but a variety of phenomena that follow the trajectory of the movement of people in time and in space to achieve multi-angle observation (Hallin, Crevani, & Lychnell, 2013; 赵旭东, 2015).

It is a form of autobiographical personal narrative that links a person to the culture they research (Hayano, 1979; Chang, 2016). In my research, auto-ethnography is more like a major instrument of studying the *dàigòu* issues regarding the individual and culture. And the "participant-observe" and "be a participant" observation method in this article is more like a weapon to help me write an auto-ethnography, which describes my life of acting as a *dàigòu* and explains reflectively this experiences and observation of the *dàigòu* culture through an inside man's view. For example, this auto-ethnography tried to answer:

"As a consumer, I really want to know why so many Chinese people are suddenly addicted to purchasing overseas products through dàigòu? And in what opportunity and under what conditions did they create this professional group? And how does this loose professional group construct a map of the world dàigòu products, i.e., global commodity dàigòu chain?"

"As a dàigòu, I would like to know how to make myself become a popular dàigòu, that is, how to buy different types of overseas products that different consumers demand? And after establishing my own operating system, how to provide more and more irreplaceable personalized labor dàigòu service?"

“As a young researcher, I try to show this social phenomenon as comprehensively as possible and provide some valuable first-hand data for the future existence and development of the dàigòu and this dàigòu profession. I also look forward to, perhaps in the historical tide of changes in consumption patterns, this research may do a little tentative discussion, that is, the influence of dàigòu economy on the world.”

The Fieldwork in Louvain-la-Neuve

Doing fieldwork is the main way to obtain the data for this research. The time of this research span lasts from 2015 to 2021. Before I got the scholarship from the China Scholarship Council, I already had some experience of being a “passive” *dàigòu* that was entrusted by relatives or friends while I was traveling abroad. These experiences made me realize that every Chinese who has the opportunity to go abroad may passively become a non-professional *dàigòu*. And these non-professional agents are likely to become professional *dàigòu* under certain circumstances. Among the past six years of intermittent overseas fieldwork, I conducted 3 years (from 2016 to 2019) of in-depth participation and observation as a full time *dàigòu*.

From 2019 until now, although I am not engaged in professional *dàigòu* activities anymore, some of the customer resources and acquaintances I had accumulated before still find me to buy some overseas products from time to time. If I have time, I am happy to continue to work as a part-time *dàigòu*, inactively exists among my friends. At the same time, this unique identity and experience also gave me the precious opportunity to continuously update and add some new but sporadic survey data in the state of “revisiting research”.

In the past 5 years, I live in a student apartment in Louvain-la-Neuve (abbrev. LLN) where Université catholique de Louvain is located. As the largest university city in Belgium, it can be described as “small

but complete in every detail” (*máquè suīxiǎo, wǔzàng jùquán* 麻雀虽小, 五脏俱全). In Louvain-la-Neuve, there is L’Esplanade, the largest shopping mall in the French-speaking area Wallonie. In this shopping mall, I can buy almost all the local or culture-specific brands that the Belgian *dàigòu* often purchase. Such as cosmetics, nutritional products, local snacks, maternal & child products, and even almost all the luxury brand cosmetics.

There is even a very professional Belgian beer store in the city, where I can order not only Westvleteren12, the world’s number one beer, but also many collections of beer glasses. For a beginning-stage *dàigòu* and a freshman of overseas ethnography, my fieldwork can be described as being carried on in front of my home.

Therefore, my identity in Louvain-la-Neuve is not like a Ph.D. I am more like an observer of foreign cultures. I am more like a migrant who is under the pressure of life and is determined to be a professional *dàigòu* as a career. In this process, I put all my energy into learning all the skills related to *dàigòu*. By visiting and shopping for various stores in the city, I learned about the local Belgian brands that Chinese consumers love. From 2016 to 2021, I have also established a good relationship with the sales representatives of many regional stores, such as cosmetics store ICI Paris, drugstore iU shop, Dutch fragrance brand store Rituals, the most famous Belgian chocolates Neuhaus store, and Galler shop, etc.

The Key Participants of this Research

Since June 2016, I started my participant observation with the *dàigòu* who live in Belgium. The early participants of this research mainly lived in Louvain-la-Neuve, where I have been doing my doctoral research at the Faculty of Economic, Social, Political and Communication Sciences (ESPO) of Université Catholique de Louvain.

Anthropological fieldwork requires the investigator should allow the participants to have the right of informed consent (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). Under such request, I initially let the participants (the *dàigòu*) know that I was a Ph.D. student, and I hoped to do research related to the *dàigòu* business. Therefore, I hoped that I could learn with them how to become a qualified *dàigòu* so that I could better understand the matter of *dàigòu* from the perspective of the *dàigòu*, i.e., the native points of view (Dullo, 2016).

In the beginning, I was able to establish contact with the participants smoothly. However, when I tried to get more detailed information of *dàigòu* activity in-depth, I found that it was quite difficult to talk with almost any *dàigòu* I met and interviewed. They are all curious why a Ph.D. tries to rack the brains to become a *dàigòu*? This kind of curiosity made them think that I must be hiding some earth-shattering secret. Otherwise, they are unable to find other more reasonable conjectures.

In order to successfully gain their trust, I quickly learned how to deal with this situation. I began to use concise but vivid theories to explain how important the *dàigòu* is in the global society. My aim was to observe and study these important and hope to express the importance of *dàigòu* to society. I also showed my student ID card in due course. Swiftly, I had a standard name among the *dàigòu*, that is *bóshì* 博士 (Doctor). In many ethnographic fields, this name should have been a disaster. However, in the course of my research, it has become magical. The first generation of *dàigòu*, the student *dàigòu*, the Chinese migrants, the part-time *dàigòu* who opened stores in Belgium, and the people who came to Belgium through marriage and engaged *dàigòu* all regarded me as a knowledgeable and trustworthy person.

As a result, they were willing to give me the privilege to ask them questions at any time and I always got patient and comprehensive answers. However, as the relationship between *dàigòu* deepened, they gradually discovered that I was really talking about most of my knowl-

edge on paper and was gradually drifting away from the reality of the *dàigòu* world. But this state of ignorance of many things in real life has allowed me to gain more support from them in the interviews and participating observations. For example, Jack LI, a professional *dàigòu* who has been in the business *dàigòu* for 7 years in Belgium. I met him at KU Leuven University when I visited my friend. He was the first participant I met after jumping out of the familiar fieldwork site of LLN. He was a veteran of cross-border trade and has led LAMY pen into the Chinese market. For a very long time, when my friends asked me to buy LAMY pens, I always ordered them from him. He said:

“You are a bóshì (Ph.D.), of course, you will not grab the job with me, so there are nothing business secrets I cannot tell you.”

——Jack LI, September 29, 2016, Brussels

In the fieldwork, all my participants were always worried that I might calculate the wrong accounts, get the wrong products, or worried that I would introduce the wrong information of *dàigòu* products to the customers. Then they gave me more detailed instructions. Just because of this, I benefited a lot from my nerd's state with no life experience. Consequently, in the subsequent fieldwork, everyone in the perception observation treated me in the beginning from the standpoint of a knowledgeable and trustworthy Ph.D. to a doctor on paper (*shǎ bóshì* 傻博士) who lacked life experience and needed to be worried about all the time.

I collected data more regularly when I became more accepted by the key participants, and also conducted more systematic interviews and participant observations with some of them. Through the introduction of one or two of my key participants, the scope of the *dàigòu* was expanded in a “Snowball effect” way (Klenke, 2018).

Most of the participants lived in Belgium and I had interviews or participant observations with them frequently thereafter. In the initial attempt to integrate into the life and cultural environment of *dàigòu*, I take the initiative to let the interviewee know about my research and boldly exposed my ignorance of many daily things. It made me get more acceptance, trust, and support from them. In this process, I tried to follow my key participants at any time I was allowed to follow participate and observe their *dàigòu* activities.

Become a Newbie Dàigòu

Newbie (*xīn shǒu* 新手) is a slang term for a novice or newcomer. It also refers to somebody inexperienced in a profession or activity. In the contemporary using background, it particularly refers to a beginner or new user of computers, often concerning Internet activity, such as online gaming. Since the main media for *dàigòu* activities are all kinds of social media on the internet, this term is used in this article to refer to people who have just entered the *dàigòu* industry, are in the initial stage, and do not have sufficient experience.

In the fieldwork, I gradually established long-term and stable friendships with several *dàigòu*, and further developed my own *dàigòu* practice. Such as participating in every link of the *dàigòu* activity and trying to work as a real *dàigòu*. In this process, I participated in the production line of *dàigòu* in Louvain-la-Neuve with some friends who lived there, and gradually transitioned from a complete newcomer to a basically qualified *dàigòu*. These personal experiences have helped me better understand the operation of *dàigòu* activity, the ups and downs of life on behalf of the *dàigòu*, and also have a more different perspective to reflect on the phenomenon of *dàigòu*.

In many cases, I was scorned by ignorance and lack of life experience was unimpeded in the participant observation. Because no one would

be wary of a layman. Therefore, no one would worry that a layman might steal their trade secrets. At the same time, I was also fortunate that I had chosen the group of Chinese overseas *dàigòu* as participants, which allowed me to avoid language barriers and cultural differences in foreign countries.

For some anthropologists, immersion in different cultures can promote the contrast between their own culture and the local one. But in my research, I am not frequently wandering between two cultures on a conceptual level, but always wandering among three cultures: namely, the Chinese culture that I live in, the local culture when I enter European society as an international student, and as a compatriot, the culture of Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium.

As far as I'm concerned, the differences in consumption habits and attitudes towards global consumer products between different cultures are not trivial. Every time when I buy some product for my clients, the local people's reaction subconsciously reminds me of this difference.

For example, Europeans seldom stock up on discounted products, they only buy what they need. However, as a *dàigòu*, it seems very unprofessional not to purchase and stock up products on promotion. For another example, Europeans are not obsessed with trial outfits or gift boxes. However, Chinese consumers may change their purchase decision due to different trial packs or gift boxes. Because they think this is cost-effective (*zhàn piányi* 占便宜, 很划算). These cultural differences often accompany me and bring some different thinking to my research.

Expand the dàigòu' Scope with "Snowball Effect"

In addition to occasionally and frequently participating in fieldwork invited by different agents, I also regularly participate in the activities of the Chinese Christian Church in Brussels. It is one of many Chinese NGOs in Belgium, where I always meet the different people who take

part in *dàigòu* activity. From their conversation, I get a lot of general information, such as the different sources of *dàigòu* products, the *dàigòu* colleagues and customers, and some interesting anecdotes that happened in the Belgian *dàigòu* market.

They also organize some *dàigòu* activities. For example, every autumn, there is an activity to organize to visit the French wineries. It provides a very convenient opportunity for the overseas Chinese *dàigòu* who want to *dàigòu* French wine.

In all participating observations and random interviews, I use my mobile phone to record these conversations on-site. The most of oral information in this book is the result of such interviews. More commonly, I chat with some participants informally, and then I will find a chair or a corner of the shop to record the conversation with mobile phone when they were busy with their *dàigòu* business. Later, on the way back, I will ask supplementary questions about some questionable information. Of course, it is a very easy way to ask for advice.

Of course, when Professor Olivier denied it many times and got to the bottom of my research, my research method was no longer a bystander sitting on a bench writing an interview report. I gave myself a magic shake then change into another person, a professional *dàigòu*. When I followed the participants to *dàigòu* activities, I did the same thing as them, namely: I sent the product details to the clients, confirmed that the order has already been placed, communicated with one or five, maybe more clients at the same time, and then the purchasing ten different types even more of overseas consumer products in one day.²⁴

Most of the time, I tell the participants about all my actions pertaining to my research. Such as making a recording of their conversations, and I will anonymize their names and remove identifying particu-

²⁴Regarding the data sources of this “magical change” identity, I will discuss in detail in the writing of multi-sited ethnography and the following research.

lars. Or I will use some conversations in my thesis writing. Sometimes I even tell them that I may need to talk to them further in the future and look forward to sharing the report I wrote if they are interested.

Most of them don't care what I said above, because I have told them in advance that all interviews are anonymous. Or as I mentioned before, they are not wary of a layman (*shǎ bóshì* 傻博士) who does not know how to settle accounts but wants to figure out how they make money from *dàigòu* activity will steal their business secret.

Since 2016, in addition to participating in the observation of the interviewees and maintaining long-term and stable friendships with several key participants, whenever I encounter difficulties, I always asked them questions through WeChat or What's app. In this way, my data supplement work never was interrupted even in the lockdown period of COVID-19 in 2020.

1.4.3 Multi-sited Ethnography

In the process of my fieldwork, I gradually found that if I only stay in Louvain-la-Neuve and I only put myself on the bench of a boutique as a recorder or an observer for *dàigòu* activities, it would be impossible to show the whole picture of *dàigòu* phenomenon. Therefore, in addition to the traditional single-point field, the other important research method I used a lot in this research is multi-sited ethnography. Because after I have established a good trust relationship with my participants, they often invite me to participate in their *dàigòu* activities. Therefore, I need to “hang out” with any *dàigòu* who can take me to participate in *dàigòu* activities. It means that I need constantly switch from one site to another when participating in observing the behavior from different *dàigòu*. No matter in outlet villages or at luxury boutiques.

Since the 1950s, anthropologists and ethnologists have carried out many reflections on single-community-focused single-point ethnographic research (Alexander & Pushnik, 2017). Marcus identified that ethnog-

raphy moves from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of larger social order (Marcus, 1995). Marcus foresaw that with globalization, technological progress, and the development of new economic conditions, the multi-sited ethnography breaks through the shackles of a single ethnography and becomes a symbol of emerging ethnography (Silvast & Virtanen, 2019). Multi-sited ethnography is literally understood as conducting fieldwork in two or more spines (Gillreath-Brown & Deter-Wolf, n.d.).

Belgium, the geographical location in the heart of Europe makes every *dàigòu* have the characteristics of multi-sited activities. After I started to participate in the *dàigòu* practice as a *dàigòu*, I further knew more about *dàigòu*, sales person, buyers from China, and the key supply channels from different countries, which further expanded my research. Consequently, in the course of this research, multi-sited ethnography becomes an indispensable research strategy.

It also made my fieldwork into a more complex auto-ethnography stage, which is beyond the limitations of a multi-sited space. For example, for the *dàigòu* coming from different countries, they also sometimes situate to exchange, allocate, and share the international product resources with each other. In view of the above characteristics, the investigation scene of this study is difficult to carry out like traditional ethnographic research. Instead, this research is based on the flow of the *dàigòu* trace, through the joint traceability of multiple factors such as different times, places, clues, and events (Hallin et al., 2013). In other words, I further proposed a multi-sited ethnographic exploratory attempt in my research (Hallin et al., 2013). I would follow the participants of the *dàigòu* events and I would trace the outcome of these events to conclude and analyze the characteristics and practical meanings of tracing *dàigòu* agents' activity (Xudong, 2017; Z. Ma, 2021).

For example, I was at the Roermond outlet village on Saturday to observe how the *dàigòu* snapped up Coach and Gucci. However, maybe

on Monday, I was told to go to the Hermès store in Antwerp to witness how they spent the least amount of money to buy the most difficult Birkin bag. On Wednesday, I was told to go to a watch shop in Brussels with another *dàigòu* to learn how to distinguish two watches that look exactly the same, but the prices are worlds apart. At the weekend, I might go to another rare auction to witness the auction of Qi Baishi's landscape paintings.

In this case, it is useless to shout that *I am tired, can I have a rest*. This is like a person who studies ethnic minority funeral culture cannot choose the time of a person's death. Doing *dàigòu* research, it is also difficult to predict where and when the *dàigòu* activity will occur.

During the three years of full-time participation research (2016-2019), I followed different places of purchase with different types of purchasers on weekdays and weekends. I shuttled back and forth to different purchasing points, chatting with every *dàigòu* I have a chance to chat with. As long as I had time, I would stay at different retail boutiques to talk to the sales representatives who served me or stay in the shop to observe the *dàigòu* who were purchasing products there.

I also sometimes enjoy a coffee with the staff at the customer center in the outlet village. They introduced me to the special discount activities for Chinese consumers. For example, the Maasmechelen Village in Belgium not only has a free bus to pick up consumers, every guest who takes the bus can also get a free coffee coupon and a freshly baked chocolate waffle there. Besides this, they also can get a 10% extra discount for some special stores.

However, more often, I appear in these shopping places with my participants as a professional *dàigòu*. For example, most of my *dàigòu* business was carried out in Belgium. Divided in detail, these fieldwork/work locations can be as specific as the place where the *dàigòu* lives, works, or purchases. My fieldwork/work sites include Brussels, Antwerp, Gent, Bruges, Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve, Ottignies, etc. And

the outlet villages in and around Belgium.

As the purchasing place most frequently visited by Chinese *dàigòu* live in Belgium, the outlet villages in neighboring countries are another important fieldwork/work area in this research. The outlet village is known as the distribution center of global discounted goods. In view of the advantages of Belgium's geographical location and the characteristics of product discounts in different outlet villages, the most frequently visited villages for *dàigòu* in Belgium are the Belgian Maasmechelen Village, the Roermond Village in Holland, and the Val d'Europe outlet in Paris. The Wertheim Village in Frankfurt, the Outlet Ingolstadt in Munich, the Fidenza Village in Milan, the Las Rozas Village in Madrid, and La Roca Village in Barcelona are also very popular.

The geographical advantage allows the *dàigòu* who lives in Belgium to go to nearby European countries to purchase global products. Similarly, the *dàigòu* in other European countries will radiate to neighboring Belgium. This is especially reflected in the newly released products, the limited design goods or parts of Hermès bags that require a long waiting list or distribution rules. But for a very small number of *dàigòu* who serve the top VIP customers, they may rush out of Europe for a limited number of products and search for this product globally. The picture (Figure 1.4) shows the scope of the global trajectory of *dàigòu*.

From the perspective of tracing *dàigòu* agents' activity, the fieldwork trajectories and data sources of this study are like this: the Maasmechelen outlet village in Belgium and Roermond outlet village in Holland, luxury stores in Brussels and Antwerp, the Antwerp World Diamond Centre, the local auction houses in Brussels, Namur. The shopping malls at Louvain-la-Neuve and Brussels, and various local brand stores, etc.

Besides these, in other related scenes, each category will involve different specific scenes in neighboring countries. For example, the branches of different brands in major European countries, such as the



Fig. 1.4 Shopping scope of overseas *dàigòu*

Source: https://www.amcharts.com/visited_countries/#CZ,SE
 Accessed Jan 14, 2021, Map made by author.

head office of Louis Vuitton in Paris, the Louis Vuitton Boutiques in Rotterdam, the Louis Vuitton Boutiques in Prague, the Louis Vuitton Boutiques in Hamburg, or the Louis Vuitton Boutiques in Barcelona, etc. But the multi-point fieldwork mentioned here, does not focus on Louis Vuitton stores in 10 different countries, but only tracks the "order route when ordering a certain LV luxury bag", and combines these Louis Vuitton stores from different countries as one unit.

Usually, *dàigòu* in different country divide of their *dàigòu* activity very clearly. For regional products and culture-specific products that the region is known and discounted outlet products, they carry it out in the country where they live (Sethi, 2019b). It is basically no need to purchase across borders. However, due to the global nature of the *dàigòu* activities and the increasing international trade ties, more and more *dàigòu* from different countries began to cooperate to order and distribute the global consumer products.

Similarly, since *dàigòu* activity is a global operation, and some of the limited designed products need to fly to different countries to snap up, the field survey locations in this study not only try to reflect multi-sited ethnography but also try certain characteristics like global ethnography (Gille & Riain, 2002) or following the trace of *dàigòu* or *dàigòu* products to do the fieldwork everywhere (Gille & Riain, 2002; Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, & Thayer, 2000).

It should be noted that I don't have the great ability and enough time to extend my research to all the locations. But taking advantage of fieldwork research, exchange studying, the international conference, and sort of private trips in the past 5 years (2016-2021), I had a chance to participate in different outlet villages, luxury stores in different countries and observe the *dàigòu* practices there. These sites include Hamburg in Germany, Prague in the Czech Republic, Paris in France, Madrid in Spain, and Lisbon in Portugal. In addition, I also used the opportunity of academic exchanges in London (from March to Sep 2019) and Dubai (Sep 2019) to interview some of *dàigòu* who took part in *dàigòu* activities there.

Now, globalization is quietly dissolving our daily lives. On the one hand, the contacts and collisions between global society and local society are becoming more and more complex and diverse. On the other hand, for a global society, both the periphery and the center are almost involved in an undifferentiated and overlapping network. In this network, information, human resources, commodities, trade, services, and other resources flow together with *dàigòu* activity, therefore the multi-sited ethnography, the clues ethnography, and the global ethnography may be a better method.

In this research, ethnography is neither a pure record of the culture of the "other", nor a simple presentation of the mental journey of an ethnography worker's "individual fieldwork, but the "presence" of the author and the subject, a dynamic cultural presentation of "empathy"

and “generating”. Therefore, this research embodies a floating, multi-sited, co-constructed ethnography and taking self as method (Xiang & Wu, 2020). It crosses national and geographic boundaries (Zani, 2019).

1.4.4 In-depth Interviews

In the process of obtaining relevant data, besides the research methods mentioned above, this research also mainly uses informal interviews to communicate with all participants. During the initial contact period with *dàigòu*, I used participant observation and conversation to accustom myself to the new fieldwork environment. There is no clear topic at the beginning, but the conversation mainly revolves around the topic of *dàigòu*.

The communication situation is like a daily conversation and the access to the answers is open and unlimited. I have been establishing a good relationship with many participants in Belgium. According to the needs of this research, the key participants are mainly divided into the following categories: *dàigòu*, their family,²⁵ friends, relatives, clients in China, and the sellers or managers in various European retail boutiques, etc.

During the COVID-19 quarantine, in order to supplement the interview data, I joined some virtual spaces of *dàigòu* to obtain a sort of data. These interviews will be resumed on social media, like WeChat, Weibo, What's App, etc. The selection of this part of visitors is mainly obtained through the friend introduction. In the process of this research, all interviews were conducted around the following themes:

²⁵Usually, the work of *dàigòu* requires the assistance of their family members. For example, overseas *dàigòu* are responsible for purchasing, packing, and transportation. After the parcel is cleared and arrives in China, the family of the agent is usually responsible for collecting the parcel and mailing them separately to different buyers. This is especially true for discounted village products purchased in bulk, cosmetics purchased in bulk, and some sharing ship fees products. However, some packages with larger value or a single category, such as limited-edition bags, expensive watches, or milk powder in full container load, etc., usually choose direct mail express for buyers.

1. *Time, process, and reasons for the appearance of Chinese overseas dàigòu in Belgium and different mainstream dàigòu countries around Belgium;*
2. *Survival and or livelihood status of Chinese overseas dàigòu in Belgium;*
3. *Interaction between the Chinese overseas dàigòu, the Chinese buyer (clients, family, relatives, acquaintance customers, recommended customers, returning customers, etc.) and the peers;*
4. *How to work together under China's network of relations (guānxi network) to build the dàigòu economy, rén ròu transportation, WeChat online social community, digital payment system, etc.*
5. *Consumers, the agent themselves, natives, sales representatives of different foreign stores and specialty stores, researchers, news media, etc. views;*
6. *Difficulties, problems, and solutions encountered by purchasing agents;*
7. *The understanding and help that the agents want to get;*
8. *The reasons why consumers choose to purchase overseas products, etc.*

The duration of all interview data is from 2015 to 2021. The countries involved in the interview are Belgium, the United Kingdom, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Netherlands, Germany, France, China, and online virtual space. Since the content and results of each unstructured interview may not be the same, the data collection of this study mainly adopts the principle of grounded theory (Chenitz, W Carole, Swanson, Janice M, 1986; Strauss, Anselm Corbin, Juliet M, 1997; Bryant Antony, 2009) and the principle of data saturation to summarize the interview data.

2

The Background of Overseas *Dàigòu* Phenomenon

2.1 Chinese Outbound Tourist Market

GLOBALIZATION has brought convenient mobility and unlimited consumption possibilities (W. Ma, 2016). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), by 2030, the number of global travelers will exceed 1.8 billion by 2030. Over one in five persons in the world will travel around the globe.¹ The annual analysis from the World Travel Tourism Council's (WTTC) quantifies the global economic and employment impact of Travel & Tourism in 185 countries and 25 regions shown as the picture (Figure 2.1).

¹Unwto.org. n.d. International tourists to hit 1.8 billion by 2030 | UNWTO. [online] Available at: <<https://www.unwto.org/archive/global/press-release/2011-10-11/international>

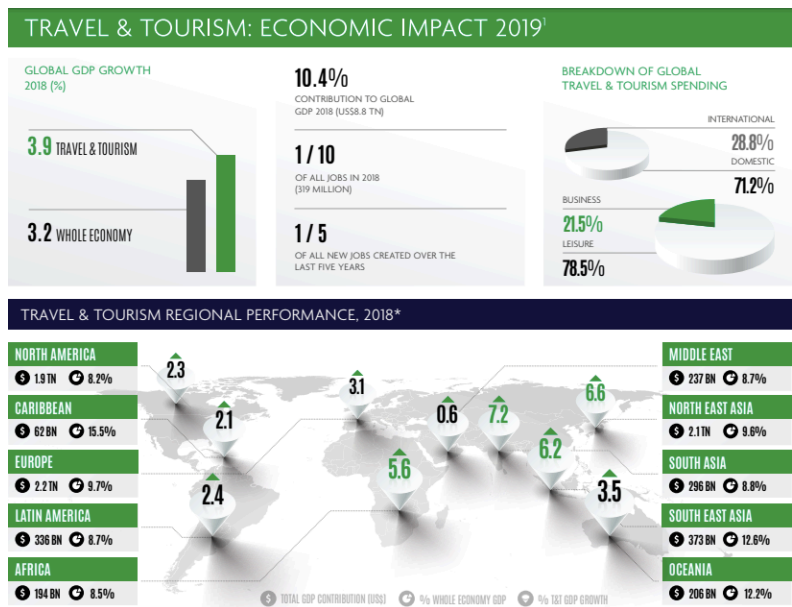


Fig. 2.1 Travel and tourism: economic impact 2019

Source:<https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/dokumenti/raziskave/raziskave/world2019.pdf>. Accessed: October 22, 2021.

The WTTC research (2019) reveals that the tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 319 million jobs. The USA, China, Japan, Germany, and the UK were the top five markets in 2018, collectively representing 47% of the global Travel & Tourism GDP. This growth, in turn, enables job creation. Travel Tourism, which already supports one in every ten jobs on the planet, and has accounted for one in five of all jobs created across the world over the past five years.²

Tourism makes people’s mobility and consumption exceed the restrictions of national borders (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). China is considered the world’s fastest-growing tourism market, Chinese tourists

tourists-hit-18-billion-2030> [Accessed 16 October 2021].

²Slovenia.info. 2019. TRAVEL TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT 2019 WORLD. [online] Available at: <<https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/dokumenti/raziskave/raziskave/world2019.pdf>> [Accessed 22 October 2021].

made 149 million overseas trips in 2018, spending a total of 130 billion U.S. dollars, according to a report released by China Tourism Academy.³ In the history of the development of the *dàigòu* business, the huge increase in Chinese overseas tourists is the most direct catalyst. The picture (Figure 2.2) shows the changes in the Chinese tourism market in the world of tourism from 1995 to 2016.

From this chart, it can be seen that the number of Chinese outbound tourists and total tourism consumption in 1995 was at the lowest level compared with the major developed countries. The *dàigòu* has not yet entered the popularization stage in the Chinese market at that era. Owning overseas products is a “privilege”. Therefore, these tourists and those relatives of Chinese descent living overseas have become the main and the only way for Chinese consumers of that era to obtain overseas goods.

Since the year 2000, China has ushered in an unprecedented wave of overseas travel and shopping, which promotes *dàigòu* activity to a large extent. The data on the graph shows that by 2008, the number and total consumption of Chinese outbound tourists abruptly began to surpass those of tourists from traditional developed countries like Italy, Australia, South Korea, and Canada, etc. Also from about this time, a considerable number of Chinese tourists traveled and purchased at New York’s Fifth Avenue, Los Angeles’ Rodeo Drive, Paris’ Champs Elysées, Brussels’s Avenue Louise, Milan’s Via Monte Napoleone, many stores throughout Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, etc. they noticed that the price of certain items in the overseas market was much cheaper than China.

It is at this time that domestic consumers can turn to friends who have the opportunity to go abroad to fulfill their eager desire to purchase overseas goods under their budget. Those tourists had become a major

³News.cgtn.com. 2019. Chinese tourists spend 130 bln USD overseas in 2018: report. [online] Available at: <<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-08-04/Chinese-tourists-spend-130-bln-USD-overseas-in-2018-report-ITbKujgXyE/index.html>> [Accessed 12 June 2021].

2 | The Background of Overseas *Dàigòu* Phenomenon

part of the early stage of free commission *dàigòu*. From 2010 to 2016, China's outbound tourism has entered a period of tremendous growth, surpassing that of the Western world such as France, Britain, Germany, and the United States becoming the world's number one.

With more and more Chinese going abroad to travel, Chinese tourists became the largest contributors to the global outbound tourism market and the main source of capital from tourist activities across the world. Figure 2.3 shows the statistics of China's private travel abroad from 2000 to 2010. From these statistics, it can be seen that in 2010, 90.1% of overseas travel was private. The report from China Tourism Academy shows overseas trips are becoming more and more convenient than ever in mainland China, facilitated by easier visa processing. In addition, more and more airlines, as well as railways, have continuously optimized cross-border transportation. Each Chinese tourist in overseas societies may play a *dàigòu* to purchase for friends during their trip. This has also created a lot of unexpected business opportunities for the first generation of *dàigòu*. Lots of them were forced to embark on a path to become a paid *dàigòu*⁴ to purchase overseas products for their relatives and friends.

These Chinese tourists who travel overseas and contribute a huge amount of total consumption have become the main constituents of early *dàigòu*. They have also become the main elements of the seasonal *dàigòu* (*jìjiéxíng dàigòu* 季节型代购人) and migratory bird *dàigòu* (*hòuniǎoxíng dàigòu* 候鸟型代购人) after the industrialization and professionalization of *dàigòu* business. It was also during this period that *dàigòu* began to attract wide attention from the media around the world. A large number of overseas reports on *dàigòu* are from this period.

⁴For more detailed information and explanation of paid *dàigòu* and the development stage of *dàigòu*, please refer to the fourth section of Chapter 4.

2.2 Purchasing Power of Chinese Tourists

China has kept its leading position in the global tourism market since 2012 with outbound tourist spending.⁵ Chinese consumers are not only want to own cellphones and cars but also want to get overseas consumer goods from the other side of the world (X. Xu, 2013). Since around 2012, when it comes to tourists spending money abroad, no country can beat China.⁶ In this process, more and more countries began to realize the need and importance to attract Chinese tourists to promote the development of their domestic tourism industry and economic growth.

For example, Japanese inbound tourism income in 2014 reached about 2 trillion yen (16.24 billion US dollars) and over 25% of 558.3 billion yen (4.53 billion US dollars) from Chinese tourists, according to the research of the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO). The consumption per capita of Chinese tourists was about 230,000 yen (1,807.06 US dollars).⁷ In 2015, there were over 5 million Chinese individuals that visited Japan, with a consumption per capita of about 230,000 yen, ranking first among tourists from all over the world, according to research from the Japanese Government Tourism Bureau.⁸

Another example, the scale of foreign tourists and credit card in 2014 spending in South Korea was 12.682 million and 10.9 trillion won⁹, of which tourists credit card spending from mainland China were respectively 5.563 million passengers (approximately 43.8%) and 6.13 trillion

⁵Chinese tourists spent \$250 billion in 2017. Retrieved 17 June 2019, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/chinese-tourists-spent-250-billion-in-2017/>.

⁶<https://www.ihgplc.com/chinesetravel/src/pdf/IHGfuturechinesetravel.pdf>

⁷Team, C. (2015). Over 5 Million Chinese individuals visited Japan in 2015. Retrieved 24 November 2015, from <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/15761/5-million-chinese-per-trips-japan-2015/>

⁸Team, C. (2015). Over 5 Million Chinese individuals Visited Japan in 2015. Retrieved 24 November 2015, from <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/15761/5-million-chinese-per-trips-japan-2015/>.

⁹1 U.S. dollar is about 1,096 won in 2014.

won (approximately 56.2%).¹⁰

Moreover, China is also one of the fastest-growing inbound travel markets to the United States. It is consistently moving up the ranks as one of the largest as well. A bilateral agreement with the United States to extend travel visa validity from one to 10 years, has been effective since November 2014. The United States stands out as a destination, which experienced strong growth, as a result of increasing efforts to boost inbound travel via improvements to visitor visas and marketing efforts.¹¹

By around 2015, shopping was likely to become one of the major motivations for Chinese tourists' travel trips abroad. This data coincides with Chinese media reports on the overseas consumption of Chinese consumers. The reports from Jinri toutiao (今日头条)¹² and Mafeng wo (马蜂窝)¹³ show that in 2015 about 53.6% of Chinese outbound tourists took shopping as the primary objective of easy trips. At least half of their travel budget was spent on shopping.

A report by the European Union about Short-Term Tourism Trends Volume in 2017 showed that Chinese tourists are the world's largest mar-

¹⁰Data released by the Ministry of Justice of South Korea in 2014, Characteristics and Prospects of South Korea's Inbound Tourism Markets. (2017). Retrieved 5 April 2017, from <https://seoulsolution.kr/en/content/6558>

¹¹https://www.ihgplc.com/chinesetravel/src/pdf/IHG_Future_Chinese_Travel.pdf

¹²Jinri toutiao, literally "Today's Headlines" or "Toutiao" (头条), is a piece of Chinese news and information content platform, Toutiao is one of China's largest mobile platforms of content creation, aggregation, and distribution underpinned by machine learning techniques, with 120 million daily active users as of September 2017 (Chinadaily.com.cn. 2021. Jinri Toutiao looks to BRICS nations - Business - Chinadaily.com.cn. [online] Available at: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2017-09/06/content_31619329.htm > [Accessed 4 March 2021].).

¹³Mafengwo.com, is a travel website, which is most frequently used by the Chinese young generation. Benefitting from the core strength of "Content + Business", Mafengwo connects individualized tourism data with global tourism product providers to offer users diverse tour experiences. It understands the preference of the young generation and therefore makes complicated travel decisions, reservations and experiences more simple, efficient, and handy. Besides, Mafengwo is also a social-tourism platform, a data-driven platform, and a new model of tourism e-commerce, which offers all-dimensional tourism information and product reservation services including spots, shopping, leisure, catering, transportation, hotels, covering over 60,000 destinations around the globe. (Itb-china.com. 2021. mafengwo.com - ITB China. [online] Available at: <http://www.itb-china.com/fair_exhibitors/mafengwo-com/ > [Accessed 5 March 2021].).

ket in terms of numbers and consumption index.¹⁴ Report by McKinsey¹⁵ shows that in 2017, Chinese outbound tourists took approximately 131 million trips and they spent 257.7 billion US dollars (Figure ??), around 20 percent of the world's total spending on tourism. .

In 2016, 3.0 million Chinese travelers visited the U.S., an increase of 15 percent from 2015.¹⁶ Data from the United States Department of Commerce, the United States Travel Association, and Oxford Economics showed that from 2016 to 2017, more than 3 million Chinese tourists have been visiting the United States each year. Chinese tourists in the United States belong to the foreign tourist groups that spend the most, and the amount of money spent per individual varies from 6,000 US dollars to 7,200 US dollars. According to the forecast of the US Department of Commerce, by 2021, the number of Chinese tourists visiting the US is expected to reach 7.3 million and contribute approximately 85 billion US dollars to the US economy.¹⁷

All those factors stimulate the unlimited potential *dàigòu* market from the side. In this process, *dàigòu* become a window to provide Chinese customers all those products previously saturated in European, Australian, American (X. Zhang, Tham, Liu, Spinks, & Wang, 2021; Jin et al., 2020).

2.3 Chinese International Students

According to the Bluebook of global talent: China Study Abroad Development Report (2012),¹⁸ shows that, from 1978 to the end of 2011,

¹⁴European Union Short-Term Tourism Trends Volume 1 • 2017-2. (2017). Ebook (1st ed., p. file:///Users/NanaMacbook/Downloads/UNWTO_EU_STT - 02.pdf)

¹⁵McKinsey-2018.09-Chinese tourists Dispelling the myths An in-depth look at China' s outbound tourist market

¹⁶Retrieved 2015, from https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_oort/document/Research_Fact_Sheet_summary_-_Country_-_Profile_china.pdf

¹⁷Retrieved 2015, from https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_oort/document/Research_Fact_Sheet_summary_-_Country_-_Profile_china.pdf

¹⁸Blue Book of Global Talent –Report on Overseas Chinese Professionals (2014). (2014). Retrieved 6 February 2021, from <http://en.ccg.org.cn/archives/69026>

China sent out a total of 2,245,100 international students. The number of students studying abroad increased from 36 in 1972 to 662,100 in 2018. Currently, China is the largest exporter of international students and it provides 15.2% of total international students.¹⁹.

Young Chinese international students that were born after 2000 are the most common types of *dàigòu*. The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan, Russia have always been popular countries for Chinese international students (王辉耀 & 苗绿, 2012). These countries also have become the origin and an important source of the *dàigòu*. In 2008, the number of Chinese international students reached 179,800 (Pan, 2013; Xinyu, 2011). There were 161,600 students studying abroad at their own expense among them, accounting for 89.9% of the total number of students studying abroad that year (刘国福, 2009). Data released by the Ministry of Education of China in 2014 (Figure 2.5) reveals that in 2013 from the more than 413,900 students studying abroad, 92.85% paid the tuition by themselves.

With regard to the development trend and scale of overseas *dàigòu* at this stage, we can draw the conclusion that the large group of self-financed overseas Chinese students has become the main middleman (*zhōngjiān rén* 中间人) for mainland Chinese consumers who are pursuing price advantages of overseas products. Why can we say this?

Firstly, because Chinese international students are often fluent in the respective foreign language. Secondly, they are familiar with the local culture-specific products. Thirdly, more and more Chinese international students get to use their free time to help domestic relatives and friends to buy overseas products to the extent that this has become a kind of new part-time job for them. Furthermore, the development of Internet and the international express made *dàigòu* transactions eas-

¹⁹IDP. (2006a). Higher education: International students in Australia. Retrieved April 23, 2006, from <http://www.idp.com/research/fastfacts/article406.asp>

ier. Lastly, they earn pocket money and have gradually become the professional *dàigòu* through this practise.

Fazal Rizvi noted in his research that the notion of exchange of ideas and intercultural learning has always been a part of the mission of international education. But beyond these broad objectives, student motivations for mobility, on the one hand, and the guiding principles and institutional forms around mobility, on the other, have varied greatly over the years. Nowadays, the international mobility of Chinese students on *dàigòu* activity has, of course, always been an indispensable component of the new e-commerce model and new globalization. This historical phenomenon is both an expression of and response to the contemporary processes of globalization (Rizvi, 2011).

2.4 Booming of Internet, E-commerce Market and Social Media

The rise of the Internet, the e-commerce market, and the prosperity of social media put a huge effect on human life (Sussman, 1997). The new communication technology restructures, reproduces and fosters new ways of consumption (Wellman, 1996; Lin, 2007; Winner, 2014; Robins, 1995; Chong, 2008). Owing to the rapid development of the Internet and information technology in China, the growth of consumers' purchasing activities in Internet shopping malls has been truly phenomenal in recent years (R. Li, Kim, & Park, 2007). In 2010 online sales in China hit 366 billion US dollars, almost as much as in America and Britain combined (Michael Hennigan, 2011).

More and more online shops and offline entity stores are winning customers by providing a very attractive discounted price for products. Internet technology enables *Dàigòu* to manage goods across borders. Through the Internet, consumers, agents, and products can be connected at once irrespective of where they are. Chinese e-commerce

evolved rapidly during the last 10 years, supported by high Internet and smartphone penetration, increasing approach in online shopping, the emergence of e-commerce platforms, and the availability of various alternative payment solutions such as Alipay (*Zhīfùbǎo* 支付宝)²⁰ and WeChat Pay (Wechat Wallet, 微信支付).²¹

According to GlobalData's E-commerce Analytics, e-commerce sales in the world's largest e-commerce market, China, is estimated to register a strong growth of 17.2% and to reach the value of CNY13.8 trillion (US\$2.1 trillion) in 2021. Against this backdrop, the Chinese e-commerce value is expected to reach CNY21.4 trillion (US\$3.3 trillion) in 2025.²² In September 2020, the 46th China Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) showed that the number of Internet users in China had reached 940 million and the number of mobile phone users was 932 million as of June 2020. The proportions of Chinese Internet users who use mobile phones, desktop computers, laptops, and tablets are 99.2%, 37.3%, 31.8%, and 27.5% respectively.

Such a large number of citizens boasts the world's largest social media market. It is very different from its Western counterparts because a whole variety of social media platforms has become an important driving force for personal cross-border shopping services. The Internet has a great impact on global business, which currently has become one of the fashionable approaches for customers and *dàigòu* to carry out trade over (Jayasubramanian, Sivasakthi, & Ananthi, 2015). Internet technol-

²⁰ Alipay Money Transfer (abbrev. Alipay), is a third-party payment service platform which is very popular in mainland China. It was launched on October 15, 2003 as a division of Taobao.com, a website of Alibaba Group. It started to operate independently on December 8, 2004. It is now a subsidiary of Ant Financial, which is independent of Alibaba Group. As of October 2019, Alipay has reached 1.2 billion global users, making it the world's largest mobile payment service organization in terms of users and the world's second largest mobile payment service organization.

²¹ For a detailed explanation of WeChat (微信), please refer to the first section of Chapter 1.

²² 14 Sep 2021 Chinese e-commerce market to reach US\$3.3 trillion in 2025, s., 2021. Chinese e-commerce market to reach US\$3.3 trillion in 2025, says GlobalData - GlobalData. [online] GlobalData. Available at: <<https://www.globaldata.com/chinese-e-commerce-market-reach-us3-3-trillion-2025-says-globaldata/>> [Accessed 5 October 2021].

ogy enables *dàigòu* to manage goods across borders. As many people who have inspired Acura Internet technology say: Internet technology has brought the globalization of purchasing agents, enabling global consumer goods to flow across national borders in an unprecedented way (Gereffi, 2010; Wasko, 2008).

In the context of the rise of the Internet, *Dàigòu*'s e-commerce activity has become ubiquitous. Social media are the most important tool for *dàigòu* activity and the combination of social media platforms and overseas *dàigòu* practice became an industrial involution, which creates real-time virtual and creative mobility for customers (P.-C. Chen, 2018; Sosnovskikh, 2020). Tencent QQ (腾讯), WeChat (微信),²³ Weidian (微店), WeChat Pay, Taobao (淘宝), Tianmao (天猫), Alipay, Sina Weibo (微博), and Xiaohongshu App (小红书) allow overseas Chinese shoppers to connect with domestic Chinese consumer more convenient than ever.

It became clear that social media are the most important field for *dàigòu* activity (Sosnovskikh, 2019). It allows overseas Chinese shoppers to connect with domestic clients more conveniently than ever before. *Dàigòu* can advertise their goods through photos and videos on social platforms. Also, we can conclude that virtual payments, such as WeChat Wallet, Alipay, or Internet bank, etc. made transactions much easier, which in turn helped clients avoid the lengthy bank queues and the sharing of sensitive bank account information.²⁴ Moreover, since China has the world's largest social network market, this guarantees the base of supporters of KOLs. The term KOLs means the key opinion leader (abbrev. KOL, KOLs), namely opinion leadership. This concept was first proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz in the two-step flow of communication theory (Jeřábek et al., 2012). Now, KOL mainly refers to product recommenders who are active on social networks, relying on

²³For a detailed explanation of WeChat (微信), please refer to the first section of Chapter 1.

²⁴China's Daigou Obsession: The Popularization of Personal Shoppers (2016). Retrieved 5 March 2016, from <https://medium.com/mailman-group/china-s-daigou-obsession-the-popularization-of-personal-shoppers-d26a38c9a332>

the Internet celebrity economy, and maintaining close interaction with consumers (Sismondo, 2015). As an effective new marketing method, KOL has been especially popular in mainland China in the past five years.²⁵ According to Ivy Wong, CEO of VS Media, in 2016, the market value of opinion leaders in mainland China exceeded US\$800 million.²⁶ They appear in large numbers in apps such as Weibo, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu. They provide subscribers with the latest products through posting and promoting various products with the help of fans. Such as tourism, luxury goods, food, fashion, etc.

However, the KOL who has a huge number of fans and economic driving force is not the key concept of this article. It only appears as the background of the individual *dàigòu*.

2.5 Anyone Can be A Potential *Dàigòu*

For most Chinese consumers, it is not easy to go abroad for shopping the real bargain (*jiǎnlòu* 捡漏)²⁷ on time by themselves. But the popularization of Chinese personal global tourists and a large number of international students made shopping globally become a reality. The injection of those groups from different countries has created a large number of potential overseas Chinese *dàigòu* who enact personal labor purchasing service for their customers (Park et al., 2020; Park, Kim, Jeong, & Minshall, 2021).

Xueyang LIU is a 26 years old international female student, who lives in London. As of 2016 when I interviewed her, she has been engaged

²⁵Escobedo, J., 2021. Nearly \$150K Per Post? What You Need To Know About China's Key Opinion Leaders. [online] Forbes. Available at: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joescobedo/2017/05/22/key-opinion-leaders-in-china/?sh=3d8cd4b272ee>> [Accessed 6 September 2021].

²⁶Warc.com. n.d. Building an influencer strategy in China: Behind the USD8 billion industry | WARC. [online] Available at: <<https://www.warc.com/Content/cef776db-e1af-441c-bc58-6ff27c53a1b>> [Accessed 6 September 2021].

²⁷*jiǎnlòu* (捡漏) refers to buying valuable things at very cheap prices. “捡” (*jiǎn*) refers to “pick up”, means pick up cheap but valuable things, “漏” (*lòu*) refers to “lasting but valuable things”.

in *dàigòu* as a part-time job for 3 years (2013-2016). She loves to travel and draws clients with her WeChat Moments and Xiaohongshu App. When I traveled to Prague, I met Xueyang in the Louis Vuitton store at Pařížská street. She was very eye-catching at the time. First of all, she has very nice looking, wearing a dazzling Cartier watch, and her gestures were very imposing. When I was observing her in the corner, I didn't expect that she would come to me and ask me to borrow my passport to help her buy the bags. Because I can't consume the 6 LV bags stipulated by Louis Vuitton by myself, it is no actual loss to me to borrow the quota of the passport to buy the bags, so I gladly agree. She was very happy to invite me to visit the Franz Kafka Museum after the successful purchase. During the visit, she shared with me a lot of her personal purchasing experience. Since then, we have maintained a relationship via WeChat.

In 2019, when I went to the UK for conference and exchange studies, she took me to the British Museum and shared some of her experiences on purchasing while traveling from 2016 to 2019. Now she has been working as a full-time global nomadic *dàigòu*²⁸ since she graduated.

When we talked about the scale and current status of global *dàigòu* When we visited the Franz Kafka Museum, she said,

“When I travel abroad, most recently, for example, the Middle East, Europe, Japan, and the US, I see a large number of Chinese buying luxury products crazily,” Lin said. The Champs Elysees and all European luxury stores districts are filled with Chinese consumers. For those who have no chance to shop overseas, dàigòu are worth existing.”

²⁸The global nomadic *dàigòu* here mainly refers to the purchase of global consumer goods by flying to different countries and regions around the world according to the needs of consumers. For a detailed discussion of this content, please refer to section 4.25 of Chapter 4 on the description of “global nomadic shopper”, i.e., (*quánqiú mǎi shǒu* 全球买手 global buyer).

2 | The Background of Overseas *Dàigòu* Phenomenon

——Xueyang, June 18, 2016, the Franz Kafka Museum in Prague

The *dàigòu* bandwagon swept across the global consumer goods market (Hughes et al., 2019), which brought a trend of the global flow of overseas consumer products. In this process, anyone could act as a *dàigòu* (Park et al., 2021), i.e., anyone based overseas who shops for global goods on the client's shopping list and ships the goods back can be considered as a *dàigòu*. The report from Qianzhan Industry Research Institute (前瞻产业研究院) summarizes the transaction scale of China's overseas *dàigòu* market from 2014 to 2018. According to this report, we can see from Figure 2.6, in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, the transaction scale of China's overseas *dàigòu* market was 154.9 billion yuan (24.784 billion US dollars),²⁹ 175.8 billion yuan (28.26 billion US dollars), 2050 billion yuan (308.73 billion US dollars), 2351 billion yuan (348.19 billion US dollars), 2601 billion yuan (393.49 billion US dollars).³⁰ This substantial boom in *dàigòu* market has driven the world's attention.

This phenomenon that any Chinese in overseas societies may provide *dàigòu* services as a *dàigòu*, further accelerates the Chinese consumers' obsession with overseas products.³¹ Meanwhile, this obsession further prompts any social connection around any Chinese consumers that have the ability or opportunity to purchase overseas goods to become a potential *dàigòu* (Sethi, 2019b). They help Chinese consumers shop the dead cheap international goods without leaving home. And they satisfy Chinese consumers' desire to express all kinds of products from overseas societies.

²⁹According to the data from The World's Trusted Currency Authority (<https://www.xe.com>), in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, the annual average exchange rate of the US dollar to the RMB was 6.25, 6.22, 6.64, 6.75, and 6.61.

³⁰<https://www.qianzhan.com/wenda/detail/190617-f9afb037.html>, Retrieved 7 February 2021.

³¹China's Daigou Obsession: The Popularization of Personal Shoppers (2016). Retrieved 5 March 2016, from <https://medium.com/mailman-group/china-s-daigou-obsession-the-popularization-of-personal-shoppers-d26a38c9a332>

From the perspective of Xueyang, she believed,

“Dàigòu is now not only the future of Chinese overseas potential career but this phenomenon is now totally included in the everyday life of a lot of Chinese people.”

——Xueyang, August 9, 2018, WeChat discussion

At the same time, in this process, the overseas *dàigòu* economy came into being. The Chinese term “*dàigòu* economy” here does not only refer to economic concepts in the sense of economics. It refers more to the fact that under this historical background, the originally sporadic and individualized *dàigòu* participants gradually create the *dàigòu* business and developed it into a profession involving many people together. They did not have a unified organization, but they gradually formed certain rules, regulations, standards, and logic. It has the trend and characteristics of industrialization and professionalization.

