

Who is caring for Chinese children in Italy?

The case of Prato and the Italian nannies' role in Chinese migrant households

“You can't talk about it, because it is not like I have insurance or something... but everybody does it. I know a lot of people who live nearby who do it. I see them walking by in the morning with small Chinese children.” (nanny Daniela, appendix 4)

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of Italian nannies in Chinese migrant households in Prato. The case is contextualized within local manifestations of transnational care deficit influenced by the local gendered labor regime. The paper discusses the role of Italian nannies as paid caregivers and brokers, using primary data from interviews with four Italian nannies, unstructured interviews with locals, and secondary data on cases that resonate with the Pratese phenomenon. The care Italian nannies provide is conceptualized in the features of ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ that naturally overlap in showing an emotional, physical, and educational inclusion of the Chinese children in the Italian family. The care of Chinese children is shaped by flexible collaboration with Chinese parents, thus creating a ‘transnational household’. The role of the nannies, however, is not rigid but negotiated relationally within a hierarchy of parity or subordination within the household. Throughout the research, manifestations of ‘othering’ (anti)discourse are intertwined with care collaboration, and brokerage interactions. Italian nannies act as brokers in interactions of ‘conduit’, ‘tertius iungens’, and ‘tertius gaudens’, contributing to shaping opportunities for labor market access, socialization, and the acquisition of language skills. The local gendered labor regime shapes the economic and care needs of Italian nannies and Chinese families. The actors thus meet in the care and brokerage needs of Chinese families, the financial interests of Italian nannies, and the needs of motherhood.

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1. Transnational care labor in Chinese households in the city of Prato

The present Western ¹ literature primarily focuses on a conventional transnational care chain, in which migrant women cross borders and sustain the households of host populations through paid care labor (Guarnizo and Rodriguez, 2017; Parreñas, 2012; Yeates, 2012). The literature includes a few European cases of the opposite, when native women are employed as nannies by migrants (Kovács, 2018; Mocanu et al., 2021; Suralová, 2015). These few cases pose a challenge to the conventional transnational care chain and present a divergent hierarchy in migrant households where native women are repositioned. This perspective reflects the evolving situation for Italian women, who have been documented as less in demand by Chinese migrants in the past (Ceccagno, 2007; Gao and Sacchetto, 2024; Krause, 2018). The current estimate of native nannies' demand among Chinese migrants in Prato is absent from the literature. The scope of this paper, however, is not nationally representative of the phenomenon. Instead, it focuses on a deep understanding of the constellation of Chinese households and analyzes the Italian nannies' position within it.

The central role of Italian women in a family-based care society is evident, as in 2018 Italian women accounted for 74% of domestic care (*Domani (im)possibili*, 2024, p. 12; Trappolini et al., 2023). In 2022, a fifth of the women with small children were stay-at-home moms, and, of the total of women who decided to resign in the same year, the primary reason indicated was the difficulties in reconciling work and domestic care (*Domani (im)possibili*, 2024, p. 12; “Relazioni annuali sulle convalide delle dimissioni e risoluzioni consensuali delle lavoratrici madri e dei lavoratori padri | INL,” n.d.). Thus, Italian women's national role as caregivers is not only fundamental to Italian households but is also becoming relevant to the Chinese. In contrast, in the past, the most commonly used practice was to send children back to China to be cared for by other family members, especially grandparents (Ceccagno, 2007; Gao and Sacchetto, 2024; Krause, 2018). This paper, therefore, aims to shed light on the current shift in the transnational care chain in the Chinese migration process to Italy by analyzing the case of Prato.

¹ Western refers to studies based on employment of women from, less wealthy countries migrating to wealthier countries (Yeates, 2004, p. 372).

1.2. The case of Prato and the research question

The paper examines the case of Prato, a mid-sized city located in the region of Tuscany, which hosts 261,094 inhabitants (“Popolazione ufficiale residente al 31 dicembre a Prato e in Italia (dati Istat) - Prato conta,” n.d.). Prato has gained significant importance, both nationally and in Europe, for its contribution to the textile industry and for being one of the cities with the highest density of Chinese migrants (Ceccagno, 2007; Chan, 2015; Del Bono, 2022; Krause, 2018). According to the Prato municipality in 2021, the Chinese population was estimated to be 14,3% of the total population and 62,5% of the migrant residents by nationality. The total estimate is 32,524 Chinese with official residence in Prato between 2017 and 2024 (“Stranieri a Prato al 31 dicembre - Prato conta,” n.d.). The actual estimate is presumably higher, given the presence of undocumented Chinese migrants in the area (Ceccagno, 2017, p. 4).

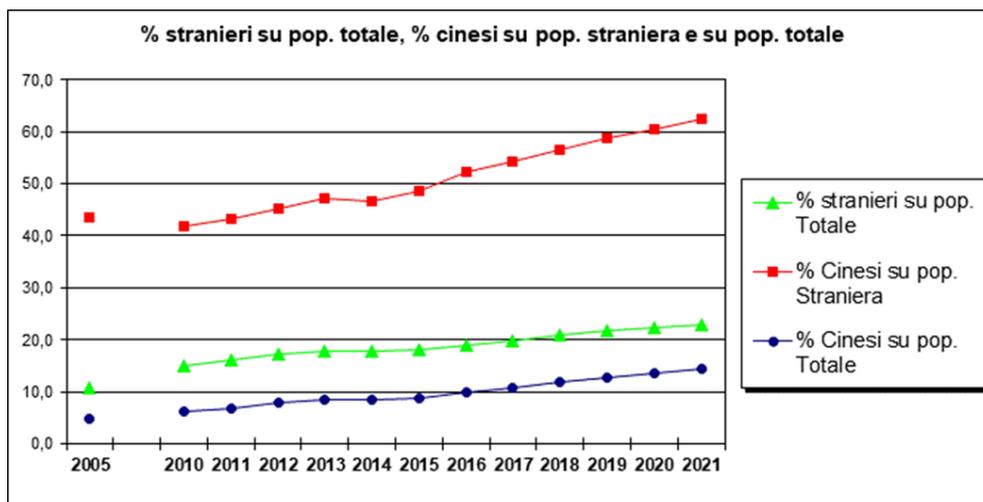


Figure 1. (“Popolazione ufficiale residente al 31 dicembre a Prato e in Italia (dati Istat) - Prato conta,” n.d.)²

The Chinese migration to Prato is historically significant, particularly in its influence on the Pratese textile industry and the critical role that Chinese migrants have played during the crises that affected the industry in the area in the early and mid-2000s (Ceccagno, 2017, pp. 1–6; Krause, 2018, pp. 6–7). During these years, Prato's textile industry shifted from a nationally recognized position in the sector where small Italian family businesses produced wool and other fabrics of medium to high quality, to a new place in the global supply chain (Ceccagno, 2017, p. 2; Krause, 2018, p. 3). In 2012, 82% of the businesses in the

² The red line illustrates the Chinese percentage's growth in relation to the migrant population and the blue line is the growth of Chinese migrants in relation to the total population of Prato.

garment³-industry in Prato were owned by Chinese residents. By 2015, nearly 50% of the manufacturers had Chinese owners (Krause, 2018, p. 3).

