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Combining sandwich care with work: Interviews with Chinese young working sandwich caregivers

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I certify that this thesis is the true and accurate version of the thesis

approved by the examiners.

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DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree in any other institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant ethics committee.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the caregiving experience of young sandwich caregivers in work. Mainstream sandwich care literature, due to its simplistic view on care as mainly involves instrumental and tangible forms, largely neglects the scope and complexity of sandwich care. The key aim of this thesis is therefore to make further theoretical and empirical developments to the conceptualisation of care. Theoretically, this research contributes to extending the theorisation of care in sandwich care literature by exploring the aspects of care that remain hidden and under-researched. Concerning complexity of caregiving, the gendered power dynamics inherent in a variety of caring relations and caregivers' context-bounded agency are investigated. From an empirical perspective, the contributions are twofold as the results not only highlight the struggle experienced by young workers, but also offer insights about caregiving and dynamic relations in Chinese Confucian context, which has not been developed adequately in the field of sandwich care.

This thesis adopts a qualitative approach following symbolic interactionism. Using data collected from 40 sandwich caregivers in work, the thesis makes theoretical contributions to the conceptualisation of care and sandwich caregivers through perspectives of hidden elements and power-laden nature of care. The findings demonstrate that care involves a variety of forms, and the hidden forms (i.e., technological and lingual care) play significant roles in shaping young workers' experience of care. Combining sandwich care with work is challenging at the stage when parents/parents-in-law are relatively young and when children are dependent, as young workers are facing the unique sandwichness caused by both present and future worries. Yet, young workers do not always unthinkingly perform care and work. Importantly, they have certain level of agency in navigating the complexity of care through reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family realms, and by crafting certain impressions on audiences. This agency, however, has largely been constrained by structural and cultural factors and with gendered implications, reflecting Confucian

values surrounding respect to hierarchy, and usually the gendered hierarchy characterising women' subordination and men's privilege.

Table of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1　Initial motivation of researching sandwich care

As a woman born in a Confucian context who is performing care to my parents, my experience as a hidden caregiver was the initial motivation for me to do this research. My mother is relatively young, and while she is physically healthy she is still dependent on me as I have to provide some forms of care for her. She constantly needs my assistance in the hospitals and banks since she cannot directly communicate with doctors or bank staff due to language barriers. She relies heavily on me to provide emotional care so as to spend adequate hours talking to and interacting with her. However, in the workplace, my role as a caregiver has not really been recognised since my previous supervisors assumed that as my parents are both young and I don't have children of my own, I do not need to provide care. I suddenly realised that I am a hidden and invisible caregiver, since the forms of care I provided is not as tangible as physical care offered to frail or aging parents. Meanwhile, combining the care I provided with work roles is still burdensome and a challenging experience for me, particularly when my organisations expected me to work extremely long hours (often started at 9 a.m. and finished late). At that time, I foresaw that the situation would be worse if I got married and had a new-born baby. Therefore, I decided to explore the experience of workers who have both child(ren) and parents/parents-in-laws to take care of, and who are hidden caregivers like myself. Besides personal motivation, there are empirical and theoretical rationales that motivate this research, which will be further explained in the following subsections.

1.2　Empirical rationales to research sandwich care

The term sandwich caregivers refers to the adults who are sandwiched between the caregiving to their younger children and their aging parent(s) (Miller, 1981; Chisholm, 1999). The term working sandwich caregivers herein refers to those employees who

carry these dual caregiving roles while simultaneously fulfilling work role responsibilities (Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020). Childcare, eldercare, and work can sometimes be incompatible with each other and compete with each other for limited resources, such as time and energy of sandwich caregivers. The incompatibility between each role the sandwich caregivers occupy and the competing demands inherent in multiple role occupancy can generate negative implications for both sandwich caregivers themselves and their hiring organisations. First of all, extensive research has revealed that being a working sandwich caregiver implies a challenging experience with various negative implications for caregivers, e.g., on subjective well-being (heightened emotional exhaustion, physical and emotional stress), work-family conflict, quality of life, and workplace absenteeism (e.g., Halinski et al., 2018; Aazami et al., 2018; Stephens et al., 2001; Rubin and White-Means, 2009; Gillett and Crisp, 2017; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004). Key challenges experienced by working sandwich caregivers include overcoming barriers to care provision, difficulties with negotiation expectations, a lack of external support, the perceived lack of control over their lives, and the attempt to maintain a balance (Boyczuk and Fletcher, 2016). Besides impacts on their well-being and career, financial implications of performing sandwich care have also been documented.

Being sandwiched with childcare and eldercare is found to be significantly related with great financial strain for working sandwich caregivers due to the need to take a leave of absence for caregiving, which then results in reduced economic welfare or impoverishment as a result of sandwich caregiving commitments (White-Means, 2017). Recent statistics show that 40% of sandwich caregivers in the UK (45.9% of women and 35.3% of men) report being unable to work, or to work as much as they would like to (ONS, 2019). Research has further illustrated that sandwich caregivers are less likely to be hired, more likely to be given lower salaries, and to receive more negative evaluations than those who only perform childcare or eldercare (Henle et al., 2020). This implies more challenges for working sandwich caregivers to have both work and care, and more difficulties to accumulate as much financial resources as those

employees who care for only children or parents/parents-in-law, and those who do not provide any informal care. Therefore, unpacking the experience of working sandwich caregivers in combining sandwich caregiver and work is essential in terms of better understanding their conditions in order to enhance equality measures.

Sandwich care is also challenging for the hiring organisations. Research indicates that employees simultaneously performing childcare and eldercare can negatively impact the organisations through hampered work performance (e.g., Burke, 2017). That is, due to the caregiving burden, the working sandwich caregivers may reduce their work productivity, have less hours on work, be absent more often from work, increase the use of employee benefits, be less interested in career advancement, and have greater intention to quit (e.g., Burke, 2017; Halinski et al., 2020; Aazami et al., 2018; Pierret, 2006; O'Loughlin et al., 2017). It is therefore essential that the management team or human resource department of any organisation clearly understands what their sandwich caregiver employees are experiencing in order to tailor policies and strategies, so as to support their employees who are sandwiched by childcare and eldercare to combine care with work. This can potentially benefit the employers in terms of increased job satisfaction and motivation, higher level of retention, increased commitment and organisational engagement, enhanced productivity and performance, and becoming better at attracting and recruiting employees in the sandwich caregiver group (Neal and Hammer, 2001).

The above discussion demonstrates the significance of investigating how the working sandwich caregivers combine care with work for a nuanced understanding, which is beneficial for not only the working sandwich caregivers (e.g., enhancing their well-being), but also for their employers (e.g., attracting and retaining employees in the sandwich caregiver group and improving organisational performance). The overall aim of this research hence is **to explore the caregiving experience of the working sandwich caregivers, and understand how they combine care with work**. It therefore lays a foundation based on which supportive policies of governments and

organisations can be designed to cater to the specific needs of working sandwich caregivers. The results can be beneficial and informative for governments and organisations worldwide, since sandwich care is a global phenomenon (Burke, 2017). As a global phenomenon, it was suggested that 10-20% of the global population in their 50s and 60s perform sandwich care (Burke, 2017). At country level, it is estimated that 2.5 million Americans and 24.3% of all adult child caregivers in the USA are considered sandwich caregivers (Lei et al., 2022). In the UK, 3% of the population are sandwiched between childcare and eldercare responsibilities (ONS, 2019), and in mainland China, 36% of adults are involved in sandwich caregiving (Burke, 2017).

Scholarly attention to sandwich caregivers is not rare. However, except for the extant and increasing research attention, there are still some aspects of sandwich care remain hidden and unexplored due to the weaknesses of existing research. One such weakness is that current research on sandwich care tends to adopt a quantitative approach by testing the hypotheses between variables (e.g., Halinski et al., 2019; Rubin and White-Means, 2009; Henle et al., 2020; Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Evans et al., 2019; Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020; Keene and Prokos, 2007; Halinski et al., 2018). However, a quantitative enquiry into the phenomenon of sandwich care fails to offer rich insights, particularly into the dynamic and complex nature of caregiving (see Burke, 2017). Moreover, a quantitative method to investigate social phenomena can lead to the neglection of the relationship between the social world and sandwich caregivers, thus it is inadequate in gaining nuances on how sandwich caregivers live, experience, adjust with, and change their social world (Hasan, 2016). Therefore, in responding to Calvano's (2013) call for more research to enrich the knowledge on the sandwich caregivers, this thesis aims to offer more holistic understandings of how sandwich care is lived and experienced through a qualitative enquiry.

The second weakness of existing sandwich care literature lies on its emphasis on how sandwich care is experienced by caregivers in the western countries. That means, the experience of sandwich caregivers from eastern societies is relatively hidden as current

knowledge of sandwich care tends to be western-focused (e.g., Hammer and Neal, 2008; Pines et al., 2011; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Guberman et al., 2012; Bastawrous et al., 2015; Manor, 2021; Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Keene and Prokos, 2007). To overcome this weakness, this research is conducted in the Chinese context. In this way, this research strives to make the lived experience of Chinese sandwich caregivers visible, and therefore broaden current western-dominant understandings of sandwich care with richness gained from a society in which the welfare system and cultural values are distinct from western countries (More information on the welfare system and cultural values of Chinese context will be explained in the section 1.4- The research context).

The third weakness of existing sandwich care literature is concerned with extensive scholarly attention being paid to sandwich caregivers above 40 years of age (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Železná, 2018; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004; Grundy and Henretta, 2006), rendering caregiving experience of the sandwich caregivers in a younger age group hidden. However, empirical research has discovered that younger sandwich caregivers (between 30 and 39 years of age) tend to report poorer mental health than the sandwich caregivers in an older age group (Kim et al., 2021). With constrained research focus and the domination of quantitative enquires in the sandwich care field of research, in-depth understandings of the experience of young working sandwich caregivers remain limited. This research addresses this lack by unpacking the experience of young sandwich caregivers workers between 20 and 39 years of age, given that the earliest marriage age in China is above 20 for women and 22 for men. The rationale to focus on the working sandwich caregivers in a younger age group is that 20s and 30s can be a pivotal age during which the sandwich caregivers are at a critical career stage with very dependent children, while at the same time performing various forms of care to their aging parents and/or parents-in-law. In this way, their experience of sandwich care can be distinct with the working sandwich caregivers in the older age group, who 'have arrived at a time of relative equilibrium in…their economic situation…', with grown children and increasingly dependent parents (Miller,

1981, p. 419). By investigating how the young working sandwich caregivers in China combine care with work, this research offers rich and context-specific insights into the complex process, in which the workers constantly make decisions regarding how to allocate resources between care (i.e., childcare and eldercare) and work.

So far, this section explained the empirical rationales of this research. The following clarifies the theoretical rationales underpinned this thesis by articulating what remains under-researched in existing sandwich care literature. One such issue concerns the conceptualisation of care.

1.3 Enriching the concept of care

In the literature on sandwich care, care is commonly understood as tasks that caregivers perform. In defining caring tasks, scholars categorise care differently. For instance, Burke (2017, p. 4) differentiates between 'hands on' tasks (e.g., bathing, feeding, and toileting) and 'managerial' tasks (e.g., planning and supervision). Others include financial (e.g., Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020; Henle et al., 2020) and emotional elements (e.g., Halinski et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2019). Despite the cover of a relatively wide range of caring tasks, the typical emphasis of sandwich care literature is on physical care, as care is usually considered needed by frail parents and dependent children (Grundy and Henretta, 2006), who experience difficulties in looking after their daily living activities. This narrow focus, however, oversights other possible forms of intergenerational care that sandwich caregivers can be engaging in (Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021). This may render a sizable portion of sandwich caregivers' status hidden, as the forms of care they are providing may not be captured by existing categories. Additionally, even though sandwich care is usually understood in perspectives of caring tasks that caregivers are performing, it, indeed, involves more than task performance. In this sense, research that explores the hidden forms and dimensions of care is needed to enrich the concept of care in sandwich care literature. The first question of this research, therefore, is to understand:

What is involved in the care that Chinese young working sandwich caregivers provide?

1.3.1 Gendered nature as one of the dimensions of sandwich care

Sandwich care is never as simple as task performance. It is complex and one of the dimensions that contributes to the complexity of sandwich care is the gendered nature. Sandwich care is heterogeneously experienced not only in different cultural and age groups, but also in a gendered way. There has been a consensus that sandwich care remains gendered with women being the primary caregivers (Burke, 2017; Remennick, 1999). Gender role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 1992) offers a useful lens through which these gendered conditions of sandwich care can be explained.

Gender role theory proposes that people construct expectations for their and others' behaviour according to their beliefs about the behaviour that is proper for men and women (Eagly, 1987). For example, it is expected that women should be communal and sympathetic thus occupying social roles related to caring for others, and men should be agentic and independent, thus breadwinner roles are seen as more appropriate for them. Gender roles have pervasive effects, in that sex provides a powerful basis for categorising people, with associated gender stereotypes (Blair and Banaji, 1996). As such, sandwich care remains women's responsibility. Following this logic, some researchers focused solely on female sandwich caregivers when exploring the sandwich caregiving experience (e.g., Dautzenberg et al., 1999; Aazami et al., 2018; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Evans et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2016). However, it is not necessarily the case that sandwich caregiving is only relevant for female caregivers. Indeed, research suggests that sandwich caregiving is also relevant for male caregivers (e.g., Kwok, 2006).

Other scholars have examined the gendered nature of sandwich care by differentiating between what caregiving tasks sandwich caregivers men and women tend to engage in.

For instance, male sandwich caregivers are found to support family members financially, and their female counterparts tend to be responsible for physical care and emotional care (e.g., Chisholm, 1999; Burke and Calvano, 2017). However, this pattern may not hold true in the trend of increasing dual-earning status, which may lead to changes to sandwich caregivers men and women's roles. Additionally, there are different ways through which sandwich caregiving can be gendered, something remains hidden with exclusive emphasis on how men and women sandwich caregivers perform caring tasks. This research thus strives to extend the current knowledge on the gendered nature of sandwich care through deepened understanding of the complexity of this gendered experience.

Besides gendered nature, sandwich care is relational by nature as it involves intensive interactions between social actors, particularly between caregivers and care receivers. Therefore, to obtain richness into sandwich care, it is essential to unpack its relational nature.

1.3.2 Unpacking the relational nature of sandwich care

Existing literature has investigated the relational nature of sandwich care through reciprocal relationships in terms of how caregivers exchange support with family members in the process of caregiving (e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). However, given the substantial research attention been paid to the sandwich caregivers above 40 years old in western countries, the exchange pattern of young sandwich caregiver workers in the Chinese context remains unclear. Additionally, current research on reciprocity in the field of sandwich care emphasises reciprocal relationships in the family domain. The undivided emphasis on familial reciprocity, however, can undermine the dynamic nature of work and family domains and how the two realms inter-relate (Kanter, 1977). To advance current knowledge on the relational nature of sandwich care, this research goes beyond familial settings, and explores how Chinese working sandwich caregivers

in a younger age group exchange care or support with both family members, and colleagues and supervisors in the workplace.

The relational nature of sandwich care, however, means more than the wide range of relationships involved in the process of caregiving. It also includes the dynamic power relations between social actors, since caregiving involves 'asymmetries and negotiations', and the exchange of care is 'filled with gendered asymmetries' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2632, p. 2647). Nevertheless, the issues of power asymmetry and gender underpinning various reciprocal relationships have not yet been adequately examined by existing sandwich care literature (Ashwin et al., 2013; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001). Therefore, to elaborate on the knowledge of relational nature of sandwich care, it is essential to take power asymmetry and gender into consideration, and investigate how power and gender shape caregivers' reciprocal exchange with family members, colleagues, and supervisors. Through the above, this thesis strives to advance the understandings of the relational nature of sandwich care in two ways. Firstly, it involves more reciprocal relationships so as to include the relationships both in the family and workplace realms in studying how sandwich caregivers exchange care and support in the process of caregiving. Secondly, it examines the impact of power and gender in framing the reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family realms.

1.4 Theoretical framing of existing research

A comprehensive theoretical framing is thus needed to further develop the conceptualisation of care for richness of the complexity of sandwich care. The current sandwich care literature reflects two dominant, opposing camps of theoretical perspectives used to understand the caregiving experienced by sandwich caregivers. On the one hand, there is research informed by 'role strain theory' (Goode, 1960), 'role dynamic theory' (Kahn et al., 1964), and 'work-family conflict theory' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), which investigates how childcare, eldercare, and work are incompatible

with each other and compete with each other for limited resources, such as time and energy commitment of working sandwich caregivers (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018; Halinski et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2001; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004). On the other hand, research informed by 'role enhancement theory' (Marks, 1977) and 'family solidarity hypothesis' (Grundy and Henretta, 2006) explores the positive aspects of simultaneous engagement with childcare and eldercare, and in some cases, along with work responsibilities (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Železná, 2018; Daatland et al., 2010). However, these studies tend to perceive the working sandwich caregivers as passive receivers, who unthinkingly perform childcare, eldercare, and work responsibilities without agency to deal with sandwich care in social interactions. With these theoretical perspectives dominating the existing literature, the holistic understandings of the ways in which combining work with sandwich care is a dynamic and hence complex process remains unexplored.

Agency 'reflects those endowments and self-regulatory capabilities that give rise to personal influence' (Murray and Ali, 2017, p. 1241). It is a force underpinning actions which actors are aware of, and believe that exercising it enables change (Ling and Dale, 2013). Therefore, an agent influences and contributes to their social environment instead of only being a product of social settings (Murray and Ali, 2017). The second research question that this thesis strives to answer is that: as active agents, **how young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role?**

To explore sandwich caregivers' agency, this thesis will draw on a symbolic interactionist role theory (Biddle, 1986; Blumer, 1969). Roles in symbolic interactionist approach are flexible and are constantly and creatively (re)constructed in interactions, rather than fixed cultural elements (Biddle, 1986). Following this perspective, working sandwich caregivers become positioned as creative agents who actively take, negotiate, and make roles with others in social interactions, instead of passively accepting whatever is on offer (Stryker, 1991). With symbolic interactionist role theory, this research studies how Chinese young workers negotiate and co-create caregiver and

work roles with their family members and colleagues/supervisors. It is therefore enriching existing knowledge on sandwich care by highlighting the working sandwich caregivers' agency in challenging the prescribed role contents and constructing their own definitions of a specific role in social interactions.

Symbolic interactionist role theory, however, has been criticised for its over-emphasis on the power of individual agency in creating the environment, while neglecting the impact of structural and contextual constraints upon expectations and roles (Biddle, 1986). In this way, insights into how care is contexualised and shaped by cultural values can be missing. Therefore, the symbolic interactionist role theory on its own is inadequate to capture the complexity of sandwich care through the dynamic interactions between caregivers and the wider social and cultural settings. Instead, an approach is needed which allows to account for how individual agency is situated within and shaped by social structures and cultural norms, to understand this dynamic relationship. To do so, this thesis adopts the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand how sandwich caregivers exert agency in social interactions through perspective of impression management theory (Goffman, 1959).

Both role theory and impression management theory originate from a dramaturgical perspective (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005; Goffman, 1959), and scholars have identified a close relationship between role scripts/expectations and impression management behaviours (e.g., Gardner and Martinko, 1988). Impression management theory not only recognises individuals' agency in creating, controlling, or altering the images that others hold about them in social interactions, but it also appraises the way role expectations and cultural norms shape and guide individual behaviours (Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Goffman, 1959; Gardner and Martinko, 1988). In this way, impression management theory is highly compatible with a symbolic interactionist approach to role theory in terms of enabling this thesis to tease out how the working sandwich caregivers exercise agency to combine sandwich care with work, while also accounting for how their agency is framed and shaped by cultural and structural factors.

By adopting the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory (Blumer, 1969) to understand impression management behaviours (Goffman, 1959), this research pays attention to how role expectations shape impression management behaviours, and how impressions are crafted to combine care with work. In doing so, this research aims to expand current knowledge of sandwich care by highlighting the dynamic power relations between the working sandwich caregivers and other actors in social interactions, and between sandwich caregivers and the wider social world.

1.5 The research context

The context of this research is Chinese Confucianism. The rationales for this resarch to be conducted in a Chinese context are two-fold. The first reason is to do with the substantial number of sandwich caregivers (36% as shown above) and the demographic changes occurring in the Chinese society. With enhanced longevity, an increasing number of people in China live longer, leading to more and more indiviudals in their fifties and sixties having one or more aging parents/parents-in-law to be cared for (Falkingham et al., 2020). The declining fertility rate and family planing has resulted in the phenomenon of '4-2-1' households (i.e. four parents (parents and parents-in-law), two adult children, and one child) in China (Liu et al., 2021). This implies fewer adult children and reduced availability of carers to perform childcare and eldercare. Recently, the Chinese government formally inscribed the third-child policy into law, encouraging families to have more than one child (Xinhua, 2022). As a result of prolonged life expectancy and government's new family planning policy, the sandwich caregivers in China may need to provide care to more people, with the possibility to take care of four parents (including parents-in-law) and more than one child at the same time. When the changing family dynamic is combined with the government's plan to gradually delay retirement age (currently 60 for men and 55 for women) (MOHRSS, 2016), in the near future, even more individuals in China can be faced with the need to simultaneously provide sandwich care to their young children and aging parents/parents-in-law while

working. Given the above-mentioned demographic trends, understanding how Chinese working sandwich caregivers combine sandwich care with work is of significant importance for the Chinese government and organisations in terms of how to care their workers in the sandwich caregiver group.

The second reason to conduct this research in China is due to the particularities of its welfare and cultural system. The above mentioned that existing knowledge on sandwich caregivers is mainly based on western countries, such as the USA, UK, and other European countries with different degrees of state welfare systems which offer relatively extensive public services and social benefits for citizens (e.g., Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021; Albertini et al., 2022; Souralová et al., 2022; Elden et al., 2022; Henle et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). There is a scarcity of research attention to how workers experience sandwich care in a Chinese context, where the government relies heavily on the family to provide childcare and eldercare due to the lack of formal social care services (Falkingham et al., 2020). Furthermore, the contextually embedded nature of care implies that the performance of sandwich care should be understood in a specific cultural context to capture the complicated ways through which care between generations takes place (Elden et al., 2022).

China has a distinct context where the Confucian virtue of Xiao (filial piety) and reproductive obligation imply strong intergenerational connectedness among grandparents, parents, and grandchildren (Chen et al., 2000). In such a society, family responsibilities are usually prioritised over individual needs, and adult children's provision of care for their aging parents/parents-in-law is the expected norm (Liu and Chen, 2022; Falkingham et al., 2020). Informed by Xiao, eldercare can start at an early stage as soon as children have the ability to provide certain forms of care. Thus, in this specific context, sandwich care can commence once the adult children start to have their first child. It is hence highly likely that, guided by Confucian values and due to the particularities of the welfare system in China, the conditions that Chinese working sandwich caregivers experience are distinct from their counterparts in western countries.

In responding to the recent call for further investigation on the experience of sandwich caregivers in non-western countries with different welfare state regimes and values (e.g., Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021; Henle et al., 2020), this research is carried out in China. In this way, this research offers context-specific insights into how the cultural values and normative expectations in China shape the way young working sandwich caregivers perform care and how they interact with people around in the process of caregiving.

1.6 Research framework and strategy

Following on from the argument above, the thesis adopts the ontological stance of symbolic interactionism, which posits that subjective meanings attached to social phenomena and behaviour are key to study the details of a situation (Hay, 2016). This stance aligns with the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory that I focus on and my understanding of role as socially constructed in interactions. It emphasises the individual's agency in interpreting and creating social reality (Flint, 2006), and is also capable of addressing questions regarding the importance of structure in defining agency and behaviour (Musolf, 1992).

In line with its ontological commitments, the thesis adopts a qualitative research design, which seeks to disclose the meanings conveyed by participants about a phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). It generates insights, and is particularly helpful when there is limited knowledge of a phenomenon (Murshed and Zhang, 2016). In this way, a qualitative method is compatible with the aim of this research, which is to unpack the hidden status of younger sandwich caregivers and the unexplored dimensions of care with rich insights. For the purpose of data collection, 41 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who met the criteria of being working sandwich caregivers in a Chinese context, of the age of 20-39 years old, an age category which has been largely neglected by existing sandwich care research (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021; Albertini et al., 2022). Thematic analysis was

selected due to its compatibility with varied data sizes, and its suitability for a wide range of topics and research questions (King and Brooks, 2018). The research questions were fully addressed and the following presents the outline of this thesis, which briefly explains how the research questions were raised and addressed in each chapter.

1.7 The outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters which proceed as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of relevant literature and theoretical framings for this research. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section provides definitions of the sandwich caregiver and discusses what remains hidden in existing sandwich care literature. The second section of Chapter 2 conceptualises the care the sandwich caregivers provide and further explores the hidden forms and dimensions of sandwich care through task performance, gendered, and relational perspectives. In terms of the gendered nature of sandwich care, this section indicates that there are other ways that sandwich care can be gendered if care is understood as a complex process that involves more than task performance. The discussion then articulates the relational nature of sandwich care through lens of reciprocity. After a detailed critical evaluation of reciprocity, the discussion presents the deficiency of current knowledge on reciprocity in the field of sandwich care research to capture the relationship between work and family reciprocity, and the power and gendered asymmetry underscored the reciprocal relationships. The third section presents the theoretical underpinnings of this research. It justifies that adopting the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand impression management behaviours is needed to investigate the complex nature of sandwich care. Moreover, this section highlights the under-researched implications of impression management, impacted by role taking and making, as a strategy to combine sandwich care with work. The last section of the second chapter discusses how caregiving is contextualised by illustrating how key values of Confucianism can guide and shape the working sandwich caregivers' experience in a Chinese context. This section argues that an investigation of the

experience of sandwich caregiving with a cultural lens adds another layer of richness to the complex nature of care through the dynamic interactions among social actors, and between the working sandwich caregivers and their social and cultural environment.

Chapter 3 discusses the research philosophy of interpretivism that guides this thesis and the methodology adopted. The chapter provides a rationale for the choice of symbolic interactionist perspective within interpretivism, and discusses some opportunities it brings to the study of the hidden aspects of sandwich care in a Confucian context. The following discussion explains why a qualitative research method suits this research in terms of insights into the nature of sandwich care with attention to the meaning making and interpreting process. Furthermore, the justifications for the choice of semi-structured interviews, the interview procedure, detailed information about the participants, data analysis method, steps taken to ensure research rigour, and ethical considerations are also covered in this section.

The findings and how the research questions are addressed are presented in three chapters. Chapter 4 discusses the research findings in relation to the first research question and the complex nature of sandwich care. It explores the forms of care the Chinese young working sandwich caregivers are providing. Through the help of symbolic interactionism, it unpacks the hidden forms and hidden dimensions of care, which remain underdeveloped in existing sandwich care literature. Chapter 5 demonstrates how sandwich care is relational by investigating how Chinese working sandwich caregivers in a younger age group draw on networks that co-exist in the workplace and family realms for resources to combine sandwich care with work responsibilities. Additionally, it compares and discusses the relationship between workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity and illustrates the relational nature of care through perspectives of quality, temporality, hierarchy, and interrelatedness. Chapter 6 concerns the second research question, i.e., how young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role? By investigating the influence of role taking and making on impression management, this chapter illustrates how the

Chinese young working sandwich caregivers, as creative agents, combine sandwich care and work in power relations with others and their social environment.

Chapter 7 draws the thesis together starting with the key theoretical contributions this thesis makes to relevant literature and theories through nuances of sandwich care concluded from previous chapters. The discussion then proceeds to the empirical contributions this thesis makes to the body of knowledge in the sandwich care field, and practical implications for organisations and policy makers in China. Theoretically, this research extends the conceptualisation of care through the hidden elements, temporality perspective, and power-laden nature of sandwich care. Empirically, this research articulates how sandwich care has a cultural element by investigating the impact of Confucian values on shaping caregiving experience of the Chinese young working sandwich caregivers. Practically, this research lays a foundation based on which policies of the Chinese government and organisations should be designed to support and care employees with sandwich caregiving responsibilities. The chapter also covers some limitations of the study, and based on the limitations and research findings, the chapter specifies areas for future research.

1.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter introduced the personal, empirical, and theoretical rationales for this research for a more nuanced understanding of the working sandwich caregivers' experience of combining work with sandwich care. The study is needed due to the substantial number of this cohort in the global labour market, especially in the Chinese context. Additionally, most existing sandwich care literature tend to employ a simplistic view on caregiving, as care is usually perceived as tasks, particularly physical caring tasks, performed, leaving some hidden forms and dimensions of care unexplored in the sandwich care literature. In this sense, the thesis is essential for holistic understandings of the complex and dynamic nature of sandwich care.

Chapter 2: Current understandings of sandwich care

2.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research is to explore the caregiving experience of Chinese working sandwich caregivers in a younger age group (between 20 and 39 years old), which is further developed into two research questions: 1. What is involved in the care Chinese young working sandwich caregivers provide? 2. How young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role? To fulfil the research aim and answer the two research questions, it is essential to review existing literature on sandwich care. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss current understandings of the experience of sandwich caregivers, and identify the research lack that is worth further exploration.

The following sections hence start with the definition of working sandwich caregivers. With empirical evidence from existing sandwich caregiver literature, the discussion then focuses on what remains underdeveloped beyond dominant and mainstream knowledge of sandwich care. The second section of this chapter conceptualises the care the working sandwich caregivers provide, and it starts from the care as tasks to be performed through the gendered nature of care to the relational nature of care. It highlights that more research efforts are needed to explore the hidden elements of care to gain a holistic understanding of sandwich care. To do this, the third section proposes theoretical framings that are helpful for this research to explore the hidden elements of sandwich care, and to unpack how sandwich caregivers combine care with work. The fourth section contextualises sandwich care and discusses the particularities of the Chinese context, which contributes to articulating how sandwich care is context embedded through a Confucian cultural lens.

2.2 Conceptualising working sandwich caregivers

The term sandwich caregivers was first introduced by Miller (1981) to refer to adults aged between 45 and 65 'who are sandwiched between their aging parents and their own maturing children' (p. 419). Demographic trends, such as the aging population, decreased fertility, delayed retirement age, and women's increasing labour force participation, mean that an increasing number of adults will face responsibilities for caring for both younger children and aging parents/parents-in-law while working (Suh, 2016; Železná, 2018; Burke, 2017). As a result of the increasing concern, the term sandwich caregiver has gained popularity in both academic and public discourses (Souralová et al., 2022; Keene and Prokos, 2007) due to the significance of sandwich care on caregivers' work life.

Conceptualising sandwich caregiver is difficult, and a consensus has not been reached on the definition, since scholars tend to focus on different descriptive aspects of caregivers when defining sandwich caregiver. That is, sandwich caregivers can mean different groups of people for different scholars depending on which descriptive aspect is the researcher emphasising. Some scholars believe that sandwich caregiving is specific to a group of people at a particular age. For instance, similarly to Miller (1981), Burke (2017) specifies the age distribution of sandwich caregivers, so as to label sandwich caregivers as those who are 'in their 50s and 60s, with aging parents, children, and perhaps grandchildren' (p. 4). Likewise, Gans and colleagues (2013) perceive sandwich caregivers as middle-aged adults who are sandwiched between caregiving to children and aging parents, with the average age of their respondents being 43 years old.

Age is not the only descriptive aspect that scholars can take to define sandwich caregivers. Some researchers, instead, perceive sandwich caregiving as specific to women. In this sense, they term sandwich caregivers as those women who provide care to children and parents/parents-in-law at the same time (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018;

Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Evans et al., 2019). In other cases, age and gender are combined, so that the sandwich caregivers refer to those middle-aged women who perform sandwich care (e.g., Souralová et al., 2022). Others go beyond the age distribution and gender specification, and instead emphasise the qualities of care that the sandwich caregivers provide. For example, some suggest that sandwich caregivers are those who 'carry a dual caregiving *burden*' (Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020, p. 862) to both younger and elder generation. It is burdensome since the sandwich caregivers have 'one or more surviving parents' and dependent children, or in extreme cases, they need to 'simultaneously *raise dependent* children and care for *frail* elderly parents' (Grundy and Henretta, 2006, p. 707).

Despite the variety in definitions, scholars have noted that the picture is slowly changing with the aging population and with the maturing children not being as independent as expected. Precarity has increased, leaving grown-up children without jobs or without secure incomes with difficulties to live on by themselves (Burke, 2017). The changing demographis trends raise the need for a definition that covers broader sandwich caring situations, and therefore a wider range of people who can be termed sandwich caregivers.

In existing sandwich care literature, another definition focuses more on the simultaneous caregiving to the younger and the elder generation. Chisholm (1999), for example, offers a general definition and views sandwich caregivers as those individuals who 'find themselves in the position of being caregivers of their young children…and care for one or both of aging parents' (p. 178). By focusing on simultaneous caregiving without specifying the age or gender of caregivers and without mentioning that the aging parents are frail, this definition covers a wider range of sandwich caring situations. Under this definition, people (men or women, and at any age) who believe they are providing care to aging parents (who do not need to be frail and highly dependent) and children, can be considered sandwich caregivers. However, this definition, similar to other definitions, has been criticised for its strong emphasis on care (Hämäläinen and

Tanskanen, 2021). To account for more forms of intergenerational support or care hence other non-typical sandwich situations that are valuable to be studied, this research follows the definition of Hämäläinen and Tanskanen (2021) and defines sandwich caregivers as those who have at least one parent/parent-in-law alive and one or more children. Due to the interest of this research being to address the complexity of combining sandwich care with work, the working sandwich caregivers in this thesis refer to those employees who have at least one child and at least one parent/parent-in-law.

Existing research has covered a variety of sandwich caregiving situations. Nevertheless, the tendency to focus on specific groups of sandwich caregivers renders the experience of other groups of sandwich caregivers hidden. In this way, a holistic understanding of sandwich care cannot be gained without nuances gained from the hidden sandwich caregivers. This research hence aims to address this lack and to explore the experience of the hidden sandwich caregivers. To fulfill this research aim, the following subsection explains how the experience of certain groups of sandwich caregivers tends to be neglected.

2.2.1 The hidden sandwich caregivers

This subsection discusses how existing research renders the caregiving experience of specific demographic groups of sandwich caregivers hidden. Particularly the sandwich caregivers from non-western countries, since current knowledge on sandwich care is western-dominant. Moreover, the status of the sandwich caregivers in a younger age group tends to be undermined since most existing research tends to perceive sandwich caregiving as specific to people above 40 years of age. The following subsection starts with the discussion of how the experience of sandwich caregivers from eastern counties remains hidden in existing sandwich care literature.

2.2.1.1 The hidden sandwich caregivers from the East

Sandwich care is a global phenomenon (Burke, 2017). However, existing knowledge of sandwich care is largely biased since current research is western-focused (e.g., Hammer and Neal, 2008; Pines et al., 2011; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Guberman et al., 2012; Bastawrous et al., 2015; Manor, 2021; Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Keene and Prokos, 2007). With research conducted in western countries, many have investigated the prevalence of sandwich caregivers, how sandwich care is experienced, and the implications of sandwich caregiving (e.g., Lei et al., 2022; Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Keene and Prokos, 2007). For example, with the nationally representative surveys of American caregivers, Lei and colleagues (2022) find that 2.5 million individuals are sandwich caregivers (24.3% of all adult child caregivers), the average age of whom are 46.3 years old and they are more likely than non-sandwich caregivers to report more financial and emotional difficulties and role overload. Based on the household production theory and with survey data collected from Italian sandwich caregivers women, Pagani and Marenzi (2008) suggest that the presence of children between 0 and 2 years old, and the need to care for a senior member can negatively impact sandwich caregivers women's labour market participation, while the help from senior members in childcare strongly increases the possibilities of their engagement in paid work. Additionally, there are two studies in relation to sandwich caregivers in the Czech Republic, investigating how care circulates in the family domain (Souralová and Žáková, 2019), and how sandwich caregivers women interpret their role and what are the pressures, tensions, and advantages of being a sandwich caregiver (Souralová et al., 2022).

Studies from the West have investigated sandwich care from different perspectives. However, the experience of sandwich caregivers from the East, particularly those who are also in work, remains relatively hidden compared to their western counterparts. This implies that more research efforts are essential to enrich existing western-dominant knowledge and unpack how working sandwich caregivers from the East experience

caregiving. Additionally, it is inappropriate to understand how sandwich care is experienced in eastern societies with the biased knowledge gained from western societies. The reasons for this are two-fold:

Firstly, there are cultural differences between the East and the West. Western countries, such as the UK, USA, and most European countries are characterised as high in individualism; while eastern countries, such as China, Korea, Malaysia, and Philippines are characterised as high in collectivism (Tavakoli et al., 2003). It has been suggested that cultures high in individualism tend to emphasise more on independence and individualisation. Thus, people in individualism cultures will be more likely to perceive family caregiving as an interruption to individual plans (Mitchell, 2014). On the contrary, in collectivism cultural settings, the self is defined in relationship to the family and other social groupings (Youn et al., 1999). Therefore, people in collectivism cultures would view family caregiving as a natural and normal function of family life (Mitchell, 2014). In this sense, how working sandwich caregivers from the East understand, interpret, and experience sandwich care will be distinct from working sandwich caregivers from the West.

Secondly, the socioeconomic conditions between most western countries and most eastern countries are different. The welfare systems in most western countries (e.g., the UK, USA, and most European countries) offer relatively extensive public services and social benefits for their citizens (e.g., Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021; Albertini et al., 2022; Souralová et al., 2022; Elden et al., 2022; Henle et al., 2020). On the contrary, there is a general lack of social services provided by the governments in most eastern countries such as China and the Philippines (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Estioko et al., 2022). This indicates a lower level of support from governments to working sandwich caregivers in the East compared to their counterparts in the West, who mainly rely on themselves or informal support when combining sandwich care with work. Given the above, research that explores how sandwich care is perceived and experienced by working caregivers from the East for eastern-specific insights is

necessary, something relatively hidden with western-dominant knowledge. This research hence strives to provide eastern-specific insights, and to do this, this research is conducted in the Chinese context. Justifications for conducting this research in China are out with the aim of this subsection. The reasons why this research is based on the Chinese context have partially been explained in Section 1.4 and will be further explained in Section 2.5, in which more details concerning the particularities of the Chinese Confucianism will be discussed.

The above discussed how cultural values can shape the perceptions and experience of working sandwich caregivers, based on which this research insists that it is inappropriate to understand the experience of working sandwich caregivers from the East with knowledge gained from the West. Indeed, due to cultural differences, the demographic characteristics of sandwich caregivers from the East can be distinct from the West. The impact of filial piety is prevalent in Asian societies (Chen, 2011), which motivates children to respect and take care of their parents (Estioko et al., 2022). Encouraged by filial piety, sandwich care can start at an early age in the East. This is supported by empirical research with quantitative data in Malaysia (Aazami et al., 2018), which indicates that sandwich caregivers tend to be younger (the average age is 34.8 years old) in Malaysia compared to their counterparts in western countries, who tend to be middle-aged or in their 40s to 60s (e.g., Miller, 1981; Gans et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential to take the sandwich caregivers in the younger age group into consideration when conducting research in eastern societies due to the strong cultural effects on caregiving.

2.2.1.2 The hidden young sandwich caregivers

With western-focused research dominating existing sandwich care literature, the caregiver status of young sandwich caregivers remains hidden. A review of previous literature highlights that extensive, and almost exclusive, research attention has been paid to sandwich caregivers aged above 40 years old or those who are middle-aged (e.g.,

O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Gans et al., 2013; Falkingham et al., 2020; Burke, 2017; McGarrigle et al., 2014). One possible explanation for this focus is that middle-age tends to be considered a pivotal stage in life, in which the parents and/or parents-in-law have gradually lost autonomy in looking after themselves while their children are still dependent; meanwhile, the sandwich caregivers themselves are facing 'major personal developments' due to 'loss of youth' and 'incipient aging' (Miller, 1981, p. 419; Gans et al., 2013). For most sandwich care scholars, eldercare is usually considered to peak later in life, and the postponement of childcare due to the lengthening of adolescence can cause a press of the middle-aged sandwich caregivers into a dual care position (Gans et al., 2013; Skolnick and Skolnick, 2003). It is hence easy to see the value of investigating the experience of middle-aged or those sandwich caregivers above 40 years of age, and exploring how these sandwich caregivers allocate limited resources (e.g., time and energy) to childcare, eldercare, and possibly work responsibilities.

Extensive current research has investigated the caregiving experience of sandwich caregivers above 40 years old from different perspectives (e.g., O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Pines et al., 2011; Boyczuk and Fletcher, 2016; Manor, 2021; Rubin and White-Means, 2009; Liu and Chen, 2022; Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021; Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Igarashi et al., 2013). For instance, informed by a life course perspective, the qualitative study of Igarashi and colleagues (2013) uses a focus group with sandwich caregivers aged between 45 and 68. Their findings suggest that caregivers attached different feelings towards childcare and eldercare. That is, parents easily and gladly expressed their commitment to support their emerging adult children on an ongoing basis; while when it comes to eldercare, the caregivers felt ill prepared for this unanticipated challenge, hence they experienced ambivalence (a mixture of joy and burden) in eldercare (Igarashi et al., 2013). The quantitative research of O'Loughlin and colleagues (2017) studies the caregiver characteristics and outcomes of older Australian baby boomers with participants aged 60 to 64. The results show that caregivers providing both childcare and eldercare are more likely to be in part-time or no paid work, and more likely to report poor self-rated health, life satisfaction, and

quality of life than other carers. Albertini and colleagues (2022) investigate the prevalence of older sandwich caregivers in Europe with participants aged between 50 and 75. Their research with survey data reveals that the prevalence of sandwich caregivers providing intergenerational support to younger and elder generations is the highest in Nordic countries (17%), followed by Continental Europe (14%), with the percentage of Southern and Eastern Europe remains lower (approximately 10%).

The exclusive scholarly attention paid to sandwich caregivers above 40 years of age means that very little is known about the caregiving experience of sandwich caregivers who are also in work in a younger age group, namely those below 39 (inclusive) years old. One possible explanation for their hidden status can be that these young workers' parents/parents-in-law are also relatively young and hence have a certain level of autonomy in their daily living activities. In this way, the workers below 39 years old with dependent children may not be considered caregivers for their elderly parents/parents-in-law. This further affects their entitlements to be qualified as sandwich caregivers, who have both childcare and eldercare responsibilities. However, empirical evidence illustrates that care can be extended to healthy care receivers, who are able to take care of their daily living activities, and some forms of care, particularly emotional care, are just as significant as physical care (e.g., Lam, 2006; Steiner and Fletcher, 2017). Therefore, young workers with dependent children do not have to wait until their parents/parents-in-law gain a certain degree of physical dependence to be qualified as sandwich caregivers. By focusing mainly on sandwich caregivers above 40 years old who have relatively dependent parents/parents-in-law, young sandwich caregivers workers are cast in a disadvantaged position without their provision of care and support receiving adequate recognition and value. This research hence strives to investigate the experience of hidden young working sandwich caregivers. It is expected that the findings will contribute to raising further research and practical attention to this cohort, thereby encouraging the design of relevant services and supportive policies to help them in their sandwich caregiver and work roles.

The hidden status of young working sandwich caregivers further implies that sandwich caregiver researchers need to be careful when conceptualising care. That is, if care is usually understood through a physical perspective, people can easily take it for granted that the young workers do not have much caregiving responsibilities (as in providing physical care) for their parents and/or parents-in-law who are relatively independent in their daily living activities. However, care takes many forms and it involves more than only providing physical care (e.g., Lam, 2006). Thus, scholars need to pay equal attention to other hidden forms of care to ensure those non-typical sandwich caregivers (who provide other forms of care) are not disadvantaged due to lack of recognition. Given the above, knowing what care is, remains important, as it not only impacts who can be termed as a caregiver, but also shapes the way how caregiving is experienced. The following section hence conceptualises care, and first discusses the forms of care that sandwich caregivers provide.

2.3 Conceptualising care

This section concerns the conceptualisation of the care that working sandwich caregivers provide. It starts with the widely accepted conceptualisation of care as caring tasks that the caregivers perform. What follows this conceptualisation is the gendered nature of care, in which how caregiving involves a gendered performance will be explained. The last subsection explores the relational nature of care through the lens of reciprocity, and discusses how the relational nature of care can be further developed to enrich the concepts of care in existing sandwich care literature.

2.3.1 Care as tasks to be performed

In general, care provided to children and aging parents/parents-in-law can be in formal or informal forms. Formal care includes services purchased and provided by experts, such as care professionals (Navaie-Waliser et al., 2002). Informal care is unpaid and provided by those who are not professional social workers, such as family members and relatives, to perform one or more daily living activities to care receivers (Oliva-

Moreno et al., 2018). This thesis is interested in informal care provided by young working sandwich caregivers; therefore, formal care will not be covered in the following discussion. For convenience, the term 'care' will be used to represent 'informal care' for the rest of the thesis.

Scholars in the field of sandwich care tend to perceive care as tasks that caregivers perform to satisfy both the physical and psychological needs of care receivers (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Železná, 2018). These caring tasks involve a broad range of activities, such as meal preparation, household chores, grocery shopping, toileting, feeding, doing the laundry, helping with paperwork, and providing financial support. Sandwich care researchers have categorised these different activities into various forms. For instance, Železná (2018) classifies assistance provided by caregivers into three forms, namely, 'personal care, practical household help, and help with paperwork' (p. 981). Burke (2017) differentiates between 'hands on' tasks (e.g., bathing, toileting, and dressing) and 'managerial' tasks (e.g., supervising and planning). Moreover, for Souralová and Žáková (2019), care involves big activities such as physical care, and the usually unnoticed little activities that people 'just do', such as chatting, drinking coffee together, saying hello and asking, 'how are you today?', and simply just 'being there' for family members (p. 2648).