Xueyang herself commented on her *dàigòu* experience over the past few years and said:

“If I did not have the experience of helping domestic friends to engage in part-time dàigòu in the early years, it would be difficult for me to continue to stay in London and support myself after graduation. I have always liked traveling. Without these clients, traveling would be a big expense for me. It is foreseeable that a large part of my income will be spent on travel. However, when dàigòu became my profession, especially after I graduated and started working as a full-time global nomadic dàigòu, I could help my customers find goods all over the world, and at the same time, the commission they paid for me is enough to cover my travel expenses in the local

2 | The Background of Overseas *Dàigòu* Phenomenon

area. As a freelancer, I think to be a dàigòu is pretty cool.”

——*Xueyang, Sep 06, 2019, British Museum*

Therefore, we say that any overseas Chinese has been engaging in *dàigòu* activities under this trend. Some of them are learning how to become a *dàigòu*, while others may act as a *dàigòu* in the future. They promote the flow of global commodities and together constitute the new development of today's globalization.

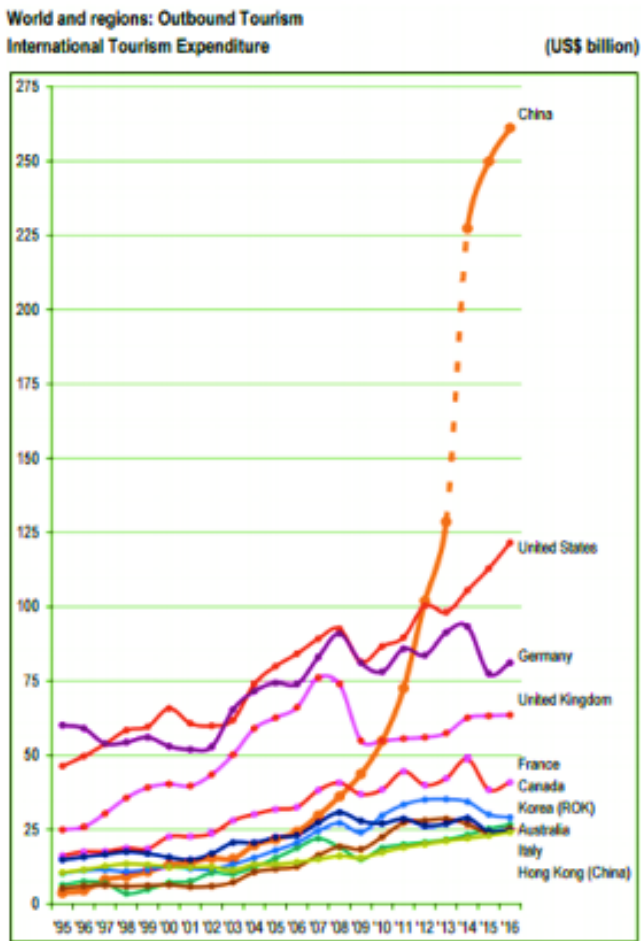


Fig. 2.2 Outbound tourism expenditure in different countries and regions (1995-2016)

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Note: The name of the original picture is “World and regions: outbound tourism international tourism expenditure (1995-2016)”. Here, according to the needs of this article, the name of the picture has been modified, hoping to help readers more intuitively experience the huge changes in China’s Outbound tourism expenditure from 1995 to 2016.

Outbound travel from China by purpose of trip ^a						
Purpose of Trip	2000		2005		2010	
	(000 trips)	(% of total)	(000 trips)	(% of total)	(000 trips)	(% of total)
Public	4,843	46.2	5,886	19.0	5,693	9.9
Private	5,631	53.8	25,140	81.0	51,627	90.1
Total	10,473	100.0	31,026	100.0	57,390	100.0

a) Passports for 'public' or official and/or bussiness travel are issued to a wide range of categories, but mostly non-holiday travellers. 'Private' passports are issued to VFR and some leisure travellers. In effect, business travellers could travel abroad on either type of passport, although they are more likely to have 'public' passports.

Fig. 2.3 Outbound travel from China by the purpose of trip
Source: China Tourism Research Institute (2011), European Travel Commission. Accessed Jan 2, 2021.

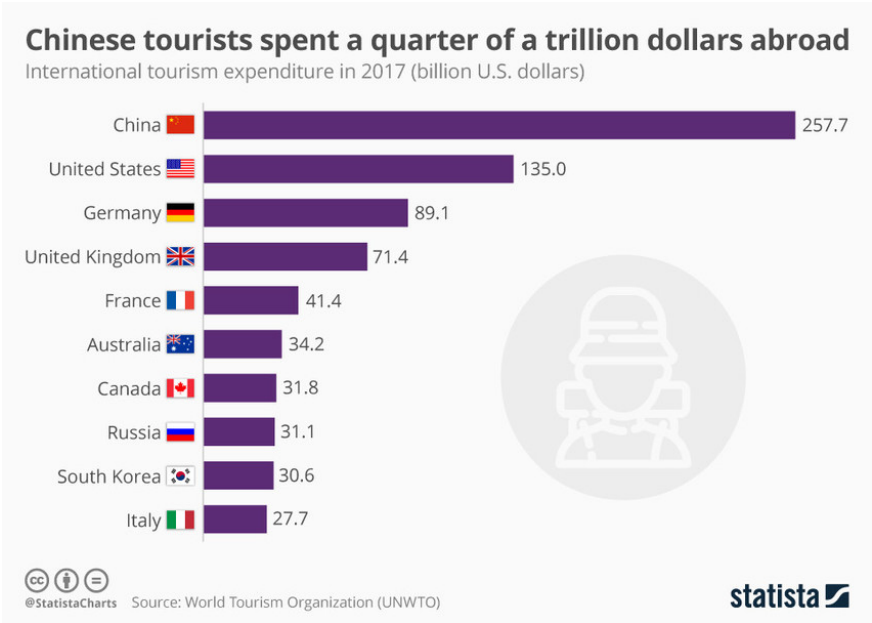


Fig. 2.4 Chinese tourists spent a quarter of a trillion dollars abroad
Source:WorldTourismOrganization(UNWTO).\https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/chinese-tourists-spent-250-billion-in-2017/ Accessed Jan 31, 2021.

Statistics number of Chinese international students			
Years	Number of international students	Number of self-funded students	The ratio of self-funded students
2000	38 989	32 293	82. 8
2001	83 973	76 052	90. 6
2002	125 179	117 000	93. 5
2003	117 307	109 200	93. 1
2004	114 682	104 281	91. 0
2005	118 515	106 500	90. 0
2006	134 000	121 000	90. 3
2007	144 000	129 000	90. 0
2008	179 800	161 600	89. 9
2009	229 300	209 400	91. 63
2010	284 700	260 000	91. 32
2011	339 700	314 800	92. 67
2012	399 600	374 500	93. 72
2013	413 900	384 300	92. 85

Fig. 2.5 Statistics number of Chinese international students (2000-2013)

Source: Statistical data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, Compiled and translated by the author.

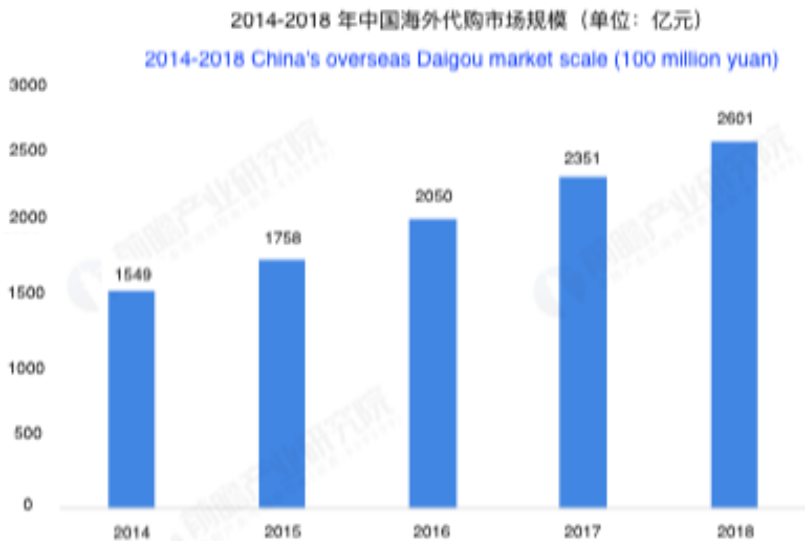


Fig. 2.6 China's overseas *dàigòu* market scale

Source: <https://www.qianzhan.com/wenda/detail/190617-f9afb037.html>.

Translated by the author. Accessed: June 10, 2020

3

Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

3.1 General Situation of Belgium

3.1.1 Brief Introduction to Belgium's History

BELGIUM (Dutch: België, French: Belgique, German: Belgien), officially the Kingdom of Belgium, is a country in Western Europe. The name originated from Roman times when it was called Belgian Gaul. It is written as Gallia Belgica in Latin, which literally means “gaul of the Belgians”. It was ruled by Romans, Gauls, and Germans for a long time (Villaescusa & Jacquemin, 2011). Consequently, Belgium has very obvious cultural integration features.

From the 14th to the 15th century AD, Belgium belonged to the

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

Duchy of Burgundy. Later it was ruled by Spain, Austria, and France successively (Deprez & Vos, 2016). In 1815, Belgium was incorporated into the Netherlands and became independent on October 4, 1830. The Chinese translation of Belgium (比利时) first appeared in the book *World Geography* (《瀛寰志略》) compiled by Jishe XU (徐继畲) in 1849.

Belgium covers an area of 30,538 square meters, about twice the area of Beijing. It is highly developed and having a population of 11.49 million inhabitants in January 2020, it is densely populated (Thomson, Diop, Stuijzand, & Horsch, 2021), making it the 22nd most densely populated country in the world and the 6th most densely populated country in Europe, with a density of 376 per square kilometer in 2017 (Mazzone, Carlton, & Griffiths, 2018). Belgium is one of the founding members of the European Community, and its capital, Brussels, is also the capital of the European Union.

Belgium has been known as the heart of Europe, with extremely convenient transportation. It borders the North Sea to the west and the United Kingdom across the sea, it borders Germany to the east, the Netherlands to the north, as well as France and Luxembourg to the south (Figure 3.1). The capital and largest city is Brussels; other major cities are Antwerp, Ghent, Charleroi, Liège, Bruges, Namur, and Leuven (Van Meeteren, Boussauw, Derudder, & Witlox, 2016).

Belgium is a federal state, with 3 relatively autonomous regions (Robert Bateman, 2006, *Belgium : Cultures of the World*). The names of the three regional institutions were borrowed from the name of the territory they represent. It refers to (from north to south): (1) the Flemish (Flanders) Region in the north, where the language is Dutch (Flemish); (2) the Brussels-Capital Region, which is officially bilingual (French and Flemish) (Janssens, 2008); (3) the Wallonia Region in the south, where the language is French¹. There is a small German-speaking

¹https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/regions

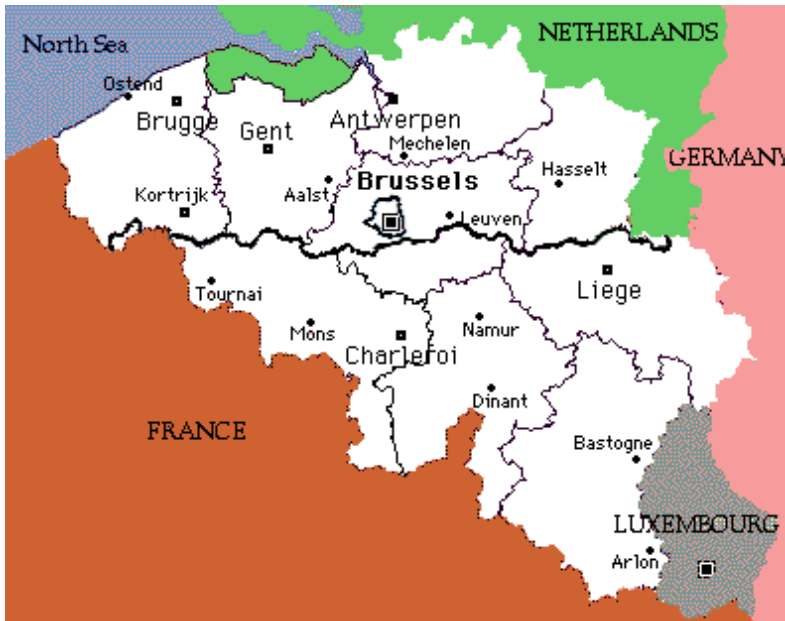


Fig. 3.1 Map of Belgium with major cities

Note: The thick black lines denote the language border separating the 3 regions: Brussels in the center, Flanders in the Northern half, Wallonia in the Southern half; thin lines delimit provinces.

More information please see: <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be.2000.http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/belgcul.html>. Accessed Jan14, 2021.

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

Community in the east of Wallonia Region, numbering around one percent. This picture (Figure 3.2) shows the three autonomous regions and four language communities of Belgium.



Fig. 3.2 Three autonomous regions and four language communities
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium#/media/File:Communities_of_Belgium.svg.
Accessed Aug 9, 2020.

3.1.2 Brief Introduction to Belgium's Geographical Location

The unique geographical location of Belgium does not limit the active trajectory of the *dàigòu* active here to the territory of Belgium

alone, reflecting the extremely strong concentric characteristics. That is, with Belgium at the core, it is available for luxury goods stores, discount villages, regional supermarkets, drugstores, etc. in different countries and regions around it. Therefore, the products purchased by Chinese *dàigòu* who live in Belgium can origin from Britain, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, etc.

The time needed to travel from the capital city Brussels to major shopping cities or major outlet villages in neighboring countries by different types of transportation only takes about 1.5 to 2 hours. In Figure 3.3, we can see that to travel by Thalys train to Paris, it will only take 1 hour and 22 minutes; to London it takes 2 hours and 2 minutes; to Cologne (Köln) by Thalys train only needs 1 hour and 47 minutes; to Amsterdam by Thalys train needs 1 hour and 53 minutes. The convenient transportation system create Brussels an international city par excellence. Although the area of Brussels is not large, it has everything readily available for *dàigòu* to purchase global consumer products.



Fig. 3.3 Transportation between Belgium and neighboring countries
Source: The ticket cover of the international train ticket. Photography by the author, June 28, 2016.

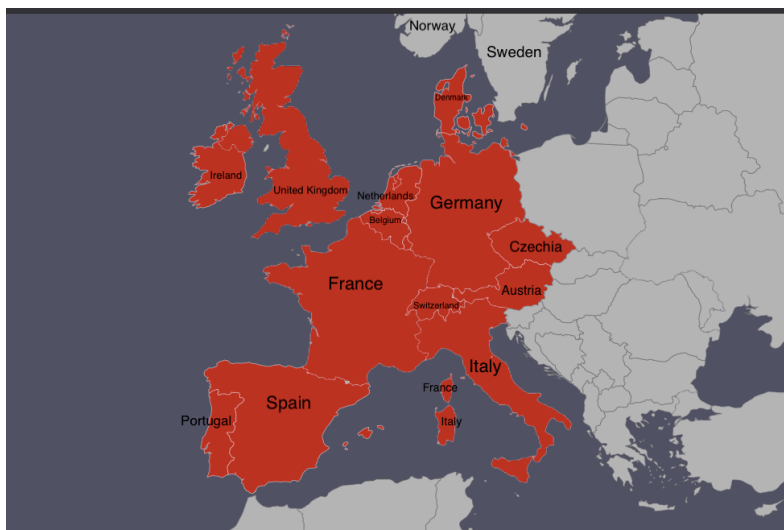


Fig. 3.4 Scope activities of the Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium

Source: https://www.amcharts.com/visited_countries/#CZ,SE. Accessed Feb 11, 2021, map made by the author.

If we take into account the convenience of low-cost airlines, the scope activities of the Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium is even more abundantly wide. Besides the cities mentioned above, Milan, Florence, Rome, Verona, Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon, Prague, Hungary, and Vienna are all potential places of purchase for Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium. The scope of activities of *dàigòu* in Belgium is shown in Figure 3.4.

The red area is the regular activity scope of Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium. The geographical advantage also makes the activity radius and area of the *dàigòu* living in Belgium naturally spreading to surrounding countries. It is quite convenient to neighboring countries to pick up products, especially for some brands that are hard to acquire in Belgium. Through the chart below, we can intuitively feel the activity space of the Belgium *dàigòu*, which also was the scope of the author's multi-sited fieldwork (ethnography).

But, some *dàigòu* often complained that working as a *dàigòu* in Belgium always had to face language and communication problems. *dàigòu* Meng said:

“In Belgium, I finally learned a few sentences of French. I tried to show off my language skills when I entered the Dutch language area outlet village. But my French was of no use there. I had no alternative but feeling a silly person.”

——Meng, April 16, 2016, at Le Brasse-Temps in Louvain-la-Neuve

During my investigation, I found that situations like this occur all too often. The language barriers are particularly obvious in the specific practice of *dàigòu*. The *dàigòu* who are often active in the French-speaking area may show a strong sense of frustration when they arrive in the Dutch and German-speaking areas. Many Belgian local and culture-specific products, such as milk powder, vitamins, over-the-counter medicines, nutritional products, etc., are also divided into Dutch and French versions.

Subsequently, although Belgium has a unique geographical advantage for most of the *dàigòu* active in Belgium, the obstacles in language and product versions cannot be ignored. Some not mentioned *dàigòu* partners who have just started to engage in purchasing, often receive qualms and queries from customers because of the different packaging versions.

3.2 Belgium's Position in *Dàigòu* Market

3.2.1 Inherent Impression of Belgium

In 2016, I was supported by the National construction of high-level university public graduate project of China scholarship council to

3 | Belgium's Position in International Dàigòu Market

pursue my Ph.D. at Université Catholique de Louvain (abbrev. UCL or UCLouvain) in Belgium. When I confirmed that my research topic was Cross Border Dàigòu Services on Global Consumer Products, I was actually a little bit sad. Because at the time, with my limited knowledge of Belgium, I rigidly thought that Belgium did not have a strong sense of presence in the *dàigòu* world.

Not only I, but many *dàigòu* and consumers have the same idea. Meng said:

“When Chinese consumers mentioned dàigòu, they all remembered Australian dàigòu, American dàigòu, British dàigòu, French dàigòu, and so on. Chinese dàigòu who live in Belgium are often called “the ones from Belgium village” (bǐlìshí cūn 比利时村/比村), or “from Brussels village” (bù lǚ sài ěr cūn 布鲁塞尔村/布村). In this way they are ridiculed because of their unknown existence in the mainstream dàigòu circles. Compared with surrounding countries, the size of the dàigòu economy in Belgium looks quite insignificant. It seems too hard to hear of it! What dàigòu buy in Belgium? It seems to be unknown.”

——Meng, April 16, 2016, at Le Brasse-Temps in Louvain-la-Neuve

This kind of disadvantage has troubled me for a very long time at the beginning of this research so that in the first 4-5 months of finalizing the thesis, I even once wanted to change the country of study. But with the fieldwork progresses, I found that Belgium has shown infinite labor resources and brand resources in the *dàigòu* market.

3.2.2 The Underestimated Position of Belgium

Through fieldwork in the past five years, I found that Belgium is a proud and distinctive existence in the *dàigòu* industry chain. For

example, It's extremely active in purchasing luxury brands, antiques at weekend flea markets, second-hand luxury stores at the Place du Grand Sablon, trendy designing brands, street fashion and co-branding artworks at Antwerp, etc.

Belgian native food products are also very famous in the *dàigòu* community. When people mention beer, they think of German beer with their thumbs up, but in fact, the world's number one beer Westvleteren 12 is not made in Germany but in Belgium. People have always thought that Swiss chocolate is famous, but the Hermès in chocolate is the Belgian GODIVA. In addition to GODIVA, other chocolate brands, such as Neuhaus, Mary, Pierre Marcolini, Galler, Guylian, Leonidas, Cote D'Or, Cupido Cocoa Truffles cannot be underestimated.

Moreover, Belgium is also the home of waffles, caramel biscuits, and French fries. It is also the country with the most Michelin restaurants in one square kilometer in the world. When Dutch, German, and British *dàigòu* in the well-known purchasing service circle cannot purchase the local milk powder due to the milk restriction order, The overseas *dàigòu* in Belgium can not only help domestic consumers purchase milk powder, but also promote to sell the underestimated local food brands to Chinese clients.

In addition to the well-known native products mentioned above, The Belgian diamonds are also well-known by many clients and attract worldwide attention. Antwerp is the second-largest city of Belgium, which has also been the world's diamond trading center since the 16th century. As one of the five major centers of the world's diamond industry, the Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC) has annual diamond transactions of billions of US dollars. 80% of rough diamonds and 50% of finished diamonds in the world flow through Antwerp and are then sold to the world. In other words, 8 out of every 10 uncut diamonds in the world will be sent to Antwerp for processing/cutting. In Antwerp, thousands of professional craftsmen go all out for "Antwerp Cut" ev-

ery day. There are about 1,800 diamond companies on the famous Pelikaanstraat street in Antwerp.

For clients who like animation, Belgium also has its own unique position. Belgium is the home of *Tintin* and *The Smurfs*. The creator of *Susu and Vivi*, Willie Wandersteen, the creator of comic *Happy Luke* Morris, the creator of *The Adventures of Blake and Mortimer* Bob Demoore and Edgar Pierce Jacob, etc., all lived and worked in Belgium. Therefore, Belgium is not inferior to Japan in terms of *dàigòu* for animation and comics, such as peripheral products, comic figures (Garage Kit)².

In the summer of 2018, the Belgian national football team “Red Devils” won third place in the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which made the “unknown” Belgium and Belgian *dàigòu*³ suddenly famous. It is no exaggeration to say that Belgium becomes one of the most suitable countries in the world to produce and develop the *dàigòu* business.

3.3 Categories of Belgian *Dàigòu* Products

Through interviews with different *dàigòu* during 2016 to 2019, we found that the most popular global consumer products and brands in Belgian *dàigòu* market can be roughly divided into the following categories, please see the table on Figure 3.5.

²GARAGE KIT refers to a model kit that is not mass-produced. Because the output is small and the complexity of mold opening is very difficult, the price is generally very expensive. Thence *dàigòu* can help people who want to buy these special figures at a lower cost and guarantee the clients can get the genuine one

³This word refers to Chinese individuals living in Belgium and working as a *dàigòu*. They are always be called Belgian *dàigòu* (agent), or *bǐ dài* (比代). Sometimes, we also use the abbreviation “DIB” to describe them. In this research, there are lots of analog title description like “Belgian *dàigòu*”. For example, the Japanesed*dàigòu*, which refers to *dàigòu* active in Japan. They are always be called *rì dài* (日代) or used an abbreviation “DIJ” instead. French *dàigòu* (*fǎ dài*, 法代, “DIF”), American *dàigòu* (*měi dài*, 美代, “DIA”), etc., they all refer to Chinese who live in these countries and act as a *dàigòu*. In the following description, if a similar title appears again, this article will not repeat the explanation.

The Most Popular Global Consumer Products and Brands in *Dàigòu* Market

Category	Specific Products	Popular Brands
Luxury goods	Watches, gemstones, bags, clothes, shoes, etc.	LV, Hermès, Gucci, Delvaux, Chanel, Dior, Prada, Fendi, Celine, Chloé, Givenchy, Burberry, Cartier, VCA, Piaget, Chopard, Tiffany, Bvlgari, etc.
Entry luxury ¹	Watches, gemstones, bags, clothes, shoes, etc.	DW, ICE, Swatch, FURLAR, BOSS, Coach, MK, MCM, Tory Burch, Longchamp, Ma je, Liu Jo, Pandora, Tod's, Swarovski, Ted Baker, etc.
Infant formulas& local foods	Pampers, child health products, baby carriages, baby formula etc.	Hipp, Aptamil, Nutrilon, Olvarit, Optimax, Mustela, Zwitsal, Godiva, Neuhaus, Jean Galler, Mary, Cupido, Lotus, Knoppers, Tango, Vedett, Duuel, Leifè, Trappist Westvleteren, Omnibionta (DHA), etc
Dietary supplement	Vitamines, calcium supplements, DHA, etc.	Davitamon, Omnibionta, Biover, Protectis, Floravitall, Swisse, Balea, Caudalie, Nuxe, Filorga, Eucerin, Weleda, Bioderma, etc.
Digital products	Cellphones, computers, earphones, etc.	Apple, Sennheiser, AKG, Bose, JBL, etc.
Lady products	Cosmetics, skin care, perfumes, etc.	Lancôme, Chanel, YSL, Estee Lauder, Vichy, Avene, Irip, Marc Jacobs, Armani, TOM FORD, L'Occitane, Caudalie, FILORGA, etc.

Fig. 3.5 The most popular global consumer products and brands in *dàigòu* market

Source: Data from the author’s interviews from 2016 to 2019. Figure translated and created by the author. Date: June 06, 2021.

3.3.1 First-line Luxury Goods

First-line luxury goods are including all kinds of first-line luxury brands that are never have discounted, but increase their prices 5-15% every year.

The first-line luxury goods/brands mentioned here are just a rough general classification. It was not present the author’s preference for different brands. The brands were selected in this article are mainly based on the popular luxuries purchased by Belgian *dàigòu* and their Chinese clients. The preferences of Chinese consumers for overseas products were another factor. In the seventh chapter of this research, there are some detailed cases analyzed on some representative first-line luxury goods.

For example, Louis Vuitton’s purchased policy, the unspoken rule (*pèihuò* 配货) of Hermès, the tips to acquire the scarce luxury goods, antique auction items, and the investment value of luxury brands, etc. In addition, since there are different strategies for purchasing different

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

global consumer products, the introduction of *dàigòu* in Belgium is mentioned in chapter 4, and the different development stages of *dàigòu* are also mentioned in Chapter 4. Therefore, the product classification in this part is just an overview.

3.3.2 Entry Luxury

The entry luxury on note 1 refers to the entry-level class of luxury goods. They are priced relatively low, which allow people of limited salary to enter the luxury market. People who love luxury goods but could not afford can satisfy themselves by purchasing the entry-luxury brands. In this way, they could enjoy exquisite taste of life without spending a lot of money. In addition to the classification of these overseas products that are popular with Chinese consumers, the classification of *dàigòu* items according to the characteristics of the country where *dàigòu* lives.

3.3.3 Infant Formula & Local Specialty

The daily necessities are including infant products and local foods, dietary supplements, lady products on the table in figure 3.5. Because infant milk powder has played a vital role in the production and development of purchasing agents. Therefore, this thesis has carried out a detailed expansion of this issue from different angles in Chapters 4 and 7, so only an overview is given here. Lots of *dàigòu* put the daily supplements and the infant formula together, because normally they can purchase these two kinds of overseas products at same store.

In addition, the common overseas products that are popular in the Belgian shopping service circle are in addition to the types summarized in the chart. In daily purchasing, there are also the following categories:

Local Brands from Neighboring Countries

The neighboring countries' local cosmetic and skincare brands are also very popular in Belgian *dàigòu* market, such as:

1. *The French cosmetic brands: NUXE, FILORGA, BIODERMA, VICHY, Caudalie, L'OCCITANE;*
2. *The German cosmetic brands: Balea, EUCERIN, Alverde;*
3. *The Dutch fragrance brands: RITUALS;* 4. *The United Kingdom cosmetic brands: The body shop, LUSH, Jo Malone, etc.*

When people mention the most welcome specialty local products in Belgium *dàigòu* market, the Belgian beer, the beer mug and chocolate could not be ignored.

Belgian Beer and Beer Mug

In Belgium, there is a well-known Belgian slang term that describes Belgian beer culture like this:

“The most conscientious and meticulous thing on the dinner table is using the suitable mugs for different Belgians beers.”

Trappist Westvleteren 12 (Figure 3.6) is called “the world’s top beer” by experienced beer lovers. In the *dàigòu* market, for the beer collector, Belgian beer and its beer mug (Figure 3.7) both have a strong place too.

The Belgian Chocolate

Belgium is often referred to as the country of chocolate. In Belgium, there are over 320 chocolate boutiques throughout, which can produce

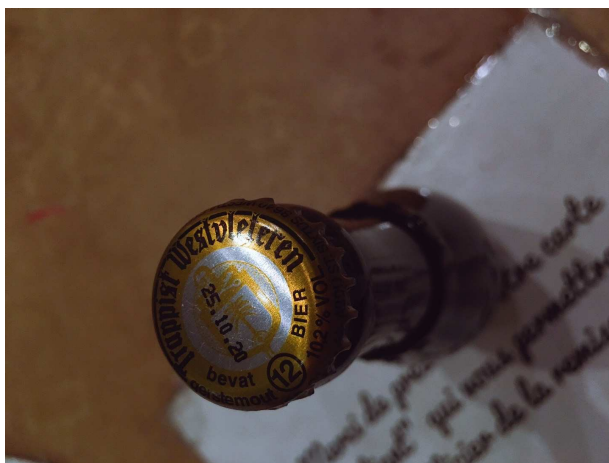


Fig. 3.6 Trappist Westvleteren 12

Photograph by the author at Beer lovers' shop, Louvain-la-Neuve, July 19, 2018.

more than 3,000 kinds of chocolate with different flavors and cover almost all people's imaginations about the taste of chocolate. With such easy access to quality ingredients and rich history of crafting the chocolate, Belgium becomes famous for *dàigòu* chocolate, especially the top chocolate brands in the world.

According to incomplete statistics from Visit Flanders's official website, Belgium has a wide variety of top chocolate brands made by the world's finest chocolatiers. For Belgian chocolate *dàigòu*, they could purchase for their clients Godiva, Neuhaus, Mary, Pierre Marcolini, Guylian, Galler, Leonidas, and Côte d'Or. Besides, Callebaut and Puratos, two of the global biggest chocolate factories, are located here. And, the global luxury chocolate brands, Godiva and Neuhaus' outlet stores are also located here.⁴

Jianya Zhou is a 26-year-old female, and a full-time master student

⁴Visitflanders.com. n.d. Top Belgian Chocolate Brands|VISITFLANDERS. Retrieved from <https://www.visitflanders.com/en/themes/from-flanders-with-food/belgian-chocolatiers/top-belgian-chocolate-brands>. Accessed 30 December 2020.



Fig. 3.7 Unique Belgian beer and beer mug

Photograph by the author at Beer lovers' shop, Louvain-la-Neuve, July 16, 2019.

at Université Catholique de Louvain. She has been doing as a part-time *dàigòu* since she arrived at Louvain-la-Neuve in 2015. I Knew her by Meng's introduction. She draws her clients by friends' introduction and her WeChat Moments. We always used to talk about my research when we had our meals together or when we went to the sport. Since we both live in LLN and she is one of the good friends of Meng, therefore, Jianya always took me to many *dàigòu* locations when I just started my research. In the following years, Jianya gradually from a participant in my research became one of my best friends in Belgium. At the same time, my research is also integrated into their lives. For example, many times, I don't need to ask her to take me to participant observation, but as long as there were some important brand activities, such as the Hermes Christmas Cocktail Party, the Louis Vuitton Mid-Autumn Festival At receptions, Delvaux's New Year's reception, etc., she would always call me and Meng to be her company and joined in the fun together. For example, When I want to know the uniqueness of the Belgian Choco-

3 | Belgium's Position in International Dàigòu Market

late's position in *dàigòu* world, Jianya commented:

“Because Belgium has Godiva and Neuhaus outlet shops, the price of Godiva and Neuhaus's chocolates purchased through Belgian dàigòu channels are nearly 30-50% cheaper than the domestic market. From the dàigòu's perspective, especially, for many newbies who are just entering the dàigòu business, it is very happy to run errands to buy the specialties Chocolates of Belgium for relatives and friends in China, even if they don't make money, since all these world-class chocolates in the outlet store can be unlimited tasted for free. Consequently, purchasing Belgian chocolate has become the first test field for many new newbies.”

——Jianya ZHOU, July 19, 2017, Maasmechelen Village

3.3.4 Belgium World Diamond Center and Antwerp Cut

Meiling LI, 32, female, a full-time *dàigòu*, lives in Gent, who had 8 years *dàigòu* experience (2008-2016) already when I knew her. I Knew Meiling by Ding's introduction. She draws clients by her WeChat Moments and Weibo account. In the interview, *dàigòu* Meiling repeatedly mentioned to me that Belgium has an unique position in diamond. Meiling said:

“When mention the Belgian dàigòu products, the world-renowned Antwerp World Diamond Center (AWDC) cannot be ignored. Among all these Belgian special dàigòu products, the most representative and unique product is none other than diamonds.”

Meiling commented on the status of Belgian diamonds in *dàigòu* world:

“For example, Figure 3.8 is a GIA-certified 10-carats diamond with E color and VVS2 grade. For ordinary consumer from the mainland diamond market, they seldom have chance to see a 10 carat diamonds in this quality, but in AWDC, they are everywhere.”



Fig. 3.8 A GIA-certified 10-carats diamond, E color, VVS2

Source: retrieved from Meiling's Wechat Moments, accessed June 18, 2018.

*“The AWDC welcomes all kinds of consumers. You should know not every diamond center in the world accepts individual customers, e.g., the London Diamond Bourse (LDB) never accepts individual buyers. It means in AWDC, anyone, including the specialists, tourists, average consumers, *Dàigòu* can visit and select a diamond leisurely here. But this situation does not mean that*

3 | Belgium's Position in International Dàigòu Market

the people I mentioned above will buy diamonds here. Otherwise, dàigòu have no value anymore."

"As I know, the biggest problem is for any consumers or tourists, it is difficult to find a reliable channel to buy an authentic diamond in a short time. This situation provides a good opportunity for Chinese dàigòu who are active in Belgium. The advantages of geography, time, and social network among them enable Belgian dàigòu can get the high-quality and first-hand diamonds, while they also can bring surprising price to customers. Subsequently, purchasing valuable diamonds has become an unique advantage for Belgian dàigòu."

——Meiling LI, June 08, 2018, Antwerp

3.3.5 Discounted Luxury Stores at Outlets

Discounted Luxury including the light luxury brands and the off-season discounted luxury brands. For such products, the main purchase channel is outlet villages. The outlet village is a very important multi-sited fieldwork area in the entire research process. The price advantage of outlet village products is an appropriate interpretation of the significance and value of the existence of *dàigòu*. Especially for average consumers, the existence of outlet villages gives them an opportunity, that is to spend the least money to enjoy world-class luxury brands.

Through interviews and data review, I compiled a summary of the 10 most popular outlet villages surrounding Belgium.

1. *Paris: Val d'Europe (France)*

La Vallée Village is home to more than 120 boutiques from some of the most exciting French and international brands. The most popular brands are Armani, Burberry, Balenciaga, Fendi, Balmain, Celine, Givenchy, Loewe, Jimmy Choo, Montblanc, Tommy Hilfiger, etc. Belgian *dàigòu*, usually go for purchasing when traveling or on business trips.

2. *Frankfurt: Wertheim Village (Germany)*

Wertheim Village does not have first-line discounted luxury goods but has assembled a lot of light luxury or trendy brands. For example, DKNY, Diesel, Fossil, G-star, Longchamp, Ted baker, etc.

Frankfurt Airport is one of the transit airports that many overseas tourists often choose. Therefore, the Wertheim Village has become one of the most frequented outlet villages by much migratory bird *dàigòu* and Belgian *dàigòu*.

3. *Stuttgart: Outletcity Metzingen (Germany)*

There are not many first-line luxury brands discounted stores in Outletcity Metzingene, but Prada in this outlet has no restrictions on purchases. For the *dàigòu* who are often troubled by the purchase restriction policy, this place is too friendly. Besides this, Bottega Veneta, Givenchy Kids, KARL LAGERFELD Kids, Miumiu, Moschino, Mido, Moncler, Swarovski, Tory Burch, and Valentino are the most popular brands for Chinese *dàigòu*. Belgian *dàigòu* usually go for purchasing here when they are traveling or on business trips.

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

4. *Munich: Outlet Ingolstadt (Germany)*

In Ingolstadt outlet, there are lots of incredible savings of up to 60% on the former recommended retail price. The brands that are more popular with Chinese consumers include Baldinini, Boss, Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Chloé, Gucci, KARL LAGERFELD, MCM, National Geographic, Prada, UGG, Versace, etc.

The Outlet Ingolstadt in Munich and the Wertheim Village in Frankfurt have similar functions. The main visitors are mostly seasonal tourists and migratory *dàigòu*. For Belgian *dàigòu*, unless they are traveling, or on business trips, they rarely spend 7 to 8 hours driving there for purchasing especially.

5. *Lugano: Foxtown (Switzerland)*

The Swiss Foxtown has many outlet stores for top luxury brands, such as Gucci, Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Armani, Prada, Salvatore Ferragamo, Jimmy Choo, Montblanc, Versace, Valentino, etc. Foxtown has complete product styles and great discounts. The price advantage makes the *dàigòu* who stock a large number of products here hardly worry that the products they grab will not be sold. For example, a Gucci scarf of 800 RMB or 900 RMB can be easily sold to domestic customers at a price of more than 1,000 RMB. For the *dàigòu* who are stocking in Belgium all the year-round, if there is an opportunity to travel or on business trips to Switzerland, they will basically arrange 1-2 days to go to Foxtown for stocking up on cheap specials.

For Belgian *dàigòu*, normally they drop in here during business trips or travel. When stocking up products, *dàigòu* normally take a low-cost airline. In the interview, many *dàigòu* said that if they were not on the trips, or could not buy a low-cost airline, they would hardly choose to go here for purchasing. Because from Belgium to Switzerland, there is only the VGT high-speed rail, the fare for one-way costs two or

three hundred euros. This expenditure has obviously greatly exceeded the possible profit.

Secondly, if *dàigòu* takes an express from Belgium to Switzerland, it basically takes more than 20 hours. Therefore, although the brands and discounts of the Foxtown are very advantageous to the *dàigòu* who live in Belgium, they are not frequent purchases here.

6. Florence: The Mall (Italy)

There are many top luxury discount stores in this outlet, such as Gucci, Prada, Versace, Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen, BV, etc. And the discounts are very large. Some trendy brands are not easy to search in another European outlet, such as McQueen, Balenciaga, can be found here.

It is the first update discounted Gucci in all European outlets; it is an important supply channel for discounted Gucci in domestic and Hong Kong buyer stores, JD Global Shopping, Tmall International Store.

Normally for Belgian *dàigòu*, they dedicated to this outlet when traveling or on business trips. If they need to purchase or stock the discount products, they take a low-cost airline. This outlet is also the main outlet where many *dàigòu* often purchase discount brands.

7. Milan: Fidenza Village (Italy)

As the fashion capital, Fidenza Village is known as the "big fashion factory". More than 130 brands from all over the world all have discount boutiques here. It is famous because of the local Italian brands, including Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Missoni, Prada, Versace, etc.

There is also some special international discount on brands like Chloé, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Karl Lagerfeld, Liu Jo, Versace, Valentino here. Affected by Milan Fashion Week, the update speed of fashion in this outlet is timelier than others.

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

For Belgium *dàigòu*, they dedicated to this outlet a low-cost airline when they have time or holiday. Because of the Light luxury brands in this outlet such as Furla, MK, Coach, Coccinelle in this outlet often have a 30% discount on the existing outlet discounts price. For example, a CK T-shirt only costs 100 RMB, and a pair of Levi's jeans cost 150 RMB. Therefore, this outlet is also the main outlet where many European *dàigòu* often fly here to purchase.

8. Madrid: Las Rozas Village (Spain)

In Las Rozas Village, there are more than 100 luxury brands. Special discounts in brands like Gucci, Loewe, Dior, Prada, Dunhill, Fendi, Ermenegildo Zegna. The extraordinary discounts of up to 60% on the original price throughout the year. In this outlet village, there is even one Bvlgari jewelry and watch discount boutique.

Belgian *dàigòu* dedicated to this outlet always take a low-cost airline to here for purchasing the discount products. Here is also the main outlet where many European *dàigòu* purchase luxury brands, especially Bvlgari jewelry.

9. Barcelona: La Roca Village (Spain)

There are more than 140 boutiques from the world's top luxury brands and 20% off above the price of the shopping village. Special discounts in brands like Chloé, Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Loewe, Max Mara, Armani, Tod's, Boss, Versace, Loewe. For most tourists or *dàigòu*, if there is no chance to go to the Las Rozas Village in Madrid, usually the *dàigòu* will go here as a substitute.

During the COVID-19 in 2020, this outlet offers the direct contact new policy, that is with the beloved brand store without leaving home, the consumer can get the online consultation, online ordering, and mailing to home service.

In addition to the La Roca Village, Barcelona also has a Burberry factory store with convenient transportation in downtown1. Therefore, in Barcelona, the consumers can get the cheapest Burberry in the world all year round.

When Belgian *dàigòu* need to purchase or stock the discount products, they normally book a low-cost airline to here.

10. London: Bicester Village (U.K)

The Bicester Village in London has 160 resident luxury and first-line luxury brands that often discount from 30 to 70%. There are a lot of incredible savings on the former recommended retail price, for example, it is quite often to buy a 10-pound Burberry shirt, a 30-pound Burberry pure wool scarf, a 50-pound Burberry leather shoe, or a 300-pound Burberry trench coat, etc.

In addition to the eye-catching huge discount Burberry, special discount in brands like Celine, Balenciaga, Balmain, Acne, Chloé, Alexander McQueen, Fendi, Dolce & Gabbana, Givenchy, Gucci, Loewe, Max-Mara, Moncler, MCM, Tod's, Versace, Valentino is also extremely common here.

The Bicester Village is one of the most favorite outlet villages for Burberry lovers. Almost every Chinese tourist would like to spend one-day purchasing goods incidentally. However, for Belgian Chinese *dàigòu*, they need to prepare a visa to the U.K. Therefore it is not a mainstream place for Belgian *dàigòu*. On the contrary, for Chinese tourists, and seasonal *dàigòu*, the London Bicester Village is more popular.

3.3.6 Summary

In Belgium, with the help of *dàigòu*, the Chinese consumers not only can acquire the hard currency of the fashion world, for example, the Rolex Oyster Perpetual Submariner, the Hermès Kelly bag, Louis Vuit-

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

ton limited catwalk bags, Gucci explosive belts, etc., but also Chinese consumers can acquire the forefront of global consumer goods through the Belgian *dàigòu*, such as milk powder, DHA fish oil, native brand vitamins, Filorga mask, and local brand cosmetics.

The special Belgian purchasing items are also including the limited sale luxury goods, the high-value jewelry, art auctions, and antique transactions. Belgium also has a great large number of buyer boutiques, trendy brand shops, design brands, and Antwerp World Diamond Center etc.

All these factors have given Belgium an irreplaceable position in global *dàigòu* market. Lots of Belgian *dàigòu* commented on Belgium:

*“Belgium is small, it even has no strong existence among several established countries. But in the *dàigòu* market, Belgium is quite unique and cannot be replaced.”*

3.4 Price Composition of *Dàigòu* Product

dàigòu ease the negotiations problems and strengthened the mutual understanding between the Chinese consumers and global brands. They earn a proportional commission through the professional purchasing service they have provided (Zappa, 2019). What *dàigòu* offers is a comprehensive service that starts with the order made by the client and finishes with the delivery of the commodity personally or by international express (Zappa, 2019).

The final price comprehends a commission that *dàigòu* is entitled to. The (Figure 3.9) below is a table of the composition of the price of a *dàigòu* product obtained through interviews with a Belgian *dàigòu*:

Generally speaking, as note 1 shows that tax rates of different countries are slightly different, but we can roughly understand it as 16% for

The Composition of dàigòu Price ^a

Category of price	Description
Commodity price	The original price of global consumer products at overseas (in the stores or on the websites).
TVA (Taxe sur la valeur ajoutée) ^b	Most countries impose a TVA on consumer goods. VAT is a consumption tax that is borne by the end consumer. The normal rate is 21% For example, the purchasing goods tax rate from European countries normally charges around 12-17%. ^{1 2}
Shipping fee	Shipping fee includes two parts: the international shipping fee and the domestic shipping fee. In Europe, the international shipping fee (from Belgium to China) costs first KG of 19 euros. When the dàigòu products arrive in China, they are delivered to by EMS or other express to clients. It cost 10-25yuan per package. ³
Tariff	The tariff fee is charged by China customs when international goods enter China.
Customs clearance charge ⁴ and insurance	For individual dàigòu shopper, the customs clearance charge and insurance are only used for very expensive purchasing goods, and this part of the cost is borne by the buyer themselves. But for dàigòu companies, most of them charge these two portions with the shipping fee together.
Exchange rate	The appreciation of the RMB promotes the growth of overseas consumption. The impact of exchange rates on large luxury goods is particularly obvious.
Commission (Service fee)	Dàigòu will charge a certain percentage commission of the dàigòu goods as their service fee.

Fig. 3.9 Price composition of dàigòu products

Sources:

a: Data from the author's interviews from 2016 to 2020.

b: (1) www.belgium.be/fr/economie/entreprise/fiscalite_et_comptabilite/tva (June 14, 2021);(2) www.impots.gouv.fr/portail/international-professionnel/tva (June 14, 2021);(3) www.economie.gouv.fr/entreprises/tout-savoir-sur-tva (June 12, 2021).

3 | Belgium's Position in International *Dàigòu* Market

the normal rate, 13% for the intermediate rate, and 5% for the reduced rate. For example, the basic necessities, such as food products, medicines, books, etc are charged by the reduced VAT rate. But for luxury goods, tobacco and alcohol are charged by the standard normal VAT rate.

According to note 2, we found that many European countries return VAT to non-EU tourists. For those who are eligible for tax refunds, this is not a small profit. Generally, the tax refund amount provided by qualified merchants to consumers generally ranges from 10-17%. Therefore, choosing a shop with a high tax rebate ratio can help *dàigòu* save a lot of profits. For example, it is often heard that some *dàigòu* say that when the total value of purchase reaches a certain percentage, the tax refund amount will be more than a single purchase.

But in fact, the ratio mentioned here is just a convention, not a legal requirement. For example, if a buyer buys Cartier in a Cartier store, normally he/she just only can get a tax rebate of about 16% provided by the global blue tax refund company. But another example is, for Bvlgari products purchased in a Bvlgari store can enjoy a full 21% tax rebate. Because the Bvlgari requires customers to return the tax refund form to the store in person or by mail, while the tax refund of Cartier is all represented by Global blue, which charges a certain percentage of service fees.

The Data of Shipping fee on note 3 supplied by Lee, who is in charge of Junan Express (君安快递).⁵ About the customs clearance charge on note 4 in the table, we found that before 2016, goods returned from overseas purchasing agents rarely file tax returns. Both the buyer and the seller rely on luck. If they are lucky enough, then the package passes through customs without being seized, both the buyer and the buyer can save a lot of money. For example, when the difference in the value of a single commodity is the largest, it can even be as high as 50%.

⁵Date: Sep 23, 2020, Brussels.

However, as China Customs has intensified its random inspections of overseas commodity tariffs, more and more individual *dàigòu* have started customs clearance business, that is, actively declare and pay customs duties for the purchasing products. In order to avoid after the customs inspection, the high tariffs are imposed or return shipping, which will cause greater losses to both *dàigòu* and consumers. For instance, sometimes, the return time is more than half a year, or the items are lost during the return process.

For the clients in China, even counting in the international transport fees, the *dàigòu*'s commission, and all the fees mentioned in the above figure, the luxury items coming from *dàigòu* approach are still considerably cheaper than those purchase domestically, not to mention the domestic unavailability of certain specific items and Chinese consumers' concerns about the product quality. An increasing number of Chinese buyers, therefore, have become reliant upon *dàigòu* and the surrogate purchasing global products service that they provide.

4

Chinese *Dàigòu* in Belgium

4.1 Number of Chinese *Dàigòu*

Ching Lin, the author of “Invisible Visibility: Inter-generational Transfer of Identity and Social Position of Chinese Women in Belgium”, stated that as of 1994 Belgium had 3,463 persons with Chinese citizenship, including 1,788 females and 1,675 males(Pang, 1998). But most Chinese in Belgium as of 1,998, originated in Hong Kong. Subsequently, before Hong Kong’s return to Chinese sovereignty, they were counted as British when they arrived, and by 1998 many of them had been naturalized as Belgian citizens. Therefore, they were not exactly counted as Chinese living in Belgium, from the perspective of mainland cultural identity(Pang, 1998).

The Chinese overseas in Belgium from mainland China were not a mainstream group in Belgian society until 2000. In 2017, there were 12.155 Chinese foreigners in Belgium.¹ This number is only counted for

¹<https://statbel.fgov.be/nl/themas/bevolking/structuur-van-de-bevolkingfigures>

those who are from the People's Republic of China and is not counted for those who are naturalized. Ethnic Chinese from other regions such as Hongkongers, Taiwanese and Chinese Singaporeans are not counted either.

And according to statistics from the IBSA (Institut bruxellois de statistique et d'analyse), as of January 2020, a total of 12030 legal residents with Chinese nationality registered in Belgium.² As of 2020, Vedia estimates the number of ethnic Chinese in Belgium at around 40.000.³ Interviews revealed that most of the Chinese who live in Belgium had several experiences helping relatives and friends in China to *dàigòu* Belgian products.

At the same time, considering the seasonal “migratory bird” type of Chinese *dàigòu* active in Belgium and the increasingly large global flying “super *dàigòu*”, as well as Chinese tourists who travel to Belgium and have purchasing behaviors, and various other purchasing Participants in Belgium, they can all be considered as potential Chinese overseas *dàigòu* activating in Belgium.

Summarizing official and unofficial data, comprehensive interviews, and multi-party statistical, it is conservatively estimated that there are around 30,000 to 40,000 Chinese who are engaged in *dàigòu* activity in Belgium. In comparison to the number of *dàigòu* from all over the world, the Chinese *dàigòu* agents in Belgium represent a scant of the population. The limited survey of the concerns of individual *dàigòu* in Belgium made it clear that the debate about *dàigòu* phenomenon in the press was not a sterile exercise separated from popular concerns. The individual *dàigòu* in Belgium deserve a special and unique existence.

²Nationalités| IBSA. (2020). [online] Retrieved 14 February 2021, from <https://ibsa.brussels/themes/population/nationalites>.

³<https://www.vedia.be/www/video/info/societe-tye-/nouvel-an-chinois-fete-malgre-tout-averviers100771s9.html>

4.2 Composition of Chinese *Dàigòu*

A substantial number of them are both active in Belgium and the neighboring countries. As a result of this, the concept of “Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium” should be understood in a broader sense. The *dàigòu* in this study may not need the Belgian residence status, or may not need to report their legal address to the city hall to apply for a Belgium ID card. Consequently, they are not included in the official statistics, which means there is an element of invisibility amongst the group of Chinese *dàigòu* who are acting in Belgium.