The landscape of Prato changed not only in terms of textile industry ownership but also in the physical space where Chinese migrants were concentrated in the Macrolotto area. The high density of Chinese migrants and their role in the area's industry created anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese sentiments both privately and publicly, which was seen, for instance, in the ordinance restricting business hours that was applied only to the Macrolotto area (Ceccagno, 2017; Krause, 2018; Lan and Zhang, 2025).

In this tense climate, the interaction between Chinese migrants and Pratese residents is clearly a dynamic to be researched in detail, especially when the Chinese parents decide to employ Italian women as nannies. Therefore, based on these reflections, the following research question has been formulated:

Why do Italian nannies perform a role in Chinese migrant households in Prato?

The paper is structured as follows: the second chapter focuses on contextualization, placing the existing literature on Chinese migrant childcare strategies within a broader perspective. In the third chapter, the theoretical framework collates transnational logic and domestic labor as interpretive lenses of the primary and secondary data. The fourth chapter describes the methodological process by including an overview of the informants and critical ethical considerations. In the fifth chapter, the primary and secondary data are analyzed. The final section summarizes the research findings and final remarks for future research.

2. Literature review

The following literature review first contextualizes the paper within the global care chain (GCC) literature. Furthermore, childcare strategies in Chinese migrant communities are illustrated at a national and transnational level. Concentrating on Italy, a brief section on Italians' childcare strategies is added to contextualize the choices of Chinese migrants. The final sub-chapter comprises a limited number of articles on native nannies employed by migrant families in Europe, including the literature present on their role as cultural brokers within a migratory process.

³ Garment work refers to *confezioni* phase of the production. It is the final phase where the clothes are sewed, buttons and such are added, and the clothes are ready to be sold.

2.1. Global care chain and transnational care labor

Approaching the field quantitatively, Lightman uses the 2010-2014 Luxembourg Income Study data to analyze care work across different regimes and types of care economics. She analyzes health, education, social, and domestic work in liberal, corporatist, familialistic, and social democratic regimes. She argues that liberal and corporatist regimes follow a ‘migrant in the market’ employment mentality relying heavily on migrant women workers, whereas social democratic regimes rely far less on migrant care workers and suggest that familialistic regimes depend mainly on family care and informal labor market (Lightman, 2022).

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila introduce the concept of ‘transnational motherhood’ in their article, focusing on Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles. They examine the meanings of motherhood by analyzing how Latina domestic workers create emotional ties with their employers’ children and develop new mothering standards grounded in their experience in their employers’ households (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997).

Parreñas focuses on transnational Filipino ‘mother-away’ families and examines how political economy and gender influence transnational communication and mothers' attempts to create intimacy from a distance. She argues that Filipino mothers uphold the expectation that they be ‘homemakers’ while rejecting the male role of ‘breadwinner’ (Parreñas, 2005). Focusing on her theoretical framework, she criticizes how the care chain literature reproduces a narrowed focus on gendered migrant work in domestic settings and suggests expanding the definition of ‘reproductive labor’ (care chain), from private to public and from households to institutions (Parreñas, 2012).

Following a similar critique, Yeates argues for expanding care chain analysis to include various groups across different settings. He argues further for a deeper focus on transnational networks and an inclusion of gender regimes dynamics (Yeates, 2004). Additionally, in his state-of-the-art article, he analyzes global care chain literature. He argues that the existing literature has helped create a better understanding of how care is provided worldwide and the transnational political and policy responses to it. He, however, identifies a problematic renaturalization of the nation-state discourse, a focus on only specific aspects of global care chain research, and how the literature supports gendered labor regimes (Yeates, 2012).

This paper places itself in this constellation by focusing on the local dynamics of the global care chain. It examines shifting childcare strategies in transnational Chinese households at the ground level and situates them within local gendered regimes of domestic

care. It aligns with transnational motherhood logic, but it expands global care chain logic by challenging the mainstream transnational definition of care and by considering new aspects of post-migration dynamics and local domestic work as equally essential as pre- and transit-migration features. The contextualization of Chinese migrants' childcare strategies, gendered division of labor, and kinship in China and Europe is provided in the next three sub-chapters.

2.2. Rural-urban Chinese migrant childcare strategies and (in)formal childcare context in China

The study of Huang et al. investigates the difference between 'left-behind' and 'migrant children's educational well-being among rural-urban Chinese settlers in China. They include a gendered perspective about the co-resident parent and its impacts on the children's well-being (Huang et al., 2020). A similar point of departure between 'left-behind' and 'migrant children' is made by Guo et al., where the type of job of the mothers - self-employed or not - and if they are intra or inter-provincial migrants, shows a divergence on whether parents migrate with the children (Guo et al., 2024). In another study, Guo also indicates how the 'left-behind' age of the children, being the youngest, influences the decision of the parents to become permanent urban settlers (Guo, 2024).

Murphy focuses her research instead on 'left-behind children' to give voice to the children's experiences and agency (Murphy, 2020). She focuses on different constellations as the grandparents take on the caregivers' role, and on the effects of the migration of one of the parents, which is similar to Huang et al.'s article. While still interested in 'left-behind' children's experiences, Wang et al. shift the object of attention by including the consequences of 'left-behind' childhood experiences into adulthood, resulting in higher income, but a negative impact on subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2023).

According to Yu et al.'s study on the reasons for the high labor-market participation rate among Chinese women, grandparents may also choose to migrate with the family to take care of their grandchildren when formal childcare services do not provide adequate care (Yu et al., 2022). On the one hand, the value of grandparental care is also shared nationwide in Li's study. The study shows that the female labor force participation rate improves when grandparental care is present (Li, 2017). On the other hand, according to Kong and Dong, when researching mothers who migrated with their children, grandparental care does not mitigate the disadvantage of lower hourly earnings, but that improves only if the mother is

part-time or self-employed (Kong and Dong, 2024). Liu et al. also confirm that the presence of parents and in-laws results in fewer hours of childcare per week for the mother, but that access to local childcare centers further reduces them (Liu et al., 2022). The study also shows that mothers' work hours decrease and housework hours increase as childcare center and nanny costs rise (Ibid.). The decision to employ a nanny is not necessarily based on a need for alternative childcare, according to Zhang et al.. They argue that it is seen as a supplement to family-based care to improve childcare and create a combined multi-care approach from different caregivers (Zhang et al., 2020).

Access to formal childcare varies by urban-rural and regional location (Chen et al., 2023). Chen et al. argue that urban mothers allocate more financial resources to formal childcare due to the unequal child-work balance. This phenomenon is common in eastern China due to the lack of grandparents and paternal care (ibid.). This section suggests a lack of consensus in the literature on the extent to which kinship childcare strategies affect gendered care labor in China. Kinship childcare strategies are also heavily present in Europe, as the next sub-chapter illustrates.

2.3. Chinese migrant childcare strategies in Europe

In her study, Lamas-Abraira describes how Chinese migrant families from Zhejiang province who migrate to various European countries employ different childcare strategies. In the study, most children are born abroad and sent back to China to be cared for by their grandparents (Lamas-Abraira, 2023). The same strategy is also evident in the study by Wu and Del Rey Poveda in Spain, where Chinese migrants' childcare strategies often result in informal childcare by family members, including grandparents, both in China and in Spain (Wu and Del Rey Poveda, 2024). Based once again on Chinese migrants from the Zhejiang province, in Portugal, Chinese women are a crucial part of the family business, and due to financial resources, paid care services are often unavailable for newly arrived Chinese migrants. When care from extended family is not possible, the children are taken to work (Li et al., 2024).