Despite the cover of a relatively wide range of caring tasks, sandwich care literature still pays exclusive attention to the provision of physical care. For many sandwich care scholars, care is usually considered needed by frail parents and dependent children, who do not have much autonomy in taking care of their daily living activities (e.g., Grundy and Henretta, 2006). Although some recognise the need to extend care to maturing children (e.g., Gans et al., 2013), the typical emphasis remains on the provision of tangible and instrumental care, i.e., physical and financial care. This, however, oversights other possible forms of intergenerational care that sandwich caregivers can be engaging in (Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021), and the limited recent attempt has been made to explore what else can be involved in the care from the perspective of task

performance. This may render a sizable portion of sandwich caregivers' status hidden, as the forms of care they are providing may not be captured by existing categories. This can further impact their entitlement to specific services and supports thereafter generating more difficulties for the hidden sandwich caregivers to combine work, childcare, and eldercare. As a result, the hidden sandwich caregivers engaging in hidden forms of care can be cast into a disadvantaged position with limited research and practical attention. To raise the awareness of the researchers and practitioners about the hidden status of some groups of sandwich caregivers and the hidden forms of care, the first question this research aims to answer is: **what is involved in the care that Chinese young sandwich caregiver workers provide?** It is expected that by answering this question, this research enriches current understandings of sandwich care by identifying various forms of care young working sandwich caregivers are providing, and thereafter to include a broader range of sandwich caregiving situations that remain under-researched.

Perceiving care solely through the perspective of tasks to be performed, however, is inadequate in forming a holistic understanding of sandwich care. Particularly when it involves the simultaneous provision of childcare and eldercare, which are very distinct by nature. First of all, childcare and eldercare vary in terms of predictability, with eldercare being unpredictable in timing compared to childcare (Calvano, 2013). Parents usually have a few months to prepare for childbirth, and childcare will gradually decrease as children mature; whereas eldercare is usually unpredictable (without a clear idea regarding when the health or function of aging parents will decline) and often increases as parents/parents-in-law age, losing autonomy in their daily living activities (Burke and Calvano, 2017; Igarashi et al., 2013). Second, the emotions generated by childcare and eldercare are distinct as well. Eldercare usually causes negative emotions as it is related to the end of life, while childcare elicits positive emotions as it is linked with the beginning of life (Smith, 2004). Therefore, sandwich caregiving cannot be understood as a mere quantitative accumulation of caregiving tasks performed to both children and aging parents/parents-in-law since it involves a complex combination of

the two due to their qualitatively distinct nature.

Sandwich care is complex and dynamic by nature (Burke, 2017). The simplistic view of care as tasks to be performed is reductive as it neglects other dimensions of care that can have a great impact on the caregiving experience of young working sandwich caregivers. One such dimension that contributes to the complexity of sandwich care is the gendered nature of caregiving. The following subsection hence concerns the gendered nature of caregiving and discusses what remains hidden and underdeveloped for richness into the gendered nature of sandwich care.

2.3.2 The working sandwich caregiving as a gendered experience

Despite the ambiguities in the conceptualisations of sandwich caregivers and care, a consensus has been reached among scholars that caregiving is highly gendered. Normative expectations for caregiving are different for women compared to men (Marks et al., 2008). Traditional gender ideology unevenly assigns household and caregiving roles to women and men (Chou et al., 2016). As a consequence, women tend to perform the majority of domestic care (Brody, 2012). In this sense, working sandwich caregiving tends to be a gendered experience, with the working sandwich caregivers women confronting the need to combine sandwich care with work. On the contrary, the working sandwich caregivers men can focus on work as the norms surrounding men's roles still emphasise 'traditional' behaviours, i.e., breadwinning (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001). This thesis has chosen to draw on gender role theory (Eagly, 1987) as relevant due to the gendered conditions.

The framing of the gendered nature of sandwich caregiving in this thesis is mainly based on Eagly's (1987) gender role theory. Gender role theory proposes that people construct expectations for their and others' behaviour according to their beliefs about behaviour that is proper for men and women (Eagly, 1987). For example, it is expected that women should be communal and sympathetic and thus occupying social roles

related to caring for others (e.g., carers), and men should be agentic and independent and hence breadwinner roles are more appropriate for them. Gender roles have pervasive effects, in that sex provides a powerful basis for categorising people, with associated gender stereotypes (Blair and Banaji, 1996). Both men and women are held accountable to normative gendered expectations, and any inconsistency is likely to elicit backlash effects in the forms of negative evaluations and treatment (Rudman et al., 2012; Hoyt and Burnette, 2013). As a result of gendered division, women are more often to assume the role of primary caregiver and shoulder greater intergenerational demands (Montgomery, 1992; Mitchell, 2014; Yee and Schulz, 2000) than their male counterparts. This may be related not only to greater caregiving time commitment, but also to the likelihood of undertaking more caregiving tasks and providing more personal care (Pinquart and Sörensen, 2006). Moreover, since women are socialised to view caregiving as a more salient role than men, they become more vulnerable to compromised well-being when stresses in this role occur (Marks et al., 2008).

Although there are variations in results across studies in the field of care, the predominant evidence suggests that women experience a greater burden and a higher level of psychological distress in the caregiving role than men (e.g., Chappell et al., 2015; Yee and Schulz 2000). For example, the longitudinal couple-level data of Chesley and Moen (2006) investigating effects of caregiving on individual psychological well-being provides evidence of the existence of gender differences in the caregiving-wellbeing relationship. The results indicate that taking up caregiver roles generates a higher level of psychological distress for employed female caregivers due to the time and emotional demands of caring for aging parents/parents-in-laws rather than their male counterparts (Chesley and Moen, 2006; see also Pyper, 2006). The research of Lee et al. (2001) supports that employed female caregivers experience more depression symptoms than male caregivers, since women are more likely to be involved in caregiving responsibilities and commit more hours to caregiving. The studies from other scholars have also shown that informal caregiving is more problematic for women's than men's psychological well-being (e.g., Garlo et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2012;

Kim et al., 2007).

The gendered nature of caregiving has also been widely recognised in the sandwich care literature. Sandwich care researchers tend to demonstrate the gendered nature of care in two ways. Firstly, sandwich caregiving tends to be perceived as an experience specific to sandwich caregivers women (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018; Tongson, 2020; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Evans et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2016; McGarrigle et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019). In this sense, some defined sandwich caregivers from women's perspective. For example, Aazami et al. (2018) perceived the sandwich caregivers as 'women who are squeezed to simultaneously meet the demands of elderly parents/in-law and their dependent children' (p. 135). Being perceived as a women-specific experience, scholars have investigated how sandwich care impacted women's work-family conflict (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018), labour market participation (e.g., Pagani and Marenzi, 2008), role balance (e.g., Evans et al., 2019), and self-reported health (e.g., McGarrigle et al., 2014).

Secondly, scholars tend to discuss the gendered nature of sandwich caregiving through the different caring tasks that sandwich caregivers men and women are engaging with. For instance, sandwich caregivers men are reported to be supporting family members financially, and women offering physical care and emotional care (e.g., Chisholm, 1999; Burke, 2017). This thesis disagrees with the first approach and strives to expand the second approach to portray how sandwich caregiving is a gendered experience. Justifications for these are illustrated as follows:

First of all, demographic changes, such as women's increased inclusion in the labour market and the prevalence of dual-earner households, imply that in some households, men (alone, or together with their wives) will increasingly take on a caregiver role and fulfil more caregiving responsibilities (Chesley and Moen, 2006). Therefore, research that examines the working sandwich caregivers' experience of combining sandwich care with work should never exclude male sandwich caregivers. Secondly, also owning

to women's increased labour market participation and increasing dual-earning status, men's and women's roles in caregiving can be changing. It is hence highly likely that the gendered pattern of caregiving as suggested by previous literature, i.e., men performing financial care and women performing emotional care (e.g., Chisholm, 1999; Burke, 2017), may not hold true in contemporary households. Additionally, there are different ways through which sandwich care can be gendered since care is not limited to tasks to be performed. Given these, the first sub-question of research question one is that: **in what ways can the gendered nature of sandwich care be manifested?**

Gender remains one of the valuable lenses through which the complexity of sandwich care can be comprehended. Relational nature is another useful perspective to untangle the complex nature of sandwich care, as sandwich caregiving involves intensive interactions and negotiations between caregivers and care receivers. Indeed, 'care is portrayed as a net of caring relations where everybody is connected to everybody, and everybody contributes to care equilibrium in the family while doing what they consider the care to be' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2647). In this way, similar to gender, relational nature is the defining feature of care, and thereafter, of sandwich care. The following subsection hence explores the relational nature of sandwich care to articulate how different social actors are connected to each other in the process of caregiving.

2.3.3 Exploring the relational nature of sandwich care

This subsection concerns the relational nature of sandwich care. The following explains how relational nature of care is understood in existing research, with particular attention being paid to reciprocal relationships between caregivers and care receivers. After conceptualising reciprocity, this subsection raises the issues of power asymmetry and gender underpinning reciprocal relationships, which need to be further developed for nuanced knowledge of the relational nature of sandwich care.

2.3.3.1 The manifestation of relational nature

Care is relational by nature as it involves intensive interactions between caregivers and care receivers. One cannot be a caregiver if there is no one receiving his/her care, and similarly, one cannot be a care receiver without another one giving care to him/her. In this sense, caregivers and care receivers are highly connected.

A review of the literature on care (in general) and also the sandwich care field highlights three major ways through which the relational nature of care and sandwich care can be manifested. First of all, the types of relationships between caregivers and care receivers exert a certain impact on the caregiving experience (e.g., Neal et al., 1997; Eom et al., 2017; Chappell et al., 2015). For instance, Neal et al. (1997) explore how the types of relationships with care receivers (such as a spouse, parents/parents-in-law, friends, and other relatives) shape the caregiving experience of employed caregivers. The survey data reveals that relationship types impact caregiving outcomes (e.g., stress and time off from work). Specifically, caregivers to parents and spouses tend to experience caregiving less favorably than caregivers to a friend or a relative (ibid). Similarly, drawing on an intersectionality framework, Chappell et al. (2015) examine the intersection of gender and relationship for caregiver's burden and subjective well-being. The findings suggest that wives, instead of husbands and daughters, are most vulnerable to role-relevant burden and negative affective dimension, since caregiving impairs their perceptions of self-value hence their self-identities (ibid).

Secondly, the relational nature of care is manifested through how caregiving impacts the relationships between caregivers and care receivers (e.g., Igarashi et al., 2013; Guberman et al., 2012). With the qualitative data collected from sandwich caregivers, the research of Igarashi and colleagues (2013) reveals that caregivers' new (e.g., the unexpected eldercare) and expanded caregiving responsibilities (to maturing children) change the nature of relationships between caregivers and care receivers, which result in new dependencies and interactions that caregivers and care receivers have to

negotiate with each other. Informed by an interpretivie constructivist design, the study of Guberman and colleagues (2012) find that baby boomers in work who are caught between the needs of their children and aging parents are able to develop a new relationship with care receivers in the process of individualising and denaturalising care. That is, by emphasising individual needs and refusing the taken-for-granted perception of care as something innate to the role of daughter, mother or spouse through intensive use of formal services, participants sought a care relationships developed on the basis of mutual respect instead of stemming from a norm imposed by family bonds (ibid).

The third and the most researched relational nature of care, in the field of both care (in general) and sandwich care, concerns the reciprocal relationships between caregivers and care receivers (e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Sung, 2018; Leopold and Raab, 2011). In reciprocal relationships, care is bi-directional or multi-directional rather than unidirectional (Souralová et al., 2022). That is, care does not just go in one direction, such as from younger to elder or from elder to younger generation. Instead, in the process of caregiving, care receivers may try to reciprocate for care received, which then leads to an exchange of care or support between caregivers and care receivers (Souralová and Žáková, 2019).

Among the three approaches to the relational nature of care, this thesis emphasises the reciprocal relationships between caregivers and care receivers. The reasons for this are two-fold: Firstly, this research is interested in sandwich care, which implies an intensive interaction in a three-generation context. Hence, the frequent flow of and constant exchange of care among the three generations is helpful in articulating the relational nature of care. Moreover, as suggested by Grundy and Henretta (2006), more research efforts are needed to explore the exchange of care in three-generation contexts as family arrangements of three generations are becoming increasingly common. Secondly, this research focuses on the young sandwich caregivers whose parents and/or parents-in-law are also relatively young. This implies that their parents and/or parents-in-law are

able to reciprocate the care received with certain forms of care, particularly physical care to grandchildren, given that they are relatively independent in their daily living activities. This is important for working sandwich caregivers, as research indicates that the support from parents and/or parents-in-law with childcare allow working parents to have both work and care without negative implications (e.g., Sung, 2018). The following hence elaborates more on the relational nature of care through the perspective of reciprocity. The following discussion starts with the conceptualisation of reciprocity, the issues around power asymmetry and gender in reciprocal relationships will also be discussed.

2.3.3.2 Understanding relational nature of care through perspective of reciprocity

As a vital principle of society, reciprocity concerns the return of benefits for previous kindness received (Molm, 2010). The norm of reciprocity is in the underlying obligations generated by exchanges of support among individuals (Gouldner, 1960). That is, when one party benefits another, an obligation for the party who receives support to make a return is generated, and the support receiver will remain indebted until he/she repays. In this sense, the obligations underpinning reciprocity contribute to maintaining social stability, as it is 'morally improper' for either debtors or creditors to break off the relationships with each other or to harm people who offered help before (Gouldner, 1960). The norm of reciprocity, as Gouldner (1960) further suggests, is conditional. First of all, the norm of reciprocity only applies to those who have received previous help from others. Secondly, the obligations of return vary with the imputed value of the help received. Thus, the return is contingent on things such as the receivers' needs when help was provided, the availability of resources of the help givers, the motivation behind the help provision, and the nature of constraints that impact the free will of givers (ibid).

Three key components of reciprocity are identified by Gouldner (1960), based on which, different types of reciprocity have been developed. These elements involve the

immediacy of returns, equivalence of returns, and interest. The first element, the immediacy of returns, is the time period between the help initially offered and when the return was made, when the obligation was created while not yet fulfilled (Wu et al., 2006). It ranges from high immediacy (the giving and receiving occur within a short period of time) to low immediacy (in which the return may take years) (Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003). Equivalence refers to the degree to which the things exchanged are alike in value (Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003). In Gouldner's (1960) conceptualisation, there are two different forms of equivalence. The first one is the 'tit for tat' equivalence, in which things exchanged can be different, but are relatively equal in value. The second form is the 'tat for tat' equivalence where things exchanged or the exchange situations are alike or identical in value. The third element, interest, is the nature of individuals' engagement in reciprocal relationships, which includes self-interest, mutual interest, and concern for others (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997).

The nature and quality of the relationships can have an impact on the three components of reciprocity. In other words, as the quality of relationships increases, individuals tend to emphasise mutual benefits rather than being concerned about the equivalence or immediacy of return (such as in family relationships). Meanwhile, in lower quality relationships, things exchanged tend to be of relatively equal value and more immediate (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Liden et al., 1997). The three elements can influence young sandwich caregivers workers' exchange behaviours since they affect what motivates people to engage in reciprocal relationships, what (as in different forms of care) can be perceived as gifts, and how caregivers and care receivers attach value to the gifts received. This will further guide how they exchange care with each other. To know more about the patterns of reciprocal exchange that can occur between young working sandwich caregivers and care receivers, the following probes into the three types of reciprocal relationships identified in the existing literature.

The three components of reciprocity generate different types of reciprocal relationships. Sahlins' (1972) categorisation involves three forms of reciprocity that fall along a

continuum from negative reciprocity through balanced reciprocity to generalised reciprocity. Negative reciprocity, 'the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity' (Sahlins, 1972, p. 195), is featured as high on equivalence and immediacy of return and high on self-interest while low on mutual interest and concern for others (Hu et al., 2011). It involves negative emotions and revenge in response to negative events or bad treatment received, which shapes reciprocal exchanges between the parties involved (Greco et al., 2019). The focus on negative reciprocity, hence, is not on giving back benefits but on returning injuries for ill treatment to restore equity (Gouldner, 1960). Balanced reciprocity is in the middle of the continuum and is characterised as being high on equivalence and immediacy and oriented towards mutual interest in self and others (Hu et al., 2011). This means, in balanced reciprocity, receivers need to return the help received with things of relatively equivalent value in a short period of time. Unlike negative reciprocity which emphasises self-interest, in balanced reciprocity, both parties are motivated to participate in reciprocal exchange for mutual benefits (Wu et al., 2006). In generalised reciprocity, the return of specific or similar gifts is not expected, and the return can be delayed rather than immediate (Call et al., 1999). It is featured by uncertainties in obligations, in terms of immediacy and equivalence (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997). That means, in generalised reciprocity, help/gift givers do not expect receivers to return things with similar value within a specific period of time, and their support is largely based on altruistic concern for others (Wu et al., 2006).

In the field of care in general, and sandwich care in particular, scholars tend to focus on balanced and generalised reciprocity, which is usually the positive side of reciprocity, in terms of how parents support children to return the help received or how children return parents' early investment in their childhood by offering care (e.g., Funk, 2012; Lee and Luo, 2021; Lewinter, 2003; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Sung, 2018). Family relationships are particular examples of generalised reciprocity, in which parents' early investment and sacrifices are likely to be returned in their later age contingent on their caring needs (Funk, 2012). From the perspective

of the equivalency of return, the value of the care exchanged can be highly imbalanced. For instance, the qualitative data of Funk (2012) with 28 men and women aged 40 to 64 from Canada reveals that besides early support from parents during childhood, adult children may still receive help from their parents, leading to the adult children's feeling of 'having over-benefited' and thus 'greater indebtedness' across their lifecourse (p. 648).

Although reciprocity in parent-child relationships tends to be long-term oriented, with children returing help or care to parents at a later age, the giving and receiving in parent-child relationships can also be relatively high on immediacy or slightly deferred (e.g., Leopold and Raab, 2011; Verbrugge and Chan, 2008). Indeed, extensive research has found that elderly parents would usually return the support from their children (e.g., sickness care, companionship, and financial support) with help such as baby-sitting, housework, financial support, and advising on family affairs (e.g., Leopold and Raab, 2011; Verbrugge and Chan, 2008; Verbrugge and Ang, 2018; Chen, 2006). Therefore, the reciprocal relationships between family members can take different forms, such that it can be either/both short-term or/and long-term oriented, contingent on the needs of both caregivers and care receivers.

Sandwich care literature that specifically investigated the reciprocal relationships between caregivers and care receivers, as with other sandwich care research, usually focused on sandwich caregivers aged above 40 years old (e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). Little is known about how sandwich caregivers in a younger age group (aged between 20 and 39) who are also in work exchange care or support with others. This research hence addresses this lack by exploring the exchange patterns of young working sandwich caregivers.

To capture nuances of the exchange patterns of young sandwich caregivers, this research also takes the dark side of reciprocity into consideration, which is not common

in the field of care and sandwich care. Neglecting negative reciprocity, however, can be problematic in terms of the richness into the relational nature of care with single-sided knowledge. The lack of attention to negative reciprocity in the field of sandwich care fails to consider that in some households, some family members can be less engaged in intergenerational reciprocity than others (Grundy and Henretta, 2006). In cases where some family members are being unsupportive to young sandwich caregivers' care or work role, these working sandwich caregivers may be able to reciprocate with similar treatment to restore equity. Indeed, research has revealed that in some familial reciprocal relationships, such as with in-laws, intergenerational reciprocity seemed to work when support from parents-in-law with childcare was received, and the level of commitment to caring for parents-in-law was contingent on the support they provided (Sung, 2018). That is, individuals felt less obligated to provide certain forms of care to parents-in-law if previous support with childcare had not been received. Therefore, it is essential to take the dark side of reciprocity into consideration to explore what and how young working sandwich caregivers reciprocate in different situations.

Similar to the substantial scholarly attention to familial reciprocities, different types of reciprocity have also been applied in organisational settings to understand various phenomena, such as inter-relationships with colleagues (Greco et al., 2019), organisational injustice or supervisor aggression (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2012), counterproductive work behaviours (Kelloway et al., 2010), workplace deviance (Lawrence and Robinson, 2007), work-family conflict (Yu et al., 2018), organisational citizenship behaviours and commitment (e.g., Walumbwa et al., 2011; Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003; Reader et al., 2017; Anand et al., 2018). However, reciprocal relationships with colleagues and supervisors in the process of sandwich caregiving remain underdeveloped. Besides this lack, workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity tend to be examined in isolation (see e.g., Ali, 2021; Walumbwa et al., 2011; Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003; Reader et al., 2017; Anand et al., 2018; Funk, 2012; Leopold and Raab, 2011; Verbrugge and Chan, 2008; Verbrugge and Ang, 2018; Chen, 2006). This can be problematic since scholars commonly agree that work and family

are interrelated domains with mutual influence on each other (Sinacore-Guinn et al., 1999). This is particularly the case for the working sandwich caregivers who simultaneously perform work, childcare, and eldercare. Therefore, it is highly likely that sandwich caregiving can 'define work orientations, motivations, abilities, emotional energy, and the demands people bring to the workplace' (Kanter, 1977, p. 56-57), and work can also frame how sandwich care is to be performed.

The mutual impact of work and family domain has been widely acknowledged, evident in the research on how caregiving and work influenced each other, either positively or negatively (e.g., Evandrou and Glaser, 2004; Rubin and White-Means, 2009; Heitmueller and Inglis, 2007; van Houtven et al., 2013; Aazami et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2017; Barnett and Hyde, 2001; van Campen et al., 2013; Dautzenberg et al., 1999; Hajek and Konig, 2016; Roth et al., 2015). However, the interrelatedness between workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity has not yet been recognised, generating a need for research to explore the dynamics between workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity. Given the above, the second sub-question of research question one is: **how young working sandwich caregivers exchange care or support with family members, colleagues, and supervisors?** Through this question, this thesis strives to expand the existing knowledge of the relational nature of sandwich care by going beyond the reciprocal relationships within family realm and showing how workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity interrelate with each other.

To examine the patterns and dynamic processes of reciprocity explained above, power and gender need to be acknowledged, since caregiving involves 'asymmetries and negotiations', and the exchange of care is 'filled with gendered asymmetries' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2632, p. 2647). The following subsection addresses the issues of power and gender and explains how greater insights into the relational nature of sandwich care can be obtained by attending to power and gender in reciprocal relationships.

2.3.3.2.1 The issues of power asymmetry and gender in reciprocal relationships

In Gouldner's (1960) conceptualisation, reciprocity is generally based on power parity and the free will of exchange actors, meaning that individuals can freely reciprocate kindness or injuries received from others. According to this assumption of power symmetry, if employers harm their employees (e.g., in cases of lack of organisational support or in cases of organisational injustice), employees will strive to maintain a balanced relationship by repaying their organisations with harmful actions through decreased performance or counterproductive work behaivour. However, in practical employment relationships, this is not always the case because of power asymmetries underpinning these reciprocal relationships (Ali, 2021; Uhl-Bien and Carsten, 2007). When entering employment relationships with the hiring organisation, the majority of workers become subordinated to employers' power and authority due to the resources employers control (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). It is usually the employers who determine the pay, the content of work, and benefits in exchange for their workers' labour. Hence when employers did something harmful to their employees, it can be challenging for the employees to reciprocate due to possessing less power (Shore and Coyle-Shapiro, 2012). In the cases of the sandwich caregivers in work, if their employers are unsupportive of their caregiver roles, return of injuries to employers can be challenging for fear of losing their jobs or negative evaluation in performance appraisals.

Similar to employment relationships, family relationships are not necessarily based on power symmetry. The power-dependence formulation of Emerson (1972) can be used to explain the power differences inherent in familial reciprocal relationships. Based on the assumption of the power-dependence formulation, in reciprocal relationships between two parties, parents and children for example, parents' power over their children is a function of the extent of their children's dependence on their parents. Dependence reflects the value of the resources that children can get from their parents, with the degree of dependence increasing as the value of resources grows. Furthermore,

the dependence level is also related to the availability of resources from other parties, such as other relatives. If there are available alternatives, the dependence level of children on their parents will decrease. It is possible that the power between the two parties can be relatively symmetric, particularly when both parties rely equally on each other for specific resources; whereas power imbalance occurs when one party becomes more reliant on the other party (Hegtvedt et al., 1993; Emerson, 1972).

Besides power differences due to the possession of resources, individuals' power in reciprocal relationships is also affected by cultural contexts since each society has its own values, rules, and social systems (Pinazo-Hernandis, 2010). In Asian societies, such as China, where reciprocity tends to be the cultural norm (Verbrugge and Chan, 2008), adult children are obligated to provide help to their aging parents even when parents cease helping their children during their adulthood. This means that parents who received their adult children's support do not need to make further returns due to the care they provided earlier. This further indicates the necessity for adult children to enter 'power play' and to negotiate with their parents in order to continue to obtain support from their parents during adulthood. The nuances of the power games in both family and work domains in the process of sandwich caregiving, however, can be lost if the power imbalance underpinning familial and workplace reciprocity is neglected. To further unpack these power asymmetries underpinning sandwich care, a gendered lens can be applied since the exchange of care is 'filled with gendered asymmetries' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2647).

Reciprocity, indeed, involves the process of social interactions and 'the pattern of exchange through which the mutual dependence of people, brought about by the division of labor, is realised' (Gouldner, 1960, p. 169-170). This mutual dependence is also brought about by the gendered division of labour. Power asymmetries that shape reciprocity are gendered due to structural and cultural factors. Gender concerns the beliefs about women's subordination and the uneven distribution of resources (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). It dictates the 'proper' behaviour for men and women,

and is hence relevant for understanding reciprocal exchange processes in which men's and women's giving and receiving reflect underpinning cultural norms. The four key points of exchange in the reciprocity process, namely giving, (non)recognition, (non)reciprocation, and responses to (non)reciprocation, are shaped by gendered norms (Ashwin et al., 2013).

First of all, at the beginning of the reciprocal exchange, actors are expected to give gender-appropriate help as gifts in order to be perceived as 'doing the right thing' (Ashwin et al., 2013). For instance, women's caregiving will be perceived as an appropriate gift according to the traditional gender ideology. Secondly, reciprocity is determined by a recognition process, in which the gift will be evaluated and the receivers make a further decision regarding whether to recognise the gift or not, and in cases of non-recognition, reciprocation will not occur (ibid). Gender ideology has a vital impact on the recognition process. For instance, since women's caregiving is usually taken for granted as part of their roles, it is possible that their care provided to care receivers will be expected rather than considered as a gift that requires future returns. This non-recognition then leads to non-reciprocation, in which receivers may not feel indebted nor feel obligated to make future returns to women's gendered giving. Gender can also impact the last point of exchange, which is people's response to non-reciprocation. According to the norm of reciprocity, one should cease their further help in cases where a return was not made to previous support provided (Gouldner, 1960). This, however, is contingent on the nature of the motive that drives initial giving (Ashwin et al., 2013). That is, if the initial giving is motivated by gender appropriate conduct, which is vital for the givers' perceived sense of self, the givers may not cease their help even in cases of non-reciprocation.

Current research on reciprocity tends to be gender-blind (Ashwin et al., 2013). This is also the case in the sandwich care field. However, the organising feature of sandwich caregiving as a gendered experience (McGarrigle et al., 2014) means that it is important to acknowledge the impact of gender when exploring how young working sandwich

caregivers exchange support with others in the work and family domains. Given the gendered nature of sandwich care, it can be assumed that young working sandwich caregivers men and women will experience reciprocity differently. Therefore, this thesis adopts a power- and gender-sensitive perspective on reciprocity in examining the process in which young working sandwich caregivers manage their different demands and responsibilities.

The focus on the power play underscored reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family domains uncover the negotiations of the roles of caregivers, care receivers, and workers. In this sense, sandwich caregivers do not unthinkingly perform what is required in a caregiver or work role. Instead, it requires agency from working sandwich caregivers to negotiate how they would like to perform sandwich care or work with family members, colleagues and supervisors. To account for sandwich caregiver workers' agency, this thesis draws on the symbolic interactionist role theory as relevant (Biddle, 1986). The following section hence discovers what is involved in a role and how the symbolic interactionist role theory enables this research to capture sandwich caregivers' agency in negotiating roles with others in the workplace and family realms.

2.4 Managing the sandwich caregiver role and work role

By its nature, being a working sandwich caregiver is concerned with individuals managing the demands and responsibilities of the many different roles in their lives (Keene and Prokos, 2007), including employees, parents, children, and spouses. Therefore, this research follows role theory (Biddle, 1986), through which the following subsection discusses what constitutes the roles that the working sandwich caregivers occupied. Special attention will be given to the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory (Biddle, 1986) to capture how working sandwich caregivers exert agency to combine sandwich care with work.

2.4.1 The content of role from the perspective of role theory

To understand how working sandwich caregivers manage multiple roles, this subsection articulates what constitutes a role. The discussion then covers the two commonly adopted theoretical perspectives in current sandwich care literature and raises the issue of the inadequacy of the two perspectives in capturing individual agency, thereafter in understanding the complex and dynamic nature of care.

This research examines the complexity of managing multiple roles by drawing on role theory, which suggests that roles that individuals occupy are shaped by the social structures in which they are embedded (Biddle, 1986). Arising from theater metaphors, role theory has been widely applied in social science research and is related to the fact that individuals behave in a patterned and specific way based on their assumed social identities in different situations (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005). Role theory 'concerns itself with a triad of concepts: patterned and characteristic social behaviours, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behaviour that are understood by and adhered to by performers' (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

Most research on work and family has defined roles as normative expectations, behavioural scripts, and patterns of behaviours (e.g., Conley and You, 2009; Bryant and Constantine, 2006; Aquino and Lamertz, 2004; Lee et al., 2015; Fyall and Gazley, 2015; Hoyt et al., 2013; Matthews et al., 2010; Vandenberghe et al., 2017). For instance, Carton and Ungureanu (2018) define the role as 'recurring actions' that are 'based on actors' expectations', as specific 'behaviour patterns and are designed to fit each domain's rules and expectations' (p. 438- p. 439). Additionally, roles according to Aquino and Lamertz (2004) are the 'behavioural scripts' that people from a certain social category enact in order to illustrate 'compliance with normative expectations' (p. 1025). Similarly, in Fyall and Gazley's (2015) investigation of the correlation between preferred volunteer tasks and socially prescribed norms, roles are viewed as consisting of 'norms applicable to individuals' (p. 293), where individuals behave in alignment

with these normative expectations.

Although the term 'role' has been used differently, a consensus has been reached regarding the basic constructs in role theory, namely, *role*, *social position*, and *expectation* (Biddle, 1986). Biddle (1986) further suggests that expectations, which are 'norms, beliefs, and preferences' (p. 69), generate roles, they are learned through experience and individuals are aware of what expectations are placed on them. This, as Biddle claims, means that 'role theory presumes a thoughtful, socially aware human actor' (ibid, p. 69). To appraise human awareness, Biddle recommends that role theorists should focus on the origins, dynamics, and impacts of roles, expectations, and social positions, and adopt a method that allows for observing roles and reporting subjects' own and others' expectations. This, however, is not always the case for some role theorists.

The role vocabulary has been widely adopted in work and family research to address practical concerns about multiple role occupancy. Most existing research on the intersections of family and work responsibilities is underpinned by role theory to evaluates either positive or negative outcomes of multiple role engagement (Keene and Prokos, 2007). This is also the case in the sandwich care literature. First of all, research that examines the challenges faced by sandwich caregivers is usually guided by 'role strain theory' (Goode, 1960), 'role dynamic theory' (Kahn et al., 1964), or 'work-family conflict theory' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) to investigate how childcare, eldercare, and work roles are incompatible with each other and compete with each other for limited resources, such as time and energy commitment of sandwich caregiver workers. The incompatibility between each role working sandwich caregivers occupy and the competing demands inherent in multiple role occupancy can generate negative implications for caregivers, such as hampered physical, social, and psychological well-being, increased inter-role conflict, and great level of time-based family interference with work (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018; Manor, 2021; Stephens et al., 2001; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004; Huang et al., 2004).

A contradicting perspective suggests that holding multiple roles does not necessarily lead to poor physical and mental health, but instead can be beneficial to psychological and subjective well-being. This viewpoint is largely underpinned by role enhancement theory (Sieber, 1974; Thoits, 1983). According to role enhancement theory, an individual who engages in multiple roles can achieve an accumulation of resources, prestige, power, and a sense of meaningfulness, which then spills over into other domains to enhance the performance and quality of life in those domains (Lorca and Lay, 2020; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Empirical research has found that adding work role onto sandwich caregiver role can be rewarding since the resources accumulated in work, such as financial and social resources, can help working sandwich caregivers manage caregiving in the family domain, or can counteract the negative effects of sandwich caregiving on well-being (e.g., Hilbrecht et al., 2017; Daatland et al., 2010).

The competing demand perspective and the enhancement perspective together, offer a partial understanding of the experience of working sandwich caregivers. The two opposing perspectives tend to perceive working sandwich caregivers as passive receivers, who unintentionally perform care and work. However, in role theory, working sandwich caregivers are the 'aware human actors' (according to Biddle's (1986) understanding), who have the agency to find creative ways of dealing with the complexity of multiple role occupancy in social interactions. Agency 'reflects those endowments and self-regulatory capabilities that give rise to personal influence' (Murray and Ali, 2017, p. 1241). The agency is a force that actors are aware of, and believe that they can create change by exercising it (Ling and Dale, 2013). An agent influences and contributes to their social environment instead of being a product of social settings (Murray and Ali, 2017). However, with the two opposing perspectives discussed above dominating existing sandwich care literature, in-depth understandings of how working sandwich caregivers exert agency to combine care with work remain limited. The second research question of this thesis is hence, as active agents, **how**

young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role?

A theoretical framework that considers working sandwich caregivers' agency is needed in order to grasp the finer details of managing multiple roles and to overcome the deficiency of most existing sandwich care research of neglecting the origins and dynamics of roles and the thoughtfulness of human actors. To do this, the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory is chosen, as it not only pertains to the origins and the interpersonal dynamics of roles, but also focuses on individual agency in social interactions. The following subsection illustrates the key assumptions of symbolic interactionist role theory and explains how symbolic interactionist role theory understands individual agency.

2.4.2 Understanding individual agency through symbolic interactionist role theory

Symbolic interactionist role theory emphasises the agency of individuals. This perspective proposes that roles are constructed in social interactions (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005). Key to symbolic interactionist role theory is how processes of social interactions decisively regulate the way behaviours and society are organised (Lynch, 2007). People adjust their conduct in their interactions with others, and coordinate to define the content of a given role according to their subjective interpretations and preferences (Harnisch, 2011; Lynch, 2007). Thus, following this perspective, roles are not static or prescribed; instead, roles are constantly negotiated between social actors in a creative way (Biddle, 1986). The emphasis, hence, is not on stable norms but on a more flexible and ongoing adaptive social process, in which role performers make sense of and interpret their own and others' behaviours. Norms and expectations are still discussed among symbolic interactionists; however, they are regarded as providing a range of broad guidelines within which individuals can manipulate the details of roles (Biddle, 1986).

In the symbolic interactionist role theory, individuals can exercise agency through 'role taking' and 'role making'. Role taking is the process of anticipating responses based on the perception of self in others' eyes (Klose, 2019). Thus, to perform a role, individuals must put themselves in the situation of others and interpret the world from others' perspective, using previous experience and knowledge of the categories these individuals belong to, and the environmental cues available in the interaction as guidelines for conduct (Lynch, 2007). This means, to perform sandwich care, caregivers need to anticipate what will be expected from them as a caregiver by interpreting role expectations from care receivers' eyes (such as from the perspectives of children, parents, and/or parents-in-law), thereafter, to give care in a way that satisfies or dissatisfies the perceived role expectations. With role-taking, individuals are able to anticipate and monitor the consequences of their own and others' actions, and sustain or adjust their and others' conduct according to the results of their anticipation and monitoring (Lynch, 2007).

Social interaction following symbolic interactionist role theory is also a process of role making, which consists of constructing, altering, and re-constructing role contents by devising behaviours in interactions with others (Lynch, 2007; Hilbert, 1981). Role actors in this perspective are regarded as active agents, who do not unthinkingly play the roles that are assigned; instead, they actively engage in role making with others (Stryker, 1991). Disagreements between individuals can happen regarding how an environmental cue and role should be defined. In cases of disagreements, actors will need to constantly communicate and negotiate with each other to reach a consensus about definitions of various roles (Lynch, 2007). The emphasis on meaning creation and constant negotiation makes role making suitable to investigate the dynamic process of sandwich caregiving, which involves intensive 'negotiations of the roles of caregivers and care receivers' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2653). In role making, working sandwich caregivers go beyond anticipation and interpretation, and engage in meaning creation with others regarding what should be included in and how they would like to perform the caregiver or work role. Given the above, symbolic interactionist role

theory offers a valuable lens to untangle individual agency since the focus of role taking in anticipating actions through interpretation, and role making in (co)creating contents of roles enables this research to articulate how the working sandwich caregivers thoughtfully set and interpret others' expectations in the process of caregiving.

Despite the potential richness the symbolic interactionist role theory offers in understanding individual agency, this approach to role theory has been criticised for neglecting the power of social structures and contextual factors on limiting individuals' agency, and little attention to normative expectations (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005; Biddle, 1986). That is, individuals cannot decide freely which roles to enact or how they would like to perform a specific role in a given situation. Their agency is likely to be constrained by structural and cultural factors, as well as others' expectations. Without attention to the impact of structural, cultural, and contextual limitations, insights into how agency and sandwich care are contextualised and shaped by cultural values and others' expectations remain underdeveloped. Therefore, the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory on its own is inadequate to capture the complexity and dynamic nature of sandwich care and multiple role occupancy. Instead, an approach that allows us to account for how individual agency is situated within, and shaped by social structures and cultural norms is needed to understand this dynamic relationship between the individuals and their social environment. To do so, this thesis takes impression management theory (Goffman, 1959), and adopts the concept of agency from the symbolic interactionist role theory to understand individuals' impression management behaviours. This enables the thesis to disclose how the working sandwich caregivers exert agency, yet also attend to how their agency is constrained by normative expectations and cultural values. The following subsection hence explains the key tenets of impression management theory, and how it complements the symbolic interactionist role theory in understanding the structurally and culturally embedded agency.

2.4.3 Structurally and culturally embedded agency through perspective of impression management

This subsection discusses how individual agency is framed by structural and cultural factors through perspective of impression management theory (Goffman, 1959). To do this, this subsection first offers a definition of impression management theory, and discusses how it complements symbolic interactionist role theory in understanding the structurally and culturally embedded nature of individual agency. The discussion then focuses on the motives behind impression management and probes into how individual agency can be exercised through various impression management behaviours. Through the different dimensions of impression management behaviour, the last part of this subsection explains the opportunities impression management theory brings in exploring the ways through which working sandwich caregivers exercise agency to combine care with work.

Impression management theory complements symbolic interactionist role theory in comprehending individual agency in caregiving. First of all, both symbolic interactionist role theory and impression management theory originate from theatre metaphors with a dramaturgical perspective (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005; Goffman, 1959). From a dramaturgical perspective, impression management theory perceives individuals as 'actors' engaging in performance to 'audiences' in different 'settings' (Goffman, 1959). It has been defined as the process by which people, consciously or unconsciously, create, control, or alter the impressions that others hold about them in social interactions (Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Goffman, 1959). In this sense, both symbolic interactionist role theory and impression management role theory acknowledge that individuals have the agency to generate influence. However, symbolic interactionist role theory focuses more on the individual level, emphasising how social actors understand and interpret behavioural scripts through role taking, and how social actors create meanings of roles in social interactions through role making (Biddle, 1986).

Meanwhile, impression management theory goes beyond individual agency, and takes role expectations and cultural norms into consideration. On the one hand, it recognises that individuals have the agency to craft impressions on audiences (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). On the other hand, impression management theory further acknowledges the influence of cultural norms and role expectations on shaping how actors craft impressions on audiences (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). In impression management theory, performers learn specific behavioural scripts and norms in context, and employ these scripts to meet the expectations of audiences. Therefore, by adopting the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand impression management, how role expectations, both interpreted from audiences' perspectives (role taking) and created from own perspectives (role making), guide impression management behaviours will be captured.

Secondly, impression management theory takes audiences into consideration. Similar to symbolic interactionist role theory, impression management theory suggests that definitions of the situation are created in social interactions (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). However, impression management theory emphasises that audiences have a profound impact on actors' perception and interpretation of the situation (ibid). This means, although actors are able to define the situation, their definition is likely to be impacted by the values and preferences of audiences in the process of meaning co-creation. In this sense, audiences' input into the meaning co-creation process is considered, which further indicates the power of audiences in shaping the level of actors' agency in terms of what impression is desired and how it should be managed.

Thirdly, in impression management theory, settings and context play significant roles in guiding actors and audiences' interactions and behaviours. Context and settings are not only places where the performance is displayed, they also provide audiences and actors with environmental cues, which are processed and interpreted selectively, to generate definitions of the situation (Goffman, 1959). Given the above, impression management theory complements symbolic interactionist role theory's lack of attention

to the role of contextual limits, cultural and structural constraints, and audiences' expectations in shaping individual agency. Thus, using the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand impression management behaviour, how the sandwich caregiving as a complex and dynamic process that involves intensive social interactions among different social actors, and between individuals and their social environment will be obtained.

In the field of work and family research, individual agency is usually investigated through the use of various strategies to combine work with caregiver roles (e.g., Carton and Ungureanu, 2018; Ashforth et al., 2008; van Putten et al., 2010; Comas-d'Argemir and Soronellas, 2019). However, the strategies enacted by actors in these studies often involve outsourcing caregiving responsibilities to formal professional services (e.g., Litwin and Attias-Donfut, 2009; van Putten et al., 2010; Comas-d'Argemir and Soronellas, 2019), drawing on networks for support (Xiao and Cooke, 2012; Evans et al., 2017; Foster and Ren, 2015), re-ordering roles according to perceived importance (e.g., Carton and Ungureanu, 2018), and creating a backstage or draw clear boundaries between roles to manage any threats experienced in one role (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Kossek et al., 2006). Limited research attention has been paid to explore how sandwich care and work can be combined by crafting different impressions. This research hence strives to untangle individual agency through the perspective of impression management, considering the influence of role taking and making.

To understand how individual agency is exercised in impression management behaviours, it is essential to first unpack what motives people to manage certain impressions. Exploring the motives behind impression management can add richness to the study of the dynamics of social interactions, and therefore, sandwich caregiving. The following subsection hence teases out the motives that drive individuals to engage in impression management.

2.4.3.1 Motives that drive impression management behaviours

Most existing research on impression management has investigated the role of managing impressions in achieving certain goals or positive outcomes (e.g., Bourdage, 2018; Barrick, 2009; Gross et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2013). It is suggested that people are more motivated to engage in impression management when they conceive such impressions as decisive in fulfilling their goals (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2011) state that individuals' impression management behaviours are likely to be motivated by economic factors (e.g., maximising utility), psychological factors (e.g., minimising punishment and peer pressure), and external constraints (e.g., social norm conformity). Firstly, the notion of economic motivation that underpins many impression management studies suggests that individuals are driven to manage impressions to achieve their ends, such as increasing compensation (Zarri, 2009). Following this rationality, extensive impression management research has investigated how individuals manage impressions to obtain favorable evaluation in interview and job performance settings (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; van Iddekinge et al., 2007; Barrick et al., 2009) and to keep one's job during times of high job insecurity (Huang et al., 2013).

Secondly, social psychological research suggests that impression management is driven by the 'social presence' of others, to anticipate potential and possible negative responses (Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2011). The presence of others (as audiences) can signify the existence of relevant role expectations. This can compel actors to take the role from others' perspective so as to deploy specific role scripts to meet the expectations of audiences through perceived role-appropriate performance. For instance, the presence of supervisors/managers can motivate employees to manage a dedicated employee impression, anticipating that managers with specific expectations on them would otherwise respond in undesired ways, such as in the form of negative appraisals in promotion evaluations. Following this rationale, empirical data suggests that newcomers actively engage in impression management in front of supervisors to

present themselves as good citizens that fit well with others and with the organisation so that their supervisors may view them as likable and socially desirable (e.g., Gross et al., 2020; Bolino et al., 2016).

Thirdly, the notion of external constraints indicates that people can be motivated to manage impressions in order to conform to social norms (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990). Rudman and Glick's (1999) research provides evidence to support this view and the findings reveal that due to traditional gender stereotypes, career-ambitious women are viewed as violating prescriptions of communal traits and are thus perceived as less socially skilled. In order to conform to the *a priori* gendered prescription of femininity and to thus minimise backlash effects, women would have to manage an impression of kinder and gentler managers (Rudman and Glick, 1999). Rudman and Glick's (1999) example further implies that when the need to manage role appropriate impressions intersects with gender, impression management becomes a complicated process. This means, men and women can be expected to perform the roles of, parents, children, and employees for example, differently in order to be perceived as role and gender appropriate by audiences.

Mainstream impression management research has examined the motivations, and how individuals crafted impressions in the organisational settings (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; Barrick et al., 2009; Huang et al., 2013; Gross et al., 2020; Bolino et al., 2016). There is scant research in the sandwich care field that explores how impressions can be created in the familial settings to achieve the goals discussed above. This can be due to the romanticised evaluation of home as a place of safety and of relaxation (Pascoe, 2017). It is hence easier to assume that there is no need to manage impressions in a safe and relaxing place, and on audiences with whom people have close relationships, such as parents, children, and spouses. However, home is not always a safe place to everyone. Rather, it is a dwelling connected with multiple meanings, and complex and dynamic power relations (Allen, 2008). In this vein, impression management remains highly relevant for the working sandwich caregivers

in the family realm, in which multiple meanings of caregiving co-exist. Therefore, to better understand how sandwich care and work are combined through impressions, this research also examines what motivates sandwich caregivers to create certain impressions on audiences in both the workplace and family realms.

To present and manage various impressions on audiences, individuals need to engage in different impression management behaviours. Unpacking the behaviours and dimensions of behaviours through which people perform impressions is essential for the nuanced understanding of how individual agency can be exercised to generate influence. The following subsection hence explains what is involved in impression management behaviours and the different dimensions of impression management behaviours.

2.4.3.2 Impression management behaviours

Impression management behaviours involve both self-presentation and third-party presentation. Self-presentation includes all behaviours and appearances manipulated by the actor himself/herself to communicate information about the self (Schneider, 1981). Third-party presentation is the communication of information by others, and it is used when a direct presentation by members themselves becomes inadequate to achieve desired outcomes (Wortman and Linsenmeier, 1977). Due to the interest of this thesis in how working sandwich caregivers themselves interact with others in the workplace and family domain, this thesis will focus on self-presentation behaviours, and tactics that can be used by working sandwich caregivers themselves to project desired impressions. The following covers the three types of self-presentation behaviours classified by Schneider (1981), after which the dimensions of impression management behaviours (i.e., assertive versus defensive impressions) will be illustrated in relation to working sandwich caregivers.

