More than a Meal: Using a feminist perspective to understand mundane food consumption experiences of Chinese people in Sheffield and Nanjing.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield
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30/09/2025

Abstract

This thesis examines the mundane, everyday experiences of food consumption in Chinese households across the contrasting urban landscapes of Sheffield, UK, and Nanjing, China. It reveals how the neoliberal ideological tenets of market logic, competitiveness, and individual responsibility are navigated, resisted, and reproduced on a daily basis. This thesis argues that seemingly ordinary experiences, such as preparing and eating daily meals, can be a critical site for investigating the impacts of global neoliberal forces. It reveals that what is on our plates is, indeed, far more than just a meal; it is a reflection of the profound social and economic transformations of our time.

Adopting a practice-based approach combined with a feminist lens, this research develops a comparative ethnographic study of the diverse household types of 56 participants across two cities, providing a rich, qualitative account of the lived realities of food consumption. It reveals the continuity and changes in family food practices in terms of cultural meaning for food and gender, as well as material elements and competencies, such as the use of online grocery shopping. The findings demonstrate how the pressure of modern life, intensified by neoliberal food regimes, leads to a series of deprivations in people's daily lived experiences. The study highlights a persistent gendered division of food responsibility despite different social contexts and men's increasing involvement in daily food work.

A significant theoretical contribution of this study is that it enriches the current practice-based theoretical framework for food consumption studies. This study sheds light on how using a feminist lens can facilitate the understanding of social inequality and justice within the practice-based approach. Focusing on exploring materiality and visceral experience in food consumption, this study also contributes to the development of existing practice theories' application in food studies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who once helped me in this research project. Firstly, my deepest thanks go to my supervisors, Professor Sally Hines, and Dr Megan Blake for their warmly encouragement and visionary guidance throughout this work. I am especially grateful to Sally for her tremendous support during my PhD journey, consistently giving me the confidence to explore my research interests. I also want to thank Megan for her patient instruction and insightful suggestions that were crucial in developing this study. Secondly, for those scholars who offered very helpful guidance for this research project. I want to thank Professor Boqing Cheng, Dr Linyan Li, whom I met in China, for encouraging me to pursue a PhD in the area of food studies. I also appreciate the thoughtful comments and suggestions I received on my research proposal from Professor Sarah Salway and Dr Eva Haifa Giraud. I also want to thank for some of my friends, who supported me during the process of recruiting and provide companionship during the writing-up period, especially Yufan, Qixin, and Shidong.

My final and most important thanks are revered for my family. To my mom and dad, your unwavering support throughout my entire academic life has been essential; without it, I could not have completed this work. And to my younger brother, Bruce: I know you always feel proud to introduce me to your friends as the sister who is ‘doing her PhD about food.’ Your pride has been a constant source of motivation.

Declaration

I, Junyi Wang, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.
Please ensure that any publications arising from the thesis are acknowledged in this section.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSA	Food Safety Agency
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

This study examines the daily food consumption experiences of Chinese households residing in Nanjing and Sheffield within the neoliberal context of China and the UK. I focus on both the continuity and changes in the daily food consumption experience. This study examines the consequences of neoliberalism, both as a political project that promotes processes such as deregulation and individualisation, and as an ideological discourse that prioritises the tenet of the market, on the urban food system. This study argues that the profound influence of neoliberalism on the urban food system creates structural conditions for a series of deprivations in people's daily lived experience with food, focusing on how these macro forces manifest in the household. Furthermore, the influence of neoliberalism on the daily lived experience of Chinese households is also shaped by gender and other social identities. The following section will elaborate on the structural deprivations, detailing how these macro-forces manifest in the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese households through concrete, lived examples.

In recent years, several new trends in food consumption have emerged in the Chinese context. Firstly, the rapid growth of online grocery shopping has significantly changed the daily food consumption experience of urban households (Zhao et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Some of China's technology giants have also invested in new food retailers that combine the services of both brick-and-mortar stores and online shopping, such as Hema Fresh, founded by the Alibaba company (Dai and Si, 2020). In a city like Nanjing, there are over 20 Hema Fresh branches located in different districts and surrounding local residential areas. The rise of online grocery shopping and the development of new food retailers have also transformed the meaning of convenience and freshness for urban residents, especially for young office workers. Although traditional wet markets in China still serve the needs of urban residents for fresh food, such as vegetables and meat (Zhong and Si, 2018), young people nowadays also prioritise convenience in their daily grocery shopping, which could fit into their busy schedules. A prominent difference is that using online shopping brings about a disconnection in sensory engagement with food during the shopping process. Unlike using the wet market, where people could use their direct sensory experience, such as touching and smelling food, to assess freshness and food quality, the online shopping process reduces the shopping experience to the decontextualised reading of production information. Chinese migrant households living in Western developed countries, such as the UK, also face the challenge of accessing their familiar fresh Asian vegetables and meat, which can cause a sense of being out of place. However, their sensory experience with food is often overlooked by host countries' urban food strategies or health policies (Mycek, 2020).

This abstraction and the marginalised sensory experience also can be viewed as the consequence of deepening market relations in food consumption, which makes food just as a commodity like other exchangeable products (McMichael and Weber, 2022). Worldwide, various food movements have emerged to build alternative food networks, such as community-supported agriculture, which aims to reconnect consumers with the production process, and the slow food movement, which seeks to rediscover the authentic taste of food (Carolan, 2011). China also has its indigenous practices of alternative food networks (Scott et al., 2018). What is often neglected in previous studies on China's food movement is that Chinese traditional agriculture, based on the small farmers' self-sufficient model, also values localisation and follows nature's principles in agricultural production (Ye, 2015). This also represents another layer of neoliberalism's deprivation, a long-term devaluation and neglect of non-Western agrarian experience (McMichael and Weber, 2022). Although people living in cities nowadays cannot return to agricultural production based on small-scale farming and can only harvest seasonal food, an urban food system based on neoliberal market relations and rules is not the unavoidable and universal pattern for all social contexts (McMichael and Weber, 2022). The discourse of neoliberalism can shape the food system, but the realities these discourses create only reveal part of the story about food production and consumption (McMichael and Weber, 2022). It is still needed to explore alternative paths based on everyday life experiences, as this study will investigate.

Beyond the sensory alienation, another manifestation of deprivation caused by neoliberalism's influence is the severe time pressure placed on young office workers, which drastically compromises the time available to enjoy their daily meals. Previous studies on the highly pressured working environment in neoliberal contexts, including the United States and the UK, have found that office workers have less time to experience the pleasure they can gain from food (Frayne, 2015; McCallum, 2020). In China, young office workers are also experiencing alienation generated from their daily work (Ma, 2021). Although their current work may provide a meaningful life, in a neoliberal working environment that emphasises competitiveness in the employment market, they must be involved in an endless treadmill to continually improve their personal skills and prove their abilities through continuous self-improvement (Ma, 2021). A related change in the daily food consumption of these young office workers is that eating has become reduced to a daily activity solely for sustaining basic energy, rather than an enjoyable experience in itself. Office workers's irregular eating habits, such as skipping meals, can also lead to long-term health consequences (Dixon et al., 2014). Medical studies have recognised the importance of following the biological clocks for when to eat, which could prevent some chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Manoogian et al., 2019). Therefore, a highly exploitative working environment deprives both daily meaningful experience from enjoying food and young office workers's long-term health. This daily experience of deprivation in eating is also worthy of further sociological study.

Furthermore, the market logic of neoliberalism, which emphasises equal opportunities in the free market, also justifies and perpetuates existing social inequalities (McMichael and Weber, 2022). Within households, based on previous national surveys in China about the time use of dual-earning couples for housework, women's allocation of time to housework is often double that of men's (Zhang, 2017; Bruin and Liu, 2020). Since the 1980s, market reform has led to the disintegration of the social welfare system and the privatisation of care services, including childcare and elder care (Yan, 2010). As a result, care responsibility has shifted to individual families, particularly onto the shoulders of women (Ji et al., 2017). However, the neoliberal economic development model rarely takes into account other social values and social relations, except for the national GDP development, which also makes unpaid care work unacknowledged in national policy (Rai, 2013). In *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) illustrated that preparing family meals, as a core part of constituting family life, involves many hidden mental activities, including anticipating the needs and preferences of different family members, coordinating various schedules, and managing differences in preferences. The preparation work involved in planning a meal is more than what family members often see as just physical activity, such as cooking, or the outcome, which typically consists of several dishes to form a proper family meal (DeVault, 1991). The hidden mental labour also requires further recognition and acknowledgement for understanding its value.

The explanations presented here illustrate that neoliberalism, both as a political project and as an ideological discourse, causes multiple dimensions of deprivations, including the marginalised sensory engagement with food, exploitation of young office workers's time and enjoyment of daily eating, and gender inequality within households. These deprivations, exploitations, and oppressions, as a consequence of neoliberalism, are manifested in everyday experiences. Therefore, investigating the daily food consumption experience is also a process that makes familiar experiences, such as grocery shopping and eating, unfamiliar through sociological explanations. To enrich the understanding of the impacts of neoliberalism on everyday life, this research employs a comparative study of the daily food consumption experiences of Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. The following section will provide a brief review of how existing sociological perspectives understand daily food consumption experiences and explain why using a practice theory combined with a gender lens could help in grasping the complex influence of neoliberalism.

1.2 Brief introduction to sociological studies on food consumption

This section provides a summary of current sociological studies on food consumption and their limitations. I will also explain why and how practice theory can facilitate the understanding of household food consumption and discuss the limitations of this approach. This research project employs practice theory, combined with a feminist perspective, to examine the daily experience of household food consumption.

Previous studies have raised some critiques of the economic model used to understand daily household food consumption (Sen, 1981; Marçal, 2012). The economic model based on Adam Smith's orthodox economic theories assumes that household food consumption is also driven by self-interest, with rational calculations, and consumption activities are reduced to purely purchasing behaviour (Marçal, 2012). Marçal (2012) proposed an insightful question: who cooked for Adam Smith? The answer is, however, since Smith never got married, his mother often prepared the dinner (Marçal, 2012). In the traditional economic model, the love, care, and intimacy conveyed through food preparation work are usually neglected (Marçal, 2012). Combined with cognitive science, the economic understanding also produces a 'deficit model' that suggests some ordinary consumers, who lack sufficient information and knowledge about nutrition and health, may make irrational choices in their daily food consumption (Lupton, 1999; Halkier and Jensen, 2011). However, both the economic and deficit models view daily food consumption as personal behaviours and merely place it within an abstract economic model, while neglecting the complexities of everyday life experiences (Marçal, 2012). In response to the economic model's understanding of rationality, Previous sociological studies that focus on ordinary consumption also argue that, in most cases, ordinary consumers can use their established routines and habits to make consumption choices without deliberation (Warde, 2001; Halkier, 2010).

Sociological studies have revealed the varied social and cultural meanings associated with daily food consumption (Holm, 2013; Murcott, 2019; Guptill, 2022). Previous sociological studies have examined the daily food consumption experience, such as family meals, to explore many sociological topics, including rules and rituals (Murcutt, 1982), family as the social organisation and institution (Charles and Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991), the symbolic meaning of food (Douglas, 1972), and the influence of larger social process on eating patterns (Holm, 2013; Warde, 2024). Influenced by the cultural turn, previous sociological studies on food consumption mainly focused on the expression of lifestyle and identity (Warde, 2016a; 2016b). The critical cultural analysis also portrayed ordinary consumers as the passive victims of consumerism, who could not realise their real needs (Halkier, 2010; Warde, 2016b). Alan Warde further concluded (2016a) that previous sociological studies mainly used food consumption as a lens to examine some significant sociological topics. However, the specific sociological explanations for food consumption itself are still underdeveloped (Warde, 2016a). Another limitation is that sociological theories' explanations for food consumption often overlook the materiality of food, such as the perishability of fresh food and the corporeal experience of food consumption (Warde, 2016a).

Although there are different versions for the explanation of practice, based on some common point, practice can be understood as the linkage of doings and sayings across time and space, organised by an understanding of how to do something properly, procedures or a competence of know-how, and engagement driving the practices (Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016b). Reckwitz (2002) and Shove et al. (2012) also highlighted the role of material as the vital element constituting practices. Besides, practice also encompasses two notions: practice-as-entity, which refers to the block pattern of the linkage of elements; and practice as performance, which refers to the existence of practice that can only be achieved through continuous enactment (Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012). In this definition, the elements of practice theory have taken into account the material aspect. For daily food consumption, applying practice theory could also facilitate understanding the complexity of everyday life. Practice theory also suggests the multiplicity of different mundane daily practices, which refers to the collaborations or conflicts of different practices carried out simultaneously (Warde, 2016b). In the context of everyday life, daily food consumption experiences, such as grocery shopping or eating, often overlap with other mundane activities, like working and children's schooling. Therefore, applying practice theory to daily food consumption could help in grasping the different yet conflicted engagements and procedures disseminated across various practices (Halkier, 2010). Furthermore, practice as performance also indicates reproduction, continuity, and changes in each enactment (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016b). Therefore, the practices of household food consumption also contain the features of continuity and change. This study also focuses on the changes and persistence in the meaning of food consumption practices among Chinese households living in various social contexts, particularly in the context of migration.

However, practice theory built from philological ideas often makes assumptions based on an abstract model, which also neglects the social positions and social identity of the carriers of practice (Schatzki, 1996; Smith, 2005). The application of practice theory also needs to be combined with other theoretical tools to grasp the influence of neoliberalism on social relations. Feminist studies have examined women's daily experience of cognitive and emotional labour involved in food preparation work (DeVault, 1991; Hochschild, 2012), which could enrich practice theories' understanding of daily food practice. Feminist and gender studies scholars have a long history of exploring the embodied experience of food, such as the women's experience of eating disorders within toxic gender cultures (Valentine and Bell, 1997). Feminist studies on the embodied experience of food have further developed the concept of visceral politics, which refers to the connected sensory experience of food, including tasting and smelling, as well as related feelings and memories about food (Probyn, 2000). These embodied experiences of food all contribute to the corporeal forms of social differences, social division, and power relations (Probyn, 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). This research also employs a feminist intersectionality perspective to identify the diverse perspectives and experiences of food consumption practices, as well as to understand the varied experiences within the Chinese ordinary households.

In summary, the application of practice theory, combined with concepts from feminist theories, could enrich the understanding of daily household food consumption experiences. This thesis also examines how practice theory, as an analytical tool, can be applied in comparative studies to analyse the different experiences of Chinese households, particularly in terms of changes and continuities in daily food consumption within the context of migration. I will expand on this further in the literature review chapter and the data chapters, evaluating the application of practice and how a feminist perspective could enrich its core concepts to explain the daily food consumption experience.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to explore the daily food consumption experiences for Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield within the neoliberal contexts. This research also addresses how to apply concepts from practice theories to examine changes and continuities in the food consumption practices of ordinary households, and to evaluate the application of practice theory in empirical studies. Additionally, this research examines how concepts from feminist theories can enrich the current application of practice theory. Given the specific Chinese gender culture, this research particularly investigates how neoliberal ideas and gender discourse interact to shape the dynamics of gender relations in daily food consumption experience across the two urban settings, Nanjing and Sheffield. This research project also addresses the following questions:

1. How can the daily grocery shopping experience and the experience of planning for meals be understood as food consumption practices? For Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield, how are their food procurement experience similar and how do they differ? How does a feminist analysis of cognitive and emotional labour reveal the unequal division of food provision work?
2. What are the changes in the cooking and eating practices, especially for the migrant Chinese households living in Sheffield? How do the cooking and eating practices become gendered in daily experience?

3. What are Chinese households' perceptions of food risks? How are they similar and how do they differ in China and the UK? How do Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield mobilise their practical knowledge of food risks in their daily food consumption?
4. How do neoliberal ideas, combined with gender discourse, manifest in the daily household food consumption practices? What are the changes and persistence in daily gender relations of Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield?

1.4 Structure of this thesis

The whole thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 includes a literature review of existing sociological investigations into household food consumption, an introduction to the concept of household food consumption, and an introduction to and application of practice theory. The main task of Chapter 2 is to provide the readers with a roadmap of the current intellectual journey. It includes a literature review for existing studies on food consumption and an introduction to the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 will introduce how neoliberal ideas contribute to the injustice and vulnerability of urban food systems in both China and the UK, and further critique the economic simplification of food consumption behaviour. On this basis, food consumption cannot be reduced to purely economic behaviour, such as purchasing, but rather contains various social and cultural significance. Based on the previous studies on family meals, the next part will introduce how existing sociological perspectives investigate household food consumption. I will also introduce the contributions of anthropological studies on food consumption, which provide a perspective for comparative studies to examine the changes and continuities in the meaning of food consumption. A limitation of previous sociological studies is that the theoretical explanation for food consumption itself remains underdeveloped. In the theory section, I will introduce the concept of consumption, drawing on the works of Alan Warde (2016b) and Daniel Miller (1998). This notion that the household food consumption process encompasses provision, appropriation and appreciation also guides the design of research and further data analysis. The theoretical part also addresses the question: How can key concepts from practice theory be applied to further data analysis? What are these core concepts? And why does this research need a synthetic theoretical framework that combines practice theory with a feminist lens?

Chapter 3, Methodology, will introduce the research design for this study, which is inspired by the lyric sociology and feminist narrative approaches. The research philosophy will also justify why this research uses a narrative approach to examine the daily food consumption experience. This research also develops a food story method that combines the use of various qualitative methods.

I will explain more about the detailed design and conduct of methods in the methodology chapter. In the Methodology chapter, I will define ordinary households as the research participants in this study and justify the selection of Nanjing and Sheffield as the research sites for a comparative study.

For the empirical chapters, Chapter 4 is about the cognitive and emotional labour involved in the household food provision experience. This chapter is divided into two sections: the practice of grocery shopping and the practice of designing a menu. This chapter is organised around Research Question 1. In this chapter, I will illustrate how to apply concepts from practice theory to understand the grocery shopping practice and the practice of meal planning. This chapter will also demonstrate how the concepts of cognitive and emotional labour could enrich the application of practice theory. This chapter also addresses the dynamics of gender relations in daily household food provision within the neoliberal context, examining the enactment of food femininities in these food practices.

Chapter 5 focuses on the appropriation part of the food consumption experience. This chapter is also divided into two sections: the practice of cooking and the practice of healthy eating. This chapter examines the changes and continuities in the practices of cooking and healthy eating, particularly in the context of migration. This chapter continues to explore the impacts of neoliberalism and provides further insight into the daily lives of young office workers in Nanjing and Sheffield. This chapter also examines a seemingly positive shift in gender relations, specifically men's increasing involvement in daily cooking. The main contribution of this chapter is to develop a sociological theory about the visceral experience of food consumption.

Chapter 6 discusses the daily practice of handling food risk. This chapter expands the concept of 'know-how' and tacit knowledge in practice theory. This chapter aims to develop layperson's everyday life knowledge of handling food risk. This chapter is divided into three parts: layperson's everyday life knowledge about food risk, the daily negotiations of mediated and embodied knowledge about food quality, and the gendering of food risk knowledge: mothers' responsibility in ensuring food safety for family members. This chapter examines participants' perceptions of food risk in China and the UK, as well as how these perceptions are reflected in their daily experiences. This chapter also examines participants' use of their mediated and embodied knowledge in daily food consumption. This chapter furtherly examines the sensory experience with food and explores its potential contribution to building a more inclusive urban food system. This chapter also discusses women's specific experience in organic agriculture.

Chapter 7 concludes the main findings of the empirical chapters and highlights the theoretical contributions of this research project. This chapter also reviews the impacts of neoliberalism, providing more detailed explanations based on the findings.

2 Literature Review

2.1 From Rational Actors to consumption practice: A review of the literature

2.1.1 Introduction

This section introduces how market relations, underpinned by neoliberalism, shape the urban food system, especially for food production and consumption. I will draw on examples and experiences from both China and the UK. A significant long-term influence of neoliberalism is that it redefines food by dismantling its inherent social and cultural values, thereby reconstituting it as a pure market commodity. With this market logic, the experience of food consumption is also reduced to economic behaviours driven by self-interest. Marçal, (2015) proposed a thought-provoking question: Who cooked dinner for Adam Smith? Marçal (2015) disclosed that Adam Smith did not get married. It was his mother who took care of him throughout her whole life and prepared dinner for him every night. Ironically, based on his own theory, Smith might explain that the behaviour of food provision is driven by selfishness, but what his mother did for him was out of love (Marçal, 2015). This is the crucial limitation of economic models' explanation for human behaviour, reducing the explanation to absolute rationality and self-interest, while failing to take into account the multiplicity of human motivations. In the following section, I will review the impacts of economic models, particularly neoliberalism, which has reinforced market relations in the food system we inhabit and downplayed other social values (McMichael and Weber, 2022). This section on literature review will also introduce the social and cultural implications of food, which are beyond a purely economic understanding.

As I will explain in the following sections, the discourse of neoliberalism has shaped our understanding of food, our relationships with food, and the existing food system (McMichael, 2000, 2009; McMichael and Weber, 2022). Michael Carolan (2012) pointed out that our relations with the food system, especially for ordinary consumers, can be understood in terms of the status of 'present-at-hand' and 'readiness-to-hand'. This metaphor can be understood as follows. People living in wealthy countries rarely think about the production process or distribution process of the frequently used food items offered by supermarkets, such as milk or eggs. People assume these food items are always available on the supermarket's shelf. This is the readiness-to-hand status. Unless people suddenly confront shortages of these everyday food items or the outbreak of food safety scandals, they might start to think about the malfunction of the urban food system they are living with. This is the 'present-at-hand' status. Carolan (2012) also proposed that most of the time, ordinary consumers are in the 'readiness-to-hand' status. However, his work did not explain the mechanism by which the readiness to hand status is perpetuated. This gap highlights the necessity of examining how neoliberal ideologies predominantly shape the understanding of food consumption, thereby preventing the public's imagination of a different urban food system.

2.1.2 When market relations dominated everything about food

Drawing on David Harvey's (2005) seminal work, neoliberalism contains two notions. The first one is neoliberalism in theory, or the neoliberal ideology, which provides some truths about the market and society. To be more specific, in a free market, competition and productivity are vital to creating wealth for society as a whole and benefiting all (Harvey, 2005). This theoretical assumption about neoliberalism also suggests that market rules could address social problems, such as poverty (Harvey, 2005). Another notion is the existing forms of neoliberalism, which can also be explained as the neoliberalisation process, firstly occurring in the 1970s in different countries with different political purposes. The existing forms of neoliberalism also include political projects and policies, such as China's market economic reform since 1978, the structural adjustment plan imposed on developing countries in the 1980s, and the UK's 2010 austerity policy (McMichael and Weber, 2022). A prominent gap between theory and the existing form is that neoliberalism did not bring the promised long-term economic prosperity (Harvey, 2005). Instead, too much liberalisation in the Global North's financial sectors leads to a series of global financial crises (Harvey, 2005). Besides, Harvey (2005) also pointed out that under the veil of freedom, the mechanism of neoliberalisation is accumulation by dispossession, including the commodification of natural resources, such as land and water, and the exploitation of environmental and labour resources. In general, the hidden logic and consequences of neoliberalisation is producing unequal social relations (Harvey, 2005; Wilson, 2018).

When it applies to food, market rules and relations also dominate the food production, distribution, and consumption activities (Herring, 2015). It is not new that for capital accumulation, the natural world is commodified as a source of raw materials (Herring, 2015; Michael and Weber, 2022). There is another tendency, the financialisation of food (Moore, 2010). Financialisation not only transformed crops into volatile exchange commodities in financial markets (Lawrence, 2017) but also reinforced the pursuit of high-rate, short-term profits (Moore, 2010). To achieve a high return, a simple market logic is to decrease the cost. Following this logic, cheap food is vital for sustaining the cheap labour (Moore, 2010). Neither cheap labour (Enloe, 2004) nor cheap food is natural in economic production arrangements; instead, they are constructed by neoliberal ideas (Carolan, 2011). The process of making cheap food is intertwined with modernised and highly industrial agricultural production (Moore, 2010). In 1970s, the Green Revolution, which was initially produced by the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico, including a 'package' of agricultural technology (mechanisation, agricultural chemicals, and high-yielding varieties of hybrid seeds), then it was introduced by international organisations such as the FAO, UNDP, and World Bank to promote intensive agriculture and increase crop yields to the rest of the world, especially the Global South (McMichael and Weber, 2022). However, the large inputs in agricultural technology also caused the 'treadmill' phenomenon: to increase the yield, farmers put more into the inputs, such as the seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation system, but the selling prices remain stable and even decrease while the costs of inputs keep rising (Carolan, 2012). The intensive use of chemical fertilisers also destroyed soil fertility, prompting farmers to use more synthetic fertilisers to recover the soil, but also trapping them in a vicious circle of unsustainable production (Carolan, 2012). As the market economy fosters massive consumption, a distorted belief has emerged that natural resources can withstand the endless exploitation resulting from human economic activities (McMichael and Weber, 2022). World scientists have warned that we are now in an ecological crisis, with the world experiencing extreme weather in recent years, including frequent flooding (Ripple et al., 2022). When market relations became the commonly shared worldview (Geuss, 1981), people hold the belief that everything can be commodified and measured by the price system (Menand, 2023). As Michael Carolan (2011) argued, what consumers can see is the food with cheap prices on the shelves; the ecological and social costs are unseen to them.

Agri-food scholars have uncovered the insecure livelihoods of small peasants in the Global South under deepening market relations (McMichael, 2000; 2009; Patel and McMichael, 2009). Under the guise of bringing development to the underdeveloped Global South, the practice of free market reorganised agricultural production in the Global South towards commercial monoculture of high-value products, while simultaneously dumping low-priced crops exported from the US (Patel and McMichael, 2009). For small farmers in the Global South, neoliberal policies such as deregulation contribute to their loss of state support and protection, which historically provided them with agricultural production subsidies, placing them in a precarious position within market relations (Ye, 2015; McMichael and Weber, 2022). Given the limited livelihood generated from agricultural production and the land grabs of transnational businesses, the Global South's small farmers were coerced into displacement from their land and rural communities to find opportunities in transnational factories and cities (McMichael, 2000). Previous studies have well-documented the unprotected conditions of agri-business factories' workers, characterised by low-wage and unstable work (Barndt, 2001). There are also studies on the expansion of slums (Davis, 2006), which I will not elaborate on here. The dispossession of peasants reveals that the free market and free trade offer an illusion of 'freedom'. The hidden story is that agribusiness and transnational corporations from the Global North manipulated international trade agreements, such as the GATT and NAFTA, and even the international organisations, WTO, to promote free trade, expand their market, and serve their own interests (McMichael, 2000). The long-term application of neoliberal policies has perpetuated social inequality and unequal socioeconomic relations between the Global South and the Global North (McMichael and Weber, 2022).

In China, the deepening market relations also placed small farmers in an insecure status (Ye, 2015). The production of small farmers on their farmland is now largely determined by the volatile market, which is beyond their control (Ye, 2015). The deepened market relationship also influences China’s agricultural production policy, which aims to commodify production inputs and enhance competitiveness in the market (Zhang, 2018). Chinese agri-food scholars found that, to catch up with modernised and intensive agriculture, local government pressured farmers to produce high-value products instead of conserving local farmers’ indigenous production (Ye, 2015). Like other indigenous agricultural systems, traditional Chinese agriculture also emphasised respecting and harmonising with nature, rather than conquering and transforming the natural environment with industrial mechanical power (Ye, 2015). Small farmers possess extensive indigenous agricultural knowledge on how to conserve soil, biodiversity, and adapt to climate change (McMichael and Weber, 2022). However, under the name of modernised development, their inherited local agricultural knowledge is devalued as lower-productive and backward, which also embodies the impacts of market relations (McMichael and Weber, 2022).

Furthermore, Chinese farmers were encouraged to use intensive agricultural chemicals on their land instead of adopting their previous sustainable and organic production methods (Shumilas et al., 2018). The widespread use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides also led to food safety issues, such as toxic chemical residues (Yan, 2012; Schumilas et al., 2018). China’s farmers are also experiencing a situation where state-owned agribusiness and private business control their production, leading farmers to invest more in production inputs while their gains from selling products remain unstable (Ye, 2015). Similarly, faced with limited livelihoods from agricultural production, a vast number of Chinese farmers have been displaced to cities in search of income-generating opportunities (Ye, 2015). A related story is about migrant workers’ precarious working conditions. The Chinese government has a rigid hukou system, which constrains migrant workers’ access to government-supported public services in cities (Chan and Selden, 2009).

In China, the food delivery industry has experienced significant expansion (Zhao et al., 2021), with over 50,000 food delivery orders processed every minute (Xinhua, 2025). The rapid growth of the digital economy also exacerbates the competitiveness between companies (Sun et al., 2023). To maintain their profits, these food delivery technology companies employed strategies that utilised third parties to recruit flexible workers, thereby alleviating labour costs (Sun et al., 2023). A noteworthy fact is that most of the delivery drivers are migrant workers from rural backgrounds (Sun and Zhao, 2024). Since the food delivery company outsourced its food delivery drivers to intermediary forms, it is also challenging for these drivers to seek legal protection to ensure their income and basic welfare (Sun et al., 2023). This is another unseen story about the market relations’ exploitation of migrant workers. This section reviewed the works of agri-food scholars to examine the influence of neoliberal ideas on the food system. Through the lens of food, agri-food studies have made significant contributions to explaining how the evolution of neoliberalism worldwide aligns with the legacy of racism, creating an unstable and unjust food system (Carolan, 2012). This is the reflection from the food production part, that food problems can’t be reduced to a purely economic activity. Goodman and DuPuis (2002) proposed that the radical transformation of the food system also needed to integrate the participation of consumers, to raise their awareness. They further pointed out the agri-food scholars' heavy reliance on the production part and the underdevelopment of theories for consumers' experience (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). Therefore, it is still needed to explore sociological theories that address food consumption itself, rather than using the consumption experience to examine other sociological topics. I will explain this further in the theory section. In the following part, I will continue to introduce how economic thinking impacts the understanding of consumption, which mainly focuses on the individual consumer rather than consumption activities.

2.1.3 A - consumer: who has too many tasks to deal with

As previously argued, neoliberalism, as a penetrating ideology within the food system, also profoundly shapes the understanding of consumption. Here, I used the term 'A-consumer' to highlight how the orthodox economic theories constructed an economic man: an individual detached from social relations, whose entire behaviour revolves around market exchange, constantly comparing prices, making calculations, and ultimately purchasing commodities (Marçal, 2015). Previous studies have summarised two typical types of consumers under this economic understanding: passive victims, who are deemed unable to make proper choices in their consumption, or heroic consumers, who proactively engage in addressing social and environmental problems (Slater, 2005; Halkier, 2010). Both these archetypes – the passive victim and the heroic consumer – embody the impacts of neoliberal ideology. The following part will challenge the economic model of A-consumer. I will illustrate that food consumption is not just about buying and purchasing and explain the influence of neoliberal ideas in shaping the two types of consumers.

However, food consumption activity is not just about affordability and food availability. Amartya Sen (1982) has illustrated that hunger and famine occurred in regions where there was sufficient food or no significant rise in food prices. It was the massive displacement and dispossession of peasants that weakened their capability for self-sufficiency and made them vulnerable to a volatile market (Sen, 1982). Furthermore, given the nature of pursuing maximum profit, market relations are inherently incapable of ensuring an equal distribution of food or spontaneously providing aid to those most in need (Sen, 1982). Nevertheless, the dominant neoliberal ideology can still be identified in the Food and Agriculture Organisation's recent report on food insecurity and malnutrition. For example, the 2018 report on *The State of Food Security and Nutrition* directly attributed the problem of malnutrition to a lack of purchasing power, leading people to choose cheap food and unhealthy, high-energy diets (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF and WHO, 2018). This explanation simplified food access to purchasing power while neglecting other social factors. The 2024 report continues to emphasise the importance of market relations, suggesting that ensuring equal access to financial resources could help alleviate hunger and malnutrition (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, and WHO, 2024). A related food problem is ‘food desert’, which refers to low-income households lacking access to healthy food (Wrigley, 2002). Particularly, the indicator of access to healthy food is reduced to the mere presence of supermarkets in households’ living areas, which are presumed to supply fresh vegetables and fruits (Wrigley, 2002). Using access to supermarkets as the primary means to address the undernutrition problem still reflects the neoliberal idea that market rules can effectively solve social problems (Ghosh-Dastidar et al., 2017; Blake, 2018). It treats the problem as the solution.

The notion of rational economic man also produces a simplified understanding of consumers’ choices in their daily consumption. The assumption is that, under the condition that consumers have sufficient information, they can make rational choices in their shopping activities (Lupton, 1999). This assumption perpetuates a deficit model, which attributes health problems, such as the prevalence of obesity and diabetes, to irrational choices made by consumers in their daily shopping and dietary habits (Halkier and Jensen, 2011). The deficit model often portrays consumers as passive victims who need more information and some educational program (Halkier and Jensen, 2011). However, the dichotomy of rationality versus irrationality itself is problematic in understanding everyday consumption. Lupton (1999) pointed out that the deficit model produces an antithesis that laypersons’ perception is inferior to experts’ knowledge. The former often used their personal and everyday life experience, which are assumed to be subjective and intuitive. The latter could employ scientific ways to produce objective facts. In the *Risk Society,* Ulrich Beck (1992) has uncovered that the ubiquitous modernised risk is the unintended side effect of the exponential growth of productivity. The modernised risks, characterised by unknown, incalculable, and irreversible consequences, demonstrate that the rationality highly valued by modernity did not bring the promised absolute control over the natural and social world, but instead directed modernised development to an unknown place (Beck, 1992, 2008). Beck (2008) summarised that given the unknown aspect of risk, the knowledge of modernised risk must employ both the rationality of science and the irrationality, including imagination, suspicions, and fear.

Furthermore, the production of knowledge about reality can’t be separated from the social and cultural environment and cannot be absolutely value-free (Lupton, 1999; Shaw, 1999). This understanding challenged the authority of scientific rationality and also justified the layperson’s perception and knowledge (Lupton, 1999; Shaw, 1999). Deborah Lupton’s (1999; 2002; 2005) series of studies on risk demonstrated that laypersons possess situated knowledge about risk, which is rooted in their everyday life experiences and makes sense in their everyday situations. Putting consumption in everyday life, household consumption is often about others and revolves around others’ wants, needs, and emotions (Miller, 1998; Hall, 2016). Even for single-head household food consumption, living in a globalised food supply chain also means that individuals’ choices in consumption can be related to ethical issues about others, such as the working conditions of farmers in a distant country or caring about our ecological environment (Herring, 2015). Therefore, there is no clear boundary between rationality and irrationality in our daily food consumption. The complexity of concerns and needs in daily consumption means that there is a rationality in the seemingly irrational (Guptill et al., 2022).

The heroic consumers can be directly linked with the impacts of individualism (MacKendrick, 2018). With the deregulation of government in public affairs, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their own well-being (MacKendrick, 2018; Blake, 2019). In the study of chemical pollution, MacKendrick (2018) found that the withdrawal of the US government from regulating toxic chemicals and pollution problems led individuals to engage in precarious consumption, which involves carefully checking labels on packages and identifying harmful ingredients to avoid using polluted products. There is another related concept, the individualisation process, which also emerged during the rise of neoliberalism. Ulrich Beck (2001) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000) proposed that with the disintegration of state-sanctioned standard biographies, individuals are not born with their social positions but are pushed to carry a do-it-yourself biography. In *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman (2000) raised the question of whether individuals have the blessing or the curse of the freedom brought by modernity. To be more specific, the do-it-yourself biography also required individuals to make choices among numerous possibilities for their lives, such as their work, marriage, and identity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Individuals are the entrepreneurs of their own lives. The cost of freedom is that they also need to undertake the consequences of the choices they make (Bauman, 2000).

Both individualism and individualisation framed the social and environmental problems as individualised responsibility (Halkier, 2010). With the freedom to make choices, ordinary consumers can participate in addressing ethical and environmental issues through their purchasing decisions (Johnston, 2008). Previous studies have found the influence of individualism. For example, the slogan, ‘voting with your dollar’, encourages consumers to use their agency to address environmental issues just by purchasing the products labelled as eco-friendly (Johnston, 2008). However, a question remains: whether the market rules can effectively address social and ecological problems? Johnston (2008) in the study about the Whole Foods Market identified that the main purpose of larger food retailers is still to encourage more consumption, which contradicts their attitudes of promoting an eco-friendly and sustainable food system. To be more specific, food retailers like Whole Foods Markets not only provide consumers with sustainable and organic products but also offer a wide choice of conventional products (Johnston, 2008). Therefore, doing something good for society and the environment while shopping is more like an optional choice for consumers rather than a duty. Johnston and Szabo (2011) also found that for consumers who patronised the Whole Foods Market, they mainly showed appreciation for the shopping environment rather than pursuing sustainable and organic agriculture. Living with a do-it-yourself biography, individuals possess a range of choices for the templates in their daily shopping. Today, they could choose to be active environmentalists, asking for low-carbon emissions in consumption. But tomorrow, they could switch to buying fruits produced by farmers in a distant country, because the tropical fruit tastes very good. Daily food consumption is complex, which is often neglected by the neoliberal model.

In *Individualisation,* Ulrich Beck (2001) argued that the pre-existing routines are disintegrated; therefore, individuals have to make choices for each step. 'It is precisely this level of pre-conscious 'collective habitualisations', of matters taken for granted, that is breaking down into a cloud of possibilities to be thought and negotiated. The deep layer of foreclosed decision is being forced up into the level of decision-making.' (Beck, 2001, p. 6). Beck's (2000) and Bauman's (2001) work provided a grand narrative to diagnose the influence of individualisation. Previous studies have critiqued Beck's theory for overlooking the everyday life context (Mythen, 2007). In *Consumption, Food & Taste*, Alan Warde (1997) also expressed that Bauman's work exacerbates individuals' freedom in consumption choices. Warde (1997) argued that social groups and relations continue to influence decision-making, as well as the established conventions. Consumer often consider their previous experiences, childhood memories, advice from friends and family, as well as the opinions of experts, which still impact on their daily decision-making. Therefore, individuals are not in a state of anxiety generated by their freedoms in making choices without any reference (Warde, 1997).

We can't deny the influence of the individualisation process on daily life. However, it is too early to claim the abolition of routine and convention in daily life. I must clarify that Beck (2001) did not say the disappearance of social categories and routines; rather, he argued that it is now the task of individuals to choose and reconstruct their social roles and traditions. Can this elaborate explanation be used to investigate mundane food consumption, which often focuses on traditions and routines? Although previous studies provided some critiques of the economic model for understanding consumption activities, these studies still used food as a lens to examine the concepts of neoliberalism rather than for food consumption itself. The food studies still need further theoretical frameworks to address this limitation. In the following part, I will continue to explore the social and cultural understanding of food consumption and the limitations of cultural perspectives.

2.1.4 Consuming food, consuming social and cultural meanings

Previous sociological studies have uncovered various social and cultural meanings contained in food and food consumption (Murcott, 2019). What constitutes 'food', or what is considered edible and inedible, varies significantly across historical and cultural contexts (Murcott, 2019; Carolan, 2012). A familiar example is that some religions have rigid proscriptions against consuming certain meats (Murcott, 2019). The consumption of specific foods can also be intimately linked with the construction of racial identity and the perpetuation of racism. For instance, African American 'soul food', like fried chicken, has often been unfairly blamed as a primary cause of obesity within the African American community (Slocum, 2011). However, this devaluation of ‘soul food’ obscures the more profound impacts of racism and structural discrimination (Slocum, 2011). A contemporary topic highlighting food’s complex social embeddedness is the ongoing debate about the safety of newly produced foods, such as Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) food. This concern also involves some social issues, such as food safety regulations in different regions and ethical considerations for altering the natural state of food (Herring, 2015). These examples could demonstrate that food and food consumption are rich sites for exploring various sociological topics.

Indeed, sociological studies have long recognised the significance of food and food consumption as a lens for exploring and examining fundamental sociological concepts. These include intricate roles of rules, rituals, social organisation, and social stratification (Warde, 2016a). Georg Simmel, in his often-overlooked work on the sociology of meals, highlighted how studying meals can reveal some regular patterns in social life (Symons, 1994). There are also several notable and dominant streams of sociological studies on food. Lévi-Strauss’s famous work, *The Culinary Triangle* (2008), is a pioneering work of structuralism. Mary Douglas (1972) and Roland Barthes (1961) also made significant contributions to using food as a lens to explore the structure of the symbolic system. For the study of social division, Bourdieu (1984), in his famous work *Distinction*, used the taste of food from different classes to examine social stratification and hierarchies.

However, as Alan Warde (2016a) summarised, many sociological studies of food consumption primarily used food to illustrate broader sociological concepts, rather than developing a synthetic sociological theory of food consumption itself. While this observation highlights a relative underdevelopment of specific sociological theories related to food and food consumption (Warde, 2016a), it doesn’t negate the profound contributions of these previous works. They have undeniably shed light on why and how studying mundane food activities matters, remaining highly insightful for current research. Focusing on everyday food activities, these studies made the most familiar aspects of daily life unfamiliar and unpacked how sociological imagination can be applied to these assumed self-evident everyday lives (Bauman, 1990). In the following part, I will use the topic of the meal to organise the previous works. I found that many previous studies focused on meals, from meal preparation and table manners to the content and format of meals.

Despite their varied forms across cultures and regions, meals are a commonly shared, routine, and regular activity that can reveal much about social life (Warde, 2016a). Meals entail spatial and temporary elements (Warde, 2016a). A relatively general model, three meals in a day including breakfast, lunch, and dinner, effectively delineates shifts in time and location within everyday social life (Warde, 2016a). Meal patterns are also shaped by broader social processes, such as industrialisation and urbanisation (Holm, 2013). For instance, in the pre-industrial era, daily life often revolved around five meals, predominantly consumed in the domestic context with family members (Holm, 2013). As the pre-industrial workplace was at home or close to people’s living areas, this pattern could be sustained (Holm, 2013). During the industrialisation era, as most people began working in industries located in peri-urban areas, the previous five meals were simplified to the familiar three meals a day (Holm, 2013). Given the influence of employment, previous studies have noticed changes in eating patterns. Dixion et al. (2014) identified that flexible working schedules also led to irregular and unstructured eating habits, which could have a potential healthy influence. Poulain (2002) in the study of French urbanites' changing eating habits also found a tendency towards the simplification of midday meals for those people who have a long commute time. Even their workplace had a company restaurant and café, some employees, especially female employees, still chose to bring a lunchbox or food takeaways to avoid waiting time and decrease the time spent on lunch hour in the workplace (Poulain, 2002). Warde (2000) also researched eating out to examine the various meanings, such as necessity, pleasure, and informalisation, contained in this prominent eating practice.

Previous studies also noticed the influence of individualisation in breaking up previous eating patterns, indicating the loss of routine and rituals in eating, especially the decline of family meal (Marshall, 2005). Even though there are some tendencies of irregular eating habits and increasing time in grazing eating and eating out (Warde, 2000; 2016 a), these individualistic eating behaviours can't indicate the disappearance of routines and rituals in eating. As Warde (1997) suggested, we must be cautious when examining the influence of individualisation on routines in everyday life. Given the media discourse of the decline of family meals, previous studies have identified an opposite tendency that family meals are still sustained and play an indispensable role for people to maintain their ideal family life, despite changes in forms (Marshall, 2005; Kjærnes et al., 2009; Jackson, 2009; Warde, 2024).

In *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) argued that the reality of family life is constructed by repetitive activities, such as having meals with family members. Furtherly, the ideal family life is constituted by proper meals (Jackson et al., 2009; Murcott, 2019). In the UK context, the proper meal usually refers to a cooked dinner (Murcott, 1982). Anne Murcott (1982) provided a detailed introduction for the content and format of a typical cooked dinner of South Wales families. Generally, a cooked dinner consists of meat, vegetables, potatoes, and gravy (Murcott, 1982). There are also rules for the cooked diners, including prescribed and proscribed food materials, cooking methods, and the presentation of the meal plate (Murcott, 1982). For example, the meat often refers to beef, lamb, pork or chicken. The use of meat should be fresh, from a warm animal, and not allow the use of offal, preserved or cold animal. The proper way to cook meat includes roasting, rather than using boiled, stewed, or fried meat (Murcott, 1982). The main vegetables must be green above-ground vegetables, while the additional ones can use vegetables of different colours, regardless of whether they are above or underground (Murcott, 1982). For plating, the meat, vegetables, and potatoes are arranged side by side in small pieces, and most importantly, they are poured with gravy cooked with salt and pepper (Murcott, 1982). Anne Murcott's (1982) study demonstrated that a cooked dinner is structured by rules governing food materials and cooking methods. Furthermore, Murcott (1982) concluded that having a cooked dinner symbolised returning home from the workplace, which emphasises the significance of a cooked dinner in family life. Mary Douglas (1972) also had a study about deciphering meals. However, Douglas's (1972) study mainly focused on uncovering how to decode food and meals like texts and grammar. While understanding the rules and regularities in meals and the food is essential, reducing them to mere text risks overlooking the distinctiveness of food itself. Returning to the debates on the decline of family meals, Jackson et al. (2009) also pointed out that the media discourse of ideal family meals disguised social differentiations and merely represented a nostalgic narrative of happy family meals from the previous middle class. As I will explain in the following, social division and social class are still crucial for understanding family meals.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (2000) provided a detailed comparison of the different manners and contents of meals between the working-class and the bourgeois. For example, working-class meals have more freedom, with a plentiful amount, mainly consisting of pasta, sauces, and soup, and are often accompanied by a ladle or a spoon (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 195). In contrast, the meals of bourgeois families follow a strict sequence of dishes and are concerned with proper forms and manners in serving and eating (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 196). Bourdieu (2000) defined the differences in food preferences as a taste for food, which is also a form of cultural competence and can be linked to economic and social capital. In summary, the different food preferences of working-class and bourgeois families could indicate their social positions and also express cultural and economic hierarchies (Warde, 2016a). Given the rigid division in food preferences, the rise of cultural omnivores led to some debates about the deterministic relationship between social class and taste (Johnston et al., 2019; de Vries and Reeves, 2021). Besides, the phenomenon of 'gastro-anomie', which refers to the collapse of previous social-cultural cues for what to eat and how to eat, also highlights the deepening individualisation process and implies a weakened influence of social class differentiation in food preferences (Warde, 2016a).

However, it's crucial not to ignore the enduring influence of social class, wealth distribution, and economic resources. Let's return to the fundamental topic of money and socioeconomic status. In the UK, the influence of austerity has led to a notable increase in the use of food banks, from 65 in early 2011 to over 1,200 in 2019 (Sosenko et al., 2019). Before seeking support from the food bank, users have already exhausted methods to tighten their belts and still face the trap of debt (O'hara, 2014; Sosenko et al., 2019). Cutting down the expenditure of local government, whose primary function is to provide social protection for adults and children, reducing the earnings of a worker in the public sector, and introducing more rigid welfare conditions have pushed many populations in the UK into a desperate situation (O'Hara, 2014; Sosenko et al., 2019). The budget for food expenditure is also influenced by other living expenses (Puddephatt et al., 2020). To be more specific, certain expenditures would be prioritised, such as housing costs and bills (Puddephatt et al., 2020). Based on the 2020 UK household expenditure survey, household spending took the largest share of expenditure, followed by transport, recreation and culture, and food took the fourth proportion share (Department for Environment Food & Agriculture, 2021, p. 211). In a more recent study on changes in eating habits, based on the 2018 Food Standards Agency survey for household food consumption, Warde (2024) further explained that while there might be no significant class differences in the consumption of basic food items, better-off households are more concerned with food quality and tend to use food retailers with relatively higher prices. This suggests that taste or food preferences for specific food items might be weakened, but the quality differences in food choices persist along socioeconomic lines. This section reviews the contributions of previous sociological studies in elucidating the social and cultural meanings contained in meals. Most importantly, previous studies demonstrated the continuity and changes in family meals and daily eating patterns. Although previous sociological studies have highlighted the significance of thinking with food in exploring sociological concepts, they still lack a theoretical curiosity for mundane food consumption activities themselves. The following section will continue to explore how previous studies have examined the changing meaning of food.

2.1.5 Anthropological studies' contribution to the changing meaning of food

In this section, I will introduce studies from an anthropological perspective that inspired me to consider continuity and change in the meaning of food consumption. The primary contribution of anthropological studies is that they locate the social and cultural significance of food and food consumption within the broader social and historical context (Goody, 1982; Klein, 2014). Previous anthropological studies have also examined shifting meanings, paying close attention to social differentiation and social hierarchies (Klein, 2014). Furthermore, anthropological research excels at linking the development of production processes with contemporary consumption patterns, often through in-depth investigation of specific food items. Sidney Mintz's seminal work, *Sweetness and Power* (1986), provides a compelling example of this approach. Mintz traces the evolution of sugar consumption from a luxury item to a basic ingredient in daily meals, using it to examine the interconnected world economy system. He uncovers two interrelated forms of the trajectory of capitalism: the establishment of sugar plantations in Europe's tropical colonies and the simultaneous development of industries in the UK. Mintz (1986) insightfully pointed out that the sugar produced by the slaves on plantations fed the spiritual and material energy of proletarian workers in Britain's burgeoning industries.

Building on the notion of world-system, Jack Goody (1982) proposed that the study of food consumption and the exploration of the social and cultural meaning of food should grasp both 'us' and 'them', both the present and the past. Goody (1982) further explained that exploring 'the other' can significantly enrich the understanding of 'us', our own culture and history. Goody (1982) also emphasised the importance of considering comparative studies with attention to historical analysis, as well as the temporal and spatial dimensions. More specifically, understanding both 'us' and 'them' directly challenged the linear and dichotomous model that often portrays Western culture as highly advanced and civilised – a universal and emulated model for the rest of the world, while deeming other cultures as inferior (McMichael and Weber, 2022. This simplified understanding, as McMichael and Weber (2022) concluded, effectively erases a past imprinted by colonialism and racism. As Stuart Hall (1991) argued, 'there is no English history without that other history'. There are some previous cultural and anthropology studies focused on the influence of globalisation, the mobility of food, cuisine culture, and people (Warde, 2016a; Klein, 2014). Several studies have focused on the globalisation of fast food and examined the localisation of the social and cultural meanings of Western fast food in new markets of non-Western countries (Abbots, 2014; Lozada, 2000). Lozada (2000) investigated Chinese children's consumption of KFC in the 1990s. Since the Chinese government promoted the one-child policy, the elevated position of children within the family meant they gained more power in influencing household food consumption decisions (Lozada, 2000). To cater to China's growing children's market, KFC implemented domesticated strategies, such as promoting the new character 'Qiqi', a cartoon chicken, rather than relying solely on the classic Colonel Sanders. KFC also employed a specific children's entertainment area to attract younger consumers. Lozada (2000) investigated the shifting meaning of fast food from the perspective of a transnational company, detailing how they considered China's changing social and economic context to make adaptations in the local context. Similarly, Yan (2000) conducted a study on the localisation of McDonald's in China, but his research primarily focused on consumers' perspective and their interpretations of consuming fast food. Yan (2000) found that the hygienic and neat environment provided by chain fast-food restaurants attracted the new Chinese middle class and young white-collar groups, who prefer to use fast-food restaurants as their socialised spaces (Yan, 2000). In contrast to Western countries, where eating in a fast-food restaurant is often perceived as a convenient way to have a quick meal, in China, the middle-class consumers reported a different consumption experience: eating at McDonald's became a new leisure activity (Yan, 2000). They might even spend an entire afternoon having beverages, reading books and socialising with friends. Yan's (2000) study thus demonstrates how specific consumption activities shape the shifting meaning in food consumption with the use of eating places.

Continuing the topic of food and globalisation, previous studies have also focused on the culinary experiences of migrant groups to explore the expression of racial identity (Slocum, 2011). Engaging with home countries' cuisine could alleviate diaspora nostalgia, as it addresses the split experience of memories about home food and the lived experience in a foreign country (Slocum, 2011). However, food and food consumption are not just a medium for expressing cultural identity

(Slocum, 2011). Previous critical and post-colonial studies also noticed the subtle racial exploitation in food consumption. Both Narayan (1995) and Cook and Crang (1996) have highlighted a form of food colonialism that is hidden in Western consumers' experiences of enjoying ethnic cuisines. To be more specific, the influence of consumerism also shapes the experience of eating ethnic cuisines. Consumers viewed the experience of tasting food from different countries as an adventurous experience and therefore could gain some cultural privileges from these exotic cuisines (Narayan, 1995). These foodies often showed a superficial interest in ethnic cuisine culture and rarely demonstrated a humble attitude to understand the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the cuisines they tasted (Narayan, 1995). The commodification of others' cuisines also expresses a complex form of food colonialism, displacing others' food from its original social context and simultaneously perpetuating a hierarchical relation.

2.1.6 Conclusion

In summary, these diverse theoretical perspectives have inspired me to move beyond a purely economic understanding, which merely focuses on the market exchange of food, and an individualistic perspective, which often overestimates the freedom of the consumer (Warde, 2016b). As previous studies have demonstrated, we can glean insights into various sociological topics from food and utilise the investigation of mundane food consumption, such as mealtime, to enrich our understanding of social life. Furthermore, the anthropological perspective has provided insightful points for examining the changes and continuities in the social and cultural meanings of food consumption, situated within the broader social processes and political-economic contexts. Now, we can link back to the influence of neoliberalism. The anthropology studies offered a potential solution to synthesise the contribution of agri-food studies, which focus more on the impact of neoliberalism on food production part, with sociology topics such as social hierarchy and social differentiation in food consumption.

However, a key critique for the existing studies is that for food itself, or in other words, the distinctiveness of food consumption, which includes a myriad of embodied experiences, like smelling, touching, and digesting, the existing theories are still underdeveloped (Warde, 2016a). In the *Practice of Eating*, Warde (2016a) suggested that further studies should integrate the corporeal aspect of food, including the physiological, alimentary, and sensory experience of food, to provide social and aesthetic accounts for these visceral experiences. Besides, previous studies rarely noticed that food consumption is embedded in the context of everyday life. Although previous studies have noticed and summarised some recursive patterns of family meals, such as the rules of meals and insistence on family meals, these studies did not provide a detailed explanation for the establishment and formation of routinised meal patterns. I have to clarify that DeVault's work (1991) emphasised the hidden emotional labour involved in planning for meals. Jackson et al.'s study (2009) also employed a practice approach to examine family meals in an everyday life context, which I will introduce in more detail in the following section. We still need further theoretical perspectives to examine the power of routines in everyday food consumption. In the following part, I will introduce Warde's (2016b) understanding of consumption, its limitations, and complement it with others' perspectives on everyday food consumption. I will also illustrate why the practice theory is suitable for understanding everyday food consumption. I will draw upon the core ideas from Theodore R. Schatzki (1996) and Andreas Reckwitz (2002) to introduce practice theory, complementing these with existing interpretations of their definitions.