For long-term shoppers and those engaging in stable *dàigòu* activity in Belgium, it is necessary to consider their identity. According to the type of visa holds by the agent and the characteristics of the activity, they can be roughly divided into five categories:

4.2.1 *Dàigòu* with Short-term Visa (C Visa)

Short-term visa means the holder no more than 3 months within 6 months after entering the Schengen country for the first time. It includes tourist visits, visits to family or friends, cultural or sports manifestations, business trips, short traineeships, transits through the Schengen area, and long-stay visa applications for more than 90 days, or short-stay visa applications aiming at a longer stay in Belgium, e.g., the holder is in Belgium for reasons of marriage or family-reunion.⁴

Dàigòu with a short stay visa, can stay for no more than 3 months within 6 months after entering the Schengen country for the first time. This type of visa is mainly suitable for the migratory bird *dàigòu*, seasonal *dàigòu*, and global flying *dàigòu*, other temporary visitors but have *dàigòu* behaviors or activities, e.g., one Chinese come to Belgium to visit his/her relatives while buying some local and culture-specific products

⁴For details information please see: https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/travel_or_belgium/visa_for_belgium

that the region is known for their friends in China incidentally.

This type of *dàigòu* with short stay visa has the unique biggest advantage, that is they can enjoy a tax refund of about 12% when they leave the EU countries. This implies that his conduct of behaving is legal but at the same time at the limit of such legality (Zappa, 2019). Due to the fact that this type of *dàigòu* holds a non-citizen passport when purchasing abroad, they can enjoy the tax exemption policy.

Accordingly, the overseas products' price from this type of agent is hugely advantageous compared to those who stay in Belgium for a long time. Because they are not eligible for a tax refund. The price also lower than the clients that buy at retail stores.

In addition, a considerable number of such *dàigòu* operate under the channel of social relations (*rénqíng* 人情). This is also one of the important reasons why their prices are far lower than other agents. Through the fieldwork, we found that this type of *dàigòu* can usually be divided into two categories. The first one is one-time, without charge fees. Their purchasing behavior mainly occurs between blood relatives, or very close friends and colleagues. Although there are no actual benefits, this type of free assistance can usually help agents accumulate a certain amount of social capital. For example, when they encounter difficulties or need some help, it will be very easy for them to get help from friends who once asked for free assistance purchasing services. In Chinese culture, we called it return the favor (*huán rén qíng* 还人情).

Huán rén qíng (还人情) refer to return the favor or maintain the social connection. To guarantee in the future, they can get the same supports. According to justice theory, one individual's acceptance of a benefit from *dàigòu* obligates to give in return the favor when they can help them (Lu, 2012).

Lin LIN, 35 years old, female, live in Brussels, Jack LI's wife, who has 7 years of *dàigòu* experience (2009-2016). Since 2013, Lin became a full- time *dàigòu*. I knew her through Jack's introduction. Lin is a

specialist in the *dàigòu* business, who provides customized *dàigòu* services. She often goes to other countries, for example, Paris, Amsterdam, Nuremberg, Cologne, Lille, Lisbon, Madrid, Barcelona, Rome, Milan, etc. to get the very rare or limited commodity. She said:

“We can get the free verbal recommendations from the receivers in return normally. The customers are recommended by the receivers under most circumstances with buying potential. At this time, after removing the strong blood or close friends connections, we can charge a certain amount for running errands.”

——Lin LIN, Nov 23, 2019, Leuven University

The other type of *dàigòu* with a short-stay visa is purchasing for making money, such as the migratory bird *dàigòu* or seasonal *dàigòu* as we pointed out above. They charge a certain amount of running errands by helping customers purchase overseas products. This part of the charge normally can cover their transportation and accommodation costs overseas. Whereupon more and more migratory bird *dàigòu* and seasonal *dàigòu* treat the *dàigòu* activity as a seasonal part-time job. The greatest pleasure of them is they can earn corresponding travel expenses when they travel overseas to buy global consumer products. However, there are also some *dàigòu*, such as Lin LIN though that this idea is too naive and does not apply to a novice *dàigòu*, especially for the tourist who first travel abroad. She explained in detailed:

“This is simply a waste of relatives’ precious travel time and expensive overseas accommodation. Everyone knows that for a Chinese consumer who is traveling abroad for the first time, it is not easy to run errands to search for a scarce luxury item. Firstly, they do

not have any experience in dàigòu business, maybe they even have no idea about they should make an appointment, book in advance, or write the client's name on the long waiting list before shopping, etc. This may cause them to spend a long time in vain, run a trip, but may not buy anything. Secondly, because of the language barrier and unfamiliar with traffic information, it is not easy to reach the correct place to purchase. Thirdly, some luxury stores have to queue up. This may seriously delay the time spent by relatives traveling overseas."

——Lin LIN, Nov 23, 2019, Leuven University

Jianya commented on this topic almost in the same opinion:

"For tourists, it is easier to achieve the goal of making money through purchasing common foreign products. Because they are relatively easy to buy, such as Apple products, international brand cosmetics, regional cultural products, local snacks, and outlet products, etc. But, if the purchase items are scarce luxury goods or some consumer goods that need to be pre-ordered in advance, it will be a disaster. Because, maybe they spend a lot of time and go to many different stores in different cities, but they cannot buy the products their friends want. This is why fewer and fewer people now still want to help their relatives to purchase overseas products when they travel abroad."

——Jianya, Sep 10, 2021, Wechat discussion

In such a difficult background, professional *dàigòu* with lots of experience, like Meiling often ridicule to say:

“Give your blood-relatives freedom and leave the professional purchasing matters to a professional purchasing agent. We can help you to buy genuine overseas goods in the shortest time with the least money.”

——*Meiling, April 04, 2020, Wechat discussion*

4.2.2 *Dàigòu* with Long-term visa (D Visa)

Applicants for the D visa are usually international students, scholars, researchers, worker, family reunion, and stay with the above-mentioned persons for a stay in Belgium more than 90 days. After successfully applying for a D visa, the holder can usually get a 180-day to 360-day visa validity period. But they must submit an extended stay application to the city hall or Immigration Office of Belgium within the specified 30 days time limit when they arrive in Belgium. Then after the application is successful, they can exchange for a long-term resident card (Card D, namely ID card)⁵ for more than 180 days. It is called one year ID card, which needs to be renewed every year.

Dàigòu with this type of visa have a stable living, learning, or working environment in Belgium, so they have become the major part of Chinese overseas *dàigòu*. However, as a D visa holder or we said long-term resident cardholder, such agents cannot enjoy the preferential tax refund policy. At the same time, they are also the types most affected by the new E-commercial online policies, such as the Postal import Tax

⁵Besides the long-term resident card (Card D), there are other types of identity documents proving the long-term stay in Belgium, such as (1) the certificate of registration in the foreigner's register, namely, unlimited stay (Card B); (2) the foreigner's identity card, namely unlimited stay of the establishment (Card C); (3) the residence card of a citizen's family member Union (Map F); (4) and the permanent residence card of a member of the family of a citizen of the Union (F + Card).

(*xíngyóu shuì* 行邮税)⁶ and the e-commerce Law (*diànzǐ shāngwù fǎ* 电子商务法) promulgated in 2019 by Mainland China.

However, due to the advantages of time and location, this type of *dàigòu* is easier to order some high price limited edition customized products that are difficult to buy. They also have some fixed sales channels, discount channels, and regular customers than the migratory bird *dàigòu*, or seasonal *dàigòu*.

When we talk about the advantages of *dàigòu* who live in Belgium for a long time with Jack LI, his view is:

*For professional agents who have lived overseas for a long time, they have their advantage in acquiring these products in short supply. First, they have more flexible time to order the commodities in short supply as a local person with their ID. Secondly, with the help of good friends who come to Europe to visit them, they can also be eligible to place an order. There is also a very common and popular ordering rule: the exchange of resources between dàigòu agents.*⁷

“For example, one Chinese dàigòu in Paris has ordered a mini bag, the Chinese dàigòu in Belgium can get this mini bag with a certain amount of remuneration. If the cooperation between two of them is very frequent, or the personal relations between them is very close, they may exchange this precious hot bag without any profit. The party receiving the favor is obliged to transfer the high-quality goods in his hand to the person who gives the favor in advance.”

⁶For more detailed explanation of postal import tax, please refer to the first section of Chapter 5.

⁷In the previous chapter, we discussed how *dàigòu* operates under Chinese *guānxi* capital.

—————*Jack LI, September 29, 2016, Brussels*

4.2.3 *Dàigòu* with Permanent Residence Card (F Card/Orange Card)

The F card is a permanent residence card, which only needs renew every 5-years. In particular, after the second time 5-years renewal requirements, the cardholder can apply to the Belgian nationality. Some *dàigòu* said:

“In this way, you never need to worry about whether the identity is legal or not.”

But, in many interviews, it was discovered that a considerable number of *dàigòu* who hold the F cards complained that if they want to retain their long-term 5 years residency status, they could not leave Belgium for more than 6 months per year. Otherwise, the F card may be canceled.

Although some *dàigòu* said there were some friends who still keep the F card even they left Belgium more than one year. But this regulation still has caused a certain measure of psychological impact on them. Especially for those who have a good career or income in China, no one wants to be restricted every year by not being able to stay in China for a long time.

Through investigation, we also found that few people can get an F card by working as a *dàigòu*. This type of visa is usually obtained through a permanent work contract or marriage. Therefore, we can understand that the cardholder of an F visa person already has a very stable job or life in Belgium. Therefore they are more relaxed when they are engaged in the business of purchasing. They are also one of the earliest agents who help domestic relatives and friends to purchase overseas products.

Compared with the C visa and D visa holders mentioned above, F cardholders, usually know more native friends, are familiar with the local policies and have time to deal with the regional departments. There are even some F cardholders who use the registration of a *dàigòu* company as their career plan in Belgium to develop.

Among F card holders, a considerable number of housewives hope to prove their social status and value through purchasing activity. Many of these agents say that *dàigòu* allows them to keep in touch with society and maintain their independent economic status in transnational marriage.

The Orange Card is easy to understand. It is a transitional visa before the F card is valid. It has the same functions as the F card but cannot leave Belgium during the holding period. This means that for an *dàigòu* holding an orange card, he/she cannot go to the Dutch or German outlet villages at will. Although some *dàigòu* also said in the interviews that they had gone to other countries for shopping or travel while holding the orange card, they were all fortunate that they did not encounter inspections during the period.

Generally speaking, for a *dàigòu* who holds an F card, their *dàigòu* business is more stable. Even as a part-time job, they give consumers the safe feeling that is:

“Even if encounter after-sales problems, a dàigòu with F card will not disappear (pǎo bù liǎo 跑不了).”⁸

4.2.4 Chinese Belgians (比利时华侨, 华人)

Chinese Belgians also named *Bìlìshí huáqiáo/rén* (比利时华侨, 华人). They are compatriots who obtained Belgian citizenship. The dif-

⁸This word is used to describe something that has been grasped or anticipated and cannot be avoided or will not change.”

ference between obtaining Belgian nationality and a five-year F card residence is mainly reflected in the fact that those who have obtained Belgian nationality do not need to worry about the residence restriction that they can not leave Belgium for more than six months. But, at the same time, changing the nationality means that when they want to return to China, they will be treated as foreigners and need to apply for a travel permit from the Chinese Embassy. For such Chinese who are engaged in the purchasing industry, this circumstance is not conducive to their further development of customers in China, especially for that *dàigòu* merchants who do relatively large *dàigòu* business.

To give the simplest example, for a Belgian Chinese, if he/she wants to open a bank card or phone card in China, the procedures are extremely troublesome. It is not easy to register WeChat without a phone number. Even someone can register a Wechat, but they cannot accept the money transfers from their clients on WeChat Wallet. For new Chinese migrants who have moved to Belgium in recent years, changing their nationality is not as popular as it used to be. Many agents who have the chance to change their Belgian nationality but they didn't yet do it. Some of them said:

“Chinese nationality is harder to acquire than Belgian nationality, why should I change it? Especially, changing nationality does not bring much benefit to my dàigòu career.”

4.2.5 *Dàigòu* who Do not Need Belgium Identity

Through investigation, it was found that a considerable part of the *dàigòu* acting in Belgium did not have a Belgian identity. They can roughly be divided into two categories. (1) The Chinese tourists who hold visa from other EU countries. (2) The second category is mainly for long-stay visa holders of other EU countries, i.e., the EU residence

permit holders or the holders of circulation Schengen visa.

The first type of *dàigòu* is mainly seasonal *dàigòu* (*jìjiéxíng dàigòu* 季节型代购) and migratory bird *dàigòu* (*hòuniǎoxíng dàigòu* 候鸟型代购). They mainly live in China, irregularly flying abroad to purchase overseas products. Before going abroad, they will try to add as many WeChat friends who have the potential purchasing power, then bring the purchased goods back by themselves. This is the basic model of the first generation of migratory bird *dàigòu*.

They are also called hands-chopping people (*duò shǒu dǎng* 剁手党), and crazily like shopping when travel abroad. They shop around all over the world during the vacation. They have been good at comparing the price no matter online or offline. It means they are worth being trusted to buying on behalf of others, at least on price. We also called them purchasing maniacs or the shopaholic. For this type of agent, the most important thing for participating in a tour of Europe is consumption rather than viewing natural or cultural landscapes. The two discount seasons, January and July in each year in Europe, are the most significant purchasing periods for them.

Different kinds of agents appear overseas and concentrate consumption. For some professional seasonal *Dàigòu*, China's annual National Day Golden Week and various small holidays are also good times for them to Europe for purchasing goods. At this time, it coincides with the off-season for overseas travel. Therefore, the prices of international air tickets and hotel accommodation are very affordable.

A seasonal *dàigòu* once said to me that the cheapest air ticket she bought was from Beijing to Paris at the end of January, after the bombing of Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris on January 7, 2015. Included taxes, infrastructure fuel, and one 23KG large suitcase just cost 1,500 RMB. The only imperfect place is that this flight needs to stop in Istanbul for 35 hours before connecting to Paris.

This kind of commendable bargain ticket can reduce the cost to

the greatest extent. Some seasonal and migratory bird *dàigòu* who go abroad for purchasing more than four or five times per year have also established a deeply and good relationship with local sales. They have the priority to order some good catches in advance, which improves the competitiveness of their purchasing products.

For the second type, the long-stay visa holders of other EU countries. They can freely enter and exit any Schengen country, including Belgium. Such agents are generally professional *dàigòu* or super *dàigòu* with the ability to serve the richest clients. They are mainly to buy the catwalk models, limited editions, distribution models, or products that need to be searched globally. Because these kinds of products have a certain scarcity and investment value and are very hard to acquire. So they need professional purchasing assistance from the professional agent with a good commission or remuneration.

For example, they can fly to Marrakech, Moscow, New York, Singapore, Dubai to grab some certain limited products. For them, generally, they must have a certain aesthetic, numerous professional experiences, and a unique taste and understanding of fashion. Consequently, their remuneration is generally higher than other types of *dàigòu*. Meantime, the professional *dàigòu* are highly mobile and occasionally they cooperate internationally in order to guarantee 100% of finding a limited edition item.

This type of *dàigòu* may be seen as very much a global nomadic shopper (*quánqiú mǎi shǒu* 全球买手), who has a loosely structured, highly flexible group organization and a very high rate of mobility because they, so to speak, follow the products all over the world, taking what is possible. In this way, they move about in search of limited items. Once in a while, they need to be involved in teamwork while the other times they should independent of each other.

The *dàigòu* who hold the long-stay visa of other EU countries sometimes pose a certain threat to the Belgian *dàigòu*. Because, for most

of the scarce commodities, in front of the limited high profits products, once bought by other agents, it means that it is difficult to buy again. However, from the interview, we found that this type of *dàigòu* actively crossed the border into Belgium and sometimes may cooperate with the local *dàigòu*.

For example, when a customer wants to buy a product that is not available in Belgium, the Belgian *dàigòu* may ask the help from the other European *dàigòu*. At the same time, they will also be sold to Belgian *dàigòu* at a very reasonable price when they stock too many products. In this process, however, they only exchange the products, not customer resources.

Although these two types of *dàigòu* are not the mainstream of the Belgian *dàigòu*, they are also classified as active agents in Belgium because the quantity and quality of the products they acquire here are not inferior to that one long living in Belgium. In other words, seasonal *dàigòu*, migratory bird *dàigòu*, and global nomadic shoppers, etc. consistent with the multi-product shopping motive, whereas *dàigòu* with a permanent residence card or with a long-term resident card appear to fit better with limited quantity, premium price, not easy to buy directly, or purchase products that you have to go to the site repeatedly (such as milk powder that needs to be ordered repeatedly, Hermès that has a demand for distribution, and Louis Vuitton that is difficult to order).

4.3 How to Become A Qualified *Dàigòu*

4.3.1 Stereotypes on *Dàigòu*

At the beginning of this research, my understanding of the profession of the *dàigòu* was like most people's views, that is:

“Dàigòu is a low threshold job and easy to make money. It is an area easy to enter, with not bad overall profits.”

Zappa described the working logic of *Dàigòu* in his article:

“As a matter of fact, more and more overseas Chinese, not only students, are engaging in such profession, due to high renewability and low costs, since not even an inventory is required, some purchases are directly made-to-order products (Zappa, 2019).”

Dingding Huang⁹ was a housewife who accompanied her husband to take a doctoral degree, and she would give birth in a few months. She has been working as a part-time *dàigòu* since she arrived in Belgium. When I arrived in Belgium in April 2016, Dingding assured me as I thought:

“You would finish your fieldwork very fast in one month, or two months maximum because we can find dàigòu very easily here. No matter in shopping malls or in outlets, whenever you see a Chinese dragging a large suitcase or shopping cart, you can aim at them as your participants and try to talk with them directly. Because these features are clearly considered as the standard configuration of a dàigòu. It means that your participants are everywhere.”

——Dingding Huang, June 6, 2016, at Dingding’s house in Louvain-la-Neuve

However, after a long time of participant observation, I found that although many *dàigòu* faced with situations seem easy to make money, the truth, however, is very different.

⁹I knew Huang Dingding because I added her as a Wechat friend from the WeChat group, then I promised her to bring the pregnant belt and baby fever-reducing stickers for her.

4.3.2 As Smart as Businessman, as Capable as Handyman

Through the rough fieldwork I found that the job of *dàigòu* consists more often than not of the consulting, ordering, paying, buying, shipping, advertising (viz., word-of-mouth marketing), and servicing of merchandise with the assist of the smartphone. Therefore, being a qualified *dàigòu* requires from the beginning not only good physical strength but also a smart brain. It requires ordering the product in a correct way and the need to settle the accounts precisely. It needs *dàigòu* to know how to package and express the products safely back to China. Occasionally, it also needs *dàigòu* to consider the exchange rate fluctuations, and to understand the skills of dealing with customs. Apart from that, *dàigòu* is also necessary to have the skill to develop customers without advertisement. Dingding added a comment to Chinese *dàigòu*:

*“Any Chinese *dàigòu* works always like a mugger.”*

—Dingding Huang, June 6, 2016, at Dingding’s house in Louvain-la-Neuve

According to Ding Ding’s comment, I tried my best to act like a crazy shopping “mugger” during the fieldwork. That is getting up early to catch the earliest public transportation, and returning back home late unsurprising.

For the *dàigòu*, it is normal to spend a lot of time and visit many stores but not acquire anything the clients ordered. At the same time, missing the train for uncontrollable reasons (such as workers’ strikes, or train delays, cancellations), having no time to eat during purchasing the whole day, and being stolen during the purchasing were also quite normal. In addition, you need to be patient with repeated orders for one product many times in different stores. Because a large number of Chinese *dàigòu* market demand is not included in the local market

goods supply.

There was a time, in which I was overwhelmed by frequent changes in the investigation environment, and I even doubted whether I was qualified for this hard job. Such a complex and huge migration has given me a rare opportunity to gain insight into the real-life conditions faced by the *dàigòu*.

The above features are not enough to reflect the hardship of being a qualified *dàigòu* accurately.¹⁰ Regarding the topic of “how to become a qualified *dàigòu*”, the following answers are high praise answers from Zhihu (知乎):¹¹

“First, as a professional dàigòu, they need to know the overseas products very well and should have a very good memory of any product. Take cosmetics as an example. At least a qualified dàigòu must know the basic products of major international brands. They need to be proficient in the differences and features of various products in different Brands. The most popular brands for Chinese consumers, such as HR, La Mer, Estée Lauder, Lancôme, Armani, GUERLAIN, Dior, Chanel, Also, must be known very

¹⁰This part of the content mainly comes from Zhihu. At the same time, in the process of summarizing it into text, under the guidance of the principle of data saturation, it also combines the author’s personal experience and interviews with some unknown *dàigòu* in fieldwork of the past few years.

¹¹Zhihu, 知乎 (zhihu.com) is a Chinese social question-and-answer website founded on January 26, 2011. Its product form is similar to that of the American online question-and-answer website Quora. Therefore, many netizens compare Zhihu to Quora in China (Please see more information here: Tech.qq.com. 2011. Q&A website Zhihu: Chinese version of Quora. [online] Available at: <<https://tech.qq.com/a/20110130/000107.htm>> [Accessed 30 August 2021].). In classical Chinese, “Zhihu” means: “Do you know?”. As of September 20, 2017, Zhihu had over 100 million registered users, 26 million daily active users, and 18 billion monthly page views (please see: Tech.qq.com. 2017. Know Almost announced that the number of registered users exceeds 100 million. [online] Available at: <<https://tech.qq.com/a/20170920/020694.htm>> [Accessed 30 August 2021].). As of May 2016, Zhihu has generated 10 million questions, 34 million answers, and 35 million approvals. At the same time, because Zhihu’s algorithm is more inclined to the answers given by experts, in addition, other experts will often correct and comment on each other. Therefore, to a certain extent, the credibility of the Zhihu platform’s answers have been increased (please see: The Economist. 2016. Posers for the party. [online] Available at: <<https://www.economist.com/china/2016/09/01/posers-for-the-party>> [Accessed 30 August 2021].).

well in dàigòu's brain. For example, for the dàigòu active in South Korea,¹² they must know Korean local brands in specific. In addition, for the most famous cosmetics brands in South Korea, they have to know the prices, the discounts, and the differences between the various sets of different packages of the same brand."

"For another example of the dàigòu active in Japan,¹³ there are hundreds of local cosmetics brands, dozens of conventional medicines, and thousands of open-shelf cosmetics. Even put the price on another side, if you want to be a qualified rì dài, emerging to shop at least 10-20 times, then you may have the possibility to distinguish the varieties."

"For anyone who wants to enter the dàigòu market, you must at least remember the location of different products in the different supermarkets, and also should remember the price, and discount information, etc. As a qualified dàigòu, you couldn't tell your clients to wait for you to check the price or features of products u purchasing. It makes you look very unprofessional. And you may lose your customers due to this unskilled and unprofessional state. In that case, it would be too bad. Because you will never just lose one customer, the customer you actually lost is the potential consumer group (network) that she/he may bring to you."

"Second, you need to absolutely work hard and have very good physical strength. Don't think that you can be a good dàigòu if you know the product and memorize the price is enough. That would be too naïve! In order to grab the limited products before

¹²They are always be called Korean *dàigòu*, or *hán dài* (韩代).

¹³They are always be called Japanese *dàigòu*, or *rì dài* (日代).

being sold out, the Koreandàigòu often skips meals and needs to stay up the whole night to line up. For the Japanese dàigòu, no matter how beautiful and elegant they are in daily life, who will be a 100% manly woman (nǚ hàn zi 女汉子) when they enter the dàigòu activity. For example, walking 20,000 steps per day and climbing stairs with a 23kg suitcase filled with products is a compulsory course for dàigòu.”

“Third, the psychological quality must be excellent and the sense of service must be strong. When you go through customs, you must be calm down,¹⁴ and when you encounter strange customers, you must be patient. For example, you should always greet the clients who have asked for dozens of prices but never place an order with a smile. Therefore, it is very important to adjust the mentality if you want to be a dàigòu.”

Summarizing the interviews and some points from the article published on Business of fashion, to become a popular *dàigòu*, you also need to possess the following qualities. For example:¹⁵

“Dàigòu should have a very good sense and taste of fashion, should know what the most fashionable trend is. They also should adapt to changes in products and lead the trend, especially for the pro-

¹⁴This point is mainly aimed at *rénròu* agents who bring overseas goods back to China. Before 2015, when *rénròu* agents were not popular, there was basically no risk in this way to bring goods back. However, with the huge increase in the output value of the overseas *dàigòu* market, the Chinese government has increased the value restrictions on the entry of individual tourists. For personal use items exceeding RMB 5,000, the postal import tax must be paid. What we said here refers to the mental state of *rénròu* when facing the “spot check” of the China customs. After more than 5 years of development, most *rénròu* agents will now choose to declare actively when entering customs to avoid unnecessary trouble. However, there are still a small number of *rénròu* agents who still choose to take the risk.

¹⁵This part of the data mainly comes from interviews with key participants such as Jianya Zhou, Meng, Xiaou, etc., and also combines some of the information I heard or read during the fieldwork.

fessional ones.”¹⁶

In the interviews, many foreigners expressed that they did not understand the Chinese. It is quite hard to understand that tiring long distances to buy overseas products back to China. However, Chinese consumers themselves are not tired of it, they feel that they have picked up the bargain, improved their quality of life, and brought a sense of pleasure when they acquire the global products.

In particular, Chinese consumers just clicked on their mobile phone screens and placed orders. The *dàigòu* helps them solve all the problems of ordering, purchasing, packing, customs clearance, and transportation before and after placing the order. Jianya Zhou further added some details on this issue, which makes it look more vivid and three-dimensional:

“You never think of how important arithmetic is in the dàigòu’s work. No person will have unlimited money to store the goods, so there is always a string in the dàigòu’s mind, that is, the price, the cost. All of those things forced every dàigòu to be as shrewd as a businessman and capable as a handyman.”

——Jianya ZHOU, July 19, 2017, Maasmechelen Village

Here is an example of when I first started to work on *dàigòu*. This example fully demonstrates *dàigòu*’s ability in time management and product selection.

On May 20, 2016, Meng and I got the first commission to purchase antique jewelries and clock (Figure 4.1) for our “customers” (friend)¹⁷

¹⁶The Business of Fashion. 2014. ‘Daigou’ Agents Help Chinese Get Luxury Goods for Less. [online] Available at: <<https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-markets/daigou-agents-help-chinese-consumers-get-luxury-goods-less>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].

¹⁷In me and Meng’s very beginning antique *dàigòu* business, there were no real customers.

to celebrate her “520 Valentine’s Day”¹⁸ with her boyfriend. We drove to the Tongeren flea market, which is identified as the biggest flea market in the Netherlands-Belgium-Luxembourg union.

Tongeren flea market is much bigger than average great, but there are only a few hours of trading. Shopping antique there is like a war. We must win it accurately and quickly, or the shopkeepers will close the stall. This experience of purchasing antiques made us realize the meaning of collection from the Chinese writer Feng Tang, that is, “Immortality has temptation, stand up for meritorious service is challenging, subsequently, people love to collect in subconsciously driven force.” Meanwhile, we practical experienced the difficulty and challenge of *dàigòu* for the first time, that is, as an agent, you must be a master of time management.

After this experience, Meng and I often went to different flea markets to broaden our horizons and sometimes joined the *dàigòu* activities with Jianya on weekends. In this process, I established a deep friendship with Meng and Jianya. They naturally became my key participants. Over the following years, Meng and Jianya always introduced their Chinese *dàigòu* friends in Belgium, who all have regular or irregular *dàigòu* behaviors or experiences. They are like my Belgian family, who gradually became my living community in Belgium. I talked to them and I

But our relatives and friends, who are in the trust and support under of *rénqíng* relations, pay us the commissions (the cost of antiques what we might buy and the transportation fee what we may spend) to support our career.

Note: I am very grateful to friends, teachers, classmates, and my parents and relatives who had provided support for this research. Thank you for your trust, otherwise, it is difficult to imagine how I would complete this research that requires a lot of economic costs.

¹⁸The 20th of May is a very special and important day for Chinese contemporary youngest because they celebrate their love on that day. For the Chinese, 520 is Chinese “Valentine’s Day” as 520 refers to a set of Chinese love numbers, with a hidden meaning of the love sentence “I love you”. Due to the pronunciation of 520 in Chinese sounds quite similar to “*wǒ ài nǐ* 我爱你” in Chinese. While “*wǒ ài nǐ*” is equal to “I love you” in English. In many Chinese opinions, the 20th of May is considered a perfectly romantic day for anyone to declare love to lovers. For those young Chinese who are in love, gifts must be given to each other on this day. If not, it will be regarded as disappointing behavior that they don’t pay attention to each other’s love”. For a more detailed introduction of 520, please see <https://www.chinaclife.com/tell-520-meaning-in-chinese-homophenic-culture-2019/>. [online] Available at: <<https://www.chinaclife.com/tell-520-meaning-in-chinese-homophenic-culture-2019/>> [Accessed 4 March 2021].

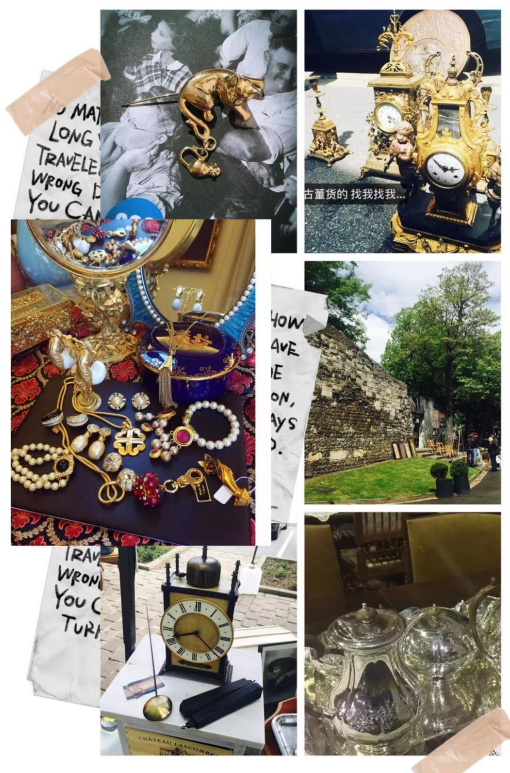


Fig. 4.1 Antiques at Tongeren flea market
 Photograph by the author, May 20, 2016.

participated in their *dàigòu* daily routine when I wanted to kill time or when I could not write. So when I was “forced” by Professor Olivier to become a genuine *dàigòu*, that I had already had almost all the basic knowledge a newbie should master. However, because in the writing process of this thesis, I mainly used the principle of data saturation to filter survey data, so I did not write a lot about the social relationship between them. Even to a certain extent, in order to reflect the diversity of participants and the saturation of data sources, I consciously selected *dàigòu* from different countries with zero or few intersections with them.

Because, I hope that in this way, which can reflect as much as possible the characteristic of dàigòu who are “scattered in different countries around the world”.

When Xueyang chatted with me, she added her views on becoming a qualified dàigòu and a qualified global buyer:

“When I travel abroad, no matter in the Middle East, Europe, Japan, or the US, you can see a large number of Chinese tourists buying goods crazily. At The Champs Elysees and all European luxury boutiques are filled with Chinese consumers. In this day and age, more and more young people, especially those who have a chance to outside have access to primary sources, want to enter this line to earn money. But the exclusive store of Cartier on the Champs-Élysées has nearly 2% more tax refund than Printemps or Galeries Lafayette. But Louis Vuitton is an exception, it’s the same everywhere. Even friends who have lived in Europe for many years maybe not know this information.”

“However, for a global nomadic dàigòu, namely, quánqiú mǎi shǒu (全球买手), who often travels between different countries and makes purchases while flying. They must be familiar with those shopping tips. Therefore, for most laymen who want to get a share of dàigòu industry, it is not difficult to be a newbie.¹⁹ As long as you are willing to endure the hardships and accumulate in a few years experience, there will always be customer resources, and you will be able to figure out basic discount information and the general rules of the dàigòu. However, if you want to become a quánqiú mǎi shǒu, it is not easy. First of all, you must have good language skills, and you also must be able to control complex and remote situations.

¹⁹For a detailed explanation of newbie (新手), please refer to 1.4.2 in Chapter 1.

Moreover, since this kind of global shopper usually touches more sophisticated precious consumer goods with high value, in fact, the cost of participating in this area is also very high. Therefore, it is never a career that you can do if you want.”

——Xueyang, Dec 21, 2020, WeChat discussion

For any more profitable business, it will be necessary for them to understand the consumers’ purchasing thinking and demands in the market (J. K. Kim, 2005). Therefore, as smart as a businessman and as capable as handyman already become a motto for *dàigòu*.

4.4 Development Stages of *Dàigòu* in Belgium

4.4.1 Budding Stage

This is a well-known thing that the origin of such a professional purchasing career is started to catch on around the 1980s in China after Deng Xiaoping promoted the open door policy (Zappa, 2019). However, through our interviews and fieldwork surveys, it is found that some other social reasons are also important to remind.

Menda Wu is a 34-years old Chinese wife, who married a Belgian man. She has settled down in Belgium for many years. Menda has been on the road of *dàigòu* for 8 years (2008-2016). I met her through the international student WeChat group before coming to Belgium. She became one of my key participants. As one of the earliest generations who engaged in the business of *dàigòu* in Belgium, Menda knows the early history of Belgian *dàigòu* well, she described the huge scale of *dàigòu*’s development at the early stage in Belgium:

“In the 1980s and 1990s, dàigòu wasn’t yet professionalized. Meanwhile, in the Chinese domestic market, face-to-face transactions

were the only way feasible. I remembered that in the 1990s when I went abroad, my relatives asked me face-to-face, again and again, to help them buy some foreign goods before they gave me the money. At that time, I never send the goods back to my relatives by post, because the shipping fee was very expensive. They had to wait until I returned to China to bring the overseas products back. Global products and transportation at that moment were not as convenient as now neither.”

*“Moreover, there is no concept of “outdated” for the design of the products in the 1980s and 1990s, even after waiting for a year, the foreign products in hand were still fashionable in China. Accordingly, most people from the Chinese diasporas would occasionally perform as surrogate buyers upon request from their friends or relatives in China, who sought favorable prices, reliable quality, or some foreign products that are very difficult to obtain in the mainland of China. Understandably, the Chinese consumers couldn’t imagine that one-day purchasing global products through professional *dàigòu* online would become a popular way to get overseas goods.”*

——Menda Wu Sep 29, 2017, at EXKi in Louvain-la-Neuve

During that era, the lack of goods plagued China. Even people that wanted to spend money and improve their lives, had no possibilities to do so, not even to mention to buy the overseas products. In 2018, an article celebrating the 40th anniversary of the reform and opening up of the People’s Republic of China in the *Overseas Edition of the People’s Daily* wrote:

“In 1978, China only produced 28,000 household refrigerators and more than 4,000 color TV sets.”²⁰

Before China reformed and opened up its gates, Chinese consumers who had a strong desire to buy overseas products tended to think that owning and consuming foreign products symbolized a way to touch the outside world. Under this scarce domestic consumer goods market, Chinese consumers tried by every means to get overseas products. If anyone had a relative or friend, who can purchase foreign goods, that is enviable beyond words. Therefore, at that time, any Chinese who lived overseas or had the opportunity to go abroad had a sacred mission, which was to act as an intermediary for their relatives to purchase overseas products. Menda commented on this historical scene:

“At that time, China had not joined the WTO, and the global commodities were not as rich as they are now. Chinese imagine that everything is good from overseas. As the only “overseas relationship” of my whole stem family, every year when I returned home (China), my suitcase was stuffed with overseas specialties. Such as chocolates, waffles, Kipling backpack, Parker pens, Gucci scarves, Italian leather products, Louis Vuitton handbags, Expensive watches, Coach wallets, etc.”

“At that time, it was quite normal that I occasionally helped my relatives and friends at home (in China) to run errands to purchase European products for free. The items included milk powder, nutritional products, cosmetics, outlet village discount branded products, etc. I am happy that I can help my relatives and friends, especially when I see their babies grow up by drinking the milk powder I bought

²⁰Bai, T., 2018. 那些年, 我们追过的进口货…….[online]Chinatoday.com.cn.Available at :< http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/zw2018/rdzt/2018ggkf/1/201806/t20180605_00131576.html > [Accessed9 June2021].

for them. Such news gives me a great sense of accomplishment.”

“In the years when I went abroad, bringing overseas products to my relatives and friends almost became an important way for me to express my filial piety and friendship. Due to the very low frequency of purchases, most of the early purchases were not paid a commission.”

——Menda Wu Sep 29, 2017, at EXKi in Louvain-la-Neuve

That entrusted person also had a sense of pride, that is, their purchasing behavior was like a window to the overseas world to help their relatives realize the mission of “to see the outside world” (*kàn kan wàim-iànde shìjiè* 看看外面的世界). Many Chinese who went abroad in the early days acted as an important bridge connecting family members and overseas products at the beginning of the generation of *dàigòu*. At this stage, there was rarely any full-time *dàigòu* and the name of *dàigòu* did not exist either. But after the 2000s, it became one of the most significant forms of a part-time job by degrees for the overseas Chinese diaspora. However, this form of part-time job is personal and discrete.

4.4.2 Forced Professionalization Stage

The *dàigòu* relationship from the beginning is mainly driven by Chinese *rénqíng* culture. But, when the frequency of *rénqíng* relations increases and it is difficult to balance, the act of purchasing gradually develops into a passive service driven by *rénqíng*. Menda gave us two examples:

“For instance, if I bought a Rolex watch for my father’s brother (shū shū 叔叔), it means I could not say no to the husband of my father’s

sister (gū gū 姑姑) next time when he/she ask me to buy the same one. Being immersed in such Chinese rénqíng connections means that I cannot refuse my best friend or close relatives to purchase the same overseas products.”

“Another example is: if I helped my mother’s sister (yí mā 姨妈) buy a Louis Vuitton handbag in Belgium, which can help my aunt to save about 30% price than she buys the same one in China. Then it means I could not refuse my aunt by marriage (gū gū 姑姑) to get the same luxury bag. Otherwise, I would destroy the balance of social relations and be considered partial.”

“In this process of balancing family relationships and friendships, I was forced to become a experienced dàigòu. There is an irresistible force push me.”

——Menda Wu Oct 08, 2018, at Paul in Louvain-la-Neuve

4.4.3 Prosperous Stage

One article named as *On the Floor with the Dàigòu, Chines Overseas Shoppers* published in *Financial Times* creating an appropriate description of the characteristics of dàigòu in this period:

“Young Chinese ladies make money by sending luxury goods back to China (Sarah Shannon, 2016:09).”²¹

Actually, however, with more and more Chinese traveling, working, studying, and living abroad since the 2000s, Chinese consumers have

²¹Ft.com. 2016. On the floor with the daigou, China’s overseas shoppers. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/0e0c6a36-330c-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153>> [Accessed 9 May 2021].

more flexible channels to obtain overseas products. Any of them at this time would have the great possibility to become an occasional *dàigòu*. Most of them initially do it mainly entrusted by *rénqíng* tie. Less of them are engaged in *dàigòu* activity for the economic purpose of hoping to make money. For instance, the global panic incident of infant formula.

In 2008, the Chinese tainted milk scandal involved milk and infant milk powder components being contaminated with melamine (三聚氰胺). After the initial focus on Sanlu milk powder (三鹿奶粉), further inspections revealed that products from 21 other Chinese dairy industries were also tainted.²² China's health ministry has issued that in this tainted milk scandal, almost 300,000 babies had become ill.²³ The melamine milk powder incident made every parent in China at that moment crazy and caused them to hunt for the safe overseas infant milk powder. They hoped that there would be a reliable person in overseas society to help them purchase it. Menda said the following words in 2017,

“In my WeChat, every mom I know orders milk powder from overseas.”

——Menda Wu Oct 08, 2018, at Paul in Louvain-la-Neuve

Suddenly every Chinese diaspora in overseas society has become a milk powder supply for Chinese babies. Anyone who has any chance to go abroad will be asked to temporarily act as an infant milk powder *dàigòu*. Parents try their best to buy overseas milk powder for the

²²English.china.com. 2008. China seizes 22 companies with contaminated baby milk powder-. Available at: <https://english.china.com/zhcn/health/news/11020771/20080917/15090931_1.html> [Accessed 1 July 2021].

²³the Guardian. 2008. Chinese figures show a fivefold rise in babies sick from contaminated milk. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/02/china>> [Accessed 1 July 2021].

children. Particularly, in the initial stage of this wave, people's motive was under Chinese *rénqíng* connections, their focus has always been on food safety, the kids growing up healthily rather than economic benefits.

Chinese parents chased for overseas brands without reservation and they trust foreign baby formulas more than national ones. This reality makes *dàigòu* activity unconsciously become a global, ubiquitous consumption feast. After several years of development, a large number of sporadic overseas individual *dàigòu* gradually opened up the link between suppliers (*dàigòu* shoppers) and Chinese consumers (clients). The consumers from the domestic market was separated by *dàigòu*. The global consumer products from *dàigòu* reach the aim of consumption globally freely of Chinese clients (Smith & Watson, 2019). The Chinese *dàigòu* in Belgium are developed rapidly in this era., ,

4.4.4 Professionalization Stage

Yuyu is a 28 years old female art international student, who has lived and studied in Belgium for 7 years (2012-2019). Yuyu is good at oil painting and art curating, she always has a high-level taste in fashion. In the spring of 2012, Yuyu went to Belgium to study for her master's degree in Visual Arts and Design at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. Yuyu started her part-time *dàigòu* job at the same time. Yuyu said:

“I helped my friends and relatives purchase since I studied in Belgium in 2012. At that time, I mainly bought infant milk powder. For instance, every month I sent one box (6 cans) of local brand milk powder to them. Sometimes I also helped my family or friends buy Louis Vuitton bags, Gucci belts, and some other valuable products. Because of the exchange rate and the differences of regional price of same products, lots of time, an expensive handbag may save 4-5 thousand RMB. Also, when I go to the outlet village dur-

ing the discount season, my relatives also like to ask me to buy some discounted products, such as Pandora, Swarovski, MK, CK, and so on.”

“I never charged for running errands in the first 2-3 years, because my friends and relatives did not ask me very frequently. I just purchased efficiently and played the role of an intermediary to help them obtain authentic overseas products. But with the increase in the number and frequency of purchasing, considering the transportation fees, time costs, and tariff fees, I was encouraged to charge a service fee as my reward. Most of my relatives who habitually asked my favor also consistently transferred some extra money as a gratitude. It made me feel very good.”

Yuyu continued to add more explanation,

“I unexpectedly changed from a poor student to a freelance dàigòu with a stable source of clients. Especially, in this job, I can be my own boss, and I can flexibly control my purchasing time and pace. My clients was built on a strong shúrén guānxi (the acquaintance’s relationship). Most of the customer expansion comes from the verbal recommendation of friends or previous customers. Even I don’t know these new customers directly, they must be friends of my friends or relatives of relatives. It means that there is an intangible trust relationship between us, and this natural trust is built on shúrén guānxi.”

——Yuyu, July 6, 2018, the Delvaux Sale at Etterbeek

Accompanied by continued, large-scale infant milk powder consumption, the higher the frequency of purchasing among relatives and

friends, the harder it became to maintain the balance of rights and obligations based upon *rénqíng*. Since that moment, *dàigòu* changed from a simple unpaid irregular act to a certain professional paid job. A large number of overseas Chinese turned from an accidental, non-professional *dàigòu* to a professional *dàigòu*.

After it has gone through the above four stages of development, overseas Chinese *dàigòu* has gradually and naturally become into new consumption way of young modern Chinese consumers to acquire the global consumer goods. It has become an indispensable part of their life. In the face of overseas products, Chinese consumers are more concerned about the quality and the prices. Due to the significant price advantage of *dàigòu* approach, even if counting the charge the service fees, the transportation costs, and the tariffs, the overall purchase price of a global product from *dàigòu* is still lower than the same product buying at domestic.

5

Transportation of *Dàigòu*

BEFORE I arrived in Belgium, I had already joined two WeChat groups of Chinese international students in Belgium through a friend's introduction. In these groups, we often see information about asking people to help bring things to Belgium from China or asking people to bring things back to China from Belgium.

I was commissioned to help Menda Wu, bring the Chinese pepper powder, and Chinese red dates on my first flight to Belgium. Meanwhile, I also helped Xiaou Wang¹ bring Cheezheng pain relieving plaster (*qízhèng xiāotòng tiēgāo* 奇正消痛贴膏), essential balm (*fēngyóujīng* 风油精), and Yunnan white medicinal powder (*yúnnán báiyào* 云南白药). For my roommate Meng in Belgium, I took some Chinese specialties for her. Such as Mimi shrimp crackers (*mīmī xiāntiáo* 咪咪虾条), spicy strips (*là tiáo* 辣条), cumin powder, capsicum frutescens (*xiǎomǐ là* 小米辣), Judas's ear (*mù'ěr* 木耳), dried mushrooms (*xiānggū* 干香菇), fermented tofu (*dòufurǔ* 豆腐乳). All of them are not easy to buy

¹ Xiaou Wang is an international student,

in Belgium.

5.1 From Accidentally *Rénròu* to Fixed Form of Transport

I had no idea at the time yet that these simple taking pleasure in helping others actions would actually implement the concept of “*rénròu*” (人肉) mentioned in this research. These people who asked me to help them bring things to Belgium also become friends and the key participants for my *dàigòu* research. They have also become important guiders to help me become a novice *dàigòu*.

After chatting with Meng all afternoon long when we met the first time, she said about the most difficult part of *rénròu* in her eyes :

“Compared with purchasing overseas genuine goods, what really troubles for dàigòu is how to ship the global consumer goods back to China safely. At that time (2012-2015), Belgium had not yet opened a lot of fast and cheap overseas express services to China. There was only Bpost (Belgian Post Group) we could use. In my memory, it was very expensive. For instance, sending a piece of document costs 20 euros. The price of sending milk powder, chocolate, wine, cosmetics, clothing, and bags with packages basically closed from 50 to 100 euros. The express time was also very long.”

“Therefore, around 80 to 90 percent of overseas products I purchased for my friends and relatives were packed in my suitcase and taken back by myself in the vacations. I even remembered the embarrassing situation that I brought the huge heavy suitcase back to China for the first time. There were full of overseas products in my suitcase, which was too heavy to move. I really felt that I was not an international student, but more like a dealer to transfer foreign goods. I don’t remember how I dragged it from Belgium to

China, especially, I had to transfer from the airport bus to train, after two times of taking the local bus, I finally touched my home gate.”

“Before 2015, i.e., before LLN set up a special express point, most of the newbie individual dàigòu active in Belgium brought purchasing goods back to China through themselves. It brings about two problems. First, the time period for customers to receive overseas goods is very long; second, the dàigòu must be tied together with the goods together. It is extremely inflexible. In this case, a specialized post way has appeared. We called it rén ròu.”

“This word can be used as a noun, which refers to people who are engaged in helping dàigòu bring purchasing goods back to China. It also can be used as a verb to refer to the behavior of helping people bring things back to China. As a verb, it means help someone bring back the purchasing goods. For example, I can rén ròu (bring back) a pair of shoes for my brother.”

——Meng, April 20, 2016, Louvain-la-Neuve

5.1.1 The Concept and Connotation of *Rénròu*

Rénròu is translated as “individual express”, *rénròu dàigòu* (人肉代购), *rénròu* agent, *rénròu kuàidì* (人肉快递). It is a quite different way of shipping overseas products to China, in which *rénròu* (the person) acts as a postman. *Rénròu* does not go through the postal route but directly relies on the individual. They help *dàigòu* to bring products back free or with a low commission.

Besides of professional *rénròu* agents, the main participants of the specialized part-time *rénròu* agents are:

- (1) Chinese diaspora who lives in Belgium for a long time;
- (2) The short visa holder who comes to Belgium to visit relatives and friends;
- (3) The short-term overseas Chinese students;
- (4) The returnees from studying in Belgium or European countries;
- (5) Flight attendants, tour guides, and tourists, etc.

Together they formed a huge group of transportation paths. Most of the agents emphasized the cost of *rénròu* is not the most eye-catching part. Because a multitude of Chinese overseas *dàigòu* in Belgium bring things back to China normally free, especially at the beginning. In *dàigòu*' cycle, free *rénròu* will be accumulated as a kind of *guānxi* capital. It means in the future their products can also be brought back to China for free or they will get another type of free help. In Chinese, we called this *huán rénqíng* (还人情), which means return the favor in the future.

In anthropology, the research of interpersonal ties in economic processes has a long tradition, especially considered as the non-economic relationship exchange, such as Malinowski (Malinowski, 1920), Mauss (Mauss, 1970), Sahlins (Sahlins, 1965), Claude Levis Strauss (Miyazaki, 2012), Pierre Bourdieu (Shapovalova, 2013; Hsing, 2003), etc. Large numbers of anthropologists have deeply analyzed social relations and trust networks by considering the role of kinship and friendship within their formation and development (Smart, 1999).

Pierre Bourdieu used the social capital concept to refer to mutual relations, which is a resource generated in social networks, based on the trust social relationships (Shapovalova, 2013). In the development

of *dàigòu*, *rénròu* as connection, which is a way of talking about the *guānxi*, rather than a set of criteria that can define their behavior (Zani, 2019). *Rénròu* combines the more social and emotional nature of long-term *guānxi* relations and interactions based on personal relationships. A trusting and reciprocal obligatory relationship is built between *dàigòu* and their *rénròu* agents (Hsing, 2003), which constitutes the significant creation of new consumption forms in a broad range of societies. Hirokazu Miyazaki (2012) clearly is aware of a gift contains within itself a part of the giver (Miyazaki, 2012), i.e., to make a free *rénròu*'s help to someone is to create a possibility of new connection (*guānxi*) between them. Give free *rénròu* favor is just like sending a gift, which is an intangibility way to establish a good reputation in *dàigòu* groups (Hsing, 2003; Standifird, 2006).

Meng made an explanatory supplement to the development of *rénròu* :

“Initially, rénrou regularly had served by dàigòu themselves. For instance, I certainly played as a rénrou when I brought products back to China by myself. But, with the development of the scale of dàigòu, professional rénrou agents have gradually evolved.”

“In the Belgian dàigòu circle, the generally accepted standard for normal price of rénrou agent based on the weight of rénrou approach is 10 euros/kg. Generally speaking, the value of these goods cannot be too expensive, the volume cannot be too large, and the weight cannot be too heavy. For example, you cannot pay 10 euros to ask someone to bring milk powder, because a suitcase cannot hold several cans.”

“Of course, you cannot just spend 10 euros to ask someone (rénrou)

to help you bring diamonds, because the value is too great. Accordingly, under this charging standard, the popular items of rén ròu are clothes, cosmetics, and accessories, etc. According to the products' value, a different item of the rén ròu approach to China is usually charged a freight ranging from 10 to 50 euros. For example, the price of a receipt or a document is 10 euros,² But for the price of rén ròu a Louis Vuitton handbag needs costs from 30-50 euros."