In Schneider's (1981) classification, self-presentational impression management

behaviour includes verbal presentations, nonverbal and expressive behaviours, and artifactual displays (p. 26). First of all, individuals can create certain impressions on specific audiences through verbal statements about their own personal qualities (ibid). Typical examples of verbal presentations include self-description, opinion conformity, accounts, apologies, and acclaiming (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). Additionally, non-verbal and expressive behaviours are also important symbols in the formation of perceptions on a person (Schneider, 1981). Expressive behaviours such as facial expression, eye contact, body position, tone of voice, gestures, and firmness of handshake play a vital role in the process of creating and projecting particular impressions. Moreover, artifactural displays concerns the use of physical appearance cues (e.g., dressing), situational context, possessions, and the like to manage desired impressions (Schneider, 1981).

Probing into impression management behaviours is beneficial for richness of the ways through which working sandwich caregivers exert agency. The above has established that working sandwich caregivers need to constantly communicate and negotiate roles with others in social interactions. This intensive and dynamic information exchange and negotiation can be achieved through a complicated combination of verbal claims, expressive behaviours, or artifactural displays. By attending to impression management behaviours, this research is interested in how sandwich caregiver role and work role are negotiated, challenged, and co-constructed by agential actors through use of symbols, be them verbal, non-verbal, or artifactural displays.

2.4.3.2.1 Dimensions of impression management behaviours

Impression management behaviours differ regarding the degree to which the performance is assertive or defensive (Tetlock and Manstead, 1985). Assertive impression management behaviours aim to enhance individuals' social impressions, and defensive impression management is designed to protect established impressions (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). In Friedlander and Schwartz's (1985) classification, one

strategy representing defensive impression management is facework. Meanwhile, assertive impression management involves four strategies: 'ingratiation, supplication, self-promotion, and intimidation' (p. 489). It is expected that these strategies can reflect the working sandwich caregivers' characteristic responses to key relationships in the workplace and at home, particularly the ones where they are motivated to seek approval or avoid blame. The following explains the five strategies and discusses how they can be used by working sandwich caregivers to project certain impressions.

First of all, individuals use facework to protect themselves from or defend themselves against blame or disapproval through denials, justification, apologies, or excuses that place themselves in a different light (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). For instance, in excuses, the actors may attempt to locate causality for inappropriate behaviours in situational factors beyond their control (Wood and Mitchell, 1981), such as being distracted by other people, being misinformed, or blaming hazards in the environment. The most commonly used assertive strategy is ingratiation (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985), in which individuals compliment others or do favors to be viewed as likable by audiences (Bolino, 1999). It is hence an impression management strategy used when interacting with people with power to obtain rewards, particularly those who control important resources (Jones, 1964). Aiming to be viewed favorably based on audiences' values and expectations, ingratiation tactics involve self-enhancements, flattery, favor doing, gift giving, and opinion conformity (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). Self-enhancements are used to distract audiences' attention from actors' unfavorable traits and direct it towards favorable ones, while favor doing or gift giving are designed to elicit the feeling of indebtedness in audiences to reciprocate the kindness received, and opinion conformity are based on the assumptions that similar values improve likability (ibid).

Individuals use supplication to reveal their weaknesses in order to solicit assistance (Cheng, 2013; Bolino, 1999). People use a supplication strategy to create impressions that they are in need of help or support and to evoke the feeling of protection and

obligation (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). Tactics such as self-depreciation and pleas for assistance are typical examples of a supplication impression management strategy. The impression management strategy of self-promotion is used when one attempts to demonstrate competence to audiences (Bolino, 1999). Self-promotion may signal that actors feel their ability and strengths are downplayed or neglected by their audiences, and tactics involves performance accounts and entitlements (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). Performance accounts are direct statements about competence and achievements, while entitlement is the claim that make other people and situational forces responsible for incompetence rather than the actors themselves (ibid). Lastly, in an assertive impression management strategy, individuals engage in intimidation to threaten targets to be regarded as dangerous (Cheng, 2013; Bolino, 1999). This strategy is used to obtain power, and the actors seek to convince the audiences that they are powerful enough to stress the audiences in cases of non-conformity to actors' expectations (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). Intimidation does not mean the actors are aggressive, actors can also achieve the desired goals through mild intimidation such as passive resistance or suggestion of emotional collapse (ibid). This strategy is typically used by people in the upper hierarchy to threaten those in the lower hierarchy. Nevertheless, Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) further point out that 'counterpower' is also possible with lower status actors intimidating audiences with higher status actors.

With limited research in the sandwich care field, little is known regarding how young sandwich caregivers who also work use different impression management strategies in different situations to protect or enhance a certain impression on specific audiences. However, impression management remains highly relevant for working sandwich caregivers as a way to exert agency to combine care with work. The above discussed that working sandwich caregivers simultaneously confront various expectations and demands from their parents, children, spouses, and employers. Situations in which role demands compete or are incompatible with each other are unavoidable from a role strain or conflict perspective (Goode, 1960; Kahn et al., 1964; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). In these situations, working sandwich caregivers can employ specific impression

management strategies to avoid blame or gain approval from domain specific audiences. Additionally, the work and family domains have usually been considered as two institutions that seek their members' exclusive loyalty, attempting 'to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries.' (Coser, 1974, p. 4). This implies the need for working sandwich caregivers to promote certain impressions so as to be considered competent in both work and family domains. Lastly, in the process of sandwich caregiving, intensive interactions between working sandwich caregivers and others, sometimes powerful others, are common. The concept of 'counterpower' from assertive impression management strategy offers insights into the power play between working sandwich caregivers and people upper in the organisational and familial hierarchy. To address the lack of research attention to impression management in the field of sandwich care literature, this thesis explores how working sandwich caregivers in a younger age group manage impressions, and examines the conditions in which specific impression management strategies are used to achieve desired outcomes in the process of caregiving.

Overall, the emphasis of impression management theory on the role of structural and contextual factors in framing individual agency complements the deficient attention that symbolic interactionist role theory pays to social structure, cultural norms, and others' expectations. In this way, impression management theory offers a valuable lens through which the complicated dynamics- between working sandwich caregivers and other social actors, and specifically, between working sandwich caregivers and their social context, can be captured. Due to the significance of structural and cultural factors in guiding individual conducts and social interactions, the following section demonstrates the key features of the research context. The Chinese context is selected due to the particularities of its cultural values that deserve further study. The following subsection hence explains how Confucian cultural values shape and guide sandwich caregiving, and how working sandwich caregivers' agency is framed by Confucianism.

2.5 Contextualising the sandwich care

The above discussion highlights the significant role of contextual and cultural factors in shaping working sandwich caregivers' caregiving experience. Indeed, caring responsibility has been perceived as 'a set of implicit cultural practices' that can have different meanings in different cultures (Tronto, 1993, p. 132-133). The relational nature of care manifested in reciprocity is also a display of 'cultural performance' and 'strategy of action' reflecting cognitive and cultural aspects (Funk, 2012; Alexander, 2004; Moody, 2008). Additionally, the adoption of the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand impression management behaviours demonstrates the prescribing role of structural and cultural factors in shaping individual agency in navigating sandwich care (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005; Biddle, 1986). Given the significance of structural and cultural factors in understanding the working sandwich caregivers' experience, it will be important to consider the social and cultural values that shape the setting in which the research is conducted, which is China. Therefore, the following subsection describes key principles of Confucianism and explains how Confucian values furnish the research with context-specific insights.

2.5.1 The guiding principles of Confucianism

Confucian cultural values are vital factors in Chinese society. The six cardinal virtues in Confucianism have been guiding family and individual behaviour in China for more than 2,500 years (Zhao and Roper, 2011). Confucian teachings emphasise the significance of human relationships with the 'self' as inextricably connected to the 'group' (Yao, 2001). In this vein, the defining power of social identities to the self becomes more prominent. Hence, for Confucianism, people are perceived as relational beings in a group rather than independent individuals, which means that they are expected to prioritise group interests and welfare above their own interests (Warner, 2010). In such a society, the role of audiences gains significant importance in shaping individuals' daily conducts, including caregiving, role taking and making, and

managing of different impressions. In Confucianism, one's conduct is subjected to assessment by different audiences according to the six cardinal virtues.

2.5.1.1 The six cardinal virtues

In Confucianism, one has to pursue six cardinal virtues (including Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin, and Xiao) that are fundamental in leading human actions and interactions. The Confucian concept of benevolence (Ren) is a foundational principle in interpersonal relations. It emphasises interconnectedness (Woods and Lamond, 2011), loving others, and goodness (Dan, 2009). It includes an altruistic concern for others' well-being and reflects the tender aspect of human feelings. The idea of righteousness or uprightness (Yi) relates to living and behaving according to moral principles, rather than focusing on material gain and self-interest (Cua, 2000). Ren and Yi are the most fundamental virtues in Confucianism. They are interdependent in that each is treated as a premise of the other, thus concern for others is only possible with proper social conduct (Park and Chesla, 2007). Ren and Yi will, to a certain extent, shape interpersonal relationships, in that they stipulate that it is wrong or inappropriate (Yi) if one fails to consider others (Ren) by maintaining individual interest at the cost of group interest. In this regard, Ren and Yi are helpful in interpreting, and thus understanding individuals' motivation and justification in giving and receiving care. For instance, sandwich caregivers who emphasise mutual-interest by giving the care to reciprocate previously received kindness from parents will be considered doing the right thing, and such behaviour is advocated by Confucianism.

The virtue of Li concerns the idea of the importance of following social norms of politeness when interacting with others (Woods and Lamond, 2011). This implies a clear social order and one is expected to stay in the right position in the social web and behave accordingly. Furthermore, the virtue of Li also indicates respect for people upper the social hierarchy, which may create a strong situational power where people lower the social hierarchy become very self-conscious and conscious of those in the

upper hierarchy (Kang et al, 2017). The emphasise on hierarchical order and respect for power makes the virtue of Li a useful angle, through which to capture how power asymmetries shape impression management behaviours and reciprocal relationships. It also enables this thesis to further uncover the power play and counterpower in the negotiation of roles in social interactions.

Zhi or wisdom includes an ongoing process of learning and an ability to perceive situations accurately, and make correct judgments (Lau, 1979). It is the 'wisdom to distinguish between right and wrong, knowledge to define good and evil, and ability to know oneself and others' (Zhao and Roper, 2011, p. 742). Zhi can guide sandwich caregivers' role taking and impression management, as it requires that actors should be wise enough to read environmental cues and interpret expectations from others' perspectives. Sandwich caregivers' interpretation will then assist them in making 'correct' decisions such as how care should be performed based on an accurate evaluation of alternatives. Furthermore, Xin (trustworthiness) represents loyalty to social rules, moral principles, and rituals of propriety, it is also considered as standing by one's word and being trustworthy (Woods and Lamond, 2011). This virtue is of great significance in social relations with others, as meaningful relationships depend on reliability without cheating or lying. In this sense, Xin provides a valuable lens through which the complicatedness of social interactions can be captured. For instance, there can be cases in which people need to manage deceptive impressions. In such cases it is interesting to see how people justify the fake impressions and attach meanings to their conducts through the virtue of Xin.

The virtue of Xiao (filial piety) in Confucianism has a direct impact on sandwich caregivers' caregiving experience. Xiao dictates that children should take care of their parents when they are in need (Estioko et al., 2022; Sung, 2003). The virtue of Xiao remains highly relevant in intergenerational relations in contemporary China regardless of socio-economic changes, such as growing income and higher levels of independence (Zimmer and Kwong, 2003). Ideally, filial children respect their parents, support them

unconditionally, and are willing to make sacrifices for their parents' well-being (Ikels, 2004). The obligation that adult children take care of their parents when they are in need has also been mandated by Chinese law (Gao et al., 2019). In this way, providing eldercare for aging parents remains a normative experience in China. This suggests that in Chinese Confucian society, eldercare can start at an early age, and individuals are sandwich caregivers as soon as they start to have the first child joining their previous two-generation household. This reinforces the need to use a broad definition of sandwich caregivers (as anyone who has at least one child and parent/parent-in-law) to capture a wider range of sandwich situations, and to include sandwich caregivers in a younger age group in this specific context.

The above interrelated six virtues inform five cardinal relationships (WuLun) in which each signifies a sense of identity, duty, and responsibility. These relationships are, from highest to lowest in precedence: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend (Woods and Lamond, 2011). These relationships are assumed to be hierarchical and complimentary in nature. According to WuLun, supervisors or managers (ruler) has to show justice, and the subordinates (subject) show loyalty; a father shows love, and a son shows filial piety; a husband shows initiation, and a wife shows obedience; the older brother shows brotherly love, and the younger brother shows reverence in return; and friends are faithful to each other.

Koh (2008) argued that the relationships described in WuLun are responsible for gender discrimination, as the six virtues and WuLun combine to generate a familial structure that produces multiple inequalities for women. The Chinese family is 'traditionally patrilineal, patriarchal, and patrilocal in principle' (Lee and Luo, 2021, p. 147) and it praises a hierarchical order based on age and gender. In such a patriarchal system, women's subordination to men is the moral law (Sung, 2003). Senior male members are endowed with supreme authority and sons are more likely than girls to receive family investments in forms of, for example, financial support for higher education (Whyte, 2005). The disadvantaged position women hold further implies a constrained

agency in social interactions with others. Besides WuLun, women's subordination and experienced gender inequality are also inherent in the *yin-yang* binary.

2.5.1.2 The *yin-yang* binary and gender inequality in China

A Confucian understanding of gender equality is inherent in the Confucian interpretation of the *yin-yang* binary. In the Chinese language, *yin*, which literally means 'shade', refers to the feminine or the passive principle in nature; whereas *yang*, referring to the sun, stands for the masculine, or things that are bright, strong, and positive (Gao, 2003). The *yin-yang* relation is not contradictory or oppositional per se; rather it is complementary and signifies the harmony of human nature (Yun, 2012). This complementary binary was used to explain that the overall mechanism of nature and society is a contingent system that balances changing situations on an on-going basis (Clark and Wang, 2004).

Indeed, *yin* and *yang* are of equal importance and cannot be separated. Both are required in order to create an integrated whole, such as a human being, a family, and the natural world. However, the complementary and polar nature of *yin-yang* binary was redefined by political leaders in ancient China to establish a desired social order based on patriarchy and hierarchy (Koh, 2008). As a consequence of this redefinition, women's subordination to men became a moral law. This is reinforced in the canonical texts of Confucianism- *I Ching,* indicating that 'heaven (*yang*) is high and noble, and earth (*yin*) is low and humble (Lynn, 1994, p. 47). Many have thereafter interpreted this high and low being of *yin* and *yang* as differences in values, according to which the superior and inferior are generated. That is, heaven is privileged over earth due to its higher position (Clark and Wang, 2004). Many thus followed this interpretation of *yin-yang* binary in *I Ching* and assumed that women are inferior to men.

Women's subordination has been further consolidated through gendered education in Confucianism. Some Confucian texts (such as Four Books and Five Classics) for

women's education seek to teach women that the role of mothers and wives was different from that of men. The common goals of these educational texts were to educate women to become wise mothers and good wives, who are expected to show complete subservience to men and sacrifice their own interests for the benefit of men (Morgan, 2001; Koh, 2008). During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-219 B.C.E), the feminine virtues of obedience were further interpreted into codes of feminine conduct, including *Three Obedience* and *Four Virtues* (San Cong Si De). According to the Four Virtues, 'wise wives and good mothers' need not be extraordinarily intelligent, clever, or beautiful, instead, they should demonstrate 'morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work' (Gao, 2003, p. 116). Additionally, the Three Obedience codified the guiding principle of obedience as a daughter, mother, and wife, indicating that women should obey their father before marriage, obey their husband once married, and obey the first son in widowhood (Ho, 1990).

Although the traditional family system is fading, the notion of women's subordination to their husbands and parents (and in-laws) remains strong in Confucian family units, including in China (Leung, 2003). In such a male-dominated and hierarchical society, women's agency in decision-making is much more limited than men. As a result, women cannot decide freely how they would like to perform a role, and their decisions are likely to be assessed against social normative expectations. For instance, it has been reported that women who violated the codes of feminine conduct by being 'too independent' and being career ambitious received their husband's and parents-in-laws' negative reactions since such violation was regarded as leading to 'family disharmony' and conflict (Zuo and Bian, 2001). It is hence likely that parents (or in-laws) and the husband would interfere when women fail to live up to these expectations, compelling women to alter their choices in the name of maintaining 'family harmony'. Some even make decisions for their wives and daughters (in-laws), as model 'virtuous' women tend not to be intelligent and independent and are supposed to have no claim in important decisions (Jiang, 2009). Given these, WuLun and *yin-yang* binary offer useful perspectives to capture how sandwich care involves gendered asymmetries and

gendered hierarchy in the process of caregiving.

Sandwich caregivers' gendered life pathways tend to be embedded in and structured by gendered normative expectations. In Confucianism, the working sandwich caregivers' gendered experience in caregiving is underpinned by the *nei-wai* distinction generated by the distinct nature of *yin* and *yang*. The following subsection describes what is *nei-wai* distinction and how it leads to the gendered experience of sandwich caregiving.

2.5.1.3 The *nei-wai* distinction and gendered sandwich caregiving experience

The distinct nature of *yin* and *yang* requires women and men to behave differently. These differences lead to a functional distinction between women and men, the inner-outer (*nei-wai*) distinction. The *nei-wai* distinction is the differences between the inner/domestic realm and the outer/public realm (Chan, 2000). Creating a gender boundary based on this functional distinction means that women are traditionally confined to the home domain and men to the public domain (Gao, 2003). Accordingly, women are assigned with domestic affairs such as childcare, eldercare and other household work, whereas men are assigned to handle outer and social affairs, such as participating in the labour market and commerce. Both men and women are expected to stay within the gender boundary; boundary crossing will not necessarily be seen as a value-adding activity and hence can lead to negative evaluations (Zuo and Bian, 2001). This means, when career-oriented women devote a majority of their time to work without taking 'good' care of their families, and when men put their family responsibilities above paid work, they are criticized as 'selfish' and 'nonfeminine' (for women) and as 'failed aspirations' (for men) (ibid).

Importantly, being assigned the inner realm does not mean that women are in charge of the family. Instead, although men are assigned to the outer/social affairs, they still rule over the family and have indisputable power over family affairs (Chan, 2000). Hence,

even though women's primary duties lie with managing household affairs, they still have little control over how things are done at home, for instance, in terms of how to perform childcare and eldercare. Being assigned the primary caregiver role, it is expected that it is women who should reduce job demands by shifting to part-time jobs or quitting the labour market and 'returning' to the home domain when conflict between roles arises rather than men. Outsourcing caring duties to a third-party provider in order to focus on the career can be viewed as inappropriate in Confucianism, as it violates not only the virtue of Xiao (filial piety), but also the norms of virtuous wives and responsible mothers. In this way, *nei-wai* distinction impacts not only who does what and how much one is expected to do in caregiving, but also how caregiving should be performed.

Besides their struggle for power in the family domain, women's power is also limited in the workplace because of the *nei-wai* distinction. Women have been largely disadvantaged in the workplace in terms of latitude of agency in decisions over important issues that relate to their own interests. Firstly, as an important element of Confucianism, *guanxi* (relationship) will continue to play a significant role in organisational life, which can, directly or indirectly, decide employees' performance evaluation, pay increase, task allocation, and promotion (Wu et al., 2019). As seen above, traditional gender ideology in Confucianism constrains women's duties to manage domestic affairs instead of outer social affairs. However, building and maintaining a quality *guanxi* network is time-consuming (Xian et al., 2019), which can take up non-working hours to participate in *guanxi* building activities. Due to the need to devote non-working hours to taking care of family members, women are less likely to maintain as many quality *guanxi* ties with colleagues as men do, who have more freedom in terms of how to spend their non-working hours. In this way, *guanxi* can be perceived as a gendered organisational and cultural practice that advantages men over women, particularly in gaining access to managerial careers through networks (Foster and Ren, 2015). Therefore, having fewer *guanxi* ties places women at an exchange disadvantage with more difficulties to climb up the organisational hierarchy, which

implies less power in organisational decision-making processes and limited control over how work should be done.

Women's disadvantaged positions in the workplace intensify when organisational values and Confucian values communicate conflicting expectations to women. In many Chinese firms, employers expect their employees to devote themselves to their work and refuse to acknowledge that women perform major roles outside the workplace. In most Chinese organisations, pay and promotion systems are largely designed in a way that emphasise seniority and service tenure (Cooke, 2010). Some organisational rules even penalise, either financially or through lower performance evaluations, employees who take leave to address family issues (Foster and Ren, 2015). On the contrary, society and the family expect women to take leave to attend to the demands of family members when there is a need to do so, which is the proper conduct informed by the norms of a 'virtuous wife', 'good mother', and 'filial daughter (in-law)' inherent in Confucianism. Nevertheless, the time loss due to leave taken for family needs makes it harder for women to accumulate service tenure in order to be considered ideal candidates for promotion or pay increase (Foster and Ren, 2015). Meanwhile, since work is men's key role and they are not burdened by family responsibilities, they are more likely to be viewed by employers as qualified for promotion and pay increase due to perceived high level of dedication, presenteeism, and commitment to work (Brumley, 2018; Gray et al., 2019). As a result, women are more likely to be in the subordinated positions in the organisational hierarchy, and hold lower paid and less skilled jobs compared to men (Du, 2016). Therefore, *nei-wai* distinction is a useful lens to unpack how men and women's caregiver and work roles are perceived and evaluated in the workplace and at home, and how this evaluation leads to gendered outcomes. Given the above, examining working sandwich caregivers' caregiving experience through Confucianism allows a holistic understanding of how individual agency, and specifically the gendered agency, in combining care with work is shaped by Confucian values.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented a critical review of the relevant literature for the thesis. The literature review highlighted that the majority of the literature in the field of care in general, and sandwich care in particular, treats care as physical care. However, a review of the relevant literature suggested that there is more to care than the physical form remains underdeveloped. In addition to the hidden forms of care, this chapter indicated care involves more than task performance, the gendered and relational nature of care, and sandwich caregivers' agency in combining care with work needed further development for nuanced understandings of sandwich care. To broaden our perspective on care and therefore sandwich caregivers at work, the symbolic interactionist role theory and impression management theory are relevant as they offer theoretical lenses through which how the working sandwich caregivers perceive, negotiate, and combine roles of work and caregiver, and how their agency is shaped by structural, cultural, and contextual factors will be captured.

The above illustrated the existing understandings of the sandwich care and identified two main research questions remained to be answered for richness of sandwich care. The following chapter discusses how the research aims were addressed, and the methodological considerations taken into account when addressing the above-mentioned two research questions.

Chapter 3: Researching the sandwich care

3.1 Introduction

The aims of this research are to uncover what is involved in the care that young sandwich caregivers workers in China provide, and how the caregiver role can be combined with work role. This chapter addresses the research aims and provides an overview of the methodological considerations that were taken into account. The thesis follows an interpretivist research philosophy, particularly, the symbolic interactionist strand of interpretivism. The discussion explains the opportunities interpretivism and symbolic interactionism bring in achieving its research aims, followed by justifications of the selection of qualitative research method through semi-structured interviews. Details on how the data was collected and analysed, protocols considered to enhance research rigour, and ethical considerations are also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Research philosophy of interpretivism

There are different types of research philosophies in relation to the assumptions about the nature of the realities the researcher faces and about human knowledge, and this research is informed by the research philosophy of interpretivism. Ontologically, interpretivism is based on constructivism, which posits that the social world is not given, but is created and sustained by social actors in interactions (Goldkuhl, 2012). Hence, reality in interpretivism is subjective, constituted by meanings, and organised by human beings (Irshaidat, 2022). Given the subjective nature of reality, Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) claim that 'the aim of all interpretive research is to understand how members of a social group, through their participation in social processes, enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning, and to show how these meanings, beliefs, and intentions of the members help to constitute their actions' (p. 13). The particularities of realities being specific to a member imply that in interpretivism, there is no single and static reality. Rather, reality is individually understood as actors make sense of the

phenomenon, hence it is 'a holistic structure that is continuously changing and more than the sum of its parts' (Darby et al., 2019, p. 397). As an interpretivist, I believe that there are a variety of realities in the world, and thus as a researcher, I need to consider individuals' efforts in constructing realities in a subjective manner (Turyahikayo, 2021). To appraise individual efforts in making sense of the world, I perceive human actors as social beings with agency (McKenna et al., 2011), who behave actively rather than 'being acted upon by the external world' (Darby et al., 2019, p. 397). Therefore, working sandwich caregivers in my perception are 'thoughtful' and 'socially aware human actors' (Biddle, 1986, p. 69) who have the agency to attach their own meanings to sandwich care. Being an interpretivist, I do not believe that there is one static and objective reality about sandwich care that exists 'out there'. Instead, in my assumptions, the meanings of sandwich care are personally understood and socially constructed in the process of caregiving, and these subjectively created meanings are likely to guide how sandwich caregivers perform care in social interactions.

As one of the interpretivists, my epistemological stance is that knowledge (including understandings and meanings) is an important element of the subjectively created realities of the world, and it is gained through interpretation. Knowing the importance of interpretation in generating knowledge, I pay special attention to the existing shared meaning systems, and I go beyond understanding a singular part of the phenomenon to develop a holistic understanding of the researched phenomenon as a whole (Goldkuhl, 2012). Thus, in this research, I strive to achieve a holistic understanding of sandwich care through working sandwich caregivers' interpretation of the meanings of care. I go beyond a singular understanding of sandwich care as physical care and task performance, and instead treat sandwich care as a complex and dynamic processes that involves not only the tangible (e.g., task performance) but also the intangible parts (e.g., the gendered and relational nature of care).

Knowledge for me, as an interpretivist, is not only subjective, but also culturally and contextually embedded, on the basis of the lived experience (Turyahikayo, 2021). This

culturally and contextually situated subjectivity makes the knowledge of contextual factors necessary, as they shape how individuals perceive and interpret their social world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Thus, I recognise the mutual and simultaneous relationships between individuals and their external social world (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this way, I treat knowledge as consisting of a complex mix of lived experience, values, contextual information, and subjectivity, which offers a framework for working sandwich caregivers to interpret and understand the social world (Turyahikayo, 2021). To appraise the significance of contextual and cultural factors in shaping knowledge, I adopt a particularistic approach and research a particular phenomenon in a particular context at a particular time (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Here, research attention tends to be paid to investigate specific motivation, meanings, and experiences to seek richness that are context-bound (Darby et al., 2019). Knowing that sandwich caregivers' experience cannot be comprehended in isolation of wider cultural and social settings, I contextualise sandwich caregiving in China. The choice of this context is driven by its potential to maximise conceptual insights, given the scarcity of research attention to the Chinese context in the sandwich care field, and the particularities of Chinese Confucian culture and its welfare system.

With interpretivist research philosophy, this research is underpinned by the strand of symbolic interactionism, which concerns the examination of the social world that is created in social interactions, by studying the symbols in meaning making in a particular context (Irshaidat, 2022). The following section discusses the key tenets of symbolic interactionism, and the opportunities this interpretivist strand offers in comprehending the complex and dynamic nature of sandwich care.

3.3 The interpretivist strand of symbolic interactionism

As an interpretivist, I perceive sandwich care as something that is flexible, subjectively and inter-subjectively constructed by working sandwich caregivers. I understand sandwich care as relational by nature, which involves intensive interactions between

caregivers and care receivers. Therefore, a perspective that takes meanings and interactions into consideration is necessary to achieve the research aims. As a consequence, I chose symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a powerful perspective in sociology, which stems from Blumer's (1969) interpretations of the thought of pragmatist George Herbert Mead. The meaning creation in social interactions is the interest of symbolic interactionists, who maintain that to fully understand a social process, the researchers should 'capture' the meanings that are experienced by participants in interactions in a certain context (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986). In this vein, symbolic interactionism is helpful in addressing the research aims concerning the content and the relational nature of sandwich care, and in understanding how sandwich caregivers attach meanings to the care and the roles they perform.

Symbols in symbolic interactionism are special types of social objects that represent something, they have specific meanings and are used to communicate a shared meaning to receivers (Flint, 2006). The meanings of symbols are context-specific and can be distinct for different social actors. In social interactions, social actors use different symbols, such as language, to convey specific meanings to other actors (ibid). Paying attention to how the participants talk about the use of symbols in social interactions adds nuances to the complexity of sandwich care, which involves negotiations of roles hence inevitably the use of language to negotiate. It also adds richness to the meaning co-creation and interpretation between interviewer and participants, as in interviews, participants may use various symbols to convey specific meanings to the interviewer. For example, in some of the interviews I conducted, the participants used facial expression and gestures (e.g., being conscious about the time by constantly looking at the watch) to convey the availability of their time and willingness to share, this largely guided how I planned my follow-up questions, which further impacted the depth of understanding of the meaning of sandwich care of that specific participant. Therefore, there are mutual and simultaneous relationships between me and the participants, and me and participants cooperate to create meanings and knowledge of a researched phenomenon (Darby et al., 2019), i.e., sandwich care.

Although there is a consensus that symbolic interactionism offers rich and diverse insights into social phenomena, it has been criticised for its inability to consider social structures and power since it focuses mainly on meaning creation at individual and interpersonal levels (Dennis and Martin, 2005). For instance, Haralambos (1980) claims that symbolic interactionism focuses on specific situations while paying limited attention to the wider social framework and therefore has 'failed to give an account of social structure' (Haralambos, 1980, p. 551). Similarly, Giddens (1997) agrees that symbolic interactionism over-emphasises the small-scale while finding it hard to address large-scale structures and processes. However, symbolic interactionism itself has changed, and has moved away from concentrating on interpersonal encounters towards investigating the links between 'micro-sociological communication processes and macro-sociological community structure' (Musolf, 1992, p. 172). Indeed, symbolic interactionism promotes the inseparability of the individual and the context, and claims that reality is never definite since meanings change as per changes in the wider context (Benzies and Allen, 2001). Taking both individual and context into consideration, symbolic interactionism is hence capable of addressing questions regarding the importance of structural and cultural factors in shaping the working sandwich caregivers' agency. The following subsection refers to the basic assumptions and the three premises of symbolic interactionism to explain how symbolic interactionism is useful for answering the research questions of this thesis.

3.3.1 Assumptions and opportunities of symbolic interactionism for researching the sandwich care in the context of Confucianism

The key tenet of symbolic interactionism that comes from Mead is the concept of the 'self', which is situated in the social world (Mead, 1934). As such, the person and the surrounding world cannot be understood in isolation. In symbolic interactionism, the 'self' is (re)conceptualised through time in responding to the environment and in social interactions between others and oneself (Crooks, 2001). For Mead (1934), the 'self'

consists of the subjective 'I' that is creative and reactive to the environment, and the objective 'me' that reflects the 'self' in the eyes of others and oneself (Jeon, 2004). Each self is multilayered, constructed in a specific context through social interactions. It is this interconnectedness between self and context that makes symbolic interactionism an appropriate approach to explore the role of Confucian values in shaping sandwich caregiving. The notion of 'self' as created in social interactions hence holds relevance for this thesis for investigating how working sandwich caregivers create, and interpret their roles as caregivers in social interactions with their family members, colleagues, and supervisors. Here, I am interested not only in the caregiver and work roles that working sandwich caregivers perform in any particular situation, but also in their deeper personal experience and the meanings that these experiences hold for them.

Symbolic interactionism holds three basic assumptions, and these assumptions provide me with opportunities to untangle sandwich care. Firstly, in symbolic interactionism, meaning is the foundation for individuals' actions (Blumer, 1969). This means that people do not unthinkingly respond to events, but create and attach meanings to the social world, and act upon the meanings they create. For symbolic interactionists, external reality does not have meanings until active creators define and interpret them, and act upon their interpretations (Flint, 2006). This aligns with my perceptions of sandwich caregivers as thoughtful human actors, who do not unintentionally perform sandwich care or work. Through symbolic interactionism, I examined how sandwich caregivers, as active agents, perceived and created meanings to the roles they occupied.

Secondly, meanings emerge from continuous social interactions between others and oneself (Blumer, 1969). In symbolic interactionism, individuals are able to act since they have reached a consensus on the meanings they create in their settings (Benzies and Allen, 2001). Thus, the creation of meaning is an interactive process, in which people construct and re-construct reality through social practices with other social actors. Consequently, what people regard as knowledge and reality are not static and external to actors, but are temporally defined and shared. Through symbolic

interactionism, I acknowledged the role of other social actors in working sandwich caregivers' performance of roles, since I believe meanings are co-created and shared. Hence, along with examining sandwich caregivers' agency in creating meanings, I also investigated how other social actors shaped the meaning creation process. In this way, special attention was paid to how participants talked about others' expectations, and how these expectations guided their actions in social interactions, such as role taking, role making, and impression management.

Lastly, meanings are assigned and altered in interpretive processes, subject to change and reconstruction in a continuous manner (Blumer, 1969). This means that realities and knowledge are not fixed, objective, or natural. Instead, they are historically and culturally situated, evolving over time and space. Hence, through symbolic interactionism, I challenged the conventional assumptions of a role as consisting of patterned behaviours, which is fixed and stable over time and can be applied across cultures. Simultaneously, symbolic interactionism claims that people have a certain level of freedom of choice, while this freedom is further shaped by cultural norms (Benzies and Allen, 2001). Following this claim, I explored the connections between individuals and their social environment, recognising the significance of macro-level structure and culture in defining and framing individuals' conducts. Therefore, I strove to understand how working sandwich caregivers' behaviours were guided and shaped by Confucian norms through a cultural lens.

Symbolic interactionism is a suitable perspective for this thesis due to its alignment with the two theoretical underpinnings adopted to conceptualise sandwich care. Firstly, my understandings of roles were also informed by the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory. In symbolic interactionist role theory, roles are not fixed cultural elements that are assigned to social actors. Rather, roles are constructed and negotiated by social actors in social interactions. Simultaneously, individuals are perceived as active agents, who constantly create and attach meanings to their social world (Biddle, 1986). This means that the perspective I adopted to study sandwich care should be

consistent with the theoretical framing I used to understand the flexible and individually created nature of roles. With the perspective of symbolic interactionism, I did not consider sandwich caregiver roles as stable cultural elements. Instead, I perceived sandwich caregivers as social actors who have a certain level of agency to define care and roles, and determine how they should perform each role they occupied. In this way, symbolic interactionism, as a powerful perspective, is helpful in examining how the working sandwich caregivers intentionally perceive and create social roles in interactions with others.

Secondly, symbolic interactionism also serves as the foundation of Goffman's analysis of impression management and interaction patterns (Dreitzel, 1970). Goffman's analytic approach, that investigates daily interactions and environmental cues (symbols) which actors use to define situations and construct a common understanding of social order, implies a symbolic interactionist view (Gillespie, 1980). Individuals in impression management theory are also considered as thoughtful actors who appear on stages in daily symbolic interactions to nurture various impressions on different audiences. As with symbolic interactionism, impression management theory appraises the role of cultural and structural factors, as well as others' expectations in shaping individuals' impression management behaviours. It is the use, the reading, and the interpretation of cultural- and context-bound symbols and others' expectations that guide and shape how the working sandwich caregivers perform in front of audiences. In this sense, symbolic interactionism is highly compatible with impression management theory in terms of comprehending how the working sandwich caregivers exert agency in social interactions through impression management to combine sandwich care with work.

Despite the opportunities symbolic interactionism brings in unpacking sandwich care, it also guides *how* to study working sandwich caregivers' experience. Informed by symbolic interactionism, I emphasised participants' lived experience, the notion of meanings perceived, and understanding a situation from the participants' views. The

methodological implications of this emphasis on how sandwich care is subjectively lived is that participants' interpretation of sandwich care is a vital part of the experience *per se* (Cope, 2005). Hence, as a researcher, I need a method that enables me to gain insights into what the sandwich caregivers consider, how they interpret their experience, what tactics they employ in different situations, and when and how alternatives are considered and chosen. Additionally, an approach that elicits the contradictions and struggles in meaning creating in social interactions is essential, recognising that reality and knowledge is subjectively and inter-subjectively constructed. To better explain the role of symbolic interactionism in guiding how I researched sandwich care, the following sections focus on methodological choice, followed by methods of data collection, sampling methods, data analysis, rigour in research, and ethical considerations.

3.4 The methodological choice of qualitative research

This research is interested in examining how working sandwich caregivers create and attach meanings to sandwich care in social interactions. As such, it is inductive as it requires sympathy to access participants' meaningful subjective and inter-subjective worlds in context, which is essential to understand the lived experience of the those being researched (Johnson and Duberley, 2015). Human behaviours and social phenomena are complicated and full of meanings. Therefore, it is impossible to reduce the lived experience, such as sandwich caregiving, to a number of discrete factors operating as different effects in isolation of the social context where the actions arise (ibid). Hence, to access and understand subjectivity and intersubjectivity, I sought explanations through sympathy: the inductive description and analysis of the lived experience (Rynes and Gephart, 2004). As an interpretivist, I strove to describe and understand participants' meanings, and inductively construct reality using concepts from social actors as basis for analytic induction (ibid). Thus a method that allows for thick description of participants' narrative and observation of nonverbal behaviours in specific settings is required. A qualitative research approach was hence selected.

As an interpretivist adopting symbolic interactionism perspective, I chose a qualitative approach to unpack sandwich care. Through a qualitative research method, I interpreted and understood the meanings conveyed by participants about a phenomenon, i.e., sandwich care (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research emphasises the jointly constructed and context-specific nature of social reality (Murshed and Zhang, 2016). The rejection of the existence of one static reality, a commitment to develop deep insights, the intention to probe into participants' meaning making process, the emphasis on reporting lived experience through participants narratives, are the main features of qualitative methodologies (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Qualitative methodologies have been widely used in social sciences to explore a phenomenon, to develop nuances of that phenomenon, or to inductively generate theoretical insights (Walsham, 2006; Venkatesh et al., 2013). If harnessed to its full potential, qualitative research methods enable problematisation of 'rigid…ways of thinking, questioning of taken-for-granted knowledge, exploration of little-known phenomena…or context…' (Köhler et al., 2022, p. 184). In this way, a qualitative research method supports me in problematising the commonly adopted conceptualisation of care as mainly in physical form, and challenging the taken-for-granted knowledge of role as fixed structural and cultural elements. In addition, it will also assist me in exploring the hidden forms and dimensions of care in sandwich care field, something under-researched with exclusive scholarly attention being paid to the tangible elements of care. Given that little is known regarding how young sandwich caregivers combine care with work in a Chinese context, a deployment of qualitative research method allows me to uncover the contextually and culturally embedded nature of sandwich care.

Fundamentally, a qualitative research method is helpful for unpacking and exploring the meaning creation process and what is behind a phenomenon. It generates insights by investigating the dynamic reality through direct interaction with participants and

immersion in context (Murshed and Zhang, 2016). A qualitative research method hence makes it possible for me to capture complex and dynamic meaning making processes through the contradictions and struggles experienced by participants. The focus on context allows me to understand how the sandwich caregivers' agency in combining caregiver role with work role is defined and shaped by Confucian cultural norms. My view of qualitative data as eliciting the inter-connections between individual actions is consistent with the symbolic interactionist role theory (Biddle, 1986) to perceiving roles as the products of social interactions and the ongoing construction of meanings through social conducts.

The limitations of a qualitative research method should also be considered. First of all, to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon lived by participants, qualitative research relies largely on the openness and willingness of participants to share meanings attached to their experience. However, in some cases, participants can be reluctant to be open and honest if they are perceived to have a vested interest (Walsham, 2006). To ensure descriptive detail, Darby et al. (2019) recommend that data should be collected in comfortable settings where participants can share their experiences freely and openly. Therefore, throughout data collection process, I ensured that the choices of interview settings and time were at discretion of participants to allow open conversation. To minimise possible external pressure that can negatively impact the richness of data, I ensured certain level of privacy of interview settings (e.g., corner of a coffee shop that was relatively far from other people), and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of research throughout the interviews. These were driven by my epistemological assumptions as an interpretivist that cooperation between researcher and participants is essential in the process of knowledge creation.

Secondly, demonstrating the rigour of the qualitive research can be challenging since qualitative enquiry informs a different approach to data generation without quantifiable techniques and standardised way of reporting (Sutton, 1997; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). However, Andriopoulos and Slater (2013) recommend that this can be overcome

by ensuring that the research are 'methodologically sound and consistent in their use of terminology' (p. 404). Following this suggestion, I strove to secure a high level of alignment between the theoretical underpinnings of the current research and the philosophical strands adopted, and between the research philosophy and methods chosen to ensure quality and rigour. More steps have also been taken to ensure rigour of this qualitative research, which will be further discussed in the Section 3.8 (Ensuring research rigour). Thirdly, Fendt and Sachs (2008) mention the difficulties involved in qualitative inquiry, including generation of high volume of unstructured data and the choice of a method to analyse and synthesise the data collected. Although a high volume of data can lead to rich findings, it can also be too complicated to be understandable. However, to overcome the difficulties confronting the management of high volumes of data in qualitative research, I used Word to organise transcripts and Nvivo to assist me in analysing interview data.

The above discussion focused on methodological details of this thesis in terms of research philosophy and methodological choice of qualitative research method. The following subsection illustrates how data was collected to understand sandwich care.

3.4.1 Researching sandwich care through semi-structured interviews

As an interpretivist who is interested in (inter)subjectivity, I believe that interactions between my participants and me during the data collection process are essential and participants are co-producers of meaningful and rich data. Hence, the data generation process, indeed, is a process of constructing and co-constructing meanings by me and participants through interactions (Goldkuhl, 2012). Following my epistemological assumptions, I conducted interviews for this research. In interviews, I strove to collect data to obtain nuances of meanings, experiences, and behaviours (Rowley, 2012). For this thesis, the method of semi-structured interview was selected. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, following which I had a set of questions but was able to vary the sequence of questions and has some latitude to probe into significant replies

by asking further questions (Lee, 1999). This feature is in line with my ontological assumptions of care and roles as flexible and individually constructed and understood as such. Recognising that sandwich caregivers tend to perceive care and work differently, the data collection method also needs to have certain level of flexibility to allow different level of probing when interacting with different participants.

Secondly, semi-structured interview was selected since it has been commonly adopted by existing qualitative inquiry into the experience of those who are offering sandwich care (e.g., Boyczuk and Fletcher, 2016; Steiner and Fletcher, 2017; Manor, 2021). The semi-structured interviews of this research were based on a schedule centering on around 18 (including questions for demographic information) clearly-phrased and well-developed questions (for more information on the interview questions, please refer to Appendix 1). Seven questions were designed to collect demographic information of participants, such as 'how many children do you have?', 'what do you do?', and 'what is your level of education?'. These questions were mostly asked in a set order. However, questions pertaining to the topic of care, work role, and impression management was asked in a flexible manner, in terms of the order of questions and the level of probing. Each question had few sub-questions or prompts, which were used when interesting themes emerged and required further elaboration.

The choice and design of interview questions, in my case, was impacted by the origin of my research questions. As an inductive research, theory plays an important role in determining research questions, which further informs the questions I used in interviews (Rowley, 2012). This is particularly the case for questions around care, role, and impression management. The adoption of symbolic interactionist role theory and the aim of uncovering the hidden forms and dimensions of care means that it would be inappropriate in this research to offer a range of care tasks for participants to choose and indicate how often they performed each task. Rather, participants were asked to define what is the care that they perform to parents/parents-in-law and children. Hence, participants were asked to share their thoughts on housework division, reflect on areas

in which participants needed to take care of their aging parents/parents-in-law and children, and define the roles they occupied (such as employee, parent, child, and spouse) from their own and others' perspectives. When designing interview questions around caregiver roles, I assumed that Covid-19 would significantly impact housework division given that most employees were compelled to work from home during that challenging time. However, after the first five interviews, the findings from participants indicated that this was not the case when the data was collected, since they had resumed the normal mode of work for almost a year. Considering this, I decided to not focus exclusively on housework division during Covid time, but to ask how housework was divided in their daily life to ensure accuracy of information. This adoption aligns with the symbolic interactionists' understanding of role as flexible by nature and evolve per changes in the wider environment.

This research intentionally explores participants' impression management behaviours at home and in the workplace. Therefore, I was interested in how participants demonstrated 'dedication' to employers or what they would do in order to be considered 'responsible' at home. However, considering that different people tend to understand impressions differently, instead of treating 'dedication' or 'responsible' as the only examples of good impressions in the workplace and at home, I asked 'how do you impress your supervisors/colleagues and family members'. This was usually asked interchangeably with 'how do you avoid negative impressions on supervisors/colleagues and family members'. In this way, I avoided leading participants' responses towards certain direction, and also left more room for participants to define what is a good or negative impression in their own views. This attempt was informed by my ontological and epistemological assumptions, of reality and knowledge (such as care and impressions) as individually defined hence differently understood by different people. Additionally, given that this research aims to unpack working sandwich caregivers' experience of combining sandwich care with work, participants were asked to reflect on incidents in which work/care intrude family/work domain, and how they resolved the conflicting demands. To probe into participants' needs in terms of support

from work and family members, I asked participants 'what could your organisation do to help you get on with work and caring responsibilities' and 'how do you find support to deal with different responsibilities'.

To ensure participants understand my questions without ambiguity, I examined the interview questions carefully for 'jargon' that may confuse the interviewees (Rowley, 2012). To do this, I went through all the questions with my two supervisors to make sure we all understood the questions the same way. Following the suggestion of Rowley (2012), I also planned the order of the questions carefully, so that previous questions set the context for later questions. For example, I asked participants to talk about their work, housework division, and their caregiving responsibilities before the question how they find support to deal with different responsibilities. To ensure the questions make sense and are helpful in answering research questions, I conducted a pilot interview. In that pilot interview, the participant was given a list of caregiving tasks, and she was asked to tick the box if she performed the activity in her daily life. However, when gathering feedback after the pilot interview, the participant mentioned that there were activities that she needed to do that was not captured by the list, such as acting as an interpreter for her parents who do not speak English. This reminded me of the importance of leaving adequate room for participants to define what is care from their own perspective without restricting care to specific forms. Therefore, for formal interviews, I asked what participants do to take care of their parents/parents-in-law and children and removed the list. After clearly planned my interview questions, I sought to recruit participants in order to conduct the semi-structured interviews. The following section explains how participants were accessed and recruited using different sampling methods.