2.2 Definition of consumption

Alan Warde (2016b) defines consumption as 'a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion.' (Warde, 2016b, p.86). This definition highlighted that consumption is not merely about buying activity and emphasised the dimensions of the use process in consumption, as well as the aesthetic expression (Warde, 2016b). In *Consumption Analysis*, Warde (2016b) particularly focuses on the appropriation part to delineate the scope of consumption activities. He notes that the verb 'consume' includes the meaning: to use up, to destroy, and to waste. From this perspective, consumption is fundamentally understood as a process of using products, an appropriation process. Warde (2016b) also defined that the experience of using products is self-oriented, which implies that shopping activities should not be the focus of consumption. Warde (2016b) explained that shopping, which is other-oriented, is a provision activity rather than a consumption activity. According to Warde (2016b), the use of products is absolutely self-oriented and self-regarding. He illustrates this with examples: 'So I may eat food at dinner, wear clothes that transmit to others messages about myself, follow therapeutic advice, invest in a house to profit financially when I subsequently dispose of it, or play the piano. All these are acts of appropriation through my making some use of objects or services.' (Warde, 2016b, p. 66). Appropriation, in Warde's framework, has two vital dimensions: some levels of engagement and conversion, which underscore the experience of using up and transforming the products (Warde, 2016b). Engagement and conversion emphasise the process of altering, interpreting, and singularising products, and most importantly, taking control over the appropriation process (Warde, 2016b, p. 68). Warde (2016b) also noted that variations and different levels of appropriation depended on the competence and resources that individuals possessed. The engagement and utilisation process can also deliver enjoyment, gratification, and other positive feelings and experiences during the use of the products (Warde, 2016b). Furthermore, appropriation is also organised by orientations towards consumption and products (Warde, 2016b, p. 74). In summary, Warde's (2016b) definition of consumption underscores the central role of the appropriation process in consumption, which could bring some feelings, experiences, such as enjoyment, pleasure, and gratification, and serve for some purposes, but also has some orientations for how to use up and dispose of the products (Warde, 2016b).

Although Warde's (2016b) definition emphasises the role of using up things in generating meanings in consumption, I would argue that studying the consumption process could be more inclusive, which also includes the acquisition part, in other words, the provision activities. In another work, *The Practice of Eating* (Warde, 2016a), explained that the manners of provision, which include both commercial and domestic provision, could impact access to food and the ways people received and consumed it. I contend that Warde's (2016b) appropriation approach risks overlooking the broader process of food consumption by primarily focusing on the moment of using-up products, particularly the economic activities and diverse resources involved in food access. A more inclusive understanding of food consumption should encompass the acquisition, and appropriation engaged in the consumption process.

Daniel Miller's extensive body of work (1998; 2008; 2010; 2012) on consumption can further complement Warde's (2016b) appropriation approach. Using Warde's (2016b) understanding, some of Miller's studies primarily focus on the provision aspect, particularly shopping activities. In *Stuff* (2010) and *The Comfort of Things* (2008), Miller also focused on the process of using up products. For example, in *Stuff*, Miller (2010) used a typical consuming activity, wearing clothes, to uncover the values constructed in the use of clothes. Miller (2010) found that people living in Trinidad were enthusiastic about dressing up and displaying their fashion styles with their apparel. A common assumption regarding this enthusiasm for fashion is that people pursue symbols signified by the clothing, or express an identity they wish to project, while disguising their actual needs or selves (Miller, 2010). In the study of Trinidadian's pursuit of fashion, Miller (2010) uncovered that local people have a very different understanding of cloth and dressing up. On the contrary, Trinidadians believe that people display who they are on the surface (Miller, 2010). They do not need to dig out a hidden, real being because they are what they appear to be to others. This is the Trinidadian philosophy of living, or their cosmology, conveyed through the consumption activity of dressing up. Much of Miller's (1998; 2008; 2010; 2012) work consistently delves into the cosmology embedded in consumption activities. Miller (1998; 2012) further pointed out that shopping activities are not merely instrumental but are also directed towards higher shared values and cosmology, such as love, care, thrift, and ethical consideration of doing something good for others and even for the natural environment. Miller's (2012) work uncovered that when studying consumption, we need to be cautious to deal with some assumptions, such as hedonism and materialism. For example, those who spent a whole day shopping might be housewives who considered the needs of other family members, rather than the new rich who were immersed in enjoying their wealth and spending money without considering the consequences (Miller, 1998, 2012). Returning to the definition of consumption, Miller's study demonstrated that investigating the consumption process, which includes acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation, can explore the hidden social and cultural meanings and also challenge the taken-for-granted understandings of consumption.

Although Miller's study provided insightful points to uncover the deep values in ordinary consumption, much of Miller's work overemphasised a grand narrative for explaining ordinary consumption while neglecting the everyday life context. In *A Theory of Shopping*, Miller (1998) provided more details about shoppers' daily shopping skills, their knowledge about different food retailers, and shoppers' evaluations of quality and prices. However, his conclusion is more about uncovering the cosmology of shopping. Therefore, we also need further explanation to understand the mundane daily food consumption. Interestingly, Warde, in his series of studies (2001, 2007, 2016a, 2016b), highlighted the habitual and unreflective aspects of daily food consumption. In the *Practice of Eating*, which particularly focused on food consumption, Warde (2016a) mainly uncovered that eating is an embodied habit, which is composed of some habitual bodily procedures, such as spooning and swallowing, and can be explained by the autonomous bodily behaviour and some propensity or tendency built into repetitive behaviours. Furthermore, in *Consumption a Social Analysis*, Warde's (2016b) understanding tends to overemphasise the unconscious aspect of consumption. Warde (2016b) defines consumption as a moment in practice, which does not require extra reflection or thought. Warde's (2016b) simplified understanding of consumption might overlook the complexity in daily food consumption.

To grasp the complexity of mundane food consumption, this study will adopt an everyday life perspective to examine the acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation processes in daily food consumption activities. The everyday life perspective emphasises the ordinary consumption activities in daily life (Scott, 2009) and has a particular interest in investigating the formation and influence of routines in daily consumption (Warde and Groncow, 2001). Here, routine refers to a routinised way of consumption, representing a normative and expectable arrangement of daily life (Kjærnes et al., 2007; Halkier, 2010). Routine can also bring a sense of order and security (Warde and Groncow, 2001). Therefore, consumers are not victims of individualisation who are detached from their familiar pathway and pre-existing social forms, nor are they compelled to make choices for every action (Beck, 2001). Bente Halkier (2010) also recognised the agency of ordinary consumers, that they are able to handle the challenges in food consumption (e.g., social and environmental issues) and their sometimes constrained personal and social conditions, drawing upon their previous daily experiences. In the following section, I will illustrate how practice theory can facilitate an understanding of everyday food consumption.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Practice theory

This section will outline how practice theory can aid in understanding the complexity of everyday household food consumption. I will also discuss the limitations of practice theory for studying food consumption and explore how these can be complemented. While ‘practice’ and ‘practice theory’ have been defined in multiple ways, a common point among these approaches is that social practice is considered the primary unit for studying social life and social order (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002). This study primarily employed the core concepts from Theodore Schatzki's (1996) and Andreas Reckwitz's (2002) definition of practice theory. Additionally, I will incorporate extended understandings of practice theory from Warde (2016a, 2016b), Shove et al. (2012), and Halkier (2010), all of whom build upon the foundational concepts of Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002). I will introduce Schatzki’s (1996) definition of practice theory and explain some core concepts which facilitate my thinking. These concepts will be organised by normativity, multiplicity of practice, material, reproduction, and changes.

In *Social Practice: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social,* Schatzki (1996) proposed an alternative approach to conceiving the essence of social life, highlighting that practice is the fundamental component of social life. For Schatzki (1996, 2016), social life can be defined as the hanging-together of human lives and entities, which can form a nexus context. Social order is an arrangement of human lives and entities, determining their places and meaning (Schatzki, 1996, 2001). Schatzki (1996) further explained that the coexistence of people requires more than rationality, cooperation, and the coercive force of norms; it primarily relies on mutual understanding and intelligibility. In summary, Schatzki (1996) provided an ontology that practice is the site where understanding is structured and intelligibility is expressed, and therefore constructs individuality and social order (Schatzki, 1996, p. 12-13).

Then, what is practice? In Schatzki’s (1996) definition, practice is ‘a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’ (p.89). The nexus of doings and sayings is organised by (1) an understanding of the proper way to carry out some activities and the ability to identify when others are doing the same activity; (2) the rules or procedures of conducting activities, which refer to the competence of know-how. Sometimes, the competence can be understood as a tacit knowledge, which is habitual and is often hard to articulate explicitly; (3) and organised by the teleoaffective structures, which refer to a set of considerations, guiding the doings and sayings, such as some specific purposes, ends, or some feelings. (Schatzki, 1996). Based on Schatzki’s definition (1996), practice encompasses both temporal and spatial dimensions. These can be understood as the trajectory of practice across time and space, such as the changing eating patterns (Schatzki, 1996; Warde, 2024). Alternatively, it can be understood that the enactment of daily practice also involves arranging daily schedules and often occurs in specific places, such as the home and workplace (Schatzki, 1996; Blake et al., 2009).

Based on this definition, Schatzki (1996) provided two notions of practices: practice-as-entity, which refers to the organisation of practice, or in other words, the nexus of doings and sayings; and practice as performance, which defines that the existence of practice-as-entity can only be realised in the continuous enactment (Schatzki, 1996, p.90).

Schatzki (1996) also introduced two types of practices: dispersed practice and integrative practice. The dispersed practice can be understood as relatively simple actions, which do not involve rigid structures, for example, the action of describing and explaining (Schatzki, 1996). The doings and sayings of dispersed practice are organised by understanding, which refers to the ability of 'knowing how to', including carrying out a practice, recognising it when others are doing the same practice, and prompting and responding to it (Schatzki, 1996). Besides, since dispersed practice involves basic actions, it can be seen in various domains of social life (Schatzki, 1996). In contrast, the integrative practice is more complex and typically governs specific social domains, such as farming and cooking practices, which also require more complex structures (Schatzki, 1996). The sayings and doings of integrative practices are often organised by a more sensitive understanding, which serves to direct proper actions in the specific domain, by more explicit rules, which also can be viewed as standard and procedures governing acts, and by a teleoaffective structure, which refers to an order for a set of ends, moods, and projects. The dispersed practices are not an element of integrative practice but can be viewed as they travel through and across different integrative practices with varying proper doings and sayings (Schatzki, 1996). Most sociological studies are interested in the integrative practice (Warde, 2016a).

Applying these concepts to examining food consumption, Warde (2016b) argued that consumption is a dispersed practice, which can be observed in various integrative practices as a moment within these complex practices. Warde (2016b) explained that when engaging in the dispersed practice of consumption, people are often unaware that they are doing so. However, some aspects of food consumption, such as dealing with food problems, are often recognised by people and also require complex engagements (Halkier, 2010), which should be attributed to integrative practices. For example, the practice of organic food consumption might require a sensitive understanding to recognise what organic agriculture is, know how to properly interact with organic farmers in a farming market, as well as some implicit rules, or knowledge for identifying authentic products. Besides, for household organic food consumption, this practice is also organised for several purposes, such as the health of family members, or serves the goal of supporting sustainable agriculture, caring about environmental issues, and may also bring enjoyment in tasting organic fruits (Haliker, 2010). Therefore, the concept of integrative practice could enrich the understanding and analysis of food consumption by identifying the orientations, know-how, and feelings embedded in mundane food consumption. In the following section, I will provide a detailed introduction to some key concepts from existing empirical practice-approach studies, which will be organised into the normativity of practice, the multiplicity of practice, materiality, reproduction, and change. I will explain how these concepts inform my thinking on studying household food consumption, demonstrate their potential as analytical tools, and outline how they shape my research interests.

2.3.1 Normativity of practice

I found that when applying to their own studies, Warde (2016a; 2016b) and Halkier (2010; 2011) grasped and extended some of the core ideas from Schatzki (1996), thereby expanding the implications for studying food consumption. In *Practice of Eating*, Warde (2016a) focused on the concept of integrative practice to extend the understanding of the organisation and coordination of practice, as well as the standard in integrative practice. Warde (2016a) furtherly summarised that since there is a normative organisation of integrative practice, practices can be improved, corrected and subjected to some judgements, which also implies that integrative practices often have a standard. There is an organisation of practice that is ‘out there’, expressed in the performance of practice, rather than in the mind of individuals (Warde, 2016a, p. 55). Schatzki’s (1996) original definition for ‘out there’ organisation refers to a general understanding articulated in the doings and sayings. In Warde’s (2016a) understanding, the ‘out there’ organisation can be linked with the notion that practice is an entity. This understanding implies that there might exist formal organisations constituted by interest parties to define the standard (Warde, 2016a, p. 58).

Another way that embodies practice-as-entity is the codification and objectification of ‘knowing-how’ and standards, such as certain forms of text, including restaurant guides, advice from nutrition experts on eating, and cookery books (Warde, 2016a). However, there is no formal regulation which specifies a uniform way of eating (Warde, 2016a). The codification of ‘knowing-how’ for eating is more akin to optional advice, lacking coercive forces, which allows for some freedom in eating practices (Warde, 2016a). Warde (2016a) also summarised that ‘eating is both weakly regulated and loosely coordinated’ (2016a, p. 119).

The multiple suggestions for eating, the involvement of different interest parties, and the relative freedom for individuals to select different frames of eating are also insightful for thinking about some issues, such as the practice of healthy eating. Warde (2016a) also pointed out that some rigid guidelines from medical professionals about diet are difficult to translate into practical implementation in daily life. This difficulty is also related to the complexities in everyday life. Schatzki (1996) highlighted the rightness and oughtness in practice and further explained that normativity can sometimes be flexible, allowing for some acceptable actions and understandings. Halkier (2010, 2011, 2022) situated normativity and acceptability within the context of everyday life, further explaining that these concepts are not fixed but rather can be viewed as a continuous accomplishment constructed through the daily negotiations. Furthermore, the enactment of practice is also embedded in social relations and the broader social and cultural context. For example, in the study of the practice of healthy eating, Halkier and Jensen (2011) also identified that Pakistani Danes confronted the situations in which they needed to weigh out the public health advice on diets for preventing diabetes and their own food culture for 'what should be healthy eating'.

How can this notion of normativity shed light on household food consumption in daily household food consumption? In summary, the understanding of normativity is discursively constructed and negotiated in everyday life relations and daily food practices (Halkier, 2011, 2022). For example, convenience food, which was once attributed to improper meals, has become normalised in daily meals (Jackson et al., 2018). The normalisation of convenience food is also shaped by family relations, such as feeding children with what they like, and daily food practice, such as using convenience food to accommodate the situation of a lack of time for preparing food (Jackson et al., 2018). Therefore, for my study, I could also explore the shifting meaning and implications of the normativity of household food consumption, as constructed in daily food practices.

2.3.2 The Multiplicity of Practice

In *Consumption Practice*, Warde (2016b) also extended the core concepts of Schatzki's (1996)'s practice theory and proposed some valuable points for daily consumption. Warde (2016b) suggested that individuals are often engaging in multiple practices simultaneously. Haliker (2010) and Shove et al. (2012) also noted the coexistence of different practices, which may harmoniously connect with one another or may have conflicts, despite their differing illustrations. Shove et al. (2012) proposed that time and space can be viewed as limited resources for competitive practices. For example, in the past, the popularity of the practice of watching television was accompanied by the decline of engaging in gardening practice (Shove et al., 2012). Furthermore, the modern life world often needs individuals to conduct multiple tasks, which is more like everyone should have 40 hours in a day (Shove et al., 2012). A question is how to organise the multiple tasks and practices that usually occur simultaneously. Actually, in *Social Practice*, Schatzki (1996) has already mentioned the hierarchy order of teleoaffective structure for governing practices. Using Schatzki's (1996) words, 'A teleoaffective structure is in fact a collective of possible orders of life conditions.' (P. 101). Schatzki (1996) further explained that individuals possess practical intelligibility for navigating the order of ends, purposes, and feelings of complex practices. The practical intelligibility refers to 'what makes sense to people to do' (Schatzki, 1996, p. 118). To be more specific, individuals are always in a situation where there are various conditions; however, with practical intelligibility, they can focus on what matters to them in that moment (Schatzki, 1996; 2001). Related concepts include practical sense, habitus, and disposition, which refer to an individual's propensity to act based on previous experience, without limiting the room for improvisation (Warde, 2016b). However, Schatzki's (1996) explanation is more like an ideal and abstract model, which makes it challenging to apply to empirical analysis.

I argue that Halkier's work (2010, 2011) on food challenges in daily life contributes to the empirical application of Schatzki's concept of practically intelligibility, even though Bente Halkier (2010) does not explicitly use this concept in her own work. Halkier (2010) applied Warde's (2016b) simplified summary of Schatzki's organisation of practice, namely that doings and sayings are organised by understanding, procedure, and engagement. Halkier (2010) elaborated that in the everyday life context, individuals often manage different practices at the same time, each with its understandings, procedures, and engagement. These varying levels of understanding, procedures, and engagement can lead to conflicts and challenges in coordinating different practices in daily life (Halkier, 2010). In her studies on environmental challenges and food risk challenges, Halkier (2010) suggested that individuals experience a state of ambivalence when they face conflicting engagement, understanding, and procedures. For example, concerns about food risk and environmental issues, which can be understood as a willingness to deal with food risk, often have a complex relationship with the procedures of handling daily food consumption, referring to the daily routines or practical do-ability in organising food consumption (Halkier, 2010). Haliker (2010) also illustrated that sometimes dealing with food risks or environmental issues is already incorporated into food shopping routines. This can represent a harmonious integration of procedures and engagement. However, in some cases, although parents may be aware of buying organic food, they also need to consider their schedules for completing the grocery shopping quickly and preparing whatever their children would like (Halkier, 2010). This illustrates an ambivalence that, even though individuals have orientations towards carefully selecting safe food, they also need to pursue practical solutions for organising daily food consumption (Halkier, 2010).

The organisation of multiple household food consumption practices is also related to time and space. However, here the time and space are not limited resources but are constructed in and shaped by the practice (Shove et al., 2012; Valentine, 1999). Some previous studies of shopping have explored the values associated with specific food shops generated in the shopping experience and practice (Miller, 1998; Blake et al., 2010). In *A Theory of Shopping*, Miller (1998) uncovered how, through day-to-day shopping experiences, consumers develop skills and knowledge regarding the price and quality of different food shops, thereby generating their own understanding of the meanings associated with these shops. Blake et al.'s (2010) study on local food illustrated how the value of local food is attached to different shopping spaces, constructed on the one hand through the discourse of retailers and on the other hand through the daily shopping practices of shoppers.

Morgan (2011) also expanded the dimensions of time and space in family practices, referring to the practical, symbolic, and imaginary aspects of time and space. The practical elements refer to the organisation of the division of labour within the household and between home and workplace to achieve practical ends, as well as the formation of family routines for daily, repetitive tasks and activities (Morgan, 2011). The symbolic dimension refers to the representation of home spaces, such as the discourse of family meal and memorable moments for family life (Morgan, 2011). The imaginary dimension is linked to the life course of family members, encompassing their experiences, memories, and imaginings of the past, present, and future (Morgan, 2011). The practical, symbolic, and imaginary dimensions can also influence each other in daily household food practices (Morgan, 2011). In *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) has pointed out that some families have the problem of not being able to sustain the family meal in their childhood memories. The different time schedules of family members make it hard to have a meal together routinely (DeVault, 1991). Previous studies have also revealed that home food practices are influenced by external factors, such as those from school or the workplace (Valentine, 1999; Evans, 2011). Evans (2011) identified that food waste is a consequence of a mismatch between the temporality of food itself, such as perishable food, and the rhythms of working hours, which do not allow for regular cooking and shopping. Blake et al. (2009), in a comparative study about family meals, also found that, to maintain the ideal family, some families made adjustments to their family food practices. For example, in the two case studies, the Hungarian family usually had their breakfast together for all family members (Blake et al., 2009). The Britain family also made Friday ‘pizza night’, so all family members could share the same food (Blake et al., 2009). Furthermore, linking with the notion of practical and imaginary time, Blake et al. (2009) explained that for children in these families, they also gained a prospective memory of family meals through these daily food practices, which they could carry on when they start their own families.

The multiplicity of practice underscores that household food practices are embedded in a wide range of daily activities and are interconnected with other daily practices, such as parenting, schooling, and work (Halkier and Holm, 2021). Recognising the multiplicity of practice could also challenge the long-term neoliberal understanding of public health, which emphasises individual families’ responsibility for ensuring their health and well-being (Halkier and Holm, 2021). The multiplicity of practice effectively highlights that pursuing healthy eating habits alone, as a solution for public health, often overlooks the complexity of coordinating daily food practices with other practices (Bowen et al., 2019). For my study, I can also explore the details of how households manage multiple practices and make arrangements for their daily food needs.

2.3.3 The Material and the distinctiveness of food

Although Schatzki (1996) in *Social Practice* has mentioned the role of things and the body in expressing understanding, Reckwitz (2002) provides a more straightforward definition, highlighting the central role of things in practice theory. According to Reckwitz’s (2002) definition, practices are routinised ways of behaviour, constituted by several interrelated elements, including bodily activities, mental activities, the use of things, and a background knowledge about ‘know-how’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). Similar to Schatzki (1996), Rectwitz (2002) also understood practice as an entity, which refers to practice can be viewed as a block constituted by the interconnected elements; and practice as the performance, which means the configuration of the block also needs the constant enactment of practice. Based on this definition, Shove et al. (2012) further specify the composed elements: material, which includes things and technologies; competence, referring to the ability to know-how; and meaning, which refers to symbolic meanings (Shove et al., 2012, p. 12). Although Shove et al. (2012) and Schatzki (1996) both emphasised the connections of different elements, they have different understandings of the role of meaning. In Schatzki’s definition (1996), the teleoaffective structures are external to the doings and sayings and play the role of organising doings and sayings. Shove et al. (2012) treated material, competence, and meaning as mutually connected and capable of shaping each other through the continuous enactment of practice. Shove et al. (2012) employed an element-based approach, which focuses on the life biography of elements, to examine the dynamics and transitions of practices. To be more specific, the transitions in practice are accompanied by changes in the linkage of elements, such as the breaking of existing patterns or the introduction of new elements, or the adoption of new ways of combining different elements (Shove et al., 2012). How can this element-based approach be applied to understanding household food consumption?

Although in the *Dynamics of Social Practice*, Shove et al. (2012) did not closely focus on food consumption, they used the example of the evolution of car-driving to illustrate how the evolution of material can bring about changes in related competences and also changes in meaning. For instance, car-driving used to be limited to serving the upper class; however, with the massive production of cars, car-driving has acquired a broader cultural meaning, including representation of youth, Westernisation, and masculinity (Shove et al., 2012). In Shove’s another study (2007) about the prevalence of freezers, they illustrated that the use of freezer can be connected with different household food practices, such as planning for households’ grocery shopping and cooking. Therefore, the use of a freezer in food practices has the extended meaning of showing care for family members. Based on the element approach, some studies have noted the role of new material elements in reconfiguring the practice, such as Truninger’s (2011) study of the use of the new cooking utensil, Bimby. Torkkeli et al. (2020) also explored how to combine Schatzki’s (1996) and Shove’s (2012) main concepts to facilitate the understanding of cooking practice and enrich the empirical analysis.

In the material part, we can also review a previous question of the limitations of existing consumption theory for studying food. The visceral experience, such as the sensory engagement with food, is also a central part of daily food consumption (Warde, 2016a). In the *Social Practice*, Schatzki (1996) also mentions that there are implicit rules and understandings governing doings and sayings, such as shaking hands with acquaintances when meeting. These are tactic rules and knowledge of know-how, which are often hard to articulate explicitly (Schatzki, 1996). Our embodied knowledge of food—the sensory experience with food—can also be viewed as tacit knowledge. Michael Carolan (2011) commented that the embodied knowledge of food, these tacit knowledges, embodies that 'we know more than we can tell.' Carolan (2011; 2015) pointed out that the modernised industrial food system has shaped ordinary consumers' tastes, making them tuned to industrial food. He also proposed that we need to re-tune to the diverse tastes of food and regain embodied knowledge about food quality, not just from intermediary information on food labels (Carolan, 2011, 2015). However, his study on embodied knowledge (2011) mainly focused on the practice of organic agriculture, while overlooking the mundane food consumption in daily life. Besides, his study still skews to the production part and makes the consumption part underdeveloped.

I would argue for another approach, the concept of visceral politics, proposed by Allison Hayes-Conroy and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008). In general, visceral politics offer an alternative approach to studying food politics and power relations, which refers to examining the corporeal aspect of power (Probyn, 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). To be more specific, sensory engagement with food, such as smelling, tasting, chewing, and ingesting it, can arouse an embodied experience, including feelings, moods, and specific memories (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). These visceral experiences provide a material form for social categories, such as gender and race, as well as ideologies like the industrialisation of food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). In the study on slow food, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) employed visceral politics and further explored the politics of food taste. To be more specific, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) discussed the role of junk food in the slow food movement. For some activities, consuming junk food is not acceptable in a food movement that pursues local and organic food. However, defining only specific tastes can be acceptable, while disapproving of other tastes, such as the sweetness aroused by ice cream, has the potential to set a dominant understanding of good food and exclude other diverse feelings (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Their study also opens a new way to examine the differences, power relations, and food politics through the investigation of embodied knowledge and experience. Another potential contribution is that visceral politics enriches the social and cultural meaning with visceral experiences, allowing us to see how social and cultural meaning can be felt at the gut level (Probyn, 2000). However, the existing studies on visceral politics mainly focused on specific food consumption, such as organic food. Many other material aspects of food in daily food consumption, such as its perishability and understanding of freshness, are neglected by the theory of visceral politics. Tacit food knowledge in daily food consumption also encompasses how to extend the shelf life of fresh food and how to store it properly in the refrigerator. These knowledges are also related to sensory engagement with food, such as checking for changes in the smell and colour of meat or fruit. Since my study focuses on mundane food consumption, I can explore on how the concept of visceral politics can be incorporated into practice theory to contribute to a specific theory of food consumption.

2.3.4 Continuity and Changes

Practice theory could also facilitate the understanding of reproduction, continuity, and changes in daily household food consumption. The key notions that practice can be understood as an entity and performance have already indicated the continuity and changes in practice (Warde, 2016b). I will review Warde's (2007; 2016a; 2016b), Halkier's (2010), and Shove et al.'s (2012) different understandings about the reproduction and changes in practice. Some points about the reproduction and innovation of practices have been introduced in previous sections. This part will provide a more concentrated explanation. For continuity in practice, many of Warde's studies (2001, 2007, 2016b) argue that everyday food consumption is habitual and routinised. In grocery shopping, people would purchase the things they usually did (Kjærnes et al., 2007). Given Warde's (2016a; 2016b) definition of the integrative practice, since the integrative practice has a standard, there are also some established rules and understandings governing the conduct. Therefore, the performance of practice could sustain the practice as a recognised entity (Warde, 2016b). Based on Bourdieu's main concepts, such as habitus and disposition, Warde (2016a) also explains that previous experiences can be retained as embodied habits and reactivated to shape current and future practices in a supportive environment. A typical example is that in a hot summer, people are easily drawn to the ice cream shop and have the impetus to consume an ice cream (Warde, 2016a).

Specifically, Warde's understanding (2007; 2016b; 2024) has noted that the trajectory of practice is embedded in and shaped by social contexts and institutional environments, such as household organisation and changes in food provision. Furthermore, the trajectory of practice also evolves across time and space. This feature can also be identified in Schatzki's (1996) definition, which states that the nexus of practice is temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed. This definition has implied the evolution of practice in different time and spaces. For example, the supermarket revolution, which refers to the dominant position of big food retailers in urban food provision, has reshaped daily grocery shopping towards a one-stop model, compared with past practices of shopping in various independent food shops (Jackson et al., 2009; Jackson, 2006). In the UK, the big four food retailers (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrison's, and Asda) dominated the food provision (Jackson et al., 2009). However, in China, supermarkets and traditional markets, such as wet markets, coexist and even maintain a more harmonious relationship, where consumers are accustomed to buying fresh food at the wet market and processed food in the supermarket (Zhong and Si, 2018).

The performance of practice cannot be identical each time (Warde, 2016b; Shove et al., 2012). Halkier (2010) furtherly explained that the performance of practice also involves experiments and improvisation. For example, the normativity of practice is negotiated in daily performance and also allows for some adaptations to acceptable procedures and understanding (Halkier, 2010, 2022). Based on the element-based approach, Shove et al. (2012) specifically focused on the dynamics and innovations in practice by examining the biography of elements and changes in the linkage of elements. Shove et al. (2012) explained that the configuration of practice always requires the renewal and sustainment of the linkage of its constituent elements. Furthermore, the performance of practice can be viewed as similar elements becoming linked in similar ways (Shove et al., 2012). For example, carrying out the practice of cooking does not require repeating every step from the last time; instead, it allows for changes and innovations, such as in food materials and utensils. In this study, I will continue to examine the continuity and changes in household food consumption practices. I will also pay attention to the changes in the new environment, such as the migration experience, to examine the changes and reproduction in the social and cultural meaning. I will explore what persists and what changes in the daily food practices.

2.4 Through a feminist lens: the limitation of practice theory

This section will critically review some main concepts of practice theory from Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002) and explain their limitations. I will also justify why this study brings in a feminist lens and how feminist theory can contribute to the application of practice theory. Previous studies have identified that practice theory lacks consideration of social hierarchy and social inequality (Walker, 2013; Halkier and Holm, 2020). Before introducing the relevant theories that complement the limitations of practice theory, I will review the definitions of practice theory provided by Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002). Schatzki (1996; 2001) proposed an ontology that social order can be viewed as an arrangement of the hanging-together entities and human lives in which each has a respective meaning and place. Furthermore, mutual understanding and intelligibility are necessary components for the formation of sociality and social order (Schatzki, 1996). To be more specific, it is in the doings and sayings that people express their understanding of something, which also refers to the process of signification (Schatzki, 1996). Participating in the process of signification and displaying understanding also contributes to engaging in coexistence with others who share the same understanding, thereby constituting sociality (Schatzki, 1996). In summary, if a person could express the shared understanding and demonstrate the intelligibility, then this person is one of the 'we', a unified social group.

To highlight that the understanding of sociality is not confined to the mind or behaviour, Reckwitz (2002) defines individuals as the carriers of practice. Although both Schatzki's (1996) and Reckwitz's (2002) explanations include emotional elements – or, in Schatzki's terms, 'the conditions of life for the existence of human beings'- in their definition of practice, their conceptualisation also tends to shape an ideal type of homo practicus (Spaargaren et al., 2016). This ‘man of practice’ is portrayed as always possessing an understanding of a certain practice, able to follow procedures properly, and capable of grasping what matters to do (Schatzki, 1996). While this homo practicus has history, it is often conceptualised as a journey of participation in a practice, from novice to expert (Shove et al., 2016; Warde, 2016b). Walker (2013) critically summarised that practice theory primarily focused on the ‘capable’ carriers, and ‘successful’ performance, thereby lacking the imagination for the obstacles and even failures in carrying out practice.

Warde (2016b) has suggested examining social differentiation in how people acquire understanding and competencies, as well as the variation in understandings. However, the examination for variations in abilities and understanding could be sharper. Walker (2013) suggested incorporating Amartya Sen’s capability approach to examine the uneven distribution of capabilities and social inequality involved in social practices. The capability refers to the conversion of resources, including income and material resources, to achieve the functioning, which refers to a desired being and status (Gombert et al., 2017). Sen’s capability approach focuses on individuals’ personal circumstances, their diverse needs, and the barriers they encounter in achieving a good life (Walker, 2013). Applying the capability approach to practice theory reveals that some practitioners are in an advanced position to integrate the necessary elements for constituting a practice. In contrast, others encounter difficulties in acquiring the required competence or are even excluded from engaging in certain practices based on their identities (Walker, 2013). For example, in the historical context of voting, before the feminist suffrage movement, women were not allowed to exercise their civil right to participate in this practice. In a more contemporary example from Papua New Guinea, women voters often face violence against women, such as intimidation in their voting process, which could result in disenfranchising women (Haley and Baker, 2023). It is notable to mention that in the definition of integrative practice, Schatzki (1996) also used voting practice as an example. The capability approach can help identify barriers and understand the uneven distribution of capabilities, such as the uneven distribution of available resources for engaging in practices, as well as the uneven consequences of these practices (Walker, 2013). However, the capability approach still needs an arrow to direct how to analyse the uneven distribution of capabilities and barriers in carrying out practice. Furthermore, the application of practice theory needs to bring the carriers of practice back to real life and give it a human face (Ahmed, 2017; Smith, 2005).

Feminist scholars provided a more radical understanding of theory and the discipline of sociology, which also inspired me to rethink the practice theory and the topic of gender and food. In the previous literature review section, although I touched upon food consumption in everyday life, I did not mention the relationship between gender and food. In the following part, I will explicitly utilise a feminist perspective to re-examine and deepen some of the concepts already discussed in this literature review. I will also introduce how to integrate a feminist perspective into practice theory to analyse domestic food consumption. Feminist scholars have an uneasy relationship with the topic of everyday life, including domestic food practices (Fraiman, 2019). To be more specific, although some of the earlier feminism ideas, such as the pioneer of liberal feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the famous *Second Sex* wrote by Simone de Beauvoir, started from the critiques of women's domestic roles in everyday life, earlier feminist scholars merely labelled the domestic everyday life as the oppression on women caused by the patriarchy and denied digging out more on it (Avakian and Haber, 2005). In *the Practice of Everyday Life, Volume II,* Luce Giard (1998) also provided a vivid personal memory to describe her complex feelings of her identity as a feminist and her later experience of learning to cook. Giard recalled that

'As a child, I refused to surrender to my mother's suggestions to come and learn how to cook by her side. I refused this woman's work because no one offered it to my brother. I had already chosen, determined my fate: one day, I would have a 'real profession'; I would do math, or I would write.' (1998, p. 151-152).

This excerpt reflects Giard's earlier feminist reflections on the traditional gender roles assigned to women. Later, when Giard left her family and began to cook for herself, she came to realise the intelligent work involved in cooking, which is carried out day-to-day by her mothers and grandmothers. Feminist scholars have recognised the importance of re-evaluating the ordinary daily life (Felski, 2000; Enloe, 2011; Hall, 2019). Cynthia Enloe (2011) proposed that studying mundane, everyday sites, such as the laundry room and kitchen, as well as domestic family life, can also uncover the operation of power that works at the macro-level. Many of her works illustrated that examining the trivial aspects of everyday life and ordinary sites could help in rethinking big issues, such as militarisation and political economy (Enloe, 2004). Feminist political economy scholars have revealed how the global economy, such as neoliberal policies, relies on and also shapes gender relations (Rai, 2013). For instance, as transnational corporations increasingly outsource manufacturing to the Global South to decrease production costs, the concept of cheap labour often intersects with prevailing discourse of femininity, such as perceived docile and patient characteristics, thereby producing a feminised cheap labour (Rai, 2013). This increasing engagement of women in the workplace also triggered anxiety about gender order, sometimes even encouraging domestic violence and thereby reinforcing traditional gender relations (Rai, 2013).

Some feminist studies have also focused on the impacts of austerity and financial crisis on the everyday lived experience, paying attention to the different gendered experiences (Cappellini et al., 2014; Hall, 2015). Sarah Marie Hall's studies (2016; 2019), for instance, utilised the everyday lived experiences of care, friendship, and intimacy to offer an alternative explanation for the influence of austerity, contrasting with grand narratives. As austerity policies reduce public expenditures, the burden of daily care work, especially childcare, often shifts onto women within families (Hall, 2019). This care responsibility also involves considerable hidden emotional labour, such as making plans and constantly monitoring the use of money every day (Hall, 2016). Such duties are often linked to feelings of anxiety, particularly as women disproportionately shoulder most of the financial management work within the household (Cappellini et al., 2014). Economic feminist' scholars also suggested that mainstream economic ideas should recognise and re-evaluate women's unpaid care work in everyday life (Folbre, 2021; Fraser, 2016). Returning to the story of who cooks dinner for Adam Smith, orthodox economic theory often lacks the imagination for gender (Marçal, 2015). Even when some economists, such as Gary Becker, attempted to understand the gendered division of labour within the household, their analysis remained based on traditional economic models, such as maximising efficiency and rationality (Marçal, 2015). As Dorothy Smith (2005) argued, women's daily experiences are reduced to abstract theories, which are based on the androcentric model. However, women themselves could not find a proper language to describe and analyse their daily experience. Ann Oakley (2018), in *the Sociology of Housework*, also offered some anecdotes about famous 'fathers of Sociology,' such as August Comte, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx. A common point among these fathers is that they did not participate in household chores. Their monumental work was, in fact, built upon the daily care and support provided by their wives.

Dorothy Smith (2005) in *Institutional Ethnography* provided a renewed standpoint theory, which is grounded in everyday lived experience, to explore how everyday experiences are structured by social organisation and social relations. Smith (2005) explained that the original standpoint theory is based on specific identities and positions, such as gender, to ask different questions about social relations from the perspective of marginal and oppressed groups. This standpoint theory tends to produce a universal narrative while neglecting the diverse experiences of women (Smith, 2005). Additionally, the original standpoint theory poses the danger of reinforcing essentialism, based on the assumption that women possess greater knowledge than men due to their gender identity (Smith, 2005). Smith's standpoint theory (2005) also begins with women's daily experiences, but its purpose is to uncover how people engage in ruling relations in their daily experiences, and how text-mediated ruling relations structure these experiences. For example, Smith (2005) drew on her personal experience as a single parent to illustrate how the discourse of mothering connects mothers' childcare work in the household and in public institutions, such as schools, which requires mothers to devote more time to their children's educational work.

Smith's (2005) institutional ethnography also could resonate with Schatzki's (1996) practice theory. Both theories examine how actual activities, such as the doings and sayings, are structured by the organisation, as seen in Schazki's (1996) understanding and teleoaffective structure, and Smith's (2005) emphasis on text-mediated relations. However, Smith's theory (2005) emphasised the subjective experience in the inquiry, highlighting that the subject's experience should not be reduced to an abstract concept and justifying the research participants' identity as the knowers in research. Smith (2005) also focused on the social differentiation and social division in the daily reproduction of social organisation and relations.

Specifically, Smith (2005) provided an example of a man and a woman moving a dining table on the stairs. The man is in the top position, which allows him to see the next step. The woman is in the bottom position, but she has more experience with this table, such as the size and shape. In their conversation, the man and woman coordinate successfully to move the table. Using the language of practice, this coordination could be explained by their shared understandings, which allow their conversation (their sayings) to be clearly articulated and enable them to recognise each other's actions in moving the table (their doings). However, Smith (2005) critically highlighted the different perspectives in the coordination process based on the man's and woman's different positions on the stairs, their different needs in the process, and their different experiences. The practice theory overlooks these different experiences. Smith (2005)'s institutional ethnography reveals that, based on their social positions, people have different perspectives and feelings of shared understanding, which is often assumed to be taken for granted as simply 'out there' in practice theory. Building on this, institutional ethnography sets the stage for incorporating a feminist lens to enrich the analysis of practice theory.

How can this theoretical framework be applied to the study of household food consumption? In the study of Feeding the Family, DeVault (1991) explicitly pointed out that she applied Dorothy Smith's concept of social organisation to study the daily food preparation work. I found that some of the summaries (Avakian and Haber, 2005) of DeVault's (1991) work ignored to clarify DeVault's selection of the theory. In *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) argued that her study did not begin by assuming the gendered identity of women in domestic work, nor by treating it as the taken-for-granted women's work. Instead, her approach was to explore how women are recruited in the daily caring work by examining their daily food preparation activities and the organisation of gender discourse, such as the mothering discourse. Earlier studies on domestic food practices primarily focused on explaining women's responsibility in preparing proper meals and how daily food preparation contributes to the reproduction of gender and family ideologies (Murcott, 1982; Charles and Kerr, 1988). Further, the previous studies on gender and food are more focused on gender identity or the narratives of femininity and masculinity to explore how the gender constructions are reproduced, contested, and challenged in the daily food preparation and consumption (Avakian and Haber, 2005; Allen and Sachs, 2007; Szabo, 2014a; Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Parker, 2019). Cairns and Johnston (2015) also proposed the idea of food femininities, which refers to the connection between women and various food work, such as grocery shopping, cooking, and caring for family members' health and well-being. Although this concept highlights women's association with food, that is not to say that the application of food femininities will support the essentialist ideas. This concept can help in examining the experiences of doing gender in daily food practices and the influence of gender discourse, such as maternal responsibilities (Cairns and Johnston, 2015).

Practice theory could enrich the application of feminist and gender concepts in daily food consumption. Although DeVault (1991) did not employ practice theory in her analysis, her explanations for how cooking became women's work also resonate with some core ideas of practice theory. DeVault (1991) explained that cooking as women's work is constructed through daily negotiations and experiments (akin to the performance of practice) among women and other household members, considering their household organisation and external institutions, such as schooling and work. The daily arrangement of housework, such as who cooks dinner and who does grocery shopping, also draws upon some shared understandings of family and gender (DeVault, 1991). Some current studies have employed practice theory to investigate gender relations in household food consumption practices (Meah and Jackson, 2013; 2017; Liu, 2017). Based on the practice theory approach, Meah and Jackson (2013) focused on the doings and sayings in cooking process to explore how men carry out the daily cooking work while not diminishing their masculinity and authority in housework. Some men participants showcased their elaborate culinary skills and even utilised their working experience to make a plan for the grocery shopping (Meah and Jackson, 2013). Liu's study (2017) on family meals focused on the spatial element, such as mobility and distance, to explore how food practices construct intimacy within Chinese families and the influence of gender norms. A typical example is that a family prepares an elaborate meal once a week to welcome the household members returning from their distant workplace. Based on the men participants' accounts, Liu (2017) also found that food preparation is still considered women's work.

David Morgan (1996) argued that family studies should open up the "black box" of the household, which assumes the household as a unified unit carrying both economic and social functions and pay attention to the distribution of resources and power relations within the household. Morgan (1996) also noticed the gendered division of labour within the household and suggested using a more fluid and dynamic understanding of the gender relations within the household. To be more specific, the gender relations within the household are not predetermined, but rather are constructed through day-to-day encounters (Morgan, 1996). With practice theory, gender can also be understood as constructed in the doings and sayings of the daily household food consumption (Morgan, 1996; Schatzki, 1996). Morgan (1996) also suggested examining the complexities of power relations within the household. For example, gender domination is not a fixed property of who owns it. In some cases, men may exercise their authority and power in the household to remedy their dissatisfaction with work (Morgan, 1996). In this study, I will employ a feminist intersectionality theory to grasp the complexities and contradictions in gender relations within the household.

There is no universal template for applying feminist intersectionality theory (McCall, 2005; Collins and Bilge, 2016). For its historical originality, Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) proposed that using sexism and racism alone could not fully explain Black women's experience in violence and discrimination and suggested an intersectionality perspective to understand the complexity in social justice. Intersectionality theory has also gained widespread application in identity politics and movement advocating for diverse needs and rights (McCall, 2005; Collins and Bilge, 2016). Some migration studies of food have already incorporated the race and gender perspective to examine the relationship between immigration identities and daily culinary experience (Longhurst et al., 2009). However, applying feminist intersectionality in analysing the social problems and complexities is not a simple adding-on model, which refers to adding on the different social categories, such as gender, race, sexuality, age, ethnicity, migration status, and so on, to explore the oppression and discrimination (Yuval-Davis, 2006; McKinzie and Richards, 2019). Feminist intersectionality theory is more akin to a perspective and an analytical tool for understanding complex social phenomena and achieving an inclusive understanding of social inequality (Collins and Bilge, 2016). In this study, feminist intersectionality theory serves as a framework for examining the diverse experiences of household daily food consumption practices and the dynamics of gender relations. Although Parker et al. (2019) proposed using an intersectionality perspective for feminist food studies, their understanding is still based on how gender identities intersect with other socially constructed identities to reproduce privileges and oppression in food production and consumption experiences. Furthermore, existing gender studies lack consideration of the material aspect of food in shaping the daily experience of doing gender. This study will also explore how to combine the visceral experience with a feminist intersectionality perspective.

Combining Smith's institutional ethnography (2006) with the feminist intersectionality perspective (Collins and Bilge, 2016), this study will also examine the diverse social positions and uneven distribution of capabilities in daily practices, as well as the hierarchies in access to understanding and competence. Furthermore, McCall (2005) suggested that an intra-categorical approach, which refers to intersectionality theory, can be used to examine the diversities and differences within the same social category groups and conduct comparative studies to understand the different experiences of discrimination. Collins and Bilge (2006) also argued that paying attention to social context could enrich the understanding of social inequalities. To be more specific, gender relations are also shaped by other hierarchical relations, such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and nationalism, and are constructed within historical and political contexts (Collins and Bilge, 2006; McKinzie and Richards, 2019). Some feminist studies have noticed how neoliberal ideas shaped the gender expectations for women (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Orgad, 2019). Orgad (2019) pointed out that the individualism and freedom valued by neoliberalism reframe women's struggles with the second shift as personal choices. Furthermore, women's stagnation in their professions is often attributed to women's personal problems, such as a lack of confidence in their career life, while avoiding discussion of the structural gender discrimination in the workplace (Orgad, 2019). Cairns and Johnston (2015) also found that neoliberalism reinforces a discourse of intensive motherhood, suggesting that a ‘good mother’ can provide children with a healthy diet and protect them from food safety risks. This discourse also shifts the government’s responsibility and rigid regulation for food problems to individual families' responsibility in their daily food choices. This study will also consider the broader social context, which influences the understanding of gender culture and relations. I will examine how different Chinese households in the UK and China express and negotiate their understanding of gender culture and relations through their daily saying and doings in household food consumption. In the following section, I will explain why I selected the Chinese context, providing a brief introduction to the changing gender culture in China.

2.5 The changing Chinese gender culture

Like many patriarchal cultures, traditional Chinese gender culture historically defined women as primarily responsible for the domestic sphere, while men dominated the public sphere (nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei) (Song and Hird, 2014). Despite debates and limitations, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) made significant achievements in elevating women’s social status in various social aspects (Angeloff and Lieber, 2012). For example, legally, the 1954 Chinese Constitution declared equal status for men and women, followed by the marriage law, and the promotion of a specific law for women’s protection and rights in 1992 (Angeloff and Lieber, 2012). During the period of national industrial development, particularly the Great Leap Forward period, the CCP actively mobilised women to participate in social development, even encouraging them to take on traditionally men’s occupations in heavy industries (Jin, 2006). This era saw the rise of famous slogans, such as ‘women can hold up half of the sky’ and ‘women can do what men can do’ (Song and Hird, 2014). The All-China Women’s Federation also publicised posters portraying women’s role as workers, such as the iconic ‘iron girl’ image, to encourage women’s participation in industrial development (Wang, 2010; Jin, 2006). Furthermore, during the industrial development period, the CCP ensured women workers received the basic right of ‘equal pay for equal work’ (Jin, 2006). In the pre-reform era, state-owned enterprises also provided social welfare benefits to alleviate women’s care burden, including public dining halls, childcare, and healthcare centres (Ji et al., 2017). These efforts significantly encouraged women to participate in the public sphere, which had historically been dominated by men (Wu, 2010).

It is notable to mention that the CCP considered women’s emancipation as an integral part of its social revolution project (Wang, 2010). Some of Mao’s revolutionary strategies, such as consciousness-raising, even influenced the Western radical feminism movement (Willis, 1984). However, in the post-Mao era, particularly after China entered the economic reform period, embracing neoliberalism, the traditional gender ideology re-emerged and gained support from national economic policies (Ji et al., 2017). Consequently, contemporary gendered slogans advocate for women to 'return to the home' and take their traditional gender roles (Ji et al., 2017). However, it is not to say that there is a complete disconnection between gender ideologies of the Mao era and the post-reform era (Wu, 2010). Chinese feminist scholars have critically pointed out the limitations and patriarchal legacy of Mao's era for contemporary gender culture (Wang, 2005). Although we can't deny the CCP's significant contribution to elevating Chinese women's status, the emancipation and liberation of Chinese women are predominantly led by the CCP, rather than being driven by Chinese women themselves (Wang, 2005). Compared with the Western feminist movement's bottom-up approach, which often begins with women's everyday concerns and problems, China's women's movement, led by the CCP, employed a top-down approach to establish the emancipation agenda for women (Wang, 2005). Therefore, women's emancipation and the earlier mobilisation of women into the socialist revolution often served as a means to achieve the CCP's broader political purposes, rather than an end itself (Wu, 2010). Chinese feminist scholars have characterised the Chinese feminist movement as 'State-led feminism' (Wang, 2005). Given the state-led characteristics of the Chinese women's movement, some Chinese feminist scholars (Wang, 2005; Jin et al., 2006) also criticised that previous gender equality is based on the androcentric model, which encourages women to emulate men in the public sphere.

Previous studies have also found that, although women were widely encouraged to participate in the public sphere, their domestic roles in the private sphere did not undergo a radical transformation (Hershatter, 1985; Wu, 2010). For example, women continued to shoulder the burden of housework even during the era of industrial development (Jin et al., 2006; Song and Hird, 2014). In summary, the achievement of gender equality in Mao's era was limited because it primarily focused on women's roles in the public sphere without bringing similar radical changes and influences for men (Song and Hird, 2014). In other words, while women today may have a broader imagination for their gender roles, extending beyond the domestic sphere, men's traditional roles in the family have not undergone a comparable transformation (Song and Hird, 2014; Wu, 2010).

The legacy of this enduring traditional gender ideology from Mao's era continues to influence contemporary Chinese gender culture and gender relations (Zuo and Bian, 2001; Ji et al., 2017). According to the 2021 China Women's Social Status Survey, women spend approximately 154 minutes on housework daily, which is twice the time men spend on housework (China Women's News, 2021). Previous studies on time-use in Chinese households have well-documented women's time poverty, referring to their increased care burden in housework, and its potential influence on their mental health (Zhang, 2017; Connelley et al., 2018; Luo and Chui, 2018). Nowadays, Chinese women also face the 'second shift' problem (Hochschild, 2012), seeking solutions to balance their paid work and household responsibilities (Ji, 2017). As Arlie Hochschild (2012) argued, while women have changed, the workplace has not provided a supportive environment that accommodates families' daily care, nor has men's willingness to share more in household work. In China, as the CCP supports neoliberal policies, the deepening of market relations has also led to the transformation of previously state-owned enterprises (Ji et al., 2017). The restructuring of state-owned enterprises and the privatisation of public services contribute to the disintegration of previous social welfare, shifting the care burden back to individual families, especially to women within the family (Ji, 2017). Although time-use studies can help identify the long-term exploitation and oppression of women in domestic labour, they often lack the perspectives, feelings, and accounts from Chinese families, particularly regarding how they feel about their current division of labour in the household. Hochschild (2012) has identified that although gender egalitarian ideas can influence couples' perspectives on gender relations, there is a gap between what people say about their attitudes and their actual feelings about it, as well as their actual practices in daily life. Traditional gender ideologies may be concealed in claims of a seemingly fair and equal gendered division of labour within the household (Hochschild, 2012).

In contemporary China, new gender discourses and gender cultures are emerging within the shifting social and economic context, impacting the allocation of household work and couples' understanding of gender relations (Song and Hird, 2014). The rise of individualisation and consumerism in China has also shaped a new form of masculinity, the familial masculinity (Song and Hird, 2014). Chinese men could refer to the media and some self-help books to learn how to be a new good man who is able express their feelings to their wives and children and engage more in childcare (Song and Hird, 2014). The Chinese government's one-child policy and the disintegration of previous childcare social welfare systems also encouraged fathers to devote more time to their children's development (Li, 2020). However, the increases in fathers' involvement in childcare are often limited to aspects related to children's education and future development, or to leisure and entertainment activities (Li, 2020). The daily repetitive childcare work, such as feeding children, is still primarily shouldered by mothers (Li, 2020). Previous studies have also found that, although Chinese men expressed support for an egalitarian relationship, their attitudes sometimes remained ambiguous when explored in greater depth regarding their views on traditional gender roles and their actual allocation of household tasks (Zuo and Bian, 2001; Song and Hird, 2014). Song and Ji (2020) observed that even among heterosexual couples intending to share housework equally, such as cooking, men also considered financial support for their family as their primary role. Their engagement in housework was thus more a way to express the intimacy within their relations than genuine support for equal gendered relations in their family (Liu, 2017; Song and Ji, 2020). In studies of men's daily cooking, Szabo (2014a; 2014b) similarly found that some men viewed domestic cooking as a way to increase their attractiveness in heterosexual relationships or believed that they should gain more recognition and rewards, as they are taking on non-traditional men's work. The traditional gender ideology also gets reflected in the understanding of women's roles. Zuo (2001) found that while Chinese couples generally recognised the importance of women's working careers for their families, there is still an expectation that women should primarily fulfil their domestic roles within the family. A phenomenon similar to that in Western countries, influenced by individualisation, is the emergence of a new 'mothering discourse' in China: the 'hot mum'. This idea portrays a woman who can look after her family well and perform well in their workplace (Shen, 2015). In a study about leftover women – well-educated women who postpone marriage, Gui (2020) found that even these women, with promising professions, expressed concerns about balancing work and family life. They viewed those women capable of handling the 'second shift' as an ideal model. Therefore, under the influence of neoliberalism in China, women face a dilemma: the discourse of individualism encourages them to pursue more choices and opportunities for personal development. At the same time, traditional gender ideology simultaneously pressures them to prioritise family well-being (Song and Ji, 2020). In recent years, the rise of the feminist movement in China, exemplified by the 2018 # MeToo movement in China, has also encouraged many young people to reconsider gender relations in their daily lives (Wu and Dong, 2019).