According to Lie, Chinese migrants in Britain prefer family care in the form of relatives for children under 3 years old. When that is unavailable, the children are taken to work by creating a flexible work environment (Lie, 2006).

According to Ceccagno's article, which analyzes the compression of personal time and work hours in Italy for Chinese migrants, the solution to this compression has been to send children back to China. She points out how employing babysitters and nannies,

primarily Chinese migrants but also Italians, has become a popular solution in recent years, especially in Naples (Ceccagno, 2007, p. 646). Going beyond practical reasons to childcare strategies, Krause analyzes the reasons behind the construction of the global household and children's circulation, focusing on Chinese migrants in Prato. She argues that global household and grandparental care are also strategic for maintaining cultural roots and inter-generational relationships with family kin (Krause, 2018b, p. 172).

This research aligns with Krause's focus and draws on Ceccagno's encounter with non-family childcare. The paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the shift in Chinese transnational households from kin to non-kin childcare by analyzing household dynamics between Pratese nannies and Chinese migrants. Krause and Ceccagno distance themselves from Gao and Sacchetto, whose analysis focuses on how families struggle to find solutions to childcare, which they call 'transnational childcare bricolage'. This definition refers to various solutions and changes in childcare strategy over time, depending on family resources and children's ages (Gao and Sacchetto, 2024). Drawing from their article, this paper focuses on a specific non-kin childcare strategy, native nannies, while maintaining a link to alternative childcare strategies. To understand the choices of Chinese migrant families, it is necessary to contextualize the childcare landscape in Italy, which is found in the next section.

2.3.1. Italian (in)formal childcare landscape

According to Mussino and Ortensi, migrants in Italy are more likely than natives to use formal childcare. Some factors that influence this decision toward informal care are the length of time the migrant has lived in Italy and whether the co-parent is a native-born Italian. These two aspects enable network expansion, foster a better understanding of the system, and reduce practical barriers (Mussino and Ortensi, 2023).

Analyzing an older age group of children, Trappolini et al. focus on informal childcare arrangements by ethnicity. They argue the same as Mussino and Ortensi: the migrant population relies less on informal childcare and on grandparents when they shift to informal care, as native Italians do. The solution involving non-relatives is still the least used for native and non-native (Trappolini et al., 2023).

When focusing on social support networks concerning childcare, Furfaro et. al. argue that Chinese mothers distance themselves from other nationalities by relying on themselves and are less likely to use services, which reflects less engagement in the welfare care Italian system, and more flexibility in their work arrangement - often self-employment (Furfaro et

al., 2020). According to the literature, the use of informal native nannies is thus uncommon among migrants in Italy, whereas kin-based childcare is still frequently practiced. There are, however, a few cases in Europe where the childcare provided by native nannies has been analyzed, which are summarized in the next section.

2.4. Native nannies in migrant households

An example of immigrants employing native nannies can be found in Bucharest, Romania. Here, Mocanu et al. explore intercultural interaction between Chinese children and Romanian nannies. The study examines how the cultural features of native nannies impact various aspects of the children's lives (Mocanu et al., 2021). Drawing on the same phenomenon of Chinese children being cared for by native nannies, Kovács explores how arrangements with Hungarian live-in nannies affect children's lives, including their identity, belonging, and behavior (Kovács, 2018).

Souralová in the Czech Republic explores the relationship between Vietnamese migrants and Czech nannies. In her papers, she researches the gendered role of Czech nannies from the nannies' perspective. She examines why they choose to work as nannies in Vietnamese families and the roles parents and nannies play in Vietnamese children's education, focusing on the meaning of education from a migrant Vietnamese perspective (Souralová, 2015).

The above-mentioned cases focus on the impact of native nannies' childcare on children's well-being and on children's education. This paper aligns with the existing literature by focusing on the interaction between parents and the native nannies' care work. It, however, takes a different perspective, researching why native nannies' childcare can be seen as a suitable alternative to other childcare strategies by analyzing how Chinese parents' needs are met in the nannies 'brokerage process' of facilitation between the Italian and Chinese communities. This perspective is often associated with local volunteering and mentoring programs, as outlined in the next section.

2.4.1. Brokerage in the migration process

In this section, only articles actively using brokerage practices as a theoretical stand are cited. However, some studies associate post-migrants, locals, or infrastructure as intermediaries in the migration process (see, for instance, Brinker, 2021; Burrell, 2024).

In Germany, Jaschke et al. analyze a mentoring program pairing newly arrived refugees with local volunteers from the host community. A positive influence was found in 30 of 85 positively matched refugees. Jaschke et al. suggest an impact on social connection, satisfactory housing, and language skills. The latter only mildly (Jaschke et al., 2022).

Similarly, Mortier, Oosterlynck, and Raeymaeckers investigate a buddy program in the Flemish region of Belgium. They argue that opening the host society to newcomers has a positive impact on social capital accumulation, but that the purpose of social networking is only partially achieved (Mortier et al., 2025).

In England, Morano-Foadi, Lugosi, and Della Croce examine the role of Third Sector Organizations in facilitating refugees' access to the labor market. They apply the concept of 'bottom-up solidarity' and suggest intermediation, brokerage, and choaching as crucial features (Morano-Foadi et al., 2023).

The definition of brokerage is elaborated on in the next chapter. The concept of 'brokerage process' operates together with concepts of care in gendered domestic labor and 'transnational households', delineating the paper's theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is structured around the concept of 'transnational household' and 'reproductive labor'. Specifically, the concepts of 'caring for' and 'caring about' shape everyday tasks nannies perform in their work. 'Brokerage process' serves as an additional interpretative layer in the nannies' work, acting as a partial bridge between Chinese migrant families and Italian institutional norms, the Italian language, and opportunities for the children. Lastly, these features are contextualized in an intercultural dimension of 'othering'.

3.1. 'Transnational household.'

In this paper, the concept describing the dynamic between native nannies and Chinese migrant families is presented as 'transnational household'. This definition is formed by two features: 'transnational' and 'household'. While 'household' conveys a spatial connotation of co-residence within the family, 'transnational' refers to affinity and cross-border, sometimes intergenerational, relationships between family members. The nature of family members' transnational disposition is often encapsulated by the notion of 'transnational family'

(Baldassar and Merla, 2014). However, in this case, the spatial configuration is crucial to the analysis. Therefore, the term ‘transnational household’ reflects the families’ constellation, encompassing spatial co-residency with native nannies, migratory processes, and ties between family members, mainly at the national level.

3.3. ‘Reproductive labor’, ‘caring for’, and ‘caring about’

In this paper, care aligns with Parreñas’ definition of ‘reproductive labor’. Parreñas includes in her definition labor outside the mainstream representation of cleaning the house and caring for children, and refers to other elements, such as emotional labor and socializing (Parreñas, 2012). More specifically, Baldassar and Merla describe the literature differentiation between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’. The first refers to hands-on activities that require physical closeness and includes all activities relating to domestic work and childcare. ‘Caring about’ entails an emotional function referring to comfort, self-validation, and advice as focal points (Baldassar and Merla, 2013, p. 205).