"The screenshots of the dialogue between overseas Chinese in the WeChat rén ròu Express group in Belgium shows that some "advertisements" did seek rén ròu agent (please see Figure 5.1). Other advertisements were seeking to share fees to bring overseas goods back to China, or seeking to bring Chinese specialty to Belgium."

——Meng, April 16, 2016, at Le Brasse-Temps in Louvain-la-Neuve

As we can see from the screenshot, everyone in the WeChat group shares primarily some level of identities and connections, such as attending the same university, coming from the same native place (*tóngxiāng* 同乡) (Bell, 2000), sharing the same nuclear family, or kinship (some member in the WeChat group are family members). These strong or weak *guānxi* links together to build a morally binding social organization. Smart, A. (1999) finds this kind of morally binding social organization can be created as a rule that everyone in it will consciously abide by due to the existence of the binding force of the *guānxi* links (Zani, 2019). This restriction effectively guarantees the existence and development of *rén ròu* as a fixed form of transportation for *dàigòu* to a certain extent.

²In order to avoid customs inspections, the price tags, and the packaging boxes are usually removed of foreign goods. Those individual customers who need the receipt, usually, can receive separately from the goods. In this case, no matter for one piece or 100 pieces of receipt, they charge the same.

5.1.2 How Many Commodities One *Rénròu* can Take?

Generally, every passenger of the international airline can have two 23kg check-in luggage, one 10kg carry-on luggage, and one backpack. The question “How many commodities can be brought back by one *rénròu*” requires specific analysis. For example, if one *rénròu* just calculate the weight, there is no problem carrying with 1,000 lipsticks in one 23kg suitcase. If it is for milk powder, then a 23kg suitcase can hold about 8 cans. Depending on the size of the luxury bag, one suitcase can probably fit 4 to 10 pieces.

But the actual operation process is much more complicated. Because every *rénròu* needs to consider whether it exceeds the scope of self-use, whether it will be subject to tariffs, and whether it is worth. For example, I had never heard of any *dàigòu* packing milk powder in a suitcase. This is because, after 2017, there have been a large number of mature milk powder purchasing channels emerging in Belgium. It is not wise bring milk powder by themselves. For another example, I had never heard of any *dàigòu* who bring back 1,000 lipsticks, because this obviously exceeds the “personal use” standard for levying tariffs.

Therefore, generally speaking, the suitcase of a *dàigòu* will evenly distribute different types of global consumer goods, so that the products inside the suitcase could look like the owner’s personal goods in legal tariffs standard. The interview also found that before China Customs implemented postal import tax (*xíngyóu shuì* 行邮税).³

Xueyang recalled before and after the 2016 postal import tax reform, the difference between *rénròu* bringing commodities returning to China in person.

³Postal import tax (*xíngyóu shuì* 行邮税), namely, tax on baggage and articles accompanying incoming passengers and personal postal articles (*xínglǐ hé yóudì wùpǐn jìnkǒushuì* 行李和邮递物品进口税), it is the import tax levied by China Customs on inbound passengers’ luggage items and personal postal items. Including value-added tax and consumption tax in the import process, so it is also the general term for import duties and import industrial and commercial taxes levied on personal non-trade entry items.

“Before the postal import tax reform, the probability of luggage being checked and taxed was very low. The main reason is that although dàigòu were already very common in overseas society at that time, it did not attract the attention of mainstream from domestic media. Also there are very seldom person in domestic China knowing the concept of rén ròu. Therefore, suitcases filled with overseas goods were just regarded as ordinary tourists’ luggage. Or it can be said that before 2016, checking the suitcases of rén ròu who looks like a “tourists” is not the main job of a customs officer.”

“And slao, at that time Louis Vuitton did not have a particularly strict purchase restriction policy. Therefore, rén ròu’s sometimes may bring 10 LV bags, 5 Delvaux bags, and 30 identical Chanel facial cleansers. If any rén ròu bring such a suitcase return to China after 2016, he/she definitely will lose money.”

“Therefore, since the implementation of the postal import tax, every rén ròu will be more cautious in their choices. For example, few rén ròu will bring watch box, Shopping invoice, and shopping bag with them. Because if it encounters customs inspection, a box of a high-value watch, a luxury bag with a complete package and price tag are almost equivalent to tell the customs officers: ‘hey, look, I bought an expensive watch with a price invoice and complete package.’ In this case, there is no doubt that the customs will impose a tax of up to 50% on the watches and luxury bag. The shopping receipts, packaging, boxes, are all vouchers for their tax collection.”

——Xueyang, Dec 21, 2020, WeChat discussion

With the development of *dàigòu* and *rénròu*, the current *rénròu* is becoming more and more professional in its operation. They even created the transportation rules to ensure its effective operation. These rules can be summarized as:

1. *Do not accept more than 5-6 different styles of luxury bags at the same time.*
 2. *Accept at most two luxury bags of the same style at one time, if it is a very valuable bag, only one.*
 3. *No large items.*
 4. *No any packaging (boxes, bags, invoices, etc.)*
 5. *For products with high value that may be taxed by the customs, the sender shall bear the relevant taxes after being taxed.*
- rénròu is responsible for coordinating and completing the customs clearance business of the taxed goods.*

5.1.3 The Price Mechanism of *Rénròu*

As we mentioned in the article pricing mechanism, almost no consumers worry about being deceived in this common friend group. The distinctive feature of *rénròu*'s behavior is the embeddedness of certain non-economic factors such as trust, social capital, and reciprocity based on familiarity exchange, cooperation (Hadjimichalis, 2006), all of which contribute to a *rénròu* agent's particular success as a new transportation path. The following is the charging standard and the advertisement of *rénròu* in the Belgian *rénròu* WeChat Group: ⁴

Basic information:

July 10, 2021, Brussels-Beijing, quarantine period: (Xi'an/14days collective quarantine; Beijing/7days community quarantine; Home/7days

⁴This data compiled through the Belgian *rénròu* WeChat group, translated by the author, the original screenshot please see Figure 5.2, Accessed and translated time: Aug 10, 2021.

home quarantine)

Delivery time:

All products will be delivered by SF Express after 28 days quarantine (pay on arrival).

Charge standard:

- 1. Documents: 10 euros/copy;*
- 2. Ordinary items: 20 euros/kg;⁵ less than 1 kg is calculated as 1 kg;*
- 3. Large items and luxury items such as bags, shoes will be charged separately.*

Description:

- 1. Not accept the liquid or powder products.*
- 2. Items to be carried by air (checked) permitted by the relevant laws of China and Belgium.*
- 3. In case of confiscation of customs fines, the owner of the item shall bear it; regarding customs levy duties, the owner of the item shall bear it.*

Contact information: XXXX-XXX-XXX

——Cai Xia, June 7, 2021, Wechat group discussion

Through the new standard of *rénròu* fee shown on the advertisement on Figure5.2, we find that this notice clearly stipulates the rights and obligations between the *rénròu* agent and the *dàigòu*, the items that can be brought, the items that cannot be brought, and the charging standards and so on. Through the “search text” and “view context” function of WeChat, it is found that there are 5 related records in the Belgian *rénròu* WeChat Group, mentioning similar information about the charging standard of *rénròu* (two of which were released by the same person Cai Xia, on different dates). Based on this fact, we can

⁵Before COVID-19, the cost of this was 10-15 euro/kg.

say that the express form of *rénròu* has become a default, universal, and mutually recognized form of transportation among *dàigòu* and Belgium *dàigòu* market.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, a number of non-pharmaceutical lockdown interventions have been implemented in numerous countries and territories around the world, such as isolation at home orders, quarantines, curfews, and similar societal restrictions to reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. In this case, the *rénròu* fee for ordinary items has doubled. But, other aspects of *rénròu* prices have not been greatly affected. During the interview, many *dàigòu* said that although the price of *rénròu* did not increase much, the number of *rénròu* was significantly reduced because of the influence of COVID-19. Moreover, we also found that the price of *rénròu* agent has hardly changed much in the past five years. This also shows that this new method of transporting overseas commodities is not designed under economic rationality. It more reflects that the reciprocity bases are the particularistic ties between *dàigòu* and *rénròu* agent (X.-P. Chen & Chen, 2004).

Through this, we found that giving and returning back the same *rénròu* support is the common exchange practices in *dàigòu* activity, which implies these particularistic ties create the basis for an ongoing relationship between two individuals. And on this basis, mature operating rules of *rénròu* have gradually evolved. *Rénròu* implicitly shows the key role of *guānxi* plays in value creation of *dàigòu*. The significance of free *rénròu* delivery roughly in gaining and maintaining trust, decreasing the transaction cost, and offering mutual support and mutually beneficial connections (Qi, 2013; Standifird & Marshall, 2000). As for those purchasing products with higher value, currently, *dàigòu* bring them back in person or find the worthy *rénròu* to bring back to China.

This is also the main reason why *rénròu* express (agent) still occupies a large market after having such an efficient and complete express network for the Chinese route. A large number of *dàigòu* insist that

the existence of *rénròu* express is irreplaceable for the higher-value purchasing products for a long time in the future, especially when they transport very expensive products, like a diamond, golden watch, and limited edition bags of rare leather, etc. The convenience and reliability make this method a popular mode of transportation among *dàigòu*. Meng shares the same attitude on this issue:

“No one will use the traditional post to transport the diamonds or golden watch back to China, you know what I mean, right? In this case, I must find someone (rénròu) who deserves my trust, if not, I will bring it back by myself.”

——Meng, Sep 24, 2021, WeChat Voice call

Rénròu enable us to understand apparently that although it is free or charging cheap, it is often helpful to build a possibility of trade connection between the recipients and givers (Laidlaw, 2000). These transportation paths of the *dàigòu* products illustrate the mobility of global consumer products through *dàigòu* approach, which crosses different social, economic, circulating through the different borders, and connect different people (Zani, 2019; Cowell, 2013).

5.2 Chinese International Express Companies in Belgium

5.2.1 A Brief History of Chinese Express Companies in Belgium

Since the beginning of 2016, there has been a special STO Express site appeared in Louvain-la-Neuve. It cooperates with the China post and Bpost, which are dedicated to the China route in Louvain-la-Neuve (please see Figure 5.12). In this screenshot, we can see that as of March

3, 2021, there were 121 members in this group. Most of the members in this group were Chinese students and scholars studying in Louvain-la-Neuve.

The STO Express site originally cooperates with the the Chinese Student Association of Université Catholique de Louvain. It is a non-profit base with the aim to facilitate the local Chinese students and scholar groups to send goods back to China. In the past 5 years, the responsible persons of the STO Express site were always the chairman of the student union's family members. Starting in 2020, the person in charge was undertaken by enthusiastic Chinese volunteer students living in Louvain-la-Neuve. The work of the person in charge of the STO Express site mainly includes:

1. *Weigh packages, collect the express delivery fee before STO picks up the packages.*
2. *Provide (sell) the packaging foam and cartons.*
3. *Post the information about express outages, parcels being taxed, or being returned.*

The appearance of the STO Express site at Louvain-la-Neuve looks nothing special, but in fact, it provides certain intangible social connections. It is helpful to build a strong, positive supportive relationship between student *dàigòu* in Louvain-la-Neuve. And it unites all Chinese students, scholars, even their family members, and Chinese immigrants living nearby Louvain-la-Neuve into a *dàigòu* group. In this group, most of the members know each other, they share common friends and *dàigòu* resources.

These features make the STO Express site and the STO online WeChat group quite different from the Bpost. Consumers who send packages by Bpost individually normally don't know each other, and after completing a single delivery service, rarely get in touch with each

other. But the STO Express site in Louvain-la-Neuve and their WeChat group, on the contrary, are more like an online and offline community. For example, members of STO often introduce customers to each other, sell goods on behalf of each other, and share postage fees sometimes, etc.

By the time I started to write this research, there were already 5 express companies in Belgium that specialize in Chinese routes (Figure 5.3.). There are Ding Ding Express (*dīngdīng sùdì* 丁丁速递), Ding Ding Express mainly operates in Leuven, because the functions and prices of Ding Ding Express are similar to STO Express, so this research does not give a detailed introduction for it. Junan Express (*jūnān kuàidì* 君安快递)⁶, ADA post (*āndá sùdì* 安达速递), Betterway Express (*yìchéng kuàidì* 易程快递).⁷

These five express companies all provide cheap and convenient direct express service from Belgium to China. Moreover, for some daily consumer goods in large demand, such as infant formula, cosmetics, nutritional products, personal care, fish oil, health products, chocolate, red wine, etc., these express routes have also specifically launched customs clearance routes service. Up to a certain extent, they alleviate the risk of customs detaining taxes. In addition to the STO Express already introduced previously, through interviews and browsing the official websites, we found that there are still some characteristics of each express that need to be mentioned. The detailed summary is as follows:

⁶Junan Express changed its name to Wingocean Intl Logistics (*hǎixiáng guójì wùliú* 海翔国际物流) in June 2021 and has set up a new office for docking Chinese business at Liege International Airport. However, since this part of the interview data and most of the information had been collected before the name was changed, the full text still uses the name Junan Express.

⁷Due to my own participant observation, that is, working as a *dàigòu*, buying the *dàigòu* products and shipping these products back to China, had not contacted ADA post and Betterway Express, so the detailed introduction of the two express companies here mainly comes from the official Website and the interviews.

5.2.2 Business Introduction of Four Chinese Express Companies

Junan Express (君安快递)

In addition to the regular package tax package service and light luxury package customs clearance business, respectively shows on the picture (Figure 5.4). Junan Express also undertakes the luggage delivery business for embassies and missions.

It can send over 500KG of return luggage. The service including transport luggage by air, customs clearance, and within the scope of Beijing Third Ring Road with free delivery.

The charging standard is: the air freight from Brussels Airport to Beijing is about 3 Euro/KG, and the document declaration operation fee is 200 euros/batch. The cost of customs clearance is about 3500 RMB/batch.

STO Express (申通快递)

It launched the mini parcel route in March 2021, like Figure 5.5 shows. It specializes in accepting small parcels of 1-3KG (*xiǎobāoguǒ zhuānxiàn* 小包裹专线). The pricing is 1KG/10 euros, 2kg/14 euros, 3KG/18 euros.⁸

Before STO Express opened mini parcels of the 1-3KG route, all the packages below 3KG were calculated as 3KG. Figure 5.6 is a copy of STO Express normal charge standard. At that time, mixing different parcels into one big package is a popular way to save freight.

During this period, the WeChat group of *dàigòu* exerted its resource integration function and provided support for different *dàigòu* to share the freight. But it is not always can easily find a partner, in this condition, many *dàigòu* will discuss with their customers to choose to delay

⁸This part of the information comes from two sections. The first section is from the official websites or WeChat groups of the above-mentioned express companies; the second section of information is from the compilation of interviews with different *dàigòu* or some person in charge of those express companies in Belgium. The time is concentrated between 2016 and 2021.

the shipping time to find other customers. The opening of the small parcel business has greatly improved the buyer's shopping experience to a certain extent. Even if you buy small items, you can quickly get overseas products with low transportation costs.

Betterway Express (易程快递)

It is the sole authorized party in Belgium for SF Express, China's largest private express company. Betterway Express has especially opened the 20KG large luggage dedicated line for Chinese international students (*yìchéng dàxínglǐ zhuānxiàn* 易程大行李专线) and the 7KG direct mail route (*yìchéng jùhuásuàn zhíyóu* 易程聚划算直邮), like Figure 5.7.

The large baggage special line will only cost 40.99 euros for air transport of 20KG luggage from Belgium to any city in China, while the same weight will cost 85 euros through Bpost and 105 euros through Junan. Betterway Express also opened a 7KG direct mail route, the price is only 19.99 euros, and the same weight of STO Express and Junan Express cost 38 euros and 40 euros.

The Belgian Post Group (Bpost 比利时国家邮政)

Bpost cooperates with Express Mail Service (EMS 邮政特快专递), which is famous for its high transportation prices. But through the interviews, it is found that these five Chinese express companies have all signed a partnership agreement with Bpost, that is, according to the contract level and the amount of express business, different companies enjoy the different partner prices. For example, Figure 5.8 shows the price of a 7KG package express via Bpost official website, which is as high as 131.2 euros. But if this package was sent by a Chinese express company, it will be sent with the member prices as a promotion.

We can see that the emergence of Chinese express delivery compa-

nies has greatly reduced the cost of delivery by *dàigòu*. To a certain extent, this also laid the foundation for the widespread popularity of the *dàigòu* consumption mode.

5.2.3 The Difference between Two Express Sites in Louvain-la-Neuve

As the second Chinese Express company set up a courier point in Louvain-la-Neuve, compared with the STO Express site in Louvain-la-Neuve, Junan Express has obvious characteristics.

First of all, STO Express needs a native person in charge at LLN, while Junan Express communicates all front-end business, such as packing, weighing, filling out express orders, and picking up time in the WeChat group. Consequently, the driver (picker) of Junan Express directly connects with the package senders. The STO is the person in charge who will dock with the STO driver (picker) after checking the courier and freight. The package senders rarely have intersections with the picker of STO.

Secondly, the payment method of STO Express is collected by the person in charge. The sale of Junan Express is only responsible for checking and collecting the packages. Through the screenshot Figure 5.9, we can see that before the driver of Junan arrives at LLN, every sender in already prepared everything. Therefore, Junan Express does not need to have a physical storage place for collecting the packages. After the package is loaded, it is directly sent to the Junan Express company. Weighing, issuing express orders, and transferring money are all done in one step when the warehouse is shipped.

Thirdly, in addition to Junan’s own route, Junan Express also has a bpost special line every week, which is more flexible in terms of express delivery and time selection, more detailed information can see from Figure 5.10.

From the Junan Express charge standard (main aggregates) list we can see that the red box on the left side of this price list is the ex-

press cost of Junan Express customs. The clearance and bonded line (from Belgium to any city in mainland China) are included. The data on the left side, shows 1KG/8 euros, 1.5KG/10 euros, 2KG/13 euros, 2.5KG/16 euros, 3KG/18 euros, and so on; the blue box in the middle is the Bpost dedicated line (as partner parcel's price) from The price sent from Belgium to mainland China is 1KG/17 euros, 2KG/18 euros, 3KG/22 euros, and so on; the green box below is the price of DHL express back to Hong Kong and Macao, of which 1KG/46 euros, 2KG/47 euros, 3KG/63 euros.

Regarding how to choose express delivery, Menda said:

“Betterway Express is the cheapest express delivery from Belgium to China currently, But Betterway does not have a service point in Louvain-la-Neuve. No one can enjoy the service of Betterway. Consequently, as far as Louvain-la-Neuve is concerned, Junan is cheaper than STO. but in fact, for dàigòu, the price is not the first key factor when sending packages. Speed is always at the top priority. In this regard, the advantage of Junan Express is more obvious.”

——Menda Wu July 17, 2021, WeChat group message

In the interview, Lee once showed me a tracking slip, which brought to him great pride in Junan speed. This tracking list (the tracking number of this parcel is 15940207729-Z6558692304QF) is from Junan Express on 2nd August 2020 (Figure 5.11), from the picture we can see that on August 2, Junan Express only took 3 days to ship this parcel from Belgium to China. Lee said:

“Such unbelievable speed is impossible for Bpost or STO, which makes Chinese consumers feel that purchasing overseas products is as convenient as shopping on Taobao.”

——Lee, Aug 9, 2020, at Junan Express pickup point in Louvain-la-Neuve

The development of Belgium's docking with China's international express companies provides an important transportation guarantee for the development of Chinese *dàigòu* who are engaged in the *dàigòu* business in Belgium. Among the six express delivery companies, except for Bpost, which is a Belgian company, the rest of the express delivery companies are all operated by Chinese.

Adhering to the principle of customer first, they have successively launched package customs clearance business, milk powder shipping and bonded business, the mini parcel route (小包裹专线), the 20KG large luggage dedicated route for Chinese international students according to the needs of *dàigòu* and consumers (易程大行李专线), 7KG direct mail route (易程聚划算直邮), order online, pay online, collection from domicile (上门取货), create WeChat group, build social relations among WeChat mailing groups, etc.

Chinese express business is seen to stand in marked different with other overseas express companies. As commonly understood, Chinese business hinges fundamentally on Chinese special bonds such as individual networks or personal *guānxi* (Kiong & Kee, 1998; Hsiung, 2013). Indeed, *guānxi* networks are credited as one of the major reason for the prosperity of overseas Chinese entrepreneurs and companies (Burt & Burzynska, 2017).

The most general usage of the Chinese Express WeChat group is based on *guānxi*. The reason why it can operate in a virtual WeChat group is that everyone in the WeChat group shares primarily some level of identities and connections (Bell, 2000). Everyone in this WeChat

group has a very good personal *guānxi* network, which led a powerful foundation to build a strong, positive supportive cooperative connections for the members in the WeChat group(Standifird & Marshall, 2000). And the establishment of these personalized express services with Chinese characteristics goes a step further to help people secure favors and support in transportation global consumer goods(Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002; Berger & Herstein, 2013).

The unique transportation paths of *dàigòu* have been used in a number of different social connections (Standifird, 2006), which not only roughly means a business activity, but also help people gain social support and emotional favor in the process of establishing personal relations. (Gold et al., 2002; Berger & Herstein, 2013).

5.3 The Reverse Transportation of *Dàigòu*?

The content of this part research mainly comes from the many discussions with Professor Anne-Marie. In the process of submitting my different versions of the thesis to Professor Anne-Marie, I always instinctively felt that I had written the question of *dàigòu* very clearly. Because from my Chinese language and Chinese cultural background, this story is about a group of Chinese who have access to overseas products to help their relatives, friends, and customers who have no access to overseas products in China, and purchase all kinds of overseas consumer products for free or for compensation. However, Professor Anne-Marie has always been puzzled and asked me the following questions. For example:

*“Are there foreigners looking for Chinese *dàigòu* to buy consumer goods from China? How, who, where, and how many?”*

*“Are there any Chinese overseas looking for overseas Chinese *dàigòu* to buy goods from China? ”*

“Questions such as whether this dàigòu activity can be reversed, for example, is there a lot of foreigners who need Chinese products through dàigòu approach? ”

These questions have contributed to my writing of this chapter, but due to the rush of time and insufficient investigation, here is only a brief statement of this question and the results of my short investigation. It is hoped that it will serve as a starting point for follow-up research. Thanks again to Professor Anne-Marie for his great support and help in my research.

It needs to be explained that the term *dàigòu* is a concept and service with Chinese characteristics. Firstly, it is rarely found that foreigners purchase Chinese goods through Chinese *dàigòu*, no matter in China or in local. Even if there are, most of them are through the traditional B2C mode to acquire the Chinese products, such as using Amazon, Taobao, or another official website, but many foreigners always complain that:

“It is not cool at all to buy Chinese products on Amazon.”

——Consumer, March 08, 2021, Louvain-la-Neuve

There are also some foreigners through China's Alibaba (Taobao) to purchase Chinese products. These products they bought still have a good price advantage even after deducting the international shipping fee, such as photographic equipment, the Chinese version of LEGO (cheaper than the original design, but still good quality), Chinese snacks, stationery, clothes, and some small accessories made in China.

Although there are a large number of Chinese living overseas who always buy goods from mainland China and bring them to Belgium through *rénròu* (friends) or international express. However, these scattered acts of “helping friends to transport Chinese specialties” did not constitute a reverse *dàigòu* phenomenon. These behaviors more reflect the storage or assistance of social capital, which is usually free and random.

For Chinese products that overseas Chinese have a large demand, such as Chinese snacks, Chinese traditional food, Chinese dim sum, and various specialty products in Chinese supermarkets, there are special Chinese merchants engaged in these areas already, just as Figure 5.13 shows.

For example, during the lockdown period of COVID-19, many owners of Chinese supermarkets or restaurants in Belgium moved from offline services to online orderings, they supply free delivery services to the Chinese, like Figure 5.14 shows, the owner of one Chinese restaurant Zai said,

“It will be delivered for free, when the single order reaches 70 euros. For one consumer, this standard may not be easy, but for the online Chinese consumer community at LLN that often has dozens or even hundreds of active consumers, it is not the big case.”

——Zai, Feb 05, 2021, Louvain-la-neuve

Moreover, this conditional free delivery mode has gradually formed a weekly regular delivery mode in the main city of Belgium during the year-long COVID-19 lockdown times. Therefore, even if the COVID-19 prevented the purchase of Chinese specialty products from China to Belgium, but the consumption of Chinese products by Chinese people living in Belgium has not been greatly affected. Especially, the profes-

sional China-Belgium international express services have also become more common than 5 years before. More important, this China-Belgium international express service is cheaper and faster than the other international Express service.

Subsequently, we can say that purchasing goods from China to Belgium is usually the native product for the Chinese. They have strong regional characteristics and are usually only available in China, which is mainly in rigid demand. And the value is cheap, the cost of international transportation is not expensive. On the contrary, the products purchased from Belgium by Chinese *dàigòu* are mainly Belgian local brands or world-class luxury goods. The price of these global consumer products is expensive or is limited to acquire. Therefore, the Chinese domestic consumers need the professional *dàigòu* to help them. The demand for reverse purchasing is not enough to form an independent reverse *dàigòu* system.

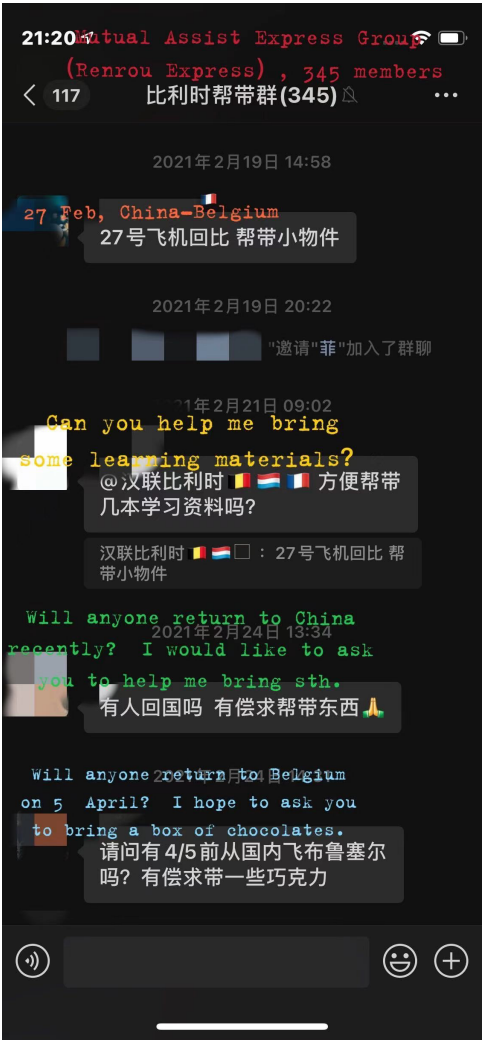


Fig. 5.1 Dialogue in Chinese *rénròu* group
Photograph by the author from *rénròu* Express group on WeChat,
March 2, 2021, translated by the author.



Fig. 5.2 Charging standard of *rénròu*

Screenshot from Belgian *rénròu* WeChat group, translated by the author. Accessed Aug 10, 2021.



Fig. 5.3 Six Chinese express companies in Belgium

Source: Lee's WeChat Moments. Note: there are 6 different Chinese express companies in Belgium mainly taking business between Belgium and China. The author downloaded the 6 companies logos by visiting the websites. Date July 16, 2021.

 君安快递 WWW.JUNANEX.EU			有效期:	8月1日--9月30日
			下单网站:	www.junanex.eu
			微信号:	Totrans110
			E-mail:	info@totrans.eu
			地址:	Leuvensesteenweg510 bld 2, Zaventem
重量	价格	奶粉名称	打包规格	欧元/箱
1公斤	17	比利时牛栏1段	3罐	60
2公斤	18	比利时牛栏2段	3罐	57
3公斤	22	比利时牛栏3段	3罐	57
4公斤	26	比利时牛栏1+2段	3罐	57
5公斤	30	比利时牛栏2+3段	3罐	57
6公斤	36	比利时牛栏3+3段	3罐	57
7公斤	40	比利时喜宝1段	3罐	66
8公斤	44	比利时喜宝2段	3罐	66
9公斤	49	比利时喜宝3段	3罐	66
10公斤	55	雀巢1段	3罐	60
11公斤	58	雀巢2段	3罐	58.5
12公斤	64	雀巢3段	3罐	58.5
13公斤	68	NIDO成人奶粉	3罐	43.5
14公斤	73			
15公斤	79			
20公斤	105			
25公斤	130			
30公斤	157			

Fig. 5.4 Junan Express charge standard

Note: this price is cooperated with Bopst, the two columns on the left are the weight and freight of ordinary express, the two columns in the middle and the right are the milk powder, the number of cans, and the freight.

Source: WeChat Moments of Lee, July 16, 2021.

sto 申通快递 express 阳光清关 mini包税路线		
China Post 包税路线		
要求	1. 请在我们系统网站《下单预约取货之前一定要先联系客服，确保你邮寄的物品可以顺利清关，避免产生不必要的麻烦。》 (收件人管理—填写收件人信息) 新建包裹前请先在“收件人管理”填写收件人信息并上收件人身份证正反面。 (新建包裹——确认发货) 选择ChinaPost包税路线，并且在备注里注明物品详细名称及规格、数量、单价。包裹运单号会在网站更新。 2. 如包裹寄包税路线，请在包裹上标注“mini.B.S”字样，邮寄时请务必和司机或我们工作人员特殊说明。 3. 此路线仅能邮寄保健品和洗护类产品，不可放其他任何商品。 4. 每箱最多只能邮寄6件，包裹超出3KG无法邮寄，包裹内物品总价值不能超过1000元人民币，请在规定范围内进行打包。 5. 实际重量与体积重量比较取大者，体积重量计算公式： 长*宽*高/6000=KG	
特点	每周周五发货 (每批最多只可发一箱同名同地址包裹)	
价格	1KG	10欧
	1. 5KG	11欧
	2KG	14欧
	2. 5KG	16欧
	3KG	18欧
声明	*包税路线破损件签收日期6日内提出索赔申请 (外箱完好的情况下无法赔偿) 请提供以下索赔资料 1. 清晰的面单号一面的外包装照片 2. 清晰的外包装破损照片 3. 邮政出具的外包装破损证明 (需派送员进行签名，如无派送员，则需要签收日2日内提出索赔申请) 4. 购物小票(需要与申报的产品相符) *物品申报应真实准确，并符合发件国家和中国相关法规 *若不如实申报，产生的后果(轻者补税，重者包裹被销毁)将由客户自行承担，本公司将不承担任何责任	

Fig. 5.5 The mini parcel route of STO Express

Source: screenshot by the author from *rénròu* Express group on WeChat, July 16, 2021.

Note:The price of 1-3KG small parcels is 1KG/10 euros, 2kg/14 euros, 3KG/18 euros.

 申通快递 express		联系电话: 027 212703 微信号: Diademlogistic 下单网站: express.eboatlogistics.com 仓库地址: leuvensesteenweg 510 building 2, 1930 Zaventem	
重量	1-3个包裹	4-10个包裹	11个包裹以上
2KG	19	18	17
3KG	22	21	20
4KG	26	25	24
5KG	30	29	28
6KG	34	33	32
7KG	38	37	36
8KG	41	40	39
9KG	47	46	45
10KG	50	49	48
11KG	55	54	53
12KG	60	59	58
13KG	65	64	63
14KG	70	69	68
15KG	75	74	73
20KG	98	97	96
25KG	118	117	116
30KG	142	141	140
以上价格为网站下单价格如委托我们出单, 每单将收取1欧出单贴单费			

Fig. 5.6 STO Express charge standard

Source: STO Express WeChat group, May 21, 2021.

Note: this figure shows that the price of ordinary packages of STO Express from 2 to 30KG is: 2KG/19 euros, 3kg/22 euros, 4KG/26 euros, 7KG/38 euros, etc.

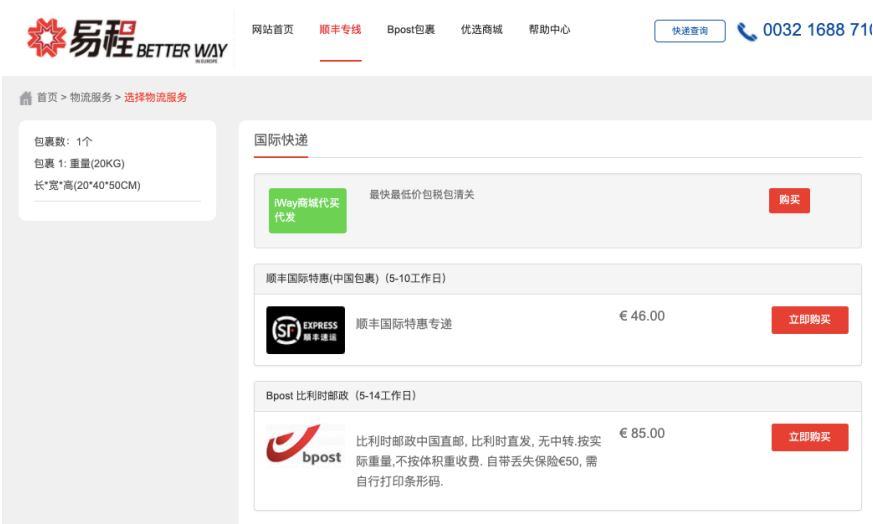


Fig. 5.7 20kg large luggage dedicated line(易程大行李专线) order form
Source: <http://iway.betterway-express.com>. July16, 2021.

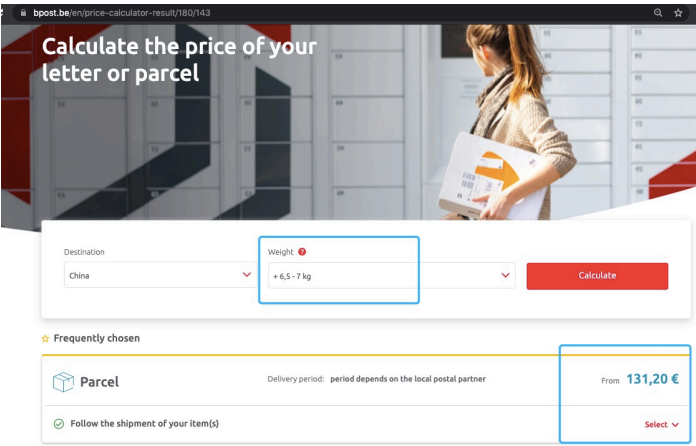


Fig. 5.8 Bpost charge standard (20kg as an example)
source: <https://www.bpost.be/en>. Screenshotsbyauthor, June11, 2021.



Fig. 5.9 Junan Express WeChat group (LLN-Namur)

Source: Screenshot from 新鲁汶 NAMUR 取货群, consulted: July 16, 2021.

有效期至2021年9月底

电话: 043770804 下单网站: www.junanex.eu

微信号: Jun an1 E-mail: info@totrans.eu

地址一: Leuvensesteenweg 613, 1930 Zaventem

地址二: Rue d'Ougree 95 Int 1, 4031 Liège

君安快递

WWW.JUNANEX.EU

君安包清关保税专线

重量	价格
1公斤	8
1.5公斤	10
2公斤	13
2.5公斤	16
3公斤	18
3.5公斤	20
4公斤	23
4.5公斤	26
5公斤	29
5.5公斤	32
6公斤	35
随重品	单独询价

bpost价格表 (其它国家单独询价)

重量	内地	香港	澳门
1公斤	17	27	21
2公斤	18	30	23
3公斤	22	32	24
4公斤	26	34	25
5公斤	30	36	27
6公斤	36	39	28
7公斤	40	41	30
8公斤	44	43	31
9公斤	49	46	33
10公斤	55	48	35
11公斤	58	50	36
12公斤	64	53	38

奶粉保税直邮价格

3公斤/箱	13欧
4公斤/箱	14欧

比利时到香港澳门DHL报价单
(其它国家单独询价)

重量	价格	重量	价格
1公斤	€ 46.00	6公斤	€ 83.00
2公斤	€ 47.00	7公斤	€ 84.00
3公斤	€ 63.00	8公斤	€ 85.00
4公斤	€ 65.00	9公斤	€ 86.00
5公斤	€ 66.00	10公斤	€ 87.00

*甘肃, 宁夏, 青海, 内蒙古, 新疆每个包裹加收2欧中转费

*请寄件人登陆君安网站注册并下单

*为保障货物安全和正常清关, 专线包裹须开箱验视, 寄件人应提供身份证明

*物品申报应真实准确, 并符合发件国和中国相关法规

*发货注意事项请查阅www.junanex.eu "服务指南"

委托我司发货默认已阅并接受以上发货注意事项

Fig. 5.10 Junan Express charge standard (main aggregates)
Source: Lee's WeChat Moments, photograph by Lee, July 16, 2021.



Fig. 5.11 Tracking record of Junan Express
Source: Lee’s WeChat Moments, photograph by Lee, August 3, 2020.
Traslated by the author.

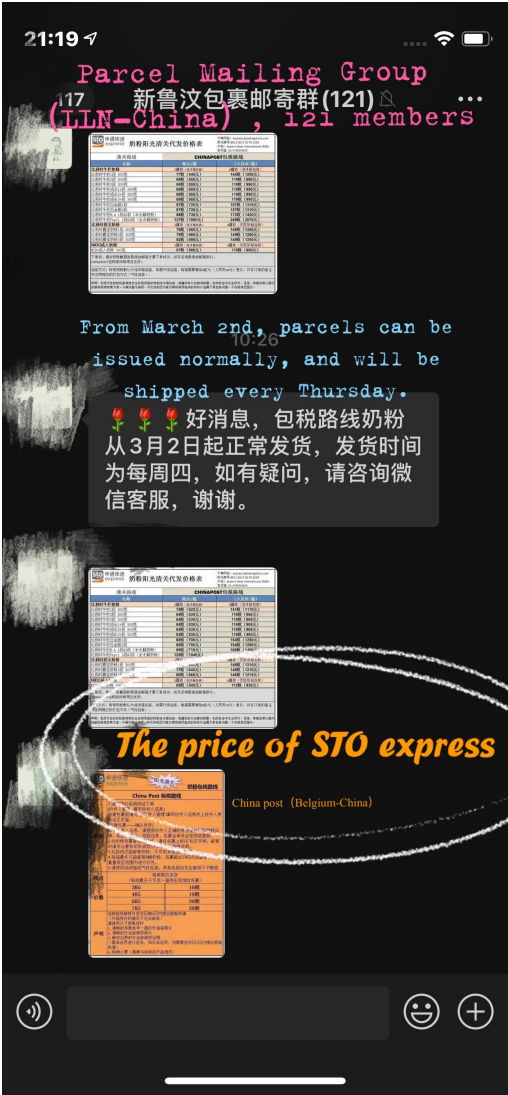


Fig. 5.12 STO Express WeChat group in Louvain-la-Neuve
Source: screenshot by the author, consulted: March 3, 2021.
Traslated by the author.



Fig. 5.13 Chinese snacks WeChat group
Sources: Screenshot from WeChat group, accessed March 2, 2021.

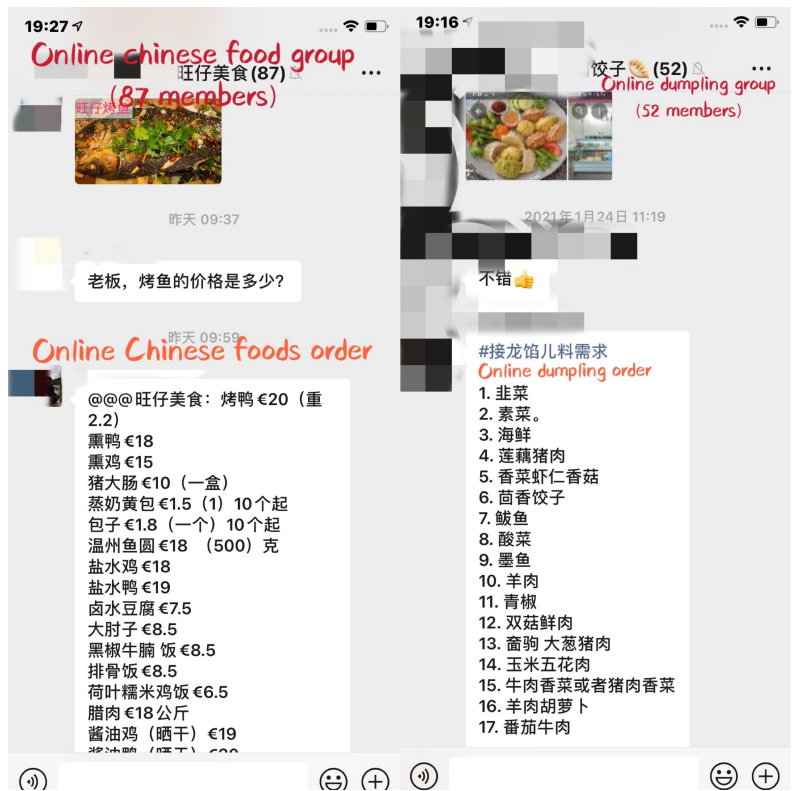


Fig. 5.14 Chinese restaurant WeChat group

Sources: Screenshot from WeChat group, accessed March 2, 2021.
Translated by the author.

6

Operation Logic of *Dàigòu*

6.1 Virtual Spaces of *Dàigòu*

6.1.1 Business on Mobile Electronic Device

Supported by appropriate electronic technology is essential to maintain loyal customers (Singh, 2002). In the mobile social network service arising era, users could connect and converse with others every second and everywhere conveniently through their mobile consumer-electronics devices (Appel et al., 2014; Carroll, Heiser, et al., 2010). The rise of new media has increased communication between people all over the world and the Internet. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, videos, pictures, and other user-generated media. Buying all over the world with a smartphone has become a popular fashion consumption trend for Chinese consumers (Jing Dong, Zhang Jingjing, 2009: 14).

Compared with the web-based social network, mobile social networks provide more opportunities for dedicated use in mobile communi-

cation, location-based, wireless network services, and augmented reality communication, etc (Y. Zhang et al., 2018). In this context, the time and space barriers for consumers to consume global commodities are gradually being broken. Meanwhile, smart mobile phones provide consumers a people-oriental mobile shopping space (Yang, Cheng, Hu, & Zhang, 2012).

The widespread use of smartphone in the past decade, have greatly enriched people's daily lives, it provides new forms of entertainment and constructs new types of relationships (Y. Zhang et al., 2018). Smartphones and other mobile devices have become an important entry point to the internet (Lomborg, 2014). Just as Dingding describe the role of smartphones in her *dàigòu* activities:

“The dàigòu business is in my pocket. When I took the smartphone out of my pocket and opened it, business was already waiting for me there.”

——Dingding Huang, June 9, 2016, at Dingding's house in Louvain-la-Neuve

Consumer Bo described this shopping mode with “ridicule”,

“We are not consumer goods, but pictures. We can buy overseas products with just one tap on the screen.”

——Consumer Bo, April 19, 2019, Minzu University of China, Beijing

But it is undeniable that the *dàigòu* consumption mode to the greatest extent combing the mobile telephone and mobile operating systems into one unit. It is a new portable shopping mode of the combination the information technology and business. It facilitates the core phone

functions such as calls and texting, alongside the internet field, including web browsing over mobile broadband, and multimedia functionality, including cameras, voice recording, video, and shopping together. In this process, consumers gradually realized that the possibility of shopping could happen anytime, anywhere. It transcends time and geographical constraints.

6.1.2 Business on Visual Community

Through interviews and surveys, among all software installed in smartphones, we found that WeChat and WeChat pay is at the forefront in the growing *dàigòu* market. It has become the top popular App for *dàigòu* and their clients (Peng & Wang, 2020; Song & Chuang, 2020). WeChat helps the *dàigòu* create an efficient communication space that has been set up during the development of *dàigòu* activity (Gan, 2017; Lien & Cao, 2014). The users could release texts, pictures, and videos in their WeChat moments, which is of vital importance to create possibilities of consumption. With smartphones at our fingertips, social interactions are no longer confined to face-to-face and between those in close proximity (Shen & Gong, 2019).

Since its launch in 2011, through the development and improvement through all these years WeChat has now covered more than 200 countries around the world and supports more than 20 different kinds of languages (P.-C. Chen, 2018). It means that Chinese people living in these countries could use WeChat to begin the *dàigòu* business easily. Because on the WeChat, the contacts are already there. For the newbie, they just need to post their location tag and share the products' detailed pictures on their moments, then the clients will come (please see Figure 6.1).

Yuanyuan, 29, female, is a full-time mother, and a part-time *dàigòu* shopper. She lives in Antwerp and has 4 years of *dàigòu* experience. I

knew Yuan through Menda's introduction. Yuanyuan told to me,

"I draw clients by moments on WeChat personal page. Initially, I just shared some parenting experiences and life moments about Belgium on WeChat. But after browsing my moments, a considerable number of WeChat friends want to buy the same products' my daughter uses for them."

"I posted all the products my daughter used on WeChat moments. The most exaggerated is that they will buy whatever I shared on moments. For example, the milk powder my daughter drinks, the vitamin D she eats, the teeth sticks she uses, the skincare products I use, the necklaces, and the sunglasses I wear."

"Gradually, I discovered that WeChat Moments are like free advertising windows. I took photos of some foreign products and posted them on moments. When my WeChat friends saw them, they would consult, and then they came to ask me to buy the same for them on my behalf. Before I went abroad, I couldn't imagine such a magical operation. I just posted the photos and someone would ask to buy. This is really amazing."

—— Yuanyuan, May 22, 2018, at Louis Vuitton shop in Antwerp

The development of mobile Internet, the popularity of smart phones, and various kinds of software, WeChat has rapidly built the relationship between *dàigòu* and consumers. Actually, in WeChat, moment is not the only window to look the overseas products, friends on there can send instant messages, create the video call, open a group chat space for each other.

In WeChat moments, Overseas Chinese *dàigòu* posts their daily life and the pictures of global consumer products together. *dàigòu* and their clients communicate with each other. Video call or voice message can help clients get details information of any products. In group, new friends (clients) are introduced by the old one. WeChat not only takes advantage of *guānxi* network in reality but also extends the strong social connections on the web. In Yuan's description how the online market is replacing the traditional offline markets.

For example, a Chinese consumer can sit at home and directly order a Louis Vuitton bag from a Chinese *dàigòu* living in Belgium via a webcam. In order to make consumers better understand the differences between similar products, text, pictures, voice messages, video chat, group messaging, user Moments, Weidian, and WeChat Pay enable convenient ways to exchange the products' information in specific. Consequently, WeChat plays a very important role in connecting the customers in mainland China and overseas *dàigòu*.

From these screenshots (please see Figure 6.2), we can see in the purple circle, that the agent and the consumer exchange information about the differences between similar products. In the red circle, we can see that the agent took scores of detailed pictures of Louis Vuitton scarfs and handbags to further explain to consumers. In the blue circle, we can see that the agent was using voice information to explain the details of the products to the consumer. And in the yellow circle, we can see that the clients, after communication with the *dàigòu*, the clients transfer the money (RMB) to the agent, which means the purchasing activity will start.

As of January 2021, WeChat's daily active users boasted 1.09 billion; 780 million people enter the Moments every day, and 120 million of them would post something in Moments; 360 million people browse the official account every day to gain knowledge of the outside world¹.

¹Source: Zhang Xiaolong, Senior Executive Vice President of Tencent and President of

WeChat is quite different with Weibo, Instagram, and Twitter. For example, on Weibo, Instagram, or Twitter, a celebrity may have millions of followers, most of whom they do not know each other in real life. However, for the WeChat friends cycle, they must have some connections in real life (B. Xu, Huang, Kwak, & Contractor, 2013; Y. Zhang et al., 2018). On WeChat, following someone is mutual and the extension of the WeChat network is positively related to the diversity of people's *guānxi* networks (Shen & Gong, 2019). Such as friends, relatives, colleagues, friend's friends, or relatives' friends, etc.

Dàigòu business is exactly right established on a good *guānxi* relationship. WeChat combines the users' social network and their trust system together, which has laid a foundation of trust for Chinese consumers to purchase overseas products through WeChat. It means that the users with a mutual following relations usually share stronger *guānxi* connections than the ones that only have one-way following (B. Xu et al., 2013; Y. Zhang et al., 2018).

Strangers can not follow you without your approval, and you have to add them back as a WeChat friend. WeChat require mutual following between two acquaintances, which allows the users to send instant messages and video call instead of using the conventional texting to each other (Y. Zhang et al., 2018). The interpersonal ties in social networks are defined as the information-carrying connection among social circles (M. S. Granovetter, 1973; Shan & King, 2015). They exchange combine, and forward various kinds of information from offline to online.

WeChat Moments improves the information diffusion among acquaintances, which increases the chance that a post is exposed to strangers as well as the probability of reposting (Y. Zhang et al., 2018). It also conveys product information, the shopping experience of the agent, consumers' fashion insights, brand ideas, and enables consumers to keep in

WeChat Business Group, made a speech at the 2021 WeChat open class PRO (2021 微信公开课) of the WeChat night (微信之夜), January 19th, 2021.

touch with agents at all the times (Peng & Wang, 2020).

As a social network-based, experiential, and *guānxi* approach purchasing global consumer products for acquaintances way (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Any *dàigòu* based overseas can easily have hundreds to thousands personal contacts in their WeChat network, enabling a personal recommendation of global consumer products to an incredibly wide network based friends in China with instant results.

In the Chinese consumer market, WeChat has developed into an ecosystem with a complete business model (Weiyang & Wang, 2020). It is no longer a mere social tool, and its functions have penetrated into every aspect of people's daily life (Chan, 2015). More and more young Chinese consumers are willing to and preference for WeChat as a shopping medium (Y. Chen, Lu, Wang, & Pan, 2019).

Starting from January 1, 2019, *dàigòu* got a new professional term given by the Chinese government: e-commerce operator. To put it simply, doing overseas purchasing business on e-commerce platforms, such as Taobao, Tmall Global (*tiānmāo guójì* 天猫国际), or Global JD.com (*jīngdōng quánqiúgòu* 京东全球购) requires uploading the business licenses, relevant qualifications, and paying taxes to the Chinese government.

However, doing the overseas purchasing business on WeChat is not necessary to upload any licenses or relevant qualifications, because WeChat has no way to distinguish *dàigòu* from ordinary users, acquaintances friends, or WeChat business operators. This is also one of the main reasons why many *dàigòu* are still active on WeChat after 2019.