Given these dynamics in Chinese gender culture and gender relations, my study will explore the evolving gender relations in daily Chinese household food consumption. This research will employ a comparative analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the reproduction and changes in gender relations among Chinese households living in mainland China and the UK. Inspired by previous studies (Morgan, 1996), this research also adopts a fluid and open perspective on the understanding of gender in everyday household food consumption. Specifically, I will examine how Chinese households, through their food practices, express, construct, and contest their understanding of gender relations.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the understanding of household food consumption to justify the use of qualitative methods in this study. Based on the practice theory, this study focuses on the process and daily lived experiences of household food consumption. To grasp the depth and nuances of the consumption process, using a qualitative method is the best choice (Mason, 2002). In the section on data collection, I will introduce an innovative qualitative method, the food story method, which is inspired by the narrative approach (Abbott, 2007; Wibben, 2010; Yan, 2023) and previous studies of household food practices (Joosse and Marshall, 2020). The food story method is primarily based on semi-structured interviews and supplemented by various qualitative methods, including a one-week household food diary, to comprehensively capture the lived experience and details of daily household food consumption. To set a background introduction for the research findings, this section also includes a profile introduction of the research participants and the selection of research sites for a comparative study. In the limitation and reflection section, I will evaluate the application of the food story method, discuss the limitations, and reflect on the ethical issues and power relations in the research process. For the data analysis, this study employed a thematic analysis to organise the interview data. I will also introduce the procedures of applying a practice theory and a feminist lens in the thematic analysis.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The purpose of this study is to investigate the daily food consumption practices of ordinary Chinese households and the changing gender relations within these households. I will utilise the characteristics of everyday household food consumption to explain and justify why a qualitative method is appropriate for this study. In the literature review section, I have illustrated that household food consumption is not merely an economic exchange activity, but a routinised and bodily process embedded in the everyday life context and family relations. Locating household food practices in everyday life, the investigation of these practices also needs to consider their daily coordination with other mundane activities (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016b). David Morgan (1996) has suggested unpacking the black box of the household to examine the distribution of material resources such as food, time, space, emotion, as well as money, the division of labour, and power relations within the household. Therefore, the research method is suitable for grasping and understanding the trivial consumption process, everyday changing gender relations in family life, and the dynamics in social and cultural meanings in food consumption.

Furthermore, some tacit knowledge and experiences in food consumption activities are hard to articulate or observe directly (Miller, 1998). For instance, daily grocery shopping can also be viewed as a skilled activity (Blake et al., 2010). It requires a set of competences, such as remembering and monitoring the shifting needs of household members, knowing what is available in different stores as well as the surrounding shopping spatial contexts, and skilfully weighing out the considerations of quality, quantity, and prices (Blake et al., 2010; Miller, 1998). In summary, building on their daily grocery shopping experience, shoppers could create mental maps of their shopping trips, including information on time and distance, to help them find the food retailers that are most suitable for their needs (Blake et al., 2010). A daily household food shopping also involves some hidden emotional and cognitive work, such as planning for different expectations, coordinating different needs, expressing love and care to others, and sometimes suppressing and sacrificing personal preferences (DeVault, 1994; Miller, 1998). Besides, the distinctiveness of food consumption itself, such as the visceral experience of eating and sensory engagement with food, also requires a research method that could capture these bodily memories (Warde, 2016a). To be close to everyday life and to capture the lived experience of food consumption, this study selected to use a qualitative method for its advantages in investigating the process and daily experience and grasping the complexities, depth, and nuance in lived experience (Mason, 2002).

This study also adopts an ontological stance that everyday lived experiences are constructed through people's narratives (Mason, 2002; Wibben, 2010). Given the discourse-oriented tendency of the narrative approach, I have to clarify that this position is not inconsistent with the ontology of sociality proposed by practice theory (Schatzki, 1996), but rather serves to enrich it. To be more specific, I further explored the sayings and doings of household food practices through the narratives of research participants. There are alternative methods that are also suitable for applying a practice theory in a qualitative study. I will discuss this further in the limitations section for future studies on food consumption practices. In this part, I will continue to justify why I used a narrative approach. The narrative approach is not a new concept in sociological studies (Earthy and Cronin, 2008). Some previous studies have used the life-story method and oral history method to examine social changes and social problems (Earthy and Cronin, 2008). For instance, earlier Chicago school's study on youth delinquency used the life history of marginalised young people to investigate the social factors related to crime and challenged the biological and pathological model, which assumes that criminals are inborn (Blackman, 2022). These earlier applications of life history also serve the purpose of encouraging readers to re-examine the pre-existing deep-seated bias against youth delinquency by putting readers themselves in the shoes of those deviant groups and forming a sympathy for their experiences (Goodson, 2001). Andrew Abbott (2007) also proposed a lyrical sociology, which highlights the role of emotion in the research process. Based on Abbott's (2007) explanation, lyrical sociology extracts events and experiences from mundane daily life and adds vivid and colourful theoretical and emotional imaginations to heighten the resonated feeling of readers.

Abbott (2007) also summarised two prominent emotional imaginations in sociological works: the outrage feeling for social justice and the nostalgia feeling of social changes.

In summary, when reading the sociological interpretations of others' experiences and encounters, readers can recognise the shared emotional experiences communicated by the writers in their works and thus be moved by the stories of others (Abbott, 2007). This is what I built into this study, to show the readers the vivid lived experience of research participants (Yan, 2023). Compared with the purely positivist quantitative method, which uses variables and categories to dig out a 'cold' mechanism to explain the relationship of variables, the narrative approach could bring in the human face in the theoretical explanation and recognise the presence and influence of emotions in studies (Nadar, 2019; Hall, 2019). Influenced by lyrical sociology, my initial ambitious plan is that a wider audience, not limited to those in academic fields, can identify with some of the personal experiences or familiar experiences of others in everyday food consumption presented in this research.

The feminist narrative approach, in particular, focuses on the power relations involved in the construction of narratives (Nadar, 2019; Hamilton, 2020). To be more specific, human beings are fundamentally storytellers who can make sense of their personal experiences, their identities and their surrounding world in storytelling (Wibben, 2010). Narrative can also structure the social world by organising the human experience into meaningful episodes and events (Wibben, 2010). The feminist narrative approach also highlights the order of narratives, which refers to the selection of narratives that maintains the existing social and political order (Wibben, 2010). Therefore, the production of grand narratives serves to construct a dominant version of social reality, while silencing divergent voices and suppressing alternative imaginings of the social world (Wibben, 2010). Feminist security studies have revealed that the grand narratives of security primarily rely on the state as the referent of security, justifying the expansion of military power and even the initiation of war as the primary means of safeguarding state sovereignty (Wibben, 2010). This grand narrative of security provides a narrowed understanding of security and neglects the everyday lived experience (Wibben, 2010).

In a study about the impacts of the 9/11 event, some African American women expressed that they have more urgent issues to be concerned about (Wibben, 2010). Their experience of violence and discrimination did not start from the event of 9/11; instead, they have already been living with the structural inequality based on the intersectionality of their gender, race, and class (Wibben, 2010). Dorothy Smith (2005; 2012) also explained that in the long-time, women are excluded from the process of creating and producing discourse which structures the ruling relations. Based on the androcentric thinking model and discourse, women often struggled to find the proper way to express their feelings and experiences (Smith, 2012; 2005). Therefore, there is no absolute objective truth of reality with a universal version, but there are diverse versions of reality based on the different social positions and identities (Crang and Cook, 1995; Lupton, 1999), and sometimes they can be contested and conflicted (Wibben, 2010; Smith, 2005). Since the second-wave feminist movement, feminists have begun to use storytelling as a powerful means to produce alternative narratives on important topics, such as violence and politics (Smith, 2005; Wibben, 2010). Through sharing personal stories, radical feminists discovered that the personal is also political (Hanisch, 2006). In the feminist movement and other social movements, storytelling is also a powerful means of raising consciousness and thereby empowering previously marginalised groups (Smith, 2005). The feminist narrative approach inspired me to explore the narratives of ordinary people about their household food consumption, which is grounded in their daily lived experiences. However, empowering research participants is beyond the scope of this research project. My role in this research project is not to inform people about something and encourage them to change their food consumption habits. This still reproduced the privileged position of the researcher. In this research about food consumption, we don't have solutions, but we have stories.

In this study, inspired by a narrative approach and feminist intersectionality, I also paid attention to the different social positions and different perspectives of research participants in the interpretation process for their narratives (Crang and Cook, 1995). Throughout the research process, I constantly reflected on my identities as a researcher and, to some extent, as a 'local person' in the two fieldwork sites, considering my relationships with research participants (Crang and Cook, 1995). I will expand more on these 'insider' and 'outsider' issues in the data collection part. Another reason for using a narrative approach is to create a relatively equal position between the researcher and the research participants in the investigation process. In this study, methods such as the food diary are also a co-working process. As the researcher, I provided instructions on how to prepare the diary, and the research participants could then use their own method to record it. I also view the investigation process as an opportunity to gain tacit knowledge of food from participants. With a narrative approach, this study is not built from a detached expert's perspective. Instead, it explores the perception, knowledge, and experiences from lay people (Lupton, 1999) (In this study, lay people means that research participants are not food study experts) to construct a food story based on the complexity of everyday life with a theoretical explanation from practice theory and a gender lens. In the following part, I will explain the selection of the research sites and give a more detailed introduction to the design and practical implementation of the food story method.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 The Research sites

To explore changes and continuities in daily food consumption practices, this study conducted a comparative analysis between two cities, Nanjing and Sheffield, in China and the UK. To justify selecting a comparative study, I will first review how previous studies examined the changes in food consumption patterns across countries. Since this study focuses on the influence of neoliberalisation on the urban food system, I will also explain how a comparative study could enrich the understanding of the neoliberalisation process. I will also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of conducting a comparative study across countries, with respect to both the analytical and practical aspects.

Previous comparative studies have mainly focused on the temporal dimension of changes and continuity in food consumption patterns within a single nation or across nations. For instance, based on a nationwide survey comparing British eating patterns in the 1950s and 2012, Warde (2024) identified a clear trend toward meal simplification, evidenced by reduced time spent on both preparation and consumption. However, despite these shifts, the study also highlights the remarkable persistence of culinary traditions, such as the roast dinner and the iconic British breakfast. Holm et al. (2019) also conducted a cross-national comparative study of changes in the timing and organisation of daily meals across four Nordic countries, based on survey data collected in 1997 and 2012. Their study identified a common pattern of individualisation and informalisation, including fewer traditional family meals around the table and increased eating while watching TV or using a laptop (Holm et al., 2019). Holm et al. (2019) noted cultural differences in cuisine across countries; for instance, Finland and Sweden maintained longer lunch breaks rooted in the tradition of hot midday meals, whereas Denmark and Norway favoured shorter lunches consisting of cold meals. Another approach to making comparisons is to focus on the institutional dimensions across countries. Drawing on public opinion surveys on food trust and institutional structural analysis across six European countries, Kjærnes et al. (2007) identified variations in countries' food provision systems and uneven reactions to previous food scandals. Crucially, their contextual comparative study demonstrated the complexity of the distribution of responsibility among consumers, the state, and the market in addressing food safety, even for European countries with shared welfare and liberal traditions. Richards et al. (2016) conducted a comparative study of neoliberal and social democratic welfare states, examining how their respective social welfare and agricultural policies address poverty and food security. Their findings revealed that food security in Australia is more precarious than in Norway; the latter benefits from robust social protection and a guaranteed minimum income, while Australia faces higher food prices and lower income security. In summary, these previous studies demonstrate that a comparative study could enrich understanding of changes and continuity in daily food consumption experience across different institutional and social contexts.

This study examines the influence of neoliberalisation on Chinese urban households 'experiences of feeding the family. Peck et al. (2018) suggested that there are no globally travelling neoliberal ideas that always remain in a pure form in different times and places. Instead, the existing form of neoliberalism should be understood as an ongoing process-the neoliberalisation process-that occurred across various social contexts and time periods, with different effects and consequences (Peck et al., 2018). For example, the promotion of neoliberal policies since the 1970s has not only widened the wealth gap between the rich and the poor within countries but also reinforced the unevenness of economic development between countries in the Global North and South (Collins and Bilge, 2016). To be more specific, the local practice of neoliberalisation often serves specific political purposes, such as restoring economic growth and sustaining the legitimacy of the ruling party, while adapting to different institutional and cultural contexts (Harvey, 2005; Peck et al., 2018). Despite contextual variation, the neoliberalisation process is dynamic and evolutionary, involving both destructive and creative forces, including the global financial crisis and subsequent policy responses (Birch, 2015; Peck et al., 2018). Given the dynamic and varied nature of the neoliberalisation process, a comparative study across countries could provide an in-depth understanding of the different trajectories of neoliberalisation and its consequences in different social contexts (Gómez and Kuronen, 2011). Therefore, I chose to conduct a comparative study to examine changes and persistence in gendered feeding the family practices that are shaped by different food provision systems across social contexts.

I selected Nanjing and Sheffield as the research sites for both practical and analytical reasons. My identity as a local person could facilitate the recruiting process and provide familiarity with local food provisioning contexts and even local cuisines, such as home dishes in Nanjing. This local knowledge of food consumption practices could also help to further explain urban residents' everyday experiences. Another important reason is that both cities experienced transitions driven by political and economic forces, which provide a basis for examining the different local forms of neoliberalisation. Formerly the capital of the Republic of China (1912–1949), Nanjing transformed from an industrial center under socialist planning into a modern "new first-tier" city led by high-tech and education (Qian, 2013). Sheffield, the world-famous steel city, also experienced a series of structural adjustment plans in the 1980s and 2010s. Although the neoliberalisation process happened in both cities serves for different political purposes and causes uneven economic development, such as the rapid economic growth in China and the continuing financial crisis in the UK, a similar consequence is that the neoliberalisation process also shaped the urban food environment in both cities. I will explain this more in the introduction to each research site to demonstrate that focusing on a single site is insufficient to understand the complex impacts of neoliberalisation on daily food practices and changing gender relations.

Although conducting a comparative study has the advantage of generating in-depth knowledge of local practices of the neoliberalisation process across different social contexts, a challenging point is how to make a systematic and valid comparison (Ragin, 1998; Gómez and Kuronen, 2011). For each site, numerous variables and effects across countries and cities could be included in a comparison of the daily experience of feeding the family (Kjærnes et al., 2007). To conduct a systematic comparative analysis, this study focuses on the daily food consumption experiences of Chinese families living in Nanjing and Sheffield to lay the groundwork for comparison.

Unlike previous studies, this study does not focus on national or cultural identity in explaining changes in Chinese middle-class food consumption. Instead, drawing on practice theory, this research examines the context of 'doing' in the daily experience of food consumption. To be more specific, this study explores the context of daily food consumption practices shaped by the neoliberalisation process in China and the UK. Another issue is that conducting a comparative study should also consider feasibility during data collection, especially for cross-national comparisons. I will explain more in the recruiting section, discussing the advantages and disadvantages. The following section will provide a historical review of how Nanjing and Sheffield feed urban residents differently, given their distinct social and economic transition paths.

Nanjing

Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu Province, is located in the Yangtze River Delta. Historically, it was the capital of six ancient Chinese dynasties, and today it is the second-largest city in Jiangsu province, with a population of around 9.5 million (Nanjing government, 2024). As the former capital city during the Republic of China period, Nanjing's foodscape is shaped by diverse political and economic forces. For example, the development of Nanjing's egg industry, which supplied locally produced eggs to British commercial enterprises, could embody the influence of imperial and colonial forces, as well as the history of the global food supply connecting Chinese producers and British urban consumers (Zhang and Zhou, 2024). During the socialist planning period, the CCP government also faced the challenge of restoring the food provision system in Nanjing in the post-war period (Wang, 2008). This section will provide a historical overview of the different trajectories of feeding Nanjing city during the socialist planning economy period and the neoliberalisation process. This section also introduces local agriculture and cuisine that shape contemporary urban households' daily food consumption practices.

Given its coastal location and favourable weather, Nanjing has the geographical advantages to develop local agriculture (Zhong et al., 2023). Although urbanisation causes the decline of farmland, by 2007 Nanjing had reached some degree of self-sufficiency in basic food items, including 44% of staple foods such as grains, 40% of vegetables and fruits, 20% of pork, and 30% of poultry (Zhong et al., 2023). The surrounding agricultural provinces, such as Anhui and Shandong, also supply Nanjing with vegetables and fruits (Zhong et al., 2023). Located in the Yangtze River Delta, famous for its water towns' culture, Nanjing's local food culture also has the characteristics of the land of rice and fish. Jack Goody (1982) introduced that the local cuisine of the Yangtze Delta (Huaiyang cuisine) consists of fresh pork and fish and primarily uses seasonal vegetables. In contrast to the intense flavours of regions like Sichuan, Huaiyang cuisine emphasises subtle, clean flavours. Its core philosophy is the pursuit of 'freshness' (鲜美), relying on the natural flavours of seasonal produce rather than heavy seasoning. For example, a typical home-cooked dish and my favourite vegetable-based dish is scrambled eggs with Malantou (马兰头, or Indian Aster). This dish is strictly seasonal, as Malantou is a wild green that only thrives in the spring months. One of the famous local foods of Nanjing is salted, brined duck. While salted brined duck is a celebrated local delicacy, it is rarely prepared from scratch at home due to its complex curing process. In some cases, when people don't have time to prepare a meat dish, or when they visit their familiar friends to have a meal, people would buy half of a salted duck from their surrounding deli store, especially in the summertime.

According to Goody (1982), ancient Chinese cuisine reached an unprecedented level of prosperity during the Song Dynasty. This culinary advancement was marked not only by the emergence of cookbooks containing nutritional guidance but also by the burgeoning diversity of urban food outlets. Teahouses and restaurants became central to urban life, offering refined dishes to the social elite and the gentry. Although Goody (1982) specifically examined ancient Hangzhou, Nanjing possesses a parallel culinary richness, stemming from its shared cultural foundations as a prominent water town in the Yangtze River Delta. Yuan Mei, a renowned scholar and gastronome who resided in Nanjing during the Qing Dynasty, systematically recorded detailed cooking steps for various ingredients in his famous work, Recipes from the Garden of Contentment (1792). His work could exemplify how the upper class in ancient China entertained guests with complex, elaborated dishes made with seasonal, fresh ingredients, following formal meal codes. Nowadays, the meals of ordinary Chinese families are simpler, consisting of several dishes of meat and vegetables, with rice as the main staple, and sometimes accompanied by soup.

Based on the 'doing' concept in practice theory, daily household food practices are shaped by local cuisines and embedded in the local food provisioning system. While contemporary Chinese urban consumers enjoy unprecedented food choices, rising meat consumption, and a burgeoning dining-out culture (Zhu et al., 2020), milestones achieved through economic reforms since the 1970s, this shift does not signify a total rupture with the previous era. Instead, the legacy of the Chinese state socialism period (1949–1978) continues to inform the current design of the urban provisioning system. Furthermore, as David Morgan (1996) argued, households are not monolithic economic units but dynamic sites in which the changing family and gender relations are involved in constructing and are also shaped by social processes. The gendered division of labour involved in feeding the family could reveal both persistence and transformation across the socialist and market-reform eras.

In 1949, following years of civil war, the CCP government faced the formidable task of stabilising food supplies for major urban populations, including those in Shanghai and Nanjing (Vogel, 2005; Wang, 2008). Chen Yun, a key architect of China's macroeconomic policy across both the Mao and Deng eras, drew upon his wartime experience (1943–1948) in managing supply chains to institutionalise the 'Unified Purchase and Sale' policy (Tonggou Tongxiao 统购统销) (Vogel, 2005). To be more specific, to ensure the provision of necessary items, such as salt, for frontline troops, Chen designed a unified purchase-and-sale policy that pays salt producers a high price to incentivise their supply (Vogel, 2005). Given this previous successful experience in ensuring a stable supply of salt, Chen Yun reinforced the unified purchase and sale policy for ensuring sufficient grain, vegetables, and meat for the urban population in the post-war recovery period (Wang, 2008). Another important political goal of promoting the unified procurement policy is to enable the CCP to achieve primary capital accumulation for the development of heavy industries in cities (Wang, 2008). Briefly, the central government controlled the quotas for grain and vegetable production, the prices at which farmers sold, and the rigid distribution of basic food in cities (Zhang and Pan, 2013). For example, to manage the supply of fresh vegetables, each city operated a Municipal Vegetable Company. This state entity was responsible for procuring vegetables from rural communes at fixed prices and then delivering them to state-owned retail outlets, including local vegetable shops (Zhang and Pan, 2013). However, artificially low procurement prices often led to inconsistent vegetable quality and a lack of variety in the planned production system, which failed to meet the sophisticated culinary demands of urban consumers (Zhang and Pan, 2013). Consequently, food access in Nanjing was governed by a dual-track allocation system: while certain meat and vegetable quotas were distributed directly as welfare through working units (danwei 单位), urban residents primarily relied on ration coupons (liangpiao 粮票) to purchase essential foodstuffs at state-designated markets (Wang, 2008).

Take a look at the daily lives of urban residents: although a danwei system, often a state-owned company, provided its members with public canteens and childcare services, the persistent unequal gendered division of labour within households remained (Jin, 2006; Ji et al., 2017). Several previous studies have focused on the Nanjing danwei system during the socialist period. In a study of ‘iron girls’, the iconic image of women and men as the same, Jin Yihong (2006) found that unmarried young women were deemed able to share the same social obligations as men and to participate in the development of heavy industry. Liu Jieyu (2007) argued that the danwei system did not significantly change a patriarchal culture in housing allocation, which prioritised married men’s applications. In other words, for women workers in danwei, they still had to obey patriarchal family life, living with their husbands or sometimes with their husband’s parents to secure their collective house (Liu, 2007). Furthermore, the danwei system involved collective surveillance of women’s domestic responsibilities, as neighbours were often their colleagues or even leaders (Liu, 2007). How women fulfil their roles as good wives and good mothers, such as feeding the family and caring for children, is also taken into account in their work performance (Liu, 2007). Put simply, a good woman should be able to take on the role of a socialist worker, devoting herself to national socialist production, and also carefully manage the family budget with ration coupons to feed the family well. This gendered burden extended into the collective services of the danwei. As Dong Yige (2024) highlights, the system relied heavily on female dependents of male workers (jiashu,家属), who provided the essential but often unpaid or underpaid labour required to run communal canteens and childcare centres. Thus, women's labour, both as formal employees and informal dependents, constituted the backbone of the danwei's social reproduction. Dong's (2024) work deconstructs the myth that danwei welfare relieved women's domestic burdens. Instead, it suggests that for married women in Nanjing, unpaid food labour extended from the private kitchen to the collective unit, where it continued to subsidise national socialist development at the expense of women's time and agency.

Previous studies summarised that the CCP government gradually eliminated the unified procurement policy after ensuring stable grain production, allowed farmers to freely sell their products on the state-owned food market, and tolerated street hawkers selling fresh vegetables (Sicular, 1995; Zhang and Pan, 2013). The current urban food policy also reflects the profound influence of the planned economy during the state socialist period. The central government clearly defined the local government mayors' responsibility for implementing the 'rice bag' and 'vegetable basket' project to provide urban residents with fresh, healthy food (Schumilas et al., 2018). The 'rice bag' project is primarily aimed at ensuring the availability and stable price of grain food (Schumilas et al., 2018). The 'vegetable basket' project aims to ensure the supply of non-grain food, including meat, vegetables, dairy products, and aquatic products (Zhong et al., 2021). Regarding food accessibility, urban planning policy also required that one wet market be located in a residential area with over 10, 000 people (Zhong et al., 2023). To guarantee urban residents' access to fresh food, the Nanjing local government has established a comprehensive retail matrix to maximise accessibility. Each residential catchment is served by a variety of formats, including a wet market, a supermarket with fresh-product zones, a low-price food shop, and online shopping deliveries (Zhong et al., 2021).

The current Nanjing urban food provisioning system is shaped by a Chinese-specific neoliberalisation process, influenced by the state socialist period (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2020). Based on the 2015 survey of Nanjing residents' food consumption, residents commonly used the wet market as their primary source of fresh products, such as vegetables and fresh and frozen meat, while supermarkets were used for staple grains, dairy products, and processed foods (Si and Zhong, 2018). Crucially, I must address a common misconception regarding the origins of these markets. Contrary to Veeck and Veeck's (2000) suggestion that wet markets emerged spontaneously following the liberalisation of small-scale farming, historical evidence suggests a more state-directed evolution. Even during the era of unified procurement, the municipal food company occasionally sanctioned open markets, which remained under the management of state-owned entities and were staffed by salaried employees (Zhang and Pan, 2013). The shift toward private management only accelerated after the 1994 tax reform; faced with fiscal deficits, local governments began restructuring or privatising state-owned wet markets as a strategic response to new economic pressures (Zhang and Pan, 2013). In 2010, the Nanjing government also regained ownership of over half of local wet markets, while retaining privatised management by non-state companies (Zhong et al., 2023). Deng's

1992 southern visit to Shenzhen, the special economic zone, was a turning point in the progress of economic reform (Harvey, 2005). The magical economic growth in southern cities encouraged top leaders to largely promote economic reform and allow greater foreign direct investment and capital mobility in China's domestic food provisioning system (Harvey, 2005). Nanjing also experienced supermarketisation, with the development of domestic supermarkets and the influx of foreign retailers such as Walmart, Metro, and Carrefour (Zhang and Pan, 2013). The COVID-19 lockdown also led to an increase in online shopping among urban residents (Liang et al., 2024). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the online food ordering industry in Nanjing had generated profits of over 100 million yuan (Liang et al., 2024). Hema Fresh, a new food retailer backed by the Chinese tech giant Ali, has expanded to over 20 sub-branches across all Nanjing districts (according to Hema's official website). However, as I will expand on in the findings section, the affluent food choices, which can be viewed as opportunities arising from the neoliberalisation process, do not alleviate women's daily burden of feeding the family. The following section will continue to introduce how the urban provisioning system in Sheffield is shaped by the neoliberalisation process and how this brings changes to daily food consumption among Chinese families living in Sheffield.

Sheffield

Sheffield, in South Yorkshire, is known as the steel city and also England's fourth-largest city (Lane et al., 2016). Given its previous flourishing heavy industry development, an important question is how an industrial city like Sheffield fed its local working-class families (Steel, 2013; Grey, 2023). To meet the burgeoning demands of an expanding industrial working class, the development of the railway network enabled Sheffield to secure a reliable supply of perishable provisions, such as fresh produce and meat. This infrastructural leap not only stabilised the urban food supply but also facilitated the spatial and commercial expansion of local markets (Blackman, 1963). Sheffield used to have an open, large market, the Sheaf Market, in the city centre, crowded with independent traders and local vegetable and fruit producers (Sheffield Market, 2026). Carolyn Steel (2013) recalled that in her childhood, the city centre was full of smells and chaos from the local food market, which is also a vital element for a vibrant city. Since the post-war urban planning project adopted modernisation ideas for city design, which prioritised cleanliness and order, town officials destroyed some open markets and relocated food markets to suburban areas (Parham, 2015). A tendency in urban planning is that British cities were not designed for people or food but for cars (Parham, 2015).

The Sheffield urban food system is also shaped by corporate power, with supermarkets' dominance (Warde, 2024). The 'big four' supermarkets have replaced mainly traditional independent stores, with companies like Tesco actively working to make their convenience more appealing through greater physical accessibility and longer opening hours (Clarke et al., 2006). The dominance of these retailers is clearly reflected in national statistics: a 2024 report on UK household security showed that over 90% of purchased food comes from supermarkets and discount retailers (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024). In the Yorkshire and the Humber region, the average trip to a food retailer is 2.7 miles (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024). Despite the convenience and variety of food choices, the dominance of supermarkets also contributes to a food environment characterised by cheap, high-calorie food options (Warde, 2024). In daily food practices, previous studies also found that the food environment, characterised by a high proportion of highly processed foods, constrained urban households' access to proper, healthy meals (Otero et al., 2016). There have well-documented studies about 'food deserts' in cities, which refers to a lack of access to healthy and nutritious fresh vegetables and fruits, and the related obesity and other chronic diseases (Carolan, 2012).

How did the neoliberalisation process shape the UK cities' food provision system and daily food practices? The context of 'doing' is not just about the food environment, but also about cultural contexts, such as the promotion of individualism and stable social welfare supports and employment markets, which enable food security (Blake, 2019). Since the 2010 austerity policy, Sheffield, like other Northern England cities, has also faced the challenge of limited local authority budgets for public expenditure to provide social protections for the most needy group (Hall, 2019). In 2021, approximately 22% of adults in Sheffield reported experiencing food insecurity (Blake et al., 2021). Based on the 2024 survey, UK households continue to face higher food prices and a continuing wage decline since 2010, which also contributes to the cost-of-living crisis (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024). Previous studies have noted the rapid growth of food bank charities since the 2010 austerity policy, which could indicate that there is an increasing number of people living in desperate circumstances (Lambie-Mumford, 2019). The social welfare reform also embodies a neoliberal culture that treats the urban population as human capital for economic development (Wilson, 2017). Central to this shift is the stringent conditionality of the Universal Credit system; social protection is no longer a de facto right but is contingent upon an individual's demonstrated 'employability' within the labour market (Lambie-Mumford, 2019). Consequently, those seeking support must demonstrate their active job search or face punitive sanctions, such as the suspension or delay of benefits (Blake, 2019).

The proliferation of food banks exemplifies a strategic partnership between local authorities and non-state actors in mitigating systemic food insecurity (Yap and Treuherz, 2025). Sheffield City Council has actively fostered cross-party urban governance, convening local food organisations, research institutes, and commercial outlets to co-produce a collective urban food strategy (Garratt and Jackson-Taylor, 2024). This stands in stark contrast to Nanjing's trajectory, where the central government mandates rigid targets for local implementation. In the UK, urban food strategies lack a universal mandate, resulting in uneven effects and diverse localised visions (Yap and Treuherz, 2025). For instance, Sheffood, a cross-sector partnership, advocates for a fairer, healthier, and greener food system through grassroots collaboration (Sheffood, 2022). However, as Lambie-Mumford (2019) argues, the professionalisation of food governance, characterised by the heavy reliance on charities and the voluntary sector, signals a deeper neoliberal shift. This transition facilitates the withdrawal of state responsibility, effectively subcontracting the duty of food security to precarious local partnerships (Coulson and Sonnino, 2019).

Previous studies also identified an unequal racial distribution of food charities, that non-white migrants are excluded from access to food aid, because of their migrant status, language barriers (Leather and Treuherz, 2022). While Sheffield is ethnically diverse—with the 2021 census identifying 79.1% White, 9.6% Asian, 4.6% Black, and 3.5% Mixed-race populations- there remains a profound lack of granular data on how these specific minority groups access or are excluded from food aid (ONS, 2023).

This study focuses on the Chinese families living in Sheffield. Compared with other large cities in northern England, Sheffield does not have a disproportionately large Chinese migrant population. According to a report by Sheffield City Council, Chinese groups began to settle in Sheffield in the 1960s (Libraries, Archives and Information, 2015). This group is diverse, comprising people from various regions that share a Chinese culture, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore (Libraries, Archives and Information, 2015). Based on the 2021 census, there are 7,385 Chinese residents in Sheffield (Sheffield City Council, 2021). Regarding their socioeconomic status, 33% of the Chinese groups are economically active, primarily working in public and service sectors, including accommodation and food services, education, human health and social work, skilled professions, and retail trade (Sheffield City Council, 2021). Furthermore, among those not in the workforce, half are students (Sheffield City Council, 2021). Chinese migrants in Sheffield have significantly shaped the city's culinary landscape, particularly through their concentration in the food service sector. This entrepreneurship draws on a rich tapestry of regional cuisines, ranging from traditional Cantonese dim sum, often established by earlier migrant waves, to Sichuanese outlets, local hot pot chains, and North-eastern Chinese specialities. These businesses reflect a diverse ownership structure: while some are legacy establishments run by the 1990s generation of family migrants, an increasing number are operated by former international students who transitioned into local entrepreneurship. Complementing the mainstream retail landscape, several specialist Chinese supermarkets in Sheffield serve as vital cultural and material infrastructures for the diaspora. These outlets provide Chinese families with essential access to culturally specific ingredients, such as Asian leafy vegetables, traditional seasonings, and regional staples, that are largely absent from domestic British supermarkets. By facilitating the procurement of these 'authentic' items, these ethnic retail spaces enable households to sustain traditional home-cooking practices, effectively bridging the sensory gap between their lived experience in the UK and their familiar cuisine (Collins, 2008; Slocum, 2011).

In summary, while both research sites are fundamentally reshaped by neoliberalisation, they manifest divergent trajectories and consequences for the daily experience of household food provisioning. Nanjing follows a Chinese-specific path, in which the central state maintains a strategic role in guiding municipal authorities to ensure grain self-sufficiency and the accessibility of fresh food. Here, market reforms since the 1970s have facilitated a hybrid landscape, integrating global supermarket chains with resilient local wet markets, to offer a diverse range of provisioning channels. In contrast, Sheffield exemplifies a more entrenched neoliberal model, characterised by the withdrawal of the state. Government responsibility for addressing systemic food precarity has been largely outsourced to the voluntary sector, fostering a fragmented partnership model between state and non-state actors. Given these different experiences, focusing on a single site, either Nanjing or Sheffield, could not provide an in-depth understanding of how the neoliberalisation process shapes the urban food provisioning system within which urban Chinese families carry out their daily food practices.

3.3.2 Recruitment of research participants

One challenging part is how to define ordinary households. This study focuses on the Chinese middle-class groups in both Nanjing and Sheffield. I selected this specific group because they could represent some common and ordinary experiences. Economically, with stable employment and income level, the middle-class groups are not the outstanding well-off group nor the financially disadvantaged group who need social welfare and benefit system support (Stenning, 2020). The life conditions of the middle-class group could also represent the mainstream political discourse of an ideal life for the public, such as the previous ‘American dream’ (Mills, 1951). In 2013, China’s President Xi Jinping also proposed the China Dream, which encourages people to pursue a better life through hard work (Goodman, 2014). China’s middle class comprises individuals who strive to improve their lives and those of their families, seeking more opportunities and laying the groundwork for a better future for their children (Wang, 2010). The CCP government also views the expansion of the middle class as a vital social force to build a comfortable and well-off society (Goodman, 2014).

Furthermore, existing studies on China’s food consumption also noticed a dietary and nutritional transition, which refers to the emerging middle-class group’s increased consumption of meat, dairy products, and food consumption away from home (Schumilas et al., 2018). However, this group is also facing contemporary challenges from changes in large social and economic environment. In the period of economic downturn, China's middle-class families and young people with middle-class backgrounds are under pressure to sustain their lifestyle and socioeconomic status while confronting a precarious job market (Wu, 2025). In recent years, an urgent problem has been the high unemployment rate of Chinese university graduates (Wu, 2025). The long-term expansion of higher education and the economic recession have diminished the competitive advantages previously offered by a university degree (Wu, 2025). Given their representative features of 'ordinary' Chinese families and the recent social and economic changes, this study focuses on the Chinese middle-class groups in both Nanjing and Sheffield as the research subjects.

Based on previous studies of the Chinese middle class, the category of Chinese middle-class families has multiple dimensions, including income level, educational level, occupations, consumption level, and lifestyle (Wang, 2010; Goodman, 2014). In the recruitment process, I also considered these multiple dimensions of the middle-class group. Recruitment occurs throughout the entire data collection process. I started the recruitment in Nanjing first and then in Sheffield. To reach a diverse range of participants and avoid a homogenous social circle, I employed multiple strategies, including engaging with local social organisations, using snowballing techniques, and posting recruitment advertisements on social media platforms. Before I began conducting fieldwork in Nanjing, I had already established networks with several local social organisations in the city, which also facilitated my subsequent recruitment. The 706 Youth Space aims to provide a sharing community for young people through a combination of online and offline activities, including salons and lectures. The middle-class group also represents certain lifestyles, such as participating in book reading and attending public lectures as leisure activities (Goodman, 2013). Therefore, 706 Youth Space is a suitable place to find potential participants with a middle-class background. 706 Youth Space also has a sub-branch in Nanjing. During the fieldwork, after discussing with the sub-branch founder, my initial plan was to use a sharing activity about food in cities to attract potential participants. The sharing activity also features an online chatting group on WeChat (a Chinese instant messaging social media), where I posted the recruitment information after obtaining permission from the Nanjing 706 founder. The social organisation Citypedia is a volunteer group that organises article-sharing activities and offline events, such as Jane's Walk, in China's cities. Citypedia also has a sub-branch in Nanjing, from which I recruited some participants. Its members are primarily professionals in urban planning, real estate, and architecture, as well as university students. Given the recession and unstable employment in China's real estate industry, it is also valuable to interview middle-class households from these fields about their daily life experiences. Likewise, I recruited participants from this group after receiving permission from both the leading organisation and its Nanjing sub-branch founder.

I also utilised my personal networks, discussing my research project with friends and asking them to share the recruitment information. With this method, I successfully recruited several research participants. Additionally, I used popular social media platforms. On Red Note, a content-sharing platform where people post about their daily lives and consumption experiences, my recruitment post did not receive a lot of attention. This experience highlighted a key challenge: successful recruitment on such a platform requires a deep understanding of its algorithmic rules and content trends, specifically how to utilise appealing topics and keywords to increase visibility. Some of the comments received were simply expressions of curiosity, without a genuine intention to participate. I also used Douban, another content-sharing platform with various thematic groups. There are also several food-related topics and groups from which I recruited participants. However, the Douban topic group has more rigid rules in regulating the posts. Some groups claimed that they did not allow the posting of any advertisement. Therefore, I also need to discuss and negotiate with the founders of the food topic groups and the related daily consumption experience group to obtain their permission, and then post the recruitment information. After the first interview, some participants also introduced me to their friends who might be interested in participating in the research activity.

In summary, I recruited a total of 27 participants in Nanjing, representing a variety of household types. Among them, there are three students currently living on campus, 13 single households (including unmarried individuals living alone or with roommates), and nine families (comprising both nuclear families with parents and children and extended families where adult children live with their elderly parents). Their ages ranged from 20s to 40s. All participants had at least a college-level education, and some held master's degrees. Their occupations are categorised as follows: 6 are in white-collar positions, 6 work in state-owned companies, government departments, or higher education institutions, 6 hold managerial positions, and 4 are professionals. Their working areas encompass a wide range of fields, including local government departments, state-owned companies, sales companies, higher education institutions, media companies, and the real estate and architecture sectors. Among these research participants, 6 of them are local people. Others are from surrounding cities or other provinces; they moved to the city for work or had stayed after graduating from a local university.

In Sheffield, I employed similar recruiting strategies, including leveraging my personal network and posting recruitment information on social media platforms. With my identity as a PhD student, I successfully recruited many master's and PhD students in Sheffield. Still again, my post on the Red Note did not receive a lot of attention, but it is better than the situation in Nanjing. I recruited several participants from the Red Note. Some of them also helped to share the recruitment information or introduced their friends to participate. I still remember that in a moment, I realised that I had recruited too many PhD students. My supervisor said: No more PhD students!

At one point, I struggled to find a comparable group of people to what I had in Nanjing. I have to admit that this is the limitation of my recruitment that I did not build a deep network with the local Chinese community earlier. Some of my warm-hearted friends introduced me to people they knew who worked in various fields in Sheffield. I also attempted to put flyers on the counter of local Chinese supermarkets but was rejected by the operators. An interesting experience was when I was holding a flyer outside a local Chinese supermarket, and a young black man passed by and asked me about my program. I truly appreciated his interests, but I still explained that I had to recruit Chinese people. When I have another program, I could invite him. Finally, following my supervisor's suggestion, I turned to the local Chinese Christian Church. Despite my initial embarrassed feeling as a non-religious person, I frankly introduced my research project and asked for permission to recruit. I soon discovered that the Church offered language classes for children, which was an ideal place to find Chinese families. To secure permission, I underwent a rigorous process, submitting my university's ethical approval letter and preparing information sheets in simplified and traditional Chinese, as well as an English version, as required. I consistently visited the Church over several weeks in the hope of meeting potential participants. An Uber driver even remembered me and said, 'You always go to the Church!'. Although the people at the Church are very friendly and showed some interest in participating, I ultimately recruited a few of them that was below my initial expectations. Some church members also worked in food service and social work activities. They also explained that my recruitment was an improper time because they were too busy during this period and could not take part in the research activity; however, as Cook and Crang (1995) argued, the fieldwork process can be marked by unexpected completeness, uncertainty, and messiness. Given the limited time, I finished up my recruitment in the Church.

I initially assumed that my shared identity would make the recruitment process smoother, especially when contacting Chinese people settled in Sheffield. However, this is a result of my lack of consideration of intersectionality. Even among Chinese people living in Sheffield, who share a common language, culture, and similar educational and economic backgrounds, there are significant differences across social circles and religious affiliations. While my identity as a Chinese person positioned me as an 'insider', as a researcher attempting to build rapport with Chinese people who have settled down for the long term, I was still perceived as an 'outsider'. What I learnt from the recruitment process in Sheffield is the differences among a seemingly homogenous group and the importance of building a network with the local Chinese community earlier.

In summary, I recruited a total of 29 participants in Sheffield. The sample consisted of 16 PhD students or individuals with a doctoral degree and three master's students. Although the participants in Sheffield focused on PhD students, their daily experiences of food consumption and gender relations varied. The diversity within this specific group also provided valuable insights for this research. Similarly, participants' ages range from the 20s to the 40s. Their working areas cover food services, entrepreneurs, higher education institutions, and the IT industry. The composition of different household types includes 9 nuclear families with or without children, 2 cohabiting couples, and 16 single households, either living alone or sharing with roommates.

Participants from various places of origin are represented, with a majority from mainland China, two from Hong Kong, and one from Taiwan. They also have different migration experiences. Three of them have been living in the UK for over 10 years, having previously lived in various cities, and nine of them have been in the UK for around 5 years, either in different cities or settled in

Sheffield. These diverse experiences and multiple identities, based on their marital status, originality, and prior migration experience, also constitute a rich dataset for Sheffield.

Since this study focuses on continuity and change in daily food consumption experiences, it is better to include a more detailed introduction to the previous household relations and gendered food practices of Sheffield Chinese families, and to support further discussion of their different food consumption experiences in the migrant context. Many of the research participants come from middle-class families, meaning their parents can support their overseas study in the UK. Among the PhD participants, 6 of them also completed their master's studies in other cities in England, and 3 of them in Sheffield. Among those with full-time work, four completed their master's and bachelor's studies in the UK and either started their own business or worked in an IT department after graduation. These diverse previous living experiences have shaped their current eating habits. Participants who have lived in different English cities have developed a taste for a wide range of food—not just Chinese or Asian dishes, but also local British cuisine and other international cuisines. Some participants even watched British cooking shows to learn how to prepare local dishes like steak and lamb. During our interviews, many were eager to introduce me to their favourite restaurants across the UK, which shows how well they have adapted to Britain's diverse food culture.

When they lived in China, participants often used high-end supermarkets, such as Hema Fresh and Sam's Club, or online fresh-food delivery services. They have developed a preference for pursuing food quality based on their previous shopping experience in China. Two of them also reported frequently shopping for imported steaks at Sam's Club, which could indicate affluent Chinese middle-class families and a demand for high-quality food. Furthermore, participants' understanding of freshness reflected broader Chinese culinary traditions. Their criteria were largely time-sensitive, focusing on seasonality and the immediacy of the 'farm-to-table' process. A key distinction was made between 'warm' meat from wet markets and long-term frozen meat, the latter being viewed as inferior. Ultimately, the wet market remains the preferred venue because it facilitates multi-sensory validation, allowing participants to rely on sight, smell, and touch to gauge freshness.

For those participants in their 20s, before moving to Sheffield, they were living with their parents. In their families, mothers undertook most of the daily grocery shopping and cooking work. Two participants also mentioned their previous cohabitation with boyfriends and reflected on their unequal division of labour in household food procurement and preparation. Both the unequal division of labour in their parent's family and their own intimate relations motivated the participants to make some changes in a new context. For those married participants in their 40s, they represent an earlier cohort of the migration group. Having moved from mainland China to the UK, they established food businesses in other cities before settling in Sheffield. These participants have built robust local networks through the Chinese Christian church and their professional circles. A particularly noteworthy practice among these participants is their engagement with local vegetable wholesale markets, where they source ingredients for both their commercial food businesses and their own household consumption. Since these couples run their food businesses jointly, they are able to share both commercial responsibilities and household food preparation more equitably compared to their younger counterparts. Additionally, one participant who previously lived in North America shared that he and his wife developed their culinary skills within the migrant context, enabling them to share the responsibility for feeding the family.

The study also incorporates participants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, whose distinct food environments prior to migration further underscore the heterogeneity of the Chinese migrant population. For the Hong Kong participants, a hallmark of their previous middle-class lifestyle was the reliance on live-in domestic helpers for household food preparation, supplemented by frequent dining in workplace canteens. Migrating to Sheffield has necessitated a fundamental renegotiation of these domestic roles; these participants have had to acquire culinary skills for the first time while simultaneously navigating the challenges of relocation. This transition is compounded by a profound sense of status inconsistency: having left high-status, well-paid occupations in Hong Kong, they now often find themselves in precarious roles or restricted to flexible employment, facing significant barriers to securing full-time professional positions in Sheffield.

Furthermore, these participants bring unique prior engagements with sustainable consumption. The Hong Kong participants highlighted their familiarity with organic food, facilitated by government-led educational initiatives that provided nutritional guidance and informed grocery shopping practices. Similarly, the participant from Taiwan noted prior exposure to sustainable food systems, where local supermarkets routinely label fresh produce as sustainable, fostering a sense of ethical consumption among urban consumers. These diverse biographies highlight the heterogeneity within the Chinese migrant group and illustrate how prior cultural socialisation continues to shape their current food consumption practices in Sheffield—a phenomenon that I will explore in greater depth in the findings section.

I ended the recruitment at each research site once I could identify some common experiences in their daily food consumption and understanding of gender relations. In general, the recruitment process at both sites follows the ethical guidelines. Before initiating the research activities, I ensured that all participants were fully informed about the research process, including their rights, and provided them with a copy of the information sheet. They then signed the consent form, based on their willingness. Another issue is the use of language; for most of the research participants, I used Mandarin to communicate with them and introduce the research program and the activities. Since I also conducted an interview with a couple, one of whom is British, I used English for the introduction and consent form. One research participant from Hong Kong preferred to use English to communicate.

3.4 A summary for the fieldwork process

The fieldwork period had two stages. The first stage took place in Nanjing from March 2023 to August 2023. The second stage took place in Sheffield from September 2023 to January 2024. After completing the data collection in Nanjing, I also used the data collection experience in Nanjing to adapt the research method in Sheffield. The general flow process for data collection was as follows: Stage 1 involved a semi-structured interview. At the end of interview, I also invited participants to the following activities. Stage 2 included a one-week food diary for household members, a follow-up interview, shopping-along activities, and a home visit for a fridge story or using a photo of the fridge to conduct a follow-up interview. During the fieldwork, all recruitment and data collection processes adhered to ethical practices. In the following part, I will introduce the different methods.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Introduction

Using a qualitative method is not a fixed step in the research process, but rather a flexible and ongoing process that allows for experimentation and innovation (Crang and Cook, 1995). In this part, I will introduce how I applied the ideas of the narrative approach in generating a specific qualitative method for data collection. Based on the narrative approach, the design logic is that a semi-structured interview is the primary method for investigating the daily household consumption experience, with the complementary methods of shopping along with research participants, the fridge story method, and a one-week household food diary for household members. I added the complementary methods for several reasons. Firstly, a single interview may not fully capture the detailed experiences of household food consumption, family relations, and gender relations. Since there is some tacit knowledge related to food consumption, it is also challenging for research participants to recall all the information in a single interview (Joosse and Marshall, 2020). In the following section of the introduction for each method, I will also discuss how these different methods contribute to an enriched understanding of household food consumption and gender relations. Secondly, as Miller (2012) noted, in a questionnaire survey or during the interview process, what people say or answer is often intended to justify their actions. This is not to imply that the research participant is dishonest in their answers. It is understandable that, as social human beings, we do care about how others perceive us and their impression on us (Goffman, 1956). In a shopping study, Miller (2012) found that research participants reported a preference for shopping in corner shops over supermarkets. However, in the later interviews, they tend to be more familiar with shopping in supermarkets (Miller, 2012). Therefore, this study also employed other techniques to form a triangulation for corroborating people's previous narratives about their food consumption. The last point is that using multiple methods could provide a flexible and supportive environment for both the researcher and the research participants. I understood that not all research participants could fully engage in all the research activities; therefore, it is necessary to have some backup plans for data collection. Offering these multiple methods, research participants had more spaces to select the activities they felt comfortable and proper to participate in (Joosse and Marshall, 2020).

3.5.2 Semi-structured interview

The first stage interview is around 50 minutes on average. In Nanjing, I also conducted a pilot study in the first interview to adapt the interview topics and questions, making them easy to understand for research participants. The process began with reviewing the information sheet and consent form with participants. I then typically started with familiar topics, such as their work in Nanjing, previous study experience, household type, and living areas. Then the detailed interview questions are organised by the following topics.

- Grocery shopping: Where did they usually shop for food? What was their last grocery shopping experience like? How did they experience using different food shops and platforms? Some also used online shopping platforms, and what changes have they noticed in food prices?
- Daily arrangement for meals: weekdays' three meals, eating out experience, and weekend arrangement of family meals.
- Household division of labour: their family's current division of household labour, with questions such as who usually did cook and grocery shopping in the households, and other housework allocations, their perceptions, feelings about this allocation or their parents' division of labour.
- Concerns regarding food safety or food shortage issues, including their previous experiences with food safety issues or shortages, their current concerns, and their perceptions of the government's responsibility in regulating food safety.
- Economic influence: Since income level and financial conditions are private topics, I placed this topic at the end. I asked about the impact of the recent economic recession.

These topics were common themes that I used in the interview process. The detailed questions varied and depended upon individuals' different living conditions, working conditions, and previous shopping experiences. I also gained insight into some unexpected topics during the interview process, such as participants' concerns about their health and their perception of fresh food. In the area of food safety, I found that initially, when I directly asked people about their concerns regarding food problems, participants were confused, and some expressed concerns about the freshness of food. Therefore, I realised that I had to be more specific about food safety and could provide some examples, such as recent food safety events, to facilitate the responses. Some research participants in Nanjing also shared their complaints about their work, which inspired me to explore the influence of work on their daily food consumption.

Another influential factor was the location of the interview. The interview contexts could also impact participants' narratives, potentially enabling them to share more or creating a stressful environment (Crang and Cook, 1995). Before meeting with the participants, I asked them about the place they thought was most convenient for an interview. Most of the interviews took place in public settings, such as cafés, fast-food restaurants, university campuses, or workplaces. Some interviews were via an online meeting, which was more convenient for participants. Some single interviews were even longer, lasting up to 1.5 hours. A few of the interviews are approximately 20 minutes long. I interviewed in a company's office. Initially, I thought I could interview with the manager, but he then introduced some employees he considered more suitable for ordinary households. I found that during the interview process, with the presence of their manager, the participants were not very flexible in talking about their daily experiences. After these brief interviews, I also invited them to participate in another online interview, which would be a more relaxed conversation. To make the process smooth, I also used a notebook to write down some keywords I regarded as important to probe more in the following questions. All the interviews are recorded using my personal mobile phone, secured with a password, and backed up on my personal laptop.

In both research sites, all the participants engaged in the first interview. The composition of interviews varied slightly by site:

In Nanjing, the majority of interviews were conducted individually. However, to capture the dynamics within relationships, two sessions involved roommates or friends who participated jointly. Furthermore, among married participants, two couples were interviewed together, while one couple was interviewed separately. A young, unmarried couple was also interviewed with both partners present.

In Sheffield, interviews were also primarily conducted individually. Two unmarried couples, however, chose to complete their interviews concurrently with both partners present.

3.5.3 Participatory observation: Shopping-along, home visit and fridge story

During the shopping-along activity, I focused on participants' interactions with the vendors, with their partners, the physical environment of the shopping site, and their selection process for specific food items. Not all research participants engaged in the shopping along activity. In Nanjing, 8 of the participants took part in the shopping along activity. With 4 of them, I shopped along with them on our first meeting. 4 of them participated in the shopping-along activity after the first interview. In Sheffield, 5 of the participants engaged in the shopping-along activity for the first time we met. During the shopping-along process, I wrote down some keywords for the events I felt were important on the notes application of my mobile phone.

I also noticed some subtle emotional and cognitive labour, including how couples negotiated their meal plans, how participants made decisions and planned meals for entertaining friends, or how they unintentionally mentioned their partners' likes and dislikes during the shopping process. After each shopping-along activity, I wrote detailed fieldwork notes in a Word document. These notes covered key aspects, including the people present, the environment of food shops, participants' interactions with vendors, their selection of products, and concerns such as food prices and unrelated complaints about working conditions. Additionally, they included my feelings and reflections on the shopping activity. One challenging part of this method is that I could not ensure all the participants could attend this activity. Despite my initial introduction of the shopping along activity, some participants later explained that they had forgotten about it.

Furthermore, for some people, having a newly met research accompany them on a shopping trip might be discomfort and strange to them (Joosse and Marshall, 2020). The daily grocery shopping is also part of people's private lives. Researcher observation of participants' actions during the shopping process could also lead to participants feeling a sense of intrusion into their private lives (Joosse and Marshall, 2020). As Crang and Cook (1995) argued, what can be stranger than one strange person observing and writing down what others did? Given the limited time for fieldwork in each site, I could not ensure full engagement for all the participants in the shopping-along activity. I also had an initial backup plan that research participants could take a photo of the food items they purchased or a photo of their receipt. Since I used the one-food diary, which covered the activity of taking a picture, I did not ask participants to do this extra activity.

Since not all research participants could engage in shopping-along, I also added another method as a backup to gain more insight into their daily food consumption. The fridge story is along with an interview. Research participants can choose between a home visit and taking photos of their fridge for a follow-up, short interview. Inspired by previous studies using the fridge story, incorporating associated materials and objects could facilitate the interview, encouraging participants to share more details about their food consumption (Joosse and Marshall, 2020). In Nanjing, two families and one single household participated in the fridge story interview at home. Four participants took photos of their refrigerators and then participated in a follow-up interview. In Sheffield, two of the participants took pictures of their fridge, and one unmarried but cohabiting couple accepted the at-home fridge story interview. I also used fridge story as the triangulation method to ask participants about their food sources. I explored different sources, such as the food they got from their parents, relatives, and friends. A topic emerging from this process was food waste. Some participants also cleaned out and checked out some expired food during the interview process. Since the fridge at home is also a private space, as Joosse and Marshall (2020) noticed, the participants might have a feeling of being checked by the researchers for their consumption. Therefore, in the interview process, I also asked participants permission to have a look and ask questions about the food items stored in the fridge. Since most of my questions are about their grocery shopping and different food sources, the whole process was easy for the participants.