3.5 Accessing and recruiting the young working sandwich caregivers

Following interpretivism, this research adopted purposive sampling approach to recruit

participants. Purposive sampling approach strives to identify and select information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon under researched, in which researchers can gain holistic understandings of the issues of great significance to the aims of the research (Bonache and Festing, 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). In a purposive sampling, the criteria of sample selection are carefully defined to aim at a relatively small sample with the objective of enhancing the depth of understanding (Silverman, 2010). Following the suggestion of Robinson (2014), this research clarified the attributes that participants must have to be qualified for the study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1. The participants (both men and women) must have at least one child and one parent/parent-in-law; 2. The participants must be employed full-time hence have work responsibilities in order to be considered a working sandwich caregiver; 3. The participants must be from China to consider the impact of Confucianism; 4. The participants must be aged between 20-39.

This research focused on the working sandwich caregivers in the younger age group, i.e., those who are between 20 and 39 years old. The caregiving experience of young working sandwich caregivers remains largely hidden due to exclusive existing scholarly attention being paid to sandwich caregivers aged above 40 (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Železná, 2018; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). For some sandwich care researchers, the value to research sandwich caregivers aged above 40 was underpinned by the pressures these caregivers experienced due to dual care position caused by relatively high intensity eldercare, and the postponement of childcare due to lengthening of adolescence (e.g., Gans et al., 2013; Skolnick and Skolnick, 2003). However, this research problematises the taken-for-granted assumption that eldercare only peak at later age, and instead claims that care (particularly non-physical care) can extend to healthy and independent care receivers, and what can be conceptualised as care is at the discretion of caregivers, as underscored by the symbolic interactionism perspective. Therefore, this research addresses the above lack by investigating how sandwich caregivers in a younger age group define what is involved in care, and how they perform care in their daily life.

Given that this research is interested in exploring the complexity of sandwich care, a relatively small sample size of ca. 20 informants for a single study is sufficient for 'a locatable voice' within the research and 'an intensive analysis of each case to be conducted' (Robinson, 2014, p. 29; see also Darby et al., 2019). On this basis, and due to the interest of the thesis is to explore gendered experience in combining sandwich care with work, I decided to recruit 20 female sandwich caregivers and 20 male sandwich caregivers. To access potential participants, I started by using personal contacts I had obtained through my previous career in the education and sales industries. A snowball sampling strategy was then used to recruit more potential interviewees by asking those who initially participated and contacted to recommend any other working sandwich caregivers who would be willing to share their experience (Rowley, 2012), with recruitment criteria clearly explained. Finding willing participants was relatively difficult and time-consuming. However, snowball sampling proved to be effective, as it generated 12 participants (mostly men) from the industries that I was not very familiar with, such as banking, health, and care industry in a time-efficient manner. Overall, personal contacts through *guanxi* (relationships) played an important role when conducting research in China in terms of gaining access to participants, their commitment to participate, and their willingness to share their thoughts. Through different *guanxi*, I managed to recruit 41 participants and conducted the interviews within four months. After recruiting the participants, I conducted the semi-structured interviews. The following section offers the overview of participants and the interview process.

3.6 Overview of participants and the interviewing process

Forty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted between May, 2021 and August, 2021. However, one interview was not completed due to the limited time availability of the participant, and difficulties experienced to approach that participant for a second time. As a result, this research used data from 40 completed interviews (20 with

working sandwich caregivers women and 20 with working sandwich caregivers men). Most of the face-to-face interviews were conducted in coffee shops with a certain level of privacy, and some were conducted in the participants' office (with entry permission). For those participants who cannot do face-to-face interviews (twelve participants), I conducted telephone interviews and online interview on Zoom (with one participant). Anonymised information about the participants is displayed in Table 1. The participants were aged between 20 and 39, working in different industries, including banking and finance, healthcare, education, IT, and the Chinese government. Although participants worked in different industries, they were all in professional work. All participants held full-time positions, and the average service tenure of participants was about seven years. The actual working hours varied depending on the nature of the work and industry. Over half indicated that they worked extra hours, with eight worked extremely long hours (60+). Of the 20 interviewed male participants, nine held non-managerial or entry level positions at the time of data collection, a number which almost doubled in the female group (17 holding entry level and non-managerial jobs). Most participants had one child, and seven had two children, with the age of the children ranging from three months to twelve years old. All of the participants had at least one parent and/or parent-in-law alive. In terms of education, most participants had a Bachelor degree, six had a Master's degree, with one doctoral degree and four graduated from college. Overall, all participants received relatively good education, and worked in professional positions.

Demographic information

	Name (Pseudonyms)	Position	Number of Hours per Week (approximately)	Work Experience (yrs)	Education (Degree)	Age of children
Male Participants	Shengkai	IT – Leader	70	3	Bachelor's	8yrs
	LanGe	Doctor - associate director	60+	12	Master's	8yrs (elder); 4yrs (younger)
	ShangLian	Designer	60	8	Bachelor's	1.5yrs
	WeiKang	Bank Manager	55-65	9	Bachelor's	4.5yrs
	LiuWen	Market Researcher (Real Estate Company)	57.5	4	Bachelor's	2yrs
	LingDong	Bank Manager	50-60	5	Bachelor's	4months
	WuTai	Civil Servant – Department Leader	50-55	6	Bachelor's	4yrs
	JingKe	Junior Lecturer (Junior High School)	50+	8	Bachelor's	11yrs
	WenDeng	IT Officer	50	15	Bachelor's	8yrs
	JingSheng	Bank Officer	50	10	Bachelor's	1yr
	YuZong	Sales Manager (Real Estate Company)	50	2	Bachelor's	8yrs
	ZhaoZhi	Director (Bank)	50	2	Bachelor's	1.5yrs
	LaoShi	Teacher (High School)	50	17	Bachelor's	12yrs
	JingLi	Bank Manager	47.5- 57	13	Bachelor's	2.5yrs
	YouGe	Pastor	48+	13	Bachelor's	9yrs
	XiaoHui	Sales Manager (Insurance Company)	40+	2	Bachelor's	5yrs
	XiaoLiang	Teacher (Primary School)	40+	5	Bachelor's	1yr and 9months
	YiCheng	Civil Servant	40	7	Bachelor's	3months
	HangZhang	Director (Bank)	40	11	Bachelor's	5yrs (elder); 1yr (younger)
	KunKun	IT Officer	40	1.5	College	1yr and 3monts
Female Participants	JieYun	Teacher (High School)	75+	3	Master's	4months
	LuoHong	Business Support Manager	60+	9	Master's	4yrs
	ZhenZhen	Teacher (High School)	60+	2	Bachelor's	2.5yrs
	XueJiao	Bank Officer	55	11	Bachelor's	7yrs (elder); 3yrs (younger)
	JunNan	Nurse	50	7	College	1year and 9 months
	XiaoWei	Teacher (Primary School)	50	5	Bachelor's	2.5yrs
	Dong Jiejie	Doctor	48	10	PhD	5yrs (elder); 1yr (younger)
	HuiFang	HRBP (Real Estate Company)	40	7	Bachelor's	5yrs
	QingQing	Civil Servant	40	6	Bachelor's	1yr and 11 months
	XiaoFang	Vice Director (Bank)	40	16	Bachelor's	8yrs
	XueHua	Nurse	40	6	College	4yrs (elder); 1yr and 1month (younger)
	ShuYun	Administrator (Insurance Company)	40	3	Bachelor's	7yrs
	CunCun	Accountant (Real Estate Comapny)	40	5	Bachelor's	3yr and 4 months
	MengTing	HR Administrator (Telecommunication Company)	37.5	2	Master's	4yrs and 2 months
	TingTing	Sales (Insurance Company)	37.5	6	Bachelor's	7yrs (elder); 1yr (younger)
	ZhuangZhuang	Civil Servant	37.5	0.5	Bachelor's	5yrs (elder); 3yrs (younger)
	HeHe	Editor (Publicating Company)	37.5	1.5	Master's	11months
	LingLing	Civil Servant	35	3	Bachelor's	4yrs
	XiaoPing	Office Administrator (Foreign-owned Enterprise)	35	11	College	10yrs
	LianYu	Teacher (College)	30	8	Master's	6.5 yrs

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

To conduct interviews, participants were contacted firstly through the phone or email to agree on the date, time, and places of the interviews. Most participants preferred to schedule the interview just few days ahead to prevent unexpected incidents from impacting the original plan. In few cases where interview dates were scheduled two to

three weeks ahead, I had to reschedule them since participants needed to resolve other affairs or some could not remember the planned dates of the interviews. The date and venues of the interviews were selected to suit the convenience of the interviewees. Assuming that all employees were busy (given their work and caregiver roles), and if they agreed to share some of their valuable time to participate in interviews, they will want to feel that this interview will not cause any inconvenience (Rowley, 2012). Therefore, I demonstrated my willingness to commit my time to travel to agreed locations (usually somewhere near informants' places of residence or work) to all participants who can do face-to-face interviews, so as to save their time in travel. Knowing the scarcity of interviewees' time, I was also very sensitive to the time pressure in setting a suitable interview time (Walsham, 2006), and participants were informed of the estimated length of interview before they participated.

3.6.1 The interview procedure

Before heading for any interview, I always double checked if the recorder worked properly or was fully charged to avoid any incidents that may impact the interview process negatively. Prior to the interviews, participants were sent copies of the consent form, participant information sheet, and privacy notice to inform them on the details of the interview, such as the aim of the research, anonymity, confidentiality, that their participation is voluntary, contact details, and other relevant information (Please refer to Appendices 2, 3, and 4 for more information). For participants who agreed to participate after reviewing the relevant documents, signed consent forms and oral consent through audio-recording were obtained before the formal interview commenced. All of the participants agreed to be audio-recorded.

Time management skill was critical in interviews. I always arrived about 30 minutes earlier before the formal face-to-face interviews started, to identify a suitable and quiet place in the coffee shop, and to prepare myself for the coming sessions. For online and telephone interviews, I always sent a kind reminder of the interview time and link in

advance. Early arrival and the friendly reminding texts, as symbols, were important in rapport building, through which I demonstrated my respect to participants and a humble attitude to show my eagerness to learn from their experiences. Through giving the impression of a humble learner, I was adjusting the power relations between participants and me as a researcher, in which participants were given whole-hearted respect and encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas without external pressure. Before the conversation started, I purchased coffee or snacks for participants as a symbol to appreciate their time and effort in taking part in the interviews. This is essential in building *guanxi* (relationships) and trust with participants, in which favours were exchanged between participants and me as a researcher, and both of us were enmeshed within networks of reciprocal obligation (Zhou and Nuens, 2013). In two interviews with IT staff, the participants did not have dinner and lunch before heading for the interview. In these cases, I purchased hamburgers for the participants and waited until they finished the meal to start the interview. This was driven by the Confucian virtue of Ren (benevolence) of concerning about others' well-being, so that I did not just emphasise whether the interview was completed or not. I also cared about participants' health and well-being and adjusted my interview schedules accordingly.

To get the conversation started, I introduced myself and explained the aim of my research to each participants. The anticipated length of the interview was indicated, and interviewees were re-assured all aspects of confidentiality and anonymity and their rights to stop and quit the interview if they feel like to (Rowley, 2012). In some cases where some participants were nervous in the beginning, I did most of the talking for the first few minutes, aiming to relax the informants to ensure a high quality and level of engagement of the rest of the interview (Walsham, 2006). To enhance interviewee engagement, probing questions were asked to allow participants to reflect further on their experiences. Prompts, such as silence, nodding heads, repeating the question, the words such as why, how, and what, were used when necessary to keep the interview moving forward (Rowley, 2012).

Interviews may not always run as smoothly as planned. In some cases, incidents occurred which interrupted the interviews abruptly. This was particularly the case for the interviews with healthcare professionals. For example, in the interviews with one nurse and one doctor, they were called to handle emergencies in the middle of the interviews. In these cases, I had to pause the interviews and waited for over 30 minutes for them to come back and resume the interviews. We resumed and completed the interviews eventually and the interruptions did not seem to present an issue for the interviewees. Zhou and Nunes (2013) suggest that this is not uncommon in a Chinese context, in which people prefer informal and non-standardised approach which permits certain level of flexibility of behaviours. This further implies the need for a relatively flexible form of interview, i.e., semi-structured interview, to cope with unexpected situations. The disruption, however, impacted how I planned the rest of the interview and therefore the depth and richness of the rest of the conversation. The incidents served as symbols that signaled the scarcity of participants' time. When this was combined with the virtue of Ren, I could feel the obligation to complete the interviews so as not to disturb participants' work to avoid causing any negative implications on the interviewees.

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the native language of the participants and myself. This is appropriate and necessary as it maintains the credibility of the research data (Marshall and While, 1994) by allowing the participants to describe their own experience with local views and allowing me to understand the words in context. Therefore, the pre-designed interview questions were translated into Mandarin and interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The length of the interviews ranged between 24 minutes and 80 minutes, with most being about 40 minutes. The length of the interviews was largely determined by the time availability of participants (shorter interviews) and emerging themes that may potentially add valuable insights and thus required probing (longer interviews). In interviews where the participants indicated that they had adequate time (through language), more attempts to probe were made. However, in cases where participants conveyed their time pressure through symbols,

such as by looking at their watch (gesture) constantly, I tried to lose some interaction time in exchange for more minutes to gain insights and finish the interviews without irritating participants (Walsham, 2006). This was guided by the symbolic interactionism perspective, which emphasises the need to pay attention to how symbols were used in social interactions to convey meanings and co-construct a shared understanding. Furthermore, for reasons of clarification, or to gain more information about valuable themes that emerged in the data analysis, some of the participants were contacted a second time after the interview via text or telephone for further confirmation of the viewpoints expressed.

The recordings were then fully transcribed. According to Siedlecki (2022), transcribers need to make many decisions regarding what to include, what to omit, or what to correct, and transcribers should also pay attention to other factors that might be relevant for emerging themes, such as sighs, laughter, or pauses. Transcription involves two key modes, that is, naturalism and denaturalism. In naturalism, each utterance tends to be transcribed in detail, and in denaturalism, idiosincratic factors of speech such as pauses and nonverbals are removed (Oliver et al., 2005). I decided to opt for a naturalised approach, in which 'language represents the real world', hence the transcript is verbatim in format (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1274). This allows a rich description and also provides context that is important for analysing, interpreting, and understanding the data.

The Chinese transcripts were then translated into English for the purpose of reporting and presenting findings. When translating the transcripts, I did not opt for literal equivalence, which implies a literal word-by-word translation, since the cultural and linguistic differences mean that literal equivalance can lead to ambiguious sentences or incomprehensive meanings (Peng and Nunes, 2008; Carlson, 2000). For intance, in one interview, the participant described himself as 'a member of the moon light club'. This caused confusion when my two supervisors were cross-checking the quotes and codes I developed, since they found it difficult to comprehend what it means in English. In Chinese, the word 'moon' can also mean month, and 'light' can mean empty. In this

sense, the 'member of a moon light club' means the participant spent every penny of his salary and has nothing left for his savings. To minimise ambiguity and misunderstanding, I then discussed this term with one of my P.h.D colleagues, and decided to adapt my translation to achieve conceptual equivalence, in which meanings of the text in both versions of transcripts are conceptually the same while not literally equivalent (Peng and Nunes, 2008).

I have been studying in the UK for over 8 years, and I am fluent in both Chinese and English. My nationality as a Chinese is a strength in the translation process, since I can understand the words in context, hence ensure the accuracy of translation and thereafter the credibility of the findings. To further enhance the accuracy of translation, backward translation was also adopted, in that I sent a paragraph (anonymised) I translated to another Chinese person who has been living in the UK since childhood to check if her translation from English back to Chinese matched the content originally expressed by the interviewees. The translation was done directly on the Chinese transcripts, so that I can constantly go back to the original language, thereafter to understand the meanings in its wider context when analysing the data. With details of how the interviews were conducted explained above, the following section discusses how data was analysed using thematic analysis.

3.7 Thematic analysis of interview data

This research used thematic analysis to analyse the data collected. Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p. 808). Thematic analysis can be used with varied data sizes, can be applied to a wide range of topics, and can be used to answer a wide range of research questions (King and Brooks, 2018). As a flexible research tool, thematic analysis offers in-depth and complex account of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In this way, it enables me to gain nuanced understandings of the complexity of sandwich care that was experienced by participants. Before conducting the formal analysis, I

organised the data into appropriate structure. I did this by creating 40 subdirectories containing one Word file for each interview and arranged chunks of text in a way that the answers to a specific question were in one place (Rowley, 2012). Participants' pseudonyms were added to the start of each of their answer, so that it was clear for me to identify who said what. Then I followed the suggestions of Nowell et al. (2017) to conduct data analysis, which involved six main phases: familiarising myself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the thesis.

According to the six-phase approach for a trustworthy thematic analysis of Nowell et al. (2017), the first stage is to familiarise myself with data, which involves repeatedly reading data to search for meanings and patterns. The reason for this is that possible patterns can be identified and shaped as the researcher becomes familiar with all aspects of the raw data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I read and re-read the transcripts multiple times to develop a clear idea regarding what stories the participants were trying to tell. During the familiarising process, I highlighted the phrases or sentences that were interesting and had the potential to lead to emerging themes.

Following data familiarisation, the second phase involves the generation of initial codes from raw data, a process of theorising that requires the researcher to continue revisiting data (Nowell et al., 2017). During this process, I moved from unstructured data to forming ideas about what was happening in the data, identified important sections, and attached labels or codes to them as they were relevant to research questions or theories (King, 2004). The codes and labels developed at this stage adhered faithfully to the terms used by participants (Gioia et al., 2012). At this stage, I adopted an open coding system, which encompassed scrutinising transcripts line by line to identify possible themes (Stern, 1980). This lead to a large number of codes emerged from interviews, and I paid full and equal attention to each data item that could inform the emergence of themes. This is to avoid missing any plausible interpretations of the data. Additionally, Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest to also reflect on missing data by asking what the

participants omitted in their answers to questions. Therefore, attention was paid not only to what interviewees said, but also what they did not say. For example, in answers to the question regarding what participants do in their daily life to take care of parents/parents-in-law and children, most participants did not mention the need to offer physical care to their aging parents and/or parents-in-law. This further informed my interpretation of their caregiving experience as involving mainly other forms of care, such as emotional care, when parents and/or parents-in-law were relatively independent and when they were able to share childcare with participants.

The third stage of thematic analysis includes organising and collating the initial codes into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000, p. 362) define a theme as the 'abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole'. Themes can be developed by sorting fragments of ideas or codes into meaningful terms or categories, and they are dependent on whether it is relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At this stage, I constantly compared the initial codes to each other to check the similarities, differences, and relationships between initial codes and decided which codes could be grouped together to develop higher-level categories or themes. For example, the initial codes such as 'spending time with child', 'telling a story', and 'reading books' were sorted into higher-level category, i.e., 'emotional care to children'. The development of themes was largely determined by what this research strove to achieve and answer. At this stage, I had to simultaneously think at the level of informants by using their terms to develop codes, and think at theoretical level of themes that capture relevant experience (Gioia et al., 2012).

In the fourth stage, the researcher should review the codes or labels for each theme to check whether they appear to form a consistent pattern (Nowell et al., 2017). The credibility of each theme is dependent on its ability to accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This stage is highly related

with the third stage, since once each code and theme has been developed, I constantly checked and re-checked the new code and theme with previously developed ones, to ensure they were distinct while at the same time conveying meaningful information. Frequent comparison at these two stages is essential, as it will not only ensure the consistency of the themes, but also enhance the credibility of the findings in terms of a truthful representation of the phenomenon under researched (Smith, 2007).

In the defining and naming themes phase, the researcher decides 'what aspect of the data each theme captures and identify what is of interest about them and why' (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 10). For example, the theme 'forms of care' captured the different types of caregiving tasks that participants constantly performed in their life, and the theme 'present-future temporal dynamic' was related to the temporality perspective of care, reflecting the fluctuating intensity, and mutual impact between present care and future care. For each theme, I considered how it fit into the overall story of the entire data set in relation to my research questions. During this stage, I constantly reminded myself of the key focus of the research, i.e., what is involved in the care the participants provided, what is the nature of sandwich care, and how participants combine care with work. This was to ensure that each theme captured part of the story and when combined, they represented a comprehensive picture of the experience of the young working sandwich caregivers. Once the researcher can clearly define the scope and content of each theme, they are ready to continue to next stage, otherwise, further refinement is required (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In the final stage, researchers write up the research (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the write-up of a thematic analysis should provide a logical, consistent, accurate, and interesting account of data within and between themes. In the formal thesis, direct quotes and even extensive passages of quotation may be included to illustrate the complexity of the story, and to convince readers of the rigour of the analysis (ibid). Ideally, the researcher will progress from simple description of data or themes to interpretation, in which the researcher attempts to theorise implications of the

patterns and broader meanings by referring to previous literature (King, 2004). Following this suggestion, I integrated findings with discussion, so that I firstly presented the quotes of participants, briefly described what did the quotes mean, and discussed the implications in relation to relevant literature, such as the sandwich care and broader care literature.

Rigourous analysis of data is one of the key elements of research and it is vital to the generation of good evidence (Green et al, 2007). Indeed, I used various protocols to ensure the rigour of this research. The following section explains what has been done throughout the whole research process to ensure research rigour.

3.8 Ensuring research rigour

The establishment of the quality of interpretivist research is largely dependent on the aim of such research. As an interpretivist, I aim to develop 'bottom-up' theories that are 'grounded' in the lived experience of sandwich caregivers, rather than to test previous theories (Cope, 2005, p. 167). As a consequence, rigour permeates the whole research process, i.e., the philosophical underpinnings, methodological choice, data collecection methods, and data analysis techniques (Leitch et al., 2010). To demonstrate research rigour, I will provide adequate detail on the design and conduct of the research in this section (ibid). To do this, it is essential to know how the quality of qualitative research is evaluated.To show the efforts made to ensure the rigour and quality of this research, the following refers to the four criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

In qualitative research, rigour and trust is usually built through four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Firstly, *credibility* is the component that enables others to recognise the research phenomenon under investigation through interpretation of interviewees' experience (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). A credible qualitative research requires that researchers to present a detailed description and interpretation of the experienced phenomenon (Krefting, 1991;

Hussey and Hussey, 1997). To achieve this, data collection and interpretation should be conducted in a systematical and rigourous manner (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Specifically, to gain insights into sandwich caregiving, I sought richness of participants' experiences through qualitative semi-structured interviews, which was based on the nature of the research topic and aims. Additionally, I strove to maintain a consistency between what is meant by participants and what is understood and interpreted by researcher (Bonache and Festing, 2020). To enhance mutual understanding, I explained the aim of my research to each participant, i.e., to understand their experience in sandwich caregiving and how they combine caregiver role with work role (Sandberg, 2005). To further understand how sandwich caregiving was differently and individually experienced, different level of probing was achieved through the use of follow-up questions in cases where elaborations were needed. These follow-up questions included: 'could you please explain that for me?', 'can you give me an example?', and 'what do you mean by saying that?'.

The ontological and epistemological assumption of interpretivism and symbolic interactionism is that reality and knowledge is not only subjectively created, but also inter-subjectively created with others (Goldkuhl, 2012; Darby et al., 2019). Hence, to make sure my knowledge claims reflected what was experienced by participants, I discussed my findings with my two supervisors. By discussing the findings with my supervisors, the knowledge about participants' experience can be refined. For example, when describing the need of some participants to interpret for their parents and/or parents-in-law, who were illiterate or semi-illiterate, we agreed to label this care form as lingual care, since it concerned mainly language use. My research results were also further refined in a cluster seminar held at the University of Glasgow, at the British Academy of Management doctoral symposium, and in seminars held by NanKai University, in which feedback about the research were collected.

Besides credibility, the quality and rigour of interpretivist research is also built through transferability. *Transferability* refers to the applicability of a research findings to other

contexts or with other participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Thomas and Magilvy (2011), transferability can be built through an intensive description of the target population by depicting the demographic and geographic boundaries of the research. To do this, I had set clear criteria before targeting the studied population, so as to include both men and women aged between 20 and 39, who worked full-time and have at least one child and one parent/parent-in-law in the Chinese Confucian context. Theoretical and practical rationales for the sampling criteria were considered at the planning stage, which also guided the sample sourcing and data collection process .

Dependability occurs when other researchers 'can follow the decision trail used by the researcher' (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011, p. 153). A certain level of dependability is essential in qualitative research as it endorses the authenticity of the research (Schwandt, 2001), and this can be achieved by a set of interrelated and inseparable processes. These processes involve 1. A description of the purpose of the research; 2. Justification for choice of informants and sampling methods; 3. A clear explanation on how data was collected, detailed information of interview process; 4. A discussion of how data was analysed; 5. A discussion of interpretation and findings; 6. A clear statement of what techniques were used to examine the quality of the research (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). These had been clearly addressed and justified in the above sections in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Lastly, *confirmability* in qualitative research is based on the achievement of credibility, transferability, and dependability. Qualitative research should be reflexive, and researchers should maintain an open attitude to the study and upcoming findings. Reflexivity means that a researcher should have a critical attitude about how their own values and bias may impact the research, therefore, the interpretation of lived experience does not just reflect the value, belief, bias, and assumptions of the researcher (Bonache and Festing, 2020). To do this, researchers need to achieve interpretative awareness, in which researchers are aware of their 'taken-for-granted frameworks'

(Sandberg, 2005, p. 58). My personal experience of being a hidden caregiver enabled me to target a group of working sandwich caregivers whose caregiving experience has not yet been recognised by scholars or practitioners. The distinct forms of care that I provided (usually technological, lingual, and emotional care) allowed me to understand and recognise the lived experience of my participants, who tended to have similar experiences. In this way, my past experience of providing hidden forms of care is an advantage, as this enabled me to comprehend the struggles my participants are experiencing in managing work and caregiving roles. However, I also strived to maintain a critical stance (Burr, 1995), so that I did not take things for granted due to my own experiences. Following the guidelines of Thomas and Magilvy (2011), I maintained an open attitude to the unfolding results by distancing myself from what I wrote in the literature review when analysing and presenting data. In this way, I avoided the situation in which I simply sought themes that would confirm my arguments in the literature review, to instead allow the emergence of new themes. During the interviews, I made conscious efforts to not to lead the participants, but to follow the flow of the interviews through probing questions and asking participants for clarification in cases of ambiguity. Moreover, I constantly and deliberately search for differences and contradictions rather than just similarities in lived experience.

Good quality research not only adopts strategies to ensure rigour, but also takes ethical issues into consideration before, during, and after data collection. The following section discusses the steps followed to address ethical issues, thereby ensuring the truthfulness of the data and the research overall.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues exist in any research and they need to be anticipated throughout the whole research process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Attention needs to be paid to ethical issues before conducting the research, at the beginning of the research and during the

planning stage, at the stage of collecting and analysing data, and in interpreting, presenting, and storing the research data (ibid). Careful ethical considerations are essential for the truthfulness of research findings and to protect the participants from social, psychological, and even physical harm (Saunders et al., 2009; Lipson, 1994). The UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has recommended researchers follow six ethical principles when conducting research (Carpenter, 2018):

1. Maximising benefit for individuals and society and minimising risk and harm.
2. Respecting the rights and dignity of individuals.
3. Ensuring participants are fully informed and participation should be voluntary.
4. Ensuring research integrity and conducting research transparently.
5. Defining the lines of responsibility and accountability.
6. Maintaining independence of research and declaring conflicts of interest.

During the interview process, psychological disturbance may occur due to factors such as research abuse (Gerrard, 1995), e.g., when participants feel pressured to share when they did not feel like to. In this regard, interviews need to be carefully planned and conducted to avoid harm to participants. Ethical approval from the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow was gained before data collection. Several protocols were adopted to minimise harm: Firstly, I designed the research questions carefully to not pressurising participants into recalling traumatic experiences. Secondly, interviews were mainly conducted in public areas to ensure safety of both participants and me. I always made sure there were no hazardous objects in the interview venues that may be harmful for the health and safety of participants and me. Moreover, a certain level of privacy was ensured in the venues of interviews, such as the corners of coffee shops, to prevent participants from feeling that their thoughts or opinions would be heard and judged by other people around. Thirdly, I paid special attention to ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of participants' personal data and research data

(Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Information from the participants was safely stored in password protected files on my personal computer. All the participants were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. Before conducting the interviews, informed consent was gained from all of the interviewees. Consent forms, participant information sheet, and a privacy notice were emailed to all of the participants before the interview. Therefore, before commencing any interview, I ensured that all of the participants were informed of the purpose of the research, data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, their rights and their free choice to end the interview and withdraw from the research if they wished to, and the measures taken to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. All interviewees were read the informed consent before start of interviews, their oral consent was gained and I sought to obtain their permission to audio recording before proceeding to formal interviews. Interviews proceeded only with those participants who agreed to the audio recording.

3.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter discussed how the research aims were addressed. The methodological choices I made were underpinned by the research aims set out in Chapter 2 and the ontological and epistemological assumptions of myself as an interpretivist. The discussion highlighted the opportunities symbolic interactionism brought in obtaining nuances of sandwich care. Additionally, this chapter marked the necessity to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants to gain in-depth and context-bound knowledge of how young working sandwich caregivers in China perceive, interpret, and attach meanings to sandwich care and work. The interviews were carefully planned and carried out, with ethical considerations taken into account. The approach to data analysis was strictly followed with more interventions in hand to ensure research rigour. The research aims and the interpretive strand of symbolic interactionism guided what is to follow in participants' description of their caregiving experience. Importantly, attention was paid to how participants talked about the care they provided, the interactions with others, their impression management behaviours, and how they define

roles from others' and their own perspectives.

The following three chapters answer the research questions: 1. What is involved in the care that Chinese young working sandwich caregivers provide? 2. How the young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role? The first research question will be addressed in the Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, with the former concerns the dimensions of sandwich care participants performed in their daily life, and the latter concerns the relational nature of sandwich care. The second research question will be addressed in Chapter 6, which discusses how the participants exert agency to combine care with work through perspective of impression management. The gendered nature of sandwich caregiving will be integrated throughout the three chapters and Confucianism will be deployed as a cultural lens to interpret participants' meanings and actions.

Chapter 4: Dimensions of sandwich care

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the dimensions of sandwich care, and answers the first research question, i.e., what is involved in the care that Chinese young working sandwich caregivers provide. To obtain nuances of how sandwich care was experienced, this chapter firstly unpacks the forms of care that participants perform to their aging parents/parents-in-law and children. The discussion then explains how participants combined the different forms in caregiving to parents/parents-in-law and children, followed by the temporality dimension of sandwich care. The gendered nature of care will also be discussed in this chapter, and this chapter investigates the gendered nature in terms of the different caring tasks that male and female participants performed.

4.2 Sandwich care as caring tasks to be performed

The findings show that sandwich care involves performing a variety of caring tasks to both parents/parents-in-law and children, and these tasks can take different forms. The following subsection hence illustrates the forms of care that participants provided in their daily life.

4.2.1 The different forms that care takes

The interviews indicate that sandwich care involves provision of different care forms to family members. Of these forms, the most tangible one is physical care that involves supports related to daily living activities and daily life, i.e., nursing care and daily care (Lam, 2006). This was particularly required when participants had highly dependent children or when the parents and/or parents-in-law were sick. For example, HeHe, the female editor with one child, explained the physical care she performed to her dependent son, so that it involved:

Everything, including all kinds of daily living activities, like bathing, dressing, and toileting…cooking…buying essentials for my son…

She further added that nursing care was also needed for her sick mother:

…last time my mom was really sick, I took 2 weeks off from work to look after her in the hospital.

HeHe's and many participants' experience of physical care has also been similarly experienced by sandwich caregivers in an elder age group (e.g., Guberman et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2022; Falkingham et al., 2020; Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020). Although different scholars tend to label physical care differently, such as 'big caring activities' (Souralová and Žáková; 2019, p. 2632) or hands on tasks (Burke, 2017), the concrete tasks performed by caregivers tend to be similar, as reported by HeHe.

Despite a variety of physical care activities, financial care (any financial or material support) also covers a broad range of activities, such as 'giving monetary gifts', 'paying for food/groceries', 'giving living fees', 'paying for services (e.g., insurance or therapy)', and 'paying for tuition fees'. One important theme emerged from the findings is that care receivers were said to be varied in their ability to have income or savings to cover their daily expenditures. Some participants indicated that their parents and/or in-laws were unemployed and retired, and thus sometimes have difficulties in having adequate financial resources to cover their living expenses. For instance, JingKe, the male teacher with one child, suggested the need to offer financial care on a constant basis to his parents who were said to be financially dependent:

Because we are from the countryside, most parents don't have pensions, and they have...like my parents, they have a little bit of pension from the insurance they bought, but the amount is not very high. So, we need to bring gifts when we visit our parents and give them living fees. I will also give additional money during big festivals or events.

Along with the need to give living fees to parents, JingKe also mentioned the need to pay for his parents-in-law's medical treatment when they were hospitalised due to sickness:

> *When my parents-in-law got sick, I provided nursing care and paid for their medical treatments.*

JingKe's provision of financial care to his parents and parents-in-law was impacted by the wider socio-economic environment of China. The economy of rural areas of China is less developed and the labour force participation rate is lower than in urban areas (Wang and Zhang, 2018). Without adequate employment opportunities, it can be difficult for some parents and/or parents-in-law from rural areas to have a pension at retirement age so as to guarantee the quality of later life. Therefore, JingKe told of the need to offer financial care to ensure his financially dependent parents and parents-in-law have adequate financial resources to cover their daily living expenses and medical treatments.

The interview data further portrays that sandwich care is not solely about provision of tangible forms of care, i.e., physical care and financial care to family members. The need to provide emotional care, which means 'maintaining or holding family members in affection, love, and esteem' (Kwok, 2006, p. 262), has been acknowledged by all participants. The findings indicate that emotional care includes activities that need relatively intensive interactions between caregivers and care receivers, such as 'playing with' children and 'take children out to explore the world' (LingDong, male bank manager, one child), 'reading books together', 'day excursion with whole family [parents, wife, and child]', and 'visiting parents or parents-in-law' (ZhaoZhi, male director of a bank, one child). Additionally, emotional care can take the form of little activities that many participants 'just' do, such as 'daily communication', 'companionship', 'having dinner together', 'making phone call/video chat', or 'listening to family members' opinions'. The identification of emotional care, and particularly the little activities, suggests that care do not always need to be tangible,

instrumental, or as big as physical and financial care. Instead, it can involve the less tangible little activities that people just do, which 'very often go unnoticed' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2632).

The findings of the provision of physical, financial, and emotional forms of care are consistent with most existing sandwich care research (e.g., Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020; Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Falkingham et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2021). The genuine forms of care that this research identified are the technological care and lingual care, something remain hidden with current research focused exclusively on the physical, financial, and emotional forms of care.

Technological care that participants provided involves assistance to help their family members in using online systems (e.g., online banking, online shopping), devices (e.g., help with printing documents), or self-service machines. CunCun's example demonstrated how her mother-in-law was said to experience difficulties in using online systems and self-service machines, compelled her to offer technological care in order for her mother-in-law to get things done:

> *Maybe like physical examination or sometimes she [her mother-in-law] got sick, I need to take her to the hospital. Because she is not familiar with the procedures in hospital, many of the services now have been digitalised. Hence I need to do something for her, such as making an appointment online.* (CunCun, female accountant, one child)

Family members who were said to need technological care usually experience difficulties in using digitalised systems particularly in institutions like hospitals or banks, where most activities had moved towards self-service due to technological advancements. This required some participants like CunCun to commit a certain amount of time to offer technological care, in forms of assistances in making appointments, using online banking, or training their family members in using the systems.

The impact of technology on the caregiving experience has not yet received adequate attention in sandwich care research. However, technology has transformed and will continue to transform the way people do their work. Organisations around the globe increasingly deploy various technologies to enhance daily operations, changing the nature of work and thereby the skills needed (Deloitte-Insights, 2022). This requires not only employees but also customers to have essential skills and knowledge in order to use those systems. Technology is omnipresent in working life, whereas the elderly (especially those who are out of work) may not be as familiar with it. The interviews provide evidence of this phenomenon. Besides CunCun, other participants also talked about how their parents and/or parents-in-law experienced difficulties in using technologies implemented by institutions such as hospitals and banks, requiring them to offer technological care on a constant basis. Therefore, to fully understand participants' caring experience against the backdrop of technological advancements and digitalisation, it is essential to include a technological care.

Some participants further suggested that their family members were in need of lingual care due to the experienced difficulties to read, communicate, and understand the official language, Mandarin in this case. For example, WuTai, a man with one child working for a governmental institution, explained that his parents relied on him to explain physical examination results, and to communicate with doctors due to difficulties they had in communicating and understanding Mandarin:

> *My parents have a low level of literacy education [primary school not completed], they cannot really communicate with doctors in Mandarin, they cannot read or understand prescriptions or test results, and do not know how things work in hospitals... They need us to accompany them to the hospital and need us to make appointments for them.*

The level of education of care receivers shaped some participants' caregiving experience. In WuTai's case, a low level of literacy education of his parents had led to

difficulties in reading or communicating in the official language. This implies that in cases where knowledge of the official language was essential, such as dealing with hospitals or banks, WuTai would have to offer lingual care, which means reading and communicating on behalf of his lingually dependent parents.

Similar to technological care, lingual care also remains hidden in the existing sandwich care literature. Some scholars have recognised the need for the sandwich caregivers to provide communication assistance to care receivers, such as making phone calls, or contacting various agencies (e.g., Evans et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2021; Suh, 2016). These authors, nevertheless, have failed to elaborate further on whether communication assistance is needed due to difficulties of using language, or physical reasons that dependents were experiencing such as hearing problems. Without teasing out the reasons behind care receivers' needs for help with communication, many scholars in the field of sandwich care research tend to assume that care receivers all have the ability to use the official language. However, this is not always the case and the lingual care is highly relevant to research sandwich care in the Chinese context.

Statistics have shown that in 1982, 22.8% of the total Chinese population aged above 15 were illiterate or semi-illiterate. In 1987, 1.4% of China's total population had attained a university degree, while in developed countries such as Europe and the United States, the proportion was above 10% during the same time period (Lu, 1995). These statistics imply that a large number of adults born before the 1960s in China are still experiencing difficulties in using the official language, and thus requiring their adult children to provide assistance in reading and communicating in Mandarin. Although this is no longer an issue for the younger generation in contemporary Chinese society, an evaluation of the young working sandwich caregivers' experience in taking care of their aging parents and/or parents-in-law (who are mainly born in the 1960s and earlier) must not neglect the influence of education.

Together, the above findings contribute to furthering current knowledge of the working

sandwich caregivers' experience. Through symbolic interactionism, this research invited the participants to define what was involved in the care they provided. The findings of this research demonstrate clearly that sandwich care not only involves the tangible forms of care, i.e., physical care and financial care, but also includes the usually unnoticed (emotional care) and hidden forms of care, i.e., technological, and lingual care. The identification of the technological and lingual care suggests that there are more to care than physical, financial, and emotional care (see e.g., Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Falkingham et al., 2020; Jang et al., 2021), that remain hidden and underdeveloped. The findings of this research hence have the potential to make a sizable portion of sandwich caregivers' status visible by identifying and recognising the hidden forms of care they are providing. In this way, this research reinforces the need to treat care and caregiver role as flexible, individually defined and experienced (Blumer, 1969; Biddle, 1986), rather than static elements that can be universally applied to different people.

The findings surrounding financial, technological, and lingual care further imply that sandwich care is historically and contextually embedded. In other words, care receivers' experience of the difficulties in securing financial income, communicating in the official language, and using technology, needs to be understood in relation to the particular socio-economic structure of particular context at a particular time. That is, the high illiteracy and unemployment rates in some areas of China when the elderly parents and/or parents-in-law were at school and working age, greatly impacted what care forms to be provided. Sandwich care is historically situated since with changes in the wider socio-economic environment, the content and nature of sandwich care can evolve over time and space. In another words, by the time the working sandwich caregivers themselves become care receivers in the future, they may not have much lingual or financial needs with enhanced literacy rate and employment rate in China. However, other types of needs may arise, contingent on the factors in the wider environment, requiring the provision of other forms of care to satisfy the new needs. Therefore, sandwich care is not a fixed or static phenomenon, instead, our

understandings of the experience of working sandwich caregivers must be temporally defined and open to revision as time goes by.

The above discussion highlighted that participants provided multiple forms of care in their daily life. This, however, does not mean that younger children, aging parents, and/or parents-in-law of participants will require same forms of care at the same time. Indeed, research findings reveal a pattern of participants' caregiving experience, such that in daily caregiving, some forms of care were more needed by children, while other forms of care were more needed by aging parents and/or parents-in-law. The following subsection thus articulates the pattern of sandwich caregiving experienced by participants.

4.2.2 The pattern of sandwich caregiving

Over the course of the interviews, it became increasingly apparent that there existed similarities and differences in the forms of care participants offered to children and aging parents/parents-in-law. That is, when it comes to childcare, some forms of care were more commonly mentioned than other forms. One of the most commonly mentioned forms of care to children was physical care. For example, ZhuangZhuang, the female civil servant with two children, mentioned the need for her to provide physical care to both of her dependent sons:

> *Both of my sons are relatively young and I still need to take care of them. For example, I need to put them to bed…anyway, it includes every aspect, like, dressing, feeding, sleeping, and travelling.*

ZhuangZhuang's provision of daily physical care to her dependent sons was similarly experienced by many other participants who had relatively dependent children.

A further analysis of the interview data reveals that many also performed emotional care on a daily basis to their dependent children. For example, QingQing, a female civil

servant with one child, suggested that besides the need to provide physical care, emotional care in the form of companionship was important for her to enhance intimacy with and the 'sense of security' of her 2-year-old son:

> *To take care of my son, I think it is companionship. Because he is only two years old and is still quite sensitive, the sense of security is also very important for him. If I have time, I will go home and spend a lot of time with him. Although he sleeps with me at night, after all he is asleep all night, we have just two or three hours before he goes to bed. If the relationship is not well developed, I am afraid that he won't have any sense of security.* (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

Emotional care was not only considered important for highly dependent children, but also perceived essential for school-age children:

> *I think it is really important that I spend time with my son…high-quality companionship is really important…it is not just like staying together, while he does his own things and I play on my iPhone…what I mean by high-quality is…that there is a high level of interaction between us, we do some exercises together, play games together, or we can read together…*(ShuYun, female administrator, one child)

For ShuYun's son, who was at school age (seven years old), ShuYun did not mention the need to offer physical care, such as feeding, toileting, bathing, and dressing. Instead, what was considered important was the provision of emotional care, which involved intensive interactions between ShuYun and her son rather than simply 'staying together'.

ShuYun and QingQing's examples indicate that emotional care is required regardless of children's age, or whether participants' children were dependent or not in their daily living activities. In this way, emotional care is usually combined with physical care in the process of caregiving to dependent children, and it can be provided on its own when it comes to school age children who have certain level of independency in their daily living activities.

When it comes to eldercare, the forms of care provided tend to be different to childcare:

> *For my parents, I feel ashamed since I did not really pay much attention to them… maybe when they got sick… otherwise, it will mainly be daily communication, since we live together.* (ShengKai, male IT manager, one child)

For ShengKai, physical care was only essential when his independent parents got sick. In terms of the emotional care that ShengKai provided to his parents, it tends to be little activities that often went unnoticed, rather than the intensive interactions many would have with their children.

Besides emotional care, other forms of care were also constantly provided to healthy and independent parents and/or parents-in-law:

> *My mother may need my help in things like, transferring money for her online, or printing some documents for her, since she is doing some courses. She doesn't need my help in things like travelling, dressing, sleeping, or eating. But she constantly needs me to buy something for her online, go to the hairdresser, or go shopping with her…and I give her 1000-2000 yuan each month as living fees…* (HuiFang, female HR manager, one child)

According to HuiFang, her mother was relatively independent hence the provision of physical care to her mother was not required. However, this does not mean that her mother does not need care in her daily life. Other forms of care continued on a constant basis, such that HuiFang provided monthly financial care to her mother and constantly offer technological care when required, along with the provision of emotional care. This echoes the findings of Lam's (2006) qualitative research, which discovered that whether care receivers have high or low level of dependency, participants still performed some forms of care, such as emotional care. This research supplemented that besides emotional care, financial care and technological care are also essential when parents and/or parents-in-law are physically independent in their daily life.

Physical care to parents and/or parents-in-law, although not required on a daily or constant basis, became essential when parents and/or parents-in-law got sick:

…taking care of my parents… it is to do with taking them to the hospital if they are sick. When they were not feeling well, and I was not able to offer some advice from a professional perspective…Then I became a driver, like, I needed to take them to the hospital. In addition to being a driver…I need to stay with them and do something for them when they need…Otherwise, if the only thing that I do is dropping them off at the hospital, taxi drivers can also do this. I must do something more, something that allow them to rely on me psychologically, make myself reliable and dependable for them... Usually, it is like nursing care, or do some cooking and buying some essentials… (XiaoLiang, male teacher, one child)

Caregiving to XiaoLiang's sick parents involved a complex combination of different forms of care at a time and was more than a purely instrumental act such as dropping sick parents off at hospital or purchasing essentials. Along with physical and financial forms of care, XiaoLiang also felt the need to be 'there to help' so as to make himself 'reliable and dependable' therefore to offer 'a sense of safety' to his sick parents.

In cases where parents and/or parents-in-law suffered from life-threatening diseases, a high level of physical care can be needed:

This is inevitable… For example, one year, my father-in-law suffered from coronary heart disease and he needed an operation. He was quite heavy and others couldn't help with this…I just had to ask for few days off to take care of him. I had offered nursing care during the day and night for three days, and I had to rearrange my work and asked someone else to cover for me. (JingKe, the male teacher, one child)

Compared to XiaoLiang, JingKe's provision of physical care to his father-in-law, who suffered from life-threatening disease was more than 'being there to help'. It tends to be high intense and was provided on a continuous basis for few days. Altogether, the interview data suggests that the needs of care receivers according to their health status

significantly decide the level of care, particularly physical care, that is demanded (Verbakel et al., 2018; Young and Kahana, 1995). Situational factors such as care receivers' high level of dependency translates into demands for high level caregiving efforts and more time spent on caregiving responsibilities (van Campen et al., 2013; Leigh, 2010; van den Berg et al., 2014; Young and Kahana, 1995). The findings of this thesis add that besides high level of caregiving efforts required to provide physical care, more forms of care are also considered essential when family members become dependent due to sickness.