3.4. ‘Brokerage process’ as interactions between actors

This paper’s definition of ‘brokerage’ aligns with Obstfeld, Borgatti, and Davis’ conceptualization. They distance themselves from a structural understanding of ‘brokerage process’ as a lack of contact and mistrust, and expand their definition beyond ‘transactions’ to ‘interactions’. This definition suggests an inclusion of social practices in the process of ‘brokerage’ and social engagement as a prolonged interaction over time. Furthermore, they remove the concept of ‘intermediaries’ which suggests an absence of ties and conceptualize ‘brokerage process’ as “ (...) behaviour by which an actor influences, manages or facilitates interactions between other actors.” (Obstfeld et al., 2014, p. 141). The role of Italian nannies in the ‘brokerage process’ is figuratively summarized below.

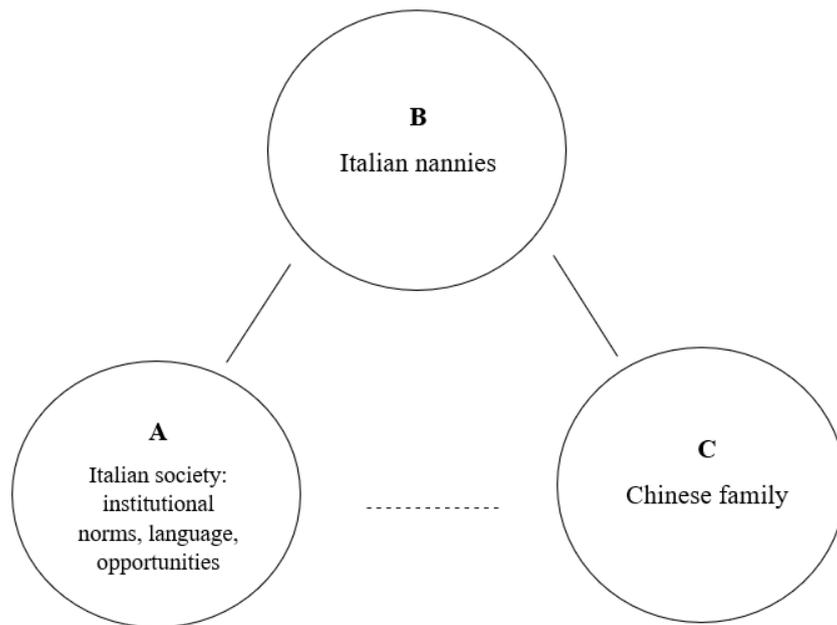


Figure 2. Representation of the 'brokerage process' between the Italian society, Italian nannies, and the Chinese family

3.3.1. The three forms of 'brokerage process' - defining 'conduit', 'tertius gaudens', and 'tertius iungens'

The 'brokerage process' refers to how Italian nannies act, directly or indirectly, as brokers. The type of action is defined as: 'conduit', 'tertius iungens', and 'tertius gaudens'.

'Conduit' brokerage refers to the transfer of information between parties, where B moderates the relationship between A and C, and entails motivation and a special skill in understanding the C community's needs. The 'conduit' brokerage is often associated with structural holes, in which B creates ties between A and C; however, Obstfeld et al. also note that it occurs in relationships where the parties are already connected. 'Conduit' like behavior relates to the role of B as translator of information and opportunities (Obstfeld et al., 2014, pp. 147–148).

'Tertius iungens' is similar to 'conduit' as they both rely on social processes through which knowledge is adapted to a specific situation and clarified, often achieved by the use of stories, metaphors, and analogies. 'Tertius iungens' differs, however, from 'conduit' in seeking to create collaboration between the parties (Obstfeld et al., 2014, p. 148).

'Tertius gaudens' is defined by Obstfeld et. al. as "(...) situations where a broker maintains or exploits unfamiliarity, competition, or conflict between parties maintained

actively or through purposeful inaction.” (Obstfeld et al., 2014, p. 145). Specifically, Obstfeld et al. suggest that unfamiliarity sustains inequality between the parties and report behavior that actively creates a situation of conflict or strategic information movement. The last two features are not fully summarized because they are not relevant to this paper’s case and are problematic to apply. Additionally, ‘*tertius gaudens*’ behaviour can involve passing on the task of conflict resolution to the parties A and C when divergent requests occur (Obstfeld et al., 2014, pp. 145–146).

3.2. ‘Othering’

The theoretical concept of ‘othering’ is included to contextualize the features of the ‘brokerage process’, ‘caring for’, and ‘caring about’. This concept is presented as a secondary understanding and becomes relevant for fully comprehending and examining interactions between Italian and Chinese families. ‘Othering’ contributes to the encapsulation of brokerage (in)actions within cultural encounter interactions. ‘Othering’ refers to the identity-shaping of the ‘self’ which, in intercultural encounter, is produced through belonging to an in-group and differentiation from ‘them’, the excluded members of the in-group of appartenance. ‘Othering’ reflects the shaping of ‘us vs. them’ boundaries and how they are maintained and reproduced in intercultural interactions (Guttormsen, 2018, p. 316).

3.4. Operationalization

The concepts ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ are operationalized, respectively, through everyday activities and emotional labor, which can manifest in expressions of concern for children’s emotional, physical, and relational well-being. Furthermore, the concepts of ‘conduit’, ‘*tertius gaudens*’, and ‘*tertius iungens*’ are operationalized through situations where the native nannies operate as translators of information, passive enablers of unfamiliarity, and supporters of collaboration between the two communities. In the analysis, all three aspects are included, but focus primarily on their role as a translator of information (‘conduit’). ‘Othering’ is operationalized in interactions in which nannies described differences between the Italian and Chinese communities. These features are then coded, which is illustrated in detail in the next chapter (see section 4.4), where the methodological process is discussed.

4. Methodology

The following section discusses access to the fieldwork, which led to four interviews with Italian nannies. The section also presents ethical and practical reflections on the researcher's positionality in the context, the limitations of gaining access to different members of the target group, a description of the respondents, and the coding process.

4.1. Ethnographic fieldwork in case-based study – reflections on an insider positionality

The paper's point of departure is my personal experience in taking an indirect part in a phone job interview between a Chinese father and an Italian woman. Through informal conversation with a local woman, I developed a primary understanding of Chinese parents' needs. In this context, my knowledge of the social, cultural, and linguistic context of Prato allowed me to gain easy access to the fieldwork and Italian nannies' willingness to take part in interviews (Greene, 2014, pp. 3–4). My knowledge of the Prato case encapsulates an understanding of a specific set of events that resonated with other cases in the literature of paid care provision; hence, the study focuses on this case, not with the intent to generalize, but to understand the typicality of gendered care provisions in the context of Prato because of its relevance to broader abstract conceptualization of global care chain (Lund, 2014, p. 226).