3.5.4 One-week food diary

When I realised that not all participants could participate in the participatory observation as I had initially planned before starting the fieldwork, I realised that I had to continue to explore alternative methods. Furthermore, after starting my fieldwork in Nanjing, I explored ways to involve participants in the co-working process primarily. Inspired by previous studies, I utilised a one-week food diary for all household members to create spaces for participants to engage in narrating and co-working. Health and nutrition studies have widely applied the food diary method to record food intake and calculate nutritional values for further intervention in health problems (Burrows et al., 2012; Holmberg et al., 2021). Unlike the conventional food diary method, this study is not from a top-down expert's perspective on people's daily nutritious information. Still, it explores the possible creative space in writing the food diary. The design of a one-week food diary draws on insights from various previous studies. Bono and Finn (2017), in their research about food access in rural communities in Cuba, used the food diary method to investigate the multiple food sources and the specific food distribution in Cuba based on its planned economy. This study also showed that using the food dairy method could corroborate with other methods, such as the semi-structured interviews, for the different food sources and food shops participants used. Joosse and Marshall (2020) also introduced a one-week food diary used in a sustainable consumption study, with the format including the daily food consumed, the way of dealing with food waste, and the reasons. Zimmerman and Wieder (1977), in their study about subculture, also employed the diary method to invite their participants to record their daily activities and personal experiences. These two studies also inspired me to use a one-week food diary, recording food shopping and eating events, to create a food consumption blog.

The one-week food diary in this research contains the following details: where participants shopped and their mode of travel, the people they shopped with, the food items they purchased, and their three meals for the week. To facilitate the recording process, I provided instructions and a sample entry. Given the workload, I gave participants flexibility to choose their preferred recording method. I also offered an alternative plan: participants could send me photos of their three meals, purchased food items, or receipts via WeChat. A short interview followed the one-week food diary to discuss weekly food consumption in detail, including daily routines, plans for using purchased food items, and any special events. To ensure a co-working experience, I also asked for participants' reflections on their eating habits and suggestions for improving the method.

Compared to other methods, the food diary saw a high level of engagement. In Nanjing, 16 participants completed a one-week food diary, with 4 of them recording for their entire family. In Sheffield, 16 participants also completed the one-week food diary, with one participant recording for their family. Diaries were recorded in various formats, including Word documents, mobile phone notes, and photos. All food diary data was securely saved in a fieldwork file on my personal laptop and backed up to the university's Google Drive.

3.6 Data Analysis

Most of the research data consists of the interview recordings. After completing the transcription, I used NVivo software to do the data coding. The coding is organised by the research questions, the practice theory, and previous food consumption studies. The coding and analysis work had three stages. The first stage involved generating opening codes and reviewing the practice theory. In this stage, all the transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo and categorised as cases with the names of participants. This is an exploration stage. Initially, I had a lot of codes including the shopping places, the time, food items, gender relations, gendered division of labour, cooking, eating together with friends, eating out, working, parenting, intergenerational care, food price, food safety, food shortage, and food waste. To explore the themes, I also wrote down the prominent findings and discussed them with supervisors. In the second stage, after being more familiar with practice theory and inspired by the previous studies, I reorganised the opening codes into some principal codes, including food sources, meal planning, eating habits and routines, cooking practices, food safety and shortage concerns, money management and economic recession, gender relations, and sensory engagement with food. Each main code also contains some sub-codes. For example, I combined the previous codes, such as those for food items and food shops, with the main code for food sources. The gender relations included the sub-codes, including household division of labour, conflict and negotiation, and emotional and cognitive labour. In the third stage, with the main codes and detailed analysis for all the quotes, I also identified the main themes. Based on the practice theory and the notions of food consumption, the main themes are household food provision, the appropriation process including cooking and eating, and food risk.

Regarding language use in the interview and coding process, I adopted a strategic approach by not translating all Mandarin interviews into English for the coding process, reserving translation only for the selected quotes intended for the final thesis. This decision was rooted in the need to preserve the authenticity of participants' expressions. I recognised that multiple translations risk losing the subtle meaning and affective resonance inherent in the original language, particularly concerning tacit knowledge about food, such as their sensory experience of freshness. Participants rarely employed academic jargon; instead, they used vivid, context-specific expressions. For instance, in describing the freshness of vegetables, some participants used the term nen (嫩), which refers to the specific visual and textural quality of a vegetable that appears newly grown and light-coloured—a nuanced meaning difficult to capture through a simple English equivalent like 'tender' or 'young'. The translation process inherently involves the researcher's understanding, thus risking the addition of an unnecessary layer of epistemological interpretation to the participants' original narratives. To minimise my interpretive influence on the original data and maintain a relatively objective approach during the initial data analysis and coding phases, I refrained from full translation.

3.7 Limitations, Ethics Considerations, and Reflection

The multiple identities of the researcher and the different social positions and perspectives between the researcher and the research subjects could impact the data collection process (Crang and Cook, 1995). To be more specific, the researcher is not a detached person, but is also living with the social relations and social context, which could enable or restrain the data collection process and their interpretation of interview data (Crang and Cook, 1995). My identities as a PhD student and an unmarried young woman may have made participants feel comfortable talking to me about their daily lives and even complaining about their work when we first met. In both sites, I ate with some of the participants at their homes or in restaurants. We could eat together, which also expresses the rapport I built with them. Some participants, who are also PhD students or have recently graduated from the university within the past year, also viewed their participation as helping their peers. I truly appreciate their help and time in engaging with my program. I also expressed my gratitude to them through gifts and by buying drinks during the research activities. I also built friendships with some of them, and sometimes they shared with me about their recent lives. Doing fieldwork is also about how to deal with interpersonal relations. This is a process that allows you to build new relationships, but it also presents the challenge of how to say goodbye. To minimise the impact on their personal lives, I also informed them of the end of the data collection. To ensure confidentiality and privacy protection, I requested their preferred pseudonym and provided them with a summary of their profile information to facilitate an agreement regarding the use of this information. Then I expressed my genuine appreciation and gratitude for their participation once more at the end.

I also recognised the differences between me, the researcher, and the research participants. A particular instance was when I watched the Barbie movie with one of the participants, a young woman, and laughed at several feminist critiques and satirical points. However, the participant expressed confusion, directly asking me, "Why did you laugh about that?" I then explained the ironic points I identified in the film's texts. My ability to identify these cinematic critiques stems from my familiarity with feminist theories. However, this familiarity does not confer a superior understanding of gender relations. Instead, it highlighted that my theoretical learning could contain an 'ivory tower' bias, confined within an academic comfort zone with like-minded researchers. While I can easily decode gender discourse, such as misogynistic lines in popular culture, the focus of this research is the real life beyond a feminist's comfort zone. The fieldwork also enabled me to realise and feel these differences. As Crang and Cook (1995) suggested, beyond the big ethics that researchers must follow, there are also many small ethics in the research process that require constant negotiation. My principle in navigating these small ethics was to maintain sincerity and reflexivity in the interactions with participants.

I also found that it was hard to delimit a clear boundary between the 'insider' and 'outsider' (Crang and Cook, 1995; Hall, 2014). Feminist ethnographers argue that the identities of insider and outsider are not fixed but are fluid and blurred and are continuously constructed throughout the research process (Davis and Craven, 2022). To some extent, my identities as a 'local person' in each site ensured that I was familiar with their food culture and their food consumption environment. This 'insider' advantage could also enhance my understanding of their food consumption experiences and their perceptions of gender relations. However, for participants in Nanjing, my other identity was that of a PhD student living in the UK; they knew that I would return to Sheffield to start another fieldwork project. In most cases, we didn't have many opportunities to meet in Nanjing. I was also an 'outsider' in their daily life.

Furthermore, among the participants living in Sheffield, even the PhD students, some of them were married or had been living in the UK for over 5 or 10 years, and I was also an 'outsider' who just started my study life in the UK for around 2 years during the period of fieldwork. Some of them were helpful to introduce the local food in Sheffield. From a feminist intersectionality perspective, I could also recognise the differences between the researcher and the research participants. I could understand these differences, as well as our different experiences and perspectives, which were shaped by multiple intersecting identities and social positions.

Due to the limitations of the research method, this study mainly used the narrative approach to explore the sayings and doings in the food practices. This method could capture the detailed experience of food consumption and household gender relations. However, given the distinctiveness of food consumption itself, I also found some alternative methods could be proper to apply into the further studies, such as using video recording for the cooking process (Torkkeli et al., 2020) and the qualitative method of eating together with the research participants to record the sensory experience (Longhurst et al., 2009).

4 Household food provision: cognitive and emotional labour in provision

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will employ a practice theory to examine the daily household food provision experiences of households living in Nanjing and Sheffield within a neoliberal context. Before China's 1980s market reform, the state-planned economy determined the daily food provision for China's urban households, with public dining halls owned by working units offering meals and a supply and marketing cooperative serving as the primary food source for households (Yan, 2010). With the disintegration of the previous welfare system, household food provision has become the responsibility of individual families. However, this responsibility is not equally shared by all household members. According to the 2020 survey on the social status of Chinese women, employed women spend twice as much time on daily household chores, including caring for family members, cooking, cleaning, and shopping, compared to men (China Women's News, 2021). This national survey indicates that household food preparation remains predominantly a woman's task. This chapter will focus on two main food provision activities—grocery shopping and meal planning—to examine the trajectory of household food provision practices. To be more specific, I will explore the continuity and changes in grocery shopping and meal planning practices over time and across different contexts. For households living in Nanjing, what are the transitions and adaptations in their daily household food provision after the market reform? For households living in Sheffield, with their migration experience, what are their new experience and challenges? I will also examine the dynamics of food femininities related to household food provision among households living in Nanjing and Sheffield.

This chapter is organised as follows. The first section is about grocery shopping. I will use practice theory to explain how shopping can be understood as a skilled practice. In this section, I will begin to investigate the influence of neoliberalism on grocery shopping and examine the specific food femininities associated with grocery shopping that are constructed through daily experiences. The second section is about designing a menu. I will continue to focus on the cognitive and emotional labour involved in planning meals. These two sections also cover the influence of neoliberalism and its relationship with the gendered division of labour in domestic food provision.

4.2 The practice of grocery shopping

The daily grocery shopping for households can also be viewed as a practice that requires necessary competence and shopping skills to ensure successful performance and stable household food provision or food security (Warde, 2016b; Shove et al., 2012; Blake et al., 2010). Imagining that when you move to a new place in a different city or even a foreign country you have never been to before, the first thing must be finding nearby food stores to get enough basic groceries for the following days. Thanks to the process of globalisation, some people might find their familiar chain supermarket or other food retailers, such as Walmart and Costco, in different cities and countries (Schumilas et al., 2018). Besides, the prevalence of online grocery shopping could alleviate some anxious feelings about accessing food groceries in a new place. With increasing familiarity with the surrounding environment, it is easy for shoppers to forget that shopping requires some knowledge and skills. Based on their daily shopping experience, shoppers could gain a ‘practical sense’ to direct their grocery shopping activities, which refers to a series of thinking activities, such as where to buy and what to buy (Schatzki, 1996). After building a habitual pattern, grocery shopping also becomes unreflective most of the time (Jackson et al., 2006; Warde, 2016b). When household members perceived the grocery shopping activities as naturally completed every day, it is also difficult for them to realise the cognitive and emotional labour involved in grocery shopping (DeVault, 1991). As I will explain below, online shopping is not simply a leisure activity of browsing and adding everything you want to the shopping basket.

Based on the practice theory, this section will uncover that shopping as a practice contains a knowledge of different food stores, such as opening hours, discounts, and available food items, and the skill of comparing different food stores with the consideration of price and quality (DeVault, 1991; Miller, 1998; Jackson et al., 2006; Blake, 2010). Furthermore, shopping practices are also influenced by other daily routines, such as children’s schooling and working hours (Jackson et al., 2006; Halkier, 2010). Grocery shopping for families is also about caring for others, considering their needs and preferences (Miller, 1998). This section will begin with the grocery shopping experiences of households living in Nanjing and then those living in Sheffield. To create an in-situ food environment that allows readers to understand food access, I will provide a brief introduction to the available food stores for each city. This section will compare the shopping experience of Chinese middle-class households living in the UK and China. Although there are some shared values regarding grocery shopping, such as a pursuit of quality and value for money, their different domestic and working routines, as well as different urban food systems, also shape distinct shopping habits among households in these two countries. I will also examine the dynamics of doing gender in grocery shopping within the households’ daily grocery shopping experience.

4.2.1 Nanjing

Based on the interviews and fieldwork observations, several different food stores surround the participants’ residential areas, including a wet market, a community grocery store, a supermarket, a low-price grocery store, and a fruit shop. This finding is also consistent with previous studies on food accessibility in Nanjing City (Zhong et al., 2021). All these different food stores are within 15 minutes’ walking distance for residents (Zhong et al., 2021). The presence of various food stores in residents’ living areas could demonstrate the achievement of Nanjing urban food policy (Zhong et al., 2021). The following picture contains participants’ nearby food stores.

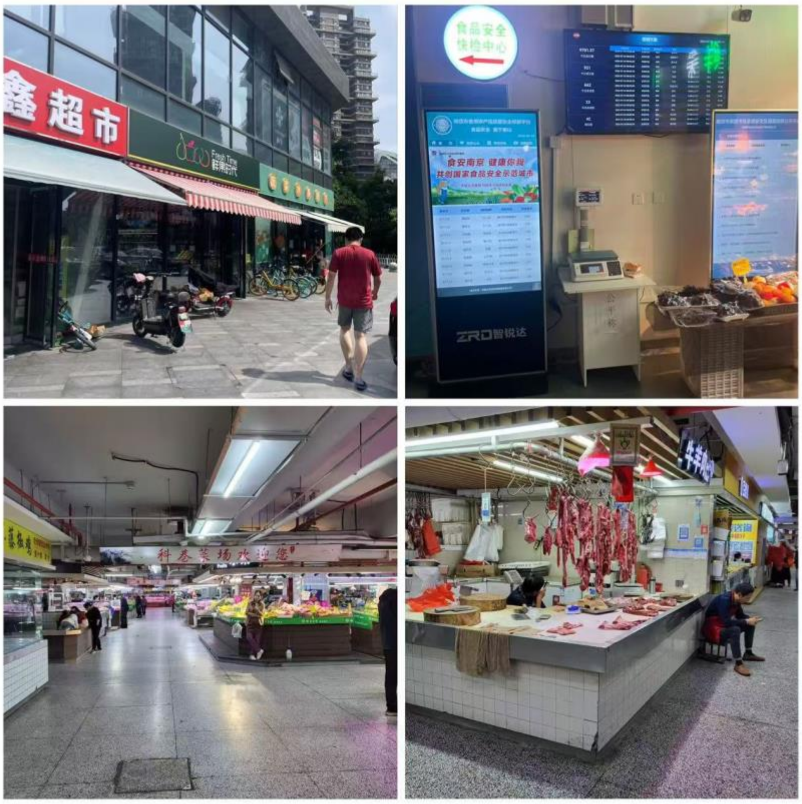

Figure 1 the nearby food stores (on the top left is nearby fruit and vegetable stores, top right is a food safety test site within a wet market, the bottom photos are the wet market. (Source: the top two *are from the* author's *own and bottom* two *from one participant)*

Convenience has a changing meaning

A common experience for participants living in Nanjing is that their daily grocery shopping is constrained by their other daily routines, especially their working hours. Even though their surrounding living areas offer various food stores, their choices of using these stores are determined by their work arrangements and commuting times. To be more specific, distance still takes a place in considering where to shop for convenience. However, the meaning of convenience is not just about a close distance from home to nearby food stores, but rather it is continuously negotiated in the daily routines of urban professionals and their household contexts (Jackson et al., 2006; Blake et al., 2010).

Some participants mentioned a mismatch between the opening hours of their surrounding food stores and their working hours. Jingle is a product manager in her 30s, working for a state-owned company. Jingle is also a Nanjing local and lives alone in her own apartment. Jingle used to shop in the surrounding wet market, but now mainly uses online grocery shopping. Jingle explained that

'People usually go to the wet market in the early morning. It closes at noon and reopens at around 4 pm. Since I live far away from the workplace, it is not a rational choice for me to use the wet market. If I go to the wet market near the workplace, I must carry a bulk of stuff on the subway back home. But if I choose to use the wet market close to home, the time I arrive there will be the closing time, which means I could have very few choices of food items.'

Zhang, in his 30s, works in the real estate industry. Zhang and his wife, Bella, are also Nanjing locals, living close to their parents. Zhang explained that sometimes their parents would bring the couple some fresh vegetables and meat from the wet market, or directly purchase from the local farmers. The couple has a daughter, who was a small baby during the interview period. Since I interviewed both couples separately, I could gather more details about their understanding of their grocery shopping habits. Zhang explained that

'In Metro and Sam's Club, we bought many frozen foods. We had a rushed morning, so we pre-heated the frozen food for the next day's breakfast. For vegetables, we rarely eat at home, except at weekends. Since both of us are Nanjing locals (Zhang and his wife), both of our parents brought many vegetables. They could go to the wet market at 5 or 6 am in the early morning or buy the vegetables from local farmers. But we don't mind that. We rarely buy fresh vegetables from the supermarket, as they can spoil after being stored for a while. Unlike other stores, these two supermarkets have extended hours until around 10 pm. If I had extra work from the company, I would arrive home at 8 pm. If I went out to drive at 9 pm, just 20 minutes to Sam's Club, then I still had 40 minutes for shopping. We rarely considered using the wet market.'

In another interview with Bella, she also explained that

'Every one or two weeks, we go to the supermarket for bulk shopping. Both of us are too busy, so we usually cook less, and we buy a lot of meat and a few vegetables. Most of the food items we purchased are frozen, such as frozen steamed stuffed buns and frozen chicken wings. These are very convenient to heat. We prioritise convenience over nutrition and taste. We are too busy. It is not realistic for us to buy groceries from the wet market every day and prepare meals.'

Before starting the interview with Bella, I also took a look around the nearby wet market. The distance from their residential area to the wet market is around 10 minutes by car. The wet market is located within a food market that also includes some small restaurants and chain food shops selling dairy products and snacks. Since I visited it at noon, it was still in the closing hour. I found that this wet market even had a food-safety testing point. Background information is that the couple are living in a high-end residential complex. Both couples are from middle-class families. For their grocery shopping, the couple also use expensive foreign chain supermarkets like the Metro and Sam's Club. A contradictory point is that, based on this background information about class, according to Bourdieu's (2000) understanding, these couples should pursue high-quality, fresh food items. However, the couple bought many convenient foods to fit in their busy working hours. This example also reflects a conflict between the daily grocery shopping and the working arrangements. The urban food policy could ensure the presence of essential stores, such as wet markets and supermarkets.

However, how to utilise different food stores and find methods to fit into daily routines remains an individualised problem for households to manage in their daily lives.

Managing the use of different food stores is also a continuous negotiation process that involves weighing the various dimensions, including time, distance, quality, and price. Mr SpongeBob and Mrs Patrick Star are in their 30s, both working in the urban planning industry and holding manager positions. Both engaged in grocery shopping. They also introduced some changes before and after they moved to their new apartment. When they graduated from their master's studies and started to rent a house outside the campus, the couple often cooked and bought groceries from the nearby wet market after work. Since they moved to their new apartment, the couple had a longer commute time and therefore decreased their frequency of cooking. The couple said that they often decided what to eat for dinner after work and then chose to buy food ingredients or eat out.

Researcher: When do you usually buy food groceries?

Sponge Bob: After work, or we buy some during the weekends for stocking.

Patrick Star: We rarely prepare grocery food on weekdays. It is a hassle. Basically, if we decided to eat at home for dinner, he (SpongeBob) would go to the community store rather than the big wet market. The price of the community store is more expensive than those of the wet market.

SpongeBob: I do more grocery shopping. So, I know that the prices of fish were over 20% to 30% higher than those offered by the wet market…We have several surrounding wet markets. I usually compare the prices of the two stores we frequently use. One has a cheap price, but the food was not fresh. It seems that freshness and an inexpensive price cannot coexist.

From their conversations, choosing where to shop also requires knowledge of the opening hours, prices and quality of different food stores. For the SpongeBob and Patrick star couple, this knowledge was acquired through a daily learning process of navigating their surrounding food stores.

Research participants mentioned the food items and services offered by various stores, which could also influence their grocery shopping choices. Tang Tang and Xixi are roommates, in their 20s. These two young women, both of whom have recently graduated from their master's studies, are seeking employment in Nanjing. Their grocery shopping involved using different food stores for different food items. Tang Tang introduced that

'The wet market near our apartment is very small. It also has a limited selection of food items. For example, it does not have beef and lamb, but only pork. If I want to buy beef and lamb, I will find a different place, either buying from the supermarket in advance or using online shopping. I have become more price-conscious lately. In the past, I often used Daily Fresh and Dingdong (both are online grocery shopping platforms). But their prices were not cheap. Now I often go to the wet market or a chain fresh food store just under our residential building. They have a cheap price compared with the stores I previously used.'

Tang Tang and Xixi also introduced a chain food store named Little Red Island, which offered the lowest market price. The Little Red Island does not provide fresh food, mainly offering processed food such as snacks, eggs, rice, and instant food. They also bought their snacks and raw eggs from this store.

‘Its products are very cheap. Its Yuanqi forest (a Chinese soft drink) only costs 4.5 yuan, but in other places, it could be 5.5 or 6 yuan for a bottle. Really cheap price.’

Since Tang Tang and Xixi did not start their work, they also had enough time to explore, compare, and combine the different food stores to obtain the necessary food items.

Xiao Ming, in her 30s, works as a clerk in Nanjing. In Xiao Ming’s family, she was mainly responsible for the grocery shopping and cooking. The first time I met Xiao Ming was at a Hema Fresh sub-branch, where we shared coconut drinks. During our first meeting, I also learned that she often used the nearby Hema Fresh for grocery shopping. Other participants also mentioned their preference for using Hema Fresh, for its high food quality, convenience, and services, such as providing deli food for shoppers. The sub-branches of Hema Fresh in Nanjing are often located near their frequently used places, such as their company or their children’s extracurricular activity school, seamlessly fitting into their daily routines. Later, in our interview, Xiao Ming mentioned that she no longer used Hema Fresh and had chosen another online food shopping platform.

Xiao Ming: ‘Now I use Dingdong. Previously, I used Hema Fresh. But in a recent period, I feel their after-purchase service is not good. I even made a report, but I didn’t receive a response. I felt so angry, so I changed to use Dingdong.’

Researcher: Do you feel okay to talk about the reason? What happened with the Hema Fresh?

Xiao Ming: ‘For example, a common issue with Hema is that after you place an order, they don’t notify you in advance that some items are already sold out. The delivery person only tells you when they arrive at the door that some items were missing and that they’ve already processed a refund. But you know, sometimes those missing items were the whole reason I placed the order in the first place—I had added other things specifically to complete the order for delivery. Having them process a refund without any notification is just really annoying.’

In Xiao Ming’s story, the services and quality of food retailers such as Hema and Dingdong are the primary considerations for her family’s grocery shopping. Xiao Ming further explained that she often chose to buy the cheapest fresh products from these two platforms, which are also of good enough quality.

From these different stories, grocery shopping can be understood as a game of trade-offs involving price and quality, time, and distance (Miller, 1998; Blake et al., 2010). These different considerations are also constrained by daily routines, shopping circumstances (Blake et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2006), and the broader socioeconomic environment (Warde, 2016b). Participants also mentioned the influence of the economic recession in recent years on their grocery shopping. Tang Tang and Xixi expressed that although they did not make a specific budget plan, they were concerned about saving money on shopping, but still would like to pay for some expensive food items they wanted. Xiao Ming also mentioned that since the COVID-19 lockdown resulted in some wage cuts, she chose to purchase green leafy vegetables at an average price instead of buying a special supply for Hong Kong. These special supply vegetables have high quality and are free of pesticide residue, but they are also more expensive. My findings recognised the influence of economic recession on daily grocery shopping choices. However, since the purpose of this section is to demonstrate how practice theory can facilitate an understanding of daily grocery shopping, I will not expand further on the impact of the larger economic environment.

Based on practice theory, the carriers of grocery shopping practices are competent ones who possess the knowledge of what is available in their surrounding stores. The differences in price and quality, and the skill of combining the different food stores. They also could make adaptations to fit into their daily routines (Warde, 2016b). However, what practice theory does not address is the hidden efforts and labour required to form competence. What makes the shopping practice work smoothly is a 'practical sense' (Warde, 2016b). With a gender lens, this study will reveal that practical sense is not an innate ability, but rather a constructed, gendered division of labour in the household, and how it can reinforce women's daily care burden in household food provision.

'Every day, we are doing shopping'

This section begins to examine the gendered cognitive and emotional labour involved in grocery shopping, which I will also continue to explore in the designing menu section. In a previous study, cognitive labour in grocery shopping includes anticipating household food stocks and considering the different needs of household members (DeVault, 1991). This section will explore how grocery shopping is a site of 'doing gender' in households' daily experience (Miller, 1998; Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Cairns and Johnston (2015) also suggested a food femininity, which is related to grocery shopping, that women are always concerned about finding the best values and providing nutritious food for family members. This is not to support an essentialist understanding of women's association with food and grocery shopping (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). This section focuses on the dynamics of doing gender in daily household grocery shopping, rather than on how the gender discourse about feeding the family is often imposed on women. The following part will add another layer to the grocery shopping practice. I will demonstrate how shopping skills and knowledge of making choices among different stores can also be viewed as mental labour, such as cognitive and emotional labour, and how these mental labours become women's work in households' daily arrangements (DeVault, 1991; Cairns and Johnston, 2015).

Rose, in her 40s, now works in a state-owned company and holds a managerial position. Rose's husband works in the bank, also taking a manager position. The couple have a middle-school age daughter. In Rose's family, she undertook all the household chores, while her husband took on the role of the family's economic provider. For their daily grocery shopping, Rose made the choices for where to buy groceries, which is also determined by her working arrangement and working hours. Rose explained that

'In my parents' generation, they could go to the wet market and bring their groceries back to their workplace. However, we are no longer allowed to do this. When I first got married, I was very worried about food groceries and how I could squeeze in time for preparing meals. Now I use my weekends to buy a bulk of meat from the supermarket for stocking. Then the difficulty is buying vegetables. I combine using the online shopping and the nearby community store to supplement when something is missing.'

This narrative also expresses a food femininity in grocery shopping that ensuring the household food provision with fresh meat and vegetables is women's daily responsibility (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Since ensuring households' daily grocery shopping is necessary for family members' sustenance and well-being, this responsibility also carries a specific moral burden for women, especially when they are unable to complete this task. In this example, Rose also mentioned her deep worries when she had no idea where to buy groceries at the beginning of her married life (Miller, 1998).

Rose also expressed complaints about her responsibility in reminding other family members to let her know whether they had consumed all the drinks stored in the fridge. For example, her husband often neglected to consider the needs of other family members. Rose said that

'I rarely consider what my husband likes. He doesn't eat with us at home. But if you buy the soft drinks, he drinks some too. For example, I stock some Diet Coke because everyone can drink it. My daughter just wants to taste it. I'm concerned about healthy and diet, like I can't have sugar. My husband also drinks fruit juice. I often find, after getting back home, I think I still have a bottle of fruit juice, but after opening the fridge, it's already gone. So, I have to tell him again, "At least, you should tell me."'

Rose's story reflects how food femininity is negotiated in daily household arrangements and constructed through the daily shopping experience (DeVault, 1991). Since Rose's husband took the role of economic provider, he could be exempt from the daily household provision activities. With daily shopping experience, Rose also built the knowledge and skills of using different food stores and could make arrangements for frequently consumed food items, which also reinforces a food femininity in grocery shopping (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Since cognitive labour is incorporated into daily shopping skills, which also solidifies grocery shopping as women's work, it is difficult to recognise its consequences (DeVault, 1991). In this narrative, Rose also expressed an annoyed feeling about constantly doing cognitive labour, such as reminding her husband to let her know whether to replenish the soft drink in the fridge. In the following story, I will continue to examine the cognitive labour involved in grocery shopping and explain how this is often even invisible to labourers themselves.

Dengjing and her husband are both university staff. They have a daughter who is in primary school. Dengjing's mother-in-law has also lived with them since the birth of her daughter. According to Dengjing, Dengjing 's mother-in-law was mainly responsible for grocery shopping at the wet market on weekdays. Dengjing 's husband also shared the grocery shopping on weekends. Dengjing did most of the online shopping, especially for her daughter's frozen food and snacks. Sometimes, Denjing also searched for new dishes in the Red Note and forwarded them to her husband to let him evaluate whether he could make them.

Although Dengjing said she did less cooking and grocery shopping, I found that she carried out many cognitive labours in shopping, such as identifying different online shopping options and researching discount vouchers (Daminger, 2019). Dengjing also introduced many online shopping platforms she used to purchase other food items. She often used an online application called What is Valuable (什么值得买) to get snacks, especially ice cream, for her daughter. Since this application offers many discount vouchers, Dengjing also researched the best price for her order with these discounts. For fruit shopping, Dengjing also joined a WeChat chatting group formerly organised by a shopkeeper to communicate with the customers. In this chat group, consumers also shared the reliable stores they patronised. Dengjing also used the group members' recommended shops to buy beef jerky as her daughter's snack.

Dengjing explained that her husband rarely had time to buy snacks from online shopping. She often used her break time to explore various online shopping platforms. In Denjing 's narrative, she even tended to downplay her efforts in grocery shopping. Although her husband is involved in the 'formal' grocery shopping, going to the wet market for fresh food, it only happens a few times a week on weekends. However, Dengjing engaged in a series of daily cognitive labours, such as constantly tracking the information about discounts, comparing prices of different food stores, and communicating with other consumers to share their experiences. In our conversation, Dengjing also said that 'every day, we are doing shopping'. This is also the subtitle of this section. Since the daily shopping often happened during Dengjing's break during work, Dengjing also treated the grocery shopping as a leisure activity or her personal interest in using online shopping. This perception also renders the constant cognitive labour involved in using online shopping invisible, reducing it to a personal skill or interest, which can also justify and reinforce the unequal gender division of labour in food shopping (Daminger, 2019). I will also explain more about the influence of invisible cognitive labour in the practice of designing menus.

The last story is still about responsibility in grocery shopping. In this story, I will introduce an unmarried man's grocery shopping story. Bai, in his 30s, works in a law firm and has his own apartment in Nanjing. Bai often cooks for himself and usually buys groceries from a nearby wet market. Bai described his experience of using different food stores.

'I often use the nearby wet market. During 2020, I also used online grocery shopping. It was very popular during that time. But the quality is just average. I still use the wet market most of the time. You can check the freshness. However, when using online shopping, it's difficult to determine the quality. A difference is that when you use online shopping, you can feel like you are making an expenditure and have to continue thinking about the value of the money. It was as if you spent 100 yuan, you have to consider how to gain 300 yuan in your shopping. You are always thinking about these things, such as the quantity, discounts, and delivery fees. It is very exhausting and not pleasant. But in the wet market, although you are still shopping for food, you can have a sense of living. You need to compare the freshness and choose what you want to eat.'

An interesting point is that Bai's narrative directly highlights the cognitive labour involved, such as constantly thinking, comparing, and counting for spending. However, compared with Dengjing and Rose, who shared responsibility for the family, he may have the option to avoid these mental activities and enjoy the pleasure of shopping at the wet market.

The following section will be the grocery shopping experience of Chinese households living in Sheffield. I will continue to examine how migration experiences bring some changes and continuity in the grocery shopping experience. As I did for the Nanjing section, I will start with an introduction to the food environment in Sheffield.

4.2.2 Sheffield

For Chinese households living in Sheffield, their daily grocery shopping involves navigating a complex food environment. They mainly make choices between various local British supermarkets, such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, and the more expensive options like Waitrose and Marks & Spencer. A key consideration, however, is their specific culinary requirements, which they typically meet by purchasing Chinese food items from Chinese supermarkets. For certain cooking materials, such as ribs, they often use the Moor Market, which features independent butcher shops. Some participants who work in food services also mentioned using wholesale markets to purchase fresh vegetables. Compared with households in Nanjing, the daily grocery shopping of Chinese households in Sheffield mainly focuses on food quality, the availability of specific food items such as Asian vegetables and Chinese cooking materials, and price differences across local supermarkets.

Grocery shopping: A learning process

Participants living in Sheffield also consider time and distance. Since many of my participants are PhD students or master's students who don't drive, they often use the nearby supermarkets or food stores located on their daily routes. Duanduan, in her age of 20s, who has finished her master's study, shared that

'When I go to the gym, which is very close to the Waitrose, I often buy groceries. Every time I pass by the Waitrose on my way to the gym, I buy some. Yesterday I bought grapes, chicken, some fruits, and vegetables. These are just for me, and I could not eat too much, so I just bought a little.'

Wenjie, a PhD student in her 20s, also described the changes in her choices between different food stores. Wenjie used to follow the ketogenic diet, which required a variety of meats in her daily diet. She used to buy different kinds of meat from the Moor Market. After completing this specific diet, Wenjie considered more for the convenience of the distance. Wenjie explained that

'I often buy groceries after work, around 5 to 6 p.m. If I am not busy, I will buy some. Most of the time, I wouldn't buy a lot in a week, just once or twice. For fresh vegetables, I often buy twice. I often choose to stop at the supermarket on the way home after I finish running. For the Moor market, I now rarely go there. Although I know they offer some affordable seasonal food and sometimes a variety of different meats, I usually don't consider it unless I have specific needs. I prioritise convenience.'

Both Duanduan and Wenjie mentioned their familiarity with using different food stores, considering household types and daily routines, such as when they are on their way to the gym. For migrant groups who have started to move to a foreign country, this familiarity also requires a learning process of exploring different surrounding food stores. Luoyi, a PhD student, in her 20s, described her first-year experience of discovering the different supermarkets.

'In my first year, I primarily shopped at the nearby Tesco Superstore. I rarely visited Marks & Spencer because it closed at 6 p.m., and in the winter, it would get dark as early as 3 or 4 p.m., making me uncomfortable about walking home in the dark. The large Tesco, however, was very close to my home, just a short walk away. I only went to Waitrose once, as it was too far from my usual walking routes. I also went to Ozmen. During that time, there was only one Chinese supermarket, the KH oriental supermarket. But Ozmen had a cheap price, such as for soy. However, I later discovered that Tesco also stocked some basic Chinese food ingredients. Then I often used Tesco for these things.'

As a researcher with an insider perspective, I sometimes found myself forgetting that the use of different food stores is a learning process built from day-to-day shopping experience. When participants mentioned stores that I was already familiar with, such as Tesco, I knew where they were and their accessibility. This familiarity could impede my awareness of the efforts hidden within habitual shopping activities. From Luoyi's narrative, in her first year of discovering different stores, she gradually developed a knowledge of their various opening hours, distances, available food items, and prices. Later, she also created a mental shopping map to guide her use of these different stores and integrate them into her daily routines (Blake et al., 2010). Luoyi shared that

‘I often used my Saturday for all the food stores I used. From my home, I would go to the Moor Market, Ozmen, the Many Marts Oriental supermarket, the nearby Aldi and then the Waitrose. I usually bought food for a week. At the Moor Market, I often bought chicken giblets to make braised dishes. I also purchased some ribs and cheap fruits. When I went to Aldi, I would buy the frozen chicken breasts because they had the cheapest price. If I wanted to have some fresh chicken breast, I also needed to freeze them for storage. So, I thought, why not just buy frozen chicken breast from Aldi.’

Through the daily shopping experience, Luoyi developed the ability to combine different food stores, considering distance, price, and specific food items. I also found that, through their daily shopping experience, some participants had detailed knowledge of food quality and specific food items at different food stores. For example, Little Rain, a master’s student, in her 20s, shared that

‘I am somewhat of a picky eater. I often buy vegetables and dairy products in Tesco. For meat, I would buy from Waitrose and the Moor Market, basically and seafood from the Moor Market. I usually buy fruits and snacks from Marks & Spencer.’

In their narrative, I did not identify a specific loyalty to local supermarket brands, such as the convenience highlighted by Tesco, a fancy lifestyle represented by Marks & Spencer, and the fair trade offered by Waitrose (Miller, 1998; Blake et al., 2010). Participants rarely mentioned these notions provided by the retailers. Therefore, their shopping experiences did not construct a hierarchical judgement for the different values attached to different food stores. Instead, based on their daily shopping experiences, they developed practical knowledge of the different food qualities and items offered by various local supermarkets.

Liu Xiaoyu is a lecturer who is married and lives in a suburb with her husband. Both are concerned about the quality of food from different stores. For their current grocery shopping, Xiaoyu shared:

‘With a car, it is very convenient for grocery shopping. We live on a hill close to a Tesco, just a 10-minute walk away. If you go further, you can find a small Sainsbury's and a local shop. This local shop offers good quality, which is better than what you can find at the supermarket. If we pass by, we will buy some vegetables, but it does not sell meat. We would visit these shops to purchase a small amount of food. For a week’s bulk shopping, we often go to the big Sainsbury’s, which is close to our climbing place. Another place we both like is Waitrose. Its food quality is better than others. As for Marks & Spencer, the quality is also good, but it has a limited choice.’

In this narrative, Xiaoyu and her husband, a British IT professional, could represent what Bourdieu (2000) said about class and taste. Both the couple have a high socioeconomic status and show a particular preference for high food quality in their grocery shopping. In a comparative example, Cheng's family, in which both Cheng and his wife work at a university, were more concerned about good value for money when using different food stores. Cheng shared that

‘We often use Morrison's, Chinese supermarkets, and the Moor Market, Lidl, and Co-op. We also go to Costco and Tesco. They are cost-effective, especially Morrison's. We usually use Morrison's for a week’s groceries. We also use the Moor Market because of its good value for money...For milk, we often use the nearby TMK supermarket. If we miss out on something at home, we go there to supplement.’

These two examples reveal that even for migrants with similar socio-economic backgrounds, class is not a determining factor in their choice of grocery shopping location. With a practice theory, their choice of using different stores is also influenced by their daily routines and their specific considerations, including the pursuit of high food quality or a good value for money.

An interesting example is from Nock, who is also a PhD student in their 20s. Nock shared their particular preference for the ice creams of Waitrose. Nock also used the Moor Market for shin beef and Tesco for coffee and fruit juices.

Nock: I live close to the Moor Market. I also buy some food from the Moor Market. I use Waitrose twice a month. When I go grocery shopping, I also check to see if Waitrose has any new products.

Researcher: Why did you choose Waitrose over other stores, such as Marks & Spencer?

Nock: Of course, I did not forget them. A small reason is that Waitrose’s own-brand ice cream is very delicious. Every time, I would buy some.

Researcher: You do the shopping just for the ice cream?

Nock: Yes, the coffee ice cream tastes delicious. Because it’s their own branding, I couldn’t obtain it from somewhere else.

In this example, the specific food item, such as Waitrose’s own-brand ice cream, is the main reason why Nock chose to use it. Sometimes, finding specific food items could be a challenging task for migrant groups. Some participants mentioned the limited choice of familiar Asian vegetables, especially green leafy ones. Another challenging task is finding proper pork without boar taint in local supermarkets. A common experience is that participants reported that the pork they bought from local supermarkets often has unbearable boar taint and is hard to remove during cooking.

Stone, a PhD student in her 20s, who has lived in the UK for over three years, shared her experience of using different stores to buy fresh pork.

‘I rarely buy pork in the supermarket. It often has boar taint, even for Waitrose. For the pork from Tesco, I can’t bear its smell. It is like the smell of a public toilet. Later, my landlord recommended that I try the pork sold in a local independent shop. Many well-off people often patronise there. I tried once, and it was good. I often buy pork from that store. Unfortunately, it is closed. Now I have to discover other stores.'

Christy is a housewife who moved from Hong Kong with her family around three years ago, and she also mentioned the different prices of vegetables.

'Many of the vegetables in the UK are Western vegetables, and this kind of vegetable is expensive in Hong Kong. For example, bell pepper. But in the UK, if you want to eat Asian vegetables like bok choy or choy sum, first of all, you can seldom buy them, and they are costly.'

Zhuge, in his 30s, who works in the IT industry in Sheffield, introduced his specific access to the local wholesale market, which allows him to obtain fresh vegetables. Other participants who work in the food services also mentioned this venue for buying fresh vegetables.

'My friend has a supermarket. I often buy vegetables from there. Every Tuesday and Friday, when it stocks vegetables from the wholesale market, I will buy some. The vegetables are from Spain. You know the wholesale market? Sheffield has two big wholesale markets. I can't say they have the cheapest price, but the freshness is the best.'

These narratives also demonstrate that for migrant groups with specific culinary habits, such as the frequent use of pork and Asian vegetables in daily dishes, finding these proper food items requires a learning process when they move to a foreign country with a different culinary culture. From their day-to-day shopping experience, they can build knowledge about where to find these specific food items. Different participants' narratives also demonstrated an intra-group difference in handling access to specific food items during daily grocery shopping. Christy mentioned the high price of vegetables and highlighted the difficulty in finding access. For Zhuge and Stone, they can use their personal networks, such as from their friends and landlord, to obtain specific food items.

I also identified a crisis of living costs in Chinese households' daily grocery shopping. In this section, I will not expand too much, as the inflation of food prices and food shortages are also related to food risk. I will leave more content in the chapter on food risk. Similar to participants living in Nanjing, Chinese households in Sheffield also exhibited a cautious attitude towards their grocery shopping expenditures. I also asked them about their budget management. A common response, even from married couples, was that they did not create a budget plan or even care about their food spending. This does not mean that they are not sensitive to the changes in food prices.

Christy moved from Hong Kong with her family and has been living in Sheffield for over two years. Since Christy is mainly responsible for the housework in her family, she has a clear sense of the changes in food prices. Christy shared that

'The first year, everything is quite good. But in the second year, you will see everything grow. I buy almost every day. So, it is easy to remember the price. It's gone up again and again. It also influences my shopping choices. For example, in Hong Kong, we would buy Heinz ketchup, but Heinz is very expensive here. Now we will try Morrison's own brand.'

In this quote, by building her knowledge of food prices and the qualities of different brands in daily grocery shopping, Christy also developed the competence to adapt to rapidly growing food prices by using cheaper alternatives. This part examined the continuity and changes in grocery shopping for Chinese migrant households living in Sheffield. The following part will continue to examine the changes in gender relations in people's daily grocery shopping activities.

Demanding conditions for positive changes in the division of labour

Compared with participants in Nanjing, I found that Chinese households in Sheffield showed a more equal division of labour, with men's greater involvement in the household's daily grocery shopping. For example, Cheng, who often engaged in daily shopping, could notice the different food prices at various food stores, which suggests that Cheng also shared some cognitive labour in grocery shopping. Except for Christy's family, after they moved from Hong Kong to Sheffield, her husband now works in the Church, while Christy changed her role from employed woman to housewife. I was also curious about the conditions under which these positive changes in daily grocery shopping could happen for Chinese households living in Sheffield. I will also continue to explore these questions in the subsequent section on meal planning. This part marks the beginning of exploring positive changes in the gender relations of some Chinese households living in Sheffield.

In *Peer Marriage*, Pepper Schwartz (1995) proposed that couples with an egalitarian relationship and a more equal division of labour exhibit specific prominent characteristics. For example, both the couple had similar socio-economic backgrounds and shared the value that they rejected traditional gender roles, where men were the sole economic providers and women were housewives staying at home. Egalitarian couples could also mutually support each other in their careers and give equal weight to each other's work (Schwartz, 1995). Furthermore, the husband's working hours could be more flexible to allow for greater engagement in household tasks (Schwartz, 1995). Another study on Spanish childless couples' egalitarian division of labour also found similar results, indicating that men's flexible time availability and their willingness to engage in an egalitarian relationship are key factors in the equal allocation of housework (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2017).

For the examples I have introduced before, Cheng and his wife both work in the university and have a similar schedule, which could allow Cheng to be more engaged in daily grocery shopping. In Liu Xiaoyu's family, her husband also showed support for her career and could actively share more when Liu was busy with her research.

I will share two stories, which are both related to the flexibility of men's work. Qiao is a PhD student in her 20s and lives with her boyfriend, a British local who works in the IT department. Since Qiao's boyfriend quit his job, they could have more time for cooking at home. Qiao does not like cooking as much as her boyfriend. In their household, Qiao's boyfriend shared more of the cognitive work involved in tracking their stocks and making a shopping list. I also interviewed with Qiao and her boyfriend together. Her boyfriend explained that

‘I just mentally try to keep track of what we’re missing, like vegetables and stuff. I can mentally keep track of it, but when things are finishing, like rice or pasta or some other ingredient, which we usually have a lot of in the house, then I’ll write it down.’

Another story is YuYu’s family. YuYu is in her 20s and works as an independent blogger on a social media platform. After completing her master’s studies, YuYu got married to her British husband. The couple has three children. In YuYu’s family, she takes the role of the economic provider by running their social media account. Her husband shares more in childcare and food preparation. When asked about the food prices, YuYu mentioned that her husband always complained about the high food prices of milk and eggs, which had almost doubled. YuYu also mentioned that

‘For grocery shopping, if we go to the supermarket together, I will pay for it. If it’s just himself, then he pays for it. For our money, we distribute it equally among our accounts. So, our cost of living is half and half. Some money has been saved in my account. I also take charge of the big items for our family.’

From these narratives, it is evident that the men in the households have a flexible schedule; therefore, they can engage more in daily grocery shopping. Furthermore, in YuYu’s family, YuYu is the primary economic provider, as she manages their social media account. These examples also showed the demanding conditions for ensuring a substantively equal division of labour in grocery shopping, with men’s flexibility in their work and women’s significant economic independence. This section highlights some positive changes in gender relations in the daily grocery shopping practices of Chinese migrant households. However, the demanding conditions for supporting the changes also indicate the difficulty of practising a truly egalitarian gendered division of labour in households’ daily life. I argue that these instances are even exceptional compared with other households. In the next section on planning meals, I will continue to examine the changes and what remains in the gendered division of labour.

Comparative analysis

The two sections have demonstrated that grocery shopping can be understood as a practice that requires knowledge of different food stores and the shopping skill of making choices on how to utilise different food stores, considering factors such as time, distance, quality, and prices. With the lens of practice theory, the shopping knowledge and skill could also form a competence or a practice sense to be applied in making arrangements for grocery shopping and other mundane daily practices (Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012). Most of the time, the practical sense could make the grocery shopping experience unreflective. For Chinese migrant households, they need a learning process to build a practical sense of grocery shopping with familiarity with their surrounding food stores. In both sites, I identified the influence of neoliberalism on the daily grocery shopping experience. Although the Nanjing government ensured the convenience of physical distance, individual households still faced the problem of how to use the different surrounding food stores, given their daily working arrangements. For transitions in grocery shopping, participants mentioned that, compared to their parents, who still preferred to use the wet market for obtaining fresh food, they chose to use online grocery shopping, which offered more flexible shopping hours. For the Chinese households living in Sheffield, they also had the problem of finding secure access to specific food items such as Asian vegetables, which usually have a higher price in the UK. Participants in Sheffield also mentioned their use of the Moor Market, which could satisfy their needs for specific Asian vegetables and meat. In a neoliberal context, these problems of grocery shopping are framed as individualised responsibilities, leaving the individual family to find solutions, rather than promoting a further transformation of a more inclusive urban food system.

Individualised responsibility is not equally distributed within households. Previous applications of practice theory have not focused on the uneven distribution of shopping competence within the household and its relationship to gender inequality (Halkier, 2010; Shove et al., 2012). Furthermore, previous applications did not account for the mental labour involved in grocery shopping competence (Shove et al., 2012). For households living in Nanjing, married couples also relied on the support from their elder parents to share their daily childcare and grocery shopping. However, the support from elder parents and the use of online shopping did not relieve women's cognitive and emotional labour in grocery shopping. I argue that online grocery shopping even contributes to a specific food grocery shopping femininity in Chinese-specific contexts. The rise of consumerism since the 1980s economic reforms and the rapid development of online shopping in China have encouraged Chinese urban middle-class women to use their online consumption to express their buying power, which is often distorted as women's empowerment in the neoliberal discourse era (Meng and Huang, 2017). In the discourse of women's empowerment, the cognitive and emotional labour involved in online grocery shopping is framed as representing women's competence in using online shopping platforms, utilising specific shopping skills, and their empowerment in the e-commerce era. A vicious circle of unequal division of labour in grocery shopping is that women's shopping skills and experience are explained by their greater interest in online shopping. Therefore, women are more competent to carry out online grocery shopping, which could perpetuate an unequal gender division of labour in grocery shopping. The specific nature of online shopping platforms, which allow shoppers to use them at any time by simply clicking on a mobile phone application, could also extend cognitive labour, such as planning and thinking about what to stock while using them.

For Chinese households living in Sheffield, the migration experience also brings about some positive changes in the household division of labour, with men's increased involvement in grocery shopping. I also identified that truly shared mental activities for men and women required demanding conditions, such as men's more flexible working arrangements or women's roles as the economic providers of households. The following section will continue to examine the cognitive and emotional labour involved in household food provision. The following section will focus on planning for a family meal.

4.3 The practice of designing a menu

In this subtitle, I have already used the verb 'designing', because I want to highlight the mental labour involved in preparing daily meals for Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. In *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) used a metaphor that planning for family meals is like figuring out a puzzle by discovering what family members like and dislike, noticing their specific needs, and monitoring changes in their tastes and some new needs, especially for children. Since family members may not directly communicate their likes and dislikes, planning meals requires constant attention and effort to learn and discover their preferences (DeVault, 1991). DeVault's study (1991) demonstrated how the value of family is constructed in the daily family meals and the hidden efforts made by women, which also contribute to an unequal gender division of labour in preparing meals. Although preparing meals is the objective form of love and care (Miller, 1998), the cognitive and emotional labour involved in the planning process also makes the daily care work of feeding the family more complex.

This section will make a separate explanation for cognitive and emotional labour to avoid underestimating the consequences and influence of each different mental activity. Cognitive labour involved in preparing meals includes identifying family members' needs and preferences for food, selecting options, such as sorting through healthy eating information, making decisions for others or oneself when preparing meals, and monitoring the outcomes, including feedback from family members (Daminger, 2019). In this study, emotional labour is related to cognitive labour, which can be viewed as the psychological consequence of cognitive work (Dean et al., 2022). For example, the constant attention and efforts could also cause a feeling of exhaustion and fatigue from the endless cognitive work (Dean et al., 2022).

With a lens of practice theory, this section will continue to examine how urban households handle the conflicts between working arrangements and preparing daily meals in a neoliberal context. I will continue to examine the food femininity related to planning meals. In this section, food femininity is not a given nature of women; rather, it can be understood as both a gender discourse and a gender practice, which is enacted and reframed in daily food practices (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). I will go further to explore the influence of neoliberalism, examining how it contributes to the construction of the gendered division in household provision and renders the gendered emotional and cognitive labour invisible. This section also covers the discussion of how participants perceive their division of labour in household food provision. I will begin with the daily experiences of Nanjing households and then describe the experiences of Chinese households living in Sheffield.

4.3.1 Nanjing

Designing a menu can also be viewed as a practice that requires culinary knowledge about what constitutes a proper and nutritious meal, as well as specific food knowledge. Rae, in her 20s, a designer, living with her parents, introduced that her family's typical meal consists of one cooked meat dish, one vegetable dish, and one soup, or having two meat-vegetable dishes and a slide like mixed cucumber, basically two dishes and one soup combination for a nuclear family.

Jingle introduced that her routinised way of planning for a week's dishes is based on the different food items. Jingle said that

'When I use the online shopping platform, I will think about what I want to eat for a week. For some food items that cannot be stored for long, such as certain green leafy vegetables, I will buy less of them. For others, such as potatoes, they can be stored in the fridge for a longer period. I will eat them later, after those perishable vegetables.'

The ability to design a menu is also related to shopping knowledge and cooking skills. A common experience is that for those who usually cook, they can simply walk into their familiar food stores or check online shopping sites. After reviewing the available food items, they can create a menu in mind with several dishes. When asking about making a specific plan for the meals, CY, in her 20s, who works in a medical company, said that

'It depends on what I can see in the supermarket. Then I will think about buying this or that for the dishes next week.'

For those new to cooking, clear guidance is needed for preparing dishes. Xiao Zheng, in his 20s, is a master's student. In his summer internship, Xiao Zheng often cooked for himself. Xiao Zheng shared that

'I am not good at cooking. I must follow the guidance from the cooking application to prepare the dishes I want to eat.'

Both narratives highlight the competence in designing a menu, with an understanding of what constitutes a proper meal, and the specific food knowledge to plan for using different food items, as well as the related knowledge about cooking and grocery shopping. However, what Schatzki's practice theory (1996) overlooks is that, in certain situations, people may lack the bodily capacity and energy to engage in the series of mental activities required to think about what to eat (Walker, 2013).

I will examine the experience of incapacity in the following section and explain how this experience can be linked to love and care in meal planning.

Multiple forms of love and care

This part will focus on explaining the influence of working on the practice of designing a menu. I will use several stories from young urban professionals to introduce their diverse experiences with care and love in preparing meals. Abel, in his 20s, has been working in a sales company in Nanjing for around two years after graduating. For Abel, even though he just needed to think about one person's meal, planning is very burdensome. Abel explained that he needs to use his break time at work to plan the dishes, or he would be too tired to continue after work. Abel said that

‘I often use the slacking off time (mō yú 摸鱼, a popular Chinese internet buzzword, which refers to how office workers will use a short time of their working hour to do something else, such as creating time for leisure activity) to think about what I want to eat and then go shopping after work. If I start to think about these just after finishing my work, I will be too exhausted to plan for the dishes. Then I will choose to go out for my dinner.’

This is a complex story of the influence of work, including both its constraints and small resistance (Bissell, 2020). Abel mentioned how working exhausted his energy for preparing meals. He also mentioned that he secretly used a portion of his working hours, which ought not to be considered leisure time, to think about what to eat.

For some participants, planning a meal could evoke a sense of pleasure, serving as an escape from their mundane work. Little Tree, in her 20s, also expressed some discontent with her current job at a sales company. During my fieldwork, I had heard many similar stories about unpleasant and even oppressive working environments. Although Little Tree was not interested in sales work, under peer pressure, she decided to settle down in Nanjing after graduation. From her perspective, planning meals could help her gain a sense of control in her daily life. Little Tree said that

‘When staying in the kitchen, I just need to follow the steps without thinking about other things. I just follow the recipe step by step. (Laughing). For baking, I only need to know the temperature. At least, baking provides a clear step-by-step process. You also could have many chances to try it. However, in real life, I don’t have a second chance at many things. I like making plans. Doing these things can make me happy. I can have a sense of control over my life.’

For these young people, planning meals is not a mental burden; instead, they can gain some joy from preparing meals. Sora is a lawyer in her 20s and lives alone in Nanjing. Sora often invites her close friend to eat at home. Sora’s friend, Hu Ning, in her 20s, is also a lawyer. Since Sora’s work schedule is more flexible, she often takes the opportunity to work remotely and prepare a meal to eat with Hu Ning together. In our first interview, Sora commented that planning meals with Hu Ning offered her a sense of happiness for a week.