In the sandwich care field, a consensus has been reached that sandwich caregivers need to perform physical, financial, and emotional care to both their aging parents and children (e.g., O'Sullivan, 2014; Jang et al., 2021; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Dautzenberg et al., 1999). However, limited knowledge has been gained regarding the caregiving pattern of sandwich caregivers in the younger age group, i.e., those between 20 and 39 years old, given that exclusive research attention has been paid to sandwich caregivers aged above 40 years old (e.g., O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Gans et al., 2013; Falkingham et al., 2020; McGarrigle et al., 2014). The findings of this research articulate that for sandwich caregivers in the younger age group, physical care tends to be offered to dependent children, particularly pre-school age children, on a daily and constant basis. In childcare giving, emotional care is considered as important as physical care, and it is usually combined with physical care to dependent children and on its own when it comes to caregiving to school-age children. In terms of eldercare performed by young sandwich caregivers, it usually involves a combination of financial, technological, lingual, and emotional care on a constant basis. Although there is no need to provide physical care to healthy and independent parents/parents-in-law in their daily life, it is still considered necessary particularly when parents/parents-in-law lose their autonomy in looking after themselves due to sickness or life-threatening diseases. Therefore, care receivers' physical dependency tends to impact the provision of physical care, while exerting limited influence on the provision of other care forms. Other forms of care, particularly emotional care, financial care, and hidden forms of

care, continue regardless of whether care receivers are dependent or not in their daily living activities. In this way, sandwich care involves an ongoing care provision. It does not stop and is underpinned by a complex combination of a variety of care forms to both children and aging parents/parents-in-law.

The above showed that caregiving experience of the Chinese young sandwich caregivers involves a complex combination of tangible forms of care, i.e., physical and financial care, the usually unnoticed (emotional care), and hidden forms of care, i.e., technological, and lingual care. However, the extensive scholarly attention being paid to the tangible elements of care (e.g., McGarrigle et al., 2014; O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Albertini et al., 2022; Jang et al., 2021) undermines the significance of the unnoticed and hidden forms of care in shaping sandwich caregivers' experience (Patterson and Margolis, 2019). The interview data, indeed, uncovers that the unnoticed and hidden forms of care are perceived as important as the tangible forms of care to both caregivers and care receivers. The following subsection discusses the importance of unnoticed and hidden forms of care this research identified.

4.2.3 The need to go beyond tangible forms of care

The interviews illustrate that neglecting the hidden forms of care, such as technological and lingual care, can generate negative implications for care receivers. This involved unmet needs of family members, particularly parents and/or parents-in-law who are illiterate or semi-illiterate:

> *My mother-in-law did not go to school when she was young, hence there is something she cannot do by herself. She never goes to the bank or hospital on her own. For example, if she needs to do something in the bank, like transferring money, I will get it done for her. If she needs to go to the hospital, we need to go with her. Since this can be quite difficult for her…* (XiaoFang, female vice director of a bank, one child)

According to XiaoFang, her mother-in-law relied on her particularly in activities that required the use of Mandarin due to limited level of education. The perceived difficulty her mother-in-law experienced in using official language means that if left alone and the need to provide lingual care was neglected, XiaoFang's mother-in-law cannot get things done in the bank or get proper medical treatment in the hospital when needed.

Provision of lingual care can be time-consuming, particularly when it is combined with physical care to dependent family members:

> *My parents cannot go to the doctor on their own. Each time they need to go to the hospital, we need to go with them…My mother had been hospitalised for half a year, and she felt she had burdened her family members a lot. Then she committed a suicide.* (WuTai, male civil servant, one child)

WuTai's case indicated that when combined with physical care, lingual care had the potential to be high intense care when his mother was hospitalised for a long period of time due to illness. Being present with his mother in the hospital to provide lingual care and physical care inevitably took time away from work and other role responsibilities. According to WuTai, this reliance on him to provide continuous and long-term physical care and lingual care generated psychological implications on his mother, who committed suicide to relieve her family members from perceived burdensome caregiving.

Despite the impacts on care receivers, unmet emotional needs due to the oversight of emotional care can cause chain effects on the whole family such as strained familial relationships:

> *I was thinking today, why we don't have any conflict during weekdays, while different kinds of conflicts arise on weekends. In fact, everyone has accumulated a lot of loneliness and emotions in their daily life, once there is a chance to get together, they will slowly show these emotions. Hence, at this time, I need to solve it wisely…Maybe listen to them [family members] and allow them to express their*

opinions. After all, they need to be recognised and they need to be affirmed by family members. (LuoHong, female business support manager, one child)

The above discussed that emotional care, particularly the little activities, usually goes unnoticed. In LuoHong's example, the oversight of emotional care provision to her physically independent family members had caused familial conflicts due to the accumulated negative emotions in their daily life. To resolve familial conflicts and satisfy family members' emotional needs, performance of emotional care through activities such as listening to family members, was considered by LuoHong as essential.

Not being able to provide emotional care can further generate negative implications for the well-being of caregivers. The findings indicate that failing to provide emotional care to family members can cause a psychological burden on some participants due to the feeling of guilty:

> *I don't think I am a good mother, since I don't accompany my son that much every day. I really envy those full-time mothers…like, I can spend a lot of time with him, I can watch him growing up, see what frustration he has, and educate him. For people like us who are working, we can only leave my son to be taken care by my in-laws. We ourselves have very little time to educate our children. Hence, I think I am not a good mother…similarly, I am not a good daughter. I owed them [parents] a lot and I did not do much for them. I left home after junior high school, spending very little time with them.* (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing experienced the 'sandwich guilt' when she was unable to satisfy the emotional needs of both her parents and child due to work responsibilities. This indicates that emotional care was one of the main parts of her caregiving experience at the stage when parents were relatively young, hence were physically independent, and when her dependent child was taken care of physically by independent in-laws. Hence, similar to QingQing, most felt obligated to not only look after their parents and children physically, but also to provide adequate emotional care to maintain familial

relationships.

The discussion of sandwich guilt is lacking in existing sandwich care literature (e.g., Hammer and Neal, 2008; Pines et al., 2011; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Guberman et al., 2012; Bastawrous et al., 2015; Manor, 2021; Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Keene and Prokos, 2007). Some participants' experience of sandwich guilt needs to be understood through the cultural lens of Confucianism. In a Confucian society, family caregiving to children and parents is the norm and this is reinforced by the Confucian value of WuLun and filial piety, which requires parents to show love and adult children to look after parents when they need (Woods and Lamond, 2011). The findings of this thesis show that caregiving to parents/parents-in-law and children not only means taking care of parents/parents-in-law and children physically, but also involves providing financial, technological, lingual, and emotional care. In a Confucian society, not being able to fulfil children's and parents' and/or in-laws' needs (be they financial, emotional, lingual, technological, or physical) can be considered by participants themselves and others as violating the six cardinal virtues of being Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin, and Xiao. Additionally, the experienced sandwich guilt for not fulfilling family members' needs further implies that in a Confucian context, the sandwich caregivers' burden is not only related to actual care provided in terms of the time or energy spent on caring tasks. The psychological burden can also arise from participants' inability to satisfy care receivers' needs according to cultural expectations. From this perspective, sandwich care is culturally-bounded. It contains 'a set of implicit cultural practices' (Tronto, 1993, p. 132-133) and is a display of 'cultural performance' reflecting cultural values in a specific context (Funk, 2012; Alexander, 2004; Moody, 2008).

The above discussion demonstrated the importance of unnoticed and hidden care forms from both caregiver and care receivers' perspectives. This reinforces the need to go beyond the conventional understandings of sandwich care as involving only tangible care forms, i.e., the physical and financial care, and instead to explore how hidden forms

of care shape caregiving. So far, the discussion highlighted the opportunities brought by symbolic interactionism in terms of comprehending the complexity of sandwich care as a historically, contextually, and culturally situated phenomenon. By rejecting care as a universally understood and static reality, this thesis captured the dynamic nature through perspective of symbolic interactionism. The dynamic nature of care gives rise to the temporal orientation in terms of differences in time spent on the different forms of care. Temporality was also present in other ways in the findings, as the following section shows.

4.3 The temporal orientation of the sandwich care

The findings show that caring needs are changing rather than static or fixed. They fluctuate so that care receivers can have high caring demands sometimes (for instance due to sickness or life-threatening diseases) and low caring needs at other times, such as when parents/parents-in-law and/or children have received medical treatments. Participants spent more hours on caregiving when care intensity increased, and committed less time on caregiving when care intensity decreased. The interviews further suggest that the changing care intensity was relevant not only for physical care, but also for other forms of care identified above. The case of LiuWen, a male market researcher with one child, provided an example of how technological care intensity varied over time:

> *I have not yet taught them [his parents] how to use online booking systems of different hospitals. Usually, we will make the appointments for them. However, once we train them, they will know how it works, like…making appointments through the phone…*

The need to provide technological care was said to arise when parents had limited knowledge regarding, for example, how to make medical appointments online. This required LiuWen to either make appointments on his parents' behalf, or to train them on relevant technological skills. After receiving LiuWen's training, this specific need

for technological care would diminish. Parents who received training would gain some knowledge of the technology, and would thereafter be relatively independent in using the system. This can free up LiuWen from offering repetitive technological care in using the same system in the future. However, it is likely that in terms of using other or newer technologies for which the parents have not received training before, the need to offer technological care would re-emerge. Therefore, the need to provide care arises and disappears over time, demanding varying level of time and energy commitment from participants in order to provide relevant care.

What the fluctuating caring needs show is that caregiving is not only *instant,* but that participants also have to plan for what *future* care will be needed. The interviews show that participants considered caring needs that their children and aging parents/parents-in-law have at present, and will have in the future. The co-existence of present and future care compels some to anticipate future caregiving burden at an early stage. As LingLing, a female civil servant with one child, explained, she needed to save up financial resources in order to cover both current expenses of her first child, and future eldercare and childcare expenditure if she has a second child:

> *When I was single, just graduated from school and got a job, I only needed to support my own life using the salary I earned…Then, after giving birth to my daughter…I decreased a lot of my own consumption...I used to think that it is fine to buy a skirt of, maybe one or two thousand yuan in the shopping mall. Now I will need to consider a lot. I am not just thinking about what I want, I need to consider more…I must think about if my parents get old…Or if they get sick, do I have adequate money…for them to pay for medical treatments. Or what if I have another child? I must change to a bigger flat... I need a lot of money for that. Thinking about this, I will just leave the skirt and won't buy anything.*

Sandwiched by childcare and eldercare has both present and future financial implications. Although the parents and/or parents-in-law of most participants were relatively young, several participants like LingLing said that they need to shore up

financial resources so as to be prepared to pay for future medical treatments of parents and/or in-laws. Additionally, in cases of potential changes to the family structure, such as having another child, LingLing further indicated the need to reduce consumption and save up *now* in order to cover *potential* expenses accrued if having a second child.

Still, temporal changes to sandwich caregiving are predictable, to a certain degree. Participants generally assumed that it would take around 10 to 20 years for care intensity, specifically in the physical care dimension, to gradually move from their children towards their parents and/or parents-in-law:

> *Currently at our age, our parents are around 60 years old, the 60s are still an age that is not... They have not reached that level where we have to take care of them every minute or hour. Maybe after 10 years, when they are getting older...* (XiaoFang, female vice director of a bank, one child)

Under normal circumstances, for example without accidents or incidents causing sudden physical harm to the younger and/or older generation, the care intensity (mainly physical care) will move steadily from the children towards the elder generation since children gradually require less care (especially physical care), while the dependency level of the elder generation gradually increases, requiring more care in different forms. Knowing this trend, most participants are able to anticipate and strategically accumulate relevant resources in the present in order to be prepared for future expected high intensity care for parents and/or parents-in-law.

Despite some predictability, there is nevertheless a certain level of uncertainty throughout the lifespan of being a working sandwich caregiver. First of all, the dependency level of children is one of the uncertainties:

> *When my children grow up, they need to work... When it is time for them to get married, I have to...Chinese-style parents will need to consider... for daughters, they need to prepare a dowry and for sons, they will need to prepare a house before they get married. I need to provide financial support for their weddings, things like*

that… At that time, the pressure might be greater than it is now… Although I am
able to juggle all these at the moment, maybe after 10 or 20 years, we won't have
so much energy, while our parents are getting old and our children have grown up,
the burden will be heavier at that time. (XiaoFang, female vice director of a bank,
one child)

By the time XiaoFang will arrive at a time of perceived equilibrium in career and family
life, she may be surprised to find out that her grown-up child still has caring needs.
Thus, XiaoFang may still be squeezed by childcare and eldercare at a later age since
her grown-up child will still be dependent, while her parents have moved from
autonomy to a degree of dependence. XiaoFang constructed a possible *future*
experience based on the likelihood that offering material support to grown-up child will
be combined with high-intensity physical care to elderly parents. Besides the changing
situation of her parents, XiaoFang's own situation is also changing due to gradual loss
of youth and her own aging. Therefore, in 10-20 years' time, XiaoFang expects to
encounter greater stress than she is facing now. This can be read in light of Miller's
(1981) proposition that being sandwiched by childcare and eldercare exposes sandwich
caregivers 'to a unique set of unshared stresses in which giving of resources and service
far outweighs receiving…them' (p. 419). The findings of this research clearly show that
these stresses come from not only present giving of various forms of care, but also
participants' future worries about the increasing care intensity, and reducing resources
to address the growing needs.

Another uncertainty throughout the whole lifespan of being a working sandwich
caregiver is to do with the rise of family members' unexpected physical caring needs.
According to XiaoFang, the sudden and unexpected heart failure of her mother required
her to reorganise her work in order to provide instant nursing care in the hospital:
…some time ago, my own mother suffered from heart failure suddenly and was sent
to the hospital for emergency treatment. At that time, I was scared silly, it just
happened in the last two weeks... first of all, I immediately asked the leader for a

leave, and my leader was quite supportive in such urgent circumstances.

The above quote indicated that the occurrence of life-threatening disease to aging parents is not necessarily predictable, and it can be abrupt, raising urgent needs for XiaoFang to provide physical care. Given this uncertainty, the physical caregiving in XiaoFang's case involved reorganising her work responsibilities since it happened unexpectedly during her work hours. The interviews further portray that the rise of such sudden, high-intensity caring needs was not uncommon, and that severe sickness can also affect participants' dependent children. Thus, being sandwiched by elder and younger generation implies a double uncertainty regarding the need to provide unexpected care. These uncertainties underpinning sandwich care compel many to make strategic plans and accumulate relevant resources in advance before expected and unexpected situation occurs. In this way, sandwich care provision is not just something participants are currently doing, but also something that they need to plan and anticipate in order to cater to future (un)expected caring needs, to have a manageable future caring burden.

To maintain control over the uncertainty and to anticipate (un)predictable future caregiving, some participants raised the need to accumulate a good amount of resources, be it financial, relational, or other forms of resources. In their present daily caregiving, participants consumed some resources, while simultaneously also saving up others to be used in the future. However, it does not mean that 'future resources' can only be used in the future. In some circumstances participants will need to deploy some of their future resources to respond to instant unexpected caring needs:

For example, we usually accumulate some resources, like reputation and relationships in our daily work. In fact,…many of them are used...for example, when something suddenly happens to my family, such as…when my parents suddenly got sick, I had to deploy some resources for them... (WuTai, male civil servant, one child)

Although some resources had been saved for the resource pool for future use, this sudden unexpected situation, WuTai had to re-allocate the future resources in order to cater to instant caring needs. When future resources have been used to satisfy current needs, WuTai may then needs to re-accumulate relevant resources in order to ensure that he is well prepared for future potential caregiving. This accumulating-consuming-reaccumulating process is a continuous process that implies a present-future temporal dynamic.

The mainstream of current research on sandwich care focused on provision of present care (e.g., Patterson and Margolis, 2019; Herlofson and Brandt, 2019; Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Železná, 2018; Evans et al., 2016; Gillett and Crisp, 2017). Limited attention has been paid to future care provision, and how future caregiving impacts working sandwich caregivers' present caregiving experience. The present-future temporal dynamic this research discovered broadens current knowledge on sandwich care, and suggests that the Chinese young working sandwich caregivers not only provide care that is currently needed, but also make strategic plans to prepare for future caring needs. The interviews indicate that sandwich care intensity is expected to increase as time goes by. Therefore, current preparation for future caregiving is perceived as an effective strategy for some participants to maintain certain control over the uncertainties underpinning sandwich caregiving. This enables participants to reduce the *future* caregiving burden and stress through taking action in the present. In this way, future care can also be considered a form of care that participants are performing in the present, as (re)accumulating resource is one of the key components of participants' current care provision experience.

Conceptualising this present-future dynamic provides a temporal perspective which enriches current knowledge of sandwich care. The findings on temporality imply that sandwich care involves not only the fluctuating care intensity over time, but also dynamic 'interactions' between present and future care. The interview data demonstrates a mutual impact between present and future care, such that present

anticipation contains future caregiving burden, and future care shapes how present care is experienced. In addition to the present-future temporal dynamic and the multiple forms of care discussed above, the findings further show that sandwich care provision is gendered since male and female participants tend to experience caregiving differently. The following section therefore discusses the gendered nature of sandwich care from perspective of the different forms of care that male and female participants provided.

4.4 Gendered differences of sandwich caregiving

The interviews illustrate that gender differences exist in participants' experience of sandwich care. Specifically, male and female participants perform different forms of care. The research findings show that compared to female participants, male participants are less likely to participate in housework (mainly lighter housework if any), and more likely to provide emotional care compared to other forms of care:

During workdays, I barely cook, maybe do some cooking during holidays. Usually, I will do stuff like washing dishes, fruit, or occasionally clothes [just put them into the washing machine]. In terms of taking care of my child, it is mainly to do with spending time with him or mentoring his homework. (ShengKai, male IT manager, one child)

Another male participant indicated similar experience:

Basically, from Monday to Friday, I don't do housework after I finish work, because it's already around 6:00~7:00pm, and it is time for dinner. After dinner, I will take care of...that is, to accompany my child for a while, like listening to the music or read books together. It is mainly to do with companionship with my family members. (ZhaoZhi, male director of a bank, one child)

A majority of the male participants did not participate much in the housework during weekdays. On weekends, they were more likely to take on some housework that was not time consuming, such as washing fruit and dishes or putting clothes in the washing

machine. In terms of eldercare and childcare, male participants were likely to offer emotional care in the form of companionship and daily communication. On the contrary, the interviews find that female participants are more likely to spend more hours on housework during non-working hours, and more likely to provide physical care than their male counterparts:

> *When I get home from work, I will do some laundry and wash the dishes. Once I arrive home, I will need to take over childcare from my in-laws. My husband doesn't do housework. At most, he will look after our daughters for 1-2 hours maximum, he cannot look after them for, like, the whole afternoon... I talked to him several times, he would say he doesn't know how to do these since he was young, so he wouldn't do it...* (TingTing, female salesperson, two children)

> *My husband said that he needs to work during the day, hence if he has to get up at night to feed the baby, he just cannot sleep anymore... At the end, it was me who had to get up and feed my son.* (HeHe, female editor, one child)

The findings suggest that compared with male participants, female participants are more likely to take on physical care to family members (e.g., toileting, bathing, and feeding). Many female participants indicated that they devoted more hours to caregiving and housework than their male counterparts. Although both female participants and their husbands fulfilled work responsibilities, some husbands were said to have more bargaining power to resist or refuse housework and caregiving. TingTing's husband was said to referred to his lack of skill, as caregiving was not something he was socialised into since young age to resist TingTing's attempt to re-allocate housework and caregiving. HeHe's husband refused caring responsibilities by emphasising the need to do his own work, while avoiding recognising that HeHe, as a working sandwich caregiver woman, also has work responsibilities to be fulfilled. In this way, their division of caregiving follows a gender hierarchy, in which his job role receives more value and recognition than HeHe's job role. Consequently, HeHe's husband was able to justify his non-participation in caregiving, which compelled HeHe

to take on most caregiving responsibilities along with work responsibilities.

As discussed above, male participants were more likely to engage in emotional care compared with other forms of care they provided. It, however, does not mean that female participants do not have to perform emotional care to family members. Indeed, the findings suggest that female participants also need to commit certain amount of their time to provide emotional care to family members:

> *My child is relatively young. Hence I hope that all of my non-working hours, particularly Friday nights and weekends, will be used to stay with her.* (XiaoWei, female teacher, one child)

Like XiaoWei, nearly all female participants said that they provided emotional care to family members, including children and aging parents/parents-in-law.

Some male participants also suggested that their wives devoted more hours to emotional care to their family members:

> *When we [he and his wife] arrive home from work, we will play with our child, we feed him and put him to bed. But it is mainly my wife who is responsible for these, I will occasionally put him to bed.* (KunKun, male IT officer, one child)

KunKun indicated that his wife committed more hours to not only physical care, but also emotional care to his child than himself. Altogether, the findings show that although the care that most male participants offered tend to be emotional care (instead of other forms of care), their female counterparts were still likely to devote more hours to emotional care to their family members along with the need to provide physical care.

To my surprise, gender difference in providing financial care was not prominent in this research. That is, male participants and female participants were both responsible for financial care to their own parents. In terms of parents-in-law, both male and female participants offered less frequent financial support compared to their own parents, such

as bringing gifts (monetary or non-monetary) when visiting, or giving money during big festivals (such as Chinese New Year or birthdays of in-laws):

I need to give my parents living fees each month. About… one tenth of my monthly salary will be used to support my parents in their life…in terms of my in-laws…I will visit them at least once a month, bring some gifts with me and offer some help when they need. (LaoShi, male teacher, one child)

Some daughters would buy some clothes or jewelry for their mothers; I will never do that. I respect her choice and will only give her money. For example, I will give her 3000 yuan monthly, or give her more when it comes to big festivals. She can choose herself, to buy whatever she wants, or do whatever she wants. (LuoHong, female business support manager, with one child)

Similar with male participants, many female participants like LuoHong were also offering financial care to their family members. Being employed fulltime in professional work implies that many female participants are able to rely on themselves for financial care to their family members. Instead of seeking spouses' help with financial care, female participants have a certain level of power and freedom in determining the frequency and the amount of financial support they would like to offer to parents and/or in-laws. With most female participants' engagement in financial caregiving, their husbands can be freed up from certain financial responsibilities, especially for their parents-in-law. Consequently, most male participants did not have to provide monthly or constant financial care to parents-in-law. Instead, they offered slight financial support to in-laws in terms of buying gifts for visits or big events.

The above discussion marked that gender is a key organising feature of family life in a way that the caregiving experience of women is distinct from that of men (Mitchell, 2014). Existing understandings of the gendered nature of sandwich care are largely based on the caregiving experience shared by either female sandwich caregivers (e.g., Aazami et al, 2018; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Evans et al, 2019; Souralová et al, 2022),

or male sandwich caregivers (e.g., Kwok, 2006). Some has investigated how sandwich caregivers men and women made decisions regarding providing care for different generations (e.g., Vlachantoni et al., 2020). This research expands the knowledge of gendered nature of sandwich care, and shows that the young sandwich caregivers men and women in China are likely to engage in different forms of care to family members. That is, the young sandwich caregivers men are more likely to perform financial care and emotional care than other forms of care. Capturing male sandwich caregivers' provision of emotional care reinforces the need to pay attention to care forms other than tangible care forms, i.e., the physical and financial care, to surface the pattern of young men's sandwich caregiving. The findings that most male participants provided emotional care on a daily and constant basis indicate the role of emotional care not only in understanding men's caregiving, but also in facilitating men's integration into families (Patterson and Margolis, 2019).

The interview data further suggests that the young sandwich caregivers women provided more forms of care and devoted more hours to care and housework than their male counterparts regardless of their labour market participation. Although some attempted to negotiate caregiving and housework in their interactions with their husbands, their husbands were able to resist and adhere to the previous uneven distribution. The constrained bargaining power of some young sandwich caregivers women is largely shaped by the cultural norms in Confucianism surrounding gendered division of caregiving and housework, which dictate that women are responsible for caregiving and domestic affairs and men are responsible for work and outside affairs (Chan, 2000). This underlines the significance of cultural settings in shaping sandwich caregiving, since if the social context does not invite and allow people to scrutinise pre-existing power structures and gender ideology, the gendered division of housework and caregiving is likely to persist. The persisting gender ideology implies that the young female sandwich caregivers' work roles are considered the 'extras' added to their traditionally assigned primary caregiver roles, with which many cannot negotiate to receive reduced sandwich caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, most young

sandwich caregivers women still perform more care and spend more hours on care regardless of how many hours they devoted to work roles.

4.5 Chapter summary

This thesis adopts the philosophical strand of symbolic interactionism to overcome the limitations of most existing sandwich care literature of focusing exclusively on the provision of tangible and instrumental care (e.g., Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Gans et al., 2013). For many sandwich care scholars, care is usually considered needed by frail parents/parents-in-law and dependent children (e.g., DePasquale et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Falkingham et al., 2020; Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020), who have limited autonomy in taking care of their daily living activities. This, however, fails to capture the scope and complexity of sandwich care responsibilities (Suh, 2016). Additionally, the narrow focus further constrained the conceptualisation of sandwich caregivers. Sandwich caregivers are usually considered those who are middle-aged, with double caring burden to both younger and elder generation (e.g., Souralová et al., 2022). In this way, young workers can be considered 'non-sandwich caregivers' who are not burdened with dual caregiving responsibilities when their aging parents and/or parents-in-law are relatively independent in their daily living activities. Without their caregiver status being recognised, it is impossible for employing organisations and wider society to see the struggle, and thus to understand and support the needs of young working sandwich caregivers. Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis clearly demonstrate that combining sandwich care and work at this stage of life can be extremely challenging due to the need to provide a variety of care forms to parents, parents-in-law, and children. The value of this research is thus to articulate the nature and effects of the hidden aspects of care, and to provide insights into the circumstances of this hitherto under-researched group of young working sandwich caregivers.

The findings presented in this chapter partially addressed the first research question, namely what is involved in sandwich care by attending to three dimensions, i.e., the

forms that sandwich care takes, the future-present temporal dynamic, and the gendered nature of sandwich care. In terms of the first dimension, symbolic interactionism facilitated this research to explore the hidden forms of care. In symbolic interactionism, care is not a fixed concept. Instead, individuals have the agency to create and attach meanings to the forms of care they provide (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, instead of providing a predefined list of caring tasks, this thesis acknowledged individual agency and invited participants to define what is care from their own perspective. In doing so, this chapter contributed to understanding the complexity of sandwich care through the scope of caring tasks that young workers cover in their non-working life. Through symbolic interactionism, this thesis suggests that sandwich care is an on-going process, which involves more than the provision of physical care and financial care to elder and younger generation. Rather, the research findings resonate with the result of Lam (2006), and claim that care can be extended to healthy care receivers. That is, the emotional care and hidden forms of care (i.e., technological and lingual care) continue regardless of whether care receivers have autonomy in taking care of their daily living activities or not. Through the identification of the hidden forms of care, the scope of care, and therefore, the conceptualisation of care has been widened. This means, the findings challenged the conventional understanding of care as mainly in physical and financial forms. Rather, this research argues that care can take different forms, and the definition and forms of care needed is both at the discretion of caregivers and the needs of care receivers.

When it comes to the second dimension, symbolic interactionism enabled the thesis to gain novel insights into the temporal dynamics between present and future care. The present-future temporal dynamic this research identified indicates that care receivers' future caring needs can shape young workers' present caregiving, and their present actions taken will frame their experience of caregiving in the future. Both expected and unexpected future care greatly impacts what and how much resources the young workers use to cater to the present needs of care receivers. To ensure adequate resources to address future and increasing caregiving burden, some are compelled to shore up a

portion of their current resources for future use. In this sense, future care becomes one of the key components of the young working sandwich caregivers' *present* caregiving. However, the present-future temporal dynamic remains relatively hidden with most existing scholarly attention being paid to provision of present care (e.g., Patterson and Margolis, 2019; Herlofson and Brandt, 2019; Falkingham et al., 2020; Železná, 2018; Evans et al., 2016; Gillett and Crisp, 2017). The oversight of future care, and usually intensifying future care, renders the present and future worries of young workers hidden. With the symbolic interactionism, this research scrutinised the taken-for-granted understandings of sandwich care as more relevant for middle-aged caregivers, and claims that the young working sandwich caregivers can also be facing with the 'unique set of unshared stresses' (Miller, 1981, p. 419), caused by a complex combination of present and future worries.

Concerning the third dimension, this chapter suggests that sandwich care is culturally and contextually situated, reflected in the gendered way the young working sandwich caregivers men and women experience caregiving. The findings indicate that the Confucian *nei-wai* distinction is still highly relevant in dual-earning households, in which women are in non-traditional roles. The trend of women's increasing labour force participation combines with a persisting Confucian gender ideology leads to the young working sandwich caregivers women disproportionately performing more forms of and spend more hours on care than their male counterparts, regardless of how many hours they devoted to work responsibilities. The identified gendered difference has been similarly experienced by other non-sandwich caregivers women (Chou et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2014; Yee and Schulz, 2000). However, the particular obstacles that sandwich caregivers women are facing is the simultaneous provision of more forms of and more hours to care to aging parents, and/or parents-in-law, as well as children, leading to more challenges faced and to be faced than non-sandwich caregivers women and their male counterparts.

So far, the findings have primarily focused on the actions and responsibilities of caregivers towards care receivers in the private domain. The following chapter broadens the view on the relational nature of sandwich care to explain how participants combine sandwich care with work through reciprocal relationships in the work and family realms. The power constellations inherent in different reciprocal relationships, and the nature of these reciprocal relationships will also be covered.

Chapter 5: Reciprocal relationships in the workplace and at home

5.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the second sub-question of research question one, namely how young working sandwich caregivers exchange care and support with family members and colleagues? To address this research question, this chapter articulates the relational nature of sandwich care through four dimensions of reciprocity, i.e., quality, temporality, hierarchy, and interrelatedness. Through these four dimensions, this chapter demonstrates the power dynamic involved in the ongoing reciprocal processes, and how these processes are gendered through Confucian values. Moreover, instead of evaluating reciprocity with a simplistic view, current research offers a holistic understanding by further examining the forms of care or types of support exchanged in both work and family domains. In this way, this chapter expects to offer insights into the relational nature of sandwich care by investigating the complex and dynamic interactions between participants and other social actors, between participants and their social world, and between work and family realms.

5.2 The quality of reciprocal relationships

The findings indicate that sandwich care is relational by nature in that provision of care involves intensive interactions between participants and other social actors, such as their family members and colleagues/supervisors. A further evaluation of the interview data suggests that reciprocal relationships in the family domain and workplace varied in quality. The following hence discusses how familial reciprocal relationships and workplace reciprocal relationships are distinct in quality.

In the process of caregiving, participants constantly exchanged care with core family members, such as parents and parents-in-law. Many suggested that they received support with childcare and housework from their parents, which generated strong obligations for participants to return parents' kindness:

> *Currently, my parents are offering me support with childcare and housework... I hope that I could take over some of these responsibilities from my parents. My parents' physical health is getting worse, so I hope that it will be me taking care of them when they get old. I need to increase emotional support to them as well.* (XiaoPing, female administrator, one child)

With her parents' decreasing physical autonomy, XiaoPing not only saw the '*need*' to but also '*wanted to*' provide increasing physical care and emotional care to return her aging parents' support with childcare and housework. This aligns with the findings of Evandrou and colleagues' (2018) research, which reveal that support with finance and childcare from parents are more likely to be returned with instrumental (e.g., transportation and gardening) and physical care (e.g., bathing, dressing, and eating) in parents' later life. While this research adds that along with instrumental and physical care, participants who received parents' support with childcare and housework were also likely to return emotional care. XiaoPing's exchange relationship with her parents is a typical example of 'tit for tat' exchange, in which things exchanged are different (with her parents offering physical childcare and housework in exchange for physical

eldercare and emotional care), but are relatively equal in value (Gouldner, 1960).

Given that physical and emotional care will be returned in parents' later age, XiaoPing further illustrated how she experienced the feeling of over-benefiting from her parents without adequate present care provision to return her parents' support:

> *Currently I am not really satisfied with myself, since my parents are providing more*
> *support to me, while I do not give much back.* (XiaoPing, female administrator, one
> child)

XiaoPing's articulation of a trade-off between the care she received and the present care she provided generated feelings of indebtedness and guilt due to perceived inequivalence. This implies that in high quality familial relationships, exchanged care can be imbalanced, with the possibility of children over-benefitted from parents' support (Call et al., 1999). However, XiaoPing clearly demonstrated her dissatisfaction with this imbalanced exchange, and expressed the desire and the need to return parents' current support with future care (as shown in her previous quote). In this way, XiaoPing was justifying her action of receiving as mutually beneficial instead of self-interested, since a return will be made in the future. Through justification, XiaoPing is constructing herself, publicly and privately, as a filially responsible daughter who not only takes, but also wants to give back to her parents' kindness and love.

The obligation of some participants to maintain relatively balanced exchange with parents, however, does not mean that familial reciprocity is always based on mutual benefits with certain level of equivalency. Familial reciprocity in the Chinese context is complicated as it involves not only parents, but also parents-in-law. In cases where parents-in-law offered support with childcare and housework, an exchange pattern similar with parent-child relationship emerged:

> *My mother-in-law is really nice, she helps us a lot with housework and childcare*
> *during working hours, so that I can focus on my job…I am not satisfied with current*
> *housework and caregiving division, since I think we don't do enough…after all my*

parents-in-law are getting old…I will need to understand them more and share more housework with them… (XueHua, female nurse, two children)

Recognising the value and the efforts her mother-in-law put in childcare and housework, there was an obligation for XueHua to make a return through understanding and sharing housework with her mother-in-law. For XueHua, there was also a feeling that she was over-benefitting from her mother-in-law which then caused dissatisfaction and guilt. Therefore, in reciprocal relationships with parents-in-law, a relatively equivalent and balanced return is obligatory from the participants' perspectives when the support from parents-in-law with childcare and housework was received.

Reciprocal relationships with in-laws tend to be different in cases where the parents-in-law did not offer support with childcare and housework. Even without previous support, some participants still felt obligated to offer some care to their aging parents-in-law:

I don't do anything else, I don't live with my parents-in-law, but… I don't accept anything from them, while at the same time, I don't give anything either. Then in my opinion, a good daughter-in-law is…we might not be very close emotionally... If I have better financial ability, that is… because my parents-in-law are getting older and poorer in health status, it will be good if I can provide some financial support, that will mean something. (XiaoPing, female administrator, one child)

Without support received from her parents-in-law, XiaoPing may not feel the need to return any form of present care in daily life. However, she still felt the need to provide future financial care considering her parents-in-law's decreasing autonomy in later life. This can be interpreted through the societal norm of filial piety in Confucianism, dictating that children should take care of parents when they age (Estioko et al., 2022; Sung, 2003; Ikels, 2004). In the case of married women, it means taking care of parents-in-law and this care is considered out of obligation to their husbands (Zhang, 2009). In this way, although there was no direct exchange between XiaoPing and her parents-in-law, her obligation to offer future financial care can be considered an indirect 'return',

on her husband's behalf, to parents-in-law's previous care offered to her husband. Consequently, similar with XiaoPing, many women in a Confucian society needs to be responsible for taking care of parents-in-law regardless of whether they have received previous support with childcare/housework or not (Lee, 2005).

Although felt obligated to provide some care, the *forms* and *level* of care were at participants' discretion in cases where parents-in-law did not provide any help with childcare and housework:

> *My parents-in-law didn't provide any help with childcare or housework, they did not provide financial support either…They rarely phoned to check how was my son…we are not so close, not many communications going on between us…I usually visit them once or twice a year, and stay with them one or two days each time…*(ShuYun, female administrator, one child)

The only form of care ShuYun mentioned provided to her parents-in-law was emotional care (rather than physical, financial, lingual, and technological care identified in previous chapter). Without support with childcare and housework, and financial support received from her parents-in-law, ShuYun did not feel obligated to provide much care in return. Instead, the forms of care and the level of care to be provided was at her discretion, so that she only provided emotional care few times per year out of filial obligation as a daughter-in-law. Thus, the level of commitment to or responsibility for caring for parents-in-law varies depending on the support they offer (Sung, 2018), and the participants had more freedom in the giving-receiving process if no previous support from parents-in-law was received.

Existing literature in care, and in sandwich care in particular, has exclusively focused on intergenerational reciprocal relationships in the parent-child dyad (e.g., Leopold and Raab, 2013; Evandrou et al., 2018; Johar et al., 2015; Grundy and Henretta, 2006), largely neglecting the role of parents-in-law in familial reciprocity. However, the findings of this research illustrate that as with parents, parents-in-law are also valuable

sources of coping when combining sandwich care with work roles. The neglect of in-law reciprocal relationships can be the result of a westernised understanding of familial relations, where household interactions are mainly between husbands and wives and in-law interactions tend to be less salient. Nevertheless, interactions within the Confucian family system cannot be appropriately understood without considering parents-in-law and parents, who tend to live with their married adult children (Sung, 2003). Indeed, some existing Southeast and East Asian research has found that co-residence is usually associated with more support from seniors (e.g., Agree et al., 2002; Biddlecom et al., 2002; Frankenberg et al., 2002), since it offers a contextual setting that enhances mutual interactions so as to increase the opportunity for support exchange. Therefore, both parents-in-law and parents need to be considered when evaluating familial reciprocity in a Confucian society due to its distinct family structure and housing arrangements.

By including parents-in-law when evaluating familial reciprocity, this research finds that reciprocal relationships between parents and parents-in-law tend to be differently experienced. Nearly all participants mentioned receiving support with childcare or housework from their own parents. In this case, there were strong obligations for participants to return parents' present and previous support (e.g., childrearing during childhood). However, reciprocal relationships with in-laws can be different since present and previous support can be absent. The research findings clearly demonstrate that in in-law relationships where both previous and present support is absent, reciprocity is relatively inequivalent and indirect, with children-in-law performing care on behalf of their spouses to their parents-in-law. Moreover, if no previous and present support has been received from parents-in-law, participants have a relatively high level of freedom in determining what and how much care to be provided, contingent on the availability of resources, and the needs of parents-in-law at specific periods of time.

The interviews show that besides family members, participants also exchanged support with colleagues in order to manage multiple role responsibilities. The quality of workplace reciprocity, however, is different from familial reciprocity:

I also seek support from colleagues. For example…our children are not quite independent. We need to pick them up from and drop them off at school. Some of my colleagues… our children are in the same school, then we will…for example, today, one of my colleagues is quite busy. Then I will pick up his/her children for him/her. If I happen to be quite busy tomorrow, I will ask him/her to pick up my child for me. This is mutual support between colleagues. (LaoShi, male teacher, one child)

In the process of combining caregiving and work responsibilities, LaoShi sourced support from his colleagues with caregiving, in terms of picking his child up from school. In LaoShi's case, the support to be returned tended to be equivalent, reflecting the 'tat for tat' exchange (Gouldner, 1960), in which LaoShi will do the same to return his colleagues' previous help. In the reciprocal relationships with his colleagues, LaoShi emphasised mutual benefit, and the giving and receiving occurred within a relatively short period of time, characterising as high immediacy (Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003).

The importance of mutual benefits in reciprocal relationships with colleagues have also been raised by another participant:

I will try my best to help my colleagues out when they are in need…so that when I need their help, they will take the initiative to help me as well. It's mutual…If I don't help them…they won't care about me when I am in need (XiaoHui, male sales manager, one child)

In reciprocal relationships with colleagues, XiaoHui was clear that if he benefited his colleagues, an obligation for the colleague who received support to make a return will be generated. However, if he did not provide help to his colleagues, it was highly likely that his colleagues will do the same to restore equity (Gouldner, 1960). Knowing this, he took the initiative to develop reciprocal relationships with his colleagues, so as to shore up these reciprocal relationships to be used in the future when he is in need.

The emphasis on mutual benefits implies that participants will not enter and maintain reciprocal relationships with colleagues who do not offer support in return, or who breach the obligation of a relatively equal return. This indicates a high level of freedom on the participants' part in determining whether to start or maintain reciprocal relationships with colleagues or not. This high level of freedom is mainly due to the limited power/status differences between peers, so that reciprocity between colleagues is largely established on the foundation of power symmetry and the free will of participants (Gouldner, 1960; Cook, 2015). In such relatively symmetrical relationships, exchange actors can pay back previous support with equivalent support (such as picking up children for each other), or reciprocate unkind actions with similar actions (such as terminating reciprocal relationships if no return support is provided), aligning with the claims of Gouldner (1960), Deckop et al. (2003), Greco et al. (2019), and Bordia et al. (2008).

So far, the above discussion highlights that reciprocal relationships in the family and workplace domain are distinct in quality due to perceived filial responsibilities in familial reciprocity compared to the transactional nature of workplace reciprocity. Familial reciprocity tends to be generalised reciprocity, which is characterised by a relatively high level of ambiguities in obligations in terms of immediacy and equivalence (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Call et al., 1999). For those who received support from parents or parents-in-law with childcare and housework, they expressed strong obligations to make a return in the future, with the feelings of indebtedness due to perceived over-benefitting from their parents and in-laws. The interview data further illustrates that in some households, parents-in-law were less engaged in reciprocal relationships. Although previous support was absent, some still raised the need to provide care, which was considered out of obligations to their spouses as dictated by the societal norms in Confucianism. In this sense, reciprocity is a 'strategy of action' reflecting cognitive and cultural aspects (Hansen, 2004; Funk, 2012; Moody, 2008), and a social process in which people construct meanings of the support received and future support to be provided.

Compared to familial reciprocity, workplace reciprocity is more transactional by nature with emphasis on mutual benefits and a relatively equivalent return in a short period of time. In reciprocal relationships in the workplace, many articulated a relatively 'cold and calculated' or transactional view of reciprocity (Molm et al., 2007). Supporting someone in return for assistance received is the main concept in this transactional view of reciprocity, where support providers' motive is to guarantee an implicit contract for return (Funk, 2012). In this way, some strove to build and maintain reciprocal relationships with colleagues so as to accumulate adequate relational resources to be used in the future. Although immediacy has been briefly covered in this section, the present-future temporal dynamic specific to sandwich care implies that the temporality perspective of reciprocal relationships needs further elaboration for nuances of how care is performed, exchanged, and combined with other responsibilities.

5.3 A temporal perspective on workplace and family reciprocity

Chapter 4 established that one characteristic of sandwich care that was identified in this thesis is its present-future temporal dynamic. The present-future temporal dynamic recognises that care varies in intensity at different time, and that some forms of care will be less needed by aging parents/parents-in-law (i.e., physical care) currently while more needed in the future with increasing level of dependency in daily living activities. This characteristic allows most participants to negotiate caregiving with their healthy and independent parents and parents-in-law by emphasising that their current support will be returned in the future when they are in need of physical care. Perceiving care through physical perspective, familial reciprocity with parents and parents-in-law tends to be long-term oriented. That is, current support from parents/parents-in-law with childcare and housework will be returned with *future* physical care, contingent on their physical dependency in their daily living activities:

> *Now, they [her parents] are willing to look after my daughter and bear some of my*

daughter's expenses, such as tuition fees, and they are more than willing to do it. Then my mother said that, if I can do my job well, my daughter can get a good education, that is enough. Then maybe when they get really old and need someone to be around, I can then turn up to help them. (XiaoWei, female teacher, one child)

Chapter 4 showed that the forms of care most participants were offering on a constant or daily basis to parents/parents-in-law tend to be emotional, financial, technical, and lingual care. Still, many parents/parents-in-law were said to be willing to spend several hours a day to provide physical care and financial support to grandchildren and engage in housework, so as to enable their adult children to concentrate on their work responsibilities. In XiaoWei's narrative, her mother's support can be motivated by two main factors. The first was her mother's altruistic concern for the well-being of XiaoWei and her grandchild. This can be understood through the virtue of Ren in Confucianism, which emphasises concerning and loving family members (Woods and Lamond, 2011). Out of concern for family members' well-being, XiaoWei's mother was said to be willing to take on physical and financial care to grandchild.

The second factor can be her investment for future return of high-intensity physical care from XiaoWei. This implies that in the giving-receiving process, parents and/or parents-in-law are not always passive receivers who do not have a say in decisions regarding how future eldercare should be provided to them. Rather, they are active agents, who take the initiative to invest a certain amount of time and money to provide assistance with childcare and housework, so as to initiate a return of *future* high-intensity physical care. This is consistent with Silverstein and colleagues' (2002) understanding of parent-child exchange, in which parents dedicate time, energy, and financial assets to their children, with the expectation that their children will provide care in return by responding to negative contingencies, such as their health declining in later life. Although the exchanged support seems to be unequal from a short-term perspective, the balance tends to be redressed in the long run, as current provision of high-intensity childcare will be returned in the future with high-intensity physical care when parents

have difficulties managing their daily activities (Leopold and Raab, 2013).

Future orientation has been commonly reported in familial reciprocity by many participants. This, however, does not mean that reciprocal relationships in the family domain are only on long-term bases. Indeed, the interview data suggests that familial reciprocal relationships can also be short-term oriented, in which support from parents/parents-in-law was returned with present care provision:

> *I understand that it is not easy for my mother-in-law to take care of my daughters, and my mother-in-law also understands that it is not easy for me to do my job…I sincerely appreciate her help with childcare and housework, which enables me to go out to work. I cannot do this without her help. Hence, I will not irritate her or make her angry. To appreciate her dedication, I usually buy gifts during festivals and big events, she will be really happy and cooks us a lot of fine dishes.* (XueHua, female nurse, two children)

Familial reciprocity does not always need to be oriented towards future. XueHua's case demonstrates that her mother-in-law's support with childcare and housework was returned with her provision of present emotional care (i.e., not making her angry) and financial care. Thus, perceiving care through financial and emotional perspectives, reciprocal relationships with family members can be short-term oriented. XueHua's return of present emotional and financial care to appreciate her mother-in-law's present support, however, did not mean that the reciprocal exchange was completed. Indeed, her return triggered second-round reciprocity, such that her mother-in-law made further return to the emotional and financial care received. In this way, the giving-receiving involves an on-going process and it never stops as long as attempts are made to return the support received in familial settings. Therefore, familial reciprocity is not likely to be a one-off exchange, it is continuous and involves extensive lineal exchanging actions.