My positionality as an insider has furthermore influenced how data has been collected, not merely through formal interviews with Italian nannies, but through ongoing on-site and remote informal conversations with locals who had direct contact with Italian nannies and had background knowledge of the phenomenon. On the one hand, my positionality helped me gain access; on the other hand, it was insufficient to establish mutual trust and complete transparency about the Italian nannies' employment situation. Transparency and trust challenges are evident, for instance, in the nanny Daniela's decision to switch to audio-only at the beginning of the phone call and in the possible false information about salary from the nanny Beatrice. My positionality may have further affected specific dynamics during the interviews, making it more challenging to gain access and build trust with the Chinese community. The Italian nannies acted as intermediaries, contacting the Chinese parents through a snowball strategy. Still, challenges such as language barriers, long work hours, absence from the family, and mistrust in my role as a researcher negatively

impacted my ability to interview the Chinese parents, and no interviews with Chinese parents were made.

4.2. Semi-structured interviews and respondents' descriptions

The empirical data include four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Italian nannies, obtained through a snowballing strategy initiated by the primary encounter with the first Italian woman. She appointed a familiar acquaintance who pointed out other Italian women employed as nannies. This strategy was implemented based on the assumption that, as an informal form of employment, it would be challenging to reach the targeted group through formal employment institutions and to counter mistrust and language barriers from both Chinese parents and Italian nannies. This strategy was implemented to select a population that met the same criteria as the employee and employer in informal agreements for babysitting Chinese migrant children in Prato, rather than representing the group as a whole (Gierczyk et al., 2024, p. 90). According to Galinsky et al., the group was difficult to survey because of challenges in identifying its members and persuading them to participate in the interviews (Galinsky et al., 2019, p. 1384). The interviews were conducted online, recorded with the informants' informed consent, and transcribed using Word and OneNote transcription software linked to the Aalborg University server to maintain the security of the respondents' data. For the same purpose, all names cited in the interviews and the respondents' names are changed to pseudonyms throughout the paper.

The respondents are four women aged 35-60. Three of them live with their children and husband, and in some cases, grandparents, while one lives only with her husband and her adult son. Two nannies had no prior experience, and two of them have been employed as nannies for years with Chinese children from different families. Two of the nannies found employment through the same digital app, which appears as a red, rounded square containing a stylized white Chinese character, with the text “华人街完整版” displayed below. The other two found employment through their prior coworker's acquaintance. Upon the parents' request, the children of three nannies lived at the nannies' residences under a 24/7 agreement between the nannies and the parents. One of the nannies babysat only during the afternoons/evenings and during school holidays. The informant's constellation is summarized in the table below.

Informants overview

| <i>Nanny</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Job situation</i> | <i>Contact with the Chinese community before the nanny job</i> | <i>Family situation</i> |
|-----------------|------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Carlotta</i> | 37 | Housewife | Worked in a Chinese school in Prato as a kitchen and cleaning professional | 3 children under the age of 11 |
| <i>Alice</i> | 45 | Housewife | Worked in a Chinese school in Prato as a kitchen and cleaning professional | 1 child under the age of 10 |
| <i>Beatrice</i> | 48 | Currently working in a supermarket | Worked as a cleaning professional in a factory owned by the Chinese and as a nanny for other Chinese children | 3 children under the age of 18 and 2 grandchildren |
| <i>Daniela</i> | 60 | Housewife | Worked as a nanny for Chinese children before the current children | 3 children over 30 (1 is living in the same house) |

4.3. Ethical considerations

My positionality must be further and carefully considered from an ethical perspective. Importantly, close relationships with some respondents guarantee easy access, but they also blur the boundaries of my role as a friend and a researcher. This can, for instance, be seen during the interview with Carlotta, when initial questions were repeated due to assumptions about my knowledge of her situation. As Green suggests, following Chavez's work, I, however, stated my position as a researcher and asked the informant to repeat her story for "the record" (Greene, 2014). Some details of her story were, nevertheless, only briefly mentioned because of my personal knowledge and close relationship with her. Noticing the ongoing conversations with the locals, my objectivity was influenced by my positionality as a family member. While during the formal interviews, my role was verbally explained, and the use of the interviews was carefully described to the respondents, the background knowledge and some critical information of the respondents' situations were exchanged in informal, unstructured interaction, letting the conversation naturally take its course and holding my position as listener (Leavy, 2014, p. 279). To counterbalance the lack of objectivity and transparency my positionality may have created, I approach the field with caution by developing an extensive background literature context, cross-referencing my findings with existing literature, and conducting formal interviews with Italian nannies.

4.4. Coding

The interviews are coded thematically. The theoretical concept of 'caring for' is operationalized through everyday activities, codified as bathing, dressing, playing, making food, administering medicine, transporting, helping with homework, and putting the children to bed. The theoretical concept of 'caring about' is operationalized by emotional labor, which is codified with words such as comfort, hugs/kisses, description of the relationship with the children (e.g. "I treat them like they were mine", the use of words mom, dad, grandad, grandmom, relating to the children with the word "missing"), words of concern (e.g., observing if the children eat enough, looking for wounds), and educational support (e.g., restricted screen time, cultivating a sport, cultivating good manners, socializing, learning Italian, cultivating a positive relationship with their parents and the school teachers).

The three forms of 'brokerage process', 'conduit', 'tertius iungens', and 'tertius gaudens', are operationalized through the roles of translator, intermediaries with a

collaborative scope, and passive enabler of unfamiliarity. These features are coded into active verbs such as help, explain, talk (with institutions), and describe. The role of a passive enabler is encoded in the expression ‘I don’t know’ in interactions with Chinese families. ‘Othering’ is coded through the words ‘i Cinesi’⁴ and ‘them’.

The theoretical concepts cited are not mutually exclusive. The boundary between the concepts is imprecise due to the relational nature of nannies' work, and they influence one another in shaping the role of nannies in the migrant household. This dynamic is analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

5. Nannies' role in migrant Chinese households

The following chapter introduces the analysis of four interviews with Italian nannies and secondary data from the literature. The analysis homogeneously refers to everyday tasks and emotional labor, following the overlapping nature of ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ concepts. The nannies’ roles as translators (conduits), intermediaries of collaboration (*tertius iungens*), and passive enablers (*tertius gaudens*) are analyzed in the second sub-chapter. Throughout the analysis, the concept of ‘othering’ is included at relevant points in the interactions between the Italian nannies and the Chinese parents.

5.1. ‘Caring for’ and ‘caring about’ in the creation of a transnational household

In the interviews, a current feature among the nannies is the everyday tasks they perform. The four nannies refer to making food, giving bottles to small children, changing diapers, transporting children, picking them up from school, helping with homework, and including them in the family’s routines, manifesting ‘caring for’ the children. Alice describes it practically: “She does what my [daughter] does [referring to the activities during the day]. When she comes back from kindergarten, she eats a snack, plays with my daughter, or watches cartoons. It depends. It depends on the day. Otherwise, they go outside and play in the garden.” (page 3, appendix 1). Daniela’s major work in ‘caring for’ the Chinese children is transporting them to swimming lessons and dance classes (appendix 4). Depending on the child’s age, the everyday effort in ‘caring for’ them is more or less demanding. Carlotta, for

⁴ *i Cinesi*, literally the Chinese. It is how the nannies often refers to the Chinese community in Prato.

instance, has decided to take in a 3-month-old child. She explains, in the following quote, the lack of sleep and the considerable effort she felt because of the child's age:

“(…) [For him] I had sleepless nights. Because you know, a 3-month-old child doesn't sleep during the night. So, many nights I would stay up with him, and during the day I would treat him like he was mine (…) Because you know bathing him, holding him, [giving him] baby food... [the baby] needs snuggling. You have to give him more attention than the others. So I had some moments when I thought, “Can I do it?”” (page 9, 12, appendix 1).