Their meal often consists of three dishes and a soup. Sometimes, Sora asked Hu Ning what she wanted to eat or prepared the dishes based on Hu Ning's likes. During our fridge story interview, the persistent words are 'This is what Hu Ning likes to eat'. Since they had many meals together, it's no wonder Sora's fridge stored so many foods items Hu Ning likes to eat. Once Sora heard Hu Ning introduce her hometown local food, the spicy and sour soup, Sora also learned how to cook it and prepared one for Hu Ning after knowing she was homesick.

Since Hu Ning always gives Sora high praise for her cooking, Sora could gain many positive feelings in preparing meals. However, in some situations, Sora might feel annoyed and even angry. In an interview at Sora's home, I also asked some questions to Hu Ning and Sora together. In this interview, I gained more insight into their friendship and the complex aspects of love and care, which can sometimes cause frustration. Sora also shared the experience that Hu Ning backed out of their meal plan.

'Once, she (Hu Ning) said she could not come for lunch, but later she just let me know that she could arrive in a few minutes. I had already prepared my own meal for around 10 minutes. I just quickly cooked two dishes for her. I was annoyed by these changes. I knew each of my friends' likes and dislikes. I also prepared dishes based on their different preferences. I had planned for how many dishes I had to prepare elaborately in my mind.'

Sora's narrative directly highlighted the elaborate cognitive work. In this story, Sora did more than she thought. Based on Daminger's (2019) definition of cognitive labour, Sora is also involved in anticipating what Hu Ning likes, coordinating their different schedules, and ensuring that Hu Ning will come for a meal. These constant cognitive labours also exacerbated Sora's negative feelings when Hu Ning could not go as she had planned. Although Daminger's (2019) study on cognitive labour primarily focuses on married couples, it also highlights that the low visibility of certain cognitive labour, such as anticipation, can lead to conflicts among couples. This is because another partner may only see the outcome and cannot perceive the continuous mental activities involved in preparing meals. This finding can also be applied here to Sora and Hu Ning's friendship. The low visibility of cognitive labour also confused Hu Ning about how much credit she should give to Sora for Sora's efforts to prepare their meals (Daminger, 2019).

The above three stories are about care and love (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Abel's and Little Tree's accounts demonstrated how self-care influences the practice of designing a menu, despite their differing forms. Abel chose to give up planning for meals as a relief after work. Little Tree used the experience of preparing meals to gain a sense of control in her daily life. Sora's story also contains the aspect of self-care, such as using her remote work chance to eat with Hu Ning and gain some pleasure from their gathering. An interesting point is that both Abel's and Sora's experiences contain how they secretly used their working time to do something else. This secret use of time can also be viewed as a form of small resistance by young office workers to the suppressed working environment in the Chinese context. Chinese sociology scholars have observed the social phenomenon of “lying flat” (tǎng pı́ng 躺平), where many young people are unwilling to engage in endless competitions (Cheng, 2021). Cheng Boqing (2021) provided an explanation linking the exploited working conditions that Chinese young people are currently involved in, characterised by compressed time, with their fast-paced, multi-tasking, and round-the-clock collaborative work. In *Work Over*, McCallum (2020) noted that the time of young office workers was stolen for the accumulation of wealth by capitalists. China’s 996 working schedule (working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days a week) also encroached on young people’s daily lives. As a response, some young people employed the strategy of engaging in self-care during their working hours as a form of resistance.

Sora’s story is also about caring for others. This story also uncovers the complex aspect of love and devotion (Miller, 1998), which can sometimes lead to feelings of disappointment. In our interview, when asked about cooking for others, Sora explained that when cooking and planning meals became a duty, like what her parents did, she would not derive any pleasure from it. The following section will continue to examine the gendered cognitive and emotional labour involved in designing menus and how food femininity in preparing meals is reinforced and challenged in participants’ daily food practices and their perceptions of the gender division of labour.

A stalled gender equality revolution within Chinese households

This part will deepen the gendered analysis of cognitive and emotional labour and examine the influence of neoliberalism on China’s urban families. I also identified the gendered experience of cognitive and emotional labour involved in planning for meals. Jingle used a vivid comment to recall her previous experience of having a grocery shopping with her ex-boyfriend in the wet market. Jingle said that

‘Every time I asked whether he wanted this or that. He just said “Okay”. You felt like you were bringing a soulless robot made of wood. I felt like I was a queen for this household (Laughing). I could decide everything.’

In this quote, Jingle directly expresses her discontent with the constant cognitive labour of providing options for dishes and even making decisions for her boyfriend. With the discourse of the good mother, which defines women’s role in ensuring proper and healthy meals for family members and children, as well as the importance of family values (DeVault, 1991; Cairns and Johnston, 2015), these cognitive labours are often more invisible for married couples.

Shao, a human resource manager in her 30s, works in a media company. Shao and her husband have a 5-year-old son. In Shao’s family, Shao is mainly responsible for the housework. Shao’s parents also help the couple with grocery shopping, cooking, and caring for the child. Each month, Shao gives her parents some money for grocery shopping. Shao also buys a bulk of fresh meat, such as beef and ribs, because her son likes eating meat. Her family usually prepares several meat dishes every day. Her husband is absent from these routine household tasks. Shao explained that her husband engaged in childcare, such as playing with their son. In Shao's narrative, Shao also conducted some cognitive labour, such as identifying her son's preferences in eating, ensuring the variety of meat, and planning for each month's household expenditure.

This example also exemplifies a typical household division of labour for Chinese urban dual-earning couples: women are mainly responsible for the housework and make plans for the allocation of household tasks and expenditures, with the support of their elder parents (Shen, 2011; Liu, 2017). Men in the family are often the helpers, who can optionally engage in childcare, such as assisting with children's education and some leisure activities (Li, 2020; Wang and Keizer, 2024). This arrangement also raises the question of how household food provision and the related cognitive and emotional labour become women's work. The following part will examine participants' perceptions of their division of labour and the influence of neoliberalism.

Most participants expressed the view that couples should share the household division of labour equally. A commonly recognised allocation is that whoever has more available time or finishes work earlier takes on more housework. They did not attribute the division of labour to gender, but rather to different personal schedules and time availability. Y is in his 20s, works for a media company in Nanjing, and lives with his girlfriend. Regarding the division of housework, Y explained

'It's supposed to be half and half. But I don't get many breaks, and she has more free time. So right now, she takes on a greater share of the housework. She does most of the cooking because I often get home late from work. I handle tasks like repairs and cleaning the floors.'

In this quote, although Y expressed an equal attitude toward the division of labour, the reality was that his girlfriend undertook more of the meal preparation because she had more available time. Daminger (2020) in the study on the gendered division of labour also identified that couples who claimed a fair allocation for housework often used a de-gendered process to explain that their current unequal division of labour was not related to gender reasons, but rather to external forces, such as the couple's different schedules. Since participants did not want to disclose their conflict to an outsider, they would create a family myth to justify their current division of labour (Hochschild, 2012). The family myth refers to the idea that couples often present to outsiders as having a shared division of labour to disguise their hidden conflicts (Hochschild, 2012). However, these de-gendered reasons did not weaken the influence of gender, since women still shouldered more of the daily food preparation work (Daminger, 2020).

Another instance is that Xiao Ming used different personal interests in eating to disguise her family's unequal allocation of cognitive and emotional labour. Xiao Ming, who shared all the food preparation work in her family, explained that

‘I care more about eating. I am picky about food and eating. But my husband does not care about eating like I do. He does not have any interest in cooking. So, I am responsible for that. He also has difficulty making choices. I often encouraged him to try to decide what to eat. But he looked very baffled. Therefore, I made the decisions for what to eat.’

In this situation, Xiao Ming used the reason that she and her husband had different interests in eating to justify an unequal division of labour. Although Xiao Ming expressed that she had more power in making decisions, what is hidden from this autonomy is her daily cognitive labour, such as planning their meals with various dishes, and her emotional labour, such as persuading her husband to have a try. Daminger (2019; 2020) also found that in the de-gendered process, women often tended to beautify their husbands’ contributions, while men, even those who were project managers, usually used the reason that they had totally different personalities at work and at home to avoid their planning labour. Xiao Ming’s accounts also exemplify how meal planning becomes a woman’s responsibility in daily interactions. Xiao Ming’s husband also holds a manager position in his company. However, when he returned home to this different sphere, he could use the reason that his personal trait is not suitable for making decisions about eating to justify his exemption from the daily, endless thinking work.

A few of the participants used the traditional gender roles to explain their division of labour. Xiao Zheng’s girlfriend, Yang, in her 20s, who works in a trade company, commented that

‘It (allocation of housework) depends on whoever has more free time. I don’t think it is necessary to use the idea of ‘good father’ or ‘good man’ to judge what a man does in housework. Even though some fathers never engaged in any housework, they were often busy with their work and could provide financial support for their families. With money and caring about family members, they definitely are good fathers.’

Regardless of the de-gendered explanation or this traditional gender assumption, participants attempted to make sense of their current division of labour. Furthermore, their explanations reflect a long-term influence of neoliberalism in Chinese family life. With the disintegration of previous social welfare support provided by urban work units and the marketisation of care infrastructures, such as education and medical care, these care responsibilities were shifted to individual families, especially women within the family (Yan, 2010; Ji et al., 2017). To be more specific, the neoliberal individualisation process, in collaboration with traditional Chinese gender discourse, led employed women to absorb the care burden associated with the ‘second shift’ (Ji et al., 2017). Even though the elder parents could share some household food preparation work, women’s cognitive labour in planning for meals did not get relieved. The neoliberalism discourse, aligned with traditional gender discourse, such as the mother’s role in sustaining family values and ensuring healthy meals (Cairns and Johnston, 2015), and the father’s role as economic provider (Wang and Keizer, 2024), contributes to making women’s daily cognitive and emotional labour unseen.

In recent years, the CCP government has also emphasised the significance of family values in social governance (Lin, 2021). Chinese President Xi Jinping defined that family is not just a living habitat but also plays a role in governing social values and ethos to promote social cohesion (Xi, 2016). Chinese scholars also noticed the importance of family meals as a core part of family life and family values (Lin, 2021). Although in Xi's discourse, the content of Chinese family values consists of Chinese traditional family values and the development of socialism, the logic of governance still embodies the neoliberal idea, which shifts the structural problem to individual families (Beck, 2001; Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Fielding-Singh and Oleschuk, 2023). Without taking a first step to recognise and alleviate women's daily cognitive and emotional labour, this government discourse, which highlights the family's role in social governance, could reinforce women's existing care burden and cause a long-term mental health impact on women (Dean et al., 2022).

The following part will continue to examine the dynamics in the gender relations of households' meal planning in Chinese households living in Sheffield. I will explore whether the immigrants' experiences can facilitate some positive changes in cognitive and emotional labour, and what the differences are in their perceptions of the gender division of labour.

4.3.2 Sheffield

A similar experience is that participants shared their routinised personal menus, which are based on their daily grocery shopping and cooking experiences, considering household types and daily routines. Rui is a PhD student in her 20s who often cooks for herself and her roommate. Rui introduced that

'We usually don't make any plan, unless I have an idea for specific food. I often buy some frequently used meat, such as the little chicken from Waitrose, lamb, short ribs, and beef. I also bought a whole box of shrimp from the Moor Market to store at home. I often ensure that we have different kinds of meat.'

Nock, a PhD student, also shared that they had a routinised plan for their weekly meals. Nock said that

'I will not write down a shopping list. I will keep in mind how much meat I need for the following days. If I might be swamped next week, then I will think that in the following days, I need six packs of different meat, six packs of green leafy vegetables, and five packs of fruits. I will ensure that my daily meal will include a staple food, a meat dish, a vegetable dish and a soup.'

Nock also mentioned that the plan for meals is based on their study and working arrangement. If Nock was too busy for cooking, they also preferred to buy a meal deal from Tesco. These narratives also reflect the competence of successfully planning meals despite participants' different idiosyncratic ways. The following section will use the stories of preparing meals for others to illustrate that the practice of designing a menu is not just a simple technical cognitive activity but can also sometimes relate to negative emotional feelings.

Planning is not a happy thing

Planning for what to eat is not just naturally coming up with some ideas and then making decisions, but instead it is continuously negotiated in daily household interactions. Although Qiao and her boyfriend equally shared in planning meals, Qiao mentioned their constant negotiations over their different ideas on what constitutes a proper meal. Qiao explained that

‘We are still in a breaking-in period for our lunch and dinner. His dinner must be a formal one. I want to eat more for lunch. But he prefers to grab something for lunch. For his dinner, it should include everything typically found in a formal meal. If I just fry something, he thinks that is not a dinner. I still have not figured out what should be dinner for him. Sometimes, I would just cook it, but I could still feel that he insisted what I made was not a dinner and that he felt unhappy about it. Or finally we chose to order takeaway.’

In this quote, a household’s routine meal is also constructed through daily negotiations over different preferences. Sometimes, the negotiation and decision-making are not a happy process for everyone.

Some participants also shared their pressures in planning meals. Xiao Mang recalled her previous cooking experience with her roommate and mentioned the constant pressure of preparing meals. Xiao Mang said that

‘My roommate is a young man. But his cooking is not even as good as mine. I always proposed that we would prepare meals together. And after getting his answer, I would allocate his part. I was annoyed with this work. As roommates, we should share these tasks equally. He could not let me do all the things. My mom also visited me recently. And I could find that when you prepare meals for two people, it is totally different from one person’s meal. You had to plan for how much two people can eat, consider the different dishes, and the available time.’

Xiao Mang’s narrative disclosed how the endless cognitive labour for preparing meals could trigger a stressful feeling (DeVault, 1991). Although this story is not for a couple, Xiao Mang shared more in thinking about what to eat. When this work became her daily routine, she was stressed and even annoyed by having to undertake all the things. Furthermore, this unequal allocation even makes meal planning more like Xiao Mang’s responsibility, given her roommate's unwillingness to participate (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). In their daily interactions for the allocation of food preparation work, an association between women and food emerges. It was Xiao Mang’s daily burden rather than her roommate.

I also identified some subtle rejections of cognitive labour. Deng Jie is living with her boyfriend, who is also a PhD student. In their household, Deng Jie is responsible for all the grocery shopping and cooking work. Her boyfriend will help when they are shopping together. In our interview, when asking about their housework allocation, Deng Jie highlighted that she did not do any housework. However, since Deng Jie could cook quickly, she undertook the daily food preparation work. Deng Jie also claimed that she decided on their meals. The contradictory point is that although Deng Jie expressed having more influence in planning meals, in fact, Deng Jie shared a disproportionate amount of cognitive labour, which even raised her discontent.

Deng Jie recalled a story about her boyfriend inviting his colleagues to dinner at home. Deng Jie shared that

‘Last week, he said some friends would come for dinner. I just got a new electric oven. He decided that they would have some barbecue. Then I cooked chicken and roasted salted lamb. I wanted to stew beef with red wine. I got a new enamel pot. However, my boyfriend said no, as he had already told his friends that they would have a barbecue. So, I just changed it to cook the beef with tomatoes.’

This narrative also reflects a typical division of cognitive labour, where men in the households make an initial invitation and let the women do the rest of the work, such as identifying alternative options for the dishes and planning the entire process (Daminger, 2019). I also asked Deng Jie about the feeling of planning two people’s meals. Deng Jie commented that

‘I felt tired! So, I used a steamer. It could cook all the dishes. You just need to prepare the ingredients. You can put some rice in it and wait. I have made steamed dishes for two weeks. My boyfriend is getting anxious about always eating steamed dishes. But he can’t say no.’

In this example, Deng Jie chose to use the steamer to relieve some of her cognitive labour in always planning for dishes. This can also be viewed as a subtle rejection. I also had a home visit with Deng Jie and had dinner with them. During that visit, I met Deng Jie at a Chinese supermarket and purchased some ingredients together for our dinner. Deng Jie also checked the message to see whether her boyfriend was back home from his meeting from time to time. Although in this example, Deng Jie did not disclose their direct conflict, her use of a steamer and some discontent with her boyfriend’s lateness all indicate there are some unaddressed problems with their daily allocations of housework. Her boyfriend could use the excuse that he couldn't cook as quickly as Deng Jie to escape from the daily meal plans, which also reinforced the unequal division of cognitive labour in preparing meals. In the following section, I will continue to use participants’ perceptions to examine how and why cognitive and emotional labour becomes women’s work, as well as some dynamics within Chinese migrant households.

It's our different personal interests, not about gender

A similar finding is that participants used different personal interests and different time schedules to justify the unequal division of labour in food preparation. I asked participants about their ideal model of housework division of labour. A common response is that a family's division of labour should be equally shared based on each partner's time schedules and personal interests. For some, fairness in housework depends on individual circumstances, such as working arrangements and daily schedules. Vanilla, a PhD student in her 20s, emphasised the importance of equity in the allocation of household chores. Vanilla explained that

'It is hard to practice a half-and-half sharing rigidly. It is not like you cook for half an hour and I will do another half an hour. We can't use time to measure it. I think it depends on whether the couple can have an agreement for their division of labour. If both feel they can accept and make a rational allocation, then it is fair. For example, if I like cooking, then I can share more about it. Or if I don't want to cook, then it can also be another's turn.'

Since Vanilla is not married, she introduced her vision for what a fair allocation of housework is. This understanding of fairness and equity also reveals a de-gendered process, in which the allocation of housework is not determined by gender but by individuals' personal choices and interests (Daminger, 2020).

Cheng and his wife are both researchers working in Sheffield. Cheng also shared a lot in daily grocery shopping and cooking. When asking about their household division of labour, Cheng explained that

'For cooking, we don't have a clear division of labour. It depends on who has available time and who wants to do it. Laundry is her work, but we have a washing machine. For childcare, since I am busy with work, she undertakes more of this. I often accompany children to sports. We play football together.'

Cheng's explanation discloses more about a seemingly fair allocation of work. Cheng's family practices the 'equity' rationale of allocation based on time availability. However, Cheng also acknowledged that he was busy with work; therefore, his wife shared more in the daily care of his two children. This seemly fair allocation could disguise the structural gender problems, such as women's disadvantaged positions in the working market and their continued compromises to ramp up their husbands' careers (Daminger, 2020). Another vital transition point in household division of labour is the birth of children (Schwartz, 1994; Hochschild, 2012). This is not to support an essentialist assumption that mothers naturally have responsibility for children. DeVault (1991) argued that feeding is constructed as women's work in daily household arrangements and negotiations. Additionally, for mothers' care responsibilities, after the birth of the first child, the couple also face continuous negotiations for the allocation of childcare (Schwartz, 1995). Hochschild (2012) provided a 'doing gender' explanation, suggesting that couples often utilise a gender discourse, which makes sense to them in terms of their division of labour. For example, the gender discourse could be the gender script of the 'good mother'; therefore, childcare became a responsibility primarily assigned to women. Although Hochschild (2012) defined this allocation of housework as a gender strategy, this explanation can also be linked to Beck's (2001) individualisation process, which suggests that individuals and individual families have the freedom to choose their life biographies or participate in the gender discourse. However, this seemingly freedom did not diminish the influence of gender inequality.

Pian shared her family's conflicts on children's education, which even led to the breakdown of her marriage. When they lived in Hong Kong, Pian was mainly responsible for her older son's education. Her husband also accompanied their two sons, but mainly for some leisure activities, such as playing video games. Pian also shared more of the cognitive labour, such as monitoring her son's study progress and the related emotional burden, such as constant anxiety for her son's school performance. Pian also acknowledged that she often got angry about this. However, since her husband rarely engaged in the daily childcare, he could not perceive Pian's long-term cognitive labour and just treated this as Pian's bad temper. Pian commented that

'Mothers are very great. I also had my work. However, I still had to find time to manage the housework and the children's education. I just want to accommodate my husband to focus on his work. You will also be happy when your husband makes progress in his career. But you know what, when children quarrelled with you, I also wanted to share this with my husband. However, I knew that he might not have the available time for addressing this.'

Since Pian's husband undertook the role of the economic provider, he could be exempted from the burdensome daily childcare work (Schwartz, 1995). In Chinese gender culture, a good man is also defined by his ability to provide financial support for his family and achieve career success (Wang and Keizer, 2024). After they moved to the UK, Pian's husband now had more time to engage in daily childcare, such as cooking for the children when Pian was busy with her part-time work. However, I also identified a hidden emotional labour that Pian always prioritised for her family members' preferences in eating, rarely for herself. In our interview, Pian often mentioned her two sons' preferences and her husband's likes. Based on the household's one-week food diary, I asked Pian about the specific food items they purchased. Pian explained that

'He likes pasta. He often cooks this. He often buys some steak. It depends on what he likes. He also buys some to store at home. So, it will be convenient for me to have the food materials to cook.'

When asking about their eating out choices, Pian also introduced that

'My two sons like Japanese food. We have tried all the different restaurants in the surrounding area. They even went to Manchester. Their father often drove them to Manchester every two weeks. When we used to live in Hong Kong, my old son often looked for steak and pizza. He often told me that the pizza here was delicious. But I don't like eating pizza or pasta.'

In this quote, Pian devoted more to compromising her personal preferences in her family's meal plan. She prioritised the preferences of her two sons and her husband. Although Pian did not like pasta and pizza, she considered her son's likes more than her own. This is also an example of intensive motherhood, that mothers are often child-centred, always put intensive time and effort into children's care, and absorb their own emotions (Woolhouse et al., 2019). Pian is also involved in a routinised emotional labour of effacing and even sacrificing her own preference in daily household food practices. With the discourse of 'great mother' and 'mother's work', the cognitive and emotional labour of compromising one's own preferences continues to be unseen.

A contrasting example is Christy's family. Although Christy shared all the housework, she also expressed some rejection of a traditional mother's role in the kitchen. Christy shared that she always made some creativity in planning to avoid repetitiveness in food preparation. Christy said that

'I know many people have a list. I can't do the thing very routinely. I will get bored. You know, you're a housewife. You need to repeat every day. I will make every day a bit different for myself. Even though my kids are not very fussy about eating, I will make something new and something special to please myself.'

Christy also made a list of the dishes she had cooked. When she had no idea what to cook, she would use this list as a reference. In Christy's narrative, although she shouldered more of the daily food preparation work, she also attempted to keep a distance from the traditional mother's role, such as devoting herself entirely to the family's food work. Therefore, Christy insisted on pleasing herself, such as finding some new food materials to cook. Christy also asked her two children to help with the cleaning up work after dinner.

This example is about some rejections of a mother's responsibility in planning family meals. Christy directly expressed her exhaustion caused by doing all the food preparation work for her family members. This direct expression of tiredness also demonstrates that the femininity associated with food, which often links motherhood with daily feeding work, has some dynamics and is often negotiated in the family's daily food practices, rather than being a fixed mothering discourse (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Previous studies have also found that some mothers rejected the intensive motherhood discourse (Woolhouse et al., 2019). For these mothers, intensive motherhood presented an unrealistic high standard, requiring them to devote more time to food preparation work, such as ensuring healthy food and considering children's needs (Woolhouse et al., 2019). They also pointed out that mothers' endless self-scrutiny over whether they provide proper and healthy meals for all family members puts them under high pressure (Woolhouse et al., 2019). The above examples demonstrated some dynamics in the gender relations constructed in daily food preparation work. In the following part, I will continue to discuss the subtle influence of neoliberalism in shaping the division of labour in household food provision.

Although some households had a more equal division of labour, when asked about their perception of their allocation of housework, some participants also used the de-gendered reasons, such as different personal interests and personal skills, to explain their current division of labour. Duanduan and her boyfriend shared cooking work equally. Duanduan also mentioned that in her own family, her father is more involved in the cooking work. I asked her whether her own family's equal division of labour influenced her current relationship. Duan Duan stated that

'It didn't influence me at all. I didn't think my partner had to know how to cook; it would be a bonus, but not a requirement. I think a man can't be a hands-off manager. My boyfriend is great; whenever I need to prepare something, he always helps me out instead of just sitting around and waiting. He is also a bit of a clean freak, and his house is spotless.'

Even though Yu Yu's husband shared more of the housework, Yu Yu also used different personal interests to explain their current division of labour. Yu Yu said that

'I didn't think my partner needed to know how to cook; it was a coincidence that my husband does. I handle the cleaning, but that's the only housework I'm willing to do. I hate cleaning the floor, but he likes doing it. We complement each other well, given our likes and dislikes. He enjoys most chores, particularly cleaning, and since the only thing that he dislikes is washing dishes, I took on that task.'

In these two examples, although men were more involved in planning meals and cooking, participants also employed a de-gendered approach to explain their equal allocation of household tasks. This can also be linked to the influence of post-feminist ideas and neoliberal ideology, which have distorted the feminist agenda by claiming that gender equality has been achieved (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Therefore, there is no need to pay attention to the gender problems and gender relations within the family. However, as I mentioned in the grocery shopping section, men's greater involvement in housework in Sheffield Chinese families requires a highly demanding condition. The totally subverted division of labour, with Yu Yu as the leading economic provider, can't be treated as an unquestioned mark of gender equality success within the household. Instead, it still reminds us that an egalitarian relationship can't rely solely on women's efforts and emancipation (Hochschild, 2012; Orgad, 2019).

Comparative analysis

With a lens of practice theory, this section also views planning meals as a practice, involving the competence to design a personal or household menu with some culinary knowledge for proper meals, as well as how to utilise different food items and consider household types and daily routines. However, this competence is not equally shared among all family members, which also suggests that using the concepts of practice theory alone may not fully understand the daily care burden of preparing meals. Therefore, this study continued to use the idea of cognitive and emotional labour to examine the practice of designing menus for household meals. For both sites, this section identified how the influence of neoliberalism permeates the everyday experience of planning meals. I also found that some young people living in Nanjing used their plan for meals as a form of self-care to have a short break from their exploited working environment. Still, this self-care embodies the influence of neoliberalisation, in that it is young office workers's individual responsibility to make arrangements for proper daily meals. Even for married couples, the CCP government recently promoted a new family discourse, highlighting family as a significant site for social governance to disseminate moral values and increase social cohesion. Without a first step to recognise the unequal gendered cognitive labour and the potential mental consequences for planning meals, given the importance of family meals in family values, this new family discourse could reinforce women's mental load in sustaining family life by organising family meals.

For households living in Sheffield, I also identified some positive changes, including men's increased involvement in cognitive labour for planning meals and engaging in negotiations for different ideas on daily meals. However, I argued that the positive changes in Sheffield households also required demanding conditions. Even though some households achieved a more equal division of household tasks, women in the family or in a relationship still used de-gendered reasons, such as different personal interests and skills, to explain their allocation of household tasks. I argue that this de-gendered process, unlike the traditional division of labour, embodies the influence of post-feminism aligned with neoliberalism. If the demanding condition for truly egalitarian relations requires women to take the absolute economic provider role or possess a higher educational level compared with their partner, this still reflects that gender equality relies on women's development and progression alone.

4.4 Conclusion

The entire chapter examined the application of practice theory in studying household food procurement and meal preparation. Some concepts of practice theory could facilitate the understanding of the individualisation process in the daily household food provision experience. This chapter focused on the multiplicity of daily practices to examine how individuals organise their daily grocery shopping and meals with the constraints of their working arrangement and other mundane practices. This chapter also explores the competence of grocery shopping and meal planning, which involves knowledge of various food stores, the skill of combining different food stores, and specific food knowledge. I also examined how the meaning of grocery shopping, such as convenience, is shaped by shopping competence and continuously negotiated at the intersection of different mundane practices. In summary, this chapter examined how the core concepts of practice theory, such as competence and multiplicity, can help unfold the formation process of the routinised ways of grocery shopping and meal planning.

This chapter also noticed the limitation of the explanation of practice theory. The competence of making arrangements for daily meals and grocery shopping is not evenly allocated within households. Therefore, this chapter also drew upon the concepts of cognitive and emotional labour from the gender studies about family meals to enrich the explanation. Through a gender analysis, this chapter demonstrates the influence of neoliberalism on both the structural level, with the retreat of the social welfare system, and the ideological level, where previous consumerism, a tendency of post-feminism, shapes a specific food femininity related to household food provision. Although women shouldered more of the individualised responsibility of ensuring a secure household procurement and proper family meals, the de-gendered process distorted their daily efforts and thoughts, as their personal interests and skills, which made their cognitive and emotional labour unseen on both the household level and the policy level. It furtherly justified the unequal division of labour within the households. The following chapters will continue to explore the application of practice theory for other food consumption activities, cooking and eating. I will also continue to examine the changing food femininities in cooking and eating practices.

5 Appropriation: cooking and eating practices

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will continue to investigate household daily food consumption activities: cooking and eating. Readers might wonder why cooking and eating activities are grouped in one chapter. I have addressed this in the title because both cooking and eating involve the appropriation of raw food materials, a process of using up food items (Warde, 2016b). Cooking and eating activities can also be viewed as a meaning-making process (Roe, 2006; Lévi-Strauss,2004). What can be defined as food, or in other words, culturally acceptable food, or at a higher level, the configuration of different cuisines of various cultures, primarily occurs during the process of cooking and eating (Goody, 1982; Sutton, 2014). Emma Roe (2006) argued that how things become food is not just about what people say about food, but most importantly, related to what and how people do with the food items, from which the meaning of food items is generated. To be more specific, cooking—the process of transforming raw food materials into cooked meat by boiling, smoking, or roasting—embodies a meaning-making process from nature to culture (Lévi-Strauss, 2004). Additionally, the act of eating can indicate that something is edible, which is also a meaning-making process (Roe, 2006). This study is not intended to explore what can be defined as edible food in the context of cooking and eating. This chapter will continue to use practice theory to examine the continuity and changes enacted in cooking and eating practices.

Since this chapter, I will begin to develop a specific food consumption theory that highlights the visceral nature of food, encompassing the act of eating, taste, and ingestion, as well as the related bodily impacts, including feelings, emotions, and memory (Warde, 2016a). This chapter will focus on the bodily process and impact involved in cooking and eating (Warde, 2016a). This chapter will continue to examine concepts from practice theory to develop a specific theory of food consumption. This chapter is organised as follows: the first section will be the practice of cooking. In this section, I will investigate the different meanings of cooking for households in Nanjing and Sheffield. I will also examine the changing gender relations in the daily cooking experience. The second section is about eating practice. I will explore the different embodied experiences of engaging in healthy eating for households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. In this chapter, I will also explore a culinary habitus across cooking and eating practices, which refers to a food-specific disposition located at the intersection of different cultures' cuisines, memories about food, and embodied experiences, such as taste and eating.

5.2 Practice of cooking

This section will use practice theory to examine the different cooking experiences of households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. As both Schatzki (1996) and Warde (2016a) directly mentioned, cooking is an exemplary integrative practice. Drawing on their work, cooking practice requires a specific understanding, more detailed procedures, and a teleoaffective structure that organises purposes and moods about cooking. Imagine a daily scenario: a person might have some ideas that cooking is for a family meal and should be healthy (Schatzki, 1996). These are the tasks and purpose of the cooking practice. Then the cook will take some food materials from a shopping bag or from the fridge. The next step is to prepare food materials. To make the process smooth, the cook also needs to have some specific understanding (a know-how) (Schatzki, 1996) about how to handle different food materials, such as washing vegetables and cutting meat. When cooking, to ensure a satisfactory outcome, the person must also be capable of using cookware and possess a specific understanding of cuisines, including how to use flavours and how to plate (Warde, 2016a). Sometimes, the rules that govern cooking steps, such as how to cook meat or vegetables, are tacit knowledge (Schatzki, 1996). The cooking person often knows 'how-to', but it is hard to explain it (Schatzki, 1996; Warde, 2016a). These understandings, procedures, and purposes are the organisation of cooking practices. Cooking practices can be reproduced in performance with these structures governing the process. Cooking practices also involve some improvisation and changes. It cannot be that the next time of cooking will perfectly copy every step of the last one. Cooking can also be viewed as integrating similar elements in each performance with interrelated changes in cooking materials, competence, and meaning (Shove et al., 2012).

This section will examine these changes in cooking practices for households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. I will continue to apply concepts from practice theory to explore the different daily cooking experiences. This section addresses the following questions: What is the cooking experience like for young office workers in Nanjing? How does their working arrangement influence their daily cooking practice? What are the various cooking experiences for Chinese international students when living in a foreign country with different culinary cultures? I will continue to examine the dynamics in gender relations in daily cooking experiences. Given the increase in men's involvement in daily cooking, does this indicate a positive change for gender equality within the household?

5.2.1 Nanjing

Young office workers' slapdash cooking

A common experience is that although cooking from scratch to prepare a proper meal with several dishes is still desirable, participants shared that they often cooked less after a day's work or chose to simplify their cooking, such as just making noodles. For some participants who work in a state-owned company or the civil service, their workplaces often have a staff canteen that offers lunch, and sometimes even breakfast and dinner. Some research participants, especially young office workers, directly expressed that they were too lazy to cook after work. Wei Yi, in her 20s, who works in a state-owned company, said that

‘I rarely cook because I feel too tired after work. I feel too lazy to cook. When I just graduated, I still had energy for cooking. After working for a time, I did not want to cook.’

With a lens of practice theory, this study will not simply accept ‘too lazy to cook’ as a social fact for young office workers, but instead has a curiosity to dig deeper into what is hidden in their narratives of cooking less (Jackson et al., 2018). The following part will use a young office worker’s story to explore the daily struggles of balancing cooking activities with the demands of work.

I noticed that this study could explore more about less cooking, inspired by a conversation I had with Abel, who is in his 20s and works in a sales company. He is not from Nanjing, but he stayed after university and now has a steady job. He shares an apartment with another young man. He takes the metro to work, and the commute is about 40 minutes. His office does not offer meals, so for breakfast, he usually grabs something quick, such as bread from the supermarket or an egg pancake from a street vendor near his workplace. For lunch, he often eats at a chain restaurant or buys convenient meals from a convenience store. For dinner, he either eats out or makes something simple, such as noodles or frozen dumplings.

Abel described himself as a ‘foodie’. When he started his job, he was still passionate about exploring restaurants in the city centre and posting about them on his WeChat Moments. In our first interview, he even showed me some of the dishes he had cooked before, such as shrimp and mushroom stewed with tomatoes. After he complained a bit about his work, I thought we were about to wrap up the interview. However, Abel suggested that

‘Why didn’t you ask me why I did not want to cook? I think that is a key point you should be writing about.’

Then I realised that this request could indicate that this is an important problem for Abel. I also invited Abel to tell me more about the reasons. Abel explained that

‘I simply do not have the energy for it. After work, I am exhausted, and cooking is too time-consuming for me. For someone like me, spending one or two hours on a meal would just make me even more tired. The thought of cooking when I am already hungry feels like torture.’

Abel’s explanation revealed a struggle: although he was willing to cook, his daily work had exhausted his energy to do so, even for himself. A recent notable tendency is that young office workers are pursuing slapdash cooking. On Douban, a popular Chinese social media platform, there is a discussion group named “Office worker’s Slapdash Cooking,” with over a thousand discussion posts and over 3,5000 active group members. Office workers’ experiment to simplify their cooking is not new. In a study on the changes in eating patterns of French office workers, Poulain (2002) also found that young white-collar workers were more likely to have simplified meals, such as a meal with no starter or a single-course meal, to fit their urban lifestyle.

This section will explore the connection between this tendency to engage in slapdash cooking and the broader Chinese social context. I will continue to examine the influence of neoliberalism on the daily cooking experience. Chinese sociologists have observed social phenomena such as the ‘treadmill’ (nèi juǎn, 内卷, referring to increasing competition in the Chinese labour market) and ‘slapdash’ (hú nong，糊弄, which refers to using a simple and relatively inappropriate method to handle daily routines and work events) (Ma, 2021). In their analysis, the tendency to approach some routines in a slapdash manner is also related to increasing workplace competition (Ma, 2021). The treadmill phenomenon also indicates the influence of neoliberalism, suggesting that individuals live in a culture of competitiveness that values constant self-development and improvement (Han, 2015; Rosa, 2013). With the endless competition and a precarious working market, office workers also consider utilising their time on valuable activities, such as dealing with extra work or developing professional skills, rather than wasting it on preparing multiple dishes (Southerton, 2003; Ma, 2021). According to the practice theory, engaging in slapdash cooking can be viewed as a compromise after the negotiation of a set of considerations, such as the project of having a proper meal, the pursuit of efficient time management, and the pressure from the workplace (Schatzki, 1996). The ‘ought to be’ or the normativity is continuously negotiated in different daily life practices (Schatzki, 1996; Halkier, 2010). Using slapdash cooking to replace proper meals can also be viewed as carrying out an acceptable performance of the practice of cooking (Schatzki, 1996; Halkier, 2010). At least, these young office workers still have a meal cooked by themselves.

The problem is not that nowadays young people need more training programs in cooking, nor that they should be encouraged to discover the wonderful things cooking can bring to them. In *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*, Michael Pollan (2014) provided many attractive descriptions of the cooking process to arouse readers’ interest in touching authentic foodstuffs and reconnecting with food and nature, especially for young white-collar workers to escape the daily life of just touching the keyboards. Pollan (2013) proposed an ideal lifestyle that he could afford: to enjoy the wonderful moment of slow cooking, baking bread, and brewing beer. However, his work overlooked the fact that having a slow life is a luxury for young office workers like Abel, who face a deprivation in time and energy (Murcott, 2019). Abel’s struggle between his willingness to cook and his lack of energy also embodies the influence of neoliberalism, which pushes individuals to use their daily experiences to cope with the consequences of structural change, such as an unstable working environment (Beck, 2001). I will continue to examine, with simplified cooking as the orientation in cooking practice, how participants made adaptations in cooking with the changes in procedures and changes in materiality of cooking.

To save time on cooking complex dishes, some participants also used the method of preparing dishes in advance and freezing them in the fridge for later use. Jingle, who often brings her lunch to the workplace, shared that

‘I often make a large batch of braised drumsticks, portion them out, and freeze them. I also cut and freeze vegetables for flavouring, like ginger, so they are ready to use whenever I need them. For dinner, I will use whatever is left over from preparing lunch, along with some staple food.’

Previous studies have noticed the combination of using a freezer for storing cooked food and a microwave for reheating in convenient cooking ways (Shove and Southerton, 2000; Jackson et al., 2018). Cooking complex dishes in advance also involves manipulating time, considering daily schedules and the timing of food, such as the perishability of different food items (Jackson et al., 2018). In this example, the use of a fridge and microwave is a material element of cooking practice, which also requires the related skill of timing to enact a convenient way of cooking (Shove et al., 2012; Torkkeli et al., 2020). Preparing meals in advance can be viewed as almost achieving cooking from scratch, albeit with a different arrangement of time and the assistance of technology, such as a freezer and microwave.

Some participants also shared their simplified meal, which consisted of only one course. Wei Yi said that

‘I often make fried rice because it is so convenient. I will make egg fried rice or add things like green peppers or luncheon meat. Lately, for dinner, I will cook boiled eggs and frozen dumplings, or just steamed rice cakes.’

Previous studies also mentioned the mixed use of fresh food and convenient food, such as frozen dumplings in cooking meals (Jackson et al., 2018). In this example, Wei Yi used simplified cooking procedures, such as boiling eggs and instant dumplings, as well as ingredients that are quick to cook.

Little Tree also shared that she often stored some dried vegetables, such as mushrooms, from online shopping, as well as instant and frozen food, which could be used to make a quick dinner. Little Tree said that

‘When I want to skip the staff canteen, I will cook dinner, but it is always something simple. On weekends, when I have more time, I will stay in and make some braised dishes. I often use frozen shrimp, frozen meat, and mixed vegetables to throw together a quick noodle dish. I have also found that pre-cooked meals are a lifesaver. They are incredibly convenient—you just need to heat them up. For someone who is not a confident cook, they are a perfect way to have a nice, complex meal without much effort.’

In this case, besides using instant and frozen food, Little Tree also mentioned the use of pre-cooked dishes to replace time-consuming cooking. Both Little Tree’s and Wei Yi’s narratives could exemplify the reconfiguration of cooking practices through the simplified cooking procedures, such as boiling and the utilisation of pre-cooked dishes.

Some participants also mentioned their use of an air fryer to make dishes very quickly. Denjing shared that when her husband and mother-in-law were not at home, she often made frozen food for her daughter. Denjing said that

'I'm not a good cook. With her (her daughter's) grandmother having returned home and my husband taking on another job, I can only prepare frozen meals for my daughter. For breakfast, we usually have milk and bread. For lunch, I will make dumplings and noodles. Moreover, for dinner, I will use the air fryer to cook some meat, sausage, and chips.'

In this case, the use of an air fryer could help Denjing fulfil her daughter's food preferences. Previous studies have highlighted that convenience and care are not mutually exclusive concepts in cooking practices (Jackson et al., 2018). This example also showed that the understanding of what is normal and acceptable cooking is continuously negotiated in households' daily life and shaped by the use of cookware, such as the use of an air fryer (Halkier, 2010; Shove et al., 2012).

Abel's story presents an orientation of pursuing slapdash and simplified cooking. The language of practice can help examine the details of the transformation of cooking practices in aspects such as simplified procedures, including boiling vegetables for noodles, the use of convenient cookware, and the use of new food products, like pre-cooked dishes. However, with practice theory alone to analyse the reconfiguration of cooking practice, it could neglect the struggling negotiation process in which slapdash cooking is a compromised outcome for office workers, ensuring they can have a basic meal without needing too much time to prepare it. The following part will examine the continuity in cooking. I will explore the gendered patterns in cooking and participants' perceptions of gender relations in their daily cooking practices.

The Artful chef father and routinely cooking mother

A common household cooking experience is that fathers could optionally engage in cooking based on their self-interests, for example, for their interests in gastronomy; however, mothers undertook most of the daily cooking and ensured a healthy meal for household members. This part will examine the different gendered patterns in cooking. However, that is not to say that men always cook in this way and women cook in that way (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). I will continue to investigate the dynamics of food femininity and the complex masculinities enacted in daily cooking.

I noticed this prominent difference between father's cooking and mother's cooking because I often received responses like 'my mom's cooking is okay, but my dad could make tasty dishes' during conversations with participants. Tang Tang shared that

‘My dad is a pretty good cook. But my mom’s cooking is more like my grandma’s; it is very focused on health. They are always making vegetables I am not a fan of, especially celery, which they like to eat.’

Participants often joked that their mothers’ cooking tastes very bland compared to their father’s, which has heavy flavours. Little Tree shared that

‘My mom's cooking is pretty bland. She uses very little oil and salt, even in her soup. She always thought my dad and I had a heavy palate. (Laughs). Both of us use lots of seasonings, but she does not even use chicken bouillon. She thinks it is healthier.’

Previous studies on mothers’ roles as ‘guardians of health’ mainly used mothers’ perceptions and feelings (Bugge and Almas, 2006; Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Woolhouse et al., 2019; Fielding-Singh and Cooper, 2023). The difference in this study is that I used the adult children’s perspective to understand their mother’s daily experience in ensuring the health of family members. Participants’ narratives still present a subtle reinforcement of food femininity in cooking and health, as they perceived their mothers’ cooking as preparing healthy meals for family members as a taken-for-granted practice. In their banter, mothers always cooked healthy, yet not very tasty dishes.

Some participants also mentioned their mothers’ efforts in preparing healthy meals.

Raine, aged 20, who just graduated from a university in Nanjing, recalled,

‘When I was in primary school, my dad was diagnosed with an illness that required a diet with less oil and salt. From then on, my family began eating less red meat and more white meat, such as chicken breast. At first, I could not stand that we only ate chicken, but my mom eventually learned how to make white meat delicious. Now, I could like these lighter dishes.’

Raine’s narrative also demonstrates a caring food femininity in cooking, which mothers considered more for the family’s health and put much effort into catering to different preferences (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Previous studies have also highlighted the emotional rewards for mothers when they cook meals that are appreciated by their children and husbands (DeVault, 1991; Cairns and Johnston, 2015). In this quote, Raine’s later acceptance of eating white meat with less flavour can also be viewed as a positive reward for her mother’s work.

Another example is still about the cooking experience of Dengjing ’s family. Dengjing mentioned that she could not cook. From her perspective, boiling frozen dumplings and using an air fryer to cook frozen meat for her daughter could not be described as cooking. Dengjing also explained that when she started dating her husband, they had decided that her husband would do the daily cooking. In her words, in a family, there must be someone to cook. When her husband was not busy, most of the time at weekends, her husband would go to the nearby wet market, buy some fresh food and cook several dishes. Dengjing also explained that

‘My husband and I both think fresh food is better. However, since I do not know how to cook, I made frozen food for my daughter.’

Dengjing ’s acknowledgement that using fresh food to cook for her daughter is better also could indicate maternal care for children’s health (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Previous studies on intensive motherhood have identified mothers’ guilty feelings when they are unable to provide their children with healthy meals (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Fielding-Singh and Cooper, 2023). In this case, although Dengjing ’s husband engaged in household cooking only on weekends, he still received more credit from Dengjing and even from Dengjing ’s mother, as an exemplary husband. This praise for her husband and Dengjing ’s self-evaluation, which suggests that she did not do enough cooking for her daughter, also unintentionally reinforces the idea that cooking should be a mother’s responsibility. The following part will continue to examine fathers’ cooking and how this familial masculinity reinforces unequal gender relations.

Some participants mentioned that their fathers often cooked for special events, such as family gatherings or for their own interests, including personal hobbies or a pursuit of gastronomy. Jingle introduced that her father’s cooking was for special events:

‘My dad is a great cook, but he rarely does it. My mom usually handles the cooking, and her food is just okay. My dad only makes more complicated dishes for family gatherings.’

Sora also explained that her father would like to engage more in cooking due to his personal interest in food. Sora said that

‘My dad used to complain about my mom's cooking all the time. He could not stand it when she would bring home lunch from her staff canteen. He has really high standards for food, somewhat like Cantonese people who will drive for miles to get fresh seafood. He is also always willing to go far to try a new restaurant.".’

Previous studies on masculinity and cooking also had similar findings that fathers’ cooking is more self-oriented and optional (Szabo, 2014a). They mainly treated cooking as a leisure activity, or for special events, such as holidays, and engaged in specific cooking activities, like the family’s summertime barbecue or fishing activity, which still presented typical masculinity (Inness, 2001; Szabo, 2014a; 2024b). Through the lens of practice theory, I will examine the expression of hybrid masculinities in cooking practices, which involve both hegemonic masculinity, which reaffirms men’s authority in cooking (Meah and Jackson, 2013), and a familial masculinity, which emphasises showing intimacy and love (Szabo, 2014a; Song and Hird, 2014; Liu, 2017).

I also found that when fathers engaged in cooking, their cooking was often more complex and time-consuming, differing from mothers’ daily cooking with common dishes. Rae, aged 20, is a designer living with her parents in Nanjing. In Rae’s family, her mother was responsible for daily cooking. Rae explained that her mother likes cooking and has more decision-making power in deciding what to eat for their meals. I also asked her about the differences between her parents’ cooking. Rae said that

‘My mom’s cooking style is very instinctive; she has a great feel for the process. My dad's approach is more precise and methodical. He is the kind of person who must follow a recipe’s steps exactly, especially for complex dishes. I think that is why he enjoys them so much—it gives him a real sense of pride when he completes a long recipe, like the time he made braised pork with eggs and was really proud of himself.’

In this example, Rae’s father used more complex cooking procedures to make a difference from daily cooking, which also tends to reaffirm a culinary hegemonic masculinity that men’s cooking is more complicated and requires more expertise (Szabo, 2014a). Meah and Jackson (2013), in a study about men’s involvement in daily cooking, also identified that men participants tended to showcase their cooking skills with professional cookware, such as the use of specialised knives, even just for cutting garlic. However, another woman participant could even use her hand to break food (Meah and Jackson, 2013). They also used a metaphor that cooking in the kitchen can be viewed as a man’s stadium to demonstrate their higher cooking level and therefore, reaffirm their hegemonic masculinity in terms of authority in daily cooking (Meah and Jackson, 2013).

Sometimes, the hegemonic culinary masculinity about men’s authority in cooking is intertwined with familial masculinity. Xiao Zheng and his girlfriend, Yang, both participated in the interview and shared their experiences of preparing meals together. Based on their one-week food diary, for dinner, Xiao Zheng often cooked complex dishes, such as sweet and sour fish, with the guidance of online recipes. Yang also praised Xiao Zheng for being talented in cooking. However, for Yang’s cooking, Xiao Zheng commented that

‘Tomatoes fried with potatoes and rice cake. That is made by another person (his girlfriend). I never could make this creative dish (in a bantering accent).’

This case is complex because Xiao Zheng cooked what his girlfriend liked to eat, the sour and sweet fish, which could show a familial and caring masculinity related to caring for others’ needs. However, Xiao Zheng’s cooking also expressed the features of traditional masculinity, such as rationally following the steps of a complex dish’s recipe. It highlighted that his cooking is different from Yang’s randomly creative cooking.

Using the language of practice, this part starts with participants’ sayings about cooking, their parents’ different cooking styles, which also subtly reproduced the caring food femininity, that daily cooking for a healthy meal is taken-for-granted as mother’s work and a culinary masculinity, which gave more credits to their father’s cooking performance. An interesting example is that, for the SpongeBob and Patrick Star couple, in empirical chapter one, I have mentioned that SpongeBob shared some daily food preparation work. In an interview with their friend Mai Mai, in her 30s, who works in the civil service, Mai Mai commented that

‘You do not often see a guy like SpongeBob—one who loves to cook and really spoils his wife.’

The examples of good men, such as Dengjing 's husband and SpongeBob, who are both involved in domestic cooking, also demonstrate the rooted influence of gender expectations that cooking should be women's work. Therefore, when men undertook daily cooking work, despite their sporadic engagement, they could earn more credit and have the privilege of making cooking an optional choice. At the very least, they have surpassed most other men who have never entered the kitchen. These images of good men who can cook also reinforce gender inequality in the responsibility of daily cooking, in which mothers' daily cooking continues to be taken for granted. The following part will explore the changes in cooking experience for Chinese households living in Sheffield. I will continue to examine the dynamics in gender relations in daily cooking experiences.

5.2.2 Sheffield

'You can always trust Chinese students' cooking skills'

In this part, I will examine how the meaning of cooking practice is shifted in migrant Chinese households' daily cooking experience. A shared experience is that participants living in Sheffield often cook time-consuming dishes and preparing proper meals with several dishes. For some participants, especially the students, cooking complex dishes is a leisure activity in the UK. Little Rain, a master student, said that

'I enjoy cooking and am confident in my skills. You can always trust Chinese students' cooking skills. Since arriving in the UK, I spent my first year living with my roommate, and we often ate together. I also shared more cooking. Daily life here is somewhat boring. When I did not want to study, I would cook.'

I also used Little Rain's comment as the sub-title for this section. On Red Note (a popular content-sharing Chinese social media platform), the trending topic # Chinese international students could be chefs had over 300,000 discussions and over 100 million views. This topic is a metaphor that Chinese international students spend more time and effort on cooking complex dishes during their overseas studies. They mocked themselves as chefs. For this insistence on Chinese cuisine, previous studies have mainly explained it as the influence of migrant groups' culinary culture preferences and the expression of their sense of belonging and national identity (Gabaccia, 2000; Slocum, 2011; Abbots, 2016). This study employs concepts from practice theory to investigate changes in elements of cooking practice among Chinese migrant groups.

A notable change in cooking is that participants often use Chinese social media platforms, such as Red Note, to search for recipes before preparing meals. For those who are just starting to learn how to cook, using social media platforms to learn the cooking process is their routine way of cooking. Ting Ting, in her 20s, who has a cake shop business in Sheffield, shared that

'I often use Red Book Note and Xia Chufang (which is a Chinese cooking application). I just used keywords to search for the recipes. For example, if I have eggs and squash in hand, I will search for how to cook these two in the Red Note.'

Some participants also shared their experience of using different social media platforms to learn cooking and explore their own recipes. Xiao Mang, a PhD student, shared that

'When I was in China, my sister recommended Xia Chufang. Later, I found Blibli (which is a video-content sharing platform) and Red Note also had some recipes. When cooking, I often search for the names of dishes. My habit is to combine their strengths and build my own recipes.'

In previous studies, users of social media platforms were mainly the content producers who shared their cooking outcomes and communicated with others (Kirkwood, 2018; Lewis, 2018). From Duanduan's and Xiao Mang's narratives, the use of social media platforms is a newly material element in re-configuring cooking practice. Their understanding of the use of social media platforms, such as Red Note, has also shifted in their daily cooking. The Red Note was initially designed for Chinese women users to share their daily experiences in the fields of fashion and beauty through various forms, such as short videos and blogs (Shen, 2024). In these examples, participants perceived the Red Note as a search engine (Shen, 2024) or a cooking encyclopaedia from which users can search for recipes and learn cooking techniques. Changes in cooking practice are not just about using different tools. The following part will examine the emotional experience of cooking, especially the experience of re-creating a sense of home.

Some research participants shared how they made food from their hometowns. Since the research participants come from different regions in China, their home foods vary. Xiao Zhu, in her 20s, is a master's student. Xiao Zhu's hometown is located in the northeast of China, where people primarily eat wheat-based foods as their main staple. When asking about her cooking experience, Xiao Zhu shared that

'Most of the ingredients are pretty easy to find. I usually end up making dishes like Coke chicken wings and beef. But sometimes I really miss wheat-based food from my hometown. I could not find it anywhere, so I taught myself how to knead dough. Now I am able to make hand-pulled noodles and pan-fried cakes.'

Snow Bamboo, a PhD student in her 20s, also shared that she could replicate the typical dishes from her hometown using the available ingredients in the UK. Snow Bamboo explained that

'I have been cooking more since I started my PhD. I often make dishes from my hometown, and my friends have told me they are very good. For example, I made oil-braised chicken, which primarily uses potatoes—an ingredient that's easy to find in the UK. I have noticed that the ingredients available here are quite similar to those in Yunnan, perhaps because the weather in both regions is alike.'

These examples can also be viewed as a successful reproduction of cooking practice that participants could use specific available food materials to replicate the dishes from their hometown. Participants mentioned their experience of cooking and eating together. At these gatherings, they often prepared complex dishes. Yue Shan, a PhD student in her 20s who completed her master's studies in the UK, shared the experience of cooking and eating with her colleagues. I interviewed with Yue Shan in her office. Yue Shan introduced that they often had meals in this office. Yue Shan said that

'During my master's, I used to cook a lot with my classmates. We had many get-togethers. In my first year of the PhD, though, we did not have this office, and we barely saw each other. Recently, with the new office, we have been getting together more often. When we do, we usually have a potluck where everyone brings a dish. If we all bring meat dishes, we will just buy a cabbage and microwave it. We also eat together at one of our colleagues' homes.'