The above section uncovered that the exchange relationships with colleagues tend to be characterised as high in immediacy. However, the uncertainties underpinning care

receivers' needs mean that peer exchange relationships can also be long-term oriented:

> *For example, the last time my father was hospitalised in JiNan for surgery I needed to take time off from work to take care of him. It was not just for two days, I needed to take two days off each week for a certain period of time, usually quite a long period, to look after him. In these cases, I will ask my colleagues to cover my classes when I really have to be absent from work due to caring responsibilities. Then, if they give lectures for me, I will be very happy to cover for them when they face similar unexpected situations in the future.* (LaoShi, male teacher, one child)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, being sandwiched between eldercare and childcare indicates a certain level of uncertainty in caregiving, such that the younger and/or elder generation could suddenly have a high level of dependency in their daily life due to illness. The uncertainties inherent in caregiving make it impossible for LaoShi to predict when the return will be needed. Consequently, LaoShi could only remain indebted until a return of favour is made in the future when the colleagues who provided help are in need of similar assistance. This is consistent with Funk's (2012) conceptualisation of reciprocity, which is similar to the notion of a 'support bank' (Antonucci, 1985), with support providers being aware of building 'credit' that they can use when necessary in the future (Klaus, 2009). The colleague's current support with work-related tasks can be considered as an attempt to invest helping credits in the support bank, whereby he/she can draw on these credits when he/she needs to take time off from work for family responsibilities in the future.

So far, the discussion indicated that both familial and workplace reciprocity can be long-term and short-term oriented. This implies that balanced reciprocity, which is relatively high in equivalency and immediacy can exist in high quality relationships, such as familial reciprocal relationships, and generalised reciprocity can exist in transactional reciprocal relationships, in which the repayment can be delayed rather than being immediate (Call et al., 1999). The findings articulate that the existence of generalised reciprocity in transactional reciprocal relationships is largely determined by

the unexpected present and future caring needs of care receivers; whereas the existence of balanced reciprocity in high quality familial relationships requires that care to be perceived from different perspectives. That is, if care is perceived solely through physical perspective, reciprocal relationships in the family domain tend to be long-term oriented given the high autonomy of parents/in-laws in their present daily life. This means that high-intensity physical care to parents/in-laws will mainly be required, and therefore, returned in the future. However, if care is perceived through financial and emotional perspectives, reciprocal relationships can be short-term oriented, and it can trigger on-going exchange actions depending on the perceived present needs of caregivers and care receivers.

Distinct from reciprocity with colleagues, the reciprocity with supervisors tends to be less specific or exact, and the return itself can last for a longer period of time:

> *When I had to fulfill both work and caregiving responsibilities, my previous leader would be supportive and approve my leave. For example, last time, my mum came and she was not well. I needed to accompany her to the hospital hence I asked for two weeks off. He approved it right away without saying that 'it is busy and you cannot leave'... Without his help, I could barely make it. I really had a good impression of him, I felt grateful... Thus, I was willing to dedicate myself to this organisation, work extra hours when necessary, and stay with this company.* (HeHe, female editor, one child)

In combining work with caregiver roles, a supportive supervisor plays the role of enabler. For example, the support from HeHe's previous supervisor in terms of approving her care leave requests enabled HeHe to be absent from work to provide care without negative implications. In this way, HeHe was able to have both work and care instead of being compelled to choose between the two. Due to power asymmetry and different positions in the organisational hierarchy, HeHe cannot reciprocate her supervisor's support in an identical manner (by approving her leaders' leave request). Instead, she embraced an abstract and idealised framework of reciprocation (Funk, 2012)

159

of dedication to the organisation. This aligns with Moody's (2008) understanding of reciprocity that a return can be made indirectly to a third party (the organisation) rather than the initial provider (HeHe's previous leader). The abstract and idealised return in the form of dedication and commitment towards the organisation, however, is hard to quantify and tends to last for a longer period of time compared with specific or exact returns made to colleagues (e.g., covering one lecture for a colleague takes about 45 minutes). Therefore, when power asymmetry is involved in reciprocity, the 'paying back' actually becomes more complex and perhaps greater than the original favour (time off). In cases when HeHe feels obligated to demonstrate dedication by working extra hours, it inevitably leads to less time available for family caregiving responsibilities. Given that HeHe's work role is usually undertaken in addition to her caregiving obligations to her parents/parents-in-law and child, working extra hours can create tension at home and may result in a high possibility of overburdening and stress.

Except supervisors, participants constantly exchanged care/support with other powerful actors, such as parents and parents-in-law in their daily life. Due to the complexity involved in reciprocity with powerful actors, it is essential to examine the role of power asymmetry in shaping young sandwich caregivers' reciprocal exchange. Particularly in the Chinese Confucian context, in which respect for power and hierarchy is the norm (Kang et al., 2017). Therefore, the following section scrutinises the role of power asymmetry in reciprocity and interprets participants' experience through cultural lens of Confucianism.

5.4 The hierarchical nature of reciprocity in the workplace and family domains

The interviews show that power and status differences impact what and how participants exchange care and support with family members and supervisors. That is, the exchange of resources is not freely chosen and available within power differences. There are certain rules that the participants are expected to follow and the rules tend to

be distinct in different reciprocal relationships. The findings further point out that some rules are differently experienced by female and male participants. The following subsection focuses on familial reciprocity and explains how power asymmetry guided female and male participants' reciprocal exchange with powerful family members.

5.4.1 Exchanging with powerful actors at home

The findings illustrate that power asymmetry is omni-present in familial relationships and it is underpinned by gendered hierarchy. That is, the experience of female and male participants in exchanging support with people higher up the hierarchy at home is distinct from each other. When exchanging support with parents-in-law, some female participants were waiting to be offered certain types of support that in-laws were willing to give:

> *Basically, I need to look after my daughter on my own, no one has really looked after her except me…my parents-in-law will not help me with childcare [physically], since they prefer to have more time for themselves and they have jobs…but they do pay for childcare services…*(LingLing, female civil servant, one child)

In in-law reciprocity, it is usually the parents-in-law, who higher up the familial hierarchy, who decide what and how much to exchange with their daughters-in-law. The decision regarding what to enter into the exchange process is dependent on the availability and scarcity of a particular resource within a specific period of time. In LingLing's case, her parents-in-law were still working, which implies a scarcity of time and energy, but relatively strong financial resources compared to those parents-in-law who were retired or unemployed. With work responsibilities, sparing time to look after their grandchild was said be difficult for LingLing's parents-in-law, especially when they preferred to have some leisure time during non-working hours. Consequently, LingLing's parents-in-law only provided financial support for paid care services instead of physically joining LingLing's nuclear family to provide hands-on support with

childcare and housework. Thus, in this hierarchical relationship, it was LingLing's parents-in-law, rather than LingLing, who had a higher level of freedom in determining what should be exchanged. LingLing, on the other hand, tend to be a passive receiver waiting to be offered a specific form of care with limited bargaining power in this particular reciprocal relationship.

Besides the forms of care, parents-in-law were also said to maintain control over the level of support to be provided. According to some female participants, their parents-in-law also decided how much support they would like to offer, such that help with childcare and housework mainly covered their working hours:

> *When I am working, it is my mother-in-law who is looking after my child. When I arrive home from work, I will share childcare with my husband. So, the two of us will share tasks such as bathing, changing diapers, and looking after her.... I feel tired when I have to look after my daughter after work though. She goes to bed quite late, which makes it hard for me to get a good sleep. Then, I feel sleepy and tired during work hours. If things can be changed…if there is a lot of housework or I cannot manage to take care of my daughter after work, I may need to pay for someone else to do this.* (ZhenZhen, female teacher, one child)

ZhenZhen's mother-in-law was unemployed, which means that she had more temporal resources to be exchanged compared to those in-laws who had work responsibilities. However, it does not mean that ZhenZhen's mother-in-law invested all her free time into housework and childcare. According to ZhenZhen, only a portion of her mother-in-law's free time was dedicated to intergenerational exchange, so as to cover her working hours when she was absent from home for work responsibilities. When it comes to non-working hours, ZhenZhen felt obligated to take-over childcare and housework from her mother-in-law, and negotiated caring and housework division with her husband. In case of feeling unable to combine work with caregiver role, ZhenZhen felt the 'need to pay for *someone else* to do' housework and caring responsibilities during her non-working hours instead of seeking further assistance from her mother-in-

law. This indicates certain constraints that ZhenZhen was experiencing in gaining her mother-in-law's continuous support with childcare and housework during her non-working hours. Therefore, in in-law reciprocity, the exchange of support is not necessarily freely available, and some have constrained bargaining power when reciprocating support with parents-in-law, who are higher up the hierarchy, with more decision-making power.

Reciprocity in the parent-child dyad was distinct from in-law relationships for most female participants. Compared with parents-in-law, most female participants had a higher level of emotional intimacy with their own parents, with different exchange rules:

> *I asked my mother for help…because when I just gave birth to my baby, it was also during the time when I just joined my company, I just could not look after my child…so I asked my mother to come and help. She had helped for… she came every week during that time and went back on weekends.* (TingTing, female salesperson, two children)

TingTing 'asked for' help with childcare from her mother when she was in need, and her mother was said to be accommodating to her request, and offered physical care to her grandchildren. This level of freedom in asking for support from parents had also been suggested by ZhenZhen:

> *I can naturally ask my mother to do something for me, I just cannot ask my mother-in-law to do something for me. For example, I can say to my mother, 'can you wash an apple for me'? I cannot ask my mother-in-law to wash an apple or to do the laundry for me. Mother and mother-in-law are different. I can argue with my mother if I disagree, while not with my mother-in-law. Because after all, we are two strangers, right? Why should a stranger accept my thoughts? I cannot accept hers, and she cannot accept mine.* (ZhenZhen, female teacher, one child)

The interviews show that it is natural for most female participants to turn to their own parents when they are in need of support. Meanwhile, when it comes to parents-in-law,

most female participants admitted that they cannot request support with their free will.

The constrained power of most female participants in requesting support from their parents-in-law should be understood in context. Traditionally, in Chinese society, married women would be considered 'daughters' once they were 'married into' the husband's family (Ugargol and Bailey, 2021). However, this is not always the case, and some female participants faced the dilemma in which they were not 'married off' (emotionally) from their natal family since they still had a stronger emotional intimacy with their own parents compared to their parents-in-law. At the same time, some female participants like ZhenZhen were not really emotionally 'married into' the husband's family; hence instead of perceiving themselves as the 'daughters' of parents-in-law they still constructed themselves as 'strangers' to parents-in-law. Therefore, compared to asking 'strangers' for help, it is safer to 'demand' specific support from their own parents. Hence, TingTing and ZhenZhen can freely request specific support from own parents, a kind of freedom which was restricted when it comes to reciprocal relationships with their parents-in-law.

The interviews further portray that male participants have different experiences of reciprocity with their parents-in-law. Compared to some female participants' experienced constraints in asking for support, most male participants indicated a higher level of freedom in asking for their parents-in-law's assistance with childcare:

In combining work with family roles, I strive to seek support from my parents and my in-laws…My wife and I are both teachers, and sometimes both of us need to work overtime. When it is essential for both of us to work overtime, I will plan in advance, and ask my parents or my parents-in-law to come over to look after my child. (LaoShi, male teacher, one child)

Although power asymmetries existed between LaoShi and his parents-in-law, it was not difficult or unnatural for LaoShi to ask his parents-in-law for support with childcare when he worked overtime. Thus, compared with some female participants like

LingLing and ZhenZhen, who were passive receivers of in-law reciprocity, the exchange relationship between LaoShi and his parents-in-law was largely based on free will within power differences.

In addition to more freedom in asking for parents-in-law's assistance, some male participants can even allocate childcare to parents-in-law:

> *I stay with both my parents and my parents-in-law. At times I live with my parents-in-law, and at other times, I live with my own parents. My mother will come over to take care of my child during summer or winter holidays; during academic semesters, my child will be staying with my parents-in-law since their house is close to the school…The reason why I <u>decided to </u>stay with both sides [of the family] instead of living with one side for the whole year is that…it is burdensome to take care of a child for a long period of time, right? My parents and parents-in-law would like to travel around at this age. Then <u>I would adjust </u>somehow, so as to leave my child with each side for only a certain period of time. In this way, both my parents and my parents-in-law can have some free time to do their own things.* (XiaoHui, male sales manager, one child)

Distinct from some female participants who found it hard to ask parents-in-law for support, XiaoHui was in the position of controlling the division of childcare between his own parents and in-laws. His decision to have childcare shared by both his parents and parents-in-law was manifested as his way of being filial to both parties by taking into consideration their personal needs such as travelling. In this way, XiaoHui was justifying his actions of receiving support with his kindness to parents and parents-in-law through equally dividing childcare between the two parties. Contrary to this, most female counterparts generally do not have this power or freedom in allocating childcare and housework to their parents-in-law.

The findings suggest that male and female participants tend to experience reciprocity differently within power asymmetries. That is, compared with female participants'

constrained bargaining power, male participants can exchange support with more powerful family members according to their free will. This implies that, although Confucianism praises hierarchy and power in general, the hierarchy and power are actually gendered (Lee and Luo, 2021). This power-laden gendered hierarchy largely guides how participants exchange support in social interactions. In Confucianism, women tend to be cast into disadvantaged positions and their subordination to their husbands, parents, and parents-in-laws is a moral law (Leung, 2003). From this subordinated position, requesting or asking for support from parents-in-law, who are higher up the hierarchy in the patriarchal familial system, can be perceived as violating the social order stipulated by WuLun and the virtue of Li (Woods and Lamond, 2011). Hence, most female participants tend to passively receive what was offered by their parents-in-law without taking the initiative to request a specific form of care. Contrary to this, male privilege in Confucianism means that men are usually endowed with supreme authority (Whyte, 2005), which can enhance their bargaining power in reciprocal relationships with people higher up the familial hierarchy, such as their parents-in-law. Hence, the Confucian principles of gendered hierarchy can partially explain why male and female participants tend to have different degrees of power in requesting support with childcare from parents-in-law when combining care with work.

Another explanation for most female participants' constrained power in seeking their parents-in-law's support during non-working hours is the complex combination of Confucian expectations of role appropriate conduct and the obligation of return in reciprocal relationships:

> *During weekdays, my mother-in-law is taking care of my children for me. Hence I cannot just leave my children to her constantly on weekends. This is unreasonable. It is acceptable if it happens occasionally due to some incidents. If it is only because I want to relax or hang out with friends, I would say this is irresponsible. I would definitely take over caring responsibilities during non-working hours. It would primarily be me who looks after my children after work. Then she can have a rest, since she is also getting older.* (ZhuangZhuang, female civil servant, two children)

In ZhuangZhuang's opinion, she was the one who should be responsible for childcare. Thus, assistance from her mother-in-law with childcare and housework was considered as '*offered to*' ZhuangZhuang *herself* rather than her husband. Recognising the gendered gifts received, there was a strong obligation for ZhuangZhuang to make a return by taking over childcare from her mother-in-law during non-working hours. Thus, this gendered gift prevented ZhuangZhuang from seeking her mother-in-law's further assistance with childcare. As such, reciprocity is largely gendered as ZhuangZhuang's receiving and recognition of the gendered gift received, and her felt obligation to reciprocate reflects the underpinned societal norm of gender ideology (Ashwin et al., 2013). In this way, the gendered nature of reciprocity greatly limited ZhuangZhuang's bargaining power in reciprocal relationships with her mother-in-law.

The Confucian gender ideology can be a useful lens to interpret and understand the identified gender differences in reciprocal relationships with parents-in-law. In Confucianism, the *nei-wai* distinction and women's primary caregiver roles mean that the family domain and non-working hours can be considered contextual clues that signal normative expectations on female participants to fulfill caregiver roles. Therefore, leaving childcare and housework to the parents-in-law during non-working hours can be perceived as culturally inappropriate. Internalising the culturally and structurally assigned roles, ZhuangZhuang herself felt it '*irresponsible*' and '*unreasonable*' for her to ask her mother-in-law for support with childcare during non-working hours. On the contrary, men's dedication to work tends to be highly appraised in line with primary breadwinner roles, since it is perceived as their contribution to the overall financial well-being of the family (Gao, 2003; Zuo and Bian, 2001). Therefore, when male participants strived to gain parents-in-law's support with childcare due to work responsibilities, it can be perceived justified for the well-being of the whole family and thus viewed as a reasonable and culturally appropriate request, which will be supported by their parents-in-law.

Although most female participants' bargaining power was greatly constrained in reciprocal relationships with the in-laws, they did not always unthinkingly accept what was offered. The interviews suggest that counterpower is possible, and some female participants are able to resist and engage their parents-in-law in reciprocal relationships:

In their [parents-in-law's] opinion, men are still the ones who make money and women are the ones to take care of the family. However, for our generation, it is not enough if it is just men who go out to work. Both men and women need to go out to make money and support the family. There are a lot to be spent every day... we need to pay for milk, diapers, clothes, and education for our child...all kinds of stuff...I work for the government...she [mother-in-law] knows that this is a long-term and secure source of income, so she will not let me resign easily. Although she said something like, if I don't trust her with childcare, I should resign and look after my son myself. At that time, I asked her a question, 'who would give financial support to me when I resign and stay at home'? She didn't say anything, because she also knew that it was impossible for her son to make money to support the whole family by himself. (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing's mother-in-law could be said to cling to traditional gender ideology so that when there were disagreements or conflicts related to childcare, she took it for granted that it should be QingQing who should resign and take care of family members instead of her husband. However, Esping-Andersen (2009) proposes that 'if women are compelled to interrupt their careers, this will have adverse effects not only on individual lifetime incomes, but also on household incomes since the income from the second wage is increasingly needed' (p. 153). By visualising the financial implications of caregiving, QingQing was reminding her mother-in-law the importance of her income for the overall well-being of the whole family, and for alleviating her husband's financial burden. By pointing to financial implications, QingQing was able to use her long-term and secure income strategically so as to compel her mother-in-law to engage in intergenerational exchange, and hence provide assistance with childcare and housework. Thus, the financial implications of being the working sandwich caregivers,

combined with her professional job, enabled QingQing to gain certain bargaining power in the giving-receiving process, and she was thus able to successfully involve her parents-in-law in reciprocal relationships.

The findings that male and female participants have different levels of power in instigating reciprocal relationships with parents-in-law indicate that familial reciprocity is a dynamic and on-going negotiation process, which is underpinned by gendered hierarchy. The role of gendered hierarchy in shaping participants' reciprocal relationships must be understood in conjunction with traditional gender ideology and respect for hierarchy in the Confucian context. Therefore, following recent work on cultural resources (e.g., Lamont and Thevenot, 2000; Swidler, 2001) and the proposition that the meaning of reciprocity tends to be different across cultures, this research suggests that reciprocity is shaped by socially constructed meanings of culturally and structurally available resources. The findings demonstrate how participants make use of cultural and structural resources, such as the Confucian virtue of Xiao, and their sandwich situations in creative and useful ways for their course of action, and in creating meanings to their actions of making returns and gaining assistance. Reciprocity in this way, is not an instrumental measure of exchange, it is rather a "social process by which actors display for others the meaning of their social situation" (Alexander, 2004, p. 529). Indeed, the identified power asymmetry in reciprocal relationships is not only a prevailing feature in the family domain, but it is also common in the workplace. The following subsection explains how workplace reciprocal relationships are hierarchical and how participants exchanged support with powerful actors in the workplace.

5.4.2 Exchanging with powerful actors in the workplace

As with reciprocal relationships in the family domain, there are specific rules that participants are expected to follow when exchanging support with supervisors. Due to power and status disparities, whether to commence the exchange relationships or not

depends on the leadership style. For example, supervisors who were more supportive of participants' caregiver roles outside the workplace were said to be more accommodating towards their care leave requests:

The schedule in our hospital is quite flexible, that is, the head nurse will do the rota at least one week in advance. If I have something to do next week, I can write it on the schedule in advance. Once the head nurse sees that I have something to do on that day, she will generally meet my needs and give me a day off to do my own things. If it is an urgent and unforeseen situation, and I need to ask for leave. For example, last time my mother-in-law cut her finger and she was hospitalised... I had to take time off to look after her and my child... then I just called the head nurse. Generally, the head nurse will find someone else to work for me that day...
(JunNan, female nurse, one child)

When it comes to the need to take time off from work for childcare/eldercare responsibilities, it was not difficult for JunNan to get the head nurse's support for leave requests or sourcing cover for her shifts. Her supportive supervisor with feminine approach of managing employees was said to plan the timetable strategically, so as to provide temporal flexibility for subordinates like JunNan who struggled between work and caregiver roles. However, the previous chapter argued that sandwich caregiving responsibilities are not always predictable, and in cases of unforeseen situations, her supportive supervisor was said to proactively source cover for JunNan, therefore making sure JunNan can leave work to take care of her mother-in-law and child.

The interviews find that not all supervisors are supportive to subordinates' caregiver roles. According to some participants, their supervisors were reluctant to provide support when it comes to caregiving:

Many teachers want to take time off to look after their family members while our principal does not allow us to ask for leaves…He will phone me and ask 'why do you need to take time off? What are you going to do?' Or he will say, 'you should try your best to arrange your time and give lectures'. That is why I only took one

day off to look after my wife when she was giving birth to my child and went back to give lectures the next day. The government stipulates that we have a two-week paternity leave, but…it's amoral, we can't ask for leave because we cannot find someone to cover our shifts when we are not there. (XiaoLiang, male teacher, one child)

XiaoLiang told of his supervisor employing a masculine approach of managing subordinates by being work-oriented, and not being supportive to subordinates' caregiving responsibilities. In his narrative, XiaoLiang's supervisor used indirect words and questions (as symbols through use of language) to convey his reluctance to approve leave requests and his expectation on XiaoLiang to stay committed to work. This largely constrained the length of XiaoLiang's paternity leave, so that he took only one day off to provide care to child and his wife rather than the mandatory two weeks due to lack of support.

Another female participant also talked about the experienced difficulties in having her care leave requests approved, and how frequent requests led to bad impressions on her unsupportive supervisor:

For example, last time during QingMing Festival, I wanted to take several days off since I wanted to travel to my hometown with my baby. My husband wanted to visit his parents with my son. I asked for three days off from my leader. He tried to stop me from doing that. He said, 'you have already got three days holiday from QingMing Festival, why you are asking for another 3 days off?' He was just not willing to give me that. Anyway, in my company, if you frequently ask for days off or ask for more days off, it is quite difficult to get that… now that I have a child, sometimes he gets sick or something. Then I will have to take time off to take care of him. At this time, there tend to be bad impressions on some unsupportive leaders. (HeHe, female editor, one child)

A masculine approach to managing employees was also evident in HeHe's company,

who also suggested the difficulties experienced in taking time off from work to provide care. According to HeHe, her unsupportive supervisor tried to not approve her leave requests through questioning the reason for leave. Unlike XiaoLiang (who had a primary breadwinner role) who can leave the caregiving responsibilities to be fulfilled by other family members, HeHe (who had a primary caregiver role) had no other choice but to take time off from work to perform caregiving when caring needs arose. It then became a problem for HeHe, since constantly taking time off from work will make a bad impression on her leader, who was the gatekeeper, with masculine rationality in decision making regarding performance evaluation and promotion. In this way, HeHe was facing a dilemma. On the one hand, her primary caregiver role means that she will be the one to take time off from work to offer care to family members. On the other hand, her supervisor leading a masculine way of managing employees means that HeHe will be negatively evaluated due to frequent leave requested because of caregiving.

Without the support received from supervisors in the process of combining caregiver role with work role, it is less likely that some will reciprocate with high level of commitment or loyalty:

> *I don't want to dedicate too much to this company, since our leader has changed, many thought about leaving this organisation. We were willing to stay since our previous leader was more supportive. Now we don't…I feel the same…I don't want to work here anymore…* (HeHe, female editor, one child)

With support received from her previous supervisor, HeHe was willing to dedicate to her hiring organisation; while without adequate support received from her current supervisor, HeHe reciprocated with reduced commitment and loyalty, and intention to leave the organisation.

The above clearly showed that the gendered approach to managing employees deployed by supervisors largely shaped participants' experience of combining sandwich care with work roles. The participants who found it difficult to secure any assistance from

supervisors with masculine approach to managing employees were likely to return low commitment and intention to leave the organisation, consistent with the findings of Yu et al. (2018). Therefore, in reciprocal relationships with supervisors, negative reciprocity can occur. However, due to power differences, it is less likely that subordinates can retaliate bad treatment by their supervisors, who directly determine their pay and make promotion decisions. Instead, the participants are found to return injuries to their hiring organisations for ill treatment received from supervisors so as to restore equity. Therefore, negative reciprocity in the presence of power asymmetry is complicated and it tends to be indirect. That is, subordinates, with a lower level of power, tend to divert retaliation towards the hiring organisation rather than return directly to the supervisors who initated ill treatment.

Overall, the interviews explain clearly that power asymmetry is decisive in shaping the young working sandwich caregivers' reciprocal exchange, in that there are different rules, usually with gendered implications, that participants needed to follow when exchanging care and support with powerful others, such as parents-in-law and supervisors. This is especially the case for interactions in a Confucian society, the centrality of which includes power and hierarchy (Aaltio and Huang, 2018). The Confucian virtue of Li indicates a social order, in which people are expected to stay in a particular position and behave accordingly when interacting with others (Woods and Lamond, 2011). In such a context, exchanging support with powerful actors is complicated due to the need for people lower in the hierarchy to show a relatively high level of obedience towards people higher up the hierarchy (Kang et al., 2014). Therefore, parents-in-law and supervisors have a relatively high level of power in determining what support to be offered, how much support they would like to offer, and whether they would like to offer support or not. However, participants are not unthoughtful agents who passively received what was offered. The interview data demonstrates that counterpower is possible through negative reciprocity in reciprocal relationships with supervisors, and participants can deploy strategies so as to successfully engage their parents-in-law in reciprocal exchange.

The above three sections examined workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity separately. However, the interviews disclose that workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity are highly interrelated with each other. The following section hence discusses the interrelatedness between workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity.

5.5 The interrelatedness between workplace and familial reciprocity

Over the course of the interviews, it is increasingly clear that workplace reciprocity cannot be investigated in isolation from familial reciprocity. The two are highly interrelated, and the findings reveal that they are complementary to each other:

> *What can I do as [being part of] dual-career couples who are born after 1980s and who have a dependent child to look after? It would be great if my parents can come over to help. Most working parents do have their own parents' support with childcare, but what if I don't? I can only take her [his daughter] to work so that my colleagues look after her for me when I need to preach. It is really hard, the working sandwich generation, I can feel the squeeze*. (YouGe, male pastor, one child)

Being able to maintain reciprocal relationships with colleagues were said to be important in combining care with work, especially in cases where familial reciprocity was weak. In YouGe's case, the reciprocal relationships with colleagues were complementary to familial reciprocity. This means that when family reciprocal relationships were weak (for example parents being unable to provide support with childcare or housework), the existence of transactional reciprocal relationships with colleagues made it possible for YouGe to fulfill childcare when he needed to work. Therefore, workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity are complementary to each other, so that the existence of workplace reciprocity can counteract the negative implications of the absence of familial reciprocity.

Interviews further point out that workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity have mutual impact on each other since work and family are two highly connected realms:

My work is relatively busy…I have to complete a variety of tasks assigned by my supervisor… I need to help other departments on a constant basis, I need to help with their tasks as well…and sometimes our colleagues may take time off to take care of family members, then I will fulfill some tasks for them…so I feel like my work intensity is quite high…I always work overtime and arrive home late… while my family members don't want that…sometimes my parents hope that I can help them a bit more… like making appointments for them when they got sick, or help them to order a taxi online… (ShengKai, male IT manager, one child)

ShengKai told of his work intensity being relatively high since besides his own job responsibilities, he constantly helped colleagues by taking on colleagues' tasks when they were in need. Fulfilling tasks for colleagues inevitably led to overtime working, which further constrained ShengKai's temporal resources that he can use to return parents' support through provision of present technological care. In this way, investing support to instigate reciprocal relationships with colleagues can lead to constrained ability to return family members' support with provision of present care.

The interview data also portrays that returning parents' previous support by providing present physical care is possible when some colleagues are willing to provide some support with working tasks:

Two years ago, my mother suffered from illness, and there were some unexpected situations…then I had to constantly ask for leaves to take care of her in the hospital…then some of my tasks… I asked my colleagues to do those for me when I was absent due to caregiving… (WuTai, male civil servant, one child)

In WuTai's example, returning parents' previous kindness with physical care means that WuTai needed to take time off from work to perform caregiving, which can be hard without the support from his colleagues with work tasks. In this sense, giving and

receiving support occurs simultaneously, such that returning parents' previous support triggers reciprocity with colleagues in the workplace.

The above demonstrates that sandwich care involves a relational process, underpinned by dynamic and simultaneous interactions between the working sandwich caregivers, their family members, and colleagues through reciprocity. The interview results indicate that workplace and familial reciprocity are highly interrelated with each other with mutual impact. The identified interrelatedness has been neglected by the existing literature on reciprocity, which focuses on either familial reciprocity (e.g., Funk, 2012; Schwarz and Trommsdorff, 2005; Silverstein et al., 2012; Ugargol and Bailey, 2021; Kohara and Ohtake, 2011; López-Anuarbe, 2013), or reciprocity in the workplace (e.g.,Anand et al., 2018; Deckop et al., 2003; Hu et al., 2011). However, it is now widely agreed that work and family are not mutually exclusive realms (Sinacore-Guinn and Fledderus, 1999). Indeed, already Kanter (1977) points out that work and family domains are interrelated with each other so that work affects family life, and the opposite is also true. The findings that workplace and family reciprocity are complementary to and mutually impacting each other provide empirical evidence to the inseparability of work and family domains. Through the interrelatedness of workplace and familial reciprocity, this research finds that giving in the workplace impacts returning in the family realm. Additionally, the giving and receiving in reciprocity can occur at the same time, such that the giving in the family domain triggers the receiving from the workplace domain. Therefore, workplace and family reciprocity cannot be understood in isolation, but need to be simultaneously considered when evaluating the young working sandwich caregivers' experience of combining care with work.

5.6 Chapter summary

Symbolic interactionism emphasises social interactions. From a symbolic interactionists' point of view, meanings of care and caregiver role are not only individually created, but also co-created in social interactions with others (Blumer,

1969; Biddle, 1986). Indeed, care involves 'a net of caring relations where everybody is connected to everybody, and everybody contributes to care equilibrium in the family while doing what they consider the care to be' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2647). This thesis hence goes beyond the individual level and investigates how care and work is negotiated with others in both workplace and family realms. To do this, this thesis invited participants to talk about how they source support with caregiving responsibilities in the workplace and at home. Specific attention has been paid to how care and support flowed and was exchanged in the process of caregiving to articulate the relational nature of sandwich care. Moreover, given the prevalence of Confucian understanding of social order, this thesis also assessed the role of power and hierarchy in shaping reciprocal exchange in social interactions. The findings this chapter demonstrated clearly portray that sandwich caregiving involves intensive negotiation and exchange of care between caregivers and other social actors, and the exchange is complicated within power asymmetry.

Sandwich care is dynamic and complex by nature (Burke, 2017), and this chapter has articulated the complexity of sandwich care through the power dynamics underpinning reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family realms. Existing knowledge of relational nature of sandwich care is pre-occupied with familial reciprocity, and primarily with reciprocal relationships between parents and children (e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). Reciprocal relationships beyond parent-child dyad, and particularly workplace reciprocity, are generally neglected. However, the informants clearly stated that in the process of sandwich caregiving, reciprocity involved a wide range of relationships, i.e., with parents, parents-in-law, colleagues, and supervisors. With narrow focus, limited attempt has been made to examine how sandwich caregivers exchange support with different social actors, and to investigate the similarity, differences, and relationships between workplace and familial reciprocity. This chapter addressed the above lack, and suggests that the reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family domains are distinct in quality. That is, familial reciprocity tends to be of

high quality due to perceived filial obligations compared to the transactional nature of workplace reciprocity. Particularly in in-law reciprocity, daughters-in-law's return to parents-in-law who do not offer support with childcare and housework is usually made out of obligations to their husbands, dictating by the Confucian norms surrounding women's role and filial piety (Estioko et al., 2022; Sung, 2003; Zhang, 2009). Although distinct in quality, familial and workplace reciprocity are highly interrelated, and workplace reciprocity can influence familial reciprocity, and vice versa.

Research on the temporality perspective of reciprocity, in terms of immediacy of reciprocity, is not rare (e.g., Leopold and Raab, 2011; Verbrugge and Chan, 2008). Scholars has suggested that the quality of relationships can impact immediacy of reciprocity, such that in high quality relationships, individuals are generally not concerned about the immediacy of return (such as in family relationships); meanwhile, in lower quality relationships, things tend to be exchanged within a short period of time (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Liden et al., 1997). The interview data clearly show that relationship quality is not the only factor that impacts the immediacy of return. Indeed, the present-future temporal dynamic of sandwich care, and how care is perceived (e.g., from physical, emotional, or financial dimension) can also determine whether the giving-receiving in the workplace and family realm is long-term or short-term oriented. This reinforces the need to adopt a broader approach to conceptualise care and not to treat care as involving only physical and financial forms, in order to capture the nuances of power dynamics in caregiving.

The norm of reciprocity is in the underlying obligations generated by exchanges of support among individuals (Gouldner, 1960). According to Gouldner (1960)'s conceptualisation, reciprocity is voluntary and discretionary by nature, and it operates on the basis of power parity. In this conceptualisation, actors in a reciprocal relationship can freely return previously received kindness or ill-treatment because of the power parity between them. However, in practical work and non-work life, this is not always true (Ali, 2021). The findings of this chapter challenge Gouldner's (1960)

conceptualisation, and argue that reciprocal exchange is never based on exchange actors' freewill due to the existence of power asymmetry.

Current sandwich care research on reciprocity tends to be power-blind (see e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). While this chapter clearly demonstrates that power permeates reciprocity and guides how the young workers exchange support with others in social interactions. Particularly in this rigid Confucian context, in which respect for power and hierarchy is the norm (Kang et al., 2017), the role of power asymmetries is omni-present in social interactions. The Confucian WuLun draws hierarchical social order according to individuals' social positions, and the virtue of Li requires that people should follow the order and conform to the codes of polite conduct when interacting with others (Woods and Lamond, 2011). In such a context, exchanging support with powerful actors is complicated due to the need for people lower the social hierarchy to show obedience to people upper the social hierarchy (Kang et al., 2014). The research findings elaborate that it is usually people upper the familial and organisational hierarchy who decide whether or not, what, and how much support to offer rather than people lower the hierarchy. In addition, within power asymmetries, the return of kindness and ill-treatment itself was complicated, with the possibility to be greater than the original favour and to be diverted towards a third party. The significant role power asymmetry plays in reciprocal exchange necessitates the adoption of a culture sensitive approach to reciprocity, and treat reciprocity as a 'cultural performance' reflecting cultural aspects (Hansen, 2004; Funk, 2012; Moody, 2008), i.e., the Confucian understandings of power and hierarchy in social interactions.

The Confucian understandings of power and hierarchy is largely gendered. Gender, however, has been widely neglected in existing research on reciprocity (Ashwin et al., 2013). The Confucian views on gender concern not only who does what in domestic and outer realms, but also women's subordinated positions in social web (Leung, 2003). Reflecting on reciprocal relationships, caregiving in Confucianism is usually perceived

as a gendered gift provided specifically to female workers. This then generates a strong obligation for women to return the gendered kindness received rather than their husbands. In this way, many female participants felt a strong need to take over care from parents-in-law so as to pay back by relieving parents-in-law from burdensome caregiving during non-working hours. Additionally, the Confucian codes of feminine conduct dictate that women should show obedience to parents-in-law and demonstrate 'diligent work' at home to be considered a virtuous wife and good mother (Gao, 2003, p. 116). This has prevented some from requiring care and seeking continuous support from parents-in-law in order to continue to work, which is considered culturally inappropriate. Contrary to women's constrained bargaining power in reciprocal exchange, many male participants are in the advantaged position regarding what and how much care can be sourced from parents-in-law. This recalls the claim of Lee and Luo (2021) that although Confucianism praises hierarchy and power in general, the hierarchy and power are gendered. By taking power disparities and gender into consideration, this research contributed to enriching the theorisation of reciprocity as not always based on power parity and freewill of exchange actors. Rather, reciprocity involves power asymmetries, and usually the gendered asymmetries, reflecting cultural elements concerning gender inequality. Overall, the power and gender sensitive approach to reciprocity added richness to the knowledge of relational nature of sandwich care as involving negotiations underpinned by gendered power dynamics.

By its nature, combining sandwich care with work is concerned with individuals managing the expectations and responsibilities of the many different roles in their lives (Keene and Prokos, 2007). The following chapter hence discusses how participants take the role by interpreting role expectations from others' perspectives, and how the perceived role expectations guide participants' conducts in social interactions.

Chapter 6: Managing multiple role expectations in the workplace and family domains

6.1 Introduction

Previous two chapters examined what was involved in the care the young working sandwich caregivers in the Chinese Confucianism provided through the perspectives of the forms of care, the relational nature of care, and partially, the gendered nature of care. This chapter answers the second research question, i.e., how young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role? To answer this question, this chapter articulates participants' interpretations of role expectations from others' views, demonstrates the level of consistency between perceived role expectations in the workplace and family domains, and discusses how participants combine sandwich care with work through impression management. The gendered nature of sandwich care will also be covered here in this chapter.

6.2 Content of role expectations in the family and workplace domains

The interview data indicates that simultaneously occupying caregiver and work roles means more than providing care and fulfilling work responsibilities. Indeed, multiple role occupation also implies a variety of expectations that working sandwich caregivers are confronted with. This section describes participants' taking of roles by interpreting role expectations from their family members' and employers' eyes, and whether there exist tensions or conflicts between work and family role expectations. The findings further illustrate that role expectations tend to be gendered, in that family members were said to have different expectations on male and female participants. Thus, the following subsection first investigates female and male participants' perceived role expectations in the family domain.

6.2.1 The perceived role expectations in the family domain

Over the course of the interviews, a gendered pattern concerning perceived role expectations surfaced. That is, when male and female participants took the roles from their family members' views, some expectations were commonly shared by female participants, while other expectations were commonly shared by male participants. For example, being a mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, and wife means that there were specific role expectations that female participants need to conform to:

> *...my mother expects me to spend more time with the family, to chat with her, to accompany my child, and to do whatever a woman should do, like, being family-oriented and focusing more on family rather than work...Then my husband expects me to have a better temper. He thinks that I am quite hostile and competitive, sometimes I just have a bad temper and I am quite straightforward... Thus, I guess he expects me to control emotion... In terms of my daughter... maybe she expects me to spend more time with her and don't be mad at her... Sometimes when she didn't go to bed in time, I would be very angry, then she would cry, saying 'mom, don't be angry'. I think this is where I am not so successful, I failed to be what an emotionally stable mother should be like. I made her feel very insecure and scared, and it is very likely that my emotions will cause her to be unconfident about herself....As for my parents-in-law... the only thing that they are expecting from me is to visit them more often in their hometown...* (LuoHong, female manager, one child)

LuoHong talked about how her family members had gender and role specific expectations on her, such as being less 'hostile' and 'competitive' in interactions with husband, providing emotional care (to both her child and mother) by spending time with the family, and do 'what a woman should do' by prioritising family responsibilities over work responsibilities. LuoHong internalised some of these expectations, particularly the expectations from her daughter, as failing to live up to her daughter's expectations resulted in LuoHong constructing herself as a 'failed mother'.

The identified gender and role specific expectations were also reported by many other female participants. However, some added that their family members also had gender atypical expectations on them:

My parents expect me to be obedient and filial to them…my parents-in-law…we don't live together, hence I don't really know what they are expecting from me… probably being filial to them as well. My husband… he expects me to have a job with a good salary, and take good care of my son… Then to be a good mother, I have to be patient and I should grow up with my child. I think a good mother is really the one who knows how to communicate with the child and the one who can have high-quality companionship with her child…this is what I am striving to achieve as well. (ShuYun, female administrator, one child)

Similar to LuoHong, ShuYun also said that her parents and parents-in-law had gender and role typical expectations on her, i.e., to be obedient and fulfill filial obligations. The need to provide emotional care to her son was also emphasised by ShuYun herself in order to be qualified a 'good mother' in her opinion. Besides gender typical expectations, ShuYun suggested that her husband was expecting her to make financial contributions to the family by having a well-paid job.

Likewise, male participants were also confronted with various role expectations in the family domain, such that fulfilling the role of a father, son, son-in-law, and husband required male participants to fulfill specific obligations and responsibilities:

My parents expect me to take good care of the family, be filial to them, and be competitive and career-ambitious…A good husband in my wife's eyes is one who spends adequate time with family members…and the one who relieves family members from financial burdens…Then as a father, I should be a good model and be responsible to my child since childbirth…I should be guiding and shaping his world views…a good son-in-law in my parents-in-law's eyes…they can understand that life is hard for our younger generation…that is, as long as we can lead a good

life, I can take good care of their daughter and my child, and I visit them sometimes, that would be enough… (KunKun, male IT officer, one child)

In KunKun's interpretation, his contribution to the well-being of the whole family through financial care provision and his masculine traits (such as being career-ambitious and providing guidance) were still highly expected by his parents, in-laws, his wife, and himself. However, except for gender-stereotypical role expectations, KunKun's working wife, who was in non-traditional role, was said to expect him to provide adequate emotional care by spending time with family members along with the breadwinner role.

The expectations from family members to combine gender typical and atypical role responsibilities were also mentioned by ShengKai:

My parents expect me to have a relatively stable job, take good care of my family, and then spend more time with them…My wife expects that I can find a balance between work and family. That's...for example, being able to spend more time with them after work, being able to... take them out to play on weekends or holidays…Then a good father...because I think for a girl, her father must have a certain degree of authority. I must keep my promise, for example...if I promise to take her out to play on weekends or give some reward if she performs well in her exams, I must fulfill this promise…In terms of parents-in-law, a good son-in-law in their opinion is one who can make money, make your families feel safe, and then be able to take care of their daughter. (ShengKai, male IT manager, one child)

In ShengKai's interpretation, both his breadwinner role and caregiver role were said to be valued by his family members. That is, along with the need to have a stable job and make money for the family, ShengKai was also expected by his working wife to find a balance between work and family, and to perform certain form of care, particularly emotional care, by spending time with the family and going out during weekends and holidays.

The above portrayed that female and male participants' gender typical role responsibilities and traits were still likely to be expected and appraised by their family members and themselves. This is consistent with the proposition of gender role theory that people tend to construct their own expectations regarding the behaviour that is proper for men and women (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 1992). These socially shared gender-stereotypical expectations will then guide how people categorise, assess, and value each other's conduct and negative evaluations are likely to be elicited in cases of inconsistency (von Hippel et al., 1995; Blair and Banaji, 1996; Rudman et al., 2012; Hoyt and Burnette, 2013). The findings further point out that in cases where the participants internalised the gendered stereotypes of role appropriate conduct, negative self-evaluation can occur when they failed to live up to the expectations that others have on them.

ShengKai and KunKun's experience of gender atypical role expectations from their family members can be perceived as resulted from their dual-earning status, so that balancing work and caregiving is not solely women's concern. Chesley and Moen (2006) agree that due to women's continuing attachment to the labour force and the prevalence of dual-earner households, it is expected that in some households, men (alone, or together with their wives) will increasingly take on the caregiving role and fulfil more caregiving responsibilities. The interview results elaborate that the forms of care that most male participants are expected to provide tend to be financial care and emotional care.

The cultural lens of Confucianism can also be helpful in understanding the identified gender-stereotypical and -atypical role expectations. In Confucianism, the *nei-wai* distinction creates a gender boundary, in which men and women are expected to stay within a gender appropriate domain and perform relevant responsibilities (Gao, 2003; Chan, 2000). However, the interviews suggest that this gender boundary was not necessarily strictly followed and clearly drawn between men and women. The data

indicates that the gender boundary can be blurred in real life, so that both male and female participants are expected to cross the boundary and fulfill some gender atypical responsibilities. In this sense, as with other phenomena, the traditional Confucian *nei-wai* distinction is not a fixed cultural element. Rather, the meanings attach to it are flexible and are projected to be re-interpreted as a result of joint construction and the changes in the wider social environment, recalling the symbolic interactionists' understanding of the social world (Blumer, 1969; Flint, 2006; Benzies and Allen, 2001).

The above quotes further indicate that although family members are said to have gender atypical role expectations, these gender atypical role expectations are always raised together with the gender typical role expectations. This means, participants are not expected to live up to gender atypical expectations at the cost of culturally situated gender appropriate roles, which will be considered unacceptable and culturally inappropriate (see Zuo and Bian, 2001). That is, female participants fulfilling work responsibilities at the cost of caregiving responsibilities, or male participants taking good care of family members while not bringing financial income to the family, can both be evaluated negatively. This, however, can have gendered implications. Although some male participants are expected to perform care along with work responsibilities, Chapter 4 revealed that the forms of care they performed tend to be financial and emotional care, and they devoted less hours to physical care and housework. Contrary to this, most female participants still spent more hours on caregiving, and provided more forms of care regardless of how many hours they committed to work. As such, simultaneously fulfilling work and family roles implies greater role demands for most female participants than their male counterparts, which has been similarly experienced by many women caregivers (e.g., Hilbrecht et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2011; Jacobs et al., 2014; van Houtven et al., 2013; Hansen and Slagsvold, 2015).

The above discussed the perceived role expectations in the family domain and how the expectations were gendered. Besides expectations from family members, the employing organisations also have specific expectations on participants. The following

subsection thus uncovers how participants interpreted the expectations from their employers' perspectives.