Carlotta often uses the expression “I treated him like he was mine,” which both Alice and Beatrice also use (pages 3, appendix 2; page 5, appendix 3). This description of the relationship between them and the children entails a feature of ‘caring about’ that goes beyond the simple ‘caring for’ them. It suggests an equal standard of care for their own children and the Chinese children, with the same rules and emotional involvement applying to all children in the household.

The same overlap is evident in how they describe their food provision for the children. Nanny Daniela describes in great detail how organized she is, relating to providing comprehensive, healthy meals. She takes pride in explaining how, in “Italian homes we eat well” (page 13, appendix 4). This description suggests a distinction between the meals she provides and those made by Chinese parents, which manifests a discourse of ‘othering’. She mentions her focus on finding strategies to help children eat vegetables and on diversifying meals according to the children's preferences, specifying that the family shared their food with them without paying too much attention to cost (page 13, appendix 4). Similarly, nanny Beatrice reflects that she would be embarrassed to ask for compensation for the food because the child is part of the family and is treated like the rest of her children and grandchildren. She mentions, for instance, that if the family goes on the park's rides, they pay the same ticket price for the Chinese child without asking for compensation, as if “he was part of the family” (page 5, appendix 3). These dynamics and descriptions of how the food is provided and to what extent the Chinese children are included in the family life and dinners suggest how the children's well-being and feeling of inclusion are a concern for the nannies, which is not simply ‘caring for’ that the children are fed, but ‘caring about’ what macronutrients they eat, if they eat enough and that the children feel included in the family routines. The perception of Chinese children as being integral members of the nanny's family concurred with Mocanu et.

al.'s findings in a Romanian context of Chinese migration. They argue that everyday practices, which are also found in nannies' care for Chinese children in Prato, help the integration of the Chinese children in the Romanian majority. However, the Prato case primarily suggests a collaboration between the parties rather than a process of integration, which are naturally not mutually exclusive. Collaboration shapes interactions and the role of nannies as facilitator between the two communities, based on the needs of Chinese families rather than solely as intermediaries of integration. This is analyzed further in section 5.2. and 5.3.

Nanny Daniela, however, distances herself from the other nannies because she never describes the relationship with the children as her own. Importantly, the children don't sleep at her house; they only do so during the school holidays, which differs from the agreements the other nannies have and may influence her and the children's emotional involvement. This dynamic is also reflected in how the children address her by her name rather than referring to her as their mom. Nannies Alice and Carlotta explain how the children refer to them as "mom", their husbands as "dad", and their parents as "granddad" and "grandma" (page 9, appendix 1; page 4, appendix 2). Beatrice notices that the Chinese child calls her children "brother" and "sister" (page 5, appendix 3). More physically, the nannies talk about 'caring about' them by snuggling, kissing, and hugging them (page 12, appendix 1; page 8, appendix 3; page 4, appendix 2). This dynamic between the Chinese children and the nannies' families suggests the creation of a 'transnational household'. The use of the words "mom", "dad", and "siblings" illustrates the need for Chinese children to define emotional and physical closeness with nannies' families, indicating a comprehensive vision of family attachments beyond biological ties, but still anchored in their migration process. Clearly, in this context, an emotional attachment, which influences the Chinese children's sense of belonging, is unavoidable, as Kovács also indicates in her analysis of live-in nannies in Chinese migrant households in Hungary. The nannies' families, however, do not seek to replace their biological ones; instead, they work together to redefine transnational ties in post-migration settings. The redefinition manifests itself in two specific actions of 'caring about'. In the first one, the nannies collaborate with the Chinese parents on educational decisions, which aligns with Souralová's analysis of Czech nannies in the Vietnamese migrant context. In the second one, the nannies recognize the Chinese parents' role as "their parents" and their involvement as the sole decision-makers. In some cases, the intention is to foster a positive relationship between parents and children (appendix 3). Relating to the first action of 'caring about', in

the following quote, Daniela explains how she collaborates with the Chinese parents in the decision of the youngest child to attend swimming lessons instead of dance class:

“(…) Because children need to play a sport at 7 or 10. It's already been 2 years since the children attended swimming lessons, and the girl has been taking dance class, but this year, because we always take the girl to the beach with us, she loves the water. So we decided to drop... because she [her mother] wanted to write her up to the Latin American dance class. But we said, let us drop that, I told her [the mom] let us drop that (...). If the girl wants to do both but can't, I will take all of them to the swimming pool. The girl wanted to go to swimming lessons like the brothers, because when I took them to swimming lessons (...) she would come with me and watch.” (page 9, appendix 4).

In this example, the decision to support the girl's well-being is made collaboratively by the Chinese parents and the nanny. It demonstrates how the nanny is attentive to the child's wishes, natural inclinations, and emotional needs, and how the Chinese parents respond positively to the nanny's suggestion. The nanny is included in decision-making processes, establishing a relationship of parity between the parents and the nanny. Similarly, nanny Alice describes how she agrees with the Chinese parents on which educational method they should follow: “(…) I have to be honest. Actually, she [the mother] was pleased because I told her, “Look, I had to reproach her because since she started summer camp, the girl has changed. She talks back, she mocks me⁵,” she said to me. “No, no, it is not ok. You have to scold her.”” (page 4, appendix 2). Furthermore, Beatrice also explains how the father of the child appreciates her rules and educational approach:

“I am more strict [talking about screen time] (...). I like them to be children. Because at this age, they have to be children. But his father appreciates the rules and ideology very much. For instance, during the week, when there is kindergarten, we go to bed at 21:00 or 21:30 at the latest. Because he has to rest.” (page 4, appendix 3).

In those two situations, the nannies and the Chinese parents agree on how to best ‘care about’ the children by deciding on what educational method to apply, and which routines the children should follow. These dynamics reflect once again a ‘transnational household’ logic.

Regarding the second action of ‘caring about’, Beatrice explains that she always discusses decisions with the child’s parents to ensure they agree with her. She describes in

⁵ She refers to rude facial expressions and voices.

this way: “First we talk, and then we decide together on things, if they are ok with [the decisions]. Because they are his parents” (page 5, appendix 3). In this quote, she recognizes the difference between her role as a nanny and the parents' role in the child's life, manifesting a different hierarchy in the household, which is still based on collaboration, but not equality in decision-making processes. Similarly, Carlotta makes the same differentiation of roles about administering medicine in this quote: “(...) Everything was written in Chinese; I didn't look into it, because the child is not mine. I do what the mother told me to do.” (page 16, appendix 1). While in some situations there is a manifestation of parity and collaboration between the nannies and the parents, in others the nannies step back and leave the decision to the parents, suggesting that the nannies' role in the household is not rigid but negotiated relationally.