During that interview, I also found that their office had a wide selection of cookware items and tableware. In this case, cooking together also transformed their office into a place for gathering and rebuilding a sense of community. Previous studies have also found that migrant groups use cooking familiar home country food to create a sense of familiarity and transform their sense of place (Law, 2001; Collins, 2008).

Some participants also struggled to find familiar ingredients or flavours for their home dishes, often using substitutes instead. Roy, a master student in his 20s, mentioned the lack of specific Chinese condiments. Roy said that

'Some of my friends are great cooks, but they complain they cannot find many of the condiments we have in China.'

Deng Jie also shared a story about the vital role food played in alleviating her homesickness. Deng Jie said that

'Food really affects me. If I cannot eat what I want, I get genuinely upset. The worst was in Liverpool when I had a powerful craving for bitter gourd. It is tough to find in the UK, and in Liverpool, it was almost impossible. I went to so many supermarkets looking for it, and the more I searched, the more depressed I got. I finally had to settle for tofu instead, but the dish was not the same. I guess my disappointment ruined the flavour.'

These stories examined how cooking can both make people feel at home and out of place (Longhurst et al., 2009). Slocum (2011) summarised that migrant groups' engagement in home cooking helped overcome the splitting of their daily lived experience in a foreign country and their memories of home food. In Deng Jie's case, her intense craving for bitter gourd and the depression of not having home food also implied a visceral experience in daily cooking. In this case, the re-configuration of cooking practice also involves a know-how of using available food items as substitutes and the visceral elements, such as specific sensory memories of home food (Longhurst et al., 2009). According to the language of practice theory, migrant groups' cooking practices fulfil a craving for home food (Schatzki, 1996). This can also be viewed as a continuity of cooking practices across time and space, driven by the sensory experience of specific hometown dishes.

Another similar cooking experience with Nanjing is that some participants in Sheffield also mentioned their engagement in simplified cooking. Little Rain also mentioned she cooks less since living alone. Little Rain shared that

'Fried dishes are not convenient for one person. My go-to meal is usually instant noodles, which I will add braised short ribs and whatever green vegetables I have in the fridge to.'

Xiao Mang also mentioned her shortage of time after taking the teaching work and the changes in her cooking. Xiao Mang said that

'I am not able to dedicate enough time to cooking. I used to try new dishes, but now I am too lazy to make anything complicated. I usually make a stew with meat, such as beef or chicken wings. All I have to do is prepare the meat, add some water, and let it stew for about an hour before adding the vegetables. Since I cook a big batch, I have food for two days.'

These examples also demonstrated a similar experience of pursuing a simplified meal based on household types and daily schedules. I will explain more about the similar experience in the comparison part. In the following section, I will continue to examine the changes in gender relations within the daily cooking experience of migrant families.

Intimate Relationships and Cooking: A Positive Shift toward Gender Equality?

A similar experience with cases in Nanjing was that I also identified a gendered pattern in the father's self-oriented cooking and the mother's daily cooking among participants in Sheffield. Stone, a PhD student, shared the differences in her parents' cooking experiences. Stone said that

'My mom knows how to cook, but her food just does not really fit our tastes. I prefer my dad's cooking. She will often cook the same dishes repeatedly if she thinks we like them. For example, she used to make brown rice for three days until I asked if we could switch it up.'

This case also reflects a maternal responsibility in cooking, considering the preferences of family members. Cooking the same food for several days can also be viewed as a strategy to alleviate the burden of meal preparation based on previous successful experience. Some participants also shared their reflections on their mothers' cooking burden. Yue is a PhD student in her 20s. I have known Yue for several years. In our previous conversations, Yue expressed support for feminist ideas. In her family, Yue's mother shared more about cooking. When asking her about this division of labour, Yue expressed that

'I have a complex feeling for this. I know it is not fair to my mom. But both of my parents are tired after work. Then who should do the cooking? From my perspective, I also do not want to cook. I even think about my future life. I do not want to have a family life like my parents.'

This narrative also highlights the dilemma faced by career-oriented women, who may have been influenced by recent China's feminist movement, such as the 2018 #MeToo movement. The dilemma is that these young, highly educated women desired a different path from their parents' generation to avoid traditional gender roles in their future families; however, they did not find a suitable solution in their daily lives. In the study of Chinese professional women's delay of marriage, Gui (2020) also noted the influence of traditional gender expectations that some professional women still perceived that the ideal modern woman should balance both their career and family life well, despite their discontent with the traditional division of labour.

Chinese gender study scholars have found that how to practice feminism in a heterosexual relationship and even for marriage is a difficult question for current Chinese young feminists (Shen, 2022). With the influence of the #MeToo movement, Chinese feminist activism has primarily focused on topics of gender-based violence and actively sought to occupy more online spaces for feminist voices and narratives (Li and Li, 2017; Wu and Dong, 2019). A complicit agreement is that the topics of family life or heterosexual relationships would not be put on the current feminist' movement's agenda, unless for making critiques of the exploitations of women. However, as Sara Ahmed (2017) insisted, we still need a feminist perspective to disclose the unfinished gender inequality. This study brings the feminist critiques back to family life and daily cooking experience. The following part will continue to examine the familial masculinity in daily cooking and evaluate the implications of men's greater involvement in cooking in the migrant experience.

A common experience for Chinese migrant households is that men often take on the role of daily cooking. I recruited Roy from a social media platform because he shared many of his daily meals. Therefore, I would like to know more about how young men like Roy engage in daily cooking and their perceptions. Sometimes, Roy also gathered with his friends, who are also young men, to cook together. Roy shared that

'For breakfast, I usually make something quick like fried eggs or bacon. For lunch, if I have class, I often eat out with friends. I also have dinner with them maybe once or twice a week. When I am eating by myself, it is just two dishes, like tomato and egg or beef with green pepper—a typical meal for one.'

In this case, Roy actively engaged in the daily cooking and also had some peers who liked cooking. Previous studies on masculinity and domestic cooking have also highlighted that young men view their daily engagement in cooking as a basic life skill, enabling them to take care of themselves effectively (Szabo, 2013; Neuman et al., 2017). Although men in intimate relationships sometimes shared more in daily cooking, it is unclear whether there is a progression toward gender equality due to men's increased involvement in cooking in migrant households.

I also observed the hybrid masculinities in the daily cooking experiences of migrant households. Duanduan shared that when her boyfriend stayed with her in Sheffield, her boyfriend also undertook the cooking work. Her boyfriend often cooked Western meals, such as steak. Duanduan said that

‘I am not a huge fan of his cooking—it is always Western food. This week, he is going to make pasta. He keeps it pretty simple, just adding a touch of sea salt and black pepper. What can I say? He insists on cooking for me.’

In this quote, although Duanduan’s boyfriend undertook all the cooking work when preparing meals for Duanduan, the problem is that Duanduan preferred to eat Chinese food with heavy flavours, such as spicy chicken wings. This is also a complex case of familial masculinity. At a superficial level, Duanduan’s boyfriend could engage in a whole process of cooking and also demonstrate the love and care in cooking for his partner. However, his cooking is still self-oriented, without considering what Duanduan actually likes.

These hybrid masculinities are also embodied in the procedures of cooking. Yu Yu shared that her husband rigidly followed the cooking steps. Yu Yu said that

‘My husband taught me how to cook. He showed me the basics, like how to prepare chicken, wash the meat, and clean the cutting board. He is also really particular about precise cooking temperatures for beef, chicken, and lamb. We even have a table on the fridge with the recommended temperatures for cooking beef and chicken. He loves to cook, so he has all this knowledge. I think he is a bit of a perfectionist—he even uses a thermometer to check the meat when he is cooking.’

The background information is that in Yu Yu’s family, she took the role of the economic provider. Her husband’s technical approach to cooking also conveyed a rationality associated with masculinity, characterised by precise control of meat degrees. This is another example of when husbands engaged in domestic cooking, they tended to make it different from women’s routine cooking.

Liu Xiaoyu also shared that her husband often cooked a slapdash meal for himself or ordered from Mindful Chef, which provided prepared food materials. While the couple shared cooking equally, they often did so separately, with one person in the kitchen preparing meals for both. In the interview about a one-week household food diary, I found some meals with carefully plated food. Xiaoyu explained that

‘My husband cooked this. You can see that he made specific areas for each ingredient—it's as if he had already planned it out in his mind. But when I cook, everything is just put in a bowl. I do not bother with that. Perhaps it is a result of his work’s way of thinking. I know why he does it! I also take photos of what I eat to show my parents, so he probably wants to make the plating look good. But he always cooks like this; he must think I care about plating. You can see from my cooking that I never consider it.’

The following picture is Liu Xiaoyu’s husband cooking. The first time I saw it, I even thought that Xiaoyu and her husband had dinner in a restaurant.

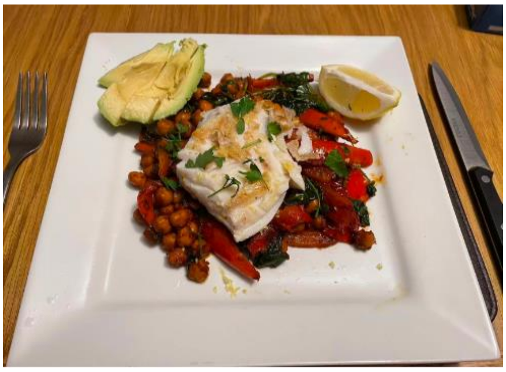

Figure 2 the plated dinner(source: by participant)

In this example, Xiaoyu's husband's insistence on plating also revealed hybrid masculinities. Creating specific plating for Xiaoyu indicates a caring and familial masculinity that conveys intimacy and care. However, a hidden story is that Xiaoyu shared more in reminding her husband to plan their meals. Therefore, this 'plating' is more like an art performance in cooking, showing love and care, which cannot compensate for the fact that Xiaoyu still shouldered more responsibility in ensuring her family's daily meals.

For households living in Sheffield, unlike the Nanjing families' apparent comparisons of artful father and daily cooking mother, the unequal gender relations are more subtly disguised under men's greater involvement in daily cooking. From these cases, even though men who engaged in domestic cooking could undertake the whole cooking process, their cooking still made a difference from routine cooking, such as Yu Yu's husband's precise control of meat temperatures and Xiaoyu's husband's professional chef-like plating. These masculine ways of cooking also produced a gender inequality in the kitchen, with men showcasing their expertise and elaborate cooking skills to gain more credit and authority in daily cooking (Meah and Jackson, 2013).

Comparative Analysis

This section employed concepts from practice theory to examine the changing meanings generated in cooking practices for households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. For young office workers living in Nanjing, their daily cooking is driven by a simplified cooking way to fit into their hectic working lives. In contrast, the international students living in Sheffield are more engaged in cooking complex dishes to re-create a sense of home and community in a foreign country. Although they have different orientations for cooking, this study identified some changes in the elements of cooking practices at both sites, including simplified cooking procedures, the use of convenience foods, and the utilisation of social media platforms, which reconfigure cooking practices with new meanings. This study also identified gendered cooking practices. To be more specific, with a gender lens, this study could examine the different gendered experiences in cooking procedures, competence, and understandings. For example, 'artful fathers' tended to showcase their complex cooking skills, while the mothers who routinely cooked were more concerned with the health of their family members.

However, this does not mean that this study supports a gender essentialist understanding of different gendered experiences in daily cooking. For households in Sheffield, although men in the households were more likely to undertake daily cooking, this study also identified the dynamics of gender relations in the hybrid expression of both caring masculinity and hegemonic masculinity in their cooking practices.

5.3 The Practice of Eating

The main theme of this section is healthy eating. Although I did not set a specific question for health problems, in the interviews with participants from both sites, many of them mentioned their engagement in healthy eating, despite their idiosyncratic experiences. The Healthy China 2030 strategy, promoted by the National Health Commission, directly identified several diet-related health problems, including obesity, malnutrition, and chronic diseases. It also offered actions, such as the design of dietary guidelines (Healthy China 2030 Strategy, 2019). This strategy also defines that individuals and families should take the primary responsibility for their health (Healthy China 2030 Strategy, 2019). This definition also embodies the neoliberal idea of treating health problems as individualised responsibility. The government's role is to ensure that individuals have access to sufficient knowledge about healthy eating. I argue that these actions also reflect a ‘deficit model’ that understands health problems as individuals’ inappropriate choices and eating behaviours, due to their lack of nutritional knowledge and motivation to promote health (Halkier and Holm, 2021). Based on practice theory, previous studies have highlighted that healthy eating is embedded in the complexity of everyday life contexts, connected with a wide range of other mundane practices, such as work, family life, and childcare (Halkier, 2010; Halkier & Holm, 2021). The contribution of practice theory to public health policy is to highlight why and how this official guidance on daily eating is difficult to translate into everyday life, revealing the limitations of current policy and its lack of an everyday life perspective (Warde, 2016a).

This section will continue to apply concepts from practice theory to examine the healthy eating experiences of office workers. From an everyday life perspective, this study will investigate how office workers address the conflicts among their pursuit of healthy eating, the constraints of their working lives, and compromised procedures. These can also be viewed as the performance of addressing health problems in an individualised way. The difference of this study is that I will explore the embodied experience in healthy eating and the influence of neoliberalism. I will examine participants’ perceptions and feelings about engaging in healthy eating and how the understanding of healthy eating becomes complicated in the migrant context.

Alan Warde (2016a) argued that what sociologists often neglect is that eating, in its nature, is a visceral experience. This study will also explore the culinary habitus of migrants living in

Sheffield. Previous studies mainly used cultural preferences to explain migrant groups' insistence on their own culture's cuisines (Abbots, 2016). Based on Alan Warde's work (2016a), *The Practice of Eating,* this section will provide a different explanation based on bodily dispositions to taste and flavours of specific cuisines. In this section, I will explore a culinary habitus constituted by the intersection of cuisines, flavours, memory, emotions, and sensory responses (Warde, 2016a).

This section is organised as follows: I will introduce Nanjing's cases first. I will examine the struggles of office workers to have healthy meals in their daily lives and the influence of neoliberalism on healthy eating. This part will also investigate mothers' responsibility in ensuring the family's health in the context of individualisation. I will continue to explore how a food femininity about healthy eating is enacted in the family's daily life. The second part will be the Sheffield cases. I will introduce a specific eating experience in a migration context: the Chinese stomach and how healthy eating is negotiated in the daily experiences of migrant households.

5.3.1 Nanjing

Can young office workers eat well?

As this title suggests, this section focuses on why it is so challenging for young office workers to have access to healthy meals during their workdays. I will start by examining participants' perceptions of their daily meals and health concerns, and then explore their practical procedures for addressing these concerns on workdays. Some participants mentioned their 24/7 intensive working pattern and their irregular daily meals. Sora's friend, Hu Ning, works in a law firm in Nanjing. Based on our conversations, Hu Ning devoted most of her time to her work. The importance of regular eating is subordinate to her work. Hu Ning explained that

'When I eat with Sora at home, my diet is healthy. Sora often cooks for me. However, since I started working, I have been skipping dinner and breakfast, with lunch being the only meal I can count on. I usually eat out with my colleagues, and then after work, maybe around 9 or 10 p.m., we will have an extra meal because we are just too tired. It is so hard to eat regularly.'

Hu Ning also introduced that her workplace promoted a work culture where employees were expected to devote all their time to the company and improve their competitiveness in the market. With this oppressive working culture and the intensive working environment, the need for regular eating is compromised. Previous studies have shown that the flexibility in working arrangements and longer working hours encroach on office workers's personal time for eating, leading to irregular eating patterns and an increased risk of chronic diseases (Dixon et al., 2014; Lund and Gronow, 2014; Manoogian et al., 2019). J.P. Poulain (2002) also used the term 'vagabond feeding' to describe the phenomenon in which young office workers often take meals in simple structures or even skip some meals, while increasing their intake of extra meals at odd hours. The dilemma is that although Hu Ning knew that eating at home is better, her exploitative working culture conflicted with her need to have regular healthy meals. This case also reflects what Schatzki (1996) said about the hierarchy of considerations in structuring practice. In this case, the working culture is prioritised over other needs.

Abel also shared his anxiety about his health since work. Abel mentioned that the meals offered by small restaurants and convenience stores often lacked green vegetables. Abel said that

‘I have seen the news about corporate cattle (shè chù 社畜， a term for Chinese young people exploited by overwork) ending up in the ICU. That really made me start thinking about my own eating habits. I was so worried I would have the same future. I used to be incredibly anxious about my vitamin intake; I even looked up what would happen if I did not get enough Vitamin A or C.’

Abel’s anxiety and his following actions of searching for nutrition information also reflect the influence of neoliberal ideas that ensuring health is a personal responsibility and requires individual solutions rather than looking at the structural problem, such as a more inclusive working environment.

Some participants mentioned that although their workplace offered meals to employees, the meals often could not meet their specific dietary needs, such as using less oil and salt and incorporating fresh ingredients. Rae, who works in a design company, shared that

‘Since I started working, I have just been eating fewer green vegetables—I mean, the real, dark leafy ones. The food in our staff canteen is awful; you definitely don't want to taste it. I guess you cannot really expect a staff canteen to cook delicious meals. Sometimes they have a tasty dish, like the dried tofu skin, but we all just assume they bought it from outside instead of making it themselves.’

These narratives could show that office workers have an awareness and even anxiety about health problems related to their daily eating, and already have sufficient understanding of a healthy diet. Their concerns about eating dark green vegetables and the intake of necessary nutrients align with the official guidance on a healthy diet. The Chinese Dietary Guidelines (2022) also recommend that adults have a balanced diet with a variety of staple foods, fresh vegetables and fruits, meat and fish, and dairy products, comprising around 12 different types of food for daily meals. The guidelines also suggested that adults should consume at least 300g of fresh vegetables, with at least half of these being dark green vegetables. Based on Warde’s (2016a) understanding, these official guidelines of a healthy diet can also be viewed as the ‘just out there’ organisation of eating practice. To be more specific, with the influential power of the National Health Commission and nutrition and medical experts who designed the dietary guidelines, these guidelines represent the formalised standard for healthy eating (Warde, 2016a). Warde (2016a) also pointed out that there is a relatively loose regulation on eating, with various sources of advice on what to eat and how to eat, and without any coercive influence. These dietary guidelines also served as a guide for the public to improve their healthy eating habits. It shows a standard for an ideal type of daily meals. The understanding of healthy eating is also continuously negotiated and gets adapted in daily experiences (Halkier, 2010).

Although participants had some shared understanding of healthy meals, their experiences showed various degrees of engagement in carrying out healthy eating. Jingle, who works in a state-owned company with a staff canteen, shared that since the canteen's food was too oily, she often prepared her lunchbox. Jingle had the goal of losing weight and specific needs for daily meals. Jingle shared that

'I am trying to lose fat, so I cook my own meals most of the time. I have to be really strict with what I eat. I pay much attention to my vegetable intake, since so many people our age do not eat enough of them. For losing fat, many fruits contain too much fructose, so I have to limit those as well, even though I love eating fruit. I usually look for vegetables that can be a good substitute, such as cucumbers or kale, which resembles some fruits. That is a new product. It just tastes like fruit.'

In this quote, Jingle even possessed a certification as a professional nutritionist and often communicated with her colleagues to share their fat loss knowledge. This narrative can also be viewed as an example of proactive engagement in healthy eating, characterised by sufficient nutrition knowledge and the competence to prepare meals with a variety of vegetables.

Some participants also shared their compromised solutions for daily healthy eating. When asked about changes or strategies for healthy eating, Rae explained that

'I can only really make sporadic changes to my diet. I thought about buying kale powder—it is made from freeze-dried vegetables and is supposed to help you get more veggies. It is just so hard to eat enough green vegetables when you are working. When you eat out, say at a small dumpling place, they seldom have fresh vegetables.'

Another example is Wei Yi's changes in ordering food takeaways. Since Wei Yi did less cooking after work, Wei Yi often ordered takeaway food for dinner. Wei Yi shared that

'I usually order from Xiao Chuniang and LaoXiang Ji (both are chain food services, offering home-style dishes. I used to order Malatang (a dish made with spicy soup, meat, and vegetables) more often last year. I think ever since the pandemic, many of my friends have started having health problems. Therefore, I also began to pay attention to my own health.'

This example showed more limited adaptations to healthy eating. Since Wei Yi used food takeaway as dinner, what she could do is to select those that offer home-like dishes. This is more like a placebo for Wei Yi. At least, she made a healthy choice for her takeaway food. The above examples also reflected the influence of neoliberalism, as participants sought personal solutions to address a structural problem in healthy eating. Without a more inclusive public health policy that considers the complexity of everyday life, the individualised responsibility for healthy eating sets an impossible task for office workers.

I also noticed the embodied experience of neoliberalism, which includes complex emotions when shouldering the individualised responsibility of maintaining health (Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Cairns and Johnston, 2015). The effect of neoliberalism is also embodied in its emphasis on productivity: neoliberal subjects who are able to self-discipline and self-improve their bodies and health (Martschukat, 2021). These deeply internalised gazes to monitor one's behaviours are also related to a feeling of self-indulgence and even guilt when one cannot maintain self-discipline (Warde, 1997).

Bai also engaged in controlling weight. However, sometimes, when he felt pressured, he ordered fast food, such as KFC, to make himself happy. KFC can be viewed as Bai's comfort food (Warde, 1997). Although eating high-energy fast food could disrupt his plan to control his weight, Bai treated eating KFC as a helpful way to relieve stress generated by his work and daily life. Bai said that

'KFC just makes me feel so happy! I will eat some fried chicken, drink a Coke, and have egg tarts, all that sweet, fatty, cold stuff. It is a real thrill. I know it is a bad habit. But when I am feeling uneasy, I want to do something "bad", like smoking. It is like cussing. Using bad words can be a great stress reliever. Getting all that negativity out is a healthy release, just like eating KFC or smoking. You are not being offensive to anyone; you are just getting a release.'

In this case, eating at KFC is a brief respite from the endless self-discipline and self-restraint projects. This example also illustrates another neoliberal burden imposed on individuals: the ability to switch from self-discipline to self-indulgence and then could revert to a self-monitored status (Warde, 1997). The ironic point is that, with the high pressures of work and the social expectations of having a successful career, having junk food, which is assumed to be avoided in self-discipline, serves as a comfort for Bai to gain some instant happiness. In the following part, I will continue to examine the influence of neoliberalism. I will turn to the daily healthy eating experience within the family to investigate how mothers shouldered the individualised responsibility of ensuring family members' healthy diets.

Mothers as the health guardians

This part will investigate how the food femininity related to family health and wellbeing is enacted in daily eating practices. Previous studies provided a notion of intensive mothering to describe mothers' responsibilities in ensuring health, which defines a good mother as one, with the experts' advice, who could put intensive time, energy, emotional and financial support for children's health and development (Hays, 1996, cited in Parsons, 2016). This motherhood is also part of the neoliberal project, as it clearly defines the responsibility of ensuring health as a personal responsibility of mothers (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Fielding-Singh and Oleschuk, 2023). In the following section, I will draw on the experiences of different mothers to examine how a food femininity centred on health is enacted in daily life.

Even during pregnancy, mothers have already begun to take responsibility for preventing health problems by controlling their diet. During our interview, Zhang's wife, Bella, had just given birth and was still in the recovery process. Bella also recalled her experience of changing her daily diet during pregnancy. Bella shared that

'My parents always thought I should eat more high-protein foods like meat and fish to get better nutrition. But then I had a test at the hospital. I learned that as a pregnant woman's hormones increase, it is better to control your blood sugar to avoid developing diabetes. After that, I started to watch my intake of sugar, salt, and oil. I had to stay away from high-carb foods like noodles and white rice. I used to love sweet and sour ribs, but I have to limit my intake of them now and eat more fruits, such as cherry tomatoes and cucumbers, instead. With this experience, I could have an opportunity to know what a healthy diet is.'

During Bella's postpartum recovery, her family also hired a postpartum doula to assist with cooking special dishes that were low in salt and oil, which were beneficial for Bella's recovery and breastfeeding. In another interview, Zhang also mentioned that the postpartum meals often included a variety of different food items, such as five different kinds of vegetables, prepared with very light cooking. Since it is hard to practice these demanding requirements at home, they went to the postpartum care centre for Bella's recovery. This case also embodies how insensitive mothering is built from the pregnancy experience. In this case, Bella followed the medical experts' advice for nutrition and carefully monitored her daily intake of specific foods such as fresh vegetables. A food femininity which defines mothers' roles as health guardians also developed in these experiences.

Cairns and Johnston (2015) also pointed out that intensive mothering can be viewed as a hegemonic femininity, which presents mothers with a universal and ideal model of motherhood roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, based on the North American context, their studies explained that the model represented the experiences of white, middle-class mothers who could afford health and nutritious food and prepare daily meals for their children with sufficient time and resources (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). The problem is that, as a gender ideology, intensive mothering could also impact how mothers perceive their daily care work. Cairns and Johnston (2015) also identified mothers' emotional experience as influenced by intensive mothering. When mothers could competently carry out their care work, such as providing what their children like to eat, they also gained some emotional reward, including the feeling of pride for what they had done and a deep emotional attachment to their children (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). However, they also pointed out mothers' continuous insecure status regarding their performance in intensive mothering (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Neoliberal ideas aligned with hegemonic femininity, placing mothers in a constant state of self-measurement and self-evaluation (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Fielding-Singh and Cooper, 2023). In the following part, I will use different mothers' stories to examine their experiences of engaging in intensive mothering. I will put their experiences in their daily family life to investigate the dynamics of maternal responsibility and gender relations in ensuring health.

Mai Mai, aged 30, works in civil service in Nanjing. She and her husband have a two-year-old son. The couple's parents often come to help the couple with childcare. After having a child, Mai Mai paid more attention to healthy and safe food. For the nutritious diet of children, Mai Mai shared that

'A child's diet should include a good mix of meat, vegetables, and protein. They should have seafood, especially sea fish, maybe two or three times a week. Sea fish has DHA, which is essential for a child's brain development. Plus, fish is a better source of protein than red meat, and it is easier for kids to digest. It is a traditional Chinese belief that white meat—like fish and chicken—is more beneficial than red meat like pork, beef, and duck because it is higher in protein and lower in fat.'

This narrative contains some nutrition knowledge, such as the benefits of DHA and protein from white meat, which could imply that young parents are endorsing scientific dietary knowledge. In the study of intergenerational differentiation in dietary knowledge, Guo Yuhua (2000) found that young parents preferred to use modern science as the guide for a nutritious diet, such as providing children with a vitamin-rich diet, while the grandparents insisted on the traditional dietary knowledge based on Chinese traditional medicine, such as having a diversified and balanced diet. This differentiation in feeding children can sometimes cause conflicts between grandparents and young parents (Guo, 2000). In Mai Mai's case, she also considered the value of traditional dietary knowledge, but she mentioned the divergent opinions on monitoring children's eating behaviour.

Mai Mai: My parents think we should always encourage the kids to eat more. We disagree with that approach. Enough is enough. Once the child no longer wants to eat, we should stop. If he gets hungry, he will let us know. But my parents would still push him just to try a little more.

Researcher: When you have different opinions, how do you handle them?

Mai Mai: I will tell my parents to shut up (Laughing). I tell them to stop talking about it, that I disagree. And then they will not say any more. You cannot simply say their opinions are wrong; many of their views are outdated. Our attitude is that childcare has to be done our way. The parents are the ones who should take most of the responsibility and concern for the child.

I also identified that in families with grandparents living with the couple, grandparents often made a concession when encountering differentiation in feeding children to sustain a harmonious relationship with family members. In Mai Mai's case, she used a relatively tough way to solve the divergent opinions and reaffirm her maternal authority in controlling children's eating (Valentine, 1999).

Mai Mai also shared an interesting story about how she handled her husband's differing opinions on her son's diet. Her husband would not let their son eat beef. It is a traditional Chinese zodiac belief that it is bad luck to eat the meat of the animal whose year you were born in, and their son's zodiac sign is the ox. However, Mai Mai believed that, for a balanced diet, it is better to have both red and white meat. Mai Mai's strategy is that when her husband does not eat with them, she can make pasta with some minced beef and secretly give it to her son. If the couple had dinner at home, her husband could also help feed the children. In this story, although the father is absent for most of the feeding work, he still has a significant influence on the children's eating habits, such as defining what is inedible.

In this case, Mai Mai clearly expressed that ensuring children's healthy eating is mothers' responsibility. Since having children, Mai Mai has become more engaged in learning about nutrition and preparing meals with sufficient nutrients. These efforts are based on the gendered assumption that mothers are more interested in learning health knowledge, and also justify the unequal division of labour that Mai Mai shouldered more in ensuring children's health. However, the understanding of healthy eating is also negotiated and sometimes yields conflicting ideas within a family's daily interactions. In this dynamic, Mai Mai's engagement in feeding children also served to solidify her authority in determining the proper way for her children to eat. However, in this case, Mai Mai's husband, who sporadically participated in their son's healthy eating habits, had the last word in making decisions. Mai Mai's method of secretly giving her son some beef still disclosed this subtle patriarchal influence.

In Rose's family, she and her husband have different eating habits. Rose was more concerned about healthy eating and engaged in regular fitness activities, which also required specific daily meal plans with reduced sugar and salt content. Rose also used fitness mobile phone applications to learn about nutrition knowledge and prepare her daily meals. Her husband rarely ate at home. Rose described that her husband often ate heavy, sweet food, which was not acceptable to her. Since her husband usually has many socialising occasions and eats at restaurants, it is hard for her to make some changes to his daily eating habits. Rose also provided an example that when the family had KFC together, her daughter often ordered a whole chicken to share with Rose. However, her husband was not satisfied with these and would order another fried chicken and ice cream for himself.

Although Rose's husband ignored his own unhealthy eating habits, he still monitored their daughter's healthy eating. Rose shared that when her husband found out her daughter did not like eating carrots, he just blamed their daughter for being too picky about her eating habits. Rose held a very different opinion. Rose shared that

'I think what her dad said was a bit much. Everyone has something they dislike. Adults could have more choices when it comes to food, and we should respect our kids' preferences, too. If my daughter does not want to eat carrots, we can find something else to get her anthocyanins. As long as children get enough balanced nutrients, I do not think it is a problem if they are picky.'

For her daughter's eating, Rose also shared her experience of socialising her daughter for proper eating behaviours. Her Daughter often complained that the food provided by their school's canteen was awful. However, Rose refused to cook lunch for her daughter like some mothers. Rose explained that

'I told her, at least you can eat the rice and the dishes, just select one you think you can accept. I think children should not be too finicky when they are young. If the children cannot bear the food provided by the school canteen because the meals do not taste good, how can they adapt to collective life and a new environment? There are many painful things to come. Eating is such a small thing at this time.'

In this narrative, Rose also distanced herself from mothers who are overly concerned with their children's health and cater to their children's every preference (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Rose's case also showed more nuanced dynamics of gender relations in the family's healthy eating experiences. Although Rose could not influence her husband's eating choices, she could educate her daughter about the moral values of eating to reinforce maternal authority, such as persuading her daughter to accept meals from the school canteen. In comparison with other mothers who cooked meals for their children to bring to school every day, Rose also engaged in self-evaluation and evaluation of other mothers' performance in ensuring children's healthy eating, which could also indicate the influence of intensive motherhood.

The above cases of different mothers' experiences also showed the enactment of a food femininity about health, which has even developed since mothers' pregnancy and gets negotiated in everyday family life. The findings also noted the embodied experience of engaging in healthy eating in the neoliberal context, such as the mothers' emotional rewards and a constant self-evaluation. These gendered experiences also demonstrated that, with a gender lens, practice theory can enrich its explanation of the daily eating experience. In the following section, I will continue to examine the embodied experience of eating in the context of migration.

5.3.2 Sheffield

Intragroup difference in the healthy eating experience

Previous studies on migrant groups' dietary changes have also identified that the deficit model provides a universal pattern of migrant groups' experiences, indicating that they lack sufficient sources and knowledge about the healthy diet of the host country (Halkier and Jensen, 2011; Mycek et al., 2020). This simplified understanding overlooks the internal complexity of how the migrant experience intersects with other factors, such as gender, occupation, age, and marital status. With an intersectionality perspective, this part will investigate the diverse experiences of engaging in healthy eating of migrant households living in Sheffield.

Some participants also mentioned their health concerns, especially some PhD students. They shared that they often paid attention to the intake of fresh vegetables and fruits to increase immunity and prevent disease. Nock said that

‘I think we all have a basic idea of what a balanced diet is. I do not follow the guidelines rigidly; I just adapt them to my own situation. For example, if I have a lot of work, I will limit my carb intake because it makes me less productive. Another reason I am so focused on my nutrition is that the NHS is so expensive. I try my best not to get sick because it is so hard to get an appointment here. Even if I do not want to eat vegetables today, I will push myself to eat some for the next couple of days.’

Nock’s narrative also reflects the long-term impact of neoliberalism on both ideological and structural levels. With concern for the lack of public care services, Nock particularly monitored their daily eating habits, such as the intake of fresh vegetables, to avoid diseases.

Some participants also shared their experiences of dieting to control their weight, despite their individual approaches. In Liu Xiaoyu’s family, the couple both focused on healthy eating. In their daily meals, the couples have focused on having less meat and more vegetables to have nutritious meals. Liu Xiaoyu also mentioned that her husband often followed a strict diet to lose fat to improve his climbing. Xiaoyu described her husband as the person who could rigidly follow his plans. Xiaoyu shared that

‘He wakes up and has a cup of black coffee, then weighs out the milk for his breakfast of oatmeal and blueberries. Sometimes, he even makes one for me. He also has a Coke. It is the same breakfast every single day. I do not know how he can stand eating the same thing—I could never do it. His diet involves a strict adherence to meal timing; after breakfast, he will not eat again for the following eight hours.’

This example also reflects the impact of neoliberal ideas. Xiaoyu’s husband’s strict management of his daily meals can be viewed as exemplary of a neoliberal subject who could carry out self-constraint and self-discipline in daily healthy eating.

Other participants also shared the embodied experience of conducting a strict diet plan. Another PhD student, Wen Jie, shared some changes in the embodied experience while doing the ketogenic diet.

‘When you start to have a ketogenic diet, the beginning period must be very tough, for around 4 to 6 weeks. Your body will adjust to the new energy-consuming way. In normal situations, we use carbohydrates and sugar as the main sources of energy. However, the ketogenic diet utilises fat as its primary energy source. Your body has to produce, store and consume the energy. It is challenging to adapt to this transformation when the entire mechanism undergoes change. It is a prolonged process. When you get some carbohydrate foods, you will get exhausted.'

This quote reveals a detailed process of embodied experience of engaging in a self-constrained eating diet. This can also be understood as the tangible effect of neoliberalism on the productive power of neoliberalism in constructing the neoliberal subject working at the gut level and felt by body organs (Probyn, 2000). Previous studies on the embodied experience of neoliberalism have focused on how power is exerted and imprinted on the body (Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Martschukat, 2021). This study explores different embodied experiences of how the body perceives power. This part will expand more on the visceral experience of eating for migrant groups as a debut to develop a specific food consumption theory and enrich the concepts of practice theory. Before introducing participants' specific visceral experience of eating hometown food, I will turn to the gendered experience of healthy eating.

Gendered experience of healthy eating

A different case is Kri's story. Kri, is a master's student in her 20s. During our conversation, she mentioned many topics related to beauty and fashion. Based on our first interview, Kri did not appear to have an interest in the topic of eating or food. Kri said she has a very small appetite and often gets by on just one meal a day. Later in another conversation, when asking about her daily experience of eating, Kri shared her anxiety about body image. Kri said that

'I do not spend much on food. I can drink some milk and feel full. I have been anxious about my body image, so I always control what I eat. Before I came to the UK, I weighed only 40 kilograms. Now, I can no longer fit into my old clothes. The anxiety got worse when I went back to China, because, you know, clothing sizes there are getting smaller and smaller. In the UK, my size was just small or medium, but in China, I had to buy an extra-large. It is so crazy!'

Cairns and Johnston (2015) also identified a food femininity in healthy eating. In their studies about diet, although participants claimed a rejection of 'dieting', they still engaged in controlling weight and fat under the guise of their health. With the influence of neoliberalism, women's engagement in controlling weight is framed as a personal choice or even women's empowerment for pursuing personal health, rather than a restriction on their bodies (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). This case also reflects the long-term influence that the consumerist culture manipulates the unrealistic beauty standards of body image set by the gender discourse to raise young women's anxiety about body image and even some eating disorders (Bell and Vallentine, 1997).

I also identified how the food femininity of women as the health guardian gets negotiated and enacted in daily interactions. Xiao Mang, a PhD student, often has meals with her boyfriend. Xiao Mang also shared their different attitudes towards healthy eating. Xiao Mang recognised the impact of irregular eating habits on long-term health and made adjustments to her diet. However, her boyfriend still insisted on his previous eating pattern. Xiao Mang said that

‘I was worried about my pancreas. I also considered losing weight and frequently researched health information. I found that some young people even get symptoms of early diabetes. A friend of mine visited us, and she noticed we were eating too many carbs, especially my boyfriend. He would even get a food coma after overeating. Now I eat more vegetables than meat, and my boyfriend even makes a separate vegetable dish for me. I have told him he should eat fewer carbs, but he said he cannot give up white rice.’

In this case, Xiao Mang cared more about healthy eating in their relationships. Xiao Mang undertook the role of proactively learning nutritious knowledge and also persuaded her boyfriend to make changes in diet. This case also illustrates how a food femininity, which defines women as the guardians of health, is constructed through daily negotiations about what constitutes a healthy and proper meal.

Migrant households also faced the challenges of access to their hometown food. Sometimes, these specific needs could be another burden when preparing healthy meals for family members. Snow Bamboo also shared the experience of preparing her husband’s weight-loss diet. Since medical advice recommended a fixed intake of vegetables, Snow Bamboo also faced the challenge of creating healthy meals with a variety of vegetables in the UK.

‘Last year, my husband started to lose weight. The dietitian suggested that he should have 250 g of vegetables per meal, which is far beyond my understanding. Additionally, 250g of vegetables in the UK is expensive. We did not follow the suggestions rigidly, but we ensured that we had vegetables at every meal. We calculated that eating 250g of vegetables means that we need to eat a whole cabbage for two people. When we were in China, I also bought a freezer to prepare meals in advance with different dishes with both meat and vegetables. After moving here, we have a small fridge. I could no longer prepare meals like I used to. Also, we had a limited choice of vegetables here. I could not bear to always eat the same types of vegetables every day.’

Snow Bamboo also mentioned the difficulty of buying some Asian vegetables, such as bok choy and choi sum, in the UK. This case also demonstrated the biased understanding of the deficit model regarding migrant groups’ healthy eating habits. The dietary suggestions often used the host country’s eating habits as a default model, neglecting the specific culinary needs and preferences of migrant groups (Halkier and Jensen, 2011). Furthermore, the deficit model, which attributes healthy eating to personal knowledge and choices, did not recognise the complexity of everyday life. Snow Bamboo also highlighted the difficulty of ensuring a fixed number of fresh vegetables. Since she was conducting her fieldwork during that time, she had enough flexible time to prepare various dishes in advance.

These narratives could reveal the different experiences of the intragroup in engaging in healthy eating among migrant households. Although migrant households experienced some common influences of neoliberalism, such as the long-term impact of austerity in terms of cutting public medical services, within the household, individualised responsibility is unevenly shifted more onto women. I also examined the embodied experience of neoliberalism. From a Foucauldian perspective, previous studies on the effect of power have primarily examined how power operates on the body, such as the construction of neoliberal subjects (Guthman and DuPuis, 2006; Martschukat, 2021). This study examines 'what power tastes like' (Probyn, 2000, p.7). In the following part, I will continue to explore the corporeal experience of social forces and social forms. I will focus on the visceral experience to examine the culinary preferences of migrant groups.

'Chinese stomach': culinary resistance/adaptations

This part focuses on Chinese cuisine, which is also a core aspect of the food experience for Chinese migrant households. This part will also explore the topics of migration identity and experience, as well as their connection to Chinese cuisine. With practice theory and the concept of visceral politics, this study does not treat the Chinese migrant group's insistence on Chinese food merely as a cultural preference; instead, this part will explore the role of visceral experience of food, such as taste and ingestion, in the construction of migrant experience (Probyn, 2000). This part will also be more theoretical. Since this part will add the visceral experience of food to the current understanding of practice theory, I will review the core concepts which will be applied to the following analysis to facilitate the explanation.

In *The Practice of Eating*, Warde (2016a) proposed that eating can be understood as an embodied habitus developed through daily, repetitive bodily procedures such as tasting and swallowing. These embodied habits also formed a specific bodily disposition towards eating, which can be viewed as an automatic bodily reaction triggered by the external environment, such as public culture about eating (Warde, 2016a). I argue that previous feminist works on the visceral experience of food provide a direction for how to apply Warde's (2016a) concepts about embodied habitus and eating procedures. Inspired by Probyn's work (2000), Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008; 2010) argued that the visceral experiences of food, including taste, smell, memory, and feelings, are material forms of power and social categories, such as gender, race, and class. To be more specific, their work provided an alternative approach to investigating power by examining the diverse feelings experienced by different bodies during sensory engagement with food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). In the following section, I will utilise these concepts to examine a specific experience of Chinese migrant households, their 'Chinese stomach,' and their reactions to local cuisine.

A common experience is that participants introduced that they have a 'Chinese stomach', which refers to their insistence on Chinese food and Chinese culinary style in a new food environment.

An interesting point is that the notion of a ‘Chinese stomach’ emerged in their responses about their experiences of eating local food. I also identified participants’ different experiences of ‘Chinese stomach’, which could indicate the intra-group differences in culinary habits.

Some participants recalled that they could not adapt to local food, especially cold meals. Vanilla, a PhD student, shared her previous experience of eating local food when she first came to the UK. Vanilla said that

‘When I first came here, I could not get used to the eating. During that time, I did not know how to cook. You know that many foods here are supermarkets’ frozen food, such as sandwiches and paninis. With a ‘Chinese stomach’, I could not accept this kind of food initially. But later, I could also eat cold sandwiches in winter.’

Little Rain, a master’s student, also shared more details of her feelings regarding the meals she bought from the campus canteen. It was a vegan curry bowl. Little Rain shared that

‘I am not sure if you have ever tried this. It was a rainy, cold day. I saw someone eating this (curry bowl). The café always serves you cold food. Even after they heat it up, it still feels cold. I could not accept the instant food they served. It was not that it tasted bad. This instant curry bowl contained some cereals that I was not familiar with. The curry tasted a little sweet. It just felt strange to me, not like a porridge and not like a soup.’

Their narratives also present their embodied resistance to the cold food from local food stores. In Little Rain’s case, the taste of the vegan curry bowl, which consists of cold tastes, strange tastes of the curry, and a texture that does not taste like porridge or soup, provided a feeling of unfamiliarity. These visceral experiences also contribute to the sense of differences. The taste of cold food also contributes to Little Rain and Vanilla’s perception of the differences between their familiar Chinese cuisines, those cooked dishes and the local food, a feeling of cold. Warde (2016a) also proposed that bodies are often accustomed to specific cuisines with their distinctive combinations of flavours and can develop corresponding sensory appreciations, in other words, preferences for specific flavours. Based on Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy’s concept of visceral politics (2008), sensory appreciations could reveal more about the migrant experience, providing a corporeal understanding of migrant identities (Longhurst et al., 2009).

Some participants also shared their appreciation of Western food. Zhuge mentioned his experience of learning to cook Western cuisines. Zhuge said that

‘British cuisine seems like a kind of “black technology”. What else is there to it besides fries? The fine-dining establishments in London are rarely British; they are often foreign restaurants. You hardly ever see a British Michelin-starred restaurant. Most of their proprietors are from Hong Kong, Italy, or France. I also learned to cook from some television programs, such as MasterChef and The Health Kitchen. I learned how to cook salmon and some simple foreign dishes, such as roast bacon and asparagus.’

Since Zhuge has lived in different cities in the UK for over 10 years, he also has a unique experience of local cuisines, which is evident in his comments on various fine restaurants. The understanding of Western food and the perceptions of different countries' cuisines vary among Chinese migrant groups.

Wen Jie also shared her appreciation for the different cuisines of various countries in the UK. Wen Jie shared that

'I enjoy trying different cuisines and do not feel I have a particular "Chinese stomach". While I do occasionally crave Chinese food, such as soup dumplings, it is only for a little while. I am not strictly bound to Chinese cuisine. Furthermore, it is quite easy to get food from various countries here. I seek out authentic cuisines, particularly those recognised by the local community.'

These two cases also illustrate the internal complexity of the visceral experience of the 'Chinese stomach' and participants' varying perceptions of Western food, influenced by their diverse occupations and varied migrant experiences. Their narratives could also demonstrate their varied understanding and knowledge of Western food. Zhuge could even learn how to cook local cuisines from gastronomy television programs. Wen Jie also demonstrated a significant interest in authentic local cuisine. These intra-group differences in the experience of tasting local food also demonstrate that there is no universal and shared experience and identity for migrant groups. These different experiences and perceptions of Chinese cuisines and local British cuisines also showed how various aspects of identities get moved through the visceral experience of eating. Wen Jie and Zhuge could gain some pleasure and appreciation from local food. However, Little Rain and Vanilla still had a strange feeling and some unfamiliarity with the local food.

I also identified gendered experience in 'Chinese stomach'. Some participants also shared their experiences of preparing Chinese food for their children. A shared experience is that participants mentioned their children's school offered them daily meals with food such as hamburgers, sandwiches, and pizza. Sometimes, their children also had different requests for their daily meals, such as some Chinese food. Participants, who are mothers, also prepared lunchboxes with Chinese food for their children. In Christy's family, her son, at the age of 16, could have lunch at home, and her daughter, at the age of 11, often had lunch at school. For her son's lunch, Christy usually made pasta. After eating the school's meal for a time, her daughter started to miss the Chinese food. Christy also made a separate lunchbox with Chinese food for her daughter. Christy shared that

'She can have school lunch. However, I think that almost all schools in the UK serve lunch mainly as pizza, fish and chips, or a sandwich. She had had it for maybe a year, then she quit. She is fine with this food, but she still wants to have Asian food. Especially, she likes dumplings, and sometimes she likes fried rice or hot noodles.'

This case also demonstrated how the visceral experience of 'Chinese stomach' and Western perceptions of food are manipulated in daily life. Previous studies have also identified that some migrant parents insisted on cooking their own culture's cuisine for their children (Valentine, 1999; Slocum, 2011). Based on my findings, parents can accept the school's meals unless their children have specific dietary requirements. This finding may also reveal the dynamics in migrant households' visceral experience of eating.

Comparative Analysis

This section examines the impact of neoliberal policies on healthy eating. With a practice theory, this section could inform the understanding of how the macro policy was translated and had an impact on daily life. At both sites, the understanding of healthy eating is negotiated and shifted through daily eating practices. I also identified the embodied experience of engaging in healthy eating for households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. Previous studies on the neoliberal project in public health and diet have focused on explaining how power operates in producing the subject of self-discipline and self-governance. This study presents a more detailed embodied experience, such as Bai's brief shift between self-indulgence and self-discipline, and Wen Jie's bodily adaptation process during a strict diet. This section also examined the gendered experiences in the practice of healthy eating. For households in Nanjing, I identified the different gendered experiences in knowledge and understanding of healthy eating, which also revealed how the gendered assumption that mothers are the primary health guardians of the family is constructed in daily healthy eating experiences.

The main contribution of this section is the exploration of the visceral experience of eating. This section combines the main concepts from practice theory and feminist visceral politics to develop a specific explanation of culinary habitus. This study used the case of 'Chinese stomach' to present the corporeal experience of migrant experience and also showed the internal complex experience among migrant groups.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the trajectories and transformations of the cooking and eating practices across time and space. This chapter also focused on the daily experience of young office workers. Both the cooking and eating practice section discussed how young office workers engage in having proper and healthy daily meals and how their understanding of proper meals is shaped by the influence of their constrained work environment. Within a neoliberal context, healthy eating is also framed as an individual's and their family's responsibility, with personal solutions. This chapter also identified the gendered experiences in cooking and eating practices. Within the households, a food femininity which defines women as the health guardians is also enacted in daily household cooking and eating practices. Although this study identified men's involvement in daily cooking, their engagement also expressed hybrid masculinities, which include both a caring masculinity that involves showing love and intimacy and the subtle influence of hegemonic masculinity, through which men reaffirmed their authority in daily cooking. This chapter also explored a culinary habitus developed in the daily cooking and eating practices. The visceral experience could enrich the current understanding of practice theory for food consumption practices. Practice theory could enrich the detailed analysis of visceral experience to be applied in migrant contexts. The feminist concept of visceral experience also offered a direction for how practice theory could explore the social division and social inequality. This chapter still presents the daily struggles of office worker in eating well. The following chapter will continue to explore the embodied experience of sensory engagement with food. I will also explore how ordinary households could participate in transforming the current food system with their embodied knowledge about food.

6 Food Risk: layperson's tacit knowledge, embodied knowledge

6.1 Introduction

The main theme of this chapter is about food risk. Although much of this chapter is related to food safety concerns in daily food consumption, I chose to use the term 'food risk,' a more inclusive articulation, to cover households' daily concerns about food consumption. I will leave the notion of 'food risk' open to discussion without a fixed definition, because the purpose of this chapter is to show how laypersons, referring to participants who are not food studies experts, build their perception and knowledge about food risk based on their everyday experiences. This chapter will investigate two different epistemic approaches to understanding food risk: the first is a scientific approach, based on the measurement and evidence of modern science (Beck, 1992; Lupton, 1999). This approach not only provides an understanding of food risk but also enables the management of food risk through food science techniques, such as food preservation and freshness techniques (Freidberg, 2010; Evans et al., 2022). The second approach is based on laypeople's daily experiences, such as their rule of thumb (Lupton, 1999; Shaw, 1999). These two different approaches are permeated in people's daily food consumption experiences, from reading package labels during grocery shopping to handling the kitchen's food waste, such as checking the perishable part of a food item by smelling it (Evans, 2011; MacKendrick, 2018).

Based on Foucault's (1996) understanding of power and knowledge, the scientific approach to food risk claims that its production is the absolute truth, grounded in scientific rationality (Beck, 1992). It also devalues other alternative forms of understanding, such as laypeople's everyday life experiences, which are often regarded as their intuitive and subjective judgement, rather than recognising them as an equally important forms of knowledge (Shaw, 2004; Mythen, 2008). These inherent biases in experts' knowledge, based on the absolute rationality of science, can be found in the mainstream discourse of food safety (Lupton, 1999). However, this discourse supports a deficit model, suggesting that consumers lack sufficient scientific knowledge of food safety and have personal biases regarding the consequences of risk, thereby leading to irrational behaviours and responses (Lupton, 1999; Meah, 2014). For example, based on the FAO's (2025) introduction to food standards, food standards are norms and principles established by experts with explicit scientific measurements to define the scope of safety and risk in food production. This definition affirms the dominant position of the scientific approach in producing influential discourse of risk (Beck, 2008). Furthermore, on the recent World Food Safety Day 2025, the director of the food system and food safety division of FAO and the director of the department of nutrition and food safety made a joint claim that encourages all stakeholders in food safety, including consumers to take actions to prevent food-borne diseases caused by food safety based on science-backed guidance and advice (FAO, 2025). In a study on China's food safety issues, food scientists also expressed a top-down perspective, suggesting that ordinary consumers require more education about proper information and knowledge of food safety (Jen and Chen, 2017).

This chapter also aims to build an alternative knowledge base on ordinary households' daily experiences of handling food risk in their food consumption process. The contents of previous chapters focused on the difficulties faced by office workers in planning their daily meals and maintaining a healthy diet. This chapter will explore how ordinary households can engage in transforming the current unsustainable and unjust food system through their everyday knowledge and embodied understanding of food. The literature review concluded that the design of the food system is based on neoliberal ideas, with market relations permeating agricultural production, food distribution, and consumption. This chapter will explore how ordinary consumers could participate in building a more inclusive food system. However, genuine participation also needs more evaluations. Overemphasising the responsibilities of ordinary consumers and individual families also has the danger of reinforcing the individualisation path of neoliberalism, which distracts attention from the state and governments' responsibility in food safety (Johnston, 2008; MacKendrick, 2018). This chapter will continue to examine the impacts of neoliberalism on food risk in two different countries, China and the UK, with a focus on the daily food consumption experiences of households living in Nanjing and Sheffield.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section focuses on layperson's knowledge of food risk based on their daily food consumption experience. This part will include ordinary consumers' perceptions of food risk, such as their daily concerns about food-related issues. I will use the concepts from practice theory to examine how ordinary consumers handle food risks in their daily food consumption. The second section will introduce a tension between the mediated knowledge about food risk, which refers to a common experience that, with the intervention of food science and technologies, ordinary consumers' knowledge about food items is mainly from the food package information, such as sell-by-date and food safety labels, and the embodied knowledge, which refers to sensory engagement with food. The last section will focus on the gendered experience of embodied knowledge. I will examine mothers' daily experiences in ensuring food safety and food quality for family members.

6.2 From everyday experience: layperson's knowledge about food risk

Based on Beck's concepts of risk society (1992), previous studies pointed out that contemporary food safety issues are the by-products of industrialised agriculture and the development of food science and technologies, such as the introduction of GMO food, the use of chemical food additives and hormones in food production and processing, and the residues of pesticides (Lupton, 2002; Yan, 2012). In *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, Bauman (2013) proposed that from modernity to post-modernity, people are always in a state of gaining something and losing something. Previously, in modern times, people have given up a portion of their freedom to achieve security (Bauman, 1997). In postmodernity, people seek to regain more freedom by exchanging their security (Bauman, 1997). This exchange state can also be applied to people's relations with the modern food system. Contemporary food technologies and agricultural production provide consumers with more choices in food products, but at the cost of unknown food risks. The problem is that, even for experts themselves, the exponential growth of food technologies can make it difficult for them to provide the public with a precise explanation for the potential consequences and influence, such as the controversial topic of GMO food (Beck, 1992; Almas, 1999; Lupton, 2005). Using Beck's words (2008), when addressing modern risks, people are in a bizarre state, such as seeking the rationality of science to make predictions while employing their imaginations to include every possible consequence. With these imperceptible and unknown risks, the modern risk society also makes people in a constant state of anxiety (Lupton, 1999).

Given the invisibility of risk, another feature is that ordinary people need to rely on mediated discourse, such as scientific explanations and media reports, to have a sense of the existence, consequences, and influence of food risk (Beck, 1992). Beck (1992, 2008) also pointed out the power relations in the construction of risk discourse, noting that the definition of risk can involve multiple stakeholders with different voices about what should be identified as risk and which aspects should be accounted for as knowledge of risk. Media report plays a complex role in the construction of risk discourse (Beck, 1992; Lupton, 2002). Mass media can intensify risks when presenting them to the public, as seen in some famous food scandals (Lupton, 2000). Sometimes, it also contains some controversial points, which can annoy the public due to these shifting perspectives (Lupton, 2002; Fuentes and Fuentes, 2022). However, this does not mean that ordinary consumers are merely passive victims who can only rely on external discourse to determine their fate in a risk society (Beck, 1992).