6.2.2 The perceived role expectations in the workplace

Being working sandwich caregivers means that along with the expectations of family members, participants were simultaneously confronted with various role expectations of their employers:

> *Overtime work has largely been promoted in governmental institutions. We should work extra hours to do our job well…nowadays we are facing great pressure, and the workload is quite heavy. Since each task will be assigned a deadline, if we can complete those tasks efficiently and with good quality within the deadline, our supervisors will evaluate our work ability positively...Although it is said that overtime work is not related to performance evaluation…I have to work overtime. Usually, performance evaluation includes task completion status. However, to complete the tasks, I will have to spend a lot of time and energy. No one ever forced me, but I have to spend much time and energy to complete the tasks.* (WuTai, male civil servant, one child)

WuTai talked about how his hiring organisation was quality-oriented, emphasised efficiency, and set clear deadlines for work tasks. Although overtime work was not explicitly stipulated in the performance evaluation, WuTai interpreted that the 'task completion' within a set deadline inevitably involved dedication of adequate time and energy to ensure quality and efficiency, which led to compelled overtime work.

The need to dedicate adequate hours to do the job well was also raised by other participants:

> *A good employee in my leaders' eyes is one who delivers good lectures, which means we have to spend much time preparing for the lectures and making the slides…I feel really tired since we have to make slides every single day…Then, we*

have to make sure that pupils all have good grades at the end of the semester…it is all standardised with various regulations constraining our behaviours at work. We cannot delay the course; we cannot ask pupils to remain at school after class…we tried to do everything we can do in order to enhance academic performance of pupils…we don't even have enough time for meals or breaks. (JieYun, female teacher, one child)

Similar with WuTai, JieYun also said that her hiring institution was result-oriented, with highly standardised procedures to regulate and constrain employees' on-the-job behaviours. When result-orientation was combined with the standardised regulations, JieYun interpreted that to be perceived as a good teacher, she will have to spend much time on work, which inevitably led to the use of her break and time for meal to complete work-related tasks.

WuTai and JieYun's examples demonstrated how employees were expected to dedicate to the organisational outcomes due to extrinsic motivators, i.e., linking results to performance evaluation. In HuiFang's interpretation, a good employee from her employer's perspective was the one who was intrinsically motivated towards organisational performance:

A good employee must be the one who strives to meet the company's targets and hence contributes to organisational performance. For back-office employees who are doing administrative jobs, they must be working hard to provide services to the whole organisation…Or, there are some employees who are less outstanding in their ability, however, they can still demonstrate highest level of loyalty to the organisation. They are intrinsically motivated to learn and improve their skills, willing to follow the company's long-term objectives, and embrace the changes in the company; they will always be there when the company needs them. (HuiFang, female HR manager, one child)

Interpreting role expectations from her employer's perspective, HuiFang suggested that

a good employee does not have to be outstanding in his/her ability, while he/she has to be motivated intrinsically towards organisational performance, demonstrate highest level of loyalty and commitment, and always be ready to help the company when it is essential.

The previous subsection illustrated that role expectations in the family realm usually involved performance of work responsibilities. However, when many were taking the role expectations from their employers' perspectives, nearly none of them mentioned family caregiving responsibilities (as shown in the above quotes). This means that their hiring organisations were seeking undivided loyalty and commitment from their employees. The undivided loyalty that the organisations were said to seek required employees to devote considerable time and energy to organisational outcomes, and to not be distracted by other roles, such as caregiver roles. Dedicating 'much time' to working, however, can have negative impacts on some participants. These involved psychological implications, such as the work pressure that WuTai was facing due to work overload, and physical implications such as JieYun's feeling of tiredness due to lack of adequate time for meals and breaks. Additionally, the undivided loyalty that most organisations were said to seek neglected that their sandwich caregiver employees also had caregiver roles beyond work realm. This oversight can negatively influence participants' performance of caregiver and work roles, and the effects tend to be gendered. The following subsection hence explains how the exclusive loyalty that most organisations sought led to gendered implications through the perspectives of consistency and inconsistency between work and family role expectations.

6.2.3 (In)Consistency between family and workplace expectations

The interviews uncover some gendered challenges that participants encountered due to various role expectations that co-existed in the workplace and family domains. The findings show that work and family domains tend to hold different, and sometimes conflicting, role expectations for female participants:

My negative impressions at home are mainly due to my working time taking up too much of my family time, then they [parents-in-law] complain, saying that 'are you still taking care of your son now?'... (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing's example of negative impressions due to overtime work illustrates that organisational and familial settings tend to convey conflicting messages to her. As discussed above, most organisations valued employees' exclusive and undivided loyalty through considerable time and energy commitment to work related tasks. This inevitably took up the time and energy that most participants can use for childcare and eldercare responsibilities. This was especially the case for female participants like QingQing, who were still considered the primary caregivers in the family domain. QingQing's decision to work overtime for positive evaluation at work, elicited negative reactions from her parents-in-law, who were said to convey their dissatisfaction using the question (as a symbol) to hint that QingQing was not performing childcare appropriately. This is in line with other research findings on backlash effects in forms of negative evaluations that some female employees experienced, due to being considered as violating the role expectations of communal behaviours (for instance caring and childrearing) (e.g., Rudman et al., 2012; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Hoyt and Burnette, 2013; Goodwin and Fiske, 2001).

QingQing's parents-in-law were said to react negatively when she failed to perform caregiving responsibilities as expected by working overtime, and she further suggested that her employing organisation also evaluated her negatively in cases where she was not able to demonstrate undivided commitment due to caregiving responsibilities:

Last time, some of my female colleagues without children said they can do the night shift as male colleagues do. However, we [who have children and parents/parents-in-law] disagreed and argued for day shifts only. Hence, the leader thought that we are troublemakers who keep changing our mind and are not cooperative with work arrangements. Indeed, women are still discriminated against in the workplace, especially when the leaders are men. (QingQing, female civil servant,

one child)

With the culturally assigned primary caregiver roles, most female participants will inevitably need to commit time and energy to care provision to parents, parents-in-law, and children. However, companies' expectations on employees, regardless of gender, to show dedication to work roles neglected that their female sandwich caregiver employees were also providing childcare and eldercare beyond the work domain. Without there being understandings towards female employees' sandwich caregiver roles outside the workplace, QingQing said she was being discriminated against and negatively constructed as a 'troublemaker', who was perceived to be noncompliant with organisational work arrangements.

QingQing's employer was said to evaluate her negatively due to caregiving, while Dong Jiejie said taking time off from work so as to provide care was not allowed in her hiring institution:

> *We are not allowed to take time off for caring responsibilities…if my children got sick, I give them some medicine after work…and I will need to work when it is working hours. This is determined by the nature of my work. Nearly none of us has asked for leave to provide physical care for sick family members. Usually, when our family members were sick in the hospital, they were cared by other relatives or family members. We couldn't do it by ourselves, we just can't…Yes, it is very unfilial...* (Dong Jiejie, female doctor, two children)

The nature of Dong Jiejie's work, as a doctor, left her with limited choice and she was compelled to remain committed to work even when there were caregiving responsibilities to be fulfilled. However, this perceived gender and role inappropriate choice led to negative self-evaluation against the Confucian norm of filial piety. Altogether, the above showed that some female participants were still experiencing the struggle between sandwich care and work, such that they can only choose one or the other, and having both was difficult due to the often-conflicting expectations in the

workplace and family realms.

Unlike female participants, workplace and familial settings tend to communicate similar role expectations to male participants:

> *The working hour in the banking industry is relatively long. Like, we usually start at 8:00 in the morning, and work until [late]… for example, the customer managers I supervise, they need to constantly work overtime. We even work on weekends to ensure the completion of the tasks… Of course, my families are very supportive of my work, and they will not expect me to do much care or housework.* (ZhaoZhi, male director of a bank, one child)

With the primary breadwinner role, ZhaoZhi's overtime work was not problematised at home and was greatly supported by his family members, who were said to take the initiative to perform care and housework.

Similarly, QingQing, as a female sandwich caregiver worker who was struggling between work and sandwich care, also talked about how she understood her husband when he was absent from family caregiving responsibilities:

> *For example, my husband does not live with us [her parents-in-law, herself, and her son] on weekdays, he only comes back on weekends. If he goes on a business trip, he will be absent from home for several months. I just have to understand him, because this is also one of his ways of being dedicated to the family.* (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing demonstrated a high level of understanding towards her husband's work role. She allowed and justified her husband's absence from caregiving responsibilities, and recognised that her husband's dedication to work was his way of contribution to the well-being of the family. As a result, similar to QingQing, most female participants still disproportionately undertook more housework and sandwich caregiving such that their husbands' time and energy were freed up from family responsibilities, which can then

be devoted to work for positive evaluation in the workplace.

The conflicting nature of role expectations in the work and family domains this research identified aligns with the research in sandwich care field informed by 'role strain theory' (Goode, 1960), 'role dynamic theory' (Kahn et al., 1964), and 'work-family conflict theory' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), which has explored how care and work are incompatible with each other and compete with each other for limited resources, such as time and energy commitment of sandwich caregivers workers (e.g., Aazami et al., 2018; Halinski et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2001; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004). However, the findings of this thesis further suggest that the conflicting nature of sandwich caregiver and work role expectations is gendered. For many female participants, orienting towards work roles can cause negative reactions from family members, and focusing on sandwich caregiving roles can be negatively evaluated in the workplace. In this way, the work and family domains become two mutually exclusive gendered institutions competing for the working sandwich caregivers women's limited resources. On the contrary, workplace and family domains tend to convey similar expectations on most male participants. Hence, being work-oriented and dedicating to work roles through overtime work are likely to be rewarded both in the workplace and family realms. Therefore, combining sandwich care with work can be more challenging for female participants rather than their male counterparts.

Facing the conflicting role expectations does not necessarily mean that female participants only unthinkingly react to role expectations without agency. Indeed, interviews show that female participants have the agency to negotiate roles with family members and employers. Role negotiation, however, is not specific to female participants. The findings further suggest that many male participants also negotiated roles with family members, given that there were gender atypical role expectations on them. The interview results find that both male and female participants are active agents who have the agency to draw on various kinds of resources as solutions to the tensions between work and sandwich care. The next section illustrates how participants

combined sandwich care with work through perspective of impression management, and how they rejected the 'either-or' option and instead insisted on 'having both'.

6.3 Crafting desired impressions as solutions to the tensions between work and sandwich care

In combining sandwich caregiver role with work role, being able to take the roles from others' perspectives is important, as it guides how participants perform and adjust their performance in front of different audiences. The findings indicate that participants creatively craft various impressions based on their interpretations of what are expected and desired so as to elicit positive or minimise negative reactions of audiences. Different impressions are crafted on different audiences, and with various aims. The following subsection explains how participants managed impressions on audiences in the workplace, such as supervisors and colleagues.

6.3.1 Managing roles appropriate impressions in the workplace

The interviews show that in the process of making impressions, a variety of symbols and resources are strategically deployed to perform in front of audiences in the workplace. For example, in interactions with supervisors, some strove to create impressions of dedicated employees on their supervisors:

> *I will display my overtime work through post on WeChat, like saying, 'we have a lot of work to do today'. Or I will just open the door of my office, since my leader would work overtime as well, sometimes he may see us working extra hours when he walked through the corridor. Or I can ask my leader questions. When it is time to get off, I would ask him like how to do a task, or is there anything we need to report tomorrow?* (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing's example shows how participants with agency can use different symbols and resources to creatively make a dedicated employee impression on supervisors. In

QingQing's case, she strategically used WeChat, the communication App in China, to visualise her dedication to work by revealing information about workload. Temporal resources had been agentially deployed such that QingQing asked work-related questions during non-working hours to symbolise her commitment by working extra hours. Additionally, QingQing utilised the physical workspace in crafting a dedicated impression, such as opening the office door when she was working overtime. This would allow her dedication to be portrayed in the frontstage to be seen and appraised by her supervisor, who had a say over important organisational decisions such as performance evaluation and pay raise. In this way, QingQing's dedicated impressions will allow her to gain favorable evaluation in the workplace, in line with the research informed by economic rationality of impression management (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; van Iddekinge et al., 2007; Barrick et al., 2009).

In interactions with colleagues, some mentioned the need to appear socially likable through approachable and supportive impressions:

> *To impress colleagues…first of all…I must face them with a smile every single day. No matter why they look for me, for example, for some tedious tasks, or sometimes I was like 'Oh!… Again?' I still have to show that I am approachable in communication…I think the feeling I am giving them is really important, whether I am nice…or easy-going…and I can solve problems for them. If I cannot resolve it on my own, I need to guide them to the right department…trying my best to help them out…* (ShuYun, female administrator, one child)

Managing impressions on colleagues, according to ShuYun, means more than favour doing, it further involved managing her emotions through facial expression, showing approachability, and appearing nice so as to be viewed likable by colleagues as audiences.

Appearing socially likable through good impressions on colleagues was important, as it will allow some to accumulate relational resources to be potentially used in caregiving:

In interactions with colleagues…what is important is the work ability, whether I am organised when resolving work-related affairs…if I am not well organised, I may cause them a lot of problems, then my colleagues may disrespect me…then… I think I need to develop private guanxi with my colleagues… I cannot be so serious to them in our daily working life, right? And I think it would be good if I can help others. Helping them may require some time and energy commitment, but if I can develop a strong guanxi, it will be good…they will have a good impression of me, and then…when I need their help, they will come to help me out as well… (XiaoHui, male sales manager, one child)

XiaoHui talked about how his impression management behaviours involved the use of self-promotion tactics to demonstrate his work ability in order to gain respect from his colleagues. Besides demonstrating work ability, XiaoHui also felt the need to maintain a good private *guanxi* with his colleagues by managing his emotions and doing favour. Favour doing, according to Friedlander and Schwartz (1985), will inevitably elicit the feeling of indebtedness on colleagues to reciprocate the kindness received. In this way, XiaoHui was able to accumulate relational resources in the process of making impressions, which can be deployed in the future, and potentially be used in caregiving.

The above demonstrated that participants constantly deployed various resources (e.g., technological, temporal, physical, and emotional resources) and used symbols (i.e., the use of language and facial expressions) to portray role appropriate impressions by interpreting what were expected by their colleagues and supervisors. The aims of the impression management behaviours varied contingent on whom the participants were interacting with. For instance, due to the power supervisors had in key organisational decisions, such as performance evaluation, participants felt the need to manage dedicated employee impressions in order to be evaluated positively, align with the economic rationality of impression management motivations (Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2011). When it comes to impressions on colleagues, besides appearing likable on colleagues, as informed by psychological rationality (Merkl-Davies and Brennan,

2011), some were also motivated to sustain good *guanxi* with each other through favour doing. Doing favour to colleagues will inevitably lock participants and their colleagues in a reciprocal exchange relationships. This is particularly important for participants, who simultaneously performed sandwich care and work roles, since the relational resources accumulated through good impressions can be used to combine care with work. In this sense, impression management, which contains cultural elements (*guanx*i), can be an effective strategy to combine sandwich caregiver role with work role through enhanced reciprocal relationships with colleagues.

Over the course of the interviews, the role of impression management in combining sandwich care with work became increasingly clear, particularly when examining how participants crafted impressions in the family domain. The following subsection hence discusses how participants make different impressions on family members to combine care with work.

6.3.2 Managing roles appropriate impressions at home

The findings indicate that impression management is not a phenomenon specific to work domain, in relationships that are maintained through employment contracts. Indeed, it is commonly engaged in by participants in interactions with family members, with whom they developed intimate relationships. Participants are motivated to manage impressions on family members for various purposes. Besides showing conformity to various role expectations of family members to avoid negative reactions, the interview data illustrates that some created certain impressions to resolve the tensions between work and caregivers roles :

> *To avoid negative impressions means compromising my hobbies and manage my temper or emotions. I owe my family a lot since I work too much. If I continue to develop hobbies such as riding a bicycle, playing basketball, or going out for a drink, I will have no time on my family…I tried to live up to various role expectations, and ended up with not being myself. I cannot just be myself in front*

of my family members. This then becomes a great topic…in most families, if people are sticking to their own opinions, it will be hard for the family to reach an agreement. Then, we will end up with familial conflicts with no harmony. (JingKe, male teacher, one child)

JingKe's impression management behaviours in the family domain involved managing his emotions and compromising personal hobbies in order to spend time with the family. In this way, emotional care was strategically used by JingKe to manage socially desired, and role appropriate impressions. Through impressions desired by the family, JingKe was able to compensate for the lost family time, and thereafter to avoid negative reactions from family members due to overtime work. Even though living up to role expectations of family members means hiding his true 'self', it was still perceived by JingKe himself as essential in alleviating the guilt he experienced due to overtime work and in promoting familial harmony.

Emotional care was also used by WenDeng to avoid negative impressions, whereas it was used particularly when the boundary between work and family domains was blurred:

To avoid negative impressions is mainly to do with verbal expression and my attitude. For example, when my work gets busy, I become anxious and irritable. Then in front of my family members, those who I have close relationships with, I tend to be quite straightforward and may say something that makes them feel uncomfortable. For example, when I am busy working at home, if my daughter makes some noise around me, I will be angry with her. (WenDeng, male IT officer, one child)

The boundary between work and family realms became blurred when WenDeng allowed his work mood to be shown in front of his family members or when he took work home. Showing his negative emotions caused by work responsibilities had chain effects in terms of family members feeling uncomfortable with WenDeng's verbal

expression and attitude. Given this, WenDeng saw the need to manage good impressions and mind his manner of speech in order to minimise the impact of work on the emotions of his family members. Therefore, for some male participants, emotional care can be used to display the impression of a caring father, husband, and son who was concerned about family members' feelings and familial harmony. The caring impressions created will then allow some male participants to anticipate negative reactions from family members caused by overtime work or work from home.

A further analysis of the interview data finds that different from most male participants' motivation, some female participants indicated that managing desired impressions can help them gain parents/parents-in-law's support with childcare and housework through harmonious reciprocal relationships:

> *I can feel the pressure to leave good impressions on my family members…For example, I will try to be as polite as possible to parents-in-law, I will send my warm regards through gifts during big events or festivals… My mother wants me to share some housework. I can understand that childcare can be tiring, so she wants me to tidy up the room, or sometimes wash the dishes. Most of the time, I will do what she expects. After all, we live together…and I need her help with childcare and housework. I feel like…if I don't do what she expects, she will be unhappy and less willing to do childcare and housework for me…*(MengTing, female HR administrator, one child)

Knowing what were expected from her, MengTing's daily impression management behaviours involved following the polite conduct and providing financial care through gift giving to parents-in-law, sharing housework with her mother, and showing a relatively high level of conformity to her mother's expectations. For MengTing, showing conformity and caregiving to her parents and parents-in-law was creatively used to craft impressions of filial daughter and daughter-in-law. The filial impressions enabled her to please her mother, which further allowed MengTing to gain continuous support with childcare and housework through sustained harmonious reciprocal

relationship with her mother.

The importance of maintaining harmonious reciprocal relationships with parents/in-laws through desired impressions was also reinforced by other female participants:

> *To avoid negative impressions on my parents-in-law, I will be obedient in most cases, as long as it does not hurt much of my interests. After all, my parents-in-law are helping me. Without their help with childcare, how can I manage to go out to work...if I don't conform or not being obedient, and keep doing what I want to do, they may get angry and say, 'would you like to take care of your child yourself?' So, I will try to follow their opinions a bit... being cooperative is also helping myself.* (QingQing, female civil servant, one child)

QingQing told of how she managed the culturally desired impression of an obedient daughter-in-law through opinion conformity. Her cooperation and conformity were constructed as helping herself so that she can have both the outer and inner realm with the help from her mother-in-law. The above examples from MengTing and QingQing demonstrated that neglecting the need to create good impressions and avoid negative impressions on parents and parents-in-law may lead to breached reciprocal relationships, which can make it extremely difficult for them to combine sandwich care with work.

Impression management has been widely studied in organisational context to gain favourable evaluations in interview and job performance settings, to anticipate potential negative responses, and to conform to social norms (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; Barrick et al., 2009; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2011; Rudman and Glick, 1999). However, limited attention has been paid to how impressions can be managed in a family context, and how it can be an effective strategy to combine care with work. This research addressed this lack and examined the role of impression management behaviours in combining sandwich caregiver role with work role. The findings that participants feel the need and 'pressure' to manage desired impressions

disagree with Pascoe's (2017) romanticised evaluation of home as a place of safety and of relaxation. Instead, this research claims that home is a dwelling connected with multiple meanings, and complex and dynamic power relations (Allen, 2008; see also Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 114). With the omni-presence of multiple meanings, impression management is considered essential to align the varied meanings through conformity. Furthermore, the Confucianism shows great respect for power, hierarchy, and seniority. In such a hierarchical society, the presence of powerful others, such as parents-in-law, can create a strong situational power that motivates individuals to manage desired impressions for positive evaluations. Therefore, similar to organisational settings, impression management is common in the family realm, and the interviews indicate that participants manage impressions on family members for different reasons.

The interview data suggests that impression management is effective in combining caregiver role with work role, underpinned by gendered differences. The findings show that male participants tend to use emotional care to create desired impressions on the family to anticipate negative responses in situations where work interferes caregiving. Impressions, however, are differently managed by female participants. Care provision, sharing housework, and culturally appropriate conducts (of being polite (virtue of Li) and obedient) are used by female participants to sustain reciprocal relationships with parents and/or parents-in-law, so as to guarantee continuous support with childcare and housework. This continuous support will then allow most female participants to have both outer and inner realms without negative implications.

The above further showed that the need to sustain reciprocal relationships with parents/parents-in-law through good impressions was not raised by male participants. This needs to be understood through the cultural lens of Confucianism. The Confucian gender ideology dictates that women should be the one to stay at home and provide care (Gao, 2003; Chan, 2000), including childcare and eldercare. This gendered division of caregiving implies that women's labour market participation will be considered

inappropriate and thereafter needs approval from domain specific audiences, particularly the audiences with power within the familial structure. This can motivate some female participants to craft desired impressions based on audiences' values and expectations to gain approval for their culturally and gender inappropriate work roles (Friedlander and Schwartz, 1985). The interview data suggests that parents and/or parents-in-law who are said to approve and support the female participants' work roles will offer help so that they are able to 'go out' to work. On the contrary, given that work roles are men's primary role in Confucianism, many male participants may not feel the need to create desired impressions, in order to seek approval or get help for their culturally appropriate roles. In this way, impression management is largely gendered and culturally bounded, in that it has been creatively deployed by male and female participants to serve gendered aims, reflecting Confucian norm of gender ideology and social hierarchy.

Simultaneously occupying work and sandwich caregiver roles means that impression management of participants will never be as simple as creating socially desirable impressions on either family or workplace audiences. Work and family are highly interrelated and the two realms can easily be merged in cases such as caregiving intrudes into work domain or work responsibilities intrude into family realm. In these cases, impression management involves a simultaneous display of role appropriate and socially likable impressions to audiences from both work and family domains. The following subsection hence discusses how participants managed to be perceived authentic in the workplace and at home by producing the rankings for role specific impressions.

6.3.3 Rankings for role specific impressions

Being a working sandwich caregiver and the double uncertainties underpinning sandwich care mean that tensions between work and family responsibilities are not uncommon. Caregiving can intrude into work domain, and vice versa. When tensions

arose, participants often made decisions on the salience of the role so as to decide which impressions to work on to anticipate negative reactions or to elicit positive evaluations:

Usually, during weekdays, if something happens at home… for example, my child is sick, and he has been in the hospital for a whole week. Then from Monday to Friday, my parents will look after him for me. Because I cannot delay my work too much, I am in a managerial position, if I am not on duty or in the office, the whole operation can be impacted, for example, it may progress slowly. It depends on how I make the final decision. Are family affairs or work affairs more important? Then I decide whether to take time off from work to fulfill caring responsibilities, or to continue working and leave caring responsibilities to be fulfilled by my parents or wife... Each time I took time off from work, I tried to explain to my colleagues the situation. Through this way, I tried to create an impression that…this is how I deal with work and family caring responsibilities… this is also how I make decisions about their leave requests due to caring responsibilities. I will make my own judgement on whether the situation is urgent or not… (ZhaoZhi, male director of a bank, one child)

When there was a need to perform caregiving during working hours, ZhaoZhi produced the rankings for role appropriate impressions according to the perceived salience of each role. Being in a managerial position and with the primary breadwinner role, ZhaoZhi felt obligated to and was able to craft an impression of a dedicated employee, who tend to minimise the impact of caring responsibilities on work. Through this, ZhaoZhi was conveying his expectations on subordinates (as audiences), who were expected to make similar decisions when work and family role tension arose.

Managing dedicated employee impressions in the cases of tensions, however, renders other impressions under the risk of being damaged. In cases of damaged impressions, some were able to repair:

To avoid negative impressions on family members, I will have to keep my promise and do what I have said before. Another thing that is important in terms of leaving

a good impression is to balance work and family life. I will give you an example…take overtime for example…I had promised the family [living with his parents, child, and wife] that I would have dinner with them tonight. However, an incident happened to a pupil, I had to deal with that at school, hence I just couldn't make it…this then causes work-family imbalance and negative impressions… I will explain the situation and make up for it. (LaoShi, male teacher, one child)

LaoShi's attempt to create a responsible teacher impression on pupils or colleagues first, damaged his impressions of a good father, son, and husband, since he failed to fulfill his promise and to maintain a harmonious balance between work and family life. In cases of damaged impressions on family members, LaoShi had a certain level of agency to fix them through explanation and compensation.

Besides the agency to fix the damaged impressions, some were able to prevent the established impressions from being damaged through active interventions:

My daughter got sick in March and also at the beginning and end of May. For the first two times, I did not take any time off from work to look after her since my mother and my sister were home taking care of her for me. The third time on 19th May, she had a fever, which lasted for three days, and it was recurring. I took one day off to take her to the hospital. The impression I tried to project through this is that… I am in the managerial position; being able to foresee hence plan something is important. Now that everything has been planned and completed in advance, taking time off to look after family members will not delay anything. We all have smartphones, if something goes wrong, I could always raise the issue and fix it using my phone. (LuoHong, female manager, one child)

Of the three cases when her daughter was sick, LuoHong only took time off from work once. The first two decisions prioritised a dedicated employee impression by staying committed to work, and leaving caregiving to be performed by other family members. Meanwhile, LuoHong's last choice created an impression that her caregiving

responsibilities will not impact work through interventions such as completing work in advance and engaging in remote working. In this way, simultaneously fulfilling work and family caring responsibilities can be considered less problematic in the eyes of the audiences in both work and family domains. However, LuoHong's impression management behaviours in the process of combining care and work were not imitable by other participants. Indeed, LuoHong's agency in anticipating potential negative reactions and preventing her established dedicated employee impressions from being damaged, was largely determined by the availability of support with childcare at home and the level of control over work.

Holding a managerial position means that LuoHong had a higher level of control over when and how she would like to complete work-related tasks than non-managerial employees. This further implies a relatively high level of agency in making decisions regarding which role appropriate impression came first, and whether to continue to work or to suspend work to provide care to their family members. However, for those participants who occupied non-managerial positions and who cannot freely access support from family members, producing rankings for different impressions so as to simultaneously appear responsible at home and competent at work on audiences can be challenging:

> *I was very busy for a while. It was when I had just given birth to my son and had just returned from maternity leave. I had to put him to bed before I could work. Generally, it would be until 11 o'clock before I could do some work-related stuff. Sometimes I needed to stay up to one or two o'clock...and my mother-in-law just couldn't understand why I still need to work from home during non-working hours. I felt annoyed when she complained... In her opinion, women should take care of the family and shouldn't work too much... When she is dissatisfied, she would say, 'see, your son is asleep again, he didn't see you again'.* (CunCun, female accountants, one child)

When work responsibilities constantly crossed the boundary and intruded into family

domain, to be simultaneously perceived as a dedicated employee, a responsible mother and a good daughter-in-law became a challenging task for CunCun. When caring needs remained to be fulfilled at home, CunCun prioritised the impressions of a responsible mother and good daughter-in-law over the impression of a dedicated employee. This ranking can be a result of both self-produced role pressures (the internalised obligation to be a responsible mother) and externally produced role pressures (the expectations of her mother-in-law on CunCun to be a responsible mother) (Erdogan et al., 2019). Therefore, when there were needing family members at home during non-working hours, CunCun felt obligated to create context specific role impressions. This will allow CunCun to portray role appropriate performance in the family domain thereafter to avoid leaving negative impressions on her mother-in-law.

The non-managerial position that CunCun held in the organisation further implies a relatively low level of control over work. With low level of autonomy in deciding when and how she can complete work-related tasks, what CunCun can do is to show conformity to the employer's (as performance evaluator) expectation and complete tasks on time. Thus, when caring needs had been satisfied, the need to create a dedicated employee impression proceeded, so that CunCun sacrificed 'me-time' or sleeping hours to complete tasks to avoid negative evaluations from her employer. Therefore, for participants with low level of control in the workplace and limited support at home, to simultaneously manage the impression of a dedicated employee, a responsible parent, and a filial child/child-in-law can be difficult.

So far, the findings show that individual impression management behaviours are largely shaped by the expectations of audiences and cultural norms (Gardner and Martinko, 1988), which provide general guidelines regarding what impressions are desired in a particular context. Still, participants have certain level of agency to find creative ways so as to craft socially likable impressions within the general guidelines. The interviews indicate that impression management remains an effective strategy to anticipate negative reactions, to enhance reciprocal relationships, and to resolve the tensions

between work and caregiver roles. However, the findings further disclose that some cannot decide freely what impressions to make at particular times and in particular environmental settings. The hierarchical positions that people hold in both organisational and familial structures largely impact the level of agency people have in manipulating the details of impressions, so to appear authentic in the front of audiences both in the workplace and family domains. The Confucian code of feminine conduct of obedience, and the entry level jobs that most female participants occupied (see Table 1) imply that it can be extremely difficult for most female participants to be simultaneously perceived as authentic in front of audiences from both work and family realms. In this sense, the impression management is a gendered practice that privileges men over women.

The above discussed how participants interpreted role expectations from others' perspectives, and accordingly crafted socially desired role and gender appropriate impressions in the workplace and at home. Combining sandwich care with work, however, is more than simultaneously showing conformity to various role expectations. Importantly, the research findings also show that participants, as active agents, have the agency to challenge and resist the predefined role expectations, so as to create self-desired impressions. The following subsection, therefore, discusses how both male and female participants crafted self-desired impressions on audiences by taking the initiative to resist predetermined rules and scripts that are.

6.3.4 Crafting self-desired impressions through role making

The interview data indicates that participants do not always show conformity to the perceived role expectations through socially desired gender and role appropriate impressions. Indeed, some have a certain level of agency to resist the predefined role contents, and construct their own definitions and understandings of a specific role:

One of the main disagreements I had with my mother is that she thought that my work and family were not balanced enough. I focused too much on work, hence she

thought I must be really tired, which I don't really think so…A balance in my opinion is to devote 65% of my attention to work and 35% to family roles at current stage… Perhaps from her perspective, I spend too much time on work…while the daughters of her friends were looking after children at home…She said, 'you can do the same'. I don't really agree with her…As a working woman, if I want to achieve something in my career, I will need to sacrifice something, including family time… Although I am not a perfect mother… I am still a good mother since I have done my best to take care of her... (LuoHong, female manager, one child)

Both LuoHong and her mother constructed different meanings regarding what makes a balanced work and family life, and what makes a woman's role. Conflicts can arise when multiple meanings co-exist in the family domain. It however does not mean that LuoHong always demonstrate conformity to her mother's expectations unthinkingly due to power asymmetry. Indeed, she resisted the traditionally gendered allocation of work and care responsibilities by rejecting her mother's definition of a balanced work and family life, and the expectation on LuoHong to be a stay-at-home mother. LuoHong redefined a mother's role through her view that devoting most of her time to work roles at her current stage was also a form of balance. In this way, she was able to craft a preferred version of self, i.e., the career-oriented good mother impression, on her family members.

Besides own parents, some also negotiated and made roles in interactions with husbands:
Ideally a good mother, daughter/daughter-in-law, and wife can take care of both the outer and the inner realms. Hahaha… but I think if family members can offer some help... Umm…The couple must negotiate with each other, like, one must do more childcare and the other one can focus more on work…Umm… a good mother… we cannot say a woman focusing on work is not a good mother…as she is providing better living environment… (MengTing, female HR administrator, one child)

In MengTing's understanding of women's roles, she emphasised having both work (outer realm) and family (inner realm), which would be impossible without the support from family members. Particularly, the couples must reach an agreement regarding who is more family-oriented and who is more career-oriented. In MengTing's definition, a woman does not always need to be family-oriented, and a career-oriented mother was also constructed by herself as a good mother.

A career-oriented good mother impression is, however, not always achievable, and MengTing elaborated that this needs her family members' support:

> *My family members are supportive…my parents and parents-in-law are all supportive to my work…that is why they are willing to take care of my son for me when I am busy working, so that I don't have to worry about him…and my parents-in-law are offering financial care.*

LuoHong and MengTing's cases reflect that a mother's role is not a fixed cultural term. Rather, it is socially constructed in interactions with family members (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005). The symbolic interactionist role theory recognises that individuals are able to assert, strengthen, and redefine the preferred version of 'self' (Harnisch, 2012, Klose, 2019a, b) in audiences' eyes. Therefore, as thoughtful agents, both LuoHong and MengTing were able to make the role of a mother, and thereafter crafted a gender, role, and culturally atypical impression of a career-oriented good mother on their family members. The resources essential in making a career-oriented good mother impression can be the support in the family domain. With the support with childcare and housework responsibilities, LuoHong and MengTing can devote the freed-up capacity to work roles without worrying about the well-being of their children. Nevertheless, for those participants who have limited access to support in the family realm, making roles from their own perspective, thereafter, crafting self-desired impressions, such as a career-oriented good mother impression, can be challenging.

Unlike MengTing and LuoHong's experience in creating gender and role atypical

impressions through role making, some male participants strategically used traditional gender ideology to resist their family members' culturally and gender atypical expectations:

A good husband in my wife's eyes is one who makes money and takes care of the family, such as childcare, cooking, doing the laundry, and going shopping with her. This is impossible…Working in the marketing department of a real estate company means I am working all the time, and I don't get time off work…Of course my wife would complain about this. She cannot understand this even after communication… However, for me, in order to get promoted, I have to invest much time in work-related learning during off-job hours, and I will also need to invest some time doing some exercises…Basically, I don't really have much time with family… I don't have time to go out with them… no time to do housework and taking care of my child on weekends. (YiChen, male civil servant, one child)

YiChen's wife was said to redefine a good husband role to include not only provision of financial care, but also physical care and emotional care. YiChen constructed this 'having both' work and care as something that was 'impossible'. He, therefore, resisted the 'caring breadwinner' impression to cling to the traditionally role appropriate impression of a good husband who is career-oriented. In making a husband's role in interaction with his wife, YiChen made a strategic use of the conflict between work and family roles to indicate the dilemma he was facing: On the one hand, there were still normative expectations on him to be the primary breadwinner and bring adequate income to the whole family. On the other hand, fulfilling the breadwinner role means that family time will be constrained, due to the need to work overtime and do work-related learning to craft an ideal candidate impression to be evaluated positively for promotion. As a consequence, YiChen rejected the gender atypical definition of a 'good' husband in his wife's eyes, and instead refused to participate much in childcare and housework. Although resistance can cause negative reactions from his wife, his resistance and non-participation in caregiving was still considered culturally appropriate. In this way, it can be hard for YiChen's wife to initiate any change to the

division of housework and caregiving at an individual level.

When confronting a similar situation, some female participants indicated that they do not have much agency to reject new definitions of various roles constructed by their family members:

> *My job is quite busy and involves a lot of overtime work. My family members cannot understand it, especially my parents-in-law. They told me to find another post. They said this is not a good one because it is too busy. They said, a woman should find a job that is easier, so that she can take care of family affairs and look after her children, and at the same time have a source of income...But... If I change to another job, I may feel more tired than I am just now because of the need to adjust…I did talk to them…like, besides work, most of my time is devoted to family rather than leisure.* (TingTing, female salesperson, two children)

Similar to TingTing, some female participants indicated that their family members constructed a woman's role to add work role onto their culturally assigned primary caregiver role. This, however, does not mean that their work roles will be unconditionally supported by family members, especially parents-in-laws. Fulfilling work role at the expense of family caring responsibilities was said to be negatively evaluated by TingTing's parents-in-law, consistent with the findings of Zuo and Bian (2001). Although TingTing did not change to a new job, she negotiated her work roles with her parents-in-law by compromising her leisure time so as to portray the socially desired impression of a working primary caregiver through conformity, who can take care of both work and the family. Therefore, it is not always possible for some female participants to resist what has been defined by powerful actors, e.g., parents-in-law. As a consequence, many female participants can only show conformity to audiences' role expectations rather than creating preferred version of self from their own perspectives.

The identified gendered experience in resisting role expectations of family members, and thus crafting self-desired impressions can be understood through Confucian beliefs

about women's subordination and men's privilege (Leung, 2003). The Confucian text of Three Obedience and Four Virtues (San Cong Si De) is the guiding principle of obedience as a daughter/daughter-in-law and wife (Ho, 1990), indicating constrained agency for most female participants to negotiate roles with powerful audiences, such as parents, parents-in-law, and husbands. The constrained agency further indicates more difficulties that many female participants are confronting with in gaining approval from audiences with self-desired impressions than their male counterparts. This also implies the need for most female participants to show conformity through socially desired impressions without much agency to make roles from own perspectives. As a result of the disadvantaged position, combining sandwich caregiver role and work role can be extremely challenging for many female participants. On the contrary, most male participants have a higher level of agency in resisting what have been defined by others, and understanding roles from their own views, due to the dominant position they hold in the familial structure (Jiang, 2009). Given the above, combining sandwich caregiver role with work role is underpinned by gendered differences, with more difficulties for women and being less problematic for men.

6.4 Chapter summary

The first two findings chapters focused on the individual and interpersonal level, and this chapter emphasises the interactions among individual, interpersonal, and socio-cultural factors in guiding daily conducts. Symbolic interactionist role theory argues that roles are flexible, rather than fixed cultural elements that are assigned to social actors (Biddle, 1986). They are constructed and negotiated by social actors in social interactions. However, symbolic interactionist role theory has been criticised for over-emphasising the individual level, while failing to consider how the structural and cultural factors can frame individual agency (Guirguis and Chewning, 2005; Biddle, 1986). This means, individuals cannot create their own understandings of, for example, a caregiver role, based on their freewill. Their agency is likely to be constrained by structural and cultural factors, as well as others' expectations. To overcome the

limitation of symbolic interactionist role theory, this thesis further adopted impression management theory to evaluate how structural and cultural factors, and others' expectations shape individuals' agency.

The findings of this chapter suggest that the young workers actively craft various impressions in interactions with different audiences in both work and family realms. Existing knowledge of impression management, however, remains limited, with knowledge gained mainly from organisational settings (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; Barrick et al., 2009; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2011). This research advanced existing understandings of impression management by going beyond organisational context to also take familial settings into consideration. This chapter argues that impression management is not only relevant in the workplace within contractual relationships, but also common at home within intimate relationships. The identified pressure felt by participants to manage impressions on family members challenged the romanticised evaluation of home as a place of safety (Pascoe, 2017). Instead, this research claims that home is a dwelling connected to multiple meanings and power relations. Especially in the Confucian hierarchical society, the presence of others, be them family members or colleagues/supervisors, can create a strong situational power that motivates individuals to manage desired impressions for positive evaluations.

According to Merkl-Davies and Brennan (2011), individual impression management behaviours can be motivated by economic factors (e.g., maximising utility), psychological factors (e.g., minimising punishment and peer pressure), and external constraints (e.g., social norm conformity). The findings of this chapter add that motivations for impression management behaviours are likely to be impacted by types of relationships. That is, in interactions with supervisors who have a strong power in key organisational decisions, participants' impression management behaviours are likely to be motivated by economic factors, so as to gain positively evaluation in performance appraisal. Psychological factors are likely to motivate young workers to

craft certain impressions so as to appear likable on peers. Moreover, when it comes to interactions with powerful actors in the family realm, particularly parents-in-law, impression management behaviours are likely to be motivated by external constraints, such as the need to conform to Confucian norms. Other empirical research has also explored how these factors motivate workers' impression management behaviours in different settings, such as job interviews (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; van Iddekinge et al., 2007; Barrick et al., 2009; Huang et al., 2013). The findings of this chapter supplement that young workers can be motivated to craft impressions to maintain harmonious reciprocal relationships with colleagues and parents/parents-in-law, and to address the tensions between work and family. Through this, this chapter extended the understandings of impression management by suggesting that impression management can be an effective strategy to reconcile both work and sandwich care through reduced tensions between, and enhanced reciprocal relationships in the workplace and family realms.

Impression management theory indicates that individuals have the agency to create, control, and alter the impressions of themselves on audiences (Goffman, 1959). The findings of this chapter elaborate that impressions are not randomly crafted. Instead, audiences' expectations and Confucian norms offer general guidelines within which participants manipulate the details of impressions. The Confucian six cardinal virtues combine with WuLun to generate strict behavioural scripts based on the social positions each occupies (Woods and Lamond, 2011). The Confucianism clearly dictates who does what in their positions, for example, a father (parent) shows love and a son (child) shows filial piety, and a husband shows initiation and a wife shows obedience (ibid). It further offers the criteria against which individual conduct is subject to be assessed by audiences, i.e., the six cardinal virtues. The findings show that many audiences were said to internalise these role scripts, and any inconsistency to the culturally defined scripts is likely to elicit negative evaluations. The salience of cultural norms and audiences' expectations compels many to take the role from others' perspective, thereafter, to gain the knowledge regarding what are expected from them. Based on

their interpretation and the knowledge of Confucian codes of conducts, performers manipulate the details of the impressions so as to live up to the normative expectations. In this way, the findings resonate with the claims of Gardner and Martinko (1988), and suggest that in crafting impressions, performers learn specific behavioural scripts and norms in context, and employ these scripts to meet the expectations of audiences.

Individual agency, for symbolic interactionist role theory, is more than just take the role and use the behavioural scripts to live up to various role expectations of audiences. For symbolic interactionist role theory, individuals can exercise agency through role making (Biddle, 1986). The interview data portrays that young workers' self-perception and own understandings of caregiver roles will also shape how they perform care in front of audiences. For example, the workers who believe that a career-oriented mother is also a good mother will strive to craft an impression of an ideal worker on employer for positive evaluation in the workplace. Hence, instead of responding to all caring needs, some would compromise family time and have some caring needs to be fulfilled by other family members. However, the above discussion further points out that this level of freedom in prioritising and defining roles from own perspectives, is not always available. It is further constrained by structural and cultural factors, with gendered implications. Being able to prioritise work over care and to make roles requires that participants have certain level of control over work and relatively free access to support with care at home. Due to the entry-level positions that many female caregivers hold, women's subordinated position in Confucianism, and the experienced difficulties in seeking continuous support with care (as discussed in previous chapter), it is not always possible for women to decide how they would like to perform care and work without considering audiences' preferences and expectations. On the contrary, the male carers have higher level of agency to decide which domain specific and role specific impression comes first, and resist the predefined expectations of different audiences. For instance, many have the agency to resist the expectations on them to take care of both work and family, and instead cling to traditional gender ideology of being work-oriented. In this way, impression management is gendered, underscored by the

Confucian understanding of gender role, women's subordinated position, and male privilege. Overall, the results this chapter presented reinforce the value of the theoretical approaches adopted in this thesis, i.e., adopting the concept of agency from symbolic interactionism role theory (Biddle, 1986) to understand impression management behaviours (Goffman, 1959). Through the theoretical approaches deployed, this thesis indicates that sandwich caregiving involves complex interplays between individuals and structural and cultural factors in their social world.

Chapter 7: Synthesising the understandings of sandwich care

7.1 Introduction

This thesis posed two research questions: 1) what is involved in the care the young Chinese working sandwich caregivers provide, and 2) how young working sandwich caregivers combine caregiver role with work role? In terms of the 'what' question, in addition to unpacking the hidden elements of care, this research explored the relational and gendered nature of sandwich care. When it comes to the 'how' question, this research adopted the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand how young Chinese working sandwich caregivers exercise agency through impression management behaviours.

The aim of this final chapter is to discuss how the research questions have been addressed. To do this, the following sections first outline sandwich caregiving experience based on the discussion presented in the previous chapters in order to articulate the theoretical contributions this thesis made to relevant theories and literature. Then the discussion focuses on the empirical contributions and practical implications of this research. Limitations of this research and an agenda for future research will also be covered, followed by concluding remarks where I will reflect on what I have learned throughout this Ph.D. journey.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

The term 'sandwich caregivers' has been defined as those adults who are sandwiched between caregiving to their younger children and aging parents/parents-in-law (Chisholm, 1999). Over the last few decades, there has been an increasing research attention to sandwich caregivers due to the substantial and growing number of this

group in the global labour market (Boyczuk and Fletcher, 2016; Burke and Calvano, 2017; Rapoza, 2017). Despite the increasing research attention, there are still ambiguities regarding who can be qualified as sandwich caregivers, which is largely determined by the vagueness concerning what can be termed as care to be provided to both elder and younger generations. Within the field of sandwich care, care is superficially conceptualised as caring tasks to be performed, which involves mainly tangible and instrumental care, i.e., the physical and financial care (e.g., Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Gans et al., 2013). Following this narrow-focused conceptualisation, sandwich care is considered relevant for middle-aged caregivers, whose aging parents gradually lose autonomy in taking care of their daily living activities, and maturing children remain dependent due to lengthening of adolescence (Gans et al., 2013; Skolnick and Skolnick, 2003; Souralová et al., 2022). This thesis problematised that the narrow focus of care as instrumental and tangible fails to capture the scope and complexity of sandwich care responsibilities (Suh, 2016). Scholars therefore urge that more research needs to be done to investigate the experiences of sandwich caregivers for nuanced understandings (e.g., Calvano, 2013). In responding to this call, this thesis explored the experience of sandwich caregiving through insights gained from young workers.