6.1.3 The Digital Payment System

“On an average morning, a young urbanite wakes up, check her social media feed and order a cab on her mobile. While sitting in traffic, she uses her phone to watch a video or purchase groceries. Later she pays the driver and buys a coffee via cellphone wallet.”

Once at work, she might make an online payment for a cinema ticket. So far, so normal. But if this young lady were living in China, every one of these activities could have been powered either by Alibaba or a company in which it has a stake.”

—The Economist, Oct 26, 2017

SOURCE: The Economist. 2017. Online retail is booming in China. [online] Available at: <<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2017/10/26/online-retail-is-booming-in-china>> [Accessed 30 October 2021].

This description of Alibaba (the parent company of Alipay) in China was made by The Economist in 2017. From this description we can see that the AliPay² is already become a popular means of mobile banking in China. As the world’s second-largest mobile wallet, as of October 2019, the global users of Alipay have reached 1.2 billion, making it the world’s number one mobile payment service organization.³ After years of development, at present, Alipay has evolved from a single payment tool to an open platform that provides payment, community services, government services, social networking, financial management, insurance, public welfare, and other scenarios. Figure 6.3 is the homepage of mobile Alipay, through it, we can see the multi-function of this digital payment application program.

From the screenshot, we can see the powerful functions of Alipay, for example, the transactions link of *huā bei* (花呗)⁴. Taobao link, currency exchange, Covid-19 updating, location tag, Yu’e Bao (the link

²For other detailed explanation of Alipay (支付宝), please refer to the forth section of Chapter 2.

³Web.archive.org. 2018. Alipay is the world’s second-largest mobile wallet | ComputerWorld Hong Kong. <<https://web.archive.org/web/20181006194900/https://www.cw.com.hk/digital-transformation/alipay-world-s-second-largest-mobile-wallet>> [Accessed 25 July 2021].

⁴In the transactions link of *huā bei* (花呗), the membership can borrow money from Alipay to shopping on Taobao

of money investment), Yu Li bao (the link of transfer money without service fee outside the Alipay), etc.

It is interesting to note that comprehensive handheld payment-consumer applications like the one provided by China's Alibaba (the parent company of Alipay), emerge endlessly. As a consequence of the popularization of new digital technology, various new digital payment systems for completing monetary transactions have been risen, for example, paying through Alipay, WeChat Wallet, paying by scanning QR code, transferring money through electric-economic systems (e.g., online bank). A secure virtual fund settlement system enables e-commerce to realize the possibility of buying and selling through information technology (Štefko, Bačík, Fedorko, Oleárová, & Rigelský, 2019).

WeChat wallet is another most common digital wallet and mobile payment App by WeChat, which allows users to perform mobile payments, online transactions and send money between contacts. More than 250 million WeChat users have already linked their personal bank accounts to WeChat Pay. With it, users can pay for pretty much anything anywhere in the whole country, even outside China. Such as (international) money transfers, WeChat fast pay, e-commerce purchases, QR code payments, sharing WeChat friends coupons, sending lucky money, in and out app-based payments, etc.

Through investigation, we found that there's a significant number of WeChat users permanently residing outside of China. With almost every Chinese tourist and resident abroad using WeChat. In WeChat, users are allowed for direct payment after instant conversations with the customer base, as well as providing a live video purchasing service. The versatility of WeChat makes shopping global consumer products ubiquitously.

Therefore, from this perspective, Alipay is just one of the payment methods that can be realized by overseas purchasing agents. And the shopping platform that relies mainly on Taobao: Taobao, although it

also provides purchasing services, its form is more like a B2C model, so it is not included in the discussion of this article, hereby explained. However, the Alipay currency exchange function can offer the diamond-card membership (*zuànshí huìyuán* 钻石会员) a special discount exchange rate. The transfer fee-free function between Alipay friends and the addition of transfer friends and other functions still make it play an important role in the development of *dàigòu* business.

Taking the Alipay's currency exchange function as an example, picture (Figure 6.4) shows that with a diamond-card membership exchange rate, for every 100 euros exchanged, consumers, can save 0.45 RMB. When we put this seemingly inconspicuous discount on a bag worth 2,000 euros, the consumer can get a discount of nearly 100 RMB by paying the *dàigòu* products fee through Alipay. Moreover, this exchange is instant, and there is no service fee. Therefore, the advantages of Alipay are quite obvious compared to the bank transfers that require charging fees, waiting 1-2 working days, and filling in a lot of forms for foreign currency exchange.

But, in the construction of the virtual purchasing community, WeChat is still slightly better. During the interview, it was found that about 80-90% of consulting and communication services are realized through WeChat. When consumers complete the preliminary consultation service and decide to purchase the overseas goods, they will choose Alipay or online banking because they do not want to pay the 1% service fee of WeChat.

Convenient online monetary transactions further ensure the convenience for Chinese consumers to purchase overseas goods. All those new e-Commercial transactions made the cross-border *dàigòu* business easier happened than before. In 2006, the number of digital shoppers only have 30 million. This number increased to 300 million in 2013, in which more than half the digital shoppers were between the ages of 20 and 29 (*China Embraces Cross-border e-commerce*, 2016). But, according to

CNNIC report of Internet Development of China, as of June 2020, the number of online payment users in China reached 805 million, accounting for 85.7% of the total Chinese netizens (Figure 6.5). In the same year, the mobile online shopping users reached 802 million, accounting for 86% of Chinese mobile netizens (Figure 6.6).⁵

The internet, and especially the mobile internet and the digital devices, now have entirely transformed all key aspects of the consumers' lives—entertainment, information, shopping, and social interaction (Sethi, 2019a). E-commerce in China is sweeping the board. In 2016, online sales in China hit 366 billion US dollars, almost as much as in Britain and America combined.⁶

In 2017, Euromonitor forecasts that online shopping' s share of total retail will rise to 24% by 2020; Goldman Sachs, whose prediction puts the figure at 31%, includes sales from one consumer to another. That is, this forecast from Goldman Sachs includes the value created by the D2C business model and C2C business model. Nowadays, about 80% of adults in China' s biggest cities had experienced the digital shopping style. They span different age groups and different professional groups. It is more important to point out that through the fieldwork we found that the D2C shopping mode and the digital payment system on the virtual communities are not actually totally isolated from such transactions in the physical world. The social character of the D2C creates a unique shopping environment for acquiring global consumer goods, as well as a unique consumer culture (Hjorth & Hinton, 2019).

⁵The 46th China Statistical Report on Internet Development, released by CNNIC, September 2020. Retrieved on 9 Feb 2021, chart translated by the author.

⁶The Economist. 2017. Online retail is booming in China. [online] Available at: <<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2017/10/26/online-retail-is-booming-in-china>> [Accessed 30 October 2021].

6.2 Affectional Resources and Social Connections of *Dàigòu*

6.2.1 *Dàigòu* Operates under the Chinese *Guānxi* System

Guānxi can simply be translated as personal connections or social relationships (Dunning & Kim, 2007). But the two common translations, “relations” and “connections”, insufficiently reflect the wide cultural implications of the concept of *guānxi* (E. Zhang & Noakes, 2019). The *guānxi* we talk about in this article is a complex network and social system of relationships in Chinese culture.⁷ In Chinese culture, *guānxi* is an extraordinary ancient concept embedded in Confucian philosophy. It sees the individual as an indivisible part of a family and community (Y. Zhang & Zhang, 2006), which emphasizes the importance of interdependent social connections. In most general usage, *guānxi* implies particularistic ties that create the basis for an ongoing relationship between two parties that operate through reciprocity to the mutual advantage of those involved and where the rewards to the parties may take both material and non-material forms (Berger & Herstein, 2013; W.-K. Chung & Hamilton, 2001).

Hwang (1987) argues that the resources involved in the social exchange relations covered by *guānxi* can include money, goods, information, service, status, and affection. In combination, these factors create a more informal and flexible coordination-based system of exchange and business in China (K.-k. Hwang, 1987; K. Hwang, 2004).

In the early days of *dàigòu*’s development. It was created under the Chinese *guānxi* network and as a necessarily reciprocal activity maintain running (Laidlaw, 2000). *Guānxi* does not separate business from personal contexts (Ambler, Styles, & Xiucun, 1999). In *dàigòu* activity, consumers focus upon trust, reciprocity, and tacit mutual commitments, which is a major dynamic in Chinese society (H. F. Chung, 2011). Those

⁷We are here to the heart of the disembedding-re-embedding process as described above in point 1.3.4 of the introduction.

features of *guānxi* component the solid grounds of *dàigòu* networks. It played a major influence on the operation of *dàigòu* activity in the virtual community built on social media (Peng & Wang, 2020; Martin, 2017).

Maurice Godelier (2013) points out in *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics* that human beings, in contrast to other social animals, do not just live in society, they produce a society and different kinds of social connections in order to live (Godelier, 2013). *Dàigòu* is built on the Chinese *guānxi* network of trust. In the realm of *guānxi* network, it can perpetuate a never-ending cycle of favors, which helps to develop non-familial interpersonal relations (Standifird & Marshall, 2000). And finally developed a set of mature logic of *dàigòu* business.

In conventional views, the online commerce sphere is a stranger-orientated network (Weiying & Wang, 2020). On the contrary, *dàigòu* transactions occur between existing familiars, such as families, relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Every Chinese no matter long-term overseas study or short-term trip has the very high possibility to become an individual *dàigòu* under the familiars' requests.

In the Chinese context, these familiars are referred to *shúrén guānxi* (熟人关系), namely, the acquaintance's relationship. Under the *shúrén guānxi*, *dàigòu* influenced by three important concepts, which are rich in Chinese *guānxi* cultural traditions (Luo, Huang, & Wang, 2012; W.-K. Chung & Hamilton, 2001):

- “*Rénqíng*” (人情):
“*Rénqíng*” is the most important moral obligation/relationship capital to maintain a good social connection in Chinese society (Xue-feng, 2011; Danning, 2011; Lu, 2012; A. Kipnis, 2003).
- “*Ganqíng*” (感情):

“*Ganqing*” is a Chinese cultural measure that reflects the depth of feeling within an interpersonal relationship (A. Kipnis, 2003; Barbalet, 2021; Haiyun, 2011; Feuchtwang, 2015).

- “*Miànzi*”: (“Face” 面子):
“*Miànzi*” refers to social status, prestige, propriety, or a combination of all three (C. Liu, Valentine, Vanderbeck, McQuaid, & Diprose, 2019; Barbalet, 2021).

These three Chinese concepts rich in Chinese *guānxi* cultural traditions are the cornerstone of shopping in virtual communities and digital payment systems (Hung, Qiu Zhang, Guillet, & Wang, 2020). All these Chinese concepts based on reciprocity supported the *dàigòu* development and created a solid and long-term relationship between *dàigòu* and their clients. Meng gave me a particularly intuitive example, she said:

“Influence of rénqíng, I should help my shúrén guānxi by my side to purchase overseas consumer goods. Because it is some kind of moral obligation to maintain a good social connection. For example, If I refused these shúrén guānxi requests, my behavior usually will be regarded as “bùgěi miànzi”. It means I made the member in the guānxi network “lose his/her face” or “I didn’t show my respect to him/her”. This kind of bùgěi miànzi (不给面子) behavior may further harm each other’s ganqing. Because in that context, I have no right to refuse their request. I was placed in a trusted position. At the same time, my help is regarded as an important measure for testing and maintaining close relationships. Sometimes the injury of refusal may even affect my parents who are far away in China or affect the maintenance of the entire family relationship.”

To avoid my misunderstanding, Meng explained further,

“In fact, this moral obligation is not working in two-way. For example, I am not unilaterally placed in a position of “ethical kidnapping” and must help my relatives buy overseas products. In other words, when these acquaintances only occasionally ask me to buy overseas products, I do not charge a fee is a smart and reasonable way to accumulate guānxi capital. However, when a certain acquaintance frequently asks me to buy overseas commodities, usually, I don’t need to speak up any words about the commission. This person will actively give me commissions or other forms of compensation under the restriction and influence of moral obligation. And this endless reciprocal behavior has gradually become the main reason why Chinese dàigòu can develop from unorganized individual behavior to a global unorganized dàigòu system that radiates different countries and regions around the world.”

——Meng, May 18, 2020, WeChat voice call

In Chinese culture, *guānxi* means social exchange among acquaintances and a crucial system of beliefs, which defines the fundamental in Chinese social networks of interpersonal relation (Lu, 2012; Bell, 2000; Danning, 2011). Xiaotong Fei points out in his book *From the Soil: the Foundations of Chinese Society* that commerce cannot exist in a close blood relations society, which influences the *rénqíng* connection (Fei, 1992; 费孝通, 2013). Fei believes that in Chinese society, transactions are mainly maintained by *rénqíng*, which is a way of giving instead of charging. But Fei points out another truth at the same time. He said that in fact, whether commercial trade or personal *guānxi*, they all a

way of exchange, and the only difference is the method of liquidation (Fei, 1992; Barbalet, 2021).

A great number of Chinese *dàigòu* in the interviews indicated that the service fees paid by the buyers for them reflected the value of their labor and respect for their help. The professional paid *dàigòu* opened a new stable channel for Chinese consumers to acquire international goods (LIU, 2018). On the basis of *shúrén guānxi*, the entrusted *dàigòu* can guarantee the authenticity of the overseas commodities, and the commission guarantees the continuity of *dàigòu* transaction.

Gradually, professional *dàigòu* appeared. They have become an important bridge connecting Chinese consumers and overseas products (X. Zhao, 2020). They supplied repetitive, specialized, and professional purchasing services with rational pay. As a new mode of shopping way, it represents economical, convenient, and optimized. As a career, practitioners are proud of themselves. Because it is appraised by Chinese consumers as an important way to build an overseas life.

Dàigòu activity works under the non-utilitarian mode of communication in the traditional Chinese acquaintance society (*shúrén shèhuì* 熟人社会). *Dàigòu* agents purchase for friends or relatives and thus offer help on the basis of mutual feelings of friendship and emotional bonds. Within the context of Chinese *guānxi* culture, the social capital of *dàigòu* was gradually conceptualization (Bian & Zhang, 2014).

Such as *dàigòu guānxi*, which built upon Chinese *guānxi* capital, which is playing a growing significance to the Chinese transitional economy in an era of increasing market competition and institutional uncertainty (Bian & Zhang, 2014; Au, 2021; YANG, ZHAO, & SHI, 2010). As the node of the interaction of *dàigòu* usually happens both in virtual and real space, which may carry across the boundary of the two spaces (Jordan, 2009). In this situation, *guānxi* networks from offline to online, could be regarded as an extension of *shúrén guānxi* (W. Zhou, Hyman, & Leonhardt, 2017; Au, 2021). It is built on trust, with consumers

in China placing trust in their networks overseas to source authentic, quality, and safe products.

The emergence of the *dàigòu* alternative shopping channel further revised the market structure. In the course of *dàigòu* existence in overseas societies, they invent new ways of thinking and of acting –both with regard to themselves and with regard to the nature which surrounds them. They, therefore, produce *dàigòu* culture and create the individualized transnational purchasing behavior or global consumption history.

6.2.2 Consumer Trust based on *Guānxi* Connection

The most widely recognized and frequently cited definition of trust is from Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, who integrated past research and theoretical developments defined trust as, “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustee, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Wekselberg, 1996). Mayer and colleagues (1995) noted that the concept of trust has been popular not only in organizational research but also in many disciplines (Wekselberg, 1996). From a social interaction perspective, trust between *dàigòu* and their clients deals not only with the psychological processes of each other but also the social processes of *dàigòu* activity.

For example, the trust relations established between the *dàigòu* and the buyers can be divided into:

- (1) *individuals and groups;*
- (2) *broad social entities and relationships between individuals;*
- (3) *relationships between individuals and groups (Wekselberg, 1996).*

In China, trust is based on emotional bonding in relationships. Through different Chinese consumers interviews, it is found that people

who purchase global consumer products through *dàigòu* approach are the most based on the person in this product or services who supply for them (C. Liu, Bao, & Zheng, 2019).

The everyday cultivation of personal connections built the nature trust relations between the Chinese (Walder, 1983). This research tries to discuss how the Chinese *dàigòu* built online trust in an e-commerce context. According to the fieldwork, and the research of McKnight *et al.* (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002; McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998), David Geffen *et al.* (Geffen & Govindaraiulu, 2001), we can divide the the online trust of *dàigòu* activity into three aspects:

Trust Based on Blood, Kinship, and Geographic Relationships

Trust based on blood, kinship, and geographic relationships is the bedrock of direct consumers. This kind of trust is rooted in the strong *guānxi* network from the Chinese society, which has a strong cultural foundation. The practice of *dàigòu* is embedded within the traditional Chinese notion of *guānxi* (familiar, non-stranger social relational networks) (Peng & Wang, 2020). In this network, it is a general belief that another party can be trusted, which has incontrovertible natural bonds in either friendship or business relations, or family relations. It means that one person is willing to depend on the other person without any condition (Nash, 2005).

For example, when Menda Wu knew that I came to Belgium to do research related to *dàigòu*, she promised that she would take me to participant observation when she went to purchase. This natural trust reflects the features of reciprocity in Chinese *guānxi* culture. Because when Menda asked me to bring Chinese specialty from China to Belgium, I didn't ask her for any payment, it means I accumulated some social capital that prompted her to give me free help when I asked her or she knew that I needed it. In this reciprocity, Even Menda's face was

full of suspiciousness why I focused on *dàigòu* as my doctoral research, she still helped me with great patience.

The virtual social relationship that Menda and I established in the WeChat group also extends to the social relationship in the real life because of this reciprocal behavior. This is because *guānxi* in virtual communities involves a close combination of social relationships, social trust (Karnouskos, Hondroudaki, Vilmos, & Csik, 2004). And these combinations have been continuously strengthened in offline communication. For Chinese consumers and purchasing agents, the establishment of this trust relationship is exactly the same.

Trust from Potential Consumers

Trust from potential consumers refers to the initial trust built on the recommendation and trust of the acquaintance relationship that a potential customer has in an unfamiliar trustee (R. Li et al., 2007). Rong Li and Jaejon Kim point out that trust is considered a key qualifier affecting a new Chinese consumer's purchasing decision (R. Li et al., 2007). Because consumers are unlikely to patronize a *dàigòu* that fails to create a sense of trust (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, & Saarinen, 1999). Thus potential trust is indirectly influenced by the Chinese *guānxi* culture and, to a certain extent, exerts a restraint on the trustee. It can provide a certain sense of psychological security and emotional protection for the first unfamiliar purchasing transaction. Such as consumer Xiaoxiao said:

“Sometimes, if these acquaintance dàigòu do not have the brand or product I want. It is not a rare thing to find another unfamiliar dàigòu through the recommendation of this acquaintance dàigòu or another friend. Because they are familiar with each other, and as one of the acquaintances of them, I can naturally enjoy the trust conveyed in this acquaintance network.”

——Consumer Xiaoxiao, April 11, 2019, Weigong Cun, Beijing

Another potential form of trust is built on the repeated consumer. It is referred to as the trust that the customer has in a familiar trustee after having some satisfying transaction experience with the trustee (H.-W. Kim, Xu, & Koh, 2004). It reflects feelings of security in the purchasing response (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). These findings can also be verified from the development process of *dàigòu*.

With the energetic development of *dàigòu*, the unpaid *dàigòu* originally existed *shúrén guānxi* that sporadically and intermittently based on blood, kinship, and geographic relations have gradually transitioned to rational, repetitive, large-scale, collective, and professional paid *dàigòu*. Under such circumstances, *dàigòu* has gradually turned from the non-utilitarian and mutual help communication into an economic transaction of economic rationality communication. The transformation from trust between *shúrén guānxi* to trust between the recommendation makes the *dàigòu* relationship have a natural cornerstone of trust.

6.2.3 Prepayment Rule between *Dàigòu* and Clients

On this basis, *dàigòu* also creates the prepayment rule, which is an unprecedented increase in the trust relationship between the two parties on the *dàigòu* transaction. Yu explained that such prepayment rule is easy to understand.

“Because paying commission and prepayment for dàigòu can effectively guarantee the continuation of dàigòuguānxi and facilitate to complete more dàigòu transactions. Because for any product that is not easy to order or purchase, no one wants to bear the risk to spend money and stockpile it by themselves.”

“Moreover, for the luxury buyers, most of the goods they want are quite expensive. An individual dàigòu does not have such a purchase ability to buy if their clients don’t pay first. This is also the most important reason why dàigòu often call themselves a porter (bānyùn gōng 搬运工). Because for bānyùn gōng, it refers to a person who works by carrying things for others. In dàigòu research, bānyùn gōng mainly refers to helping Chinese customers purchase the selected overseas goods and transport them back to China. Thus, this work is not a profit-oriented business, especially at the very beginning stage which relies on guānxi connection.”

—Yuyu, July 6, 2018, during the Delvaux Sale 2018 at Etterbeek

In the period when the *dàigòu* is equivalent to *bānyùn gōng*, the purchase service provided by them can basically be simplified into three steps, namely, collecting money, buying the overseas goods, and sending the goods to consumers in China. The purchasing service in this process does not involve the need to sell the personalized labor, and the purchased goods rarely have problems such as the need to order, difficulty to buy, need to face purchase restrictions, or need to solve the *pèihuò* problem, which will be mentioned later. Therefore, their service in this stage is called the “carrying goods back to China” service, i.e., a porter’s service.

The last reason for the prepaid rule is that the purchase of goods from any *dàigòu* are usually very complicated, normally they need to order scores of things in advance. Customers who conform to prepaid rules can avoid mistakes or be forgotten. In this stage, the work of *dàigòu* is focused on holding consumers’ money to help them purchase items. Consequently, they are just working as a shopping agent, and everyone defaults to the potential prepayment rules. In this process, no one is worried about being deceived after paying the full amount in

advance. Because nobody wants to fall out of trust that they built for many years in their personal *guānxi* system. Yuyu continue to explain:

“The destruction of this social connection that has been operating in family, friends, and relatives may affect the entire family network. Therefore, the new customers introduced by acquaintances will generally be treated nicely. For example, dàigòu under the recommendation from a friend can ask for a little more commission, but they never can sell friends’ friends or relatives’ friends the fake products.”

——Yuyu, July 6, 2018, the Delvaux Sale 2018 at Etterbeek

A good reliable *dàigòu* is the one who not only helps the clients buy the items they want from abroad but also establishes trustworthy virtual relations with the clients. Most of the clients agree that they are more likely to shop again with the same *dàigòu* if the previous experience was pleasant.

6.3 Extended Clients by Word-of-Mouth Recommendation

For the Chinese consumers addicted to *dàigòu* channel, word-of-mouth recommendation marketing is by far the most powerful form of advertising (Lang & Hyde, 2013). For most *dàigòu*, word-of-mouth recommendation is also the best way to extend their business scale (Business of fashion, 2014:04). In this word-of-mouth recommendation, *dàigòu* do not need to advertise themselves. Because new clients will add them as Wechat friends through their friends’ verbal recommendations or their friends’ good shopping adventures. It means that there is a potential, intangible relationship based on their common friends’ trust between the new customers and the *dàigòu*.

WeChat platform provides the user the great online i.e., virtual social community to accumulate a wide spectrum of relations ranging from strong *guānxi* relationships (e.g., blood relatives, close friends, best colleagues), to weak *guānxi* relationships (e.g., friends' friend, colleagues' friends, classmates' relatives) to latent *guānxi* relationships (e.g., normal clients add the WeChat friends through recommending). This way of expanding online WeChat friends through offline relationships facilitates connecting with others, which undoubtedly helps to strengthen the virtual supports and social connection between the *dàigòu* and the potential new consumers in the virtual community (G. Wang, Zhang, & Zeng, 2019). It also to a certain extent increases the purchase probability of the potential new consumers.

Through this larger virtual *guānxi* network on WeChat, it can enable the Chinese consumers to access more diverse global consumer product resources through their WeChat moments (Shen & Gong, 2019). In this process, certainty, familiarity, and good purchasing experience are assumed to increase the extended client's prerequisites of trust (Shen & Gong, 2019). Therefore, we can see the magical operation mentioned in the interview with Yuanyuan, i.e., a Chinese who lives overseas, just post a photo of an overseas product on her WeChat Moments, then she would possibly receive countless orders of these products. And she would eventually be cultivated into a *dàigòu* by these countless orders⁸.

Another form of word-of-mouth recommendation is scanning the *dàigòu*'s Wechat accounts or QR codes to extend the customers. Mengling always said that some of her clients always send her WeChat QR code to their friends in reality. In this way, she added a growing number of new potential clients on WeChat. Because all these clients have a very good *guānxi* connection with the recommendation of *shúrén guānxi*. It means this good *guānxi* connection, in reality, will transfer to the WeChat

⁸Here, the word "countless orders" refers to the endless demands from her offline social relations for asking her help to purchase overseas products

friends network too. They obtained new clients through the introduction of old friends. No one wants to damage the trust relationship established on the network of friends for little benefit. Because it is difficult to add new consumers through the way of friends recommend for a long time in the future, if this trust relationship is broken.

Group Chat is another way of approaching unfamiliar clients, which is good cross-platform support and perfect for professional online discussion (Zeng, Deng, Wang, & Liu, 2016). WeChat provides a group chat function for strangers to converse. Every user can join a new group by scanning the group QR code, being invited by an existing group member, or clicking a group link (Y. Zhang et al., 2018). In the same group, the unfamiliar members are like instant messengers, but they can add each other to be friends without introduction. Users in the group could send messages, pictures, voices, videos, and links. For *dàigòu* and their clients, group Chat has become a popular way to propagandize purchasing activities. In this process, *dàigòu* have been gradually surpassing the companies to act as a directly personalized purchasing service provider and establish a direct customer relationship.



Fig. 6.1 Purchasing goods through WeChat

Source: screenshots by the author from different participants' WeChat Moments, consulted: March 3, 2021. Translated by the author.

Note: in order to protect the personal privacy of the participants, the WeChat profiles were pix-elated.

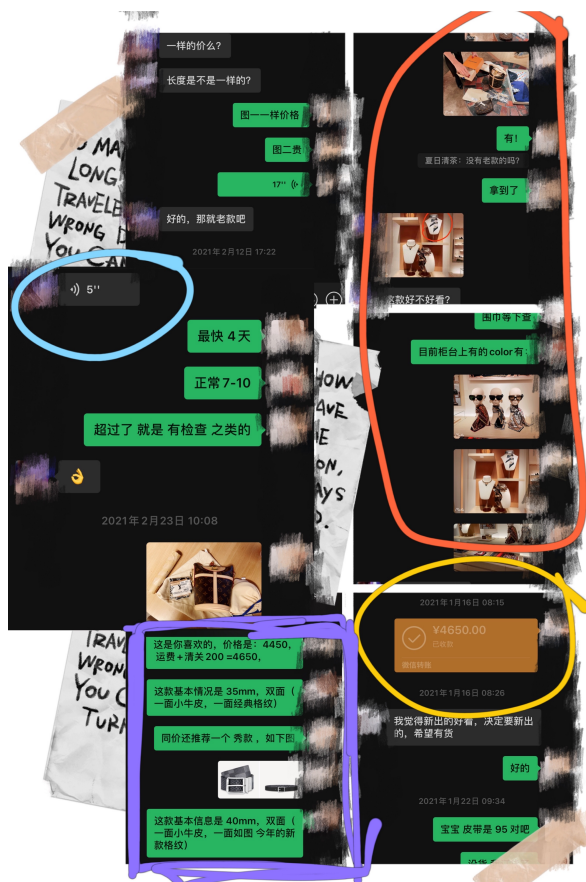


Fig. 6.2 *Dàigòu* communicated with buyers on WeChat

Source: screenshots by the author from different participants' WeChat message, Accessed: March 3, 2021. Translated by the author.

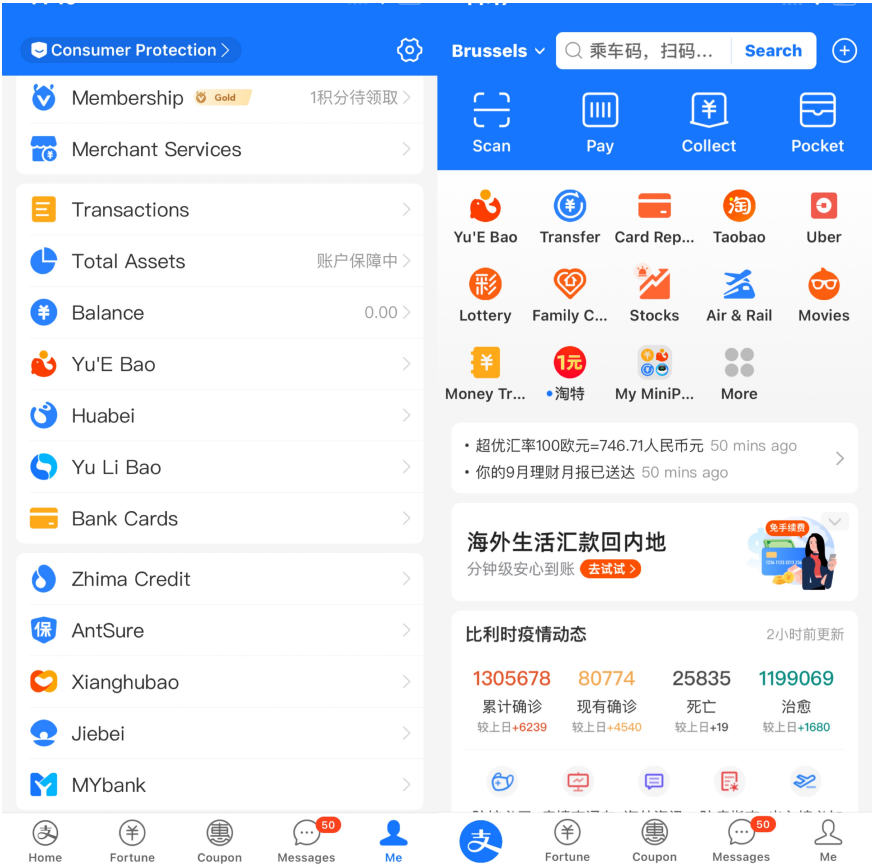


Fig. 6.3 The homepage of mobile Alipay

Source: The homepage of the author’s Alipay. Accessed: Oct 23, 2021.



Fig. 6.4 Alipay currency exchange function

Source: screenshot of the author’s Alipay. Accessed: Oct 23, 2021.



Fig. 6.5 China's online payment user scale and utilization rate
Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), June, 2020. Translated by the author, accessed Feb 1, 2021.



Fig. 6.6 China's mobile payment user scale and utilization rate
Source: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), June, 2020. Translated by the author, accessed Feb 1, 2021.

7

Irreplaceable Labor Service of *Dàigòu*

REGARDING why Chinese overseas *dàigòu* can successfully establish their own *dàigòu* business and the professional characteristics, many researchers and participants usually attribute the reasons to the inherent features of the Chinese *guānxi* culture. However, in the process of forming this global professional system, the research still encountered great doubts. For example, many people thought that *dàigòu* is a gray industry and cannot develop for a long time (Huang, He, & Chen, 2020; X. Zhang et al., 2021; Z. Zhang & Feng, 2017; K. Zhao, Zhao, & Deng, 2016). Through this research, I became more and more aware that the labor service provided by Chinese *dàigòu* will continue to exist for a long time in the future, which also has certain social and cultural values. This certainly deserves more investigation in the future. The narration in this chapter is the result of further unfolding many of the issues I discussed before when I entered the process of writing the

thesis. To a certain extent, the depth and breadth of this part of the content have yet to be further explored. Therefore, I sincerely hope that this quick discussion can provide a more comprehensive overview of the existence and development of *dàigòu*.

7.1 The Limited Purchase Policy in Infant Formula

The dairy product contamination incident that broke out in mainland China in 2008 caused Chinese consumers to worry about the quality and safety of domestic milk powder. After experiencing this powder incident, almost every Chinese parent was looking for overseas relationships to buy overseas milk powder since 2008.¹ In some countries, canned milk powder is snapped up by overseas Chinese who serve Chinese parents. These overseas Chinese are not necessarily all professional agents. But the high-density purchase demand of Chinese consumers has led to the emergency of milk powder supply crisis in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. After purchasing limits on the amount that can be exported to mainland China, the fear of Chinese parents for an end of the safe supply of baby milk powder became a great problem.

In order to avoid the spread of this trend in overseas societies, and to safeguard enough infant milk powder for local residents, a considerable number of countries restricted Chinese consumers from snapping up regional milk powder, starting from May 2012. Countries that produce substantial amounts of milk powder such as Australia, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, amongst others, successively issued “milk powder purchase limitations” (*nǎi fěn xiàngòu zhèngcè* 奶粉限购政策). Some countries stipulated that each person could only buy two cans of milk powder per day to deter crazy Chinese consumers. This phenomenon once caused a global milk shortage panic.

¹ For a detailed discussion of this event, I refer to the fourth section of Chapter 4.

Against this background, the purchase cost for baby milk formula has increased. The Chinese buyers, even under a strong *guānxi* connection, gradually need to pay a certain commission to maintain the balance of the urgent purchasing panic. After this milk powder incident, *dàigòu* began to differentiate. Some part-time *dàigòu* abandoned the part-time job in the infant formula area. While others embarked on a path of a professional stage.

For example, some international Chinese students, who work as junior *dàigòu* abandoned it for reasons as follows.

“In order to ship the milk powder back to China smoothly, dàigòu needs to prepare (buy) bubble film, tape, paper box, and foam box. But these materials are usually sold for a package, if not, they are sold for single at a high price. In other words, if the dàigòu only buys milk powder for the relatives occasionally, or if this is not a highly repetitive business, purchasing milk powder for friends in China is actually not cheap.”

——Meng, Sep 24, 2021, Wechat voice call

Through the interviews, we found that the job of a *dàigòu* in purchasing milk powder has changed from helping others with a small amount of effort to selling labor that requires careful calculation. Meng said:

“In fact, helping relatives buy milk powder is no mean feat. For example, buying milk powder for relatives is definitely not as simple as what you think: just walking into the store and buying milk powder. Since every overseas Chinese is basically helping their

domestic friends to buy milk powder, many stores, therefore, have already entered a situation where there is no milk powder to be bought. It is not easy to buy a certain amount (usually 6 cans) of baby milk powder for a newbie dàigòu. Because this basically means that this newbie needs to visit different stores or supermarkets many times and browse different websites multiple times to be able to buy the specific amount of milk powder.”

—Meng, Sep 24, 2021, WeChat Voice call

In such a severe situation, Chinese consumers with eager needs for overseas milk powder may not be able to access effective and useful support from their overseas relatives². But the professional *dàigòu* on WeChat recommended by friends can serve as supportive outlets. Because they truly understand how to acquire the foreign infant formula milk, as well as they could offer more practical *dàigòu* support services, such as consulting, ordering, purchasing, and delivering the overseas milk powder, etc. This kind of labor service that requires *dàigòu* to order milk powder multiple times, in multiple locations frequently, is not an easy case that every Chinese living overseas to complete. Therefore, those who stayed in this purchasing area began to move towards professionalism. They sell their labor and time to provide professional personal consulting and purchasing services for Chinese consumers.

For *dàigòu* who had experienced the milk powder purchase restriction policy from overseas societies and finally stayed in this market, their *dàigòu* business has gradually expanded to other areas which need more specific personalized labor. With the growth of Chinese consumers' broader and more comprehensive demand for overseas commodities, Chinese overseas *dàigòu* services have also evolved from purchasing merely milk powder to purchasing daily necessities, luxury brands, and

²Here, the overseas relatives mainly refers to that non-professional *dàigòu*.

high-value investment items such as scarce jewelry, costly watches, and valuable diamonds, etc.

7.2 Luxury Lipstick Working as the Substitute of Luxury

In fact, in the interview, many consumers who are not keen on *dàigòu* always asked the questions: ³

“Even the luxury cosmetics purchased through dàigòu channels will be half price cheaper, I still don’t understand why these consumers are not willing to spend tens of RMB on domestic lipstick? And why do they rush to spend hundreds of RMB on luxury lipsticks?”

——Consumer Zhai, Sep 30, 2016, Paris

“Except for the logo printed on the lid of the lipstick, I don’t think there will be any difference between the two lipsticks when they are applied to the lips.”

——Consumer Bing, Oct 24, 2017, Namur

But the Chinese consumers, who can accept lipstick for hundreds of RMB, have a common understanding of the value of luxury cosmetics. That is, no matter the medium, luxury brands always tend to present a certain lifestyle, personality, taste, or identity (J. Ma, Mo, & Zhao, 2021; X. Xu, 2013). For those primary luxury consumers who are just entering the luxury market, luxury lipsticks (e.g., Chanel, Dior, Lancôme, YSL, Givenchy) without any doubt work as the substitute for luxury (L. Jiang

³The data source in this part mainly comes from the compilation of WeChat discussions and the discussions with consumers in the fieldwork from 2016 to 2021. The interview location was on WeChat, Belgium, and surrounding countries.

& Cova, 2012). They believe that by acquiring luxury lipsticks, they can perceive a certain lifestyle, personality, unique taste or identity of luxury brands.

Particularly for those consumers who are young, who just economically independent, and in the initial stage of consuming luxury goods cannot afford the same luxury brand bags or clothes, but they can obtain the same satisfaction and joy by consuming a piece of ornamental luxury lipsticks (Falkoff, 2021). Compared with expensive luxury products, luxury lipstick brings almost the same social significance to the consumers. For example, lots of Chinese consumers said: ⁴

“The feeling of owning an expensive luxury lipstick, for me, is almost the same as the joy of buying an Hermès bag.”

——Consumer Yao, comes from Kunming, Jan 01, 2017, Wechat discussion

“When I bought a Givenchy pink lambskin lipstick from dàigòu channel that was out of stock for a long time, I felt that I had the whole world.”

——dàigòu X, May 10, 2018, Rotterdam

“The lips with Chanel lipstick are totally different, which makes my smile not only textured but also expensive”

——Consumer CC, come from Wuhan, Jan 05, 2018, Wechat discussion

⁴The data source in this part mainly comes from the compilation of WeChat discussions with different consumers and the interviews with consumers in the fieldwork or WeChat. Date: 2016-2021, the interview location: Wechat, China, Belgium and surrounding countries.

“I used the most expensive lipstick, and I felt really more energetic when I went to work.”

——*dàigòu Zhai, Sep 30, 2016, Paris*

“When I got a global out-of-stock lipstick from the dàigòu approach, I felt that I was served by them (dàigòu) like a queen.”

——*dàigòu Bing, Oct 24, 2017, Namur*

Experiencing the joy of consuming small luxury items as a kind of practice of conspicuous consumption, making these Chinese consumers in their infancy stage full of confidence in their future work and life. The level of future income makes them rethink the value and meaning of work. The possession of small items of big-name luxury goods also gives those Chinese consumers greater enthusiasm to work.

For luxury brand lipsticks obtained from *dàigòu* channel, in addition to bringing these experiences, such as brand experience, it confers to the consumers the possibility to express themselves, the status-seeking, the conformity, the face-saving, to save money, a high quality and fashion adventure, etc (L. Jiang & Cova, 2012). On a personal level, it can ensure that consumers spend the least money but get genuine luxury tiny products and personal purchasing services.

In addition to bringing a unique consumer experience, the price difference of buying big-name lipsticks and cosmetics through the *dàigòu* channel is also one of the important reasons why Chinese consumers prefer *dàigòu*. The following report was an interview with Shaohua Yi, an associate researcher at the Institute of Financial and Economic Strategy of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in 2012 when *dàigòu* was just emerging in mainland China. Through this interview, we can

get a sense of the huge price difference through the *dàigòu* channel in 2012:

“China implements a high import tariff policy for luxury products, which varies from 6.4% to 25% depending on the category of goods. However, in addition to tariffs, for overseas products sold in China, it is also needed to pay value-added tax, consumption tax, business tax, etc. This has resulted in the final retail price of overseas goods sold in China being nearly two-thirds higher than the imported CIF (Cost Insurance and Freight) price.”

*“Take Estée Lauder eye cream as an example, the CIF price is 175 RMB, plus 30% consumption tax, 10% import tariff, and various import costs. The duty-paid price is 274.5 RMB; after the enters circulation, it will be required to continue to pay about 17% value-added tax, 5% business tax, urban maintenance and construction tax, etc. We also must consider the advertising and publicity fees of this eye cream. In the end, the final retail price of this eye cream in domestic direct stores is about 540 RMB, which is 3.08 times higher.”*⁵

Fei Yu, female, full-time housewife and a part-time *dàigòu*, lives in Leuven, who had 6.5 years (2010-2017) of *dàigòu* practice. I knew her by Jianya’s introduction. She shared a similar example of price differences. And this kind of experience is more common in other luxury cosmetics brands. Fei Yu said:

⁵Business.sohu.com. 2012. Why are international luxury goods selling expensive in China. [online] Available at: <<https://business.sohu.com/20120814/n350589207.shtml>> [Accessed 14 October 2021].

“Taking the most popular YSL brand rouge pur couture the slim matte lipstick (also known as xiǎo jīnguǎn 小金管) as an example. The price of this lipstick on the official website in mainland China is 350 RMB. But the original price of this lipstick in European cosmetics stores is only 39.95 euros (approximately 297 RMB). While many overseas cosmetics are often discounted. As Figure 7.1 shows the discounted price of this lipstick in Europe is only 19.95 euros (approximately 149 RMB). But most consumers can buy this lipstick from the dàigòu approach only at 169 RMB. It is more than 50% cheaper than the channel of mainland specialty stores. Moreover, this price still includes the purchasing fee, the international shipping fee, and the price after the domestic shipping fee.”

——Fei Yu, May 21, 2018, Brussels

From the above example, we found that the existence of the *dàigòu* makes the luxury lipstick that originally has the function to distinguish the Chinese consumers' consumption ability and the level of consumption gradually become the first experimental product to enter the luxury world. In the interviews, consumer Bo said,

“To make a decision to buy a lipstick costing 350 RMB may need to think about it for a while, but if I know that there is a channel that can acquire a guaranteed quality luxury lipstick for only 169 RMB, I hardly need to think about it, I just buy it. Especially when I found that the lipsticks I bought through this channel were not only cheap but also genuine. So in the future, when I need other cosmetics or overseas products, I will find this person to help me again without hesitation.”

In the consumer market in Mainland China, due to the influence of regional pricing mechanisms, tariffs, and exchange rate fluctuations, etc., the pricing of the same product in Mainland China is 15% to 50% higher than the price of overseas markets, which is almost a default “rule” . The existence of *dàigòu* just narrowed this huge price gap. *Dàigòu* also let the consumption of luxury goods gradually become secularized, that is, for every Chinese consumer, as long as they yearn for luxury goods, *dàigòu* can always provide them suitable choices that can suit their consumption ability and expectations. Therefore, the lipsticks of Luxury Brands not only work as a substitute for luxury brands but also act as the key for Chinese consumers to enter the luxury world, in an equal and less huge global price difference way.

This “saving money” situation from *dàigòu* approach is more prominent in the high value-added products of luxury brands such as Hermès, Chanel, Delvaux, Gucci, Dior. Therefore, the service provided by Chinese overseas *dàigòu* has gradually become synonymous with: “guarantee the quality, improve the happiness, help consumers save money, ensure the quality of consumer goods and improve the quality of consumers’ life.” The function of *dàigòu* not only sells their labor, service, and time, but also supplies the Chinese consumers a joyful mood, enthusiasm for work, and the driving force for future consumption of higher-value consumer goods.

7.3 The Hunger Marketing at Louis Vuitton

The limited purchase policy does not only appear on overseas dairy products. Lutana is a shop assistant working at the Louis Vuitton store in Brussels. She has worked there for 8 years. Lutana has been giving me a lot of help since I engaged in *dàigòu* for this research. She claims that she knows Chinese *dàigòu* very well. She told me that at the Louis Vuitton store in Belgium, even in the whole Europe, there has been a

limit on the number of products purchased policy (*xiàngòu zhèngcè* 限购政策). From her point of view, the establishment of this policy is very reasonable, Lutana says:

“Because every Chinese (dàigòu) who snapped up bags have superior purchasing power. This leads to frequent out-of-stocks if there is no limit policy towards them. The average consumer, therefore, has a very low possibility to buy the bags. In this context, a limited purchase policy for handbags mainly aimed at Chinese consumers was born around 2015. Of course, no one has ever admitted that this policy is aimed at Chinese consumers.”

“Before 2018, this purchase restriction policy requires consumers (mainly Chinese) with a valid certificate (ID card or passport) can purchase 5 Louis Vuitton handbags within 6 months (silk scarves, wallets, and belts are not counted). After 2018, however, this purchase restriction policy has become that Chinese consumers can only buy two handbags within half a year, and the remaining three places are used to buy peripheral products such as silk scarves, wallets, shoes, belts, clothes, or Louis Vuitton jewelry, etc.”

——Lutana, Nov 19, 2018, at Louis Vuitton store in Brussels

Lots of Chinese consumers made it clear that this policy is a discriminatory provision for Chinese guests. Many Chinese *dàigòu* have a similar feeling, Meiling complained :

“We have never seen Louis Vuitton restrict European consumers. Customers from the Middle East or other regions do not have this requirement too. Sometimes, even the bags are just displayed in

the window, but the shop assistant always tell you that they are not for sale or they don't have stock. However, when you turn around to leave, you find that the foreigner next to you was shopping for this bag and got it!"

——Meiling Li, June 08, 2018, Antwerp

Lutana explained this policy:

"Even if foreigners buy many bags at once, it is only an individual case and does not affect our supply. However, if Chinese consumers, especially Chinese dàigòu are not restricted, they can buy all the bags at the first second when the store opens."

——Lutana, Nov19, 2018, at Louis Vuitton boutique in Brussels

Her description is not exaggerated at all, especially in many news items we will easily see similar reports, such as a report from an article by Mailman Sport (2016) corroborates the Chinese *dàigòus'* crazy purchasing power:

"This empty window display of the Cartier shop in Russia was not robbed, instead, the items were all sold out by Chinese dàigòu."

——*China's Daigou Obsession, Mailman Sport, 2016.*⁶

In this context, it is not easy for ordinary Chinese tourists or consumers to buy hot commodities, especially classical luxury bags. In other words, for average consumers or tourists, there being a quota to

purchase Louis Vuitton handbags, there is often no stock in the store for them left.

The Chinese *dàigòu* that sell their professional labor services on behalf of the purchasing just meet the needs of these consumers. Meanwhile, the Chinese *dàigòu* are very sensitive to the availability of luxury goods. For example, Louis Vuitton has released a popular mini backpack (i.e., Palm Springs mini backpack, LV 小书包), which will cause the entire *dàigòu* community to look for this bag. Consequently, there has been a weird situation, that is, looking for a *dàigòu* may be faster than going to a specialty store to buy the scarce bags.

Not everyone believes in this shortage theory. Many people think that this shortage is just an illusion from the marketing of luxury goods companies, which is the hunger marketing we often hear. It refers to commodity providers who intend to reduce production in order to maintain higher prices and profit of margins of commodities. However, it is an indisputable fact that Chinese consumers rely on overseas *dàigòu*. From a macro perspective, the large number of *dàigòu* and the shortage of products in demand often coexist at the same time. However, this does not affect the single Chinese consumer's purchasing the hot overseas products through *dàigòu* channel.

Especially for luxury brands that do not lack customers, the hunger marketing strategy is just a way to preserve the scarce luxury bag resources (H. Yan & Qu, 2014). The purpose of hunger marketing is not only to increase the price but also to generate high added value to the brand, so as to finally establish a high-value image for the brand (Lo, 2021; Y.-N. Yan, Huang, Li, Chuang, & Wang, 2019). Therefore, luxury marketing does not consider the large market share and the short-term benefit (H. Yan & Qu, 2014). The consequence of hunger marketing makes it for the consumers very difficult to buy goods.

Each luxury brand determines the brand's pricing strategy based on positioning and market segmentation (Q. Xu, 2020). Louis Vuit-

ton, for instance, in marketing uses the limited number policy of hunger marketing, to create an atmosphere of shortage of supply on out-of-demand bags to increase the desire of customers to buy their products and created some sense of panic among Chinese consumers and Chinese overseas *dàigòu* (Q. Xu, 2020). In this trend, the existence of *dàigòu* is very necessary. They inject exuberant vitality into the domestic market. *Dàigòu* Meng commented on their work like this:

“We are not simply carriers (bān yùn gōng 搬运工) of overseas goods. We provide our customers with exclusive global goods, especially those scarce luxury goods, with the least cost. What we sell is not just simple labor, because this labor is irreplaceable.”

——Meng, Oct 20, 2021, WeChat discussion

As of the period of my thesis fieldwork, the purchasing service of Chinese *dàigòu* has been extended to almost all rare luxury goods. Through the survey of the luxury market, it is found that a classic luxury bag has a special function: it is a financial product that can be invested and has the potential for appreciation. Consumer Bo said:

“Due to hunger marketing, and a 5% -25% increase in price rate per year of the most top luxury brands, the luxury goods gained an investing and the collection value in the luxury market. For example, the price of the Speedy25 bag from Louis Vuitton with a huge increase of 104% from 2008 to 2021.

——Consumer Bo, April 19, 2019, Minzu University of China, Beijing

Such a situation where the value of buying a bag can be preserved and increased, not only appears in luxury bags of Louis Vuitton, it has almost become the general law of classic luxury bags. According to research based on UnionPay transaction data for the 2019 China Luxury Report released by McKinsey & Company shows in 2018 (Figure 7.2), Chinese consumers at home and abroad spent 770 billion RMB (115 billion US dollars) on luxury items, which is equivalent to 30% of the global spend. It is expected about 65% of global luxury consumption will be conducted by Chinese consumers by 2025.

The thoughts of many consumers also corroborate this data from the side. Many Chinese consumers who like to purchase luxury bags excitedly said⁷:

“Buying stocks and buying funds cannot guarantee the continued growth of investment, but the growth rate of good-looking classic luxury bags never disappointed me. For example, the rate of return price brought by the annual price increase of these bags still can give me a good price in the second-hand luxury goods market. Even if I already showed off using this bag for 10 years.”

——Consumer A, Feb 05, 2021, comes from Shanghai, WeChat discussion

Moreover, through the investigation, we must be clear about the fact that the classic products of the first-line luxury brands are not only never discounted, but their prices are increasing every year, and the annual increase is not low. According to the analysis data from CBNDData (DT Finance)⁸, one of the classic handbags of Chanel named

⁷The data source in this part mainly comes from the compilation of WeChat discussions with different consumers. Date: 2016-2021

⁸CBNDData, also known as DT Finance (DT 财经), CBN (First Financial 第一财经) or First

“Chanel 2.55” has increased in price in the past 10 years, and the average annual increase is as high as 9.1%. For more detailed information about this price changing trend please see Figure 7.3.