This section will situate the mediated discourse in two institutional contexts, China and the UK, to examine its role in shaping perceptions of food risk. For food safety issues, both countries experienced sensational food scandals, such as the 2008 milk scandal in China and the BSE outbreak in the UK. Although both countries' food safety governance embodies the influence of neoliberalism, especially in terms of individualised responsibilities in dealing with food safety, different institutional contexts also make the role of mass media differ in shaping ordinary consumers' understandings. Through the lens of practice theory, this part will also investigate how participants' perceptions of food risk manifest in their daily experience of handling food risk. I will start with the households' experiences in Nanjing first, and then for participants living in Sheffield.

6.2.1 Nanjing

'Food safety issues are prevalent in China'

A common experience is that, although all participants living in Nanjing were aware of the prevalence of food safety problems, this awareness did not develop into a proactive response. When asked about concerns about food safety issues, the SpongeBob and Patrick Star couple expressed a taken-for-granted attitude towards the food safety problems when eating outside. Patrick Star said that

'Since we don't have kids, we're not worried about this problem. We figure we are immune to all poisons! (laughing). Especially when we eat out, we have pretty much already accepted that we are probably eating gutter oil.'

This narrative reveals that Patrick Star acknowledged the prevalence of food safety issues, that some restaurants would use gutter oil and could accept this. In this study, participants' taken-for-granted attitudes differ from the findings of previous studies, which indicate a strong emotional reaction, such as concern for food safety problems. Previous studies identified 'worried type' consumers in dealing with food safety, who paid specific attention to food safety issues and had intense emotional reactions toward the food safety problems (Halkier, 2010). These consumers often actively acquired specific knowledge about food safety issues, such as the use of hormones in meat products, and engaged in targeted consumption practices for food safety, including the purchase of organic food or seeking out special food stores, like local butchers (De Krom, 2009; Halkier, 2010). For the Chinese context, a city-wide survey of Nanjing residents in 2015 also reported that over half of the participants worried daily about food safety, with 21% being 'seriously worried' (Si and Zhong, 2018). Other qualitative studies, which interviewed urban residents about their food safety concerns, also identified strong emotions, including anxiety and a fear of food problems, particularly regarding the influence of the Sanlu milk scandal (Gong and Jackson, 2012). A nuanced difference of this study is that, at the cognitive level, participants were aware of the prevalence of food safety problems in China. However, participants did not exhibit a strong feeling, such as any expression of anxiety for food safety. A question is why have they taken a take-for-granted attitude toward food safety, even though there are still constant outbreaks of food safety scandals?

A shared experience is that participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the content about food safety problems on social media platforms. To be more specific, participants mentioned that they did not intentionally search for information related to food safety issues but could receive a lot of recommended information. Lei, a master's student in her 20s, shared that she rarely ordered food takeaways after learning about the food additives used in the food takeaway cooking process. Lei explained that she learned the information from Douyin, which revealed that some small food takeaway businesses used kē jì yǔ hěn huó 科技与狠活 (technology and hardcore tricks in Chinese, referring to manufactured additives) to deceive consumers, rather than cooking fresh food. Lei shared that:

‘Takeaway food has too many additives. After learning about the food industry online, I found that many foods contain additives. You can't really eat well. I rarely order food delivery now. I just stumbled upon this content on Douyin, but it’s clear they use a lot of additives. It made me feel a bit scared.’

Although Lei showed concern for unknown additives used in food takeaways and did not order food takeaways to avoid additives, when asked whether she would pay attention to consumers’ rights, Lei said that

‘In most cases, unless a food safety issue is very serious, I won't pay much attention to it. This problem is just so common. All you can do is be careful when you're shopping. I think food safety problems are unavoidable.’

From Lei’s narratives, content produced by social media platforms could shape her perception of food safety issues. However, Lei also emphasised that she usually would not pay specific attention to these problems even in an environment full of food safety information. Although some content, such as concerns about food takeaways, may capture participants’ brief attention, most of the time, the overwhelming information from social platforms is more like background noise in their daily lives. Previous studies have also identified that when hearing about food scandals from news reports, some consumers make initial responses, such as stopping the purchase of suspicious food items (Dr Krom, 2009; Shaw, 2004; Halkier, 2010). In the long term, consumers may gradually forget about the food scares and repurchase the food items (Shaw, 2004; De Krom, 2009). Previous studies have focused on the impacts of traditional media reports. The distinctive feature of using social media platforms is that participants mentioned they have become accustomed to automatically recommended information about food safety problems from these platforms. That is part of their daily routines of using social media platforms. In this study, checking news and receiving information from social media platforms can also be viewed as a routinised way for participants to acquire knowledge about food safety.

Some participants also shared their evaluations of the content about food safety offered by different social media platforms. Jingle, a product manager in her 30s, mentioned that some independent media accounts on social media platforms could distort the food safety problem. She trusted the content from official accounts. Jingle shared that

‘I followed some of the official accounts on Blibli (a popular content-sharing platform), like the Sichuan province market administration’s official account. Their content is so engaging; you can see their whole investigation process. They showed their audience how they'd inspect all sorts of places, like cafés, and go straight to their back-of-house kitchens and storage rooms. They’d also explain which things the places did well and where they were violating regulations. Now I know everything should be on shelves, at least 30 centimetres off the ground. It was a subtle education, and now I can actually remember some of this food safety information.’

Jingle’s narrative also highlights the impact of individualisation, in which consumers themselves engaged in making comparisons and evaluations based on various information about food safety. With sufficient information about food safety provided by official accounts, consumers like Jingle can also make informed choices in their daily consumption. Lupton (2002, 2005) pointed out that Australian consumers mainly hold distrust of the content about food safety issues generated by mass media and trust official news and reports more. In this study, participants generally relied on content from different social media platforms to form their perceptions about current food safety issues. To some extent, they gave some trust to these public social media platforms. I will use the 2008 Sanlu milk scandal to explain the complex role of social media platforms in shaping perceptions of food safety and consumers’ long-term distrust in government performance in regulating food safety. I argue that participants’ heavy reliance on content from social media platforms can be attributed to their distrust in government performance.

In China, social media platforms could significantly raise public concern about food safety by exposing food scandals (Yan, 2012). They could even furtherly facilitate the reformation of food safety regulation (Tam and Yang, 2005). However, to maintain the CCP’s legitimacy, government agencies still rigidly monitored internet sentiment related to online discussions and also produced official discourse to shape public perception (Yang, 2013; Wang and Ma, 2020). The 2008 Sanlu poisonous milk scandal could exemplify the complexity of social media in China’s specific institutional context. The infant milk products were found to contain melamine, a toxic chemical used to make plastic, which caused over 50,000 children to have severe kidney disease (Yan, 2012). Before the outbreak of the Sanlu milk scandal, another media exposure of an unqualified infant milk in 2004, with the support and intervention of China Central Television (CCTV), highlighted the weaknesses in food safety regulation, specifically the blurred responsibilities of different food regulatory administrations (Tam and Yang, 2005). The CCTV’s report also pressured the national government to conduct further investigations into milk powder production (Tam and Yang, 2005). In response to the unqualified milk powder, China’s milk-producing enterprises, such as Sanlu, set new quality standards and established test processes to improve the protein level (Fearnley, 2022). These dairy companies also imposed their standards of food quality on small dairy farmers with whom they had contracts (Fearnley, 2022). The subsequent problem is that to meet the standard, these small producers utilised the strategy of adding melamine to their samples (Fearnley, 2022). This story also embodies the ironic part of modernised risk. To improve food quality, producers choose to use toxic chemicals. Their solution becomes the problem.

Before this food scandal became sensational news, some consumers had posted complaints in online discussion forums; however, the Sanlu company chose to suppress negative information online and even requested support from the local government (Yang, 2013). Until the New Zealand Prime Minister asked the Chinese government to recall suspicious products, this event started to raise attention from the international community (Keck, 2009). With the contribution of non-official journalists, who insisted on reporting incidents of poisoned milk, this event ultimately became a sensational food scandal, leading to further actions of the Chinese government (Keck, 2009; Yang, 2013). A comparison is that non-official news sources, such as the *South China Morning Post*, conducted a series of investigations and reports on inspection results. However, official media such as *People's Daily Online* primarily reported positive information on how government agencies managed the crisis (Keck, 2009; Yang, 2013). Ordinary consumers also engaged in a dissenting discussion of this food scandal. Since the official media provided limited information, netizens' posts primarily focused on requesting more details about the official investigations, such as the potential health risks, and expressed their disappointment with the food safety regulations (Yang, 2013; Wang, 2017). The victims' families even formed online activism in popular social media platforms, such as Weibo, to ask for the truth of their children's health consequences and seek justice (Yang, 2013). However, the government agency also tightly controlled these dissents and blocked some radical online protests initiated by victims' parents (Yang, 2013). This massive exposure of food quality problems facilitated the reformation of food safety regulations, with the enactment of a new Food Safety Law in 2009 and the establishment of the China Food and Drug Administration in 2013 (Jen, 2017). The Food and Drug Administration also aims to address previous problems of overlapping responsibilities distributed across different departments (Jen, 2017). Despite these advancements in food safety regulation and the harsh legal penalties for food crimes, the recurrence of contaminated milk and the continued circulation of counterfeit food in the market significantly diminished public trust in food safety regulatory agencies (Yan, 2012).

Some research participants also expressed their concerns and distrust regarding the government's performance in food safety regulations. A shared concern is the unsatisfactory standard of food quality. Little Tree referred to her own working experience to explain her concerns about food quality standards.

'I think of pre-made dishes as products. I'm not sure what their qualification process is like, but based on my experience, the tests aren't hard to pass. I'm really skeptical about how rigorous the testing is. A product might meet the lowest standard, so you can't call it unqualified, but that doesn't mean it's good.'

Little Tree's quote resonates with the findings of previous studies (Yan, 2012) and demonstrates how deep distrust is manifested in daily life experiences. In this quote, Little Tree used her working experience to reveal a common sense that most food products meet the lowest standard. In *Risk Society,* Beck (1992) used the example of the maximum number to illustrate the paradox in risk management, where the maximum number provides producers with a scope within which the use of toxins is permitted. In this example, as well as the Sanlu milk scandal, setting a standard, which is assumed to be a strategy for controlling risk, now introduces more unknown risk to consumers. In general, this long-term distrust of government performance in addressing food safety shapes participants' taken-for-granted attitudes toward the prevalence of these problems. Given the CCP's selective reporting on food safety issues and a general suppression of information, consumers are compelled to piece together their understanding of food risks from various media platforms. This forces participants to accept that managing daily food risks is their personal responsibility. The following part will examine how these taken-for-granted attitudes manifest in daily food consumption.

Practical logic of dealing with food safety

Using Schatzki's words (1996), participants' daily food consumption practices are structured by a taken-for-granted attitude and their understanding that the food safety problem is prevalent in China. I identified that participants had their routinised ways of dealing with food safety. Some participants mentioned that since they have already used supermarkets or a formal wet market, which could ensure their food quality, they would not be furtherly worried about food safety. Zhang, a manager in his 30s, who often purchased from foreign chain supermarkets, said that

'That is why we often used the Metro and Sam's Club. The quality would not have any problems.'

Wei Yi, in her 20s, who works in a media company, also shared that

'I choose Hema Fresh to buy meat. I trust this brand. The meat sold by Hema also tastes fresh. My friend told me that the wet market could have spoiled meat. Then I never came to the wet market.'

Both Zhang and Wei Yi expressed that they often would not pay specific attention to food quality or food safety problems, as they have already used reliable food stores. Their responses can also be understood as addressing food safety, which has already been unconsciously incorporated into their daily shopping routines. Participants have built a routinised way to deal with potential food safety problems. Previous studies have also found that some consumers have already developed a habitual approach to food safety, such as buying organic food or using local butchers (De Krom, 2009; Halkier, 2010).

I also found that participants treated food safety as a daily common problem, which usually has practical solutions (Halkier, 2010). Some participants shared that they often use price as the criterion to evaluate food quality when shopping. Tang Tang shared that

'I once bought fake meat from Pinduoduo. I was drawn in by the low price, but I later realised the meat was manufactured—they'd added water or other things to it. It wasn't real meat. That's when I learned that if the price is much lower than the market rate, it must be fake. Now, when I shop, the first thing I do is check the price to make sure the platform is trustworthy.'

In this narrative, given her previous experience of buying fake meat, Tang Tang has developed a routine procedure for checking prices to evaluate food quality. Wei Yi, who often ordered food takeaways, also had the experience of dealing with food safety concerns in food takeaways. Wei Yi shared that

'I check the hygiene of the restaurants. If I see a place that looks really messy and dirty, I won't go there. I usually stick to chain restaurants like Pizza Hut and KFC, or local chains like Xiao Chuniang and Lao Xiangji (both serve consumers with typical dishes). I feel like these places have some guarantee of food safety.'

Both Tang Tang's and Wei Yi's narratives illustrate how consumers employed their rule of thumb to address food safety concerns, such as avoiding suspiciously low prices and inspecting the hygiene environment when shopping (Green et al., 2003; Shaw, 2004). With their everyday experience of food consumption, ordinary consumers developed their layperson's knowledge about food safety (Lupton, 1999).

I also found the involvement of new elements in the routinised procedures of dealing with food safety. Some participants mentioned their experience of returning food items with problems on online grocery shopping platforms. They also expressed a familiarity with the returning process. Tang Tang shared that

'You don't need to return the food in person. You can keep the bad food and select the refund on the grocery app. There's no need to contact them directly, since I didn't buy it from their physical store. For fruit, I often buy from our nearby fruit shop. Everyone uses WeChat now, so if there's a problem, I just contact them on WeChat to get a refund or a replacement.'

From the perspective of practice theory, Tang Tang's experience of online shopping and returning can also be viewed as that with the new material element, the online shopping application on a mobile phone, consumers also developed new skills in their routinised procedures when addressing food safety, such as their familiarity with the process of return and refund services.

The practical logic of dealing with food safety can also be identified in consumers' responses when confronted with food poisoning. I found that among participants who experienced food poisoning while eating outside, all chose not to file a formal report or request compensation. Xiao Hu, at the age of 20, who works in a media company, shared her experience of food poisoning.

'After eating hotpot, I woke up at midnight vomiting and with diarrhea. I suspected it was food poisoning. At first, I thought I'd just eaten too much, but my friend reminded me that vomiting and diarrhea don't happen just from being too full. My colleague later gave me some medicine and I felt better. I didn't hold the hotpot restaurant responsible.'

Their decision not to make a formal report could demonstrate that the previous 'deficit model' about consumers' reactions and behaviours in dealing with food safety is based on an abstract cognitive science model. Based on the deficit model, with sufficient information and knowledge about food safety, ordinary consumers would make informed choices, such as utilising their understanding of consumer protection law to seek compensation, as policymakers expected (Meah, 2014; Jen and

Chen, 2017). In this study, even well-educated participants still chose to address their experience of food poisoning personally, rather than reporting it. Based on Lupton's explanation of laypeople's knowledge (1999), their responses not to use formal reports can also be understood as their practical logic, which suggests that their solutions made sense to them in that situation.

This part also highlighted that, due to distrust in government regulation, participants took on their individual responsibility in dealing with food safety in their daily food consumption practices. The practical logic could explain the hidden mechanism in their daily experience of dealing with food safety. However, consumers' perception of food risk is also shaped by the institutional context. I argue that the formation of a hidden mechanism of dealing with food safety is also embedded in the social and political context. In this study, participants' practical logic can also be viewed as their adaptation to the influence of individualisation on daily food consumption. The following section will continue to examine the impact of neoliberalism on the daily experience of handling food risks in the migrant contexts.

6.2.2 Sheffield

Concerns about food prices and food shortages

Participants living in Sheffield had different concerns about food risk. Some participants mentioned the inflation of food prices and other indispensable bills, especially for those participants who work in the food service business. Huang, in her 40s, has been living in Sheffield for around 5 years with her family. Huang and her husband have a food takeaway business. When asked about the influence of the recent economic recession, Huang directly mentioned that their food business was struggling with the rapid increase in costs. Huang shared that

'Since we have a food business, you can feel that the food prices are keeping rising. Some food prices have doubled. The lowest price of eggs could be 10 pounds for a box, but now it could be 70 pounds. Also, for the bills of electricity and gas, if you rent a house, you could know how unbelievably high they have been.'

The inflation in prices also influenced participants' daily shopping. Due to the high food prices, some participants shared that they paid more attention to the value for money when shopping. Duanduan, a master's student in her 20s, shared that

'I found that the meat at Ozmen's is good, and so is the meat at the Moor market. I'll go to the cheaper stores now, not always Waitrose. My boyfriend likes Marks & Spencer, and we'll still go to the Moor market after we shop there. It's like, 'save where you can, spend where you must.' Even if some food isn't from a fancy store, it can still be really fresh.'

These narratives demonstrate that, facing inflation in food prices, participants also have practical solutions to address these challenges, based on their daily shopping experiences. These shopping experiences also reflected the influence of neoliberalism, which meant that ordinary households had to shoulder the consequences of the economic recession by making cautious choices in their daily shopping.

Another concern is about the food shortage, especially for some commonly used food items. Some participants mentioned the shortage of eggs and tomatoes in supermarkets. They also shared their practical solutions to deal with food shortages. Wen Jie, a PhD student in her 20s, shared her experience of buying eggs. Wen Jie said that

‘I remember that at one time, eggs were in short supply. I consumed a lot of eggs. Then I found that when I went to the supermarket after work, the eggs were often sold out. Only during the non-peak time, such as in the morning, when they just replenish eggs, you can buy some.’

In the interview about the fridge story, Qiao’s boyfriend also shared their method of freezing some fresh vegetables, which are often out of stock in the supermarket. Qiao’s boyfriend said that

‘There’s always something missing in random. Sometimes they’ll be missing garlic, or maybe they’re missing onions, or some of the vegetables. Last time we went, they were missing the chicken that we usually buy. When we go to Tesco, they often miss the bean sprouts. But I just froze it. I try to buy as many as I can and then freeze them.’

In these narratives, participants also treated food shortages as a mundane problem. They have practical solutions based on their shopping knowledge, such as the opening hours of different food stores and knowledge about storing food, to handle food shortages. Since many migrant households rely on their food business for income, inflation in food prices and food shortages also have a greater impact on their business. Sarah Marie Hall (2019), in her study about the influence of Austerity on everyday life, argued that there is a difference between living with and living in the impacts of Austerity policy, highlighting the different ways and degrees of the influence. In this study, migrant Chinese households living in Sheffield also exhibit intra-group differences in their experience of food price inflation, with families who work in the food industry experiencing greater hardship.

The UK has a high standard for food safety

Participants living in Sheffield also expressed that they often would not worry about food safety issues in the UK. However, their reasons are different. Participants noted that, compared to China, they trusted the food safety regulations in the UK. Participants also used media reports to learn about food safety events. From their perspective, the news about the food recall can be viewed as the local government has undertaken its responsibility in food safety regulation. Wen Jie, a PhD student, commented that the food safety information in the UK is more transparent, which also increases her trust in the local government’s food safety regulations. Wen Jie recalled that

‘I remember one year there was a food scandal where beef was secretly replaced with horse meat. It became a huge story across all of Europe. China has had similar issues. For example, some hotpot places would use duck instead of beef or lamb. Many people were aware of it, but we simply accepted it and didn't consider it a major issue. At least it was still edible meat. In the UK, even though the horse meat scandal wasn't a safety or hygiene issue, a problem like that caused a completely different reaction. It shows you that people here have very high standards for food. You often see news about food recalls, like when Tesco had to recall some meat that was found to be problematic.'

Previous empirical studies, based on surveys, have also found that consumers have confidence in the UK's food safety. In a comparative analysis of consumers' trust in food among different European countries, Kjærnes et al. (2007) found that British consumers trusted the food they purchased from supermarkets. British consumers also had high confidence in the improvement of food safety over the past 20 years (Kjærnes et al., 2007). According to the 2023 Food and You 2 survey, consumers have high confidence in food safety (UK Food Security Report, 2024). However, these previous studies did not include immigrants' experiences, which leaves some spaces for further studies to examine the different experiences in food safety issues.

An interesting point is that some research participants mentioned that local British people prefer to use a formal approach to address food hygiene issues. G, in his 30s, who has been living in the UK for over a decade, runs a food business in Sheffield. G introduced that

'Every restaurant here has to pass food safety inspections. They have strict requirements for things like storing different food items at specific temperatures and maintaining a high level of hygiene within the premises. When it comes to Chinese restaurants that mainly serve other Chinese people, they might not worry too much about food safety. Chinese customers generally won't make a big fuss. However, if a restaurant also serves local people, there's a risk that a customer who gets sick, say with a case of diarrhea, will report it. My aunt, who also runs a restaurant in another city, once had a customer file a complaint claiming the food at her place wasn't hygienic. '

G's narrative also demonstrates that local people can actively engage in addressing food safety and share the responsibility as consumers. These responses also reflect the influence of neoliberalism on food safety regulation, which constructs consumers as self-managing and self-governing subjects (Foucault, 1996; Lupton, 1999). In the following section, I will use the event of the UK's BSE outbreak in the 1990s and the subsequent reform of food safety regulation, as well as the development of the Food Standards Agency, to illustrate the UK's path to individualisation.

The story of BSE began when cattle were fed contaminated feed made from sheep and other cows, a practice intended to boost production (Lupton, 2002). This resulted in the emergence of a new infectious disease. Initially, when cases of BSE emerged, the British government did not take immediate action to address the food problem, and even claimed that beef was still safe to eat (Lupton, 2002). The reluctance of the British government to reveal its investigation into the influence of BSE also diminished public trust in food safety regulation, which led to panic about beef products

(Kjærnes et al., 2007). Following the BSE crisis, the British government established the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to restore consumers' trust and confidence in food in the UK (Kjærnes et al., 2007). The FSA has the objective of prioritising consumers' interests (Kjærnes et al., 2007). Another distinctive feature is that FSA is independent from any government department (Webster, 2002). Other European countries also adopted this consumer interest-oriented model after the BSE crisis (Halkier, 2010). Their policies also recognised consumers as significant stakeholders in food safety regulation and reframed their roles as active agents in solving food safety problems (Halkier, 2010). To increase consumer participation, the FSA employed a series of strategies, including establishing a consumer committee to understand consumer needs, launching food labelling initiatives to provide consumers with more information, and incorporating consumer voices into policymaking (Webster, 2002). These changes in food safety policy also effectively restored the confidence of British consumers in food products and their trust in government regulation.

However, given the neoliberal institutional context in the UK and other Western countries in the 1990s, consumers' agency in addressing food safety regulation also requires further scrutiny regarding its actual purpose and effects (Kjærnes et al., 2007). With a glimpse, the reforms in food safety policy gave consumers more empowerment to participate in addressing food safety problems. It also highlighted the politics of food consumption, indicating that consumers can now play a role as citizens to bring about some transformation in food safety regulation (Johnston, 2008). Based on Foucault's concept of the art of governance (1996), these outcomes are the achievement of neoliberal governance. Consumers are perceived as autonomous, self-governing subjects who undertake the responsibility to address food safety problems (Lupton, 1999). The FSA's strategies, such as the promotion of food labelling, can also be viewed as the techniques of neoliberal governance. These food labels provide sufficient information to facilitate consumers to make the 'right' choice for their health and safety (Draper and Green, 2002; Mayes, 2014). Therefore, ordinary consumers shared some responsibilities in food safety, which were assumed to be undertaken by the state and corporations (Mayes, 2014).

Furthermore, the feature of FSA as an independent organisation also indicates the consumers' community's self-organisation in food safety issues with less government intervention (Blake, 2019). The nature of FSA itself also embodies the idea of neoliberalism. I argue that the UK's neoliberal context reflects Foucault's notion of the productive aspect of power (Foucault, 1996). Unlike participants living in Nanjing, who passively accepted the government's lack of regulation, participants in Sheffield actively and voluntarily participated in self-governance.

This self-governance can also be identified in their daily experience of dealing with food safety. Participants also mentioned that they often use the hygienic rating of a restaurant to evaluate a restaurant's food safety. Yue, a PhD student, commented that

'I've noticed that some restaurants display their hygiene ratings outside, while others don't. It would be much better if all restaurants were required to show their ratings. If I knew a restaurant had a low score, I wouldn't go there.'

In this narrative, using the hygiene rating has become part of participants' daily routines when making choices for eating outside. This daily routine also embodies the subtle influence of neoliberalism in daily life.

However, even in an environment with high food safety standards, participants still expressed that they would not use a formal complaint when confronting food safety problems. Cheng, a lecturer, shared his family's experience with food poisoning. Cheng said that

'Once, when my family and I were travelling in London, we all got sick, and we suspected it was from the food at our hotel. However, we didn't report it; we just waited to recover. We didn't even try to get a refund or negotiate with the hotel. I think if food gives someone diarrhea or another common illness, most people don't see it as a big problem unless the sickness gets worse.'

This narrative also demonstrates the limitations of the 'deficit model' in understanding everyday experiences related to food safety. Based on the 'deficit model', a consumer like Cheng, who has a high level of education, should submit a formal report and request compensation after reviewing relevant food regulations and laws. However, in this narrative, Cheng's family still employed a rule of thumb based on some common experience about food poisoning. Participants' responses to taking food poisoning personally also showed that individualised responsibility in addressing food safety has been incorporated into their practical logic.

Food safety problems in Chinese restaurants

I noticed that many participants mentioned that Chinese restaurants had food safety issues, particularly with hygiene problems. Xiao Mang, a PhD student who used to do part-time work in a Chinese restaurant, recalled that

'I feel Chinese restaurants here are notorious. I once heard that the Chinese supermarket sold some expired condiments at a lower price to the Chinese restaurant. For example, at the R restaurant, I once ordered braised pork feet. I can taste that the food materials are not fresh. This is the lower-priced restaurant. However, even high-end restaurants, such as the one near the N building, which is also a popular spot, attract many local people for dining. I worked there for a short time. Once upon a time, a consumer wanted fried rice for take-away and sent it to our kitchen. The auntie working the kitchen was too busy, so she just used her hand to package the fried rice.'

This finding diverges from previous studies on racism and Chinese restaurants in Western countries. Previous studies have primarily focused on the perspective of Western racism to examine how Chinese food was stereotyped as 'dirty' and 'dangerous' (Yan and Sautman, 2024). A classic example of this is the stereotype that Chinese people eat rats and bats (Ryan et al., 1999). Such racist views of Chinese food also led to discrimination against Chinese restaurants, a problem that became particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eichelberger, 2007; Yan and Sautman, 2024). This study, however, found that the negative perceptions of Chinese restaurants originated within the intra-group, especially among Chinese people living in the UK. Inspired by Slocum's studies on whiteness (2007; 2008), I argue that Chinese participants' perceptions of local Chinese restaurants can also be viewed as an example of how racial understandings are constructed through daily interactions with people and places. In Xiao Mang's narrative, she used her observations of improper conduct in the Chinese restaurant's kitchen, a series of issues related to food takeaways, to construct her perceptions of the hygiene problem in Chinese restaurants and generate an intra-group racial understanding of Chinese restaurants as being prone to food safety issues.

Nock, a PhD student, offered a different perspective on the hygiene issues. Nock shared that

'I know some Chinese restaurants have even removed smoke alarms and don't follow proper regulations for rubbish disposal. They might hire private companies to handle their waste instead. I know a restaurant owner who didn't even bother to fix a smoke alarm. Even if the food they serve is safe to eat, you still feel suspicious because of their hygiene issues. I think all business owners, whether they're British or Chinese, want to reduce costs. To make more profit, what they often do is find ways to reduce spending on things like hygiene and safety.'

The pursuit to decrease costs can also be linked to the macroeconomic environment, especially the influence of neoliberalism on migrant labour. The deregulation of the labour market and the decline in social welfare support have significantly disadvantaged migrant workers (Luo et al., 2023). The recent economic recession and the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown have exacerbated the challenges faced by the food business. These pressures could also intensify the disadvantaged positions of migrant workers who work in Chinese restaurants. The exploitative working conditions of migrant workers are the hidden stories of consumption. The financial pressure of some Chinese restaurants and the unprotected migrant labour are also part of the stories of the impacts of neoliberalism.

Comparative Analysis

This section explored layperson's knowledge of food risks in daily household food consumption. Based on Beck's concept of a risk society, characterised by invisibility, food risks can be viewed as a contested discourse open to deliberation and debate among different stakeholders. This section used practice theory to further examine how the notion of food risk manifests in everyday life. This section also identified the practical logic of ordinary consumers in dealing with food risks.

Participants often have a practical sense, a competence of 'know-how' in dealing with food safety and food shortage. Their practical solutions for food risks are also developed from participants' daily shopping and cooking skills. This section also highlighted the different perceptions of food risks among participants in the two countries. I also identified the different manifestations of neoliberalism in these two countries. For participants living in Nanjing, with a long-term distrust of government regulation on food safety, they passively accepted the prevalence of food safety problems. They also took on food safety issues as a personal responsibility. A typical response is that even though some of them experienced food poisoning, they did not make a formal report to seek the government agencies' intervention. For Chinese households living in Sheffield, although they had more trust in the UK government's performance on food safety regulation, they voluntarily assumed the individual responsibility for food safety. For example, some participants also mentioned using hygiene ratings to make decisions about eating out. Their different perceptions and experiences of food safety also demonstrated that using practice theory alone could make a comprehensive explanation. Although both sites demonstrated the influence of neoliberalism on the daily experience of dealing with food risks, their different paths —passive acceptance of the prevalence of food safety problems and more voluntary engagement in handling food risks —showed that the various institutional contexts also shape the practices of handling food risks.

6.3 Embodied knowledge and mediated food knowledge

This section will continue to investigate the layperson's knowledge and science-technical knowledge of food. This section will examine how ordinary consumers employ their embodied knowledge, such as their sensory engagement with food and their interaction with scientific-technical knowledge, like the supermarkets' standardised food quality, differently. In Embodied Food Politics, Michael Carolan (2011) proposed two different epistemic forms of knowledge about food. One is produced by the industrialised global food system, resulting in food quality that is represented in a standardised form, as presented on package labels (Carolan, 2011). This mediated knowledge also entails an understanding of food quality produced by food technologies, big food retailers, and agri-business, which create a standardised quality of food, such as freshness (Freidberg, 2010; Carolan, 2011). For example, the apples sold in the supermarkets often have a beautiful colour and a stable appearance to attract consumers (Freidberg, 2010). However, consumers also have complaints about the loss of taste (Friedberg, 2010). Besides, to guarantee a whole year's supply of fruits from their original regions, only certain kinds of fruits can endure long-term distance, while maintaining their colourful appearance with the intervention of technology (Friedberg, 2010). As Carolan (2011) argued, although the industrial food system provided a stable quality and widespread knowledge about food by just using food labels, it also caused a loss of flavour and the diversity of fruits. The second form of knowledge is embodied knowledge of food (Carolan, 2011). With this knowledge, people's understanding of food quality comes from their sensory engagement with food, such as tasting, touching and smelling (Carolan, 2011). Consumers could use their first-hand experience to construct their understanding of freshness (Carolan, 2011).

Previous studies mainly focused on the experience of alternative food networks to examine consumers' embodied knowledge (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; 2010; Carolan, 2011). I argue that their findings present a dichotomy between the mediated knowledge produced by the industrial food system and the embodied knowledge based on organic agriculture or childhood memories of land and food. Both Carolan's (2011; 2015) and Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy's (2008; 2010) work suggested that with an embodied knowledge, ordinary consumers who are accustomed to the taste produced by the industrial food system in the long term, could re-tune to a different understanding of food quality based on their visceral experience. This rediscovery of food quality is also limited to participation in community-supported agriculture or some alternative food network movement, which opposes intensive and industrial agriculture production (Carolan, 2011). This section will examine these two different forms of food knowledge in the daily food consumption experiences of ordinary consumers. I will use consumers' perspectives to explore the mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge they applied when shopping.

6.3.1 Nanjing

Reading labels: a practical way of knowing food quality

I found that both mediated knowledge of reading food labels and embodied knowledge of using sensory engagement shape participants' understanding of food safety and freshness in their daily shopping experience. Participants also shared their experiences of using information provided by food packages and labels to evaluate freshness. In an interview with Tang Tang and Xixi, they mentioned that they often read the sell-by dates to know the freshness.

Tang Tang: I did not check dates on food packages until I started shopping with XiXi.

Xixi: I've always had the habit of checking dates. Once a package has been opened and exposed to the air for a while, I don't really want to eat the food. I prefer to buy the freshest food. I would never buy anything that's past its best-before date.

In this conversation, Tang Tang and Xixi's understanding of freshness is based on the sell-by dates printed on the food packages. Xixi also mentioned that the food package could sustain the freshness of food items. The use of plastics in food packaging can also be viewed as a technological intervention in the temporal aspects of freshness, extending the shelf life of perishable food (Evans et al., 2022).

For food safety, participants also shared their experiences of reading labels when shopping. Rae shared that she often noticed the food label of non-GMO food. Rae said that

‘I often read food labels about GMO food. Additionally, if I could find organic food in supermarkets, I would buy it. Organic food and non-GMO food are my first choice. But if the food stores don’t have too many choices, I can also accept the normal products regardless of organic or non-organic.’

Rae also mentioned the potential harm of GMO food; therefore, she often pays attention to the non-GMO labels when shopping. In this quote, reading food labels for food safety information can also be viewed as a practical solution for participants to deal with food risk. Since the consequences of GMO food are invisible to consumers, the mediated knowledge also offers consumers the agency to make choices. However, this agency also showed the influence of neoliberalism (MacKendrick, 2018). Consumers’ daily experience of learning food safety information on labels and carefully reading these labels when shopping also embodied the individualised responsibility in protecting oneself from food safety problems (MacKendrick, 2018).

Some participants also mentioned the food quality and freshness provided by Hema fresh. Sora shared that

‘I never buy eggs from wet markets. I usually get mine from Hema Fresh that are graded as ‘raw edible’ or are imported from Japan. Some of the fresh eggs at Hema are even considered safe to eat raw.’

This quote also reflects a standardised freshness produced by the new food retailers. As Carolan (2011) argued, since consumers rarely have the opportunity to gain firsthand experience of food, they use the food stories on packages produced by food corporations to acquire some knowledge about food, such as the origin of production or even personal stories about the founders of food companies. Hema Fresh is also dedicated to creating engaging and informative food stories for its consumers. On its official website, Hema Fresh used a picture of a village located in a mountainous area, bathed in morning sunshine, with the introduction text stating that it captures the vitality of nature from the harvesting site. Previous studies also pointed out that this discourse of nature employed by retailers can be viewed as a marketing strategy to fill the epistemic gap caused by the industrial food system, such as the increasing distance between consumers and producers and a loss of direct knowledge about food (Carolan, 2011; Johnston et al., 2009). In this example, Hema constructed a representation of nature centered around the image of a tranquil village to provide consumers with a compelling narrative regarding its production. Furthermore, the food retailers provided consumers with a nature could be predictable and controllable with a standardised quality (Evans et al., 2022). What supports this manufactured nature are the interventions of food freshness technologies (Evans et al., 2022).

During my fieldwork, I also visited the offline stores of Hema Fresh and found a wide variety of fresh food products. For example, the egg products have various labels, including Daily Fresh (which is Hema’s branding product), free-range eggs, organic eggs, local eggs produced in

Nanjing, and raw edible eggs. These multiple products also provide consumers with options to do something good while shopping (Johnston, 2008). For example, the consumption of free-range eggs could satisfy consumers' needs for food safety and ethical consumption (Johnston, 2008). However, previous studies on whole food markets have also pointed out that retailers' range of choices is more geared towards encouraging consumption rather than genuinely caring for the environmental impacts (Johnston, 2008). Furthermore, Hema Fresh also used the discourse of helping local small farmers to attract consumers and persuade them that they can do something good while shopping at Hema Fresh. However, Dai and Si (2020) found that to make its organic products competitive in the market, Hema Fresh set a rigid standard for the quality of organic food and decreased the buying prices of organic products, which puts the small farmers at a disadvantaged position in organic markets. Using Carolan's words (2011), the production process and the labour of small farmers are what the industrial food system wants consumers to forget about.

Embodied knowledge about freshness

Reading the label is not the only way for participants to know the food quality and freshness. Participants also shared their sensory engagement with food when shopping. Lei, who often went to her nearby wet market, shared that

'I usually go by the look of vegetables. For example, with tomatoes, you just have to look at them—you can tell if they're fresh. You can also give them a squeeze or a smell. For tomatoes, just smelling them is enough.'

This quote illustrates a different epistemic form of knowledge by utilising sensory engagement with tomatoes to determine freshness (Carolan, 2011; Orlando, 2018). When asking about the freshness of meat, Lei further explained that

'For meat, the time it spends in the cold chain can't be too long. More than three days is just not acceptable. Meat can't be fresh if it's been in a cold chain for a long time. At the wet market in my hometown, the chickens are killed and sold to consumers right away.'

Lei's narrative about freshness also reveals a distrust of the freshness produced by cold chain technology, as it disrupts the natural temporal dimension of freshness (Friedberg, 2010). Zhong et al. (2020) in a study about freshness in the Chinese wet market also mentioned the element of immediacy, which refers to that the fresh meat should be just killed. Consumers could see the live fish and chicken and observe their butchering process in the wet market (Zhong et al., 2020). This sensory engagement, including watching, smelling, and touching, constituted an embodied knowledge about food freshness (Klein, 2013; Zhong et al., 2020). Unlike Carolan's study (2011), which showed that consumers could only have this experience through community-supported agriculture, in this study, Chinese consumers can still have a visceral experience with food in their nearby food stores, such as the wet market.

The resistance to food technologies and scientific interventions on freshness can also be identified in participants' eating experiences. Sora mentioned the differences between the meats sold in supermarkets and the meat purchased from her hometown. Sora said that

'I usually buy my meat from my hometown. My mom knows some local butcheries. The pork in Nanjing tastes really bad. It's like frozen meat that's been thawed. It still has a pork smell, but it doesn't taste like meat anymore. When I was a student in Shanghai, live chickens and pigs were not allowed in the city so that retailers would process the meat in advance. Even though the meat is safe, it loses its flavour because of mass production. The frozen meat smells like a wet dishcloth on a summer day. I often find that the meat I buy here has that smell.'

Although Sora used the food labels in her daily shopping, in this narrative, Sora also trusted her first-hand knowledge, the taste of meat. In this quote, Sora could use the different tastes of pork to know the differences between massive livestock production and a more organic way of feeding pigs. Evans and Miele (2012) also suggested a sensory process of eating while thinking, such as thinking about the different production methods. In another study about free-range eggs, Miele (2011) described the life of chickens living in the intensive broiler system. To increase chicken production, technological interventions, such as breeding selection, decreased the chickens' maturity period and rendered them unfit to live outdoors (Miele, 2011). For chickens living in battery cages, it is common to see their aggressive behaviours, such as injuring or killing each other (Miele, 2011). Additionally, the intensive broiler system can also contribute to the spread of diseases, such as bird flu (Miele, 2011). Chinese livestock production also underwent an intensive agricultural transformation, including the application of intensive broiler systems and the use of antibiotics to increase production (Li, 2009). Ye (2015) suggests that small-scale farmers previously used a more humane approach to raising chickens. This included giving them more space for their daily activities and even individually feeding pills to sick chickens by opening each one's mouth. Using Carolan's words (2011), the intensive livestock production also created a flattened taste of meat for consumers. Modernised intensive agriculture and large food retailers collaborate to create a monopolised mediated knowledge of fresh food, shaping consumers' sensory experiences with food, such as the flattened taste of meat. However, Sora's narrative about the taste of meat could show a bodily resistance to the products of intensive agriculture. Consumers know more than they could directly tell (Carolan, 2011).

Some participants also recalled the taste of free-range chicken from their childhood memories. Dengjing shared that

'I rarely have chicken soup now. My grandma, who lived in a village on a hill in my hometown, used to raise her own chickens. I feel like the chicken here just has no flavor. So, I no longer eat chicken soup. You know, the taste you had in your childhood—chicken cooked for a long time—that's a very different taste.'

In this narrative, the embodied knowledge of food quality is also linked to childhood memories about good food. Previous studies have also identified that after tasting organic food, some consumers recall childhood memories about agriculture, such as watching their parents or grandparents grow their own food (Carolan, 2011; Orlando, 2018; Huang et al., 2024). The embodied knowledge of food quality also intersects with memories and emotions, such as feelings of disconnection. Dengjing's narrative also conveys a sense of loss, specifically the loss of a good-tasting chicken.

I also found that some participants developed their embodied knowledge of food through interactions with vendors in the wet market. Their experiences are also related to the emotional experience, such as the feelings of familiarity and trust. Jingle shared that

'For meat, I always shop at the same stall. If the meat looks good and I've never had a problem with the vendor cheating on the weight, I know they're honest and sell good-quality products. I also used to shop at a specific vegetable stall. Later, the woman who ran it would always give me some extra food, sometimes even another whole bag of vegetables after I'd already bought one. She usually gave me vegetables that didn't look perfect, but they still tasted great.'

Jingle's narrative reveals a different dimension of embodied knowledge, a sense of trust that developed through daily interactions with vendors. Therefore, the embodied knowledge is not only created through sensory engagement with food, but also includes personal interactions.

Bai also shared a story about learning the quality of eggs through interactions with vendors. Bai said that

'I once bought eggs from the nearby wet market. A vendor sold eggs that looked and smelled good. But the eggs were not very big. The first time, I felt very curious, so I bought some. The vendor told me how he contracted a mountain in X city (which is also in Jiangsu Province) to raise free-range chickens. For the differences in taste, those very cheap eggs will have a yolk that is white or light yellow. They are also tasteless. But for those real free-range eggs, they are very different. The yolk will be yellow and somewhat reddish. The egg also has a good smell. You can feel that you are eating the authentic protein.'

Bai's narrative also demonstrated that embodied knowledge can be derived from interactions with producers. Previous studies on food quality have also found that some organic farmers refused to use certification for organic food; instead, they opted for direct marketing to consumers and inviting them to visit their production environment to gain a deeper understanding of organic food (Fearnley, 2022). Bai's experience also shows that knowledge of food quality is constructed through interactions with producers, interpersonal trust, and sensory experiences with food, including smelling, cooking, and eating the eggs.

The above narratives describe how participants develop their embodied knowledge in the wet market. However, not all the participants enjoyed shopping in the wet market. I also found that some participants who are not Nanjing locals expressed a reluctance to shop at the wet market. Xiao Ming, whose hometown is in another nearby city, shared that

‘I once shopped in a wet market. But I still had some concerns. I have been fleeced before. The vendors could treat people very differently. For example, the vendor thought you were a young girl and was unaware of food prices. They would give you a higher price.’

Xiao Ming’s narrative also demonstrated how migrant status influences the perception of food quality. Zhong et al. (2020) in their study on freshness highlighted the significant role of the wet market in providing consumers with a sensory experience of freshness, based on Chinese culinary culture. However, Xiao Ming’s quote suggests that the market's influence on shaping an understanding of freshness also needs to take into account diverse experiences based on different social positions, such as migrant status.

This study also demonstrated a mixed use of the different epistemic forms of knowledge about freshness, including the mediated knowledge created by food technologies and food retailers, as well as the embodied knowledge based on participants’ sensory engagement with food. I argue that the understanding of freshness is also embedded in daily life. The notion of good food and safe food is not fixed by a particular shopping place or specific knowledge but is continuously constructed in daily life. The following part will continue to examine the manifestations of the mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge in migrant contexts.

6.3.2 Sheffield

Embodied negotiation of sell-by dates

Participants in Sheffield also shared their experiences of using mediated knowledge, as offered by food labels, such as sell-by dates, and their embodied knowledge in their daily food consumption. Nock, a PhD student, shared their changing understandings of the freshness and food safety that are constructed by the sell-by dates. Nock said that

‘I found that food here doesn't have an expiration date. It just has a best-before date. In Asia, we tend to use expiration dates. Here, consumers are advised to follow the best-before date, but even after that date, the food is often still okay. At first, I followed the best-before date strictly, but now I prefer to check if the food is still good. I started to feel this way with eggs. I used to think I had to eat them all before the best-before date. What made me change was that, for example, if the eggs' best-before date was the 7th, I would have thrown them out on the 9th. But later, I cracked some open and saw they were still perfectly good. Their appearance hadn't changed at all.’

This narrative demonstrates a shift in the understanding of food quality, from relying on mediated knowledge as a reference for freshness to employing sensory experience to evaluate food quality. Still, the understanding of food quality is dynamic and not fixed on a particular type of knowledge.

Snow Bamboo, another PhD student, shared her concern about the suspiciously long sell-by dates set by food retailers and compared them with her previous shopping experience in China. Snow Bamboo shared that

'Once upon a time, I bought duck meat. The smell was not unpleasant, but rather an abnormal, fishy odour. I rarely had a similar experience when I was in China. I am not sure whether it's because they have a long supply chain, from slaughtering to the market. The sell-by dates often would be ten days and half a month. However, in China, the sell-by dates for meat are usually not that long. One to two days is the most in China. When I first used Waitrose delivery, I found that the meat's sell-by dates were ten days. I felt terrified. If I bought the meat, it said that it would expire the next day, which means it was slaughtered over ten days ago. It might look good, but you don't know what's going on inside the situation.'

Snow Bamboo's narrative also reveals a distrust of both the mediated knowledge about freshness provided by food labels and the cold chain technologies that extended the temporality of meat's freshness. The purpose of this section is not to evaluate which kind of knowledge is better, but to look at how the mediated food knowledge and the embodied knowledge are employed by participants in their daily consumption experience. In this study, the migrant experience added another layer to the embodied knowledge of food quality and safety. Snow Bamboo's understanding of freshness is based on the natural status of freshness. The intervention of technology, which prolongs the life of perishable meat, has raised a feeling of unfamiliarity and even anxiety. Finally, Snow Bamboo used her familiar method, simply by looking at the appearance of the meat and smelling it to determine its freshness. Still, in this narrative, the embodied knowledge about food is also related to emotional experience.

Embodied freshness in a migrant context

Participants also shared their abundant embodied knowledge of freshness. Jin, in his 40s, has several food businesses in Sheffield. Jin used to cook in the kitchen. He is also familiar with evaluating freshness through sensory experience. Jin shared that

'You can tell whether food is fresh just by looking at it. For instance, with fish, you can check their eyes. Fresh fish that have just been killed still have clear, firm eyes. But for a fish that has been dead for a while, the eyes are sunken. Or with shrimp, you can tell their freshness by whether their heads have darkened.'

This quote shows a different understanding of freshness compared to the mediated knowledge, such as the sell-by dates printed on food packages. Jin provided a vivid sensory experience by looking at the eyes of fish. This sensory experience also helps build a connection with food and nature by utilising embodied knowledge (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Here, nature is the natural life of perishable food without any intervention from food technologies.

Participants in Sheffield also shared their experience of tasting meat. Pian shared the differences between meat in the UK and the meat she used to eat in Hong Kong. Pians said that

'I think Hong Kong's pork is better than here. In Hong Kong, we have fresh pork. But the UK's beef and lamb are better. When we lived in Hong Kong, we also ate imported beef and lamb. I think the pork sold in the supermarket had odd smells. But Hong Kong's pork never has this problem. Additionally, Hong Kong's chicken also tastes better (Laughing). Chicken here can't compare with Hong Kong's chicken. We used to buy chicken from the vendors in the fresh market. You can pre-order chicken at the stall. It is not allowed to slaughter chickens in the fresh market. The operator will process in advance. The chicken tastes delicious. My son always says that ever since we came here, he hasn't had any chicken that tastes satisfying.'

This quote also expresses a sense of loss. For Pian's family, they could not gain their familiar tastes of meat from the local supermarkets. Pian also explained that even though they used a similar way to cook chicken soup, it still tasted different. This sensory experience is also about differences, a different taste of chicken soup. This different taste also can be viewed as the corporeal experience of migrant status (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Through eating, tasting the chicken soup raised a bodily experience of differences (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). In this section, these different tastes and smells of meat also shape the understanding of food quality. Future urban food policies could also take into account the concept of good food, drawing on the experiences of migrant groups and their embodied knowledge of food quality, which extends beyond cultural preferences for particular foods.

Participants also shared their experience of reconnecting with the sensory experience with food. Some participants mentioned their use of the Moor Market, where they could employ their embodied knowledge about freshness. Vanilla, a PhD student, shared that

'I think the meat provided by the Moor Market is fresher than the supermarket's meat. I can select the meat by myself. For steak, I want the steak to have some fatty meat. But you can have minimal choices in a supermarket. You can't ask the staff in the supermarket whether they could help you find some fresh products. However, in the Moor Market, there are several different butcheries. I can ask the operator whether they have steak with more fat, and if they do not display the meat I want in the window, they will find some for me in the stockroom. For freshness, I will look for the colour. For beef, if it has a shiny red blood colour, then it is fresh. I can also smell the meat to know its freshness. But the meat in the supermarket is packaged, and you cannot smell it. In the market, I can smell the meat.'

This quote also could show a comparison between mediated knowledge, such as reading the label, and embodied knowledge, such as smelling the meat. In this narrative, Vanilla directly mentioned that she could not smell the packaged meat provided by the supermarkets. This point is also about the disconnection caused by the industrial food system. Consumers are disconnected from the first-hand experience of food. In the Moor Market, participants could reconnect with nature and food by engaging their senses.

An interesting finding is that, once a day, when I visited the Moor Market, I found a butcher shop that even used Chinese characters for ‘pork belly’ on the label for meat. Every day, many Chinese immigrants visit the Moor Market to buy fresh meat. Through these daily interactions with Chinese consumers, the butcher shop also gains insight into the Chinese consumers’ preferences for freshness. Deng Jie, a PhD student, also recalled that

‘It is surprised that when I shopped for ribs in the Moor Market, a male operator saw I was Chinese and gave me a thin rib. He knew I would like it.’

This quote can also be viewed as how embodied knowledge about freshness in turn shapes the place (Blake et al., 2010). The daily interactions between the butchers and consumers also contribute to an understanding of freshness in a specific place, the Moor Market.

Comparative analysis

This section challenged the dichotomous understanding of mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge regarding food quality and freshness. For participants living in Nanjing, reading food labels can be viewed as a practical solution to obtain information about food safety, such as avoiding GMO foods. However, in their daily shopping experience, mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge can coexist. For example, although Sora trusted the freshness produced by Hema Fresh and also used food labels to address food safety concerns, Sora also mentioned the distinct tastes of meat from her hometown’s independent butcheries and the meat sold in supermarkets. Participants also showed a bodily resistance to the tastes of meat produced by intensive agriculture. For households living in Sheffield, their understanding of freshness is also shaped through daily experiences. Nock mentioned a shift in understanding from relying on sell-by dates to using embodied knowledge to evaluate food quality. In a migrant context, sensory engagement with food is also connected to emotional feelings, such as a sense of familiarity or unfamiliarity, as well as a sense of loss. In this study, participants also utilised the Moor Market to regain their sensory engagement with food. This section also demonstrates the visceral aspect in the construction of understanding about food quality and food safety.

6.4 Mothers’ knowledge of good food and safe food

This part will examine the gendered experience of embodied knowledge about food quality and freshness. Michael Pollan (2013) used to claim that mothers know best about what food is. The purpose of this section is not to support an essentialist understanding that, since mothers have a better knowledge about safety and food quality, they undertake the responsibility of protecting family members from food risks (MacKendrick, 2018). This section will continue to examine how the specific nature of food itself, such as its sensory experience and embodied knowledge, constructs a mother's specific knowledge about food quality. I will continue to investigate the femininity of food and the changing gender relations enacted in the daily food consumption experience. This part will be composed of the different stories of mothers who deal with food risks.

I will start with the story of Mai Mai to examine mothers' responsibility in ensuring food safety for family members, especially their children. Although most of the research participants in Nanjing treated the food safety issues as very common, Mai Mai directly expressed anxiety about food safety since she had children.

'I often buy meat from Hema Fresh. Its meat is certified free of Bisphenol A. You know its products could meet the EU standards, such as those related to the environment and feeding methods. We also buy fish from Hema. Or we asked our relatives to buy some from the coastal regions. I rarely buy meat from the wet market because of the antibiotics. Since having children, we are very concerned about food safety. Previously, I heard that some dumplings and even noodles were treated with boric acid to enhance their taste. I even bought some test paper to test the products we bought from the supermarket.'

In this narrative, Mai Mai mentioned several food safety labels, including the BPA certification and the European Union standard. Mai Mai even used test paper to ensure the safety of the dumplings from the supermarkets. These are the mediated forms of knowledge about food safety, specifically using food labels to determine food quality. However, the accumulation of this mediated knowledge also requires many efforts and time. Mai Mai also mentioned that she often uses the Little Red Book to learn about food safety and test methods. Besides, to ensure the food safety of vegetables, Mai Mai also used her personal networks to subscribe to organic vegetables produced by a local farm in Nanjing.

Mai Mai's experience also embodied a food femininity related to maternal responsibility in ensuring food safety. Previous studies also linked this maternal responsibility with the influence of intensive motherhood and the impacts of neoliberalism (Cairns and Johnston, 2015; MacKendrick, 2018). Mothers, as the primary health guardians in the family, also have the responsibility to protect their children from external pollution and risk (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Mai Mai's quote also reflects an anxiety about food safety after having children. However, this maternal responsibility is not an innate characteristic of mothers, but is constructed through daily food practices. Mai Mai also mentioned the distrust of the government's regulation on food safety. Therefore, in this story, Mai Mai also personally undertakes the responsibility of dealing with food safety with her routinised shopping experience, such as buying meat from Hema Fresh and purchasing fresh vegetables from the local farm. The individualised responsibility also brings emotional experiences, such as the constant anxiety associated with frequently occurring food safety problems (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Previous studies have found that mothers often engaged in calibration of their performance, trying not to be too extreme in dealing with food safety while still performing their duties effectively to ensure food safety (Cairns and Johnston, 2015). I argue that these emotional experiences, such as constant anxiety and self-evaluation, are the embodied exploitation of mothers. However, based on my findings, mothers' work is still often unseen and taken for granted by participants.