In the following quote, Carlotta notices that she has greater contact with the child and therefore a greater chance to build a positive attachment. She expresses concern about the relationship between the child and the parents:

“(...) She told me, “But I am the mother”. And I told her, “But you have to come more often to see the baby. Take him back home more often. He never sees you; it is normal that the baby... I am talking about a 3-, 4-, 5-, 6-, 7-, 8-, or 9-month-old baby. He does not realize who the mother is or who the nanny is. His reference figure is the person who lives with him h24.” (page 1, appendix 1).

Carlotta ‘cares about’ the child's well-being and recognizes how difficult it is for the child to create a safe emotional attachment with the Chinese mother if the baby lives with her and her family. In her interview, Carlotta repeatedly expresses concern about the lack of contact between the baby and her parents. Her fears for the child's well-being are driven by her emotional attachment to the child, which relates to practices of ‘transnational motherhood’ as Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila analyze in their article. However, Carlotta's motherhood is not reevaluated, as they examine in their article; instead, she suggests that her mothering may be superior because it is based on physical closeness, as Kovács concludes in her article. The same is indicated by Daniela when she explains how she cares better for the children with structured routines and a better organized home:

I don't know, maybe it is a different way of living. It is different having a grandfather looking after a small child, and the other attending daycare; he was 8 months old, I

remember. It is different. Maybe he would keep him there playing, I don't know. We are different. Listen, they learn at my house: routines, how to brush their teeth, how to wash their hands, and how to sit still at the table. At *their* home, it is different because their parents don't have time and aren't organized. We, like when we were working. Even though we had a lot to do, on weekends we would do laundry, and the house would be more organized. *They* are not as organized as *we* are; they can't. I see the mom, the mom of the kids, can't be as organized. Sometimes they leave boxes of clothes there, never put back in place. Because I visit them often. And for instance, on weekends, they divide the chores: she does the laundry, and he cooks and cleans the kitchen, leaving room. But *they* don't have *our* organization. So they learn how to be organized, right? This is also very important. They are very *italianizzati*⁶ because they live with an Italian family... they learn *our* rules, when they start school, they integrate better, right?" (page 20-21, appendix 4)

According to Daniela, the Chinese family struggles to maintain an organized home and to 'care for' the children in a farsighted way. She explicitly states that the children are at a good point in the process of *Italianization*. She indicates how she perceived a difference between 'caring for' and 'caring about' the children between her and their parents' home. In this quote, Daniela manifests a discourse of 'othering', implying how the organization in Italian homes and the Italian upbringing is superior, as Carlotta's quote and Kovács also indicate. In Carlotta and Daniela, the implications of a superior upbringing in their own homes are manifesting a new dynamic in the 'transnational household'. If on the one hand the role of the nannies in 'transnational household' is negotiated relationally and not rigid, on the other hand the nannies themselves placed their care above the Chinese family suggesting how the 'transnational household' and the intercultural collaboration is not exempted from 'othering'; instead it follows and is build upon a relational negotiated process of 'othering' of the Chinese community.

Carlotta also reports the experience of another nanny who has simply accepted the Chinese child entirely as her own daughter. Carlotta mentions that there is no longer contact with the Chinese parents, except when there is a need to renew 'permesso di soggiorno'⁷, and the child expresses the wish to remain at the house of the nanny and discontent in leaving. She also explains the experience of an Italian nanny who went through social services and got foster care for the child (pages 18-19-20, appendix 1). Beatrice condemns the decision of

⁶ They are very Italian. The process of becoming Italian.

⁷'Permesso di soggiorno' is a formal document that gives the permission to reside in Italy for a longer period and it is request 8 days after the entrance in the country ("Visto e permesso di soggiorno | Ministero dell'Interno," n.d.).

another nanny to take the child entirely in, because the child would no longer visit the Chinese parents. She explains that she is not “here to steal the child from anyone” (page 7-8, appendix 3). Although she stresses the importance of the children remaining attached to their parents, it is interesting that, under the agreement, she no longer receives any salary for living with the child. This suggests greater involvement in the child's well-being, no longer based on economic interests. She mentions that the financial cost is only discussed when significant expenses, such as clothes, are needed. This information, however, is unclear. Unstructured interviews with locals who have a relationship with the nanny discredited this agreement between the nanny and the family. The lack of transparency about the salary suggests a sense of vulnerability and fear for the authorities to become aware of the situation. Daniela clearly states apprehension in talking about the wages in the following quote:

“(…) I don’t talk with everybody about the fact that they pay me, if they ask, “How much do they pay you ?” Sometimes they give me clothes [she answers the question of the salary]. What do you say to the neighbours? You can’t talk about it, because it is not like I have insurance or something... but everybody does it. I know a lot of people who live nearby who do it. I see them walking by in the morning with small Chinese children.”
(page 23, appendix 4)

Even though Beatrice and Daniela may fear their lack of insurance, Alice and Carlotta do not mention this in their interviews. The process of finding this employment, however, is very different among them. While Beatrice and Daniela were contacted directly by acquaintances, Alice and Carlotta used an app to reach out to Chinese families in need of childcare. These two different processes may have influenced the degree of informality that the nannies perceive in their employment status and their apprehension about being uncovered by the authorities.

The last theme identified in the interviews, related to ‘caring about’ the Chinese children, is the feeling of missing the child when the agreement ceases to be a suitable solution for the children's care, as the Chinese family situation evolves. Daniela mentions how much she misses the Chinese baby that she has been babysitting in the past, but who she no longer ‘cares for’. She, though, finds comfort in the fact that she still has contact with the family. She explains that the family workplace is so close by that she can visit them whenever she wants and that she has an excellent relationship with them (pages 14-15, appendix 4).

Similarly, Carlotta describes in great detail how challenging it was to see the child go

and how they still have contact with the child and family in the following quote:

“I have to be honest, it hit hard. Because we needed the money, yes, but we didn’t think about the aftermath. Because you get attached, also the children, my children. It was difficult to explain that it was a job (...). Because he was part of the family, he was always with me, h24... the grandparents, my parents were part of it, and they also grew attached [to the child] (...). I can’t fully let him go. I still visit him, I still call him. If we are going out to a sushi restaurant, I prefer to go to theirs so that I can see the child. My children still mention him; they search for him. Do you understand? We have a wonderful relationship. If I don’t see him at least once a month, I miss him.” (page 9-10, appendix 1)

Carlotta explains that the relationship with the family is still ongoing, even though the work agreement has concluded. She also describes how difficult it was for the mother to end the working relationship, a decision primarily driven by economic considerations, as they discussed directly with her. As Carlotta describes, both felt strongly about this decision, and they agreed that living with Carlotta’s family was a positive experience for the child. In this situation, Carlotta and the child's mother agree on how to ‘care about’ the child, thereby manifesting a ‘transnational household’ logic. Furthermore, Carlotta speculates about the roles the granddad and the dad played in it. She refers to a gendered family structure in which the decision was made primarily by the father-in-law and the child's father, without considering the mother's wishes. She describes how the father-in-law has to be ok with the decisions, otherwise *they* wouldn’t do anything (page 7, appendix 1). This description suggests a discourse of ‘othering’. Carlotta generalizes about Chinese family structure as *their* way of making decisions, which entails that it applies only to *them*, *i Cinesi*.