What’s more unbelievable is that in 2020, when COVID-19 was raging around the world and the global economy was not optimistic, the trend of luxury bags price increase was even more fierce. Take some products under the three major luxury brands of Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Dior as examples. After comparing their prices in October 2019 and May 2020, it is found that the most dramatic price increase is the classic flap bag of Chanel (Chanel cf), which has increased by 25.5%.

In terms of brands, even if Louis Vuitton increased its prices five times during the COVID-19 period from Oct 2019 to April 2021, the increasing trend of LV was still relatively flat. On average, the increase was about 8.3%. But the average gains of Dior and Chanel were as high as 11.8% and 15.1% (see Figure 7.4).

Commercial Data Center (第一商数据中心), is based on Alibaba’s commercial database and is dedicated to analyzing and insight into the dynamics of China’s consumer industry.

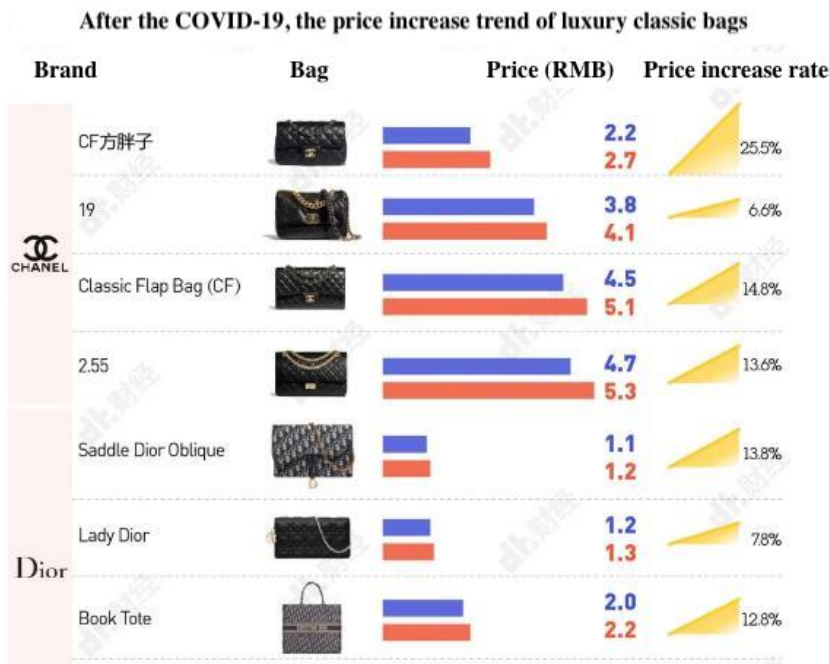


Fig. 7.4 After the COVID-19, the price increase trend of luxury classic bags

Source: DT Finance, translated by the author.

Note: the blue bar is the price before the increase; the red bar is the price after the increase. Accessed: Oct 9, 2021.

Taking into account the average price, market positioning, and the price increase of these three brands, we boldly believe that the higher the positioning of luxury goods, the higher the price increases. Under such a trend, the fact that many consumers agree to purchase luxury bags from the *dàigòu* channel naturally has a function:

“*Buying early is equal to saving money*” (攒钱的速度, 赶不上涨价的幅度). Here “*Buying early is equal to saving money*” refers to what I translate “*The speed of saving money never keeps up with the price increase*” (zǎnqián de sùdù, yǒngyuǎn gǎnbùshàng zhǎngjià de fúdù 攒

钱的速度, 赶不上涨价的幅度)。In other word, if a consumer has always wanted to buy a certain luxury bag, it may be a very wise choice to buy it early. Spending a lot of money on a luxury bag here will not be regarded as paying a premium for the brand. On the contrary, it will be regarded as a good and courageous investment in one's dream or hobby.

“*The earlier you buy it the sooner you can enjoy it*” (*zǎomǎi zǎo xiǎngshòu* 早买早享受). This is the point of view expressed by many female consumers in interviews, and they generally have a sense of joy that “*they spend money where it can be put to the best use*” (*bǎqián huāzài dāorènrshàng* 把钱花在刀刃上). The evaluation standard of this kind of joy has almost nothing to do with the value of the product, whether it is worth it or not. These female consumers are more concerned about this scarce luxury obtained through *dàigòu*, which brings a great sense of happiness and joy to them. They are regarded as priceless. At the same time, this priceless mental feeling has been given an appreciation by the market on the material level. That is the prices of these scarce luxury bags are not depreciated, on the contrary, they have been rising.

As incomes rise, China is transitioning from a saving society to a spending society. A CLSA survey of 340 consumers and 31 luxury store managers in China's tier 1-3 cities found that more and more Chinese consumers have made or are planning a luxury purchase. Those who bought luxury goods in 2018 spent an average of 10.0 to 12.0 percent of their total household income.⁹ Saving to buy luxury goods also has a certain investment value. From an economic perspective, investment requires wealth owners to sacrifice current consumption, purchase or purchase certain accumulated capital in order to achieve value appreciation in the future (Luenberger et al., 1997; Gomes, 2001; Mott, 2012).

⁹Finfacts. ie. 2011. China's economy is still sustained by industry; Set to become the world's largest domestic market for luxury goods. Available at: <http://www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/Asiaconomy/article1021684_printer.shtml> [Accessed 28 September 2021].

However, the value added by investment luxury items does not require investors to sacrifice current consumption. On the contrary, this type of investment encourages and stimulates consumption, and to a certain extent stimulates the market's demand for luxury goods and increases the value of luxury.

Therefore, among those who have purchasing power, this collection value from luxury products has an incredible potential price drive. The consumption motive for shopping globally through the Chinese *dàigòu* is greatly predicated on the existence of price differences (Chandra, Head, & Tappata, 2014). The rich Chinese consumers who have the ability to purchase high-value luxury are addicted to purchasing (investing) in luxury goods. They often ridicule: ¹⁰

“The investment in cherishing leather or limited edition bags, the diamond with clarity quality, pieces of jewelry from celebrities obtained from the auction, limited edition clothes, and shoes have more stable profits than investing in stocks and cars. Because of the return on investment, high-value luxury goods could easily be verified on yearly international auctions markets.”

——Consumer A, comes from Shanghai, Feb 05, 2021, Wechat discussion

For many investment-oriented consumers, purchasing classical luxury items has already become a wise investment. An experienced professional *dàigòu* has become an indispensable personal shopping assistant in their pursuit of global luxury goods. Especially, the post-COVID-19 has made logistics more difficult, but it still only takes between two and three weeks to ship products to China through *dàigòu* approach. Moreover, with added tax, insurance, certain brands' prices are still lower

¹⁰The data source in this part mainly comes from the compilation of WeChat discussion. Date: 2016-2021

than can be found domestically. With luxury brands increasing their prices globally, the business will be particularly strong for the *dàigòu* in the future for a while.

7.4 The Unspoken Rule of Hermès (*Pèihuò guīzé* 配货规则)

Many consumers living in mainland China complained in the interviews,¹¹

“Before dàigòu was born, even if I accept spending the high price on the same luxury product in China, unfortunately, I might still have no chance to get the items I strive for. In other words, I have money, but I can’t buy the luxury products I want.”

——Consumer Jiang, Oct 23, 2018, comes from Shanghai, WeChat discussion

This sold-out situation is extremely common in the Chinese domestic market, especially among the limited edition luxury products or some other modish designs. For example, Hermès Birkin and Kelly bags are limited to purchase. But one rarely knows that it may take a couple of years to put your name on the waiting list to buy this bag. Consumer Bo¹² says,

¹¹The data source in this part mainly comes from the compilation of WeChat discussions and the interviews with consumers in the fieldwork. Date: 2016-2021, the interview location: WeChat, Belgium and surrounding countries.

¹²Consumer bo, female, 35 years old, a native of Beijing, has nearly 10 years of *dàigòu* experience and likes luxury goods and fashion brands very much. She is the author’s classmate during the postgraduate study period. At the beginning of the author’s research on *dàigòu* topic, she asked me to purchase luxury goods many times and provided for my research a lot of first-hand information. The interviews with Bo were mainly conducted through WeChat and voice calls. The interview format is an open interview, generally without the main theme, but most of them were focused on the purchased product and its characteristics. During the author’s fieldwork in China in April 2019, I met with Bo many times, ate meals, and discussed the *dàigòu*-related topics. During the 2020 COVID-19, P has helped me to supplement the information through WeChat interviews many times.

“Although your name has been placed on the waiting list of Hermès Birkin, for example, it does not mean you can quickly buy it. Normally, after you put your name on the waiting list, you still need to wait for half a year or a year, then you may finally be eligible to get the admission ticket to touch the Birkin or Kelly bag. The meaning of the admission ticket is: you are eligible to buy the Birkin or Kelly bag, but as to whether you can buy it, you have to go through a round of selection rules (Pèihuò guīzé).”

——*Consumer Bo, April 19, 2019, Minzu University of China, Beijing*

The above story is definitely not unheard of. We can easily find on the internet a large number of crazy tips to teach you how to spend the least time with a plain purchase record to get a Hermès Birkin or Kelly bag or Hermès. In this situation most of the customers, especially the customers from mainland China, really need a professional personal *dàigòu* to help them get an authentic Hermès Birkin, as soon as possible. To this end, they will take the initiative to pay more commissions with great pleasure in order to ensure that they get the Hermès Birkin or Kelly bag that tens of thousands of people are fighting for.

Through investigation, we know that, for a consumer who has an admission ticket to buy a Birkin or Kelly, they usually need to buy a product that is 1:1 or 1:1.5 equivalent to the Birkin or Kelly bag's price. Then they are eventually eligible to buy this bag. For example, a client has a ticket to buy a Birkin bag priced at 7,400 euros, which means for he/she needs to spend 7,400 euros or even 10,000 euros to buy some other Hermès products, such as silk scarves, cups, pillows, woolen blankets, clothing, shoes, wallets, ties, saddles, buckets, umbrellas, playing cards, ashtrays, cloaks, clothes, watches, necklaces, earrings, chair, table lamps, etc.

This is an unspoken rule of Hermès. No one says this, but everyone understands. If you don't follow this rule, then the clerk will tell you that there is no Birkin in stock. This unspoken rule is called *pèihuò* (配货). All the products that come from *pèihuò* are not popular to sell. For example, a Hermès wool blanket usually costs 1,000 euros. Consumer Bo says,

“I think only a lunatic would spend so much money on a blanket.”

——Consumer Bo, April 19, 2019, Minzu University of China, Beijing

Although the consumers who purchase the Birkin or Kelly through *dàigòu* channel don't need to buy such expensive blankets, the unspoken rule *pèihuò* has never changed. In other words, It means that *dàigòu* needs to find a “lunatic” customer to buy all of *pèihuò* products.

This is why the value of a Birkin or Kelly bag on the *dàigòu* market far exceeds its original price. First of all, these professional *dàigòu* help consumers save the long waiting time. Secondly, for any consumer, unspoken rules of the Hermès are inevitable. That is to say, *dàigòu* helps consumers avoid spending money on *pèihuò*.

However, the facts are not as simple as imagined. One Hermès sales representative Laurent¹³ said to me:

“Because Hermès has always insisted on making bags by hand, it

¹³I met Laurent in December 2017 when she helped me order a Hermès picotin bag in size 22, a pair of black patent leather Hermès slippers, and a pair of black Hermès loafer shoes with green leather inside, three 90cm silk scarfs, two kelly gold buckle belts at one time. In the later conversation with Laurent, She whispered “the consumers who took a lot of *pèihuò* like me, but never mentioned that they want to acquire the Birkin, if in the future they still can keep a good purchase record, it is the default of the sales woman to give this kind of consumers the priority to enter the waiting list”. Laurent is a senior clerk at Hermès and has several years of experience in luxury stores. She is one of the few sales person in the Hermès store in Brussels that is eligible to order Hermès Birkin bag. Since I knew Laurent in 2017, I have been asking her help to order the small Hermès products. It was not until 2019 that I had the first opportunity to put my name on the waiting list to buy Hermès Birkin bag.

leads to a surprisingly low annual output. All the Hermès bags have been spent several months even more than one year on the craftsman's hand, not only that but also the after-sales services of Hermès bag will be provided by the same craftsman for the whole life too. In other words, you have found a lifelong doctor for your bag. This bag doctor clearly knows the past and present of your bag. She/he can provide your bag with decades of best care and maintenance services."

——Laurent, June 23, 2018, at Hermès boutique in Brussels

This is why many consumers compare it to an "heirloom" when they talk about Hermès. We can often hear stories like this during interviews. For example, a young and beautiful lady proudly showed off carrying the Hermès bag her mother gave her and enjoyed free zipper updates and leather care services at the Hermès store. You have to know, this bag has been purchased for almost 20 years. In this case, Hermès needs to use some ways/rules to select the client who really loves Hermès. Laurent continued,

"I know it is not easy for Chinese consumers to accept. While for those old European customers who started to buy Hermès from their grandparents or their parent's generation, they are truly eligible for those Birkin or Kelly."

"For Chinese consumers, they may feel that Hermès is forcing them to buy "useless" expensive goods. However, look at those old consumers who have been consuming Hermès products from the generations of grandparents or parents. In their long generations' spending history, they do consume a lot of 'useless' expensive Her-

mès products, for example, shirts, scarves, teacups, gloves, scarf buttons, jewelry, watches, etc.”

“Moreover, some of these Hermès products purchased by grandparents or parents have been inherited by their offspring as family heritage. In such an inheritance relationship, few people consider whether Hermès products are worth this value. In particular, the vast majority of Hermès products, except for those that have not been preserved, or have been consumed, have always been appreciated in value.”

——Laurent, June 23, 2018, at Hermès boutique in Brussels

An investigation from a second-hand luxury bags market shows that the Hermès bag can earn back at least 1.5-2 times the original price to first-hand customers. Consumer Bo said:

“For example, a price of 6500 euros (about 50,000 RMB) Hermès Kelly bag can be sold for 100,000 to 120,000 RMB in the second-hand market. Compared with traditional investment, consumers can enjoy the fun of buying and holding the bag. These emotional factors are not available in the stock market and property market.”

“As a female consumer, I am not interested in stocks and houses. Because it is impossible to carry a Tesla stock, nor a house on my back to attend some activity or travel somewhere, but I can take a rare Hermès with me. Especially it is constantly rising in value year by year.”

——*Consumer Bo, April 19, 2019, Minzu University of China, Beijing*

For that *dàigòu* agents who are active in the Hermès bag market all the year-round, they provide Chinese consumers with irreplaceable labor services. They are familiar with the Hermès *pèihuò* rules and know how to purchase a popular Hermès Birkin with the fastest speed and the most correct *pèihuò* products. In this process, Chinese consumers can spend the least price and get their favorite Hermès bag as fast as possible.

At the same time, the *dàigòu* have also gradually developed a mature purchasing system for scarce luxury products. For example, they will carry out cross-border cooperation, that is, *dàigòu* from different countries will cooperate to buy the same bag, and then look for the buyer with the highest bid together. For the *pèihuò* products that are not good for sale, Chinese overseas *dàigòu* have gradually developed a special system for selling them.

Figure 7.5 shows that the Kelly bracelet in rose gold set with 61 diamonds worth 11,400 euros, is converted to 85,032 RMB according to the exchange rate on October 10, 2021. However, the price of this bracelet in the Chinese mainland market in April 2020 has already reached 94,500 RMB. But it can be bought unexpectedly through the *dàigòu* channel only for around 40,000 RMB (4xxxx)¹⁴.

From the screenshot of the WeChat chat, we can see that the same male consumer bought two gifts for his girlfriend through the same *dàigòu* in two months. The reason for buying the first gift in April is for the “520” (Valentine’s Day in China). The reason for the second gift buying in June is to celebrate the birthday of his girlfriend.

As shown in Figure 7.6, from the chat history on the left, it can be found that this male consumer also bought a bag for his girlfriend

¹⁴The symbol “4XXXX” marked on the screenshot means that this bracelet can be purchased in the range of 40,000 RMB to less than 50,000 RMB through the Chinese *dàigòu* channels.

through the same *dàigòu* in 2020. Stimulated by this “gift-giving” culture in China, many start-up consumers are very willing to consume these seemingly useless luxury small products, such as Hermès *pèihuò*, and other luxury perfumes, silk scarves, gloves, etc. Its function is like the luxury alternative lipstick we mentioned earlier. Consumers can spend the “minimum” money to buy the “cheapest” Hermès products.

From the dialogue between the author and the friend Yang, it can be seen that Yang has asked the author to purchase overseas products three times in half a year. They are Gucci Dionysus mini handbag, which was purchased in January 2021 and received on February 4, 2021; the Hermes twilly silk scarf was ordered on April 5, 2021, and planned to be delivered on China Valentine’s Day 520 (The 20th of May)¹⁵ for his girlfriend; a Gucci limited commemorative lipstick, which was ordered on June 29, 2021, and was planned to be given to his girlfriend in August for celebrating her birthday.

But Yang isn’t the only customer relying on *dàigòu* to shop in Chinese gift culture. A multitude of young Chinese consumers I met during this research shared the same mind as Yang. For example, Xiaoxiao has been eyeing an LV duffle bag as a reward for surviving the COVID-19 lockdown. But because this bag has been so well-received and consequently hard to get, so she turned to her *dàigòu* on WeChat for help. In addition to YANG and Xiaoxiao, there are also many Chinese consumers who spend their wages or set new life goals to reward themselves. Others, even said *I didn’t shop on Taobao on Double 11, so I came to dàigòu to release my wallet*.

The Chinese seem to be able to create many reasons for giving/shopping gifts. For instance, some health products should be given to the elders during the Spring Festival, and some small gifts should be given between lovers on Valentine’s Day, each other’s birthday, the 520 (May

¹⁵For a more detailed explanation of Chinese 520 Valentine’s Day, please refer to the third section of Chapter 4.

20th), Children's Day (June 1st), Tanabata Festival (Qixi Festival), and Christmas. On festivals such as China's Teacher's Day (Sep 10th), the Mid-Autumn Day, and New Year (Jan 1st), it seems to better prepare some small gifts to teachers, bosses, or colleagues to maintain a long-term relationship. As a principle of reciprocity, usually, the giver will also receive a gift or may get more support on work from the receiver. Consequently, purchasing global consumer products through *dàigòu* seems to be a trend in China's gift-giving culture. Because these foreign products always can bring the gift-giver a feeling, that is "*this gift gain a big ego*" (*yǒu miàn zi* 有面子). Although many foreigners do not understand the strange gift-giving culture of the Chinese. But most Chinese consumers trust in it.

Therefore, the experienced *dàigòu* are always acting as the best middleman for overseas consumer goods, and creating a special consumption channel that specializes in "*Pèihuò*". In this channel, not only can satisfy the purchase pleasure of entry-level luxury enthusiasts. At the same time, it has also increased the possibility that consumers invest in scarce luxury bags.

Cultural and social differences contribute to the rapid growth of the Chinese luxury goods market through *dàigòu* channels. Foreign luxury brands in particular, with logos and signature collections, are particularly desirable. There is nothing the Chinese consumer values more than three little words on the bag: "*Made in France*" or "*Made in Italy*", etc. But, in addition to bringing some conspicuous consumption value to Chinese consumers, these three little words or some big logos are more embodied in what makes them assure it's worth spending because it presents the best product on the planet (Susan Owens, 2015:07:01). Yet, in the interviews, many consumers said that they are now consuming luxury goods because of the value and quality. Especially through *dàigòu* channels, the price of these luxury goods can be greatly reduced. Consumer luxury goods have gradually evolved into a

new consumer culture or consumer value identity in the Chinese.

In this context, “*The demand in the dàigòu market is still strong*”, one of European-based *dàigòu* said. Especially, through *dàigòu* approach, all those three products, including international freight, customs clearance, and insurance fee, helped Yang save more than two thousand yuan. It should be noted that the Gucci bag Yang acquired from *dàigòu* approach is a velvet model, which is more expensive than the cowhide model in the Chinese market, and the Gucci limited edition lipstick is out of stock in China. The most important thing is that Yang only spent around 7,000 RMB then her girlfriend could obtain three “top-notch” luxury brand consumer goods, which made YANG and his girlfriend very happy. And consumers like Yang who are willing to consume small luxury goods, such as Hermès “*Pèihuò*” are not the minority in China. Even though the unspoken *pèihuò* rule of Hermès scorned strongly by Chinese clients, masses of them still share the same mind like Yang :

“Earning desperately and spending actively is my view of life.”

——Consumer Qianqian, Nov, 2020, WeChat discussion

“It is a pleasure to spend hard-earned cash. In fact, this is a strong motivation to earn money.”

——Consumer Mimi, Dec 03, 2020, WeChat discussion

This is also the difference between the younger generation of Chinese and their parents. Their parents are considered to be a hard-working generation. Today’s young Chinese are a generation of work hard, play hard, and consume hard. In the process of changes in consumption concepts in such young Chinese, who have an increased de-

mand for high-quality and genuine overseas products, Yang said:

“If there is an assurance and a trusted dàigòu that can deliver these overseas goods with extremely high added value, such as Hermès bags, back to China safely, they are willing to pay up to 100% or even more premium on this kind of product.”

—Yang, June 19, 2020, WeChat discussion

In the development process of *dàigòu*, they constantly adjust their services, the labor, and the goods they sell, which make them meet the needs of different consumers. For bag lovers, they can help them buy bags as quickly as possible at a reasonable price. For high-price Hermès *pèihuò* products that are not easy to sell, they create super discounts to attract buyers who are vacillating but do not want to miss the opportunity to “pick the bargain” (*jiǎnlòu*).¹⁶ For those high-price but still can accept small Hermès products, such as ties, cups, gloves, scarves, silk scarves, they have also specifically found the suitable consumer groups, which addicted to Chinese gift-giving culture and pleasure to buy the small Hermès *pèihuò* products.

It is no exaggeration to say that Chinese *dàigòu* integrate different types of consumer products in the consumer market and provides Chinese consumers with products and services that are most suitable for them. Through the fieldwork, we found that we cannot use simple conspicuous consumption to summarize Chinese consumers’ pursuit of global luxury products. For normal people, it is crazy spending money in this way. But for consumers like Yang, per month salary is around 10,000 RMB or even more, have a strong interest in luxury pieces of stuff, also know some reliable *dàigòu* in their life. They believed in

¹⁶For a detailed explanation of *jiǎnlòu*, please refer to the Chapter 2.

themselves, shopping in this way to acquire luxury is reasonable. In the interview, we also even the wealthiest class Chinese consumers, they still hope to get the high-quality and low-cost goods through a reliable *dàigòu*. It leads me finally to a consideration of the changes in the anthropological boundaries of economic behaviour that this case reflects (Servais, 2015).

Moreover, many consumers who are keen to purchase overseas products through the *dàigòu* channel basically have a certain understanding of the overseas products they will consume. They may pursue the quality of commodities or pursue the value appreciation potential for a certain commodity. The existence of *dàigòu* meets the increasingly personalized consumer needs of these different types of Chinese consumers. *dàigòu* and the personal labor service, therefore, have become valuable and irreplaceable.

7.5 From CBO Shopping to CBD Shopping

Note: CBO Shopping refers to Cross-border Online shopping; CBD shopping refers to Cross-border *Dàigòu* Shopping.

In the development stage of *dàigòu* business, there is a very important stage that we haven't talked about before, that is *hǎitáo* (海淘). In layman's terms, *hǎitáo* is a concept created from the perspective of consumers. It refers to shopping global overseas products through overseas online shopping or cross-border online shopping way. We call these kinds of Chinese consumers *hǎitáo kè* (海淘客), who are the first group of individual consumers to connect with overseas online shopping websites in the personal form. However, due to the limitations of China's Internet environment, these Haitao customers usually need to resort to Virtual Private Network (VPN) when browsing overseas websites.

Jiajia ZHANG is a friend of mine, I had known her for many years

in China. She is 31 years old, has lived in Brussels for 6 years, and has worked as a part-time *dàigòu* for 5 years around. Before going abroad, she was engaged in finance-related work in Xi'an. As a senior *hǎi táo kè*, a experienced *dàigòu* consumer, and a professional *dàigòu*, she said:

“Before the popularity of dàigòu thriving, I always shop on the overseas website. It both saves time and has suitable promotions sometimes. For example, surfing on Taobao, Tmall, Jingdong, Amazon in China or surfing on some other overseas online shop, I could easily get the European overseas products like La Prairie Skin cream, Jimmy Choo high heels, FILORGA mask, Omnibionta DHA for pregnant women, Godiva chocolate from Belgium, Chanel cosmetic and Hipp milk powder from the Netherlands or Germany and so on.”

Jiajia continued to explain the situation at that time,

“But, I’ve never seen Hermès, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga, Celine, Burberry, Max Mara, Rolex, Van Cleef & Arpels, Cartier, Piaget, Chopard, Tiffany, Bulgari, Rolex or any very expensive diamond sold online, although all of these top luxury goods have opened online stores, and some even opened WeChat official accounts to suit the Chinese market. For these luxury goods that cost tens of thousands of US dollars at every turn, if I could not buy them by myself, I prefer to choose a professional dàigòu to help me purchase. Even if the Chinese consumers finally find a relevant luxury online store link, they still have a skeptical attitude to buy from clicking the button.”

“The emergence of professional dàigòu allows you to see a pos-

sibility, that is a professional person can not only save you time but also help you reduce the cumbersome problems of international transportation, insurance, after-sales, translation, etc. And the overseas products they provide are often cheaper than the ones you buy by yourself. Then why not choose them?"

——Jiajia ZHANG, Feb 16, 2019, at Hermès boutique in Brussels

Xiaoxiao is a white-collar from Beijing, who has nearly ten years of experience shopping for overseas products through *dàigòu* approach. In Xiaoxiao's WeChat account, there are at least four to five different *dàigòu* serve for her for long period. Some are country-specific, meaning they specialize in combing the sources of the products in the European *dàigòu* circle or the North America *dàigòu* circle for better prices. Others are brand-specific, meaning they hunt for unique brands, such as Louis Vuitton, Hermès collections, or niche brands like Delvaux, even auction items from Christie's, etc. Xiaoxiao expressed the same view on this phenomenon:

"The existence of dàigòu is essential, because there are so many things that we can not buy without them."

——Xiaoxiao, April 11, 2019, Weigong Cun, Beijing

As the global flow of Chinese people becomes more and more frequent, Chinese overseas *dàigòu* and their customers have developed a professional purchasing system, and consumer goods from different countries around the world flow rapidly in this system. Xiaoxiao told her personal experience of shopping through this system.

“The first factor I consider to choose an overseas Chinese dàigòu, is my relatives or very close friends who live overseas. They can provide stable and continuous overseas products. Moreover, the prices of these products are moderate, and the quality is guaranteed. Compared to a decade ago, when the logistics were not so developed, it is really convenient to purchase overseas products now. Most daily consumer goods can be shipped back to China within two to three weeks after ordering.”

“As a middleman, dàigòu can bring consumers an immersive shopping experience to the greatest extent. For example, they share all the detailed information of the products to customers on virtual communities. They can wear the products and let the customer feel how the products look on a normal person. It shows the true appearance of how to wear the products, not like an elegant model only shows how impeccable the product is. Most of dàigòu also could wait for the customers to try out the items at the offline stores then purchase through dàigòu channel directly.”

“Cross-border dàigòu shopping way is much simpler than cross-border online shopping. Because for CBO shopping way I must spend time and energy on my own to translate foreign websites. And when I go shopping online, the success rate is often affected by the stability of the VPN. This makes me have a huge headache. For example, I finally filled out a whole order form in English (sometimes in German or French), and when I was about to pay, the VPN went offline...”

“But the CBD shopping way could help me avoid all these kinds of trouble. And because the transactions are based on acquaintances,

the quality and after-sales of the products are relatively guaranteed. In this process, I don' t need to speak any English at all, nor do I need to look up a German or French dictionary. Naturally, my consumption habits gradually switched from cross-border online shopping to cross-border dàigòu shopping naturally."

———Xiaoxiao, April 11, 2019, Weigong Cun, Beijing

Because of the presence of Chinese *dàigòu* all over the world, in cross-border shopping way, the physical place of consumers becomes less significant as the basis. But more important is where the overseas Chinese *dàigòu* live and purchase (Miller, 1992). They provide a special channel for Chinese consumers that can acquire global consumer products at any time and anywhere.

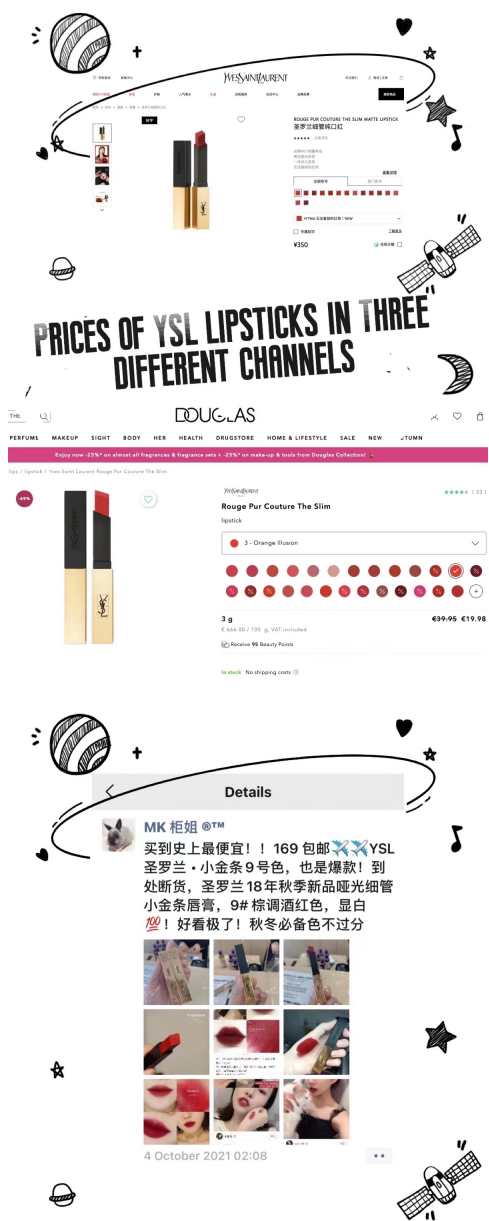


Fig. 7.1 Prices of YSL lipstick in three different channels
Sources: 1.¥ 350-<https://www.esteelauder.com.cn/>; 2.€ 39.95, € 19.98- <https://www.esteelauder.be/be/nl/>; 3.169 包邮- MK 柜姐's WeChat Moments. Date: Oct 14, 2021.

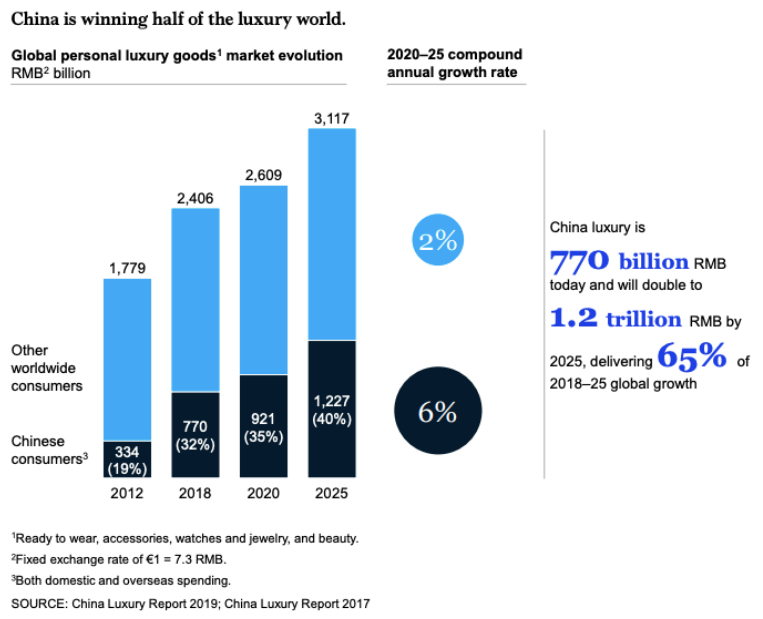
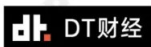
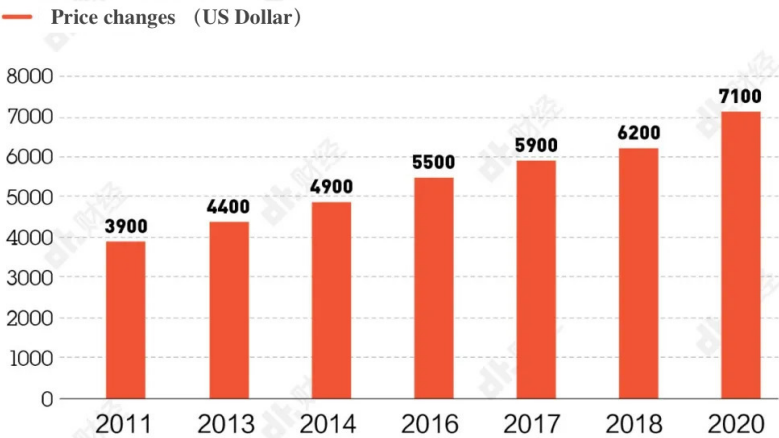


Fig. 7.2 China is winning half of the luxury world

Sources: China Luxury Report 2019; China Luxury Report 2017, accessed Feb 22, 2021.



The trend of Chanel's 2.55 price increase in the past ten years (2011-2020)



Note: The price is the official price of the marked year

Data source: DT Finance, translated by the author



Fig. 7.3 The price increase trend of Chanel 2.55 in the past ten years
Source: DT Finance, translated by the author. Accessed: Oct 9, 2021.

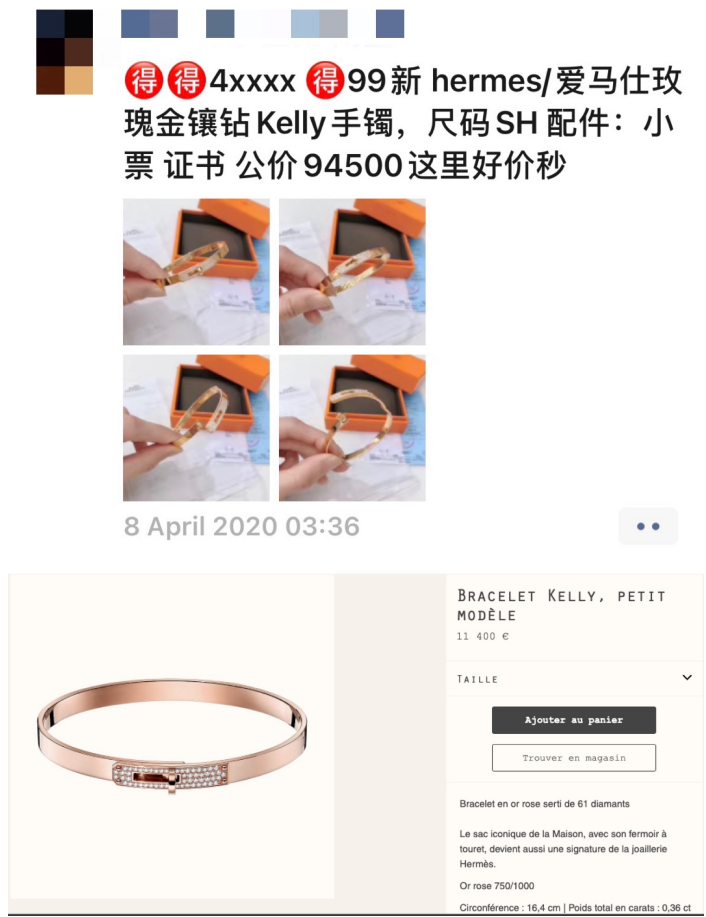


Fig. 7.5 Price of Kelly bracelet in rose gold with diamonds from the *dàigòu* channel and official website

Sources: The author's WeChat Moments and the Hermès Belgium official website, <https://www.hermes.com/be/fr/>. Date: Oct10, 2021.



Fig. 7.6 Chinese gift giving culture in *daigou* business
Sources: the screenshots are from the chat/purchase history of the author and the author's friend Yang.
Date: Feb 4, 2021; April 5, 2021; June 29, 2021.

8

The Future of *Dàigòu*

WITH the development of e-commerce, the international transport industry, and the increasing number of Chinese outbound tourists in recent years, geographical restrictions of global commodities have become less and less significant. The end of physical distance and the rising of the borderless trade (Carely 1992 in Flew 2002) triggered the global scale of *dàigòu* economies. Frances Cairncross expressed that the communications and the information technology revolution greatly changed our lives (Cairncross, 2002). It shortens the distance between local goods from all over the world to Chinese consumers. The *dàigòu* shopping mode is generally stated as the expansion of activities beyond the boundaries of particular nation-states. It provides Chinese consumers with a wider and more diverse consumption possibility. As a fast-growing international business mode, *dàigòu* normally acts as an intermediary in a global marketplace (Park et al., 2020). They provide personalized purchasing services for Chinese consumers, who fill the gap in the Chinese Consumer market (Hughes et

al., 2019).

8.1 “D2C” E-commerce Business Mode has been Formed

8.1.1 Brief Introduction of Virtual Trade

E-commerce refers to the use of digital devices (such as the computer, smartphone, Ipad, etc.), network (cable network or wireless network), and remote communication technology to make the business transaction process without cash or card (Turban, Whiteside, King, & Outland, 2017). A more complete definition of e-commerce is the use of electronic means of communication and digital information processing technology in business transactions to create, transform, and redefine relationships for consumption (Gupta, 2014).

Nowadays, the Internet, multimedia, and social platforms have become essential channels for consumers to acquire a wide range of products. In the era of e-commerce, consumers no longer need to look at physical objects and don't have to rely on cash and bills for transactions (Niranjanamurthy, 2014). According to Anjali Gupta's research (Gupta, 2014), the virtual trading market could be divided into five different major types:

- 1) *Business-to-business (B2B)*;
- 2) *Business-to-consumer (B2C)*;
- 3) *Business-to-government (B2G)*;
- 4) *Consumer-to-consumer (C2C)*;
- 5) *Mobile commerce (M-commerce)*

B2B (Business-to-Business), also known as company-to-company business, refers to the direct commercial relationship established between enterprises. It usually forms complementary advantages between

enterprises, but it is more difficult to cater to the needs of individual consumer groups. Therefore, to a certain extent, this is also one of the reasons for the rise of an enterprise-oriented consumer mode, B2C (business-to-consumer).

The term B2C refers to the companies that sell directly to consumers. The idea of B2C was first utilized by Michael Aldrich in 1979, who used television as the primary medium to reach out to consumers (Yoganandan & Baskar, n.d.). B2C became immensely popular during the dot-com boom of the late 1990s when it was mainly used to refer to online retailers who sold products and services to consumers through the Internet (Mäkeläinen, 2006; Laffey, 2004). Decades after the e-commerce boom, with smartphone apps and traffic growing year-over-year, B2C companies are continuing to eye a new growing market : mobile purchasing, namely B2C mobile-commerce (abbrev. B2C m-commerce).

B2C mobile-commerce is all about wireless e-commerce, where mobile devices and B2C mobile apps are used to do business on the internet (Abdelkarim & Nasereddin, 2010). Prominent examples include mobile financial services (e.g., m-banking), mobile services involving payment such as m-retailing (e.g. m-ticketing or purchasing through apps), etc. (Khalifa & Shen, 2008). But, with the continuous development of electronic and communication technology, as well as the rapid development of science and technology, the monotonous B2C business mode scarcely satisfies consumers' growing requirements on global consumer goods (H. Chen, 2017). Under such circumstances, Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, JD (Jingdong), Dangdang, and other e-commerce platforms/companies have gradually emerged as the prototype of C2C (consumer-to-consumer e-commerce) mode.

C2C business is a relatively new form of business model in e-commerce that has emerged with technology and the sharing economy (Puschmann & Alt, 2016). Since its inception around 1995, the C2C

market has been growing rapidly worldwide. C2C is quite convenient, customers don't need to visit an offline store and they can trade with each other in an online environment. Customers can typically benefit from the first-hand products and often find items that are difficult to locate elsewhere (J. K. Kim, 2005). Due to the absence of retailers or wholesalers, the margins of C2C can be higher than traditional pricing methods for sellers (Wu, Vassileva, Noorian, & Zhao, 2015; Lindblom, Lindblom, & Wechtler, 2018).

8.1.2 Innovative Combination between C2C and M-Commerce

D2C e-commerce mode (*dàigòu*-to-consumer) refers to a transaction in which *dàigòu* directly serves individual consumers. It has yielded a flourishing development on the basis of the Chinese *guānxi* system. As an innovative combination between C2C and mobile commerce business form, D2C mode defines a special consumption pattern, which the overseas Chinese *dàigòu* create a complete service system for Chinese domestic to purchase the global products.

The term D2C first appeared to be used by the government and the people of Australia. Due to the great economic value created by Chinese *dàigòu* in Australia, as early as around 2010, *dàigòu* has already become a unique business and career mode exclusively for Chinese immigrants living in Australia. We can find some clues in Pamela Parker's article posted in 2018. She wrote:

“Under the D2C business, consumers can buy anything they want in any corner of the world with dàigòu shoppers' help.”

In D2C business mode, the *dàigòu* provides necessary information about the product on their personal social media, accepts the buyer's request, and then uses the international express delivery to deliver the

product to the door after purchasing (H. Chen, 2017). Consumers can use social media, Internet technology to humanize the online selection of global products with the help of *dàigòu*. This makes transnational consumption possible in the era of the Internet, the virtual realm. More and more consumers are entering this market every day with various types of requirements (J. K. Kim, 2005). In this process, *dàigòu* plays an indispensable role in D2C e-commerce mode.

“Chinese individual dàigòu shoppers in Australia can make upwards of 1000,000 US dollars (856,433 euros) a year selling Australian products to customers in China.”

SOURCE: BBC News. 2018. How to become a professional shopper. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-43259904>> [Accessed 6 August 2021].

Learning from the term familiar “B2B”, “B2C” and “C2C” business modes, Australians have created the “D2C” business mode exclusively for Chinese *dàigòu*. The Australian government even encouraged the incubation of the website “Daigou Sales” (Justin Sargent, 2018: 02) named after the Chinese pinyin form Daigou. Under this series of encouraging policies, the Australian government aims to open the door to the Chinese market by introducing the brand-new mode of D2C to local companies, that is, using the way that Chinese people prefer and have more Chinese characteristics. They hope the local companies could be accepted by Chinese consumers quickly, accurately, and efficiently in D2C mode.

The founder of the “Daigou Sales” website firmly believes that the form of *dàigòu* working as a cultural and economic middleman can help local Australian brands open the Chinese market with the lowest risk and the lowest cost (Justin Sargent, 2018: 02). On this issue, Jiajia expressed a similar understanding, she firmly believes:

“D2C business mode can provide the most considerate help for B2C platforms which do not use Chinese translation and Chinese consumers who do not speak foreign languages. These kinds of personal shopping services are not available to offline consumers in the B2C consumption mode.”

Jiajia continued to add her own views on this issue:

“Overseas brands and retailers should embrace the D2C e-commerce mode to capture the Chinese market, re-establish closer customer relationships with the first-hand consumer data of Chinese dàigòu shoppers, just like the intelligent Australian. They also can get useful tips to open the Chinese market from dàigòu’s experienced personal service. Most importantly, dàigòu provides a personalized shopping experience, which has been favored by hundreds of thousands of Chinese consumers.”

“Because it is still difficult to acquire global consumer products, to get the after-sell services, and to solve the problems for regular consumers online. Therefore, I strongly believe like many other dàigòu that the dàigòu concept will keep being developed during a very long time.”

——Jiajia ZHANG, Feb 16, 2019, at Hermès boutique in Brussels

Traditional economics claims that the rationalization of the market should isolate human emotion and personal relations from economic activity (Lawler & Yoon, 1998). Jonathan H. Turner, and Jan E. Stets

(2006) claim that despite the progress made by five different general theories (symbolic interactionist theories, interaction ritual theories, dramaturgical theories, power and status theories, and exchange theories) aiming to understand human behavior, several issues yet remain unresolved: the nature of emotions, feeling, and affect (Turner & Stets, 2006). Any business that relies on B2C mode wants to maintain good relations with their customers to ensure their return (Singh, 2002; Y. Chen et al., 2012). In D2C mode, Chinese consumers deal directly with *dàigòu*, who acts like a personalized assistant to address the language, cultural, consultation, and after-sales service barriers that Chinese consumers might face in B2C mode (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010). As we all know, most B2C marketing campaigns are geared to demonstrate the value of a product or service. At the same time, the D2C mode elicits a personal emotional response to their customers (Adjei et al., 2010).

The D2C e-commerce business mode is attractive because the large group of *dàigòu* scattered in overseas societies act as a “seamless docking” middleman between Chinese consumers and overseas products¹. The personalized D2C mode offers service to every Chinese consumer. Other studies that followed (M. Granovetter, 1985; Offer, 1997; Bandelj, 2015) showed that social networks and social relations still operate in a modern economy.

Unlike e-commerce, *dàigòu* commerce transactions have occurred between existing familiars *guānxi* networks (Jin et al., 2020) in China since the early days (such as families, relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues), contrasting with the conventional views that the online sphere is a stranger-orientated network (Weiyang & Wang, 2020). Tens of thousands of individual Chinese overseas *dàigòu* and their clients built mutual trust under the Chinese *guānxi* system, which has already become one of the most striking features in the paradigm of consumption

¹Loxton, T., 2018. What Is Daigou Shopping And How Is It Impacting Your Business? online Getblix.com. Retrieved from <https://www.getblix.com/blog/is-daigou-shopper-activity-impacting-your-business>, accessed 18 April 2018.

in China. And these active interactions and relationships among members are crucial to the success of D2C e-Commerce (J. Chen, Zhang, & Xu, 2009).

Now the world is slowly realizing that *dàigòu* can help local companies grasp a better understanding of Chinese consumers' and their needs, which can play an incredibly important role in introducing brands and in building brand confidence in the Chinese market. In other words, *dàigòu* serves as an economic bridge, which solves the problems that might occur between regional businesses and Chinese consumers. Moreover, these overseas companies do not need to pay remuneration to individual overseas Chinese *dàigòu*, nor do they need to purchase insurance and provide social benefits for them (L. Chen, 2013; Sethi, 2019c; Huang et al., 2020).

But these companies have already broadly obtained the free shopping guide, advertising, after-sales services, brand value promotion, Chinese market development, and other services provided by tens of thousands of *dàigòu* on behalf of the Chinese customers. Although they are reluctant to admit it, these are social facts that cannot be ignored. Chinese overseas *dàigòu* offer a double or triple-win solution for overseas brands, Chinese domestic buyers, and themselves.

Through around 20 years of development, the D2C e-commerce business mode has been finally formed. In this mode, Chinese *dàigòu* create a complete purchasing service system between overseas products and Chinese consumers. Through thousands of overseas Chinese *dàigòu*, the D2C mode makes the flow of global commodities faster and more convenient. *Dàigòu* and this shopping system they created in various countries have rapidly escalated into a critical supplement and a flexible bridge of B2C and C2C e-commerce business mode.

8.2 Dàigòu Becomes New Form of Future Globalization

8.2.1 Overseas Consumer Goods in Xiao Pu's House

Xiao Pu, the author's high school classmate, is a veteran purchasing madman with 25 years of *dàigòu* experience. Pu's first overseas product was SONY Walkman, which he got in 1995 from his uncle who worked in Japan at that time.

As the first batch of consumers to consume overseas products, Xiao Pu's house is almost a global commodity distribution center. Expanding his items acquired from *dàigòu* can basically spell out a map of global *dàigòu* system. He recounted his personal *dàigòu* experience like this:

“My family started to dàigòu foreign goods through the dàigòu channel around 2005, especially after the ‘Sanlu Incident’ in 2008, I bought foreign goods more frequently than before. From my son’s birth in 2012 to the present (2021), the milk powder he drank, the rice cereal he ate, the diapers, body soap, baby toothbrushes, chewing sticks, and unbreakable baby bottles were basically all from Europe. The shampoo, toothpaste, electric toothbrush, shower gel, skincare products, used by my wife and I were basically purchased from Japanese dàigòu. When I first started dàigòu infant milk powder, my sister happened to be studying in Germany, so she sent us packages every 2-3 months. Basically, everything my son uses is enough. The main reason why I like dàigòu for Japanese stuff is that my roommate was studying in Japan for a Ph.D. So every 2-3 months, I asked him to help me dàigòu once. It can be used for several months at a time. And slowly, domestic brands are less and less used in my house.”

“However, in 2015, my sister graduated and returned to China.

But I purchased more and more overseas products, and gradually I have a 3-4 stable dàigòu friends on my WeChat. If I need dàigòu overseas products, I will buy from them. The price of them is reasonable, and the products are guaranteed to be authentic. Moreover, we have known each other like relatives. Sometimes, I also recommend new customers (friends) to them. The cosmetics used by my wife, the regular medicines at home, my razor, the Japanese rice cooker that is very popular on the news for 6000 RMB, heating toilet seats, Zwilling knives, Philips kettles; biscuits, Chocolate, milk powder, and vitamin D for children are basically all purchased from different countries in the past few years.”

“Moreover, after using overseas products for a long time, I gradually developed a habit and became reluctant to change them. During the COVID-19 epidemic last year, all European stores were closed. I was very worried at the time. If my shampoo finishes, what should I do with my hair! Fortunately, it was unlocked down after a few months of isolation. Now I always stock up more to prevent the next quarantine if I don’t have shampoo. Suddenly the familiar taste is gone, and you can’t concentrate on work, it is too uncomfortable.”

“Later, didn’t you go to Belgium to study for a Ph.D., and when you went there happened to coincide with the time when my sister came back. You see, the overseas products that my house uses now are basically Belgianized since the year you went to Belgium. Now, the vitamins my mother eats are all Belgian. And the big-name cosmetics used by my wife, you bought them back.”

“However, starting from about 2018, I started to have the opportunity to travel abroad due to work reasons. At the beginning stage, I buy for myself, but sometimes I bought for my colleagues, friends, and family. Because I bought too much for friends, it made me looks like a dàigòu. The most impressive memory was the first time I returned back to China, I hold with two 28-inch suitcases that were all full of foreign products. The most exaggerated is I bought 30 bottles of French Innoxa eye drops for my friends, It is a small bottle with ultramarine color. It is particularly beautiful. It costs 70-100 RMB for each bottle. Not expensive, but it reflects French characteristics. I remember that I emptied several drugstores and pharmacies near the hotel.”

“Now, the LV bags my wife uses, the LV belts I wear, the BV wallets and handbags I bought in discount villages, and the Gucci backpack I bought in Europe when I was on a business trip. The prices of luxury are quite cheap. In addition, my tourist visa can also get tax refunded. After the tax refund, I can save thousands of RMB than I bought in China. Calculating the luxury goods I bought in the past few years, I saved a lot of money.”