A parallel story is Pian's engagement in buying organic food. This is also a story about voluntarily taking individual responsibility in dealing with food safety. Pian explained that when she used to live in Hong Kong, she began learning about organic food and organic production. From Pian's perspective, buying organic food could ensure family members eat safe food and also support the local organic farmers. Pian also explained that the Hong Kong government often offered some educational programs to citizens about healthy and safe food. Pian's story also exemplified the impact of neoliberal governance on daily life. The use of educational programs about healthy food and the dissemination of pamphlets about organic agriculture embodied the idea of neoliberal governance, which posits that, with sufficient information, ordinary consumers can make informed choices about food. This study also demonstrates women's responsibility in ensuring the safe food for household members and their actively engagement in supporting organic agriculture.

Previous studies on China's community-supported agriculture have also found urban middle-class mothers' active participation in organic agriculture, such as organising buying clubs from organic farmers (Si et al., 2018). This study further examines the influence of neoliberalism on the experiences of different households when purchasing organic food in various social contexts. In Mai Mai's story, with a distrust of government regulations on food safety, Mai Mai treated undertaking personal responsibility as unavoidable in the Chinese context, carrying some emotional burdens. However, in Pian's story, the impacts of neoliberalism are more subtle, operating through educational programs that persuade individuals to make responsible choices in their daily shopping. Furthermore, both Mai Mai's and Pian's families are from the middle-class group, with well-paid work to support their practices of buying organic food. Cairns and Johnston (2015) also argued that intensive motherhood in raising organic children can be viewed as a representation of middle-class mothers' consumption experience. However, in a gender culture, which makes this representation a universal pattern, it could continue to reinforce mothers' daily care burden, especially on their emotional experience, when they cannot meet the unrealistic standard set by intensive motherhood.

I will continue to examine how mothers work in ensuring food safety for families, which is often unseen by family members, and how the embodied knowledge about food becomes mothers' work. A common experience is that many participants, both from Nanjing and Sheffield, shared that their mothers often went to the wet market earlier to buy fresh vegetables. Rainie recalled that

‘My mom told me that the vegetables sold in the early morning are fresh and various…I will help my mom carry the food stuff she bought. My mom also taught me how to select vegetables, such as which vegetables are fresh.’

This quote also indicates participants’ perception that mothers often go to the wet market to buy fresh food. They viewed these as their mother’s personal shopping habits for freshness. Mothers’ daily work of buying fresh food is also considered to be taken for granted.

Some participants also mentioned that their mothers often used personal networks, such as friends and acquaintances, to seek safe food sources. Rae shared that

‘My mom often bought lamb from the wet market. Her colleagues also sent us some Tan sheep, a Japanese breed. You can get a whole year’s worth of meat from one of them. The lamb has no smell. I think the food source and process at Hema Fresh aren't transparent enough, but with friends and other personal networks, you know the meat is good because the source is so transparent. You know how the sheep were raised, unlike those factories where you don't know what's going on with the processing.’

This is another taken-for-granted perception that mothers have the skills to utilise their personal networks to ensure their households have safe food sources. From interviews, it is evident that most of the work of ensuring reliable food sources is undertaken by mothers within families.

Cao, in his 40s, who is a manager working in Nanjing, also shared his wife’s experience in growing organic food in their backyard. Cao explained that

‘My wife likes doing these things (growing food). I rarely participated in these things. She did not work now, so she could have more time to grow vegetables. We had cucumbers, onions, cabbage, carrots, tomatoes, and even watermelons. All grown by her.’

In this quote, still, women in the family were considered as naturally interested in healthy eating and organic food. Cao’s family also has a traditional gendered division of labour, in which Cao takes the role of the economic provider, and his wife undertakes the role of food safety guardian in the family.

Sometimes, mothers and even grandmothers also pass on their knowledge about food quality to their adult children. Little Tree shared a story that she learned about homegrown chicken and eggs from her grandmother. Little Tree said that

‘Last week, my grandmother visited me in Nanjing. They also brought some eggs, a box of 60 eggs. I told them I just bought eggs. But my grandma said that “the eggs you bought from the supermarket can’t be as good as the eggs from home.” The chickens raised by my grandpa eat corn and rice. They also eat seed oil. In our village, some elderly people who want to ensure the quality of their food prefer to buy seeds and bring them to the shop to make their seed oil. They could also use seed oil residues to feed the chickens, which could make them very fat and produce large eggs. The eggshell is also thick.’

In Little Tree’s family, they still have some homegrown and raised food. However, for Little Tree, she also expressed that, unlike her mother and grandmother, she has lost the embodied knowledge of evaluating the quality of meat just by tasting it.

‘For those intensively raised chickens, they (Little Tree’s mother and grandparents) think the meat could not taste good, unlike that of free-range chickens. They preferred the chicken sold in the wet market or from others they knew. The free-range chicken usually has firm meat. But I can’t tell the difference. Even though the pork, my mom often said that some of it smelled. I think we are in different generations. My grandparents and parents ate the homegrown food. However, after I started working, I usually bought food from online platforms or supermarkets. I rarely went to the wet market.’

In this story, Little Tree’s mother and grandmother also undertook the responsibility of cultivating Little Tree’s embodied knowledge about food quality by telling her the different tastes of meat produced by intensive agriculture and by home-raised chicken. Little Tree’s narrative also expressed young people’s disconnection with the sensory experience of food.

Some participants also mentioned the intergenerational differences in the use of mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge. In Zhang’s family, the couple’s understanding of safe food is based on trust in modern food science, such as checking the sell-by dates to know the freshness. However, Zhang’s mother-in-law persisted in traditional agriculture by small farmers. Zhang described their different understanding of fresh vegetables:

‘Like my mother-in-law, in her 60s, she preferred the vegetables grown by local farmers. However, I believe that vegetables grown by local farmers can’t be as fresh as those grown in greenhouses. I use the perspective of the food industry. They use a mystical view of food.’

This quote also attributes mothers’ knowledge of food quality to the traditions as an opposition to modernised agricultural production. Zhang expressed support for the mediated knowledge and gave more trust in modern science. At the same time, his quotes discounted his mother-in-law’s embodied knowledge for its freshness, referring to it as a 'mystical view of food.' Furthermore, both Little Tree’s and Zhang’s narratives showed an association of mothers’ embodied knowledge, such as their knowledge of traditional agriculture, with nature and ecology. To be more specific, their narratives also showed mothers’ care responsibility for the natural environment and Chinese conventional agriculture, such as prioritising the products of small farmers.

Although this section presents different stories of mothers’ experiences in ensuring food safety and quality for their families, it is not to say that this study supports an essentialist understanding of maternal food work. This study also identified a taken-for-granted perception among participants that mothers have specific knowledge of safe and good food. I argue that these taken-for-granted perceptions reinforced the current unequal gender division of ensuring household food safety, which makes mothers’ efforts and hidden labour still unseen. Within the neoliberal contexts, which shift the food safety to individualised responsibility, the gender burden is exacerbated and remains invisible within the households and also on the macro-policy level. Furthermore, this section examined the food femininity of organic food in the Chinese-specific contexts. Based on the findings, mothers also took responsibility for passing on traditional agricultural knowledge, such as the organic way of raising livestock and utilising their personal relationships to build a supportive network of safe food for their families. However, again, that is not to say that mothers are naturally inclined to nature. A debatable point is that women could utilise their specific knowledge to participate in addressing environmental issues, such as the expertise of small-scale farmers in using inter-cropping to mitigate the effects of climate change (McMichael and Weber, 2022). In this study, mothers' traditional agricultural knowledge and practices in organic agriculture are also valuable for enriching the embodied knowledge with indigenous conventional agricultural wisdom (Carolan, 2011). However, a potential danger is to step into the trap of essentialism. These are not naturally maternal work or maternal agricultural knowledge. Women's knowledge and voice about what a sustainable food system needs to be heard. However, at the same time, another problem is how to recognise and acknowledge their contributions without essentialising gender roles.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the layperson's knowledge about food risk. Based on practice theory, previous studies on laypersons' knowledge have primarily focused on the practical logic of addressing food safety issues in daily food consumption. This study added another layer of the layperson's knowledge, which is based on the materiality of food. Previous studies on embodied knowledge have mainly focused on specific food consumption, such as the consumption of organic food and participation in community-supported agriculture. The main contribution of this study is that I examined the embodied knowledge of food quality and food safety in the context of everyday life. As I mentioned earlier, this chapter will explore how young office workers can engage in transforming the current food system. Findings in this chapter could show that ordinary consumers have some understanding of what constitutes good and safe food, based on their sensory engagement with food. However, with an intersectionality perspective, the understanding of food quality based on embodied knowledge could also be complicated in the migrant contexts. Based on the experiences of participants living in Sheffield, I also found the emotional experience associated with the embodied knowledge, such as a sense of loss of their familiar taste. Their visceral experience with food also constitutes a specific corporeal aspect of migrants' experiences. Besides, this study also examined the gendered dimension of food knowledge. I argue that neoliberal contexts exacerbate mothers' daily care burden in ensuring household food safety. With a taken-for-granted perception that mothers know best about fresh food, mothers’ food work continues to be overlooked at both the household level and the macro-policy level.

7 Conclusion

This section reviews the findings from previous finding chapters and provides a summary of the application of practice theory in investigating household daily food consumption experiences for a comparative study. Although I have already presented some evaluations in the empirical chapters, this chapter provides a more detailed explanation of the concepts from practice theory that I used in the analysis of the findings, addressing the theories' limitations, and showing how concepts from feminist and gender studies were drawn upon to strengthen the analysis. I will also highlight the contribution of this study in developing a theory of food practice. I will also examine how this study can shed light on promoting changes in real life, particularly for young office workers living in Nanjing and Sheffield. To bring the theory back to life (Ahmed, 2017), this chapter will also examine, through the lens of practice theory, how this study could contribute to providing some visions for a more inclusive and humanised urban food system, which recognises the values of care and love, and embraces differences.

Before introducing the main findings, it is necessary to remind the readers of the purpose of this study, to evaluate whether I have already addressed the research questions I proposed. The objective of this study is to employ practice theory as the theoretical framework to investigate the daily food consumption experiences of Chinese households living in Nanjing and Sheffield within the context of neoliberalism, examining the continuity and changes in their household food practices. As I mentioned in the literature review section, practice theory has neglected the experiences of its carriers as social beings who hold social positions and identities. I also brought in a gender lens and some feminist studies' concepts to investigate the different perspectives and different experiences of engaging in household food practices based on the intersection of gender and other social identities. This study also examines the continuity and changes in daily food practices within the context of migration. In the literature review section, I also highlighted the limitations of existing sociological theories regarding food consumption. I pointed out that the existing studies did not take into consideration the materiality of food and the related visceral experience with food. This lacuna implies this study's potential to contribute to the development of a specific food consumption theory by integrating the materiality of food and the visceral experience of food consumption.

The findings chapters were organised by three themes: the cognitive and emotional labour involved in household food provision, the changing meaning generated from cooking and eating practices, and layperson's knowledge about food risk. Each chapter investigates the influence of neoliberalism on household daily food consumption experiences and explores the changing gender relations constructed in these daily food practices.

The first data chapter, 'Household Food Provision,' has two sections: the practice of grocery shopping and the practice of designing menus. The first section demonstrates that, through the lens of practice theory, the daily shopping experience can be viewed as a shopping practice, which requires knowledge about various food stores, including their opening hours, distance, food quality, and prices, as well as the shopping skills to combine the use of different food retailers. Most of the time, shoppers can use their practical sense, developed from their daily shopping experiences, to navigate the use of various food stores. For households living in Nanjing, I found that the convenience of the grocery shopping environment offered by Nanjing's urban food policy could not effectively translate into participants' daily lives. A problem is that there is a mismatch between the opening hours of specific food stores, such as the participant's nearby wet market and their daily schedules. This finding highlighted the limitations of Nanjing City's current urban food strategy, which prioritised convenience over physical distance while neglecting everyday life contexts. For migrant households living in Sheffield, their different experiences revealed that participants needed a learning process about their surrounding food stores to develop their practical sense for grocery shopping. They also face challenges in grocery shopping, such as accessing Asian vegetables and pork without the boar taint smell from local food stores. In a neoliberal context, these daily grocery shopping problems are often framed as personal troubles, which can be addressed with practical solutions. Practice theory can explain how participants utilised their practical solutions, such as their practical sense and established shopping routines. However, placing this study within the neoliberal context also highlights the limitations of practice theory, as it overlooks the uneven consequences and influence of neoliberalism. For example, although some participants who are Nanjing locals could receive some fresh food from their parents, those young office workers who live in Nanjing alone had to seek alternative food sources, such as online food shopping, to fit into their daily routines. I also identified the intra-group differences among Chinese migrants. I found that for those participants who have lived in the UK for a long time, they also built their personal network to gain access to fresh Asian vegetables and pork. Therefore, with an intersectionality perspective, practice theory could enrich the understanding of the uneven distribution of competence in shopping skills and knowledge.

The section on designing menu drew upon the cognitive and emotional labour to examine the practice of planning meals. The application of these two concepts is the main contribution of this chapter. With the language of practice theory, planning meals also requires competence, including shopping and cooking skills, to make arrangements for daily meals with various dishes. However, what practice theory overlooks is that in some cases, participants may lack the capacity, such as the energy, to engage in mental activities like planning meals. Therefore, this section employed the concepts of cognitive and emotional labour from feminist studies to examine the embodied experience of planning meals. This study also identified some small resistance among young office workers, who used the activity of thinking about what to eat for meals as a brief respite from their long working day. I also concluded that, despite their different decisions, such as giving up planning meals or designing menus for eating with friends, these young people engaged in various forms of self-care.

This finding also raises a question for future studies on how young office workers can access proper and healthy meals in a highly pressured work environment.

In both sections, with a gender lens, I also identified how the impacts of neoliberalism collaborated with gender discourse to make household food provision women's work and cause their cognitive and emotional labour to remain unseen. To be more specific, neoliberalism has aligned with post-feminist discourse to frame women's shopping as an expression of their empowerment, utilising their buying power, especially in the Chinese context, with the rise of online shopping. This de-gendering explanation distorts shopping as women's personal interests, at the same time making women's cognitive and emotional labour invisible. This chapter also explored the manifestation of the de-gendering process in the household division of labour. Similar to previous studies, this chapter also found that although participants claimed to support an egalitarian allocation of housework, their existing division of labour in the household still showed that women shared more of the housework. Participants also used personal reasons, such as different personal interests or skills, and external working arrangements to justify the unequal division of labour. These de-gendered perceptions, such as the notion that a person with more interests in eating is more likely to do more meal planning, also contribute to making cognitive labour invisible. I also identified the negative emotional experience of women who often undertook cognitive labour in grocery shopping and meal planning.

However, that is not to say that women in this study have a shared unequal experience in household food provision. I also recognised some small resistance to the everyday cognitive labour. For example, Deng Jie, who lived with her boyfriend in Sheffield and undertook all the food preparation work in her household, finally chose to use a steamer to solve all the cooking. I also identified some positive changes in the Sheffield migrant families, in which men in these families were able to engage more in household tasks, such as grocery shopping and meal preparation. However, I also found that the realisation of a genuinely equal allocation of housework requires demanding conditions, including men's strong willingness for an egalitarian relationship and their flexible working time, which could allow their more engagement in housework.

In summary, inspired by DeVault's study on family meals (1991), this study also focused on the cognitive and emotional labour involved in planning meals. The difference is that I used concepts from practice theory, including the competence and multiplicity of different mundane practices, to unfold the cognitive and emotional labour involved in household food provision. Given the importance of family values in family life, the first data chapter also identified that the current Chinese official discourse, which prioritised the family's role in social governance, could potentially increase women's existing mental load on preparing family meals. Without a comprehensive understanding of women's hidden cognitive and emotional labour, this family discourse merely exacerbates the unequal division of labour, since women's mental labour is still unseen.

In the finding chapter about appropriation in household food consumption, I focused on two main food consumption activities: cooking and eating, because both activities involve a conversion of food items. This chapter examined two main topics: the changing meaning of cooking and the different levels of engagement in healthy eating. In the section on cooking practice, I found that young office workers living in Nanjing are pursuing simplified cooking, with fewer procedures and conveniently processed foodstuff. I also examined the impacts of neoliberalism on the daily cooking experience. The deepened market relations in the working environment also led to a working culture that encourages competitiveness and a treadmill phenomenon in workplaces. Therefore, for young office workers, to increase their competitiveness in the workplace, the meaning of daily cooking and eating is reduced to maintaining basic sustenance. In contrast, Chinese international students living in Sheffield are engaging in making complex dishes and recreating some of the food from their hometown to rebuild a sense of home. With the language of practice theory, changes in cooking practices can be attributed to alterations in cooking procedures and changes in material elements, such as the routine use of social media platforms in cooking, resulting in a reconfiguration of cooking practices.

This section also identified the gendered cooking practices. To be more specific, this section explored the concept of doing gender in the sayings, such as participants' perceptions of their parents' different cooking styles and the doing of cooking, which refers to the cooking procedures. I identified the expression of hybrid masculinities, including both the hegemonic masculinity and a familial or caring masculinity about care and love in the cooking practices. The subsection 'artful cooking father and routinely cooking mother' also supported previous studies, which found that although fathers can engage in daily household cooking, their cooking remains self-oriented and optional. With the concepts of practice theory, such as the cooking procedures and competence, I also found that fathers often cooked complex dishes with many steps to show their cooking is different from mothers' routine cooking.

In contrast, I found that many participants reported their mothers' cooking is often repetitive and more concerned with the health of family members, with less salt and oil in their cooked meals. In contrast, husbands' engagement in cooking, despite their infrequent participation, could gain praise from family members, such as the image of a good man who cares for families. The disproportionate credit given to men who engaged in cooking also reinforced the gender assumption that cooking should be women's work. At the same time, women's daily cooking work and their responsibility in caring for health remain as taken-for-granted. For participants living in Sheffield, I also recognised the subtle expression of hegemonic masculinities. Although some participants mentioned that their husbands expressed care for family members through their daily cooking, I still identified the presence of hegemonic masculinities, such as Yu Yu's husband's use of a thermometer in cooking meat and the elaborate plating made by Liu Xiaoyu's husband. Both of these cooking procedures, utilising professional equipment or creative plating, demonstrated that men's cooking is more of an art performance, by which men could reaffirm their authority. These findings also highlighted the complexity of changes in gender relations among Chinese households in Nanjing and Sheffield. In summary, the doings and sayings of cooking expressed hybrid masculinities that convey both care and intimacy, as well as men's authority in the kitchen.

The section on the practice of healthy eating continued to examine the influence of neoliberalism on the daily eating experience for participants living in Nanjing and Sheffield. This section also highlighted the impacts of China's current national health policy, which directly defines individuals and families as the primary role in ensuring health. This section also explored how this individualised responsibility in healthy eating is embodied in daily food practices. I also found that young office workers in Nanjing employed some compromised adaptations, such as Rae's example of drinking kale powder to compensate for the lack of green vegetables in their diet. This section noted the problem that, although some workplaces have staff canteens, the meals offered by these canteens often fail to meet participants' specific healthy requirements. The current national healthy eating and diet strategy also needs to consider the constraints faced by young office workers in engaging in healthy eating.

Many participants shared their eating experiences of controlling weight and fitness. These examples also embodied Foucault's ideas on neoliberal subjects, which posit that people who can prove their ability in self-discipline and self-constraint, such as the intentional control over what to eat. I also identified the embodied experience in engaging in self-disciplined eating, as seen in Wen Jie's example of bodily adaptation caused by the ketogenic diet and Bai's experience of occasionally eating junk food to gain instant happiness. This chapter's main contribution is that it provides a different understanding of the influence of neoliberalism and the power relations, which focuses on the embodied experience of being neoliberal subjects. The section on eating utilised embodied experiences, such as bodily responses and adaptations to a rigid diet, to reveal the corporeal aspect of power relations in neoliberalism. The mainstream understanding of Foucault's idea of power relations primarily focused on how productive power operates on the body, such as the construction of neoliberal subjects. Drawing on feminist studies in visceral politics (Probyn, 2000; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008), this section examined the workings of power relations on a gut level by providing a corporeal form for the influence of neoliberalism on healthy eating.

Furthermore, another contribution of this section on eating is that I examined the specific eating experiences of Chinese migrant groups—their Chinese stomach. I argue that Warde's (2016a) work on embodied habitus in eating, including the repetitive bodily techniques and autonomous bodily reactions in eating, can be helpful in understanding bodily habituation and resistance to specific cuisines. Although Warde's concepts could explain the bodily mechanism in addressing different cuisines, such as the difficulty in bodily adaptations to cold food and a sensory disposition to the flavours of Chinese cuisines, the feminist concept of visceral politics provides a critical perspective for Warde's concepts of eating practice to direct to the social division and identities. This study found that the visceral experience related to Chinese cuisine is grounded in the taste of food, sensory memories of home cooking, a sense of home, and bodily responses, such as participants' indigestion after eating cold meals they purchased from local food stores. Participants' different visceral experiences of different cuisines also constituted their migrant identities, bringing their migrant experience a corporeal form.

Based on the feminist intersectionality perspective, I also identified the intra-group differences in experiences of Chinese stomach and Western food, given participants' diverse migrant experiences, ages, and occupations. For example, Zhuge, who has lived in the UK for over 10 years, even learned some dishes from local gastronomy television. Wen Jie, a PhD student, also expressed a strong interest in trying different cuisines from various countries. Mothers also mentioned their children's adaptation and resistance to the local school's meals. Some children also asked their mother to prepare a lunchbox with Chinese food after eating the school meals for a time. Previous studies on the eating habits of migrant households have also noted the insistence on home country cuisines. The difference is that this study did not attribute this persistence to home food as a simple nostalgia feeling or a culinary culture preference; instead, this study focused on the food-specific bodily habituation and resistance.

This section on eating practice also examined the gendered experience of eating. Based on Cairns and Johnston's (2015) study on food femininity, I also examined maternal food work in relation to healthy eating. This section investigated the influence of intensive motherhood in the Chinese context. Similar to previous studies, I found that the food femininity associated with healthy eating began during the mother's pregnancy experience. This food femininity is also constructed in households' daily arrangements and interactions. I identified the complex gender relations within the Chinese family. In the context of individualisation, with the lack of social welfare support for childcare, Chinese families also have a composition where adult children still receive various forms of support from their parents, such as financial support for purchasing goods or assistance with childcare. In this study, I also identified intergenerational differences in healthy eating for children. I found that elderly parents who live with their adult children often tend to compromise on their differing opinions. Although mothers could have some agency in making decisions about the children's eating, especially having more decision power in their interactions with elderly parents, this decision power did not change the fact that mothers shared more of the responsibilities of ensuring healthy meals for family members. Although fathers engaged less in children's daily healthy eating practices, their intermittent involvement still held more authority in the family, disproportionately influencing their children's eating habits. This finding further underscores the dynamics in gender relations that operate in Chinese families in the daily eating experiences.

The third data chapter explored the possibility that the mundane daily experience of food consumption could help transform the current food system, which is built on neoliberal ideas. This chapter expanded the concept of competence of 'know-how' in practice theory. Based on Ulrich Beck's (1992) concept of risk society and Lupton's work on risk (1999), I explored layperson's knowledge of food risk, including their practical knowledge built from everyday experience of addressing food risk and an embodied knowledge about food, which is constituted by the sensory engagement with food and a specific expertise for the materiality of food, such as the freshness and perishability. This chapter also has the purpose of developing layperson's knowledge on food risk as a response to the experts' deficit model. I found that participants in both sites had an awareness of the prevalence of food safety problems in China. Participants also expressed a taken-for-granted attitude toward the food safety issues. Previous studies based on nationwide or citywide surveys have found that Chinese urban residents express concerns and even serious worries about food safety issues. This study, with in-depth interviews, disclosed a more nuanced experience. Although participants recognised the prevailing food safety problems on a cognitive level, as they often received food safety information from various social media platforms, they did not have strong emotional responses or radically alter their food consumption habits. Instead, participants drew on their practical knowledge, developed through their daily shopping and cooking experiences, to address the food risks. I also identified the different perceptions of food risks for households living in Nanjing and Sheffield. Besides the food safety issues, Chinese families living in Sheffield also faced food shortages due to extreme weather conditions and rising food prices. These problems also suggest that the current urban food system is unsustainable.

This chapter also found that participants' perceptions and their routinised way of dealing with food risk needed an explanation based on the different institutional contexts. Although there are some common experiences, such as taking on food risks as personal responsibilities, the underlying mechanisms differ. The misconduct of the government performance in food regulation in previous food scandals and the endless news about food safety problems caused a long-term distrust of participants living in Nanjing. Therefore, participants in Nanjing passively accepted an individualised responsibility in addressing food risk. In contrast, although the UK significantly restored consumers' confidence in food safety from previous food scandals, the strategies promoted by the Food Standards Agency, such as the use of food labels and a hygiene rating system, still embodied the neoliberal idea, shifting the government's and food corporations' responsibility in tackling food risks to individual consumers. In the UK context, consumers are voluntarily accepting their active roles in handling food risks. This section also furtherly examined the manifestation of neoliberal impacts in different institutional contexts.

The section on mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge focused on the understanding of freshness in daily food consumption. I explored two different forms of food knowledge: the mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge. The former refers to the representational form of freshness produced by food corporations and retailers. This freshness is often uniform and standardised with the intervention of food technologies in extending the life of perishable food, such as fresh vegetables and fruits. The problem is that this standardised freshness also brings some costs, such as the diminished variety of apples and the loss of the sweet taste of fresh fruits. In contrast, the embodied knowledge is based on the sensory engagement with fresh food, such as touching, smelling, and tasting. Michael Carolan (2011) summarised this knowledge as an active way of learning through the body and also thinking through the body about the difference between the standardised freshness provided by the industrial food system and the taste of freshness generated from organic agriculture. Previous studies on embodied knowledge mainly focused on the experience of engaging in community-supported agriculture or organic agriculture. This study examines the application of embodied knowledge in the daily shopping experience. I argue that mediated knowledge and embodied knowledge did not have an antithetical relationship, unlike the either-or relationship. Based on participants' experiences, the use of mediated knowledge, such as checking the sell-by dates or reading labels related to food safety and the embodied knowledge co-existed in their daily food consumption. For example, Sora mentioned her trust in Hema Fresh's food safety label and also used her sensory experience of the taste of meat to evaluate the food quality. Nock also shared the shift in experience from relying on best-before dates to using the sensory experience of checking the appearance of food to determine freshness. The understanding of freshness and food quality is also shaped by the different uses of these two forms of knowledge.

I also identified a specific food femininity in food safety in this chapter. A gender assumption is that mothers know best about what safe and good food is. I also found that mothers undertook the task of ensuring trusted and safe food sources, such as using their personal networks to purchase fresh meat from familiar butchers. Besides, this maternal food work can also be related to the influence of neoliberalism. In the context of long-term distrust of the government's regulation on food safety, mothers also took on the responsibility of ensuring their children's safe food through personal solutions. This section also examined a specific maternal knowledge about organic food and organic agriculture. Although some mothers' expertise in traditional Chinese agriculture, which emphasises a harmonious relationship with nature and livestock, could contribute to the embodied knowledge, a potential danger is that overemphasising a specific mother's knowledge in safe food might reinforce the essentialist understanding that women are naturally inclined towards nature and food.

In summary, these data chapters expanded the core concepts of practice theory to develop a specific food consumption theory grounded in the materiality of food and the visceral experience. Based on concepts from gender studies regarding cognitive and emotional labour, this study adds another layer to shopping practices, highlighting the uneven distribution of shopping skills and the perpetuation of unequal gender relations. This study also showed how the materiality of food and the visceral experience contribute to food femininities related to family health, well-being, and specific knowledge about organic and sustainable agriculture, which is often used to justify food work as women's work within the household. This study also demonstrated how the impacts of neoliberalism in the two different social contexts, China and the UK, collaborated with gender discourse, such as intensive motherhood and women's empowerment, and gender practices, including food femininities, reinforced unequal gender relations. Since this study employed a qualitative method, the results will not reflect the nationwide tendency, but rather the daily experiences of the participants. Although this may be a limitation of this study, the finding still reveals the dynamics of gender relations within families shaped by the daily food practices. In the Chinese context, there is a historical legacy of egalitarian gender relations, particularly during the Mao era. This study also identified the expression of egalitarian gender relations. However, in daily food practices, the discourse of neoliberalism aligns with gender discourses to disadvantage women at both the structural level, with a continuing blindness to women's daily mental load and less intervention from the state to promote an inclusive urban food system, and the ideological level, such as encouraging women's traditional family roles in recent family discourse.

This research also highlighted young office workers' daily struggles to have proper and healthy meals. In an exploitative working environment with longer working hours and the toxic treadmill culture, the positive meaning of having meals, such as deriving a sense of fullness and the pleasure of tasting food, is deprived. Based on practice theory and the capability approach, what these young people were deprived of was the freedom of time and their bodily capacity, which they could use to prepare meals and enjoy the food. This study further examined the embodied experience and the visceral experience of food and found that these young people also experienced a loss of the positive moods and feelings brought by food and eating. Eating for them is more like a daily necessary task, rather than the discovery of the quality and sensory experience of food. That is not to say that this study also supports those ideas, such as Michael Pollan's concept of a slow life and slow eating. I argue that these portray the perspective from privileged positions while neglecting the unequal and uneven distribution of time and energy. Further studies could continue to explore ways to introduce substantive changes that enable young office workers to eat well and healthily. Furthermore, this study also identified the migrant group's lack of voice in the urban food strategies. Findings from participants' daily food practices demonstrate that the Chinese migrant group's insistence on Chinese cuisines is not just about cultural preferences but is also constructed by a set of connected visceral experiences, including taste, food memories, and embodied habituation and resistance to different cuisines. The mainstream deficit model also reduced the diverse expertise of these migrant groups on food and eating to a simple understanding, such as a lack of sufficient knowledge about healthy food. In the neoliberal context, since household food security is framed as an individualised responsibility, the different embodied experiences of migrant groups have also continued to be overlooked. The current urban food plans in both cities, Nanjing and Sheffield, could also consider these daily struggles faced by people. In the Chinese context, I have argued that the current Nanjing food policy lacks an everyday life perspective, considering how people actually utilise the different food stores to fit into their daily routines. In the UK context, the definition of urban food security and the urban food strategy also failed to consider the visceral experience and embodied knowledge of food as a vital dimension in daily food practices. Before taking any actions, the first step is to uncover the ongoing influence of neoliberalism on participants' daily lives.

This study identified the continuing violence and deprivation caused by the influence of neoliberalism in the urban food system. Participants' visceral experience of eating and smelling also reminded them of a sense of loss, which refers to the loss of the taste of good food quality caused by industrialised and intensive agricultural production. The taste of good food, such as free-range chicken raised organically, still lingered in participants' memories. Further food practices on organic, ecological, and sustainable agriculture, also could consider these layperson's embodied knowledge related to safe and good food quality. I argue that the current good food movement remains focused on specific food consumption activities, such as participation in alternative food networks and the purchase of organic food, while neglecting the experiences and knowledge of ordinary consumers in their daily lives. Further studies could continue to explore the application of visceral politics and embodied knowledge in daily food consumption.

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9 Appendices

Appendix A Table of interviewees

Households in Nanjing				
Participants	Age	Gender	Occupation	Household occupation
Lei	20s	Female	Master's student	Living in student accommodation
Sora	20s	Female	Lawyer	Living alone, her own house
Xiaoming	30s	Female	Editor	Married, living with her husband, without children
Abel	20s	Male	Sales work	Renting an apartment with a roommate
Little Tree	20s	Female	Sale work	Renting an apartment with a roommate
Jingle	30s	Female	Product manager	Living alone, her own house
Tang Tang	20s	Female	Master's student, seeking work	Her own house, living with her friend Xixi
Xixi	20s	Female	Master's student, seeking work	Living in Tang Tang's house
Raine	20s	Female	University graduate	Living in student accommodation
Weiyi	20s	Female	Working in a media company	Renting an apartment with a roommate.
SpongeBob	30s	Male	Manager, working in Real Estate industry	SpongeBob and Patrick Star are a married couple living in their own house. During the interview, without children.
Patrick Star	30s	Female	Manager position, working in government department	Married, living in their own house
Zhang	30s	Male	Manager position, working in consultant industry	Zhang and Bella are a married couple living in their own home. They have an infant who was only a few months old at the time of the interview.
Bella	30s	Female	Manager position	Married, living in their own house
Rose	40s	Female	Manager position	Nuclear family, Rose and her husband have one daughter of middle school age.
Mai Mai	30s	Female	Manager position,	Married, Mai Mai and her husband have a son, 2 years

			working in government department	old. Mai Mai’s parents are living with the couple to help with childcare.
Shao	30s	Female	Human Resource manager	Married, Shao and her husband have a son in the age of kindergarten. Shao’s parents are also living with the couple to help childcare.
Y	20s	Male	Working at a media company	Living with his girlfriend, his own house
Xiaohu	20s	Female	Working at a media company	Renting an apartment with a roommate
Cy	20s	Female	Analyst, working at a medical company	Renting an apartment with a roommate
Bai	30s	Male	Lawyer	Living alone, his own house
Rae	20s	Female	Designer	Living with her parents
Dengjing	30s	Female	University Professional service staff	Married. Dengjing and her husband have a daughter of primary school age. Her mother-in-law is living with the couple to help with childcare.
Xiao Zheng	20s	Male	Master’s student	Living in student accommodation
Yang	20s	Female	Manager position	Yang is Xiaozheng’s girlfriend. Rent a house, living alone
Hu Ning	20s	Female	Lawyer	Rent house, living alone. Huning is Sora’s friend, who often eats with Sora.
Cao	40s	Male	Manager position	Married. Cao and his wife have two daughters: the older of middle school age and the younger of primary school age.

Households in Sheffield					
Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Household occupation	Personal history of living in the UK
Kri	20s	Female	Master’s student	Living alone, in student accommodation	Around 4 years, completed her graduate study in the UK
Liu Xiaoyu	30s	Female	Lecturer	Married, living with her husband (British local, working in IT industry) in their own house	Living in the UK since 2014. Use to live in a city in Southern England and then doing PhD in Sheffield
Yue	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting an apartment, living alone	Completed her master’s in Sheffield
Xiao Mang	20s	Female	PhD Student	Renting an apartment, living alone	Living in the UK for around 3 years since PhD study
Stone	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting an apartment, living alone	Living in the UK for around 4 years since PhD Study
Dengjie	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting an apartment, living with her boyfriend.	Completed her undergraduate and master’s study in a city in Northern England
Nock	20s	Preferred use Their	PhD student	Nock’s hometown is in Taiwan. Renting an apartment with a roommate.	Living in the UK for around 4 years since PhD study
Vanilla	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting a house in an en-suite type with other roommates.	Completed her master’s study in the UK and used to study in a city in

					Southern England
Little Rain	20s	Female	Master's student	Renting apartment, living alone	Living in the UK since master's study
Qiao	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting a house with her boyfriend	Living in Sheffield for around 6 years
Qiao's boyfriend	20s	Male	Working at IT industry	Living with Qiao	British local
Zhuge	30s	Male	Working at IT industry	Unmarried, living in his own house, having a roommate.	Living in Sheffield for around 7 years. Completed his undergraduate study in a city in Southern England, and master's study in Sheffield.
Rui	20s	Female	PhD student	Renting an apartment with a roommate.	Living in the UK for around 6 years, completed master's study in Sheffield
Wen Jie	20s	Female	PhD student	Living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK for around 6 years, completed master's study in Sheffield
Yue shan	20s	Female	PhD student	Married, living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK for around 6 years, completed her master's study in a city in East Midlands.
Luoyi	20s	Female	PhD student	Living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK for around 5

					years since PhD study
Duan Duan	20s	Female	Master’s student, seeking work at Sheffield	Living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK for around 2 years since master’s study
Pian	40s	Female	Part-time work	Divorced. Living in her own house with two sons (middle school and primary school age). The children’s father visits regularly to dine with the family and assist with childcare.	Pian used to live in Hong Kong. Pian’s family moved to Sheffield for around one year. They decided to move to the UK for improving the learning environment of their children.
Yu Yu	20s	Female	Content creator, running her social media account.	Married, living in her own house. Yu Yu and her husband (British local) have three children: a daughter of kindergarten age, a two-year-old, and an infant	Living in Sheffield for around 5 years. Yu Yu completed her master’s study in Sheffield.
Snow Bamboo	20s	Female	PhD student	Married, living with her husband in Sheffield, rent house.	Living in the UK for around 7 years, used to study in a city in Southern England
G	30s	Male	Food business owner	Married, living in his own house. G and his wife have an infant.	Living in the UK for around 10 years. After completing his mater’s study in Sheffield, G started his own food business.

Jin	40s	Male	Food business owner	Married, living in his own house. Jin and his wife have two sons: one in his 20s, one of primary school age.	Living in the UK since 2010s, used to work in a city in Southern England
Ting Ting	20s	Female	Food busines owner	Renting an apartment with a roommate	Living in Sheffield for around 2 years, completed her master's study in Sheffield
Xiao Zhu	20s	Female	Master's student	Living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK since her master's study
Roy	20s	Male	Master's student	Living alone, renting an apartment	Living in the UK since his master's study
Huang	40s	Female	Food business owner	Married. Huang and her husband have two sons, both of primary school age. Living in their own house.	Living in Sheffield for around 4 years. Used to live in a city in Northern England.
Cheng	40s	Male	Lecturer	Married. Cheng and his wife have two children, a son of primary school age and a daughter of kindergarten age.	Living in Sheffield for around 2 years. Cheng's family used to live in North America.
Christy	40s	Female	Housewife	Married. Christy and her husband have two children: a son of high school age and a daughter of primary school age. Living in her own house.	Christy's family used to live in Hong Kong and moved to Sheffield for her husband's work. They have been living in Sheffield for around two years

Appendix B: Interview Guidance

Preparation before the Interview (ensuring participant have read the information sheet and sign consent form before start)

Questions will be asked on the following topics:

- Household food provision
- Cooking
- Risks related to household food provision
- Neoliberalism impacts: the influence of economic recessions on everyday household consumption and family relations
- Gender relations and gender divisions of labour related to household food provision

Household food provision

1. Describe to me a typical day of food shopping (What are your food shopping habits? When do you buy food for feeding the family? Where do you usually go shopping? By yourself or with other family members? Why do you choose the specific shopping site?)
2. Do you usually have a food shopping plan? How and when do you make the food shopping plan? What will be your priority when making the shopping plan? Who else in your family also helps make the plan? Can you describe your feelings about making the food shopping plan?
3. Describe your daily meals for weekdays and weekends, and experience of eating out (who makes the decision for eating out, how you decide for where to eat)
4. Do you have budget management for expenditures on food and other living costs? If yes, would you like to share with me some strategies you used for saving money?

Cooking

1. personal experience of learning cooking (Do you learn from your parents? Where do you learn to cook?)
2. feelings about cooking (do you like cooking? How about the feeling of cooking for others?)

Gender relations and gender divisions of labour related to household food provision

1. Who in your family undertakes the grocery shopping and cooking?
2. How do you feel about your current division of labour?
3. Do you feel any changes in recent years?

4. If so, would you like to share more about your feelings and experiences with the changing gender division of labour?

Food Safety and other concerns on food problems

1. For food shopping and eating, what are the reasons for you to choose a specific food item? (If the answers are about food quality, then I could encourage the participants to talk more about their knowledge about what constitutes good quality food. However, it all depends on the answers provided by the research participants. If they have difficulty understanding the problem, I plan to give some examples, such as health, and taste…)
2. Do you have any worries about food problems? (If the participants give me a short answer, I will encourage the participants to talk more about the food issues they confront or have heard about) Which specific food item do you think has a food problem?
3. Would you like to share with me the strategies you used to avoid food problems?
4. Who do you think should take responsibility for ensuring food safety problems? And why?

Neoliberalism impacts/economic recessions impacts on everyday life (If this topic is too sensitive, I will put this problem in the last part)

Can you tell me a bit about the impacts of the economic recession on your family or personal life? Have you experienced any changes to your career plan or family plan? How do you feel about those changes?

Appendix C

Instruction Sample providing to participants about a one-week food diary (I also explained to participants that the form could be flexible, try not to add extra burden on their work)

第一天　　学则路附近的罗森超市

时间：中午 12 点
步行
独自一人
矿泉水，可乐，柠檬茶。。。。。。

第二天

English Version:

First Day　Lawson’s convenient store near Xue Ze Street
Time: 12 pm
by Walking, just myself
mineral water, diet coke, and lemon tea

Appendix D

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research project

mundane food shopping in the neoliberal context

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Research purpose

This research will explore the routine grocery shopping experience of ordinary household in England and China. This research will make a comparative study for understanding the difference and similarities of daily food shopping experience in different countries. This research will also pay attention to how social change such as individualization process and the practice of neoliberalism impacts on the daily life of ordinary household. This research will also use the lens of gender to examine the routine grocery shopping experience.

Research Participant recruiting

This project will look at the household-level daily food shopping activities in two cities in different countries (Nanjing, China and Sheffield, England) to make a comparative study. I will recruit at the minimum of 15 households for each city. The research focus are ordinary households who are not the extremely affluent or poverty.

Voluntary participation

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact jwang359@sheffield.ac.uk If you wish to withdraw at any point of this research process, all of your data will be destroyed immediately. However, it could not be applied in the case of finishing publication. All of your data will be processed in de-identification and anonymity. At the end of the research project, all the data will be destroyed if there is not any further use. For any further use about data sharing, I will confirm with you again and sign another consent form sheet.

Please note that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield

Participation

The research activities include the semi-structured interview, participatory observation which refers to shopping along with research participants, and participatory activity of letting the research participant take photos of their recent food shopping. Semi-structured interviews are the core method. The other two methods are used to facilitate the interview process. The interview will be taken around 50 minutes each time. I will ask some opening-ending questions about routinely food shopping experiences and your perceptions about gender. You do not need to answer all the questions. It will all depend on you to decide on further participation. Before starting, I will confirm with you the date, time and place to take the interview and will send you the information sheet, and consent form. If you would like to participate in the participatory observation, we will talk about proper time and place to make the observation of food shopping during or after the interview process. The participatory observation will be conducted one time. If you do not want to participate in the participatory observation, you can take a photo to record your recent food grocery shopping before the interview. I will ask some questions around food items you purchased in the interview process.

All the interviews will be an audio recording, if you have any questions about this, you could ask me again. I have the responsibility to explain to you the interview process. After completing the interview, I will make a transcript and data process. If you want to check the transcript, feel free to ask me.

If you feel uncomfortable during the interview process and observation process, you could raise this problem at any time. I will confirm with you again for stopping or continuing the data collection process.

Disadvantage and risks of taking part

The interview question will be about your daily food shopping routine and experience. In the whole process, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, feel free to ask me to stop. I will confirm with you again for stopping or continuing our conversation. Before starting, I will reaffirm with you an available date, time, and place for taking the interview.

For the issue of data security, all the personal data will be saved on the laptop with password protection. I will also make a backup on the University of Sheffield Google Drive account which has a robust system for data protection.

Benefit of participation

There is no benefit to participating in this research project.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will be organized based on an equal relationship between the researcher and the research participant. I am very appreciative of your valuable participation and look forward to our collective knowledge-producing in this research process.

Confidentiality

All the information that I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. If you agree to us sharing the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your details will not be included unless you explicitly request this.

For further data sharing, I will send a consent sheet with you again for affirming you have been fully informed for further data use purposes.

Legal basis of processing data

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying to process your data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

As we will be collecting some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive race/ethnicity, living area, and income level, I also need to let you know that I am applying the following condition in law: that the use of your data is necessary 'for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific research purposes or statistical purposes (9(2)(j))

Data Use

After completing the data collection, the recording of the interview will be a transcript and translated (this case will be used in fieldwork in China). All the data will be anonymised and processed in the NVivo software for analysis. Only the research team including Junyi Wang, Professor Sally Hines, and Dr Megan Blake could have access to the data. The University of Sheffield has the copyright for data generated in this research project.

The data will be stored for the whole research process. All the personal data will be destroyed immediately if there are not any impacts on the findings and purpose. For further use of data, it will be stored in the University of Sheffield repository. In general, the research data will be stored for 10 years after publication.

For further publication and research use, all the data will still be non-identifiable and anonymous. Due to the nature of this research, other researchers may likely find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

Funding

This project does not have any funding. The institution of the research is the University of Sheffield.

Data Controller

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Ethical Review

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Sociological Studies department.

Research Misconduct and Reporting route

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact (Professor Sally Hines; sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk). in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Sociological Studies (Professor Nathan Hughes; nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

If you wish to make a report of concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact (Professor Sally Hines; sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk). If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled satisfactorily, please contact the Head of the Department of (Professor Nathan Hughes; nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk) and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk).

If you need further support, here are some information about the relevant organizations:

Citizen's Advice Sheffield; Advice Line: 0808 278 7820; Address: Citizens Advice Sheffield & Law Centre, The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane, Sheffield S1 4FW; webpage: https://citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk/get-help/.

Mind Sheffield; Tel: 0114 258 4489 ; Email: info@sheffieldmind.co.uk; Address: The Wellbeing Centre, 110 Sharrow Lane, Sheffield, S11 8AL; webpage: https://www.sheffieldmind.co.uk.

Sheffield Flourish; Phone: 0114 273 7009; Email: info@sheffieldflourish.co.uk; Address: Upper Floor, 4 Windrush Way, Sheffield, S3 8JU; webpage: https://sheffieldflourish.co.uk.

You could keep this information sheet and also the consent form for any further questions.

Thank you for your participation!

Chinese version of participant information sheet

参与信息表

研究题目

女权理论视野下探究新自由主义环境中日常生活的食物购买

您被邀请参加一个研究项目。在您决定是否参与之前，重要的是要了解为什么要进行这项研究以及它将涉及什么。如果您愿意，请花时间仔细阅读以下信息并与他人讨论。询问我们是否有任何不清楚的地方，或者您想了解更多信息。花点时间决定你是否愿意参加。谢谢您阅读此篇

研究目的

本研究将探索英国和中国普通家庭日常的杂货店购物体验。本研究将进行比较研究，以了解不同国家/地区日常食品购物体验的异同。本研究也将关注个人化进程和新自由主义实践等社会变革如何影响普通家庭的日常生活。这项研究还将使用性别的视角来检查日常的杂货店购物体验。

研究参与者招募

本项目将对不同国家两个城市（中国南京和英国谢菲尔德）的家庭日常食品购物活动进行比较研究。我会为每个城市至少招募 15 户人家。研究的重点是非极度富裕或极度贫困的普通家庭。

自愿参与

是否参加由您决定。如果您决定参加，您将获得保留此信息表（并被要求签署同意书），您仍然可以随时退出而不会产生任何负面后果。你不必给出理由。如果您希望退出研究，请联系 jwang359@sheffield.ac.uk 如果您希望在本研究过程的任何时候退出，您的所有数据将立即被销毁。但是，它不能用于完成出版的情况。您的所有数据都将以去识别化和匿名的方式进行处理。在研究项目结束时，如果没有进一步的使用，所有数据将被销毁。对于数据共享的任何进一步使用，我将再次与您确认并签署另一份同意书。

请注意，通过选择参与这项研究，这不会产生具有法律约束力的协议，也不会在您和谢菲尔德大学之间建立雇佣关系

参与

研究活动包括半结构式访谈、与研究参与者一起购物的参与式观察，以及让研究参与者拍摄他们最近购买的食物照片的参与式活动。半结构化访谈是核心方法。其他两种方法用于促进面试过程。每次面试大约需要 50 分钟。我会问一些关于日常食品购物经历和你对性别的看法的开放式问题。您无需回答所有问题。这完全取决于您决定是否进一步参与。在开始之前，我将与您确认接受采访的日期、时间和地点，并将向您发送信息表和同意书。如果您想参加参与式观察，我们会在面试过程中

或之后讨论适当的时间和地点进行食品购物的观察。参与式观察将进行一次。如果你不想参加参与式观察，可以在采访前拍照记录下你最近买的食物。我会问一些关于你在面试过程中购买的食品的问题。

所有的采访都将是录音，如果您对此有任何疑问，可以再问我。我有责任向你解释面试过程。完成访谈后，我会做一个成绩单和数据处理。如果您想查看成绩单，请随时问我。

如果你在面试过程中感到不舒服，你可以随时提出这个问题。我将再次与您确认停止或继续面试过程。

参与的劣势和风险

访谈问题将与您的日常食品购物习惯和经历有关。在整个过程中，如果您随时感到不舒服，请随时要求我停止。我将再次与您确认停止或继续我们的谈话。在开始之前，我将与您再次确认访谈的日期、时间和地点。

出于数据安全的考虑，所有的个人数据都将保存在带有密码保护的笔记本电脑上。我还将在具有强大数据保护系统的谢菲尔德大学Google Drive帐户上进行备份。

参与的好处

参加这个研究项目没有任何好处。

虽然参与该项目的人没有直接的好处，但希望这项工作将基于研究人员和研究参与者之间的平等关系来组织。我非常感谢您的宝贵参与，并期待我们在这个研究过程中产生集体知识。

保密

我在研究期间收集的有关您的所有信息都将严格保密，并且只有研究团队的成员才能访问。除非您明确同意，否则您将无法在任何报告或出版物中被识别。如果您同意我们与其他研究人员共享您提供的信息（例如，通过在数据存档中提供），那么除非您明确要求，否则您的详细信息将不会被包括在内。

为了进一步共享数据，我将再次向您发送一份同意书，以确认您已充分了解进一步的数据使用目的。

处理数据的法律依据

根据数据保护立法，我们需要通知您，我们申请处理您的数据的法律依据是“为了公共利益而执行的任务需要处理（第6(1)(e)条）)。更多信息可以在大学的隐私声明中找到 https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general。

由于我们将收集立法中定义为更敏感的种族/民族、居住区域和收入水平的一些数据，因此我还需要让您知道，我在法律上适用以下条件：使用您的数据出于公共利益、科学研究或统计目的的存档目的是必要的(9(2)(j))

数据使用

完成数据收集后，访谈录音将成为笔录并翻译（本案例将用于中国的实地考察）。所有数据都将在NVivo 软件中进行匿名处理以供分析。只有包括研究团队中的主要研究者王君仪、研究者的导师Sally Hines 教授和 Megan Blake 博士在内的研究团队才能访问这些数据。谢菲尔德大学拥有本研究项目中产生的数据的版权。

数据将被存储用于整个研究过程。如果对调查结果和目的没有任何影响，所有个人数据将立即销毁。为了进一步使用数据，它将存储在谢菲尔德大学的存储库中。一般来说，研究数据会在发表后保存 10 年。

对于进一步的出版和研究用途，所有数据仍将是不可识别和匿名的。由于这项研究的性质，其他研究人员可能会发现收集的数据有助于回答未来的研究问题。我们会征求您的明确同意，以便以这种方式共享您的数据。

资金

这个项目没有任何资金。研究机构是谢菲尔德大学。

数据控制器

谢菲尔德大学将担任本研究的数据控制者。这意味着大学有责任照顾您的信息并正确使用它。

伦理审查

该项目已通过谢菲尔德大学的伦理审查程序获得伦理批准，该程序由社会学研究部门管理。

研究不端行为和报告途径

如果您对研究的任何方面不满意并希望提出投诉，请联系（Sally Hines 教授；sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk）。第一个例子。如果您觉得您的投诉没有得到满意的处理，您可以联系社会学研究系主任（Nathan Hughes 教授；nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果投诉与如何处理您的数据有关，您可以在大学的隐私声明中找到有关如何提出投诉的信息：https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general。

如果您希望报告与您参与本项目导致的潜在剥削、滥用或伤害有关的关注或事件，请联系该项目的指定保护联系人（Sally Hines 教授；sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果问题或事件与指定的保护联系人有关，或者如果您认为您向该联系人提交的报告没有得到满意的处理，请联系系主任（Nathan Hughes 教授；nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac .uk) 和/或大学的研究伦理与规范负责人(Lindsay Unwin; l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk)。

如果您需要寻求帮助，以下是相关组织信息：
南京人社局公共服务平台，热线电话：12333， 地址：南京江中东路 265 号新城大厦二期 16 楼， 官方网站：http://rsj.nanjing.gov.cn。

南京市妇联，热线电话： 12338， 地址：南京成贤街43号，官方网站：
http://women.nanjing.gov.cn。
南京红十字会，热线电话：83612907， 地址：成贤街43号，官方网站：
http://www.njredcross.org.cn。

您可以保留此信息表以及任何其他问题的同意书。

感谢您的参与！

Appendix C Participant Consent Form

Using a feminist paradigm to understand mundane food shopping in the neoliberal context

	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include semi-structured interview and observation. The interview will be audio recorded.	☐	☐
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study any time before 12/30/2023 ; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for the (date) that I provide to be deposited in University of Sheffield repository so it can be used for future research and learning	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:

Researcher (Junyi Wang; jw359@sheffield.ac.uk) Primary Supervisor (Professor Sally Hines; sally.hines@sheffield.ac.uk) Head of Department (Professor Nathan Hughes; nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk)

The University of Sheffield West Bank
Western Bank
Sheffield S10 2TN

Chinese version of consent form

普通家庭的日常生活食物购买经历
知情同意书

	Yes	No
研究项目参与		
我已阅读并理解日期为 DD/MM/YYYY 的项目信息表或项目已向我充分解释。 （如果您对此问题的回答为“否”，请在您完全了解您参与该项目的意义之前，不要继续填写此同意书。）	□	□
我有机会就该项目提出问题。	□	□
我同意参加这个项目。我了解参与该项目将包括半结构化访谈和观察。采访将被录音。	□	□
我明白，选择作为志愿者参与这项研究，并不构成具有法律约束力的协议，也不打算与谢菲尔德大学建立雇佣关系	□	□
我明白我的参与是自愿的，我可以在 2023 年 12 月 30 日之前的任何时间退出研究；我不必说明我不再想参加的任何理由，如果我选择退出也不会产生任何不良后果。	□	□
在项目期间和之后如何使用我的信息		
我了解我的个人详细信息，例如姓名、电话号码、地址和电子邮件地址等，不会向项目以外的人透露。	□	□
我理解并同意我的话可能会在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中被引用。我了解，除非我特别要求，否则我不会在这些输出中被命名。	□	□
我理解并同意，只有在其他授权研究人员同意按照本表格要求对信息保密的情况下，他们才能访问这些数据。	□	□
我理解并同意其他授权研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，前提是他们同意按照本表格的要求对信息保密。	□	□
我允许将我提供的（日期）存放在谢菲尔德大学的存储库中，以便将来用于研究和学习	□	□
以便研究人员可以合法使用您提供的信息		
我同意将我持有的作为本项目一部分生成的任何材料的版权转让给谢菲尔德大学。	□	□

研究参与人员 签名 日期

研究参与人员 签名 日期

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