Sandwich care is dynamic and complex by nature (Burke, 2017), which remains underdeveloped given that caregivers are usually considered passive receivers who unthinkingly perform childcare and eldercare without agency to exert influence (see e.g., Aazami et al., 2018; Manor, 2021; Stephens et al., 2001; Evandrou and Glaser, 2004; Huang et al., 2004). However, symbolic interactionist role theory suggests that human actors are thoughtful, and they have agency to navigate the complexity of care in social interactions. Additionally, there are more to sandwich care than the mere performance of caring related tasks to younger and elder generation that remain under-researched. Indeed, sandwich care involves intensive negotiations, underpinned by power dynamics and gender asymmetries (Souralová and Žáková, 2019). This thesis, hence, has set to explore the complexity of sandwich care through the hidden elements

of care, the gendered and relational nature of sandwich care, and the agency that young workers have in resolving the complexity of sandwich care. The following subsections elaborate on the hidden elements and the power-laden nature of sandwich care to articulate how the findings of this research make theoretical contributions to relevant theories and literature.

7.2.1 Sandwich care has hidden elements

The first research question this thesis has set out to answer concerns what is involved in care. Regarding the content of care, this thesis encourages to go beyond the conventional conceptualisation of care as the provision of tangible and instrumental care (i.e., physical and financial care) and recognise individual agency in defining care. This will not only facilitate understanding of the scope and complexity of caring responsibilities (Suh, 2006), but also take broader sandwich care situations into consideration by attending to other hidden forms of care that sandwich caregivers can be offering (Hämäläinen and Tanskanen, 2021). The findings on the hidden forms of care illustrate that care takes different forms and has more than provision of only physical care and financial care, as indicated by mainstream sandwich care research (e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Železná, 2018). This is not in itself a new line of argument as early research acknowledges that some forms of care, such as emotional care, continue to independent care receivers, and is as important as physical care provision in ensuring the well-being of care receivers (e.g., Lam, 2006; Boyczuk and Fletcher, 2016). However, what this thesis adds is that the hidden forms of care, i.e., the technological and lingual care, are also needed constantly, and they collaborate with physical, financial, and emotional care to shape the caregiving experience of young workers in China.

The exploration and identification of the hidden forms of care reinforces the value of conceptualising care through symbolic interactionism lens. Symbolic interactionism emphasises individual agency in creating and attaching meanings to care and caregiver

roles (Biddle, 1986; Blumer, 1969). Here, care is flexible, the content of which is subjectively defined by caregivers. In symbolic interactionism, caregivers are not treated as passive receivers, whose choices are constrained within a predefined list of caring tasks, which are dominated by physical and financial elements. Rather, caregivers are treated as thoughtful agents, who do whatever 'they consider the care to be' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2647). By considering individual agency when conceptualising care, this thesis was able to tease out what remains hidden underneath the rigid understandings of caring tasks. Through the hidden forms of care, i.e., technological care and lingual care, this thesis broadened the scope of sandwich caring responsibilities, so as to consider not only tangible elements, but also intangible and hidden elements when investigating how care impact employees' working and non-working life. Except for the hidden forms of care, the symbolic interactionism further portrays the temporal dynamics between present and future care, something remains hidden given the limitations of current approach to conceptualise care.

The temporality perspective of sandwich care has been recognised in existing literature. However, current approach to understand the temporality perspective remains limited given two conditions. First, existing understandings of the temporality perspective focus mainly on the number of hours caregivers spend per week on caregiving (e.g., Chassin et al., 2010; Hammer and Neal, 2008; Estioko et al., 2022). This simplistic view assumes that sandwich care remains unchanged, with caregivers providing certain number of hours of care each week in a fixed manner. However, the findings on the temporality perspective clearly show that sandwich care implies varying levels of care intensity. This means, the care receivers can have high caring needs at times, and have relatively low caring needs at other times, requiring sandwich caregivers to offer different levels of care. In this way, care intensity fluctuates, and the level of a specific form of care is offered in a flexible manner.

Secondly, most sandwich care research has treated sandwich caregiving as provision of present care (see e.g., Patterson and Margolis, 2019; Herlofson and Brandt, 2019;

Falkingham et al., 2020; Železná, 2018; Evans et al., 2016; Gillett and Crisp, 2017), while neglecting how care can be oriented towards the future, and the mutual impact between present and future care. The present-future temporal dynamic this research identified suggests that sandwich care involves more than the performance of present caring tasks. It contains the future worries that the young workers are compelled to anticipate concurrently. In this way, future care is one of the vital components of sandwich caregivers' present caregiving, and there is a dynamic interaction between present and future care. That is, the foreseen and unforeseen future caring needs largely guide how the young workers allocate resources among work, present sandwich care, and future sandwich care. Meanwhile, their present anticipation through resources accumulation shapes how sandwich care will be experienced in the future. Through the temporality perspective, this thesis added richness to the knowledge of the complex nature of sandwich care through the temporal dynamics between present and future care.

By identifying the hidden elements of care, i.e., the hidden forms of care and the present-future temporal dynamic of care, this thesis contributed to theorisation of care in sandwich care literature in two ways. First, care should be treated as individually constructed rather than consisting of a pre-existing list of caring tasks, mainly physical and financial care tasks, that caregivers perform in their non-working life. In doing so, the content of care and what can be termed as care remains at the discretion of individual caregivers. Hence, caregivers do whatever they consider the care to be, which is not necessarily, and do not always need to do with physical and financial care provision. This further contributed to extending the conceptualisation of sandwich caregivers as not necessarily those who are middle-aged, who provide care to their frail parents and dependent children. Instead, this research resonates the claims of Tomkins and Bristow (2023) that care can be experienced at different stage of life. Hence, sandwich care is also relevant for young workers whose parents and/or parents-in-law are relatively independent in their daily life and whose children are taken care of by other family members during non-working hours. This reinforces the need to use a broader definition

of care and sandwich caregiver so as to take a wider range of sandwich situations into consideration for nuanced understandings.

Secondly, the temporality perspective of sandwich care enriched existing knowledge by taking the evolving nature of care and future-orientation into consideration. This means, sandwich care should be perceived as flexible rather than static concept that is fixed overtime and caters only to present caring needs. The findings demonstrate that care intensity fluctuates hence young workers are offering a varying level of care forms to both younger and elder generation. What contributed to the complexity of sandwich care is that besides present caregiving burden, young workers are compelled to anticipate the future worries about increasing care intensity given the predictable and unpredictable caring situations. Through inclusion of present-future dynamic of care, this thesis argues that sandwich care is experienced differently at different stage of life. For young workers, the experienced sandwichness is not only about the sandwichness between younger and elder generation, but also the sandwichness between present and future caring burdens.

Overall, symbolic interactionism recognises individual agecy in defining what is involved in care from caregivers' own perspectives. In doing so, it allows this thesis to challenge the rigid way of conceptualising care and sandwich caregivers. However, symbolic interactionism has been critisised for over-emphasising the individual level while neglecting the wider context and how macro level factors, such as structural and cultural factors, constrain individual agency (Biddle, 1986). Therefore, if conceptualising care solely through symbolic interactionism lens, this thesis will not be able to capture how care involves relational, contextual, and cultural elements. For rich insights into sandwich care and the contextual bounded nature of care, this thesis went beyond the individual level, and took the interpersonal level (through reciprocal relationships) and macro level (through impression management) factors into consideration. The following subsection articulates the complexity of sandwich care through the power-laden nature of care.

7.2.3 Sandwich care is power-laden

Along with the hidden elements, the research findings highlighted to emphasise the role of power in shaping young workers' sandwich caregiving experience, which remains under-researched in mainstream sandwich care literature (see Hammer and Neal, 2008; Chassin et al., 2010; Steiner and Fletcher, 2017; Aazami et al., 2018; O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Turgeman-Lupo et al., 2020). This thesis suggests that sandwich care is power-laden, and power manifests itself in the reciprocal relationships and the way young workers exercised agency through impression management to generate influence. This subsection first articulates how power permeates sandwich caregiving through the relational nature of care.

7.2.3.1 Power-laden nature of care through reciprocal relationships

Sandwich care is relational by nature, since according to Souralová and Žáková (2019), 'care is portrayed as a net of caring relations where everybody is connected to everybody' (p. 2647). In addition, the symbolic interactionism approach to studying sandwich care emphasises that care is not only individually created, but also inter-subjectively created in social interactions (Blumer, 1969). It is hence essential to explore how caregivers and others interact to co-define care. This thesis therefore investigated the relational nature of sandwich care through the reciprocal relationships. Reciprocity concerns returning benefits for the previous kindness received (Molm, 2010). In Gouldner's (1960) conceptualisation of reciprocity, when one party benefits another, there will be a strong obligation for the party who receives kindness to make a return.

In the field of sandwich care literature, empirical research on reciprocity is not rare, and scholars have examined how caregivers and care receivers exchange support with each other (e.g., Souralová and Žáková, 2019; Souralová et al., 2022; Grundy and Henretta, 2006). However, existing knowledge of the relational nature of sandwich care through

reciprocity remains underdeveloped given two conditions: First of all, existing sandwich care research that explores the reciprocal exchange focuses exclusively on the familial settings, and primarily within parent-child dyad (see e.g., Grundy and Henretta, 2006). This, however, undermines the scope of relationships involved in caregiving, and the interdependency between work and family realms. The findings clearly show that in the process of caregiving, besides own parents, young workers are able to rely on a wide range of relationships for support, i.e., parents-in-law, colleagues, and supervisors. Importantly, workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity does not operate in isolation. Instead, the findings show that they are complementary to each other and there exist mutual impacts between workplace reciprocity and familial reciprocity.

The second condition that constraints existing knowledge of reciprocal exchange in the sandwich care literature concerns the issues with power and gender. Dominant understandings of reciprocity are based on the assumption of power parity and that exchange actors are minimally dependent on each other (Molm, 2010). That is, one can freely and independently decide the return. This assumption, however, is not compatible with the hierarchical dynamics of the relationships in Chinese context given the Confucian respect to hierarchy and power in social interactions (Kang et al., 2017). In Confucianism, there is a clear social order, and individuals are expected to stay in the right position and respect people upper the social hierarchy (ibid.). In such a rigid society characterising with power asymmetries, it is not always possible for exchange actors, particularly those who are lower the social hierarchy, to freely decide what and how to return the kindness or ill treatment received. Rather, it is powerful actors, such as parents-in-law and supervisors, who have more power in determining whether to offer support or not, what support to be offered, and how much support to participate in exchange, than young workers themselves.

Except for the issues with power, Gouldner's (1960) conceptualisation of reciprocity fails to concern gender, and Ashwin and colleagues (2013) criticise that existing

research on reciprocity tends to be gender-blind. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that if power was to be considered in comprehending the dynamics of reciprocal exchange, gender needs to be further acknowledged since exchange of care is not only filled with asymmetries, but also 'gendered asymmetries' (Souralová and Žáková, 2019, p. 2647). For Gouldner (1960), the pattern of exchange is realised through the mutual dependence of people. The research findings add that the mutual dependence of people is brought about by the gendered division of labour. Gender, in Confucianism, concerns not only women and men's roles in work and family domains, but also women's subordinated position and male privilege (Whyte, 2005). Hence, the Confucianism implies a hierarchy based on gender, in which women have more constrained bargaining power in negotiating care with powerful actors than their male counterparts. The findings illustrate that power and gender intersects to determine what is perceived as a 'gift', who is the 'gift' being offered to, how much value is attached to the 'gift' received, and how the return is made to the gendered 'gift' received. The Confucian gender ideology and women's subordinated positions dictate that it is usually women who are to receive the gendered support with caregiving, and thus, it is women who should reciprocate the kindness received. Therefore, within power differences, the giving and returning of care is complicated with culturally bounded and gendered rules to follow.

The findings on reciprocal exchange have indicated the value to examine the relational nature of sandwich care through Gouldner's (1960) conceptualisation of reciprocity. For many sandwich scholars, care is usually understood as the performance of a variety of caring-related tasks to both younger and elder generation (see e.g., Železná, 2018; Falkingham et al., 2020). Through the lens of reciprocal exchange, this thesis contributed to extending the theorisation of sandwich care as concerning not a mere performance of different caring tasks. Rather, sandwich care involves a wide range of caring relations, within which caregivers exchange support with actors in both the work and family domains. The conceptualisation of care, and the knowledge of relational nature of sandwich care, has been further enriched by adopting a power and gender sensitive approach to understanding reciprocity. In doing so, this thesis argues that

caring relations and the negotiation of care are underpinned by gendered power dynamics. The identified gendered power disparities inherent in reciprocal relationships also extended the viewpoint of Gouldner (1960), such that exchange of care is not always based on actors' freewill and power parity. Rather, there are structural and cultural rules that individuals are expected to follow when interacting with different exchange actors. The existence of context-bounded rules, in this case, reflecting Confucian norms surrounding women's subordination, reinforces the need to adopt a culturally sensitive approach to study reciprocity, and treat reciprocity as a display of cultural performance and strategy of action reflecting both cognitive and cultural aspects (Funk, 2012; Moody, 2008).

7.2.3.2 Power-laden nature of care through context-bounded agency

The findings highlighted that besides reciprocity, power is also manifested in how the working sandwich caregivers exercise agency in the process of impression management. Impression management theory (Goffman, 1959), along with informing thoughful human actors, who have agency in creating and recreating impressions of themselves on audiences, further considers the wider context and socio-cultural factors in shaping individual agency. In this way, it facilitates counteracting the drawbacks of symbolic interactionist role theory of over-emphasising the individual while neglecting the social structures, contextual factors, and normative expectations (Biddle, 1986; Guirguis and Chewning, 2005). However, except for its wide application to study organisational phenomena (e.g., Sandal et al., 2014; Peck and Levashina, 2017; Barrick et al., 2009; Merkl-Davies and Brennan, 2011; Rudman and Glick, 1999), impression management remains under-researched in the familial realm and in the field of sandwich care. This could be as a result of the romanticised evaluation of home as a place of safety and relaxation (Pascoe, 2017). However, the interview data disagrees with this assumption, and instead illustrates that many felt the need and the pressure to manage desired impressions in front of family members. This indicates that home can be connected with complex and dynamic power relations due to the co-existence of multiple meanings

(Allen, 2008; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). The presence of multiple meanings means that impression management is not only relevant in contractual relationships, but also common in interactions with family members, with whom people developed intimate relationships.

The findings on the commonality of impression management in the familial context reflect certain level of compatibility between the two theoretical frameworks adopted, i.e., the symbolic interactionist role theory and impression management theory. Symbolic interactionist role theory suggests that meanings of roles are individually created and understood (Biddle, 1986). Therefore, family members will develop their own understandings of each role, which is not necessarily shared and agreed by other family members. The co-existence of multiple meanings of caregiver and work role can lead to disagreements and conflicts, which generate the need for people to negotiate roles with each other. Impression management hence is one of the strategy that young workers creatively used to negotiate roles, to seek approvals or positive evaluation, and thereafter to minimise the tensions.

The analytical approach of Goffman's impression management theory (1959) emphasises daily interactions between performers and audiences. Goffman's conceptualisation of actors performing and adjusting their performance on stage based on the reactions of audiences, implies a symbolic interactionist view (Gillespie, 1980). The findings offer empirical evidence to this, and argue that to ensure the impressions crafted are desired and therefore will elicit positive evaluations by audiences, performers will have to take the role from others' perspectives. Here, the interpretations of audiences' expectations and knowledge of Confucian norms are significant, as they serve to offer a range of broad guidelines, within which young workers can manipulate the details so as to live up to the normative expectations. This recalls the claim of Gardner and Martinko (1988) that actors performance on stage is likely to be shaped by cultural norms and role expectations, as actors learn specific behavioural scripts and norms in context, and employ these scripts to meet the expectations of audiences.

The extra richness that symbolic interactionist role theory adds to the understanding of impression management behaviours is that individual agency is more than just role taking, it also involves role making. That is, actors do not just take the role and interpret role expectations from audiences' perspective. They can also create their own understandings of roles and convey intended meanings through self-desired impressions, which are not always consistent with audiences' expectations and Confucian norms. For example, the Confucian *nei-wai* distinction and codes of feminine conduct dictate that women to be virtuous and show diligent work at home (Gao, 2003). In this sense, being career-oriented is culturally inappropriate in Confucianism and hence not desired by parents and/or parents-in-law. Still, some female participants have certain level of agency to resist the cultural scripts and make the role of a mother, thereafter to craft career-oriented good mother impressions on their family members. The insights into this resistance, however, can be lost if agency is understood only through impression management perspective, which emphasises how actors live up to societal norms (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). The findings on the non-conformity to Confucian norms and other expectations through role making reiterate the value of the theoretical framework adopted due to the richness symbolic interactionist role theory contributed to understanding impression management behaviours.

Resistance and non-conformity to cultural norms and others' expectations, however, is not always doable and achievable. The discussion in previous chapter highlighted that being able to create socially desired and self-desired impressions requires a certain level of control over work and access to support with childcare and housework from family members during non-working hours. In this way, level of agency in crafting impressions through role taking and making is gendered. The findings illustrate that many women tend to experience more constrained agency compared to their male counterparts due to their disadvantaged position in both organisational and familial hierarchy, and the difficulties confronted in gaining continuous support from parents-in-law. Therefore,

through exploring how agency is exercised in impression management, this research argues that impression management is gendered, underpinned by the Confucian norms surrounding feminine conducts and women's subordinated position.

By adopting the concept of agency from symbolic interactionist role theory to understand how sandwich caregivers exercise agency through impression management, this thesis made theoretical contributions to symbolic interactionist role theory, impression management theory, and conceptualisation of care and caregivers in sandwich care literature. First of all, the findings enriched the conceptualisation of agency in symbolic interactionist role theory. Symbolic interactionist role theory focuses on how individuals, with subjectivity, adjust their conduct and define the content of roles according to their subjective interpretations and preferences (Harnisch, 2011; Lynch, 2007). It, however, over-emphasises the individual level while neglecting the role of wider contextual and cultural factors. The findings of this research added that although individuals have agency to take and make roles with their subjectivity, the level of agency is contextually-bounded and hence not freely exercised without external constraints. In the process of exerting agency, individuals will have to take structural and cultural factors, as well as others' expectations into consideration.

Secondly, the findings extended the viewpoints of Goffman's impression management theory (1959). In impression management theory, individuals have agency to create, control, and alter their impressions on audiences. However, individual impression management behaviours are guided by cultural norms, role expectations, and audiences' preferences, as actors employ the learned behavioural scripts in contexts to meet the expectations of audiences (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). The findings of this research highlighted that impression management involves more than only interpreting hence living up to audiences' expectations and cultural norms. It also includes making roles from own perspectives, and employing self-created meanings of roles to craft self-desired impressions on audiences so as to resist the predefined role scripts. Additionally, through the investigation of agency in impression management within Confucian

context, the findings broadened the conceptualisation of impression management beyond organisational context and enriched the understandings of the gendered nature of impression management. Mainstream impression management research that explores role of gender tends to investigate how women navigate their female identities in male-dominated contexts (e.g., Rudman and Glick, 1999; Garr-Schultz and Gardner, 2018), or the gender differences in the use of impression management tactics (e.g., Singh et al., 2002; Guadagno and Cialdini, 2007). The findings of this thesis highlighted that besides the gendered differences in impression management goals, there are also gendered differences in the level of agency in creating socially desired and self-desired impression on audiences, reflecting the persisting gender inequality in the Confucian context.

Lastly, this thesis extended the theorisation of care in sandwich care literature and argued that care involves not only task performance and power relations between caregivers and other social actors, but also the dynamic interactions between the individual and the wider socio-cultural context. It highlighted that care should be understood in context and in relation to the particularities of cultural norms, rather than a fixed element that can be applied across culture. In addition, this thesis further contributed to enriching the conceptualisation of sandwich caregivers. The term sandwich caregivers is usually perceived as those adults who are sandwiched between childcare and eldercare responsibilities (Chisholm, 1999). Existing approach to perceiving sandwich caregivers remains inadequate, since caregivers' agency in generating influence has not yet been well recognised (see e.g., Falkingham et al., 2020; Grundy and Henretta, 2006; Železná, 2018; Daatland et al., 2010). This thesis broadened this simplistic view and acknowledged that sandwich caregivers are thoughtful human agents who have agency to navigate the complexity of sandwich care, rather than passive receivers who unthinkingly perform childcare and eldercare. Importantly, the findings elaborated that the agency that sandwich caregivers possess is structurally and culturally-bounded, reflecting the prevailing understandings of gender in a specific context.

Altogether, this section discussed the theoretical contributions this research made to extending the conceptualisation of care and caregivers in sandwich care literature, and to enriching the knowledge of agency in symbolic interactionist role theory and impression management theory. The following section discusses the empirical contributions this thesis made by exploring the caregiving experience of young workers in a Chinese context.

7.3 Empirical contributions

This research made empirical contributions to the understandings of sandwich care and sandwich caregivers with context-specific insights. The contextualisation of sandwich care has been established in two ways:

1) This research investigated the sandwich caregiving experience of the young workers, aged between 20 and 39. Existing knowledge of sandwich care has been established based on the experience shared mainly by middle-aged caregivers or caregivers above 40 years of age (see e.g., O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Gans et al., 2013; Falkingham et al., 2020; Burke, 2017; McGarrigle et al., 2014). This has been termed as a pivotal stage in which the sandwich caregivers simultaneously perform high intense physical care to aging parents and instrumental support to their maturing children, while at the same time face 'major personal developments' due to 'loss of youth' and 'incipient aging' (Miller, 1981, p. 419; Gans et al., 2013). The exclusive focus, however, renders the experience of sandwich caregivers from other demographic groups, such as young sandwich caregivers, hidden.

By exploring the caregiving experience of the young workers, this research challenged the conventional understanding of sandwich caregiving as physical and financial care provision, which is specifically experienced by middle-aged or caregivers above 40 years of age. The findings, particularly the identification of the hidden forms of care

and the temporality perspective of sandwich care, clearly showed that sandwich caregiving is also challenging for young workers. In their daily life, young workers provide high intense physical care, along with the need to offer emotional care, to their dependent children. Although physical care is not frequently needed by their independent parents/in-laws, the young sandwich caregivers still need to provide a mixture of emotional, financial, technological, and lingual care to their aging parents/in-laws on an ongoing basis. What contributes to their challenging experience is the need to address both current and future worries about caregiving. The interview data suggests that caregiving increases as time goes by since parents/in-laws are getting older while care to children continues. To ensure adequate resources for future high intense caregiving, the young working sandwich caregivers were compelled to plan ahead and shore off some of the resources to be used in the future. Therefore, caregiving for the young sandwich caregivers is complicated, it is not only about what they are doing currently, but also what they anticipate that they will be doing in the future.

2) This research contextualised sandwich care by investigating how care was experienced by the Chinese sandwich caregivers and applying the Confucian values to interpret, and thus to understand sandwich care. Current knowledge on sandwich care is western-focused (e.g., Hammer and Neal, 2008; Pines et al., 2011; Pagani and Marenzi, 2008; Guberman et al., 2012; Bastawrous et al., 2015; Manor, 2021; Henle et al., 2020; DePasquale et al., 2018; Keene and Prokos, 2007). By examining sandwich caregiving in Confucianism, this research broadened the existing western-centered knowledge of sandwich caregiving with context-specific insights gained from Chinese Confucianism.

The findings suggest that sandwich care experienced by the Chinese young workers is largely shaped by the Confucian norms, which not only guide how to perform but also who is responsible for caregiving. In terms of how caregiving should be performed, the Confucian norm surrounding filial piety dictates that adult children should take care of parents when they need (Estioko et al., 2022; Sung, 2003). The interview data indicates

that this is still relevant in contemporary Chinese society, such that many see the need to and wish to provide various forms of care to their aging parents and parents-in-law regardless whether they are dependent in their daily living activities or not. In this way, eldercare in China can start at an early age, and it involves an ongoing provision of a variety of care forms, which is not just to do with the provision of physical care. Additionally, the Confucian norm of *nei-wai* distinction guides who is responsible for caregiving in China. The *nei-wai* distinction assigns different roles to men and women (Gao, 2003). Dictated by the *nei-wai* distinction, the care that men and women are providing tends to be different. The interviews illustrate that men are more likely to take care of younger and elder generation through financial and emotional caregiving, while women are more likely to provide more forms of care and higher level of care regardless of how many hours they devote to work. Although the young working sandwich caregiver women are able to navigate the complexity of sandwich caregiving, the level of agency and bargaining power in negotiation is largely constrained by the Confucian norm surrounding women's subordinated positions in the social hierarchy. Therefore, by examining the sandwich care in context, Confucianism in this case, a holistic understanding of how contextual settings frame caregiving and social interactions was obtained.

7.4 Practical implications

The findings from this research have important implications for organisations and policy makers who are interested in supporting the working sandwich caregivers in combining care with work. Particularly in the Chinese context, in which the three-child policy, aging population, and delayed retirement (Xinhua, 2021; MOHRSS, 2016) implies that an increasing number of working adults will be facing the sandwich caregiving to both their younger children and aging parents/in-laws. Recently in China, the implementation of the three-child policy has led to an ongoing debate on motherhood and gender equality, due to the prevalent gender ideology (Gao and Li, 2021). Given the increasing practical and research attention being paid to childcare, this

research urges that the voices of sandwich caregivers, who provide a variety of care forms to both the younger and elder generations, need to be heard more. The value of this thesis is, therefore, to communicate their voices to a broad range of audiences, to raise the awareness of the challenges they are facing, and thus to encourage the design and improvement of relevant supportive policies, catering specifically to the need of sandwich caregivers.

There are different policies in China to support workers with childcare or eldercare responsibilities. However, the existing policies remain limited with two key concerns. First, the supportive policies paid undivided attention to the provision of physical care to either children or aging parents. For example, following the implementation of the three-child policies, the Chinese government has introduced a variety of policies, striving to ease the burden of childcare. One of the most prominent policy is the extension of parental leave. In Shanghai, for instance, the revised family planning regulation extended maternity leave to 158 days, and parents are entitled to five days of annual paid leave until their child turns three (Yang, 2021).

When it comes to eldercare, the Chinese government has introduced different measures to enhance eldercare services, such as revised regulation on the provision, supervision, and operation of nursing homes (Xinhua, 2020). However, policies regarding how to support caregivers with eldercare repsonsibilities in work remain limited. Different provinces in China may have their own regulations in eldercare. For example, the "implementation measures for marriage leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, nursing leave and other vacations" in TianJin city stipulates that single child has a maximum of 20 days of nursing leave annually, 10 days for non-single child, to take care of parent(s) aged above 60 who is (are) hospitalised due to sickness (Tianjin-Municipal-People's-Government, 2022). However, to be qualified for nursing leave, the workers should provide relevant medical documents from the hospital (ibid).

The above-mentioned childcare and eldercare policies, however, strictly stipulate that the paid annual leave is only provided to parents with highly dependent children, and to adult children whose aging parents aged above 60 are hospitalised. This reinforces the conventional understanding of childcare and eldercare as mainly to do with physical care provision. Nevertheless, the research findings clearly demonstrate that care takes different forms, and other forms of care, such as emotional, technological, and lingual care, are as important as physical care for both caregivers and care receivers. To better support sandwich caregivers, and to consider a wide range of sandwich situations, this research suggests that organisations and policy makers maintain an open attitude towards care forms, and not take it for granted that care only includes physical dimension. Hence, policy makers can review their existing policies, and make sure new policies take different forms of care into consideration, and reduce barriers for sandwich caregivers to take time off from work to provide childcare and eldercare when necessary. Organisations should nurture a care friendly culture, in which caregiving is normalised and perceived as important part of their workers' life. Therefore, it is important that organisations take the initiative to communicate the availability of and enhance the accessibility to supportive policies, and allow their employees to leave for caregiving without worrying about negative implications.

The second concern of existing supportive policies regards the gendered implications. Take parental leave for example: the new regulation extended maternity leave of women workers to 158 days, while made little changes to paternity leave for men. In the revised regulation, fathers are only entitled to 15 days of paid leave, and in some provinces of China, it can be 30 days (Yang, 2021). The significant gap between maternity leave and paternity leave implies higher costs for hiring female workers than male workers, which has the potential to reinforce hiring discrimination and employment uncertainties due to 'motherhood penalties' (Gao and Li, 2021, p. 256). In terms of gender equality and discrimination, the Chinese government has different regulations in place to protect female workers' rights. For instance, the Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Article 27 of the "Employment Promotion Law" stipulates that organisations

shall not exclude women or raise the recruitment criteria when hiring women. Article 48 of the "Constitution of the People's Republic of China" protects women's rights and interests, and stipulates that men and women get equal pay for equal work. Moreover, Article 2 of the "Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law" suggests that the state takes necessary measures to promote equality between men and women, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, and prohibit exclusion and restriction of women's enjoyment and exercise of various rights and interests. Even with regulations against gender discrimination, invisible discrimination still exists in recruitment and promotion (Gao and Li, 2021). To reduce discrimination against women in employment due to caregiving, this research suggests that men need to engage more in caregiving, and this can be achieved through interventions at both national and organisational levels.

To engage male workers in caregiving and enhance gender equality, this research suggests that policy makers to consider extending paternity leave so as to minimise the gap between 158 days of maternity leave and 15 days of paternity leave. Alternatively, government can consider 'shared parental leave (SPL)', in which employed mothers switch part of their leave, and they can decide how the SPL can be shared, i.e., either parents take it in turns or take time off together to provide childcare (CIPD, 2022). However, barriers to extending and implementing paternity leave in China exist, due to the persisting *nei-wai* distinction, lack of governance, and workplace stigma.

The persisting *nei-wai* distinction means that fathers' roles in childcare are not expected by the wider society, and childcare is still considered women's responsibility in China (Gao and Li, 2021). In this way, the role of fathers can be largely downplayed by parental leave regulations. Indeed, fathers' rights in taking paternity leave have not been adequately protected in China. The National Population and Family Dynamics Monitoring Survey conducted by the National Health Commission in 2019 suggested that a third of fathers did not take full paternity leave (News-CNR, 2023). This is also evident in the interviews, with some male participants suggested that they were compelled to reduce their paternity leave due to the difficulties experienced in having

their leave requests approved by supervisors. Therefore, the Chinese government needs to take effective measures to monitor the implementation of paternity leave at organisational level, and hence to ensure fathers enjoy their rights to take the statutory days of paternity leave. Moreover, a report showed that men still face barriers to take paternity leave due to stigma attached and unfriendly workplace culture (CIPD, 2020). In this vein, the CIPD (2020) suggests that organisations should create an open culture to normalise fathers taking paternity leave, and reduce financial barriers to those fathers who plan to take and have taken paternity leave. Although this is recommended for a UK context, the recommendation is equally useful for the Chinese context in which men's roles still center around work. It is expected that through these interventions at both state and organisational level, fathers will gradually engage more in childcare. Men's increasing participation in non-typical roles, i.e., childcare, will then steadily transform the stereotypes of women being primary caregivers in the Chinese society, as suggested by the dynamic and changing nature of gender stereotypes (Diekman and Eagly, 2000; Diekman and Goodfriend, 2006). Through this, gender equality can be steadily enhanced.

Over the course of the interviews, one thing that came through consistently was flexibility. Flexible working is important for working sandwich caregivers to remain in work, while the percentage of organisations proactively promoting flexible working options is still low (CIPD, 2016). This is also the case for Chinese organisations. Although experts suggest that organisations in China can pilot flexible working for female workers (Chen, 2019), flexible working should not exclude male workers due to the importance of their role and engagement in caregiving. Moreover, Atkinson and Hall (2009) argue that if flexible working options are designed and introduced 'for women' (p. 663), it can reinforce the gendered perceptions of roles. Therefore, this research recommends that male workers should be involved and entitled to flexible work arrangements, which is beneficial for enhancing equality measures. To enhance flexibility, this research suggests that organisations can consider four approaches to flexible work.

First, organisations in China can consider formal flexible working options that emphasis working hour reduction, such as part-time work, for both male and female sandwich workers (CIPD, 2017; Parker, 2014; Atkinson and Hall, 2009). However, the report of US-China Business Council revealed that among the wide variety of different approaches to flexible working arrangements for white-collar workers, implementation of part-time work options remains low (Parker, 2014). In China, the unrestricted global capitalism and a Confucian norm of hierarchy combine to make the 996 regime a default corporate culture in many Chinese organisations (Wang, 2020). Under the 996 regime, employees are expected to work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days a week (Yang et al., 2021). With the culture of long working hours, implementing part-time work options can be difficult in China. However, organisations can consider part-time options for sandwich caregivers during the period when the care intensity is high if a permanent part-time option is not ideal. This will allow their workers to remain in work while at the same time fulfilling high intense sandwich care responsibilities. Relevant interventions need to be implemented to ensure sandwich caregivers are not only aware of the availability of part-time option, but also able to choose the option without negative implications on their finance and career.

Secondly, organisations can also consider other flexibility schemes that emphasise arrangements rather than reduction of working hours, e.g., flexitime and flexiplace schemes. In flexitime schemes, employees are empowered to select working hours (Chen, 2018). With flexitime, the working sandwich caregivers can adjust the starting and finishing times around the core hours. In this way, they can fit their working hours around sandwich caregiving responsibilities. Alternatively, organisations can implement flexiplace (ibid). With flexiplace, sandwich caregivers can decide where to work, and hence are able to work away from the office, e.g., at home or hospitals (as indicated by some participants) when there are needs to provide care.

Thirdly, organisations can consider informal forms of flexible working options to counteract the weaknesses of formal flexible working options (e.g., part-time work), i.e., being applied only to a specific types of employees (particularly women caregivers), and negative implications on salary and career due to reduction in working hours (Atkinson and Hall, 2009). Although hard to define, informal flexible working schemes allow sandwich caregivers to have high level of control over their working hours and working patterns, which is beneficial for employees to combine sandwich caregiver role and work role (ibid). In the interviews, some participants appraised the flexibility offered by their supervisors, such as planning duty roster in advance to enable subordinates to adjust working time to fit caregiving commitments, and actively sourcing cover in urgent situations. This research suggests organisation to encourage the use of these informal flexible working schemes, so as to support a diverse range of caregivers employees without financial and career implications due to reduced working hours (Atkinson and Hall, 2009). Lastly, the present-future temporal dynamic this research identified in terms of varying intensity of care implies that a certain level of flexibility in the management of care-related paid leave can be considered. This means, organisations can consider the possibility of allowing sandwich caregiver workers to shore up some of their paid leave allowance to 'leave bank' when care intensity is low. This is to ensure that the working sandwich caregivers have adequate resources to cope when care intensity increases.

Having illustrated the practical implications of this research and suggested how organisations and policy makers can enhance their existing policies to support the working sandwich caregivers,　the following section discusses the limitations of this research and sets out an agenda for future research.

7.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite the valuable contributions made to relevant theories and literature by investigating the complex and dynamic nature of care through a context-specific

perspective, this research is not without its limitations. First of all, it is possible that some participants, despite their consent to participate in the interviews, may not always freely share their lived experience. This, according to Zhou and Nunes (2013) can be due to the Confucian dynamism characteristics of *mianzi* (face). The notion of *mianzi* is related to how a person is recognised based on his/her social standing and position, and it refers to individuals' attempts to preserve and protect face (ibid). In the interview process, it was clear that to protect or save face, some were reluctant to be absolutely direct in their answers. This has usually led to the vague answers to the questions asked. In addition to preserving their own faces, some were striving to protect the face of their family members and hiring organisations. In this way, obtaining honest responses was made difficult. However, to ensure the credibility of interview data, the participants were always ensured the purpose of this research, the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of research data. In addition, I used trigger and probing questions for the answers that were unclear, ambiguous, and lack of elaboration. To fully capture participants meanings conveyed, directly and indirectly, I reviewed the entire script when analysing and interpreting the interview data.

The second limitation of this research concerns the demographic characteristics of participants. Chapter 3 showed that all participants received relatively good education and worked in professional positions. This means that the results may not be suitable for interpreting the experience of the working sandwich caregiver workers in non-professional positions. However, the aim of this research is to gain rich insights into the lived experience of participants, rather than to generalise the findings to a wider population. In this way, the homogenous samples serve the research aim well with nuanced and context-specific understandings of sandwich care (Robinson, 2014). Due to the particular type of participants that I had, future research could explore how sandwich care is experienced by different demographic groups of caregivers working in different work positions, such as working sandwich caregivers in precarious work positions.

Thirdly, the findings indicate that sandwich care is relational by nature, such that it involves intensive interactions between caregivers and care receivers. However, this research only heard from caregivers. In this way, the single-sided information offers partial understandings to the relational nature of sandwich care. However, the above mentioned the signficant role *mianzi* plays in shaping people's answers in Confucianism. To protect their own and their family members' *mianzi*, participants in China may not want to give honest response in front of each other. Particularly the presence of powerful actors in the family realm, such as their parents or parents-in-law, can create a strong external pressure which will largely guide how caregivers react in the interview and respond to the questions. Therefore, this research purposefully seek insights from caregivers only, so to minimise the impact of power disparity and *mianzi* on the credibility of research findings. Future research can explore the relational nature of sandwich care in dyad, such as parent-child dyad, husband and wife, and parent-in-law and child-in-law. However, interventions need to be planned carefully to ensure the credibility of interview data.

The findings clearly demonstrate that sandwich care is power-laden, and power manifests itself in all aspects of caregiving, including reciprocal relationships, individual agency in navigating sandwich care, and gendered caregiving experience. However, the role of power in sandwich care literature remains underdeveloped. Therefore, more research efforts are necessary to unpack how power permeates sandwich caregiving, and how it shapes caregiving experience for nuanced understandings of sandwich care. Furthermore, the above discussion highlighted the lack of research attention to the hidden forms of care and the present-future temporal dynamic of sandwich care. Future research in sandwich care field can explore more forms of care that remain hidden, and how the hidden forms impact caregiving and work. Additionally, more research attention is needed to further develop the understandings regarding the dynamics between present and future care.

To close the thesis, the following section presents concluding remarks and reflects on what I have learned throughout the whole Ph.D. journey.

7.6 Concluding remarks

In this closing section of the thesis, I will summarise sandwich care first and then reflect on what I have learned by doing this research.

This thesis has articulated that sandwich care is complex and it is more than performing present physical caring tasks to care receivers. It involves a complex combination of tangible and hidden forms of care, the dynamic interaction between present and future care, and a wide range power relations in the workplace and family realms. What adds more complexity to sandwich care is the behavioural scripts prescribed in the context, such as Confucianism, in guiding what care to be performed and how people should behave in the process of caregiving. Thus, combining sandwich care with work is a challenging experience. However, this thesis emphasised that sandwich caregivers have agency to navigate the complexity, while the level of agency is likely to be determined by structural and cultural factors, reflecting the long-standing gender inequalities in the wider social environment. The structural and cultural-boundedness further implies that sandwich care needs to be understood in specific contexts and cultural settings, and it is inappropriate to apply the knowledge of sandwich care gained from a particular group of people to others with distinct demographic and cultural backgrounds.

Upon completing this thesis, there are some key points about research that I would like to reflect on. In general, the whole Ph.D. life involves an on-going process in which I need to always go back and forth to refine my understandings and my thesis. The whole process is not as exciting as I would assume before I started the journey. It is boring, challenging, and can be painstaking. There are different commitments that require me, as one of the many Ph.D. students, to reasonably allocate the limited resources that I have, i.e., time and energy. Besides the need to simultaneously do work and study, I

also need to take care of my own mental and psychological well-being. Writing up is not as simple as summarising key debates in field, it also involves challenging and problematising the rigid way of thinking and the taken-for-granted assumptions. This can sometimes lead to self-doubt, particularly upon receiving the correction suggestions from supervisors. I often felt overwhelmed and lost when things did not work out as expected. At this time, conversations with supervisors and chat with other Ph.D. colleagues is key to minimise ambiguities and reduce the experienced stress.

Doing a qualitative research is never straightforward, and there are many challenges that I, as one of the qualitative researchers, need to resolve for nuanced understandings of the phenomenon researched. First of all, there are uncertainties involved in interviews. The willingness to participate, to share honest answer, and to complete the interview is never guaranteed and is at participants' discretion. Throughout the whole interview process, unexpected situations may occur, which may impact the interview process and richness of the findings. At this time, it is essential to maintain calm and professional, and strive to ensure the completion and maintain the depth of interviews. Secondly, analysing data and extracting insights from the raw data is challenging. In qualitative interviews, I need to deal with the messiness of the data. There are a substantial number of initial codes that I need to sort and organise into meaningful themes. The whole process can be difficult and time-consuming. It further implies an intensive decision-making process, which also includes outlying the non-fitting data. During this process, staying focus on the research aims and research questions is important, as it enables me to clearly see which themes will answer the questions set out and which will not. However, if I were to realise the same project again, I will still choose qualitative method due to the richness it generates. What I will do differently is that instead of just doing semi-structured interviews, I will ask some participants to keep daily diary for a week, recording what do they do to take care of their family members, and how they negotiate care and work with family members, desirably with some photos taken if possible. I will then incorporate these information-rich documents with semi-structured interviews for more insights into sandwich caregiving and power

dynamics. However, having participants to keep diary and sharing photos can be extremely difficult in China given the need to preserve face and given their strained temporal resources. This requires a strong private *guanxi* in order to gain their commitment and willingness to share.

Overall, throughout the whole lifespan of being a Ph.D. student, I have refined my research skills and gained some teaching experience. Particularly the courses taken and the experience obtained in relation to qualitative research method have enabled me to develop further as a researcher, who had experience with only quantitative research before. Through this Ph.D. journey, I have become a more experienced researcher, with both quantitative and qualitative experience, which is beneficial when it comes to career in academia. Besides the career prospects this journey brought, I also learned how to be a better people in real-life world and in interactions with others. I have been challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions throughout the whole journey of Ph.D.. I learned how to maintain open to new things and not to judge people based on past experience and previous knowledge. I learned how to remain persistent and resilient when it comes to external pressure and obstacles, and to never give up hoping and being a better person. These facilitate to reshape my personality, which is vital for me to embrace fortunes and resolve challenges. Finally, at the completion of this degree, I can see how the rewarding aspects of Ph.D. outweigh the efforts I devoted.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Interview Questions

Demographic information

1. How many children do you have?

2. How old is (are) your child(ren)?

3. Do you live with your parents or parents-in-law?

4. What do you do?

5. How long have you been doing your work?

6. What is your level of education?

7. How many hours do you usually work every week?

Work role and impression management in the workplace

8. What are your job responsibilities?

9. How is your performance judged?

10. What is a good employee in your opinion/your supervisor's opinion?

11. How do you impress your manager or colleague?

12. Reflect on a situation when work was disrupted by caring responsibilities.

13. What could your organisation do to help you get on with work and caring responsibilities?

Family role and impression management at home

14. Tell me about the division of housework at your home.

15. What do you do in order to take care of your parents and children?

16. What is a good mother in your opinion/your family's opinion (for each role).

17. How do you impress family members/ how do you avoid negative impressions on family members?

18. How do you find support to deal with different expectations and responsibilities?

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Combining Care with Work- The Sandwich Generation in a Confucian Context
Name of Researcher: Ling He
Name of Supervisor: Marjana Johansson, Belgin Okay-Somerville

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research

- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded (or video recorded if it is online interviews.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name   of   Participant   …………………………
Signature   ………………………………………

Date …………………………………

Name   of
Researcher   ……………………………………Signature   ………………………
………………

Date …………………………………

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

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

Thank you for reading this.

My name is Ling He, a second-year PhD student at the University of Glasgow. I am currently doing research for my PhD thesis. This research investigates how members of the 'sandwiched generation' (being sandwiched with the provision of elder care to parents and childcare to younger dependents) manage their duties and tasks at home and work. I will collect data via one-to-one interviews, which will take around one hour. In the interview I will ask you about *the division of housework at home, disruption to work due to caring, and what tactics you could use in order to manage work and family responsibilities.* You don't have to prepare for the interview. It is expected that the findings of this research could help inform caring policies at organizational and national level, thus better protecting and supporting the sandwich generation in their working and private lives. Before you take part, it is essential that you are aware that:

- Your participation is non-compulsory and voluntary. Hence throughout the whole interview process, and the research project, you are free to stop and withdraw at any point if you wish. In the event of withdrawal, data already gathered will be destroyed and will not be used in my study.
- Before data collection, personal data will be stored securely without anyone else having access to it. Your personal information, for instance, your name and the organizations that you are working or worked for will be pseudonymized. I will delete personal data (including names, contact information, e.g. email address and phone number, etc…) once I collect data.
- A high level of confidentiality will be maintained for research data as well, which will be safely stored in UofG's password-protected One Drive. Authenticated researchers may access by making a personal request (shared in anonymized format). Data collected will be used in this thesis and in the production of conference papers and journal articles. Data will be kept safely for 10 years, and once I am sure that there is no need to use the raw data anymore, I will delete the data in a safe manner

- Assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions regarding this research please do not hesitate to contact me via email at: l.he.1@research.gla.ac.uk ; or if you wish to speak with my supervisors regarding this research, please contact my supervisors Dr Marjana Johansson at: Marjana.Johansson@glasgow.ac.uk, and Dr Belgin Okay-Somerville at: Belgin.Okay-Somerville@glasgow.ac.uk.

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Privacy Notice

PRIVACY NOTICE

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: Combining Care with Work- The Sandwich Generation in a Confucian Context

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project - Combining Care with Work- The Sandwich Generation in a Confucian Context. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews or potentially follow up on the data you have provided.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and will de-identify your personal data from the research data (your answers given during the interview, for example your name and the name of your company) through pseudonymisation.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies. Please see accompanying **Participant Information Sheet**,

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by: the researcher of this project, <u>Ling He</u>. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe: such as pseudonymisation, secure storage, and, encryption of files and devices. I will delete personal data (including names, contact information, e.g. email address and phone number, etc…) once I collect data.. Similarly, research data will be safely stored in UofG's password-protected One Drive, and authenticated researchers may access by making a personal request (shared in anonymized format). Research data collected will be used in this thesis and in the production of conference papers and journal articles. If you would like a copy of the summary of my findings, please do not hesitate to contact me at: <u>l.he.1@research.gla.ac.uk</u>. Research data will be kept safely for 10 years, and once I am sure that there is no need to use the raw data anymore, I will delete the data in a safe manner.

Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompanies this notice.

What are your rights? *

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see <u>UofG Research with personal and special categories of data</u>.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the <u>webform</u> or contact <u>dp@gla.ac.uk</u>

Complaints
If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.
Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at <u>dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk</u>

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) https://ico.org.uk/

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval. After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of 10 years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____