“Moreover, when purchasing overseas as I used to, I am a little ‘dependent’ on it. Just like someone is addicted to Taobao, I am particularly addicted to dàigòu. I bought global consumer goods by myself when I had the opportunity to go abroad, or I pointed to a familiar overseas friend to buy it on my behalf. When my friend couldn’t count on, I still have professional dàigòu active in different countries on my WeChat.”²

²This interview about Xiao Pu first happened in 2016. When I just started to work on this topic. In 2018 and 2019, Xiaopu supplemented the content of the interview. In 2021, before my thesis is finalized, Xiaopu has made some additions and revisions again.

The Xiao Pu's home mentioned above-full of global consumer goods, may be a bit exaggerated. However, the convenience of purchasing global commodities has become an established fact for Chinese people to consume overseas products.

8.2.2 The Global *Dàigòu* Map and the Global *Dàigòu* System

With the continuous deepening of the globalization process, the population of various groups and the flow of commodities from various countries around the world have become increasingly frequent, which has brought huge opportunities for D2C shopping mode. The rise of individual global tourists made *dàigòu* become an important channel to obtain overseas commodities. Thousands of hundreds *dàigòu* are bringing the world together in an incredibly impressive way. They are making the world become more informed, more connected, and small, therefore global consumer goods are flowing and updating faster. In this process, the global *dàigòu* system and industrial chain is an irresistible social process.

Theodore Levitt first proposed the concept of global marketing in his article *Globalization of Markets* (Levitt, 1993). He advocated that in the era of globalization, multinational companies will use unified communication methods in every corner of the world to sell their unified products and services. Therefore, providing specialized, diversified, and personalized purchasing services has become *dàigòu*'s biggest advantage, which reduces economic losses in production, distribution, and advertising. *Dàigòu* in different countries already form an indispensable part of today's globalization.

With the quality of Chinese consumers' life standards, levels of the economy improved a lot in the past 30 years, which caused that Chinese consumers can have a more autonomous consumption way to acquire global consumer products compared with 20 years ago. From 2000 un-

til now, more and more Chinese consumers have liberated themselves from the domestic market. Chinese consumers are free today to shop globally with the help of Chinese *dàigòu* in overseas societies. According to the region to which the agents belong or live, the characteristics and popularity of the products, *dàigòu* can be subdivided into different types (Solca, Grippo, Lucarelli, Pozzi, & Borgonovo, 2016; Paik, 2020; E. Zhang & Noakes, 2019) , such as European *dàigòu*, American *dàigòu* (J. Liu & Boger Jr, 2017), Australian *dàigòu* (MARTIN, 2017), Japanese *dàigòu* (Bofulin & Coates, 2017), Korean *dàigòu* (Paik, 2020), etc. *Dàigòu* from different countries and regions reflect different regional product characteristics. Consumer Xiaoxiao said:

“Through dàigòu, Chinese consumers can purchase global products all over the world. Such as electronic products and cosmetics in the United States; milk powder, health products, and UGG-boots in Australia; dairy products in New Zealand; luxury brands, jewelry, expensive watches, and tailored into ready-to-wear in Europe; non-prescription medicines in Japan; and skin-care products in South Korea, etc.”

——Consumer Xiaoxiao, April 11, 2019, Weigong Cun, Beijing

Dàigòu redefines the special shopping pattern for the Chinese to acquire overseas products, in which Chinese consumers have a chance to decorate their life via a wide range of global consumer products (Gad Saad,2015; Thomai Serdari,2020). The professional *dàigòu* do not only provide the most considerate help for purchasing service but also can give supports to overseas firms at the same time. They can help overseas brands and retailers capture the Chinese market, re-establish closer consumer relationships, and sometimes they can give some useful tips to overseas brands in designing new collections. They also can give the

brands first-hand tips with a large amount of personal *dàigòu* experience.

Most research on cross-border shopping considers permanent migration (Chandra et al., 2014; R. Li et al., 2007). Such as overseas Chinese compose the main part of *dàigòu* to purchase and deliver the global consumer goods back to China. But, price differences also motivate a large amount of cross-border *dàigòu* (Chandra et al., 2014). For example, at many borders, more and more Chinese tourists are now joining the trend of purchasing the world. The Chinese tourists who work as *dàigòu* also open up new channels and new ways for brands to engage with Chinese consumers. Chinese tourists fly over the border and purchase cheaper global consumer products. After years of development, *dàigòu* has created the global *dàigòu* system with their Chinese consumers together.

Because, for Chinese consumers who demand overseas goods, it is not important whether the identity of this agent (*dàigòu*) is confirmed or not. The most important thing is that this agent can help them buy overseas consumer goods in genuine and inexpensive. Cross-border *dàigòu* also can provide the Chinese investors a reliable channel to purchase luxury products at a reasonable price through a novel D2C experience. Xiaoxiao went on to add comments:

“Because the current global dàigòu market has already formed a scene where dàigòu are ubiquitous.”

——Consumer Xiaoxiao, April 11, 2019, Weigong Cun, Beijing

Looking back on the long history, the Chinese have never participated in the process of globalization as much as today. This scattered *dàigòu* can provide comprehensive one-to-one procurement services in every corner of the world. Thus shopping globally has been consisting

new form of future globalization. It is estimated that tens of millions of Chinese *dàigòu* are currently engaged in purchasing services.³ Nowadays, Chinese *dàigòu* are distributed in five continents, in more than 100 countries and regions. Most of them have experience helping relatives and friends to purchase overseas products. They indirectly shape the global *dàigòu* system and unfold the Chinese consumers' world *dàigòu* map. In addition to the above reasons, the combination factors such as easing travel abroad restrictions by the Chinese authorities, the emergence of a newly rich Chinese middle class, increasing numbers of direct flight connections from the mainland of China, etc. have also jointly promoted the scale of the world *dàigòu* system.

On this map, the overseas *dàigòu* have gradually shaped five *dàigòu* circles/regions. They are the North America *dàigòu* circle (US & CAN *dàigòu* circle),⁴ the Australia and New Zealand *dàigòu* circle (AU & NZ *dàigòu* circle), the European *dàigòu* circle (EU *dàigòu* circle), the Southeast Asia *dàigòu* circle (SEA *dàigòu* circle). They have further constituted the global system of *dàigòu* like Figure 8.1 shows.

In this case, the country where the *dàigòu* is located or live becomes an important measure of why the consumers choose them. For example, most experienced Chinese consumers generally believe that the *dàigòu* active in Japan and South Korea are good at cosmetics and vintage luxury⁵. Xueyang, who had experience in purchasing Japanese products, commented on the Japanese *dàigòu* market:

“In Japan, second-hand luxury goods have a very good market. Be-

³There is no final conclusion about the number of active *dàigòu* in the world, but according to Australian media, there were more than 1 million *dàigòu* (part-time and full-time) merely in Australia in 2018.

⁴Because of the active agents in North America *dàigòu* circle mainly lives in the United States and Canada. Therefore, they are called by Chinese consumers United States and Canada *dàigòu* circle (abbrev. US & CAN *dàigòu* circle). The naming of other *dàigòu* circles basically follows the same rules. That is, the area is named after the country where the main active *dàigòu* people live.

⁵Vintage luxury, is also named *zhōnggǔ huò* (中古货ちゅうこひん). It means second-hand luxury goods.



Fig. 8.1 The global *dàigòu* system

Source: https://www.amcharts.com/visited_countries/, accessed Feb 7, 2021.

Map made by the author, Feb 7, 2021.

cause from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Japan experienced the second major economic development after the 1960s. During this period, the Japanese were keen on buying luxury goods. According to rumors, many Japanese girls owned their own luxury goods at the age of 20 around. However, with the bursting of the economic bubble, many Japanese took out their valuables and sold them; in addition, the trend of minimalism was very popular in Japan during this period.”

“As a result, many Japanese resell their excess consumer goods one after another. This has become the reason for the wide variety of second-hand luxury goods in Japan, good quality, and low

prices. In this context, a large number of second-hand stores (i.e., vintage stores) were born in Japan. In these stores, you can not only buy high-quality and cheap second-hand luxury goods, but the biggest highlight is that you can find many limited editions, rare models, discontinued models, and designers' proud works of the luxury brand. Therefore, in the world of Japanese vintage products, although they cannot compare with the antiques in museums, they can withstand the test of time and are valuable for collection and investment. Necessarily, the Japanese vintage luxury goods have become a very distinctive branch in the dàigòu market."

——Xueyang, Oct18, 2021, WeChat discussion

Many dàigòu thought that the past few years are the golden era of development of dàigòu. In the boomed development of dàigòu, which success embedded along several dimensions, cleverly combines Chinese consumers, global consumer products within the complex dialectic frame between the virtual and the physical, local and global, object and relationship (Zani, 2019). Dàigòu has become an extension of social relations that crosses national borders. Almost at the same time, Chinese consumers have formed a strong reliance upon highly flexible global dàigòu.

It is foreseeable that in the future, more and more Chinese people will go all over the world to buy overseas goods, and the global trend of consumption is inevitable. Necessarily, it is particularly important to incorporate the global economic behavior of dàigòu into a broader cultural perspective. For the dàigòu phenomenon, this is no longer a single-dimensional economic problem, but a multi-dimensional and cross-cultural problem. As a new form of future potential globalization. We can explore the sustainable development path of consumption globalization and reflect on the new manifestations of globalization in

the new era through culture, politics, resources, society, and the relationship between people involved.

8.2.3 How Far Can *Dàigòu* Go?

The huge scale of *dàigòu* transactions has urgently promoted the Chinese government to issue some necessary “corrective regulations” to administer this phenomenon. The Chinese government has been cracking down on *dàigòu* since 2016 by enforcing them to obtain licenses and register as businesses. Though it didn’t end *dàigòu* activities, it did signal that the Chinese government is trying to regulate the practice. A great number of reports or publications stressed certain dilemmas about *dàigòu*, but seldom provided a correct solution to those dilemmas. The policymakers seem not to know quite well what to do about the *dàigòu* issues as well. For instance, *announcement on matters concerning the inspection and release standards for inbound passengers’ baggage and articles* clarifies:

“The tax exemption regulations for inbound passengers’ baggage and articles, and the total value of imported goods acquired abroad from an inbound resident passengers for their personal use should less than 5,000 RMB and is limited to personal use. If the quantity is reasonable, it will be released without tax. The part over 5,000 RMB will be charged the postal import tax (xíngyóu shuì 行邮税).⁶ For profit-making goods, regardless of their value, they must declare entry to the customs and pay postal import tax according to regulations, otherwise, they are suspected of smuggling.”

SOURCE: <http://online.customs.gov.cn/static/pages/index.html?guidebookUrl=/static/pages/guides/000629014002/000629014002.html>, Accessed 22 May 2021.

⁶For more detailed explanation of postal import tax, please refer to the first section of Chapter 5.

In addition, the introduction of some administrative regulations discouraged some purchasing agents, such as The Ministry of Finance, the General Administration of Customs, and the State Administration of Taxation on the Tax Policies on Cross-Border E-commerce Retail Imports, referred to as postal import tax, points out that for cross-border e-commerce or purchasing agents if the single amount exceeds 2,000 RMB and the entire year exceeds 20,000 RMB, these shipments are subject to postal tax. The practical situation we found from the fieldwork however, was very different:

“For any Chinese traveling abroad, as long as they spend overseas, their consumption will 100% exceed this tax exemption, i.e., 5000 RMB, because the price of 80-90% luxury handbags exceeds 10,000 RMB. Not to mention the dàigòu who are professional in helping friends buy overseas products.”

SOURCE: Wang, L., 2020. Chinese Daigou Got Rich Shopping Abroad. Now, They are Going Broke. Online Sixth Tone. Retrieved from <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005426/chinas-daigou-got-rich-shopping-abroad.-nowtheyare-going-broke>. Accessed 2 April 2020.

“As early as around 2013, when I first started to work on dàigòu, the two suitcases I returned home (China), the carrying suitcase, the backpack, and a tote bag on my hand, were all filled with overseas items, and there was nobody to check before entering China. But after implementing the tax on personal postal articles, i.e., after 2016, when I return to China, I still carried the same suitcases. And I was super nervous and worried about being inspected by the Customs and being taxed.”

“However, after 2018, I basically haven’t brought overseas goods back by myself, because it’s not cost-effective. I encountered a (customs) inspection, this trip I ran in vain. To declare commodities, is a very laborious task. In addition, after 2016, professional rén ròu and customs clearance companies began to handle these matters.”

She also complained that,

“The higher profit margins dàigòu business, like wine, luxury watch, expensive jewellery and luxury brands cosmetic, etc. after the postal import tax, as long as it is taxed, the tax rate is as high as 50-60%.”

——Songzi DU, Oct 21, 2021, WeChat discussion

The implementation of the postal import tax has caused many *dàigòu* to suffer direct losses during entry inspections. In other words, even for ordinary consumers, they only buy two big-brand bags, for example, one for themselves and the other for their mother, which already exceeds the tax-free standard. But this kind of “zero-consumption” overseas tourism plan does not conform to the culture of Chinese tourists at all. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, the top priority for Chinese tourists to go out is not sightseeing, but consumption. Therefore, from this perspective, the formulation of this policy has basically not played a practical role. Instead, everyone criticized it as useless.

Shopping is one of the most enjoyable leisure-time activities for many Chinese tourists, which is the primary reason for tourism for some destinations (Lau, Sin, & Chan, 2005). In Ambarish Chandra, Keith

Head, and Mariano Tappata's article, they define shopping across an international border as a trade-off between benefits derived from buying a range of products at lower prices and the costs of travel (Chandra et al., 2014). Therefore, from this perspective, if China Customs really strictly implements the 5000 RMB standard for overseas consumption, it is almost equivalent to formulating a policy that will destroy the enthusiasm of the Chinese tourists to travel abroad. That is the cross-border shopping retains a vital influence on the economy (Chandra et al., 2014), travelers return to their country of residence, but it does not influence the earning income during and after the visit. At the same time, such policies that lack consideration of the purpose of Chinese consumers' travel abroad are also not conducive to promoting the development of the tourism economy.

Under this situation, starting from April 9, 2019, in order to promote the expansion of imports and consumption, the Chinese government has lowered the tax rate for postal import tax. Among them, the tax rate for food, medicine, and other commodities was reduced from 15% to 13%; textiles, electrical appliances, etc. are reduced from 25% to 20%. However, this reform of postal import tax does not involve the popular categories in the *dàigòu* industry.

Upon that, on January 1, 2019, China officially rolled out a new e-commerce law (*diànzǐ shāngwù fǎ* 电子商务法). Under this law, all *dàigòu* participants will be legally required to register as e-commerce operators and acquire licenses in both China and the country where they work as a *dàigòu*. This new e-commerce law requires the *dàigòu* subject to taxation in both China and the region where they purchase goods.⁷

Although this policy has promoted the legalization of *dàigòu* to a

⁷The Chinese Ministry of Finance, the General Administration of Customs, and the State Administration of Taxation on the Tax Policies on Cross-Border e-Commerce Retail Imports.

certain extent, there are still some difficulties in the actual implementation process. For example, many of them are still not declaring, despite the e-commerce law, and most of *dàigòu* themselves do not agree with this statement. Lily complained:

“This policy is impractical. It hardly takes into account the difficulty of practitioners in dàigòu industry and is not conducive to the sustainable and healthy development of dàigòu. For example, I have already paid the local consumption tax when I purchase the goods. Why should I pay the tax again, or even twice? I don’t understand.”

“Also, in this situation, after I register as a legalized dàigòu, it means I need to pay taxes twice? Even some Europeans pointed out that if a dàigòu can register a dàigòu company in overseas societies, then he/she can get a certain tax rebate in Europe. However, take Belgium as an example, for most dàigòu individuals, it is not easy to register as a dàigòu company here or register as a freelancer full-time dàigòu work. Especially for individuals who work part-time or occasionally work as dàigòu, it is too hard.”

Therefore, how to improve the development of *dàigòu* was also of paramount concern to *dàigòu* and Chinese consumers. On the one hand, short-term visa holders and long-term visa holders that change once a year, simply do not have the qualifications for such registration. For long-term ID cardholders, such as F cards or F+ cards, and even for individual Chinese *dàigòu* holding Belgian nationality, the sporadic *dàigòu* services are not stable, and the money they make mostly cannot cover the expenses required to run a *dàigòu* company. Greg Cole, director of the digital agency CDGL Strategic Communications said:

“As long as a price gap remains in and outside of China, a portion of Chinese consumers will continue to seek dàigòu.”

SOURCE: Jing Daily. 2021. Will Daigou Help Brands Survive COVID-19? | Jing Daily. [online] Available at: <https://jingdaily.com/will-daigou-help-brands-survive-covid-19/> [Accessed 7 November 2021].

These laws and regulations we discussed here, such as proposing to register a *dàigòu* company, are more applicable for the *dà dàigòu* which we mentioned in this chapter before. In other words, for individual *dàigòu* practitioners, whether it is the Chinese government, the Belgian government, or other foreign governments, they need to formulate a regulation, as well as some support specifically for this unique group to help them develop better.

Even though lots of experts argue that *dàigòu* is a gray market zone and as a career is not entirely legal, the existence of this trade way destroys the local markets and the basic trade rules (H. Li, Shao, & Zhu, 2018; X. Zhang et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020). They also advocate that *dàigòu* will not exist long in the future. But, the Bain & Company 2015 study on China luxury market highlighted that cross-border e-commerce is a major alternative luxury channel that is chosen by Chinese luxury consumers and is a crucial driver for the shift in China's luxury consumption pattern from local to global. Bain.cn. 2016. [online] Available at: <https://www.bain.cn/pdfs/201601210331128186.pdf> [Accessed 23 October 2021]. Besides, through interviews and investigations, we found that the following characteristics of *dàigòu*'s existing status will “protect” it as a profession and a socio-cultural phenomenon to continue to exist for a long time.

First of all, from a certain level, as a profession, it is not completely illegal, and as an individual consumer, their activities are totally in a

legal area. At least for individual *dàigòu*, as individuals, they help a limited number of relatives, friends, or clients to purchase corresponding products within the scope of the legal purchase quantity. For commodities with a large quantity and frequent transportation, such as milk powder, daily necessities, and cosmetics, several express companies operated by the Chinese have opened special customs clearance services to help them avoid legal problems. As local long-term visa holding consumers, they paid the consumption tax exactly. Therefore, from this perspective, there is nothing wrong with their existence.

For a career or a global economic phenomenon that will still exist maybe five years, ten years, twenty years down the line, it is quite important to make a proper policy or regulation. The Chinese government already made some regulations when it became aware of the huge market scale that *dàigòu* market created. But from the *dàigòu* perspective, these regulations did not bring any practical help nor did they give good protection and guidance to the development of *dàigòu* yet. For example, putting a new rule to forbid the development of *dàigòu* will not protect the domestic market. As a social and cultural phenomenon, it is better that we find some good ways to support it instead of forbidding it. Therefore, it will be a significant issue that is relevant for the Chinese policymakers that need to pay attention to studies concerned.

As for the integration of *dàigòu* in overseas society, there are already some relatively successful experiences that can be used for reference. For example, *dàigòu* have been developing very well in Australia. The Australian government advocates that the local companies cooperate with *dàigòu* to avoid the risks when they enter the Chinese market. Even if this kind of thinking is coming from the government level in other overseas societies, until recently it is obviously not very popular.

However, we can still notice some subtle changes. That is after the COVID-19 pandemic, the attitude of European brands, especially the luxury brands, towards the attitude to *dàigòu* has eased. In the

future, we may still try, on some level, to change the mind and redefine the position of *dàigòu* in the consumer market and trade market. Some *dàigòu* advised that firms should treat *dàigòu* like VIPs, offering them exclusive discounts, because in a certain mind, *dàigòu* do not hurt the local market but are actually acting as a facilitator of the buyer-seller (Z. Xie, 2019) to build a good bridge between Chinese consumers and the overseas brands. Especially, most individuals *dàigòu* pay taxes twice when they buy overseas commodities and when the commodities enter China. It means it is legal on the individual level. Another example is the countries like Australia, which makes a lot of policies to encourage *dàigòu* to help local companies to open the Chinese market with low risk. Many other researchers (Ramaseshan, Bejou, Jain, Mason, & Pancras, 2006; Raab, Ajami, & Goddard, 2016) advised that for brands, building a global customer relationship management (CRM) system based on Chinese overseas *dàigòu* would be helpful to them in tracking this powerful, global consumer group. Furthermore, brands could surely use the first-hand information from *dàigòu* to prioritize sought-after, limited-edition products, or consider strategic offers that fall in line with *dàigòu*, namely the Chinese consumer's requests. For example, global international luxury brands are considering integrating traditional Chinese cultural elements more than ever with the objective of being in line with the expectations and attitudes of the grand potential Chinese luxury market (Rovai, 2016). Serena Rovai even created a new concept, namely "Chineseness", in luxury to express the importance of Chinese culture for different brands. This new concept refers to a growing number of global brands combining Chinese cultural elements to provide a strong sense of ritual for Chinese consumers to purchase (Rovai, 2018, 2016). In this process, the consumption of luxury goods in China nowadays is developing from the conspicuousness of blindly following the crowd to the personalized direction that shows the individual's taste, preferences, and investment inclination. Chinese luxury

customers are now changing from a traditional predisposition collectivist view to an individualistic orientation (Jiaxue, 2009). Rather than pushing the same objects to a mass Chinese audience, the international brands try to target more and more the different Chinese consumer groups separately (Manovich 2001:42).

8.3 Significance of *Dàigòu* to the World

8.3.1 From Global Travel of Masks to New Consumer Culture

In early 2020, when the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in Wuhan, the domestic anti-epidemic materials were in short supply. After knowing about the relevant situation, Chinese overseas students and overseas Chinese spontaneously organized the “Million Masks” movement (Figure 8.2) to support China at the first time. On January 31st, the first batch of 16,169 pieces of protective materials took off from Los Angeles in the United States to Shanghai Pudong International Airport and donated them to 13 hospitals and 1 COVID-19 testing agency.⁸ As of the end of February, only the “Million Masks” working group had sent back 4 batches of donated materials, totaling more than 100,000 pieces, to help 51 units in 21 prefecture-level cities in 6 provinces in China. As of March 22, domestic caring companies and anti-epidemic units had successfully pledged or purchased 1,246,873 pieces of qualified anti-epidemic materials overseas through the assistance of the “Million Masks” working group, including 500,000 pieces of protective clothing and 350,000 pieces of masks, and goggles, disinfectants, etc.⁹

On the personal *dàigòu* level, the main business of every overseas *dàigòu* at that COVID-19 period became masks. Due to the foundation laid by the previous *dàigòu* experience, they knew how to do it on

⁸ “百万口罩”行动发起人：希望大家都知道留学生心系祖国。(2020). Retrieved 21 February 2021, from <https://news.sina.cn/sh/2020-04-17/detail-iircuyvh8300599.d.html>

⁹ “百万口罩”行动发起人：希望大家都知道留学生心系祖国。(2020). Retrieved 21 February 2021, from <https://news.sina.cn/sh/2020-04-17/detail-iircuyvh8300599.d.html>



Fig. 8.2 “Millions of Masks” Movement

Source: <https://news.sina.cn/sh/2020-04-17/detail-iircuyvh8300599.d.html>.

Retrieved: February 21, 2021, photograph by Diqing LIU.

the new aim. Masks, goggles, isolation gowns, disinfectants from different countries traveled to China. When the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in China at the beginning of 2020, every Chinese, living, studying, traveling overseas at that time naturally purchased *dàigòu* masks for their relatives and friends in China. In Figure 8.3, we can see Xue'er, a *dàigòu* living in Australia. She helped her Chinese relatives purchase masks locally. This screenshot was posted on January 26, 2020. The staff member of this pharmacy in Australia was holding a sign written in both Chinese and English: No Flu Masks/Sold Out (没有口罩). It showed from the side that before Xue'er went to this pharmacy, a large

number of Chinese people had already come there to purchase masks. Therefore, the staff wrote “没有口罩” in Chinese to remind Chinese consumers that the masks were sold out.

The picture below shows the *dàigòu* Lily, who lives in Belgium, who got masks and hand sanitizers from another *dàigòu* during the COVID-19 quarantine in Belgium from March to May 2020. From Lily’s WeChat Moments, we knew that Lily and her *dàigòu* friend knew each other through *dàigòu* business on WeChat. They never met each other, but they cooperated and supported each other like close friends. In this screenshot, Lily posted pictures with gratitude:

“Thanks to being a dàigòu, I’ve come to know many other dàigòu friends from all over the world (on WeChat). (Therefore) I can get masks (from them) when there are no masks (left in) Belgium. When hand sanitizers were sold out, (I) got hand sanitizer from (another dàigòu) friend too. (Being a dàigòu), (I) can also buy (Chinese specialty) duck eggs during the COVID-19 Quarantine.

——Lily’ s WeChat Moment, May 12, 2020

It is not the only case of helping relatives and friends like Xue’er or being helped by relatives and friends like Lily to facilitate the flow of masks around the world. In addition to these organized overseas donations, almost every Chinese student living abroad has bought masks and anti-epidemic supplies for their relatives, friends, teachers, family members, and customers in China. When overseas COVID-19 epidemic prevention materials were sold out, these Chinese students living overseas also received countless loving masks from Chinese relatives, friends, family, customers, and teachers. After the outbreak of the overseas COVID-19 at the end of March 2020, masks have been continuously sent back to Europe by the Chinese again. Figure 8.4 respectively recorded

the masks from China received by the authors who were quarantined in Belgium from March to May of 2020. To a certain extent, this reflected the characteristics of the new consumer culture during the COVID-19 quarantine period.

Picture 8.4 is divided into four parts in total, the above picture (left) was posted on April 11, 2020. There were 28,000 people diagnosed with COVID-19 in Belgium. The author received masks from the family in China on the same day. They consisted of 5 blue packages of KN94 masks from South Korea and 20 pieces of gray 3M masks from Vietnam. These masks were separately bought through two *dàigòu* in two different countries two months ago when China was deeply mired in the COVID-19 epidemic. The above picture (right) was posted on April 17, 2020, there are 34,809 people were diagnosed with COVID-19 in Belgium. The author received a “health bag” (*jiàn kāng bāo* 健康包) sent by the Chinese Embassy in Belgium to all Chinese students studying in Belgium. This *jiàn kāng bāo* containing 20 pieces of medical masks, 2 pieces of N95 masks, and two boxes of Lotus Qingwen Capsules (*liánhuā qīngwēn jiāonáng* 莲花清瘟胶囊)¹⁰, disinfection tissues, and protection brochures, etc. The bottom picture (left) was posted on April 22, 2020. There are 100 pieces of Japanese medical masks sent by the author’s friend from China. And the bottom photo on the right was taken on April 22, 2020. At that time, masks, disinfection tissues, and hand sanitizer were out of stock in Belgium, but the author received masks from friends, relatives, and all walks of life in China through the previous *dàigòu* network.

Despite the major disruptions for the whole world created by COVID-19, the momentum of *dàigòu* from overseas Chinese seems to remain strong. Now China’s overseas *dàigòu* and their *dàigòu* activity have be-

¹⁰*liánhuā qīngwēn jiāonáng* (莲花清瘟胶囊) referred to as *liánhuā qīngwēn* (莲花清瘟), is a Chinese patent medicine studied during the treatment of SARS. During the 2020 COVID-19, *liánhuā qīngwēn* was approved by the National Medical Products Administration of China for the treatment of mild and common COVID-19 patients.

come not only isolated individual behavior but also a systematic and group behavior. From the content of these screenshots on the picture, we can see the influence of the world system of *dàigòu*. Even during the COVID-19 period, the internal operation of *dàigòu* has been self-contained and has not been affected too much.

In addition, the reverse transportation of *dàigòu* we mentioned in chapter 5 has unexpectedly developed greatly during the COVID-19 epidemic. Take Belgium as an example, during COVID-19 quarantine, except for supermarkets and pharmacies, all luxury stores, outlet villages, and cosmetics stores, etc. were closed. But the overseas Chinese *dàigòu* did not stay idle. They tried to organize the transportation of masks, goggles, protective clothing or Chinese specialties from China to Belgium.

Figure 8.4 recorded all the anti-epidemic supplies the author got when masks, disinfection tissues, and hand sanitizer were out of stock in Belgium. This situation where the epidemic prevention materials can be obtained across borders has happened to almost every Chinese overseas. Everyone can always get support from relatives or friends through a certain network of relationships, namely *guān xi*, we mentioned in chapter 6. At the same time, with the help of a mature global *dàigòu* system, the epidemic prevention materials were quickly and accurately delivered to overseas Chinese. Even though most of these reverse *dàigòu* activities are a kind of reciprocity in the Chinese *guānxi* network, this reverse transportation of *dàigòu* still reflects, to a certain extent, the possibility of the future consumption culture.

Through the global *dàigòu* system, Chinese consumers are not only able to purchase global consumer goods from different countries, such as electronic products in the United States, milk powder in Australia and New Zealand, luxury brands in Europe, skincare products in Southeast Asia, etc. but they also can bidirectionally transport the masks, protective clothing, goggles, and hand sanitizer globally during the COVID-

19. In this system, individual *dàigòu* and Chinese consumers jointly responded to the public health emergency of international concern (abbrev. PHEIC): COVID-19.

This research tries to analyze how this kind of labor service (shopping way) may in the future become a new consuming culture. It means maybe one day, it will change the whole world consumption pattern. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown period, everyone had to stay at home and transfer the consumption way from an offline store to an online world. Ravi Sharma, Banking and Payments Lead Analyst at GlobalData, comments:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has further driven e-commerce activities, as concerned consumers are increasingly using the online channel for their purchases to avoid getting exposed to disease vectors, a trend that is expected to continue even beyond the pandemic.”

SOURCE: 14 Sep 2021 Chinese e-commerce market to reach US\$3.3 trillion in 2025, s., 2021. Chinese e-commerce market to reach US\$3.3 trillion in 2025, says GlobalData - GlobalData. [online] GlobalData. Available at: <https://www.globaldata.com/chinese-e-commerce-market-reach-us3-3-trillion-2025-says-globaldata/> [Accessed 5 October 2021].

But in the beginning, it is not easy for overseas companies, especially the local ones to organize such booming orders at one time abruptly. The express of the online orderings is also a huge task for them. But for the Chinese, who already have around two decades of experience of shopping all over the world through an agent in front of the screen, and create their own global *dàigòu* system to serve this new consuming way. So maybe overseas companies can get some experience from *dàigòu* and D2C business mode.

The traditional B2C or C2C business mode is difficult to meet all

these unique and complex kinds of needs from individual consumers and emergency situation from the world. But individual *dàigòu* scattered around the world have become an important part of global support systems and industrial chains. They have also become important participants and builders of the new globalization process. The personalized *dàigòu* service reveals the feature of consumption in the personal dimension of the Chinese luxury perspective. More and more Chinese online buyers believe that *dàigòu* approach to acquire the overseas global consumer goods represents a perfectly convenient and economic way of shopping. Meanwhile, new media follows the logic of the postindustrial or globalized society whereby every individual can construct their own custom lifestyle from a large number of choices globally (Manovich 2001:42).

We can even boldly predict that the global *dàigòu* system and its industry chain, or this form of consumption mode, may fundamentally change the consumption patterns and consumption habits of people all around the world in the future. And it is also possible that the *dàigòu* shopping way will become another new consuming culture.

8.3.2 From Gray Market to Vital Part of Cross-border Business

Many researchers deny the promotion and stimulus effect of *dàigòu* and the D2C business mode on the local economy (H. Li et al., 2018; X. Zhang et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020). They pointed out that *dàigòu* transactions occur not in market forms, but in “gray markets”, where organizations’ resources are allocated by unauthorized intermediaries (Park, Hyunkyu, and Minshall, Tim, 2017). They asserted that firms once involved with *dàigòu* may find it difficult to terminate their relationship with these gray marketers¹¹. In Zappa’s 2009 research, it is pointed out that *dàigòu* is considered as an agent who works in the gray

¹¹This article was published online on Nov 30, 2017. For more detailed information please check the article link: <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2017.14536abstract>

market. Other research following (Levi & Soudijn, 2020; H. Li et al., 2018; Z. Zhang & Feng, 2017; Huang et al., 2020; K. Zhao et al., 2016) insist that *dàigòu* functions as a kind of “smuggler” because shopping in this way can avoid the high custom taxes. Huang said that as a gray zone, it is an “ungoverned” inter-organizational relationship that progresses over time, and it disrupts the local market (Huang et al., 2020).

Songzi Du, a young *dàigòu*, that I met on the plane from Brussels to Dubai, has been working for luxury brands in Italy and Dubai for more than 8 years. She started her *dàigòu* business to supplement her living expenses, but it quickly became a stable part-time job. By connecting with her personal working experience in luxury stores in different countries, she had the chance to build a network of suppliers to access luxuries with employee discounts. For ordinary merchandise, she can buy them at a price of 30% off and for the series that are not very well-sold, she may get a discount of 50%, or even higher. For those limited editions, catwalks editions, or niche designs that are very difficult to buy, Songzi sometimes may also have a chance to get at a price of 5-10% off. Then she sells it with an increase of about 10-15% on the basis of this employee discounts. From the perspective of Songzi, she fully understands the reasons why brands do not welcome *dàigòu*. Songzi mentioned the following reasons in the interview:

“Take the Italian Gucci store as an example, their brand route prefers to accept individual consumers who purchase through official offline or online stores, rather than a “middleman” as dàigòu. Firstly, this way will hurt the exquisite image of the brand over the long term, because consumers get the knowledge and impression of the brand through photos and videos taken by a middleman (dàigòu). Secondly, for brands, the existence of a large number of middlemen will affect the brand’s sales share in the Chinese mar-

ket to a certain extent, making it harder for a brand to track sales and formulate regional strategies. Moreover, if the long-term development continues, it may really cause brands to rely on dàigòu as predicted by some experts.”

Songzi further explained:

“The ‘middleman’ here refers to a big dàigòu (dà dàigòu 大代购) who can enjoy 22% off the original price, i.e., tax refund price. And the goods they purchase will be delivered directly from the Gucci stores to Hong Kong or Macau. For example, a middleman who can reach the level of dà dàigòu, just needs to spend 780 euros for a bag of 1,000 euros.”

“However, dà dàigòu need to have mature Hong Kong or Macau customs clearance companies and transshipment channels to accept these goods, and also need to successfully ship them back to the mainland market. In addition, for dà dàigòu, the international freight also varies due to the difference in the amount of the goods. For example, the single pick-up below 20,000 euros has a freight standard ; between 20,000-40,000 euros is another standard. When the single pick-up quantity exceeds 40,000 euros, a new freight standard will be implemented.”

——Songzi DU, Sep 11, 2021, WeChat discussion

The Gucci tax refund price for *dà dàigòu* mentioned here is completely different from the Louis Vuitton limit policy (*xiàngòu zhèngcè* 限购政策) mentioned in previous chapter. For example, Louis Vuitton’ s

xiànggòu zhèngcè is aimed at a consumer who can only buy 3 handbags in half a year. Most individual consumers can easily consume three bags at one time, because of the scarcity of bags. Therefore, LV does not treat *dàigòu* in different grades. There is also no *xiànggòu zhèngcè* at Gucci stores. But the same consumer (here, refers to *dà dàigòu*) may buy 10 to 50 of the same bag or 50 to 100 same belts at a time. The contradiction lies in the fact that at one side, Gucci does not want China's *dà dàigòu* to disrupt its market supply, but on the other side, it has designed a unique tax rebate and carriage standards to “encourage” *dà dàigòu* to shop massively.

And there are not a few luxury brands setting the similar “thresholds” standard to attract Chinese *dà dàigòu*. For example, Loewe, Celine, and Bulgari all have similar marketing strategies. Since the operation mode of this type of *dà dàigòu* is completely different from the individualized *dàigòu*, therefore they are not the main body of this research. However, we still have to discuss this issue here, because there are pros and cons to the existence of *dà dàigòu*. Therefore, in terms of brands, they also don't like to sell their products directly to *dà dàigòu*. In addition, considering the possibility of brand's reliance on *dà dàigòu*, and the uncertainty of *dà dàigòu*'s legal position in overseas societies and other factors.

But thus far, there are also many other brands that seem to be alright with that. Renee Hartmann, a co-founder of China Luxury Advisors said:

“The legal aspect is not exactly a black and white scenario, because for a lot of brands, once you sell your product, it's out of your hands, especially with shipping and customs.”

SOURCE: Jing Daily. 2021. Will Daigou Help Brands Survive COVID-19? | Jing Daily.
[online] Available at: <https://jingdaily.com/will-daigou-help-brands-survive-covid-19/>

[Accessed 7 November 2021].

While lots of overseas luxury brands may still be deciding whether or not to work with *dàigòu*, we must admit that *dàigòu* will remain a vital part of the cross-border luxury business for a long time (Ng, 2017; Sosnovskikh, 2021; X. Zhang et al., 2021). For example, before the COVID-19 epidemic, sales person in luxury stores were unwilling to serve for *dà dàigòu*. The price of the goods sold to *dà dàigòu* is cut off the 22% tax rebate, therefore, this part of the sales is not included in the sales representative performance. Secondly, a large number of *dà dàigòu* “transfers” luxury goods from the European market to the Chinese market, which has impacted the sales of brands there to a certain extent. On the whole, luxury brands tend to “*not welcome dàigòu*”. In the eyes of many luxury brands, this kind of “unwelcome” is not discriminatory because they consider that they want to “*prioritize the sale of goods in the store to consumers who go to the store for personal consumption by themselves, but rarely consider selling the goods in the store to a dà dàigòu at first*”. Therefore, from this perspective, it is indeed just a sales strategy for brands to maintain a balanced local supply.

But, after the COVID-19 lockdown in particular, no one knew how long the epidemic will last, facing the sluggish global consumer market, Chinese consumers still keep their key position of revenue for global consumer products. For example, when Belgium was unlocked, Chinese *dàigòu* living there rushed into the stores to be the first to purchase for Chinese consumers far away in China. Even during the lockdown period, Chinese consumers can still consume global goods from *dàigòu*’s stock up, which makes the brands begin to believe that Chinese overseas *dàigòu*, no matter whether they are individual ones or *dà dàigòu*, hold different consumers’ resources on their hand. It has become essential for stores as they try to weather the ongoing COVID-19 storm. Therefore,

more and more brands began to lean towards *dàigòu*.

For Chinese consumers, they continue to drive the global consumer goods market growth without going out (Gerth, 2010). Griffiths in his articles suggested that brands should work with *dàigòu* as *dàigòu* can help these brands to better understand the new Chinese consumers, their purchasing power, lifestyle, and demand (H. Chen, Griffith, & Hu, 2006; H. S. Lee & Griffith, 2012; Q. Chen, He, Zhao, & Griffith, 2008; X. Xu, 2013). *Dàigòu* can also help them access the Chinese market, build brand image, reach more potential customers (Ng, 2017; Jin, 2017). For those native local brands, the impressions on Chinese consumers could come from *dàigòu*, therefore in some level, we could not deny that *dàigòu* can help these brands/firms maintain their cultural integrity as much as possible (H. Chen et al., 2006; H. S. Lee & Griffith, 2012; Q. Chen et al., 2008).

Dàigòu are discrete of course, but they count in the hundreds of millions if we add the scattered *dàigòu* together. Chinese consumers shop all over the world by clicking the screen and virtually connect with them. They are moving as a cultural phenomenon, they promote products transfer internationally and reshape consumers' shopping behavior. However, this does not mean that *dàigòu* is a piece of by-product.

Because *dàigòu* create their own cultural system and have their own operation logic, the D2C business mode developed through social networks and social media platforms and generated new means of communication, ways of payment, and ways of shopping, thus constituting the malleable, mutable, and polyhedral substance of globalized consumption (Zani, 2019; Shilei, 2016).

From an anthropological point of view, the borderless shopping way charged by *dàigòu*, which crosses the barriers of time and space, is not only an economic behavior but also a new type of social and cultural phenomenon.

At the same time, it is also an exploratory attempt for our future

social lifestyle and global consumption practices (Manovich et al., 2014). Information technology, mass media, and the global consumer experience across national borders all define the elements of globalization in the new era. In Belgium and global, with the help of new media technology and digital technology, globalization of consumption has been further developed (James, 2000a).

Therefore, the significance of this research may lie in a large number of case studies, and try to show how can we help *dàigòu* to exist and develop better when this important phenomenon will continue to exist for a long time in the future.



Fig. 8.3 Global travel of masks.

Sources: Xue'er's WeChat Moments. Date: Jan 26, 2020. Lily's WeChat Moments, Date: May 12, 2020. Translated by the author.



Fig. 8.4 A new type of consumer culture

Sources: The author's WeChat Moments. Date: April 11, 2020; April 17, 2020; April 22, 2020.

Key Chinese Concepts

Chapter 1

<i>dàigòu</i>	代购 (n, v, adj)
<i>dài</i>	代 (v)
<i>gòu</i>	购 (v)
Ali Research Institute	阿里研究院 (n)
<i>dàigòu guānxi</i>	代购关系 (n)
<i>guānxi</i>	关系 (n)
<i>L'Énigme du Don</i>	《礼物之谜》(n)
<i>rénqíng zībēn</i>	人情资本 (n)
<i>Yangshi Xinwen</i>	央视新闻 (n)
<i>Xinhua Wang</i>	新华网 (n)
<i>Yangshi Wang</i>	央视网 (n)
<i>Zhongguo Qingnian Bao</i>	中国青年报 (n)
<i>Nanhua Zaobao</i>	南华早报 (n)
WeChat	微信 (n)
Weibo	微博 (n)
Xiaohongshu	小红书 (n)
Dianxiu	店秀 (n)
recommend notes	种草笔记 (n)
<i>zǒuchūqù zhànlüè</i>	走出去战略 (n)
<i>hǎiwài mínzúzhì</i>	海外民族志 (n)
<i>máquè suīxiǎo wǔzàng jùquán</i>	麻雀虽小, 五脏俱全 (slang)
<i>bóshì</i>	博士 (n)
<i>shǎ bóshì</i>	傻博士 (n)
<i>xīn shǒu</i>	新手 (n)

zhàn piányi

占便宜, 很划算 (adj)

Chapter 2

Jinri toutiao

今日头条 (n)

Toutiao

头条 (n)

Mafeng wo

马蜂窝 (n)

jìjiéxíng dàigòu

季节型代购 (n)

hòuniǎoxíng dàigòu

候鸟型代购 (n)

quánqiú mǎi shǒu

全球买手 (n)

zhōngjiān rén

中间人 (n)

Tencent QQ

腾讯 (n)

Weidian

微店 (n)

Wechat Wallet (WeChat pay)

微信支付 (n)

Taobao

淘宝 (n)

Tianmao

天猫 (n)

Zhīfùbǎo (Alipay)

支付宝 (n)

jiǎnlòu

捡漏 (adj, v)

jiǎn

捡 (v)

lòu

漏 (n)

Qianzhan Industry Research Institute

前瞻产业研究院 (n)

Chapter 3

Belgium

比利时 (n)

World Geography

《瀛寰志略》 (n)

Jìyú Xú

徐继畲 (yú) (n)

bīlìshí cūn

比利时村/比村 (n)

bùlǔ sàier cūn

布鲁塞尔村/布村 (n)

bǐ dài

比代 (n)

rì dài

日代 (n)

fǎ dài

法代 (n)

měi dài

美代 (n)

Junan Express

君安快递 (n)

Chapter 4*huán rén qíng*

还人情 (v)

diànzǐ shāngwù fǎ

电子商务法 (n)

pǎo bù liǎo

跑不了 (adj)

Bǐlìshí huáqiáo

比利时华侨 (n)

Bǐlìshí huárén

比利时华人 (n)

pèihuò

配货 (n, v)

duò shǒu dǎng

剁手党 (n)

wǒ ài nǐ

我爱你 (I love you)

quánqiú mǎi shǒu

全球买手 (n)

Zhihu

知乎 (n)

hán dài

韩代 (n)

nǚ hàn zi

女汉子 (n)

kàn kan wàimiànde shìjiè

看看外面的世界

shū shū

叔叔 (n)

gū gū

姑姑 (n)

yí mā

姨妈 (n)

Melamine

三聚氰胺 (n)

Sanlu milk powder

三鹿奶粉 (n)

Chapter 5*qízhèng xiāotòng tiēgāo*

奇正消痛贴膏 (n)

fēngyóu jīng

风油精 (n)

yúnnán báiyào

云南白药 (n)

mīmī xiātiáo

咪咪虾条 (n)

là tiáo

辣条 (n)

xiǎomǐ là

小米辣 (n)

mù'ěr

木耳 (n)

gān xiānggū

干香菇 (n)

<i>dòufu rǔ</i>	豆腐乳 (n)
<i>rénròu</i>	人肉 (n, v, adj)
<i>rénròu dàigòu</i>	人肉代购 (n)
<i>rénròu kuàidì</i>	人肉快递 (n)
<i>tóngxiāng</i>	同乡 (n)
<i>xíngyóu shuì</i>	行邮税 (n)
<i>xínglǐ hé yóudì wùpǐn jìnkǒushuì</i>	行李和邮递物品进口税 (n)
STO Express	申通快递 (n)
<i>dīngdīng sùdì</i>	丁丁速递 (n)
<i>hǎixiáng guójì wùliú</i>	海翔国际物流 (n)
<i>āndá sùdì</i>	安达速递 (n)
<i>yìchéng kuàidì</i>	易程快递 (n)
<i>xiǎobāoguǒ zhuānxiàn</i>	小包裹专线 (n)
<i>yìchéng dàxínglǐ zhuānxiàn</i>	易程大行李专线 (n)
<i>yìchéng jùhuásuàn zhíyóu</i>	易程聚划算直邮 (n)
The Belgian Post Group (Bpost)	比利时国家邮政 (n)
Express Mail Service (EMS)	邮政特快专递 (n)
The mini parcel route	小包裹专线 (n)
Collection from domicile	上门取货 (n)

Chapter 6

WeChat open class PRO	微信公开课 (n)
WeChat night	微信之夜 (n)
<i>tiān māo guó jì</i>	天猫国际 (n)
<i>jīngdōng quánqiúgòu</i>	京东全球购 (n)
<i>huā bei</i>	花呗 (n)
<i>zuànshí huìyuán</i>	钻石会员 (n)
<i>shúrén guānxi</i>	熟人关系 (n, adj)
<i>rénqíng</i>	人情 (n)
<i>gānqíng</i>	感情 (n)
<i>miànzi</i>	面子 (n)

bùgěi miànzi

不给面子 (n)

shú rén shèhuì

熟人社会 (n)

bānyùn gōng

搬运工 (n)

Chapter 7*nǎifěn xiàngòu zhèngcè*

奶粉限购政策 (n)

xiǎo jīnguǎn

小金管 (n)

Palm Springs mini Backpack

LV 小书包 (n)

xiàngòu zhèngcè

限购政策 (n)

DT Finance

DT 财经 (n)

CBN (First Financial)

第一财经 (n)

First Commercial Data Center

第一商数据中心 (n)

zǎnqián de sùdù , gǎnbùshàng zhǎngjià de fúdù

攒钱的速度, 赶不上涨价的幅度

zǎomǎi zǎo xiǎngshòu

早买早享受 (slang)

bǎqián huāzài dāorènrshàng

把钱花在刀刃上 (slang)

pèihuò guīzé

配货规则 (n)

yǒu miàn zi

有面子 (adj)

hǎitáo

海淘 (n, v)

hǎitáo kè

海淘客 (n)

Chapter 8*zhōnggǔ huò*

中古货 (n)

no flu masks/sold out

没有口罩

jiàn kāng bāo

健康包 (n)

liánhuā qīngwēn jiāonáng

莲花清瘟胶囊 (n)

liánhuā qīngwēn

莲花清瘟 (n)

pǔsù

朴素 (adj)

guānxi consumption

关系消费 (n)

References

- Abdelkarim, A., & Nasereddin, H. (2010). Mobile commerce. *Journal of Mathematics and Technology*, 4(1), 51–56.
- Abélès, M. (2018a). Pour une anthropologie globale du luxe... et de la mode. entretien avec marc abélès. *Terrains/Théories*(8).
- Abélès, M. (2018b). *Un ethnologue au pays du luxe*. Odile Jacob.
- Adjei, M. T., Noble, S. M., & Noble, C. H. (2010). The influence of c2c communications in online brand communities on customer purchase behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(5), 634–653.
- Alexander, F. K., & Pushnik, J. C. (2017). Public-public partnerships for a new paradigm in the civic role of the university. *Sustainability: The Journal of Record*, 10(5), 315–321.
- Ambler, T., Styles, C., & Xiucun, W. (1999). The effect of channel relationships and guanxi on the performance of inter-province export ventures in the people's republic of china. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 16(1), 75–87.
- Analytica, O. (n.d.). E-commerce gives exporters greater access to china. *Emerald Expert Briefings*(oxan-db).
- Aneesh, A. (2006). *Virtual migration: The programming of globalization*. Duke University Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Vol. 1). U of Minnesota Press.
- Appadurai, A. (2014). Arjun appadurai. *Globalizations*, 11(4), 481–490.
- Appel, L., Dadlani, P., Dwyer, M., Hampton, K., Kitzie, V., Matni, Z. A., ... Teodoro, R. (2014). Testing the validity of social capital measures in the study of information and communication technologies. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(4), 398–416.
- Arditi, J., Bramlett, M. D., Cerulo, K. A., Cook, D. T., DuPuis, E. M., Halton, E., ... others (2000). *New forms of consumption: Con-*

- sumers, culture, and commodification*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Asshidin, N. H. N., Abidin, N., & Borhan, H. B. (2016). Perceived quality and emotional value that influence consumer's purchase intention towards american and local products. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 35(3), 639–643.
- Au, A. (2021). Guanxi 2.0: the exchange of likes in social networking sites. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(13), 1891–1906.
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2010). When virtual worlds expand. In *Online worlds: Convergence of the real and the virtual* (pp. 237–251). Springer.
- Bainbridge, W. S. (2011). *The virtual future*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Baker, S. M. (2006). Consumer normalcy: Understanding the value of shopping through narratives of consumers with visual impairments. *Journal of retailing*, 82(1), 37–50.
- Bandelj, N. (2015). Thinking about social relations in economy as relational work. *Re-imagining economic sociology*, 227–251.
- Barbalet, J. (2021). The analysis of chinese rural society: Fei xiaotong revisited. *Modern China*, 47(4), 355–382.
- Basmann, R. L., Molina, D. J., & Slottje, D. J. (1988). A note on measuring veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 531–535.
- Belk, R. (2010). Possessions and self. *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing*.
- Bell, D. (2000). Guanxi: A nesting of groups. *Current anthropology*, 41(1), 132–138.
- Berger, R., & Herstein, R. (2013). Marketing and non-market based value creation: gifts and guanxi. *Journal of Business Theory and Practice*, 1(1), 166–185.
- Bian, Y., & Zhang, L. (2014). Corporate social capital in chinese guanxi

- culture. In *Contemporary perspectives on organizational social networks*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Bingzhong, G. (2021). Overseas ethnography and globalized society. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 11(1), 374–377.
- Bofulin, M., & Coates, J. (2017). Bakugai! explosive shopping and entangled sino-japanese mobilities. *Anthropology News*, 58(1), e275–e278.
- Bonetti, F., Perry, P., & Fernie, J. (2017). The evolution of luxury fashion retailing in china. In *Luxury fashion retail management* (pp. 49–67). Springer.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard university press.
- Brooker, G. (1976). The self-actualizing socially conscious consumer. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 3(2), 107–112.
- Brown, K. (2019). *Contemporary china*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Brusadin, L. B. (2016). The gift theory of marcel mauss and the potlatch ritual: a triad of hospitality. In *The routledge handbook of hospitality studies* (pp. 314–326). Routledge.
- Burawoy, M., Blum, J. A., George, S., Gille, Z., & Thayer, M. (2000). *Global ethnography: Forces, connections, and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Univ of California Press.
- Burhanuddin, A. (2018). Rethinking world system theory: A historical and conceptual analysis. *WANUA: Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, 1(1), 1–16.
- Burt, R. S., & Burzynska, K. (2017). Chinese entrepreneurs, social networks, and guanxi. *Management and Organization Review*, 13(2), 221–260.
- Cai, P., et al. (n.d.). Australia must capitalise on the chinese diaspora. In *East asia forum quarterly* (Vol. 8, p. 38).
- Caillé, A. (2020). *Anthropologie du don*. La découverte.

- Cairncross, F. (2002). The death of distance. *RSA Journal*, 149(5502), 40–42.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Springer.
- Campbell, C. (2005). The sociology of consumption. In *Acknowledging consumption* (pp. 103–132). Routledge.
- Carroll, A., Heiser, G., et al. (2010). An analysis of power consumption in a smartphone. In *Usenix annual technical conference* (Vol. 14, pp. 21–21).
- Chan, C. (2015). When one app rules them all: The case of wechat and mobile in china. *Recuperado de* <http://a16z.com/2015/08/06/wechat-china-mobile-first>.
- Chandra, A., Head, K., & Tappata, M. (2014). The economics of cross-border travel. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 96(4), 648–661.
- Chang, H. (2016). *Autoethnography as method* (Vol. 1). Routledge.
- Chanial, P. (2010). Bourdieu, a paradoxical “inheritor” ? *Revue du MAUSS*(2), 483–492.
- Chen, H. (2017). Application of internet of things technology in ship’s personal life. In *2017 international conference on computer technology, electronics and communication (icctec)* (pp. 1318–1321).
- Chen, H., Griffith, D. A., & Hu, M. Y. (2006). The influence of liability of foreignness on market entry strategies: An illustration of market entry in china. *International Marketing Review*.
- Chen, J., Zhang, C., & Xu, Y. (2009). The role of mutual trust in building members’ loyalty to a c2c platform provider. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 14(1), 147–171.
- Chen, L. (2013). An analysis of an online purchasing service for the overseas chinese.
- Chen, P.-C. (2018). The development path of wechat: Social, political and ethical challenges. In *The digitization of business in china*

(pp. 127–152). Springer.

- Chen, Q., He, Y., Zhao, X., & Griffith, D. (2008). Sources of product information for chinese rural consumers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 27(1), 67–97.
- Chen, X.-P., & Chen, C. C. (2004). On the intricacies of the chinese guanxi: A process model of guanxi development. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 21(3), 305–324.
- Chen, Y., Huang, R., Chen, D., Wang, Y., Liu, W., Li, X., & Li, Z. (2012). Exploring the different photocatalytic performance for dye degradations over hexagonal znin₂s₄ microspheres and cubic znin₂s₄ nanoparticles. *ACS applied materials & interfaces*, 4(4), 2273–2279.
- Chen, Y., Lu, Y., Wang, B., & Pan, Z. (2019). How do product recommendations affect impulse buying? an empirical study on wechat social commerce. *Information & Management*, 56(2), 236–248.
- Chong, G. (2008). 7 embeddedness and virtual community. *Chinese Women and the Cyberspace*, 2, 135.
- Chung, H. F. (2011). Market orientation, guanxi, and business performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(4), 522–533.
- Chung, W.-K., & Hamilton, G. G. (2001). Social logic as business logic: Guanxi, trustworthiness, and the embeddedness of chinese business practices. *Rules and networks: The legal culture of global business transactions*, 1, 325–346.
- Clarke III, I., Micken, K. S., & Hart, H. S. (2002). Symbols for sale... at least for now: Symbolic consumption in transition economies. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 29(1).
- Clingingsmith, D., & Sheremeta, R. M. (2018). Status and the demand for visible goods: Experimental evidence on conspicuous consumption. *Experimental Economics*, 21(4), 877–904.
- Communities, I. (1983). *Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

- Cowell, A. (2013). The pleasures and pains of the gift. In *The question of the gift* (pp. 290–308). Routledge.
- Dalton, G. (1969). Theoretical issues in economic anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 10(1), 63–102.
- Danning, W. (2011). Guanxi or li shang wanglai? reciprocity, social support networks and social creativity in a chinese village. *The China Journal*(66), 184–186.
- De Mooij, M. (2019). *Consumer behavior and culture: Consequences for global marketing and advertising*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Deprez, K., & Vos, L. (2016). *Nationalism in belgium: shifting identities, 1780-1995*. Springer.
- Derval, D. (2018). Understanding luxury shoppers. In *Designing luxury brands* (pp. 1–26). Springer.
- de Seta, G. (2015). Postdigital wangluo: The internet in chinese everyday life. *Anthropology Now*, 7(3), 106–117.
- Dittmar, H. (2007). *Consumer culture, identity and well-being: The search for the 'good life' and the 'body perfect'*. Psychology Press.
- Douglas, M., & Isherwood, B. (2003). *The world of goods: Towards an anthropology of consumption* (Vol. 6). Psychology Press.
- Douglas, M., & Isherwood, B. (2021). *The world of goods*. Routledge.
- Dreher, A., Gassebner, M., & Siemers, L.-H. (2012). Globalization, economic freedom, and human rights. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56(3), 516–546.
- Dullo, E. (2016). Seriously enough? describing or analysing the native (s)' s point of view. *After the Crisis*, 133–153.
- Dunning, J. H., & Kim, C. (2007). The cultural roots of guanxi: An exploratory study. *World Economy*, 30(2), 329–341.
- Eade, J. (2003). *Living the global city: Globalization as local process*. Routledge.
- Ekinci, Y., Sirakaya-Turk, E., & Preciado, S. (2013). Symbolic consumption of tourism destination brands. *Journal of business re-*

- search*, 66(6), 711–718.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2015). Free gifts and positional gifts: Beyond exchange. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 18(4), 451–468.
- Elliott, R. (1999). Symbolic meaning and postmodern consumer culture. *Rethinking marketing: Towards critical marketing accounts*, 112–125.
- Ellis, C. (2009). *Autoethnography as method*. JSTOR.
- Elms, J., & Tinson, J. (2012). Consumer vulnerability and the transformative potential of internet shopping: An exploratory case study. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28(11-12), 1354–1376.
- Falkoff, R. (2021). Lipstick vitalism: On the beauty of a different modernity in primo levi's periodic table. *Configurations*, 29(1), 53–72.
- Fan, Q. (2019). An exploratory study of cross border e-commerce (cbec) in china: Opportunities and challenges for small to medium size enterprises (smes). *International Journal of E-Entrepreneurship and Innovation (IJEI)*, 9(1), 23–29.
- Fei, X. (1992). 12. consanguinity and regionalism. In *From the soil* (pp. 120–127). University of California Press.
- Feuchtwang, S. (2015). Social egoism and individualism. *Journal of China in Comparative Perspective*, 1(1), 143–160.
- Fine, B. (2002). *The world of consumption: the material and cultural revisited* (Vol. 19). Psychology Press.
- Frändberg, L., & Vilhelmson, B. (2003). Personal mobility: a corporeal dimension of transnationalisation. the case of long-distance travel from sweden. *Environment and Planning A*, 35(10), 1751–1768.
- Friedman, D., & Ostrov, D. N. (2008). Conspicuous consumption dynamics. *Games and Economic Behavior*, 64(1), 121–145.
- Fung, A. (2021). Transnational flow of chinese and uk fashion discourse: Analyses of digital platforms and online shopping in china. *Fashion Theory*, 1–14.

- Gan, C. (2017). Understanding wechat users' liking behavior: An empirical study in china. *Computers in human behavior*, 68, 30–39.
- Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C., & Wellman, B. (1997). Studying online social networks. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 3(1), JCMC313.
- Geffen, D., & Govindaraiulu, C. (2001). Erp customer loyalty: an exploratory investigation into the importance of a trusting relationship. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application (JITTA)*, 3(1), 3.
- Gentile, C., Spiller, N., & Noci, G. (2007). How to sustain the customer experience:: An overview of experience components that co-create value with the customer. *European management journal*, 25(5), 395–410.
- Gentry, J., Baker, S. M., & Kraft, F. B. (1995). The role of possessions in creating, maintaining, and preserving one's identity: Variation over the life course. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Gereffi, G. (2010). 8. the global economy: Organization, governance, and development. In *The handbook of economic sociology* (pp. 160–182). Princeton University Press.
- Gerth, K. (2010). *As china goes, so goes the world: How chinese consumers are transforming everything*. Hill and Wang.
- Giddens, A. (2003). *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*. Taylor & Francis.
- Giddens, A. (2013). *The consequences of modernity*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Gille, Z., & Riain, S. Ó. (2002). Global ethnography. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 271–295.
- Gillreath-Brown, A., & Deter-Wolf, A. (n.d.). On point (and not npr): Ancient tattooing in the southwestern united states.
- Glick Schiller, N., & Salazar, N. B. (2013). Regimes of mobility across the globe. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 39(2), 183–

200.

- Godbout, J., & Caillé, A. (1992). *L'esprit du don*. La découverte Paris.
- Godelier, M. (2000). Things you don' t give or sell but which you keep: Valuable and social objects. In *The economics of reciprocity, giving and altruism* (pp. 182–195). Springer.
- Godelier, M. (2013). *Rationality and irrationality in economics*. Verso Trade.
- Godelier, M. (2014). *L'énigme du don*. Fayard.
- Gold, T., Guthrie, D., & Wank, D. (2002). An introduction to the study of guanxi. *Social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi*, 3.
- Gomes, J. F. (2001). Financing investment. *American Economic Review*, 91(5), 1263–1285.
- Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. *American journal of sociology*, 91(3), 481–510.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American journal of sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.
- Gupta, A. (2014). E-commerce: Role of e-commerce in today' s business. *International Journal of Computing and Corporate Research*, 4(1), 1–8.
- Gygli, S., Haelg, F., Potrafke, N., & Sturm, J.-E. (2019). The kof globalisation index–revisited. *The Review of International Organizations*, 14(3), 543–574.
- Hadjimichalis, C. (2006). Non-economic factors in economic geography and in 'new regionalism' : a sympathetic critique. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30(3), 690–704.
- Haiyun, M. C. Z. (2011). Fei xiaotong's investigations and conceptualization of the social gan-qing ethnic regions. *Northwestern Journal of Ethnology*.
- Hallin, A., Crevani, L., & Lychnell, L.-O. (2013). Introducing the multi-

- spatial study: Taking process ontology seriously in organization studies. In *Nordic academy of management, nff, aug 21-23, 2013, iceland*.
- Hannerz, U., & Ulf Hannerz, H. (1996). *Transnational connections: Culture, people, places*. Taylor & Francis US.
- Hanson, S. S. (2004). Critical auto/ethnography. *Ethnography unbound: From theory shock to critical praxis*, 183–200.
- Hawkins, D. I., Mothersbaugh, D. L., et al. (2010). *Consumer behavior: Building marketing strategy*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin,.
- Hayano, D. M. (1979). Auto-ethnography: Paradigms, problems, and prospects. *Human organization*, 38(1), 99–104.
- Hjorth, L., & Hinton, S. (2019). *Understanding social media*. Sage.
- Holt, D. B. (1997). Poststructuralist lifestyle analysis: Conceptualizing the social patterning of consumption in postmodernity. *Journal of Consumer research*, 23(4), 326–350.
- Holt, D. B. (1998). Does cultural capital structure american consumption? *Journal of consumer research*, 25(1), 1–25.
- Hoontrakul, P. (2017). *Economic transformation and business opportunities in asia*. Springer.
- Hsing, Y.-t. (2003). Building guanxi across the straits: Taiwanese capital and local chinese bureaucrats. In *Ungrounded empires* (pp. 153–174). Routledge.
- Hsiung, B. (2013). Guanxi: Personal connections in chinese society. *Journal of Bioeconomics*, 15(1), 17–40.
- Huang, H., He, Y., & Chen, J. (2020). Cross-market selling channel strategies in an international luxury brand's supply chain with gray markets. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 144, 102157.
- Hughes, C.-H. L., Lucas, G. J., & Brown, D. L. (2019). The daigou business model: Explanation and implications. In *Academy of management proceedings* (Vol. 2019, p. 15531).

- Hung, K., Qiu Zhang, H., Guillet, B. D., & Wang, L. (2020). China watching: luxury consumption and its implications. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 37(5), 577–592.
- Hung, K., Ren, L., & Qiu, H. (2021). Luxury shopping abroad: What do chinese tourists look for? *Tourism Management*, 82, 104182.
- Hunter, A. (2016). Monetizing the mommy: mommy blogs and the audience commodity. *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(9), 1306–1320.
- Hwang, K. (2004). Social connections in china: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi. *Contemporary Sociology*, 33(5), 572.
- Hwang, K.-k. (1987). Face and favor: The chinese power game. *American journal of Sociology*, 92(4), 944–974.
- James, J. (2000a). *Consumption, globalization and development*. Springer.
- James, J. (2000b). Globalization, conspicuous consumption and the international demonstration effect reconsidered. In *Consumption, globalization and development* (pp. 28–60). Springer.
- Janssens, R. (2008). Language use in brussels and the position of dutch. some recent findings. *Brussels Studies. La revue scientifique pour les recherches sur Bruxelles/Het wetenschappelijk tijdschrift voor onderzoek over Brussel/The Journal of Research on Brussels*.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., Tractinsky, N., & Saarinen, L. (1999). Consumer trust in an internet store: A cross-cultural validation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 5(2), JCMC526.
- Jayasubramanian, P., Sivasakthi, D., & Ananthi, P. (2015). A study on customer satisfaction towards online shopping. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(8), 489–495.
- Jeřábek, H., et al. (2012). Merton a lazarsfeld: spolupráce sociologické teorie s empirickým výzkumem. *Sociológia-Slovak Sociological Review*, 44(1), 62–82.

- Jiang, L., & Cova, V. (2012). Love for luxury, preference for counterfeits—a qualitative study in counterfeit luxury consumption in china. *International journal of marketing studies*, 4(6).
- Jiang, L. Y., & Kungel, N. (n.d.). Chinese cross-border online shopping through agents from sweden—.
- Jiangang, G., Tian, K., & Guang, T. (2018). Non-economic factors impacts on economy: On interphase operating principle. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, 20(2).
- Jiaxue, C. (2009). The analysis of tendency of transition from collectivism to individualism in china. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 5(4), 42–50.
- Jin, H. (2017). *The impact of digital platforms on new zealand firms' entry strategies: The case of alibaba* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Auckland University of Technology.
- Jin, H., Moscardo, G., & Murphy, L. (2020). Exploring chinese outbound tourist shopping: A social practice framework. *Journal of Travel Research*, 59(1), 156–172.
- John, W. S. (2003). Metrosexuals come out. *online] NYTimes. com., June, 22*.
- Jones, Q. (1997). Virtual-communities, virtual settlements & cyber-archaeology: A theoretical outline. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(3), JCMC331.
- Jordan, B. (2009). Blurring boundaries: The” real” and the” virtual” in hybrid spaces. *Human organization*, 68(2), 181–193.
- Kardes, F. R., Cline, T. W., & Cronley, M. L. (2011). Consumer behavior: Science and practice.
- Karnouskos, S., Hondroudaki, A., Vilmos, A., & Csik, B. (2004). Security, trust and privacy in the secure mobile payment service. In *3rd international conference on mobile business* (Vol. 35).
- Katona, Z., Zubcsek, P. P., & Sarvary, M. (2011). Network effects and personal influences: The diffusion of an online social network.

- Journal of marketing research*, 48(3), 425–443.
- Kenning, P. H., & Plassmann, H. (2008). How neuroscience can inform consumer research. *IEEE Transactions on Neural Systems and Rehabilitation Engineering*, 16(6), 532–538.
- Khalifa, M., & Shen, K. N. (2008). Explaining the adoption of transactional b2c mobile commerce. *Journal of enterprise information management*.
- Kim, H.-W., Xu, Y., & Koh, J. (2004). A comparison of online trust building factors between potential customers and repeat customers. *Journal of the association for information systems*, 5(10), 13.
- Kim, J. K. (2005). *Factors influencing consumers' apparel purchasing intention in the c2c e-commerce market*. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Kiong, T. C., & Kee, Y. P. (1998). Guanxi bases, xinyong and chinese business networks. *British Journal of Sociology*, 75–96.
- Kipnis, A. (2003). Anthropological approaches to self in contemporary china. *The China Journal*(50), 127–132.
- Kipnis, A. B. (2021). Introduction: “overseas ethnography” and the audiences of academic anthropology in china. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 11(1), 366–369.
- Klenke, K. (2018). Knowledge transfer through leadership succession in intergenerational family firms. *International Leadership Journal*, 10(1).
- Kranton, R. E. (1996). Reciprocal exchange: a self-sustaining system. *The American Economic Review*, 830–851.
- Krogman, N. (2019). Consumer values and consumption. In *Routledge handbook of global sustainability governance* (pp. 242–253). Routledge.
- Kuijs, L. (2005). Investment and saving in china. *World Bank Policy Research Paper Series*(3633).

- Laffey, D. (2004). The rise and fall of the dot com entrepreneurs.
- Lahoti, R., Jayadev, A., & Reddy, S. G. (2015). The global consumption and income project (gcip): An introduction and preliminary findings.
- Lai, A. W. (1995). Consumer values, product benefits and customer value: a consumption behavior approach. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Laidlaw, J. (2000). A free gift makes no friends. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6(4), 617–634.
- Lang, B., & Hyde, K. F. (2013). Word of mouth: What we know and what we have yet to learn. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction & Complaining Behavior*, 26.
- Langthaler, E., & Schüßler, E. (2019). Commodity studies with polanyi: Disembedding and re-embedding labour and land in contemporary capitalism. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 44(2), 209–223.
- Lau, H.-f., Sin, L. Y.-m., & Chan, K. K.-c. (2005). Chinese cross-border shopping: An empirical study. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 29(1), 110–133.
- Lawler, E. J., & Yoon, J. (1998). Network structure and emotion in exchange relations. *American sociological review*, 871–894.
- Lee, H. S., & Griffith, D. A. (2012). Transferring corporate brand image to local markets: Governance decisions for market entry and global branding strategy. In *Interdisciplinary approaches to product design, innovation, & branding in international marketing*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Lee, R. L. (2011). Modernity, solidity and agency: Liquidity reconsidered. *Sociology*, 45(4), 650–664.
- Leung, K., Chen, Z., Zhou, F., & Lim, K. (2014). The role of relational orientation as measured by face and renqing in innovative behavior in china: An indigenous analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal*

- of Management*, 31(1), 105–126.
- Levi, M., & Soudijn, M. (2020). Understanding the laundering of organized crime money. *Crime and Justice*, 49(1), 000–000.
- Levitt, T. (1993). The globalization of markets. *Readings in international business: a decision approach*, 249, 249–252.
- Levy, S. J. (1999). Symbols for sale. *Brands, consumers, symbols and research: Sidney J Levy on Marketing*, 203–212.
- Li, H., Shao, J., & Zhu, S. X. (2018). Parallel importation in a supply chain: The impact of gray market structure. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 114, 220–241.
- Li, J. J., & Su, C. (2007). How face influences consumption. *International Journal of Market Research*, 49(2), 237–256.
- Li, R., Kim, J., & Park, J. (2007). The effects of internet shoppers' trust on their purchasing intention in china. *JISTEM-Journal of Information Systems and Technology Management*, 4, 269–286.
- Licoppe, C., & Smoreda, Z. (2005). Are social networks technologically embedded?: How networks are changing today with changes in communication technology. *Social networks*, 27(4), 317–335.
- Lien, C. H., & Cao, Y. (2014). Examining wechat users' motivations, trust, attitudes, and positive word-of-mouth: Evidence from china. *Computers in human behavior*, 41, 104–111.
- Lin, H.-F. (2007). The role of online and offline features in sustaining virtual communities: an empirical study. *Internet Research*.
- Lindblom, A., Lindblom, T., & Wechtler, H. (2018). Collaborative consumption as c2c trading: Analyzing the effects of materialism and price consciousness. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 44, 244–252.
- Liu, C., Bao, Z., & Zheng, C. (2019). Exploring consumers' purchase intention in social commerce: an empirical study based on trust, argument quality, and social presence. *Asia Pacific Journal of*

Marketing and Logistics.

- Liu, C., Valentine, G., Vanderbeck, R. M., McQuaid, K., & Diprose, K. (2019). Placing 'sustainability' in context: narratives of sustainable consumption in nanjing, china. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 20(9), 1307–1324.
- Liu, J., & Boger Jr, C. A. (2017). The shift from a local to a global consumption pattern in the drivers of china's luxury consumption. In *2017 2nd international conference on modern management, education technology, and social science (mmetss 2017)*.
- LIU, Y. (2018). A study on the closing of luxury stores in china. from the overseas purchasing and e-commerce' s point of view.
- Lo, C.-L. (2021). Perceived impacts of hunger marketing on buying behaviors: A survey study of online shoppers.
- Lomborg, S. (2014). The internet in my pocket. In *The ubiquitous internet* (pp. 47–65). Routledge.
- Lu, L.-T. (2012). Guanxi and renqing: the roles of two cultural norms in chinese business. *International Journal of Management*, 29(2), 466.
- Lucock, X. S., Old, K., Woodford, K., & Lucock, S. (2019). What china wants from farming 'down under' .
- Luenberger, D. G., et al. (1997). Investment science. *OUP Catalogue*.
- Luo, Y., Huang, Y., & Wang, S. L. (2012). Guanxi and organizational performance: A meta-analysis. *Management and Organization Review*, 8(1), 139–172.
- Lury, C. (1996). *Consumer culture*. Rutgers university press.
- Ma, J., Mo, Z., & Zhao, Y. (2021). Dynamic luxury advertising: Using lifestyle versus functional advertisements in different purchase stages. *Journal of Advertising*, 1–18.
- Ma, W. (2016). *China's mobile economy: opportunities in the largest and fastest information consumption boom*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ma, Z. (2021). The confusion and new turn of ethnographic writing

- read writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography. *Frontier of Higher Education*, 3(1), 14–17.
- Mäkeläinen, S. I. (2006). From b2c to c2c e-commerce. *Course Essay: Department of Computer Science, University of Helsinki*.
- Malinowski, B. (1920). 51. kula; the circulating exchange of valuables in the archipelagoes of eastern new guinea. *Man*, 20, 97–105.
- Manovich, L., Tsivian, Y., Zimmermann, P., Weinbren, G., Bassett, C., Anderson, S., et al. (2014). *Transmedia frictions: The digital, the arts, and the humanities*. Edited by Marsha Kinder and Tara McPherson. Berkeley: University of ...
- Marcus, G. E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual review of anthropology*, 24(1), 95–117.
- Mariampolski, H. (2006). *Ethnography for marketers: A guide to consumer immersion*. Sage.
- Martin, F. (2017). Rethinking network capital: hospitality work and parallel trading among chinese students in melbourne. *Mobilities*, 12(6), 890–907.
- MARTIN, F. (2017). Trading in the grey zone: Chinese students find innovative ways to make a living in australia.
- Mauss, M. (1970). *The gift: Form and functions of exchange in archaic societies*. Cohen and West.
- Mauss, M. (2002). *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. Routledge.
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of management review*, 20(3), 709–734.
- Mazzone, P., Carlton, J., & Griffiths, H. (2018). Summary vision screening data: Belgium (brussels).
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of

- consumer goods. *Journal of consumer research*, 13(1), 71–84.
- McCracken, G. (1987). The history of consumption: a literature review and consumer guide. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 10(2), 139–166.
- McCracken, G. D. (1990). *Culture and consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities* (Vol. 1). Indiana University Press.
- McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). The impact of initial consumer trust on intentions to transact with a web site: a trust building model. *The journal of strategic information systems*, 11(3-4), 297–323.
- McKnight, D. H., Cummings, L. L., & Chervany, N. L. (1998). Initial trust formation in new organizational relationships. *Academy of Management review*, 23(3), 473–490.
- Mill, J. S. (2006). The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom.
- Miller, B. (1992). Collective action and rational choice: Place, community, and the limits to individual self-interest. *Economic geography*, 68(1), 22–42.
- Mirowski, P. (2001). Refusing the gift. *Postmodernism, economics and knowledge*, 431–458.
- Miyazaki, H. (2012). Gifts and exchange. In *The oxford handbook of material culture studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Modelska, G., Devezas, T., & Thompson, W. R. (2007). *Globalization as evolutionary process: modeling global change*. Routledge.
- Mott, T. (2012). Investment. In *The elgar companion to post keynesian economics, second edition*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Moulding, R., Kings, C., & Knight, T. (2021). The things that make us: self and object attachment in hoarding and compulsive buying-shopping disorder. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 39, 100–104.
- Mudditt, J. (2018). Market forces. *Company Director*, 34(2), 38–41.
- Murphy, E., & Dingwall, R. (2007). Informed consent, anticipatory

- regulation and ethnographic practice. *Social science & medicine*, 65(11), 2223–2234.
- Murray, T. H. (1987). Gifts of the body and the needs of strangers. *The Hastings Center Report*, 17(2), 30–38.
- Mylonas, H., & Tudor, M. (2021). Nationalism: What we know and what we still need to know. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24, 109–132.
- Nash, C. (2005). Geographies of relatedness. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(4), 449–462.
- Ng, M. (2017). Luxury brands and social media in china: New trends and development. In *Luxury fashion retail management* (pp. 167–184). Springer.
- Nicosia, F. M. (1973). Consumer behavior: Can economics and behavioral science converge? *California Management Review*, 16(2), 71–78.
- Niranjanamurthy, M. (2014). E-commerce: Recommended online payment method-paypal. *International journal of computer science and mobile computing*, 3(7), 669–679.
- Nisbett, N. (2007). Friendship, consumption, morality: practising identity, negotiating hierarchy in middle-class bangalore. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13(4), 935–950.
- Offer, A. (1997). Between the gift and the market: the economy of regard. *The Economic history review*, 50(3), 450–476.
- Oliveira, J. (2020). Let's talk about the role and impact of social computing in our lives. In *Proceedings of the brazilian symposium on multimedia and the web* (pp. 1–2).
- Ougaard, M. (2004). Political globalization. *Hampshire und New York: Palgrave Macmillan*.
- Paik, W. (2020). The politics of chinese tourism in south korea: political economy, state-society relations, and international security. *The Pacific Review*, 33(2), 331–355.

- Palmer, A., & Koenig-Lewis, N. (2009). An experiential, social network-based approach to direct marketing. *Direct Marketing: An International Journal*.
- Pan, S.-Y. (2013). China's approach to the international market for higher education students: Strategies and implications. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(3), 249–263.
- Pang, C. L. (1998). Invisible visibility: intergenerational transfer of identity and social position of chinese women in belgium. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 7(4), 433–452.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Mendelson, A. (2011). Toward a new (er) sociability: Uses, gratifications, and social capital on facebook. In *Media perspectives for the 21st century* (pp. 225–243). Routledge.
- Park, H., Kim, S., Jeong, Y., & Minshall, T. (2020). Customer entrepreneurship on digital platforms: Challenges and solutions for platform business models. *Creativity and Innovation Management*.
- Park, H., Kim, S., Jeong, Y., & Minshall, T. (2021). Customer entrepreneurship on digital platforms: Challenges and solutions for platform business models. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 30(1), 96–115.
- Pears, I. (1999). *An instance of the fingerpost*. Penguin.
- Peng, W., & Wang, W. Y. (2020). Buying on weixin/wechat: Proposing a sociomaterial approach of platform studies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 0163443720968460.
- Plotkin, W. (1995). The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier. *American Planning Association. Journal of the American Planning Association*, 61(2), 284.
- Polanyi, K., & MacIver, R. M. (1944). *The great transformation* (Vol. 2). Beacon press Boston.
- Prodnik, J. (2012). Post-fordist communities and cyberspace: A critical approach. In *Cybercultures* (pp. 73–100). Brill.

- Puschmann, T., & Alt, R. (2016). Sharing economy. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 58(1), 93–99.
- Qi, X. (2013). Guanxi, social capital theory and beyond: Toward a globalized social science. *The British journal of sociology*, 64(2), 308–324.
- Raab, G., Ajami, R. A., & Goddard, G. J. (2016). *Customer relationship management: A global perspective*. CRC Press.
- Ramaseshan, B., Bejou, D., Jain, S. C., Mason, C., & Pancras, J. (2006). Issues and perspectives in global customer relationship management. *Journal of Service Research*, 9(2), 195–207.
- Rao, F. (2020). Unravelling material/digital shopping space: An assemblage approach. *Geography Compass*, 14(11), e12539.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). The virtual community: Introduction. Retrieved June, 26, 1998.
- Rheingold, H. (2000). *The virtual community, revised edition: Home-steading on the electronic frontier*. MIT press.
- Rizvi, F. (2011). Theorizing student mobility in an era of globalization. *Teachers and Teaching*, 17(6), 693–701.
- Robertson, R. (2011). Global connectivity and global consciousness. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(10), 1336–1345.
- Robins, K. (1995). Cyberspace and the world we live in. *Body & Society*, 1(3-4), 135–155.
- Robinson, W. I. (1998). Beyond nation-state paradigms: Globalization, sociology, and the challenge of transnational studies. In *Sociological forum* (Vol. 13, pp. 561–594).
- Robinson, W. I. (2011). Globalization and the sociology of immanuel wallerstein: A critical appraisal. *International Sociology*, 26(6), 723–745.
- Roth, W.-M. (2005). *Auto/biography and auto/ethnography: Praxis of research method*. Brill.
- Roth, W.-M. (2009). Auto/ethnography and the question of ethics. In

- Forum qualitative sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative social research* (Vol. 10).
- Rouchier, J., & Bousquet, F. (1998). Non-merchant economy and multi-agent system: An analysis of structuring exchanges. In *International workshop on multi-agent systems and agent-based simulation* (pp. 111–123).
- Rovai, S. (2016). Chinese institutional and legal barriers to the development of a luxury industry. In *Luxury the chinese way* (pp. 38–48). Springer.
- Rovai, S. (2018). Digitalisation, luxury fashion and “chineseness” : The influence of the chinese context for luxury brands and the online luxury consumers experience. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 9(2), 116–128.
- Sahlins, M. (1965). On the sociology of primitive exchange. *The relevance of models for social anthropology*, 139, 236.
- Sahlins, M. (1969). Economic anthropology and anthropological economics. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 8(5), 13–33.
- Schiffman, L. G., Kanuk, L. L., et al. (2009). Consumer behavior. *Harlow, England: Prentice Hall*.
- Schwarzkopf, S. (2015). Mobilizing the depths of the market: Motivation research and the making of the disembedded consumer. *Marketing Theory*, 15(1), 39–57.
- Senol, I., Levi, E., & Aslanbay, Y. (n.d.). A new fashion consumer typology: Dealing for luxury via electronic markets.
- Servais, O. (2012). Autour des funérailles dans world of warcraft. ethnographie entre religion et mondes virtuels. *Mutations des religions et identités religieuses, Paris, Desclée*, 231–252.
- Servais, O. (2015). Funerals in the ‘world of warcraft’ : religion, polemic, and styles of play in a videogame universe. *Social Compass*, 62(3), 362–378.

- Servais, O. (2019). ‘no life’ eschatology: The incorporation and avatari-
sation of digital eremitism. In *The digital social* (pp. 197–218).
De Gruyter.
- Servais, O., Douyere, D., & Catellani, A. (2020). *Religieux et digi-
tal: nouvelles conceptualisations en mondes francophones*. SAGE
Publications Sage UK: London, England.
- Servais, O., & Liogier, R. (2017). Epilogue: Towards a technical-
scientific reconfiguration of religious narratives? *Social Compass*,
64(1), 68–75.
- Sethi, A. (2018). *Chinese consumers: Exploring the world’s largest
demographic*. Springer.
- Sethi, A. (2019a). Digital china. In *Chinese consumers* (pp. 33–54).
Springer.
- Sethi, A. (2019b). Key segments of chinese consumers. In *Chinese
consumers* (pp. 55–85). Springer.
- Sethi, A. (2019c). Luxury with chinese characteristics. In *Chinese
consumers* (pp. 107–121). Springer.
- Seymour, R. (2020). *The twittering machine*. Verso Books.
- Shan, Y., & King, K. W. (2015). The effects of interpersonal tie strength
and subjective norms on consumers’ brand-related ewom referral
intentions. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 15(1), 16–27.
- Shannon, S. (2016). On the floor with the daigou, china’ s
overseas shoppers. Retrieved from ft. com: [https://www.ft.
com/content/0e0c6a36-330c-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153](https://www.ft.com/content/0e0c6a36-330c-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153).
- Shapovalova, T. (2013). Social capital as a non-economic determinant
in the economic growth: empirical economic analysis.
(4), 127–133.
- Shen, C., & Gong, H. (2019). Personal ties, group ties and latent ties:
connecting network size to diversity and trust in the mobile social
network wechat. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 29(1), 18–34.
- Sheth, J. N., Newman, B. I., & Gross, B. L. (1991). Why we buy what

- we buy: A theory of consumption values. *Journal of business research*, 22(2), 159–170.
- Shi, X., Tang, J., & Dong, C. (2021). Should a domestic firm carve out a niche in overseas markets? value of purchasing agents. *European Journal of Operational Research*.
- Shi, X., Yao, S., & Ma, Y. (2021). When and how should cross-border platforms manage blockchain technology in the presence of purchasing agents? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Operational Research*, 2140020.
- Shiau, W.-L., & Luo, M. M. (2012). Factors affecting online group buying intention and satisfaction: A social exchange theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(6), 2431–2444.
- Shilei, S. (2016). Chinese consumers' explosion of buying in japan: A puzzle. *The Supply-Side Reforms of the Chinese Economy*.
- Siddiqui, N., Mannion, M., & Marciniak, R. (2019). An exploratory investigation into the consumer use of wechat to engage with luxury fashion brands. In *Social commerce* (pp. 213–234). Springer.
- Silvast, A., & Virtanen, M. J. (2019). An assemblage of framings and tamings: multi-sited analysis of infrastructures as a methodology. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 12(6), 461–477.
- Singh, M. (2002). E-services and their role in b2c e-commerce. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*.
- Sismondo, S. (2015). How to make opinion leaders and influence people. *Cmaj*, 187(10), 759–760.
- Sivakumar, G., & Amsaveni, N. (2013). Online shopping—a new revolution in globalization era. *EXCEL International Journal of Multidisciplinary Management Studies*, 3(5), 250–253.
- Smart, A. (1999). Expressions of interest: Friendship and guanxi in chinese societies.
- Smith, J., & Watson, G. (2019). Bibliography for dummies. *Journal of Thesis Redaction*, 10(2), 645–671. doi: 001.002/123456789

- Sohaib, M., Hui, P., Akram, U., Akram, Z., & Bilal, M. (2018). How non-economic motivations affect electronic word-of-mouth: evidence from chinese social media. *International Journal of Information Systems and Change Management*, 10(4), 311–332.
- Solca, L., Grippo, M., Lucarelli, G., Pozzi, M., & Borgonovo, F. (2016). Who buys where: decrypting cross-border luxury demand flows. *Milan: Exane BNP Paribas Research & ContactLab*.
- Song, X., & Chuang, F.-M. (2020). A new social-media business model for luxury products: An empirical study of daigou' s services via we-chat platform in china. In *2020 global marketing conference at seoul* (pp. 897–897).
- Sosnovskikh, S. (2019). Daigou activities within russia-china economic relations. *Available at SSRN 3503853*.
- Sosnovskikh, S. (2020). A new form of parallel trading within economics relations between russia and china. *Post-Communist Economies*, 1–25.
- Sosnovskikh, S. (2021). A new form of parallel trading within economics relations between russia and china. *Post-Communist Economies*, 33(1), 94–118.
- Stafford, T. F., Turan, A., & Raisinghani, M. S. (2004). International and cross-cultural influences on online shopping behavior. *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*, 7(2), 70–87.
- Standifird, S. S. (2006). Using guanxi to establish corporate reputation in china. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 9(3), 171–178.
- Standifird, S. S., & Marshall, R. S. (2000). The transaction cost advantage of guanxi-based business practices. *Journal of world business*, 35(1), 21–42.
- Štefko, R., Bačík, R., Fedorko, R., Oleárová, M., & Rigelský, M. (2019). Analysis of consumer preferences related to the use of digital devices in the e-commerce dimension. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 7(1), 25.

- Stovel, K., & Shaw, L. (2012). Brokerage. *Annual review of sociology*, 38, 139–158.
- Strate, L. (1999). The varieties of cyberspace: Problems in definition and delimitation. *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)*, 63(3), 382–412.
- Su, L. Y.-F., Akin, H., Brossard, D., Scheufele, D. A., & Xenos, M. A. (2015). Science news consumption patterns and their implications for public understanding of science. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 92(3), 597–616.
- Sussman, G. (1997). *Communication, technology, and politics in the information age* (Vol. 27). Sage.
- Thøgersen, J. (2005). How may consumer policy empower consumers for sustainable lifestyles? *Journal of consumer policy*, 28(2), 143–177.
- Thomson, G., Diop, M. Q., Stuijzand, S., & Horsch, A. (2021). Policy, service, and training provision for women following a traumatic birth: An international mapping study.
- Tomlinson, J. (1997). *Cultural globalization and cultural imperialism*. na.
- Tomlinson, J. (2012). Cultural globalization. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*.
- Turban, E., Whiteside, J., King, D., & Outland, J. (2017). *Introduction to electronic commerce and social commerce*. Springer.
- Turner, J. H., & Stets, J. E. (2006). Sociological theories of human emotions. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 32, 25–52.
- Uberoi, J. S. (1962). *Politics of the kula ring: an analysis of the findings of bronislaw malinowski*. Manchester University Press.
- Ungureanu, C. (2013). Bourdieu and derrida on gift: Beyond “double truth” and paradox. *Human Studies*, 36(3), 393–409.
- Urry, J. (2003). Social networks, travel and talk1. *The British journal of sociology*, 54(2), 155–175.

- Van Meeteren, M., Boussauw, K., Derudder, B., & Witlox, F. (2016). Flemish diamond or abc-axis? the spatial structure of the belgian metropolitan area. *European Planning Studies*, 24(5), 974–995.
- Villaescusa, R. G., & Jacquemin, T. (2011). Gallia belgica: An entity with no national claim. *Etudes rurales*(2), 93–111.
- Walder, A. G. (1983). Organized dependency and cultures of authority in chinese industry. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 43(1), 51–76.
- Wang, G., Zhang, W., & Zeng, R. (2019). Wechat use intensity and social support: The moderating effect of motivators for wechat use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 91, 244–251.
- Wang, S. (2017). Globalization from below. daigous in paris, intermediary sales agents between french producers and chinese consumers. *Cultures Conflits*(4), 107–128.
- Wang, W. Y., Zhao, X., Chen, X., & Yang, Y. J. (2019). Online trust in the context of global migration: Mobility, sociality, and the production of chinese diasporic subjectivity in australia. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*, 2019.
- Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of consumer culture*, 5(2), 131–153.
- Wasko, J. (2008). *Cross-border cultural production: economic runaway or globalization?* Cambria Press.
- Weiying, P., & Wang, W. Y. (2020). Buying on weixin/wechat: proposing a sociomaterial approach of platform studies.
- Wekselberg, V. (1996). *Reduced" social" in a new model of organizational trust*. JSTOR.
- Wellman, B. (1996). For a social network analysis of computer networks: a sociological perspective on collaborative work and virtual community. In *Proceedings of the 1996 acm sigcpr/sigmis conference on computer personnel research* (pp. 1–11).
- Wickman, J. (2011). Book review: Coad, david: The metrosexual: Gender, sexuality, and sport. albany: State university of new

- york press, 2008. isbn: 978-0-7914-7410-5. *Men and Masculinities*, 14(1), 117–119.
- Widlok, T. (2016). *Anthropology and the economy of sharing*. Routledge.
- Wilson, S. M., & Peterson, L. C. (2002). The anthropology of online communities. *Annual review of anthropology*, 31(1), 449–467.
- Winner, L. (2014). Technologies as forms of life. In *Ethics and emerging technologies* (pp. 48–60). Springer.
- Wolf, K. D. (2008). Emerging patterns of global governance: the new interplay between the state, business and civil society. *Handbook of research on global corporate citizenship*, 225–48.
- Wong, N. Y., & Ahuvia, A. C. (1998). Personal taste and family face: Luxury consumption in confucian and western societies. *Psychology & Marketing*, 15(5), 423–441.
- Wu, K., Vassileva, J., Noorian, Z., & Zhao, Y. (2015). How do you feel when you see a list of prices? the interplay among price dispersion, perceived risk and initial trust in chinese c2c market. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 25, 36–46.
- Xiang, B., & Wu, Q. (2020). 把自己作为方法: 和项飙的对话 [the self as method: conversations with biao xiang].
- Xiao, B., & Mantesso, S. (2019). The daigou channel—how a handful of chinese shoppers turned into a billion-dollar industry. *ABC News*.
- Xie, C., Bagozzi, R. P., & Grønhaug, K. (2019). The impact of corporate social responsibility on consumer brand advocacy: The role of moral emotions, attitudes, and individual differences. *Journal of Business Research*, 95, 514–530.
- Xie, Z. (2018). Mobilities, communication, and asia| im/materializing cross-border mobility: A study of mainland china–hong kong daigou (cross-border shopping services on global consumer goods). *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 14.
- Xie, Z. (2019). *Brokerage practices and the brokers' mobilities: The*

- nexus of gender, technology, and labor in chinese daigou* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong).
- Xinyu, Y. (2011). Mobility strategies and trends: The case of china. In *International students and global mobility in higher education* (pp. 25–41). Springer.
- Xu, B., Huang, Y., Kwak, H., & Contractor, N. (2013). Structures of broken ties: exploring unfollow behavior on twitter. In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 871–876).
- Xu, Q. (2020). A study of the marketing strategies of high-end luxury brands: The case of hermes. In *2020 2nd international conference on economic management and cultural industry (icemci2020)* (pp. 462–467).
- Xu, X. (2013). Chinese consumer: Understand new chinese consumers, their purchasing power, lifestyle and demand.
- Xudong, Z. (2017). Clue tracing methods of clue ethnography. *Ethno-National Studies*, 05.
- Xue-feng, H. (2011). Renqing in an acquaintance society [j]. *Journal of Nanjing Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 4.
- Yan, H., & Qu, X. (2014). Research on the marketing strategy of luxury goods. *Contemporary Logistics*(15), 42.
- Yan, Y.-N., Huang, P.-T., Li, Y.-F., Chuang, C.-Y., & Wang, S.-Y. (2019). Cases of hunger marketing in digital era. In *International cognitive cities conference* (pp. 578–583).
- YANG, H.-t., ZHAO, W.-z., & SHI, C.-s. (2010). Using learning game theory to analyze offline payment in b2b with” guanxi. *Journal of Harbin Engineering University*, 06.
- Yang, K., Cheng, X., Hu, L., & Zhang, J. (2012). Mobile social networks: state-of-the-art and a new vision. *International Journal of Communication Systems*, 25(10), 1245–1259.

- Yoganandan, G., & Baskar, M. M. (n.d.). Consumers buying behavior towards online shopping with special reference to erode district.
- Yu, H. (n.d.). Editorial—beyond e-commerce: The social case of china's digital economy.
- Zani, B. (2019). *Mobilities, translocal economies and emotional modernity: from the factory to digital platforms between china and taiwan* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Université de Lyon.
- Zappa, A. (2019). *Daigou: a "grey" form of market entry into china* (B.S. thesis). Università Ca'Foscari Venezia.
- Zeng, F., Deng, G., Wang, Z., & Liu, L. (2016). Wechat: a new clinical teaching tool for problem-based learning. *International journal of medical education*, 7, 119.
- Zhang, E., & Noakes, L. (2019, Sep 01). Optimal interpolants on Grassmann manifolds. *Mathematics of Control, Signals, and Systems*, 31(3), 363–383. doi: 10.1007/s00498-019-0241-9
- Zhang, J. (2019). From self isolator to business owner: Social standing and economic mobility among chinese housewives in japan. *アジア太平洋討究* (36), 175–188.
- Zhang, L. (2017). Fashioning the feminine self in “prosumer capitalism” : Women's work and the transnational reselling of western luxury online. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 17(2), 184–204.
- Zhang, X., Tham, A., Liu, Y., Spinks, W., & Wang, L. (2021). ‘to market, to market’ : uncovering daigou touristscapes within chinese outbound tourism. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 1–21.
- Zhang, Y., Li, Z., Gao, C., Bian, K., Song, L., Dong, S., & Li, X. (2018). Mobile social big data: Wechat moments dataset, network applications, and opportunities. *IEEE Network*, 32(3), 146–153.
- Zhang, Y., & Zhang, Z. (2006). Guanxi and organizational dynamics in china: a link between individual and organizational levels. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 67(4), 375–392.
- Zhang, Z., & Feng, J. (2017). Price of identical product with gray market

- sales: An analytical model and empirical analysis. *Information Systems Research*, 28(2), 397–412.
- Zhao, K., Zhao, X., & Deng, J. (2016). An empirical investigation of online gray markets. *Journal of Retailing*, 92(4), 397–410.
- Zhao, X. (2020). Digital labour in transnational mobility: Chinese international students' online boundary work in daigou. *New Media & Society*, 1461444820934096.
- Zheng, J. (2017). *Daidou can a complex story be told without words?* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Northeastern University.
- Zhou, N., & Belk, R. W. (2004). Chinese consumer readings of global and local advertising appeals. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(3), 63–76.
- Zhou, W., Hyman, M. R., & Leonhardt, J. M. (2017). Examining online chinese buyer-seller relationships, understanding e-guanxi: an abstract. In *Academy of marketing science annual conference* (pp. 189–190).
- 万祝元, & 万红松. (2000). 对乡镇卫生院代购药品的管理探讨. *江苏药学与临床研究*, 8(2), 47–48.
- 于彤, & 窦媛媛. (2008). 白领选“代购”全国淘便宜. *北京纪事 (纪实文摘)*(6), 64.
- 侍苏华. (1996). 试谈村卫生室药品代购. *江苏卫生事业管理*, 7(4), 215–216.
- 刘国福. (2009). 近三十年中国出国留学政策的理性回顾和法律思考. *浙江大学学报: 人文社会科学版*, 6, 15–24.
- 史勤波. (2006a). 刍议网络代购的市场机会及发展思路. *商场现代化*, 10(461), 150–151.
- 史勤波. (2006b). 网络代购产生的原因及其发展需注意的问题. *经济论坛* (8), 71–72.
- 史勤波. (2006c). 网络代购的市场机会. *电子商务世界* (4), 70–71.
- 孙艳兰. (2007). “职业代购”升温: 差价的诱惑. *观察与思考* (2), 44–45.
- 安雅. (2007). 代购: 新时代的购物方法. *绿色中国* (11X), 93–95.

- 张东亮, & 戴雨. (2009). 海外代购人, 在酣畅“血拼”中收割 money. 大经贸 (5), 86-88.
- 张樊. (2009). 互联网打通海外购物通道. 互联网天地 (2), 46-47.
- 徐新建. (2018). 自我民族志: 整体人类学的路径反思. 民族研究 (5), 68-77.
- 李莺. (2006). 专业代购. 商界. 城乡致富 (3), 29-29.
- 梁民赅. (1999). 浅谈加强村卫生室药品代购的做法与体会. 江苏卫生事业管理, 10(4), 55-55.
- 江玮, & 江源. (2009). 实例: 海外代购. 中国市场 (3), 57.
- 潘少华, & 李向东. (1997). 乡镇卫生院代购村卫生室药品的实践与成效. 中国初级卫生保健, 11(8), 22-23.
- 王延中. (2014). 海外民族志研究大有可为. 世界民族 (1), 43-49.
- 王普, & 罗裕秋. (1997). 警惕代购摩托行骗. 摩托车信息 (5), 33-33.
- 王辉耀, & 苗绿. (2012). 中国留学发展报告 (2012). 北京: 社会科学文献出版社.
- 王铭铭. (2011). 所谓“海外民族志”. 西北民族研究, 2.
- 童敏. (2007). 代购: 全球商品唾手可得. 质量技术监督研究 (1), 54-55.
- 翟崇文. (1996). 乡镇卫生院代购药库的建设与管理. 中国农村卫生事业管理 (11).
- 蓝冰. (2006). 我的代购生涯. 大众商务: 创业版 (07S), 64-65.
- 语言交流经济学. (n.d.).
- 费孝通. (2013). 乡土中国: 修订本. 上海人民出版社.
- 赵旭东. (2015). 线索民族志: 民族志叙事的新范式. 民族研究, 1, 47-57.
- 郑延荣. (2001). 经追认的代理行为之法律后果——析一起代购股票纠纷案. 人民司法 (6), 23.
- 郝国强. (2014). 近 10 年来中国海外民族志研究反观. 思想战线, 40(5), 57-64.
- 顾江平, 蔡东辉, et al. (2002). 一起委托代购机票合同纠纷案. 浦东开发 (3), 61-61.
- 高丙中. (2010). 海外民族志: 发展中国社会科学的一个路途. 西北民族研究 (1), 20-33.

高丙中. (2014). 海外民族志与世界性社会. 世界民族, 1.

高丙中, & 熊志颖. (2020). 海外民族志的发展历程及其三个层次. 广西民族大学学报 (哲学社会科学版), 3, 2-9.