In this sub-chapter, the notions of ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ have been analyzed. Starting from hands-on everyday tasks that illustrated a dimension of ‘caring for’ the children, the sub-chapter delves into manifestations of ‘caring about’. The nannies’ emotional labor is evident in their support for the children's physical, emotional, and relational well-being, even after the work agreement is concluded. Specifically, the two concepts overlap in some situations, creating a collaborative dynamic between the Italian and Chinese families, which is defined as a ‘transnational household’. The nanny’s role in the ‘transitional household’ is,

however, not rigid; it is negotiated relationally, ranging from parity to subordination in different situations. Finally, collaboration and subordination are shaped around the discourse of ‘othering’, manifesting in some dynamics a morally superior care vision from the nanny perspective.

5.2. ‘Brokerage process’

In this sub-chapter, the analysis focuses on the ‘brokerage process’ and how the nannies act as a ‘conduit’, ‘tertius inguens’, and ‘tertius gaudens’ for the Chinese families’ opportunities to participate in the Italian labor market, language skills, socialization, and (un) familiarity between the Italian institutional norms and the Chinese families.

5.2.1 ‘Conduit’ of access opportunities in the Italian labor market

The role of nannies is clearly discussed in the context of the lack of suitable childcare to meet the needs of Chinese families while they work long hours. There is general agreement among the nannies that there is an incompatibility between how *i Cinesi* work and the possibility of childcare, which reveals a distinction in how the two communities work and suggests an ‘othering’ discourse around *i Cinesi* choices. The nannies primarily refer to the long hours and the fact that they cannot take their small children to work because the Italian authorities have workplace control programs⁸ in place. They face fines if the children are found in the workplace (Cagioni, Coccoloni, 2018; see, for instance, page 5, appendix 1; page 2, appendix 2; page 2, appendix 3; pages 7-8, appendix 4). The practice of bringing children, by Chinese parents, to the workplace is also confirmed in the literature, both in Italy and in Europe (see section 2.3). Workplace control programs, therefore, pose another practical challenge for Chinese families seeking suitable childcare solutions. Carlotta describes the incompatibility with the Chinese family work hours and the need for childcare in this way: “*Her culture, their culture, is that they must work. I said “Are you not coming to see the baby?” “No, we work, we work, we must work. We can’t keep the baby; a child is a commitment for us. I pay you to keep the baby,” she said.*” (page 5, appendix 1). In this case, an action of ‘conduit’ is suggested. Carlotta acts as a ‘conduit’ of opportunities, enabling Chinese parents to work while she serves as the child’s caregiver. While sustaining a discourse of ‘othering’, she acts as an intermediary between the family’s needs and Italian structural norms, ensuring the child

⁸Control programs refer to the Chinese workplaces being supervised to comply with Italian laws on working hours, working conditions, and the work environment (“Osservatorio Interventi Tratta – Non c’è luogo della terra in cui gli schiavi non continuino a lavorare e sudare, costruire e soffrire. – Kevin Bals,” 2025)

is not taken to work with the Chinese parents and grows up in a safe environment. The need to work long hours is the primary reason parents hire a nanny, as other nannies noted in their descriptions (pages 5, appendix 1; 2, appendix 2; 2, appendix 3; 7-8, appendix 4). The role as ‘conduit’ of work opportunities is also suggested in Morano-Foadi et.al.'s findings. They argue that local volunteers' brokerage activities influence newcomers' access to the labor market. While the Chinese families are not newcomers in a temporal sense, and the nannies are not actively required to work as intermediaries, the same process is demonstrated in this analysis. The nannies' role as intermediaries and facilitators of opportunity translation suggests a positive influence on Chinese families becoming active workers in the Italian labor market.

While Alice and Carlotta maintain, respectively, a neutral and ‘othering’ perspective on the Chinese family's need to work long hours and employ others to care for the children, Daniela reflects on her personal experience to find a meeting point between the two communities. In the following quote, she describes how, in the past, the same decisions were made by her and her parents, creating an anti-discourse of ‘othering’ and showing understanding of Chinese families’ situations:

“But, there is something I would like to say, ok? So, before, when the Italians owned the companies and factories, ok? Here in Prato, many factories were sold to the Chinese, and I also worked in a dyeing factory, among other things, yes? (...) So when our parents owned the factories, because my mom had a factory, and when I was little, I was always with my parents who were working, also our parents took the children with them to work, and they would put them in crates, and they would grow up in them (...). I took my daughter, my firstborn, and worked with my mom, and my daughter would stay in the crate and play there. So, we would keep her there with us, right? Nowadays, people are making too big a deal out of it [taking the children to the workplace].” (page 7, appendix 4)

Daniela sympathises, furthermore, with the Chinese community. She mentioned how long working hours and taking children to work are efforts that must be made to afford living and create a better future for the family⁹ (page 17, appendix 4). Her perspective on the interaction with the Chinese family suggests a ‘tertius iungens’ role, where she does not simply translate

⁹ She is, however, much older than the other nannies (60 years old), which may influence the legal and discursive flexibility that existed in her youth regarding the decision to take small children to factories.

information, but fosters a collaboration between the two communities based on understanding and similar goals.

Similarly, Beatrice talks about friendship, rather than a simple nanny-employer situation. She describes the relationship with the child's family and her thoughts about the Chinese community in this way:

“At the beginning, we agreed on a salary, but honestly, I followed their needs... I followed their needs because of the relationship. We are friends, we know each other, and if they can, they give me something; otherwise, I wouldn't have started working, I wouldn't be an employee at [name of the supermarket chain] (...). No, I love *i Cinesi*. If today they were to ask me... Now I work in a supermarket, but I was also employed as a cleaning professional before. If an Italian person asked me to come and work for them, I would say no. If a Chinese person asked me, I would always say yes.” (page 6, appendix 3)

In the dynamics Beatrice illustrates in this quote, she shows her understanding of the family's financial situation. Even though, as mentioned in section 5.1, it is unclear if this information is accurate, it manifests an anti-discourse of ‘othering’. She demonstrates sensitivity toward her relationship with the Chinese family, possibly accepting financial responsibility for the child. Furthermore, she manifests strong feelings for *i Cinesi*, showing a sense of affinity with the community and a positive connotation in working under a Chinese employer. In this case, Beatrice interacts with the Chinese community as a ‘conduit’ of opportunities. She expresses friendship, suggesting a concern for the Chinese family's well-being and financial struggles, thereby demonstrating knowledge of their needs and supporting their ability to work by agreeing to live with the child without compensation.

5.2.2 ‘Conduit’ and ‘tertius iungens’ of language skills, socialization, and (un)familiarity

As Gao and Sacchetto suggest in their article, childcare strategies change over time, depending on the child's age and the Chinese family's resources. The same strategy appears in the interviews conducted in this research. The nannies mention that some Chinese families employ grandparental childcare, which is also identified in the literature as an alternative childcare strategy (see sections 2.2 and 2.3). There is, however, no consensus on its effectiveness in supporting the mother's housework. Specifically, Murphy's analysis also

suggests a gendered, intergenerational family structure in which male care is rarely experienced. Thus, an Italian nanny may be perceived as a suitable alternative, following a gendered care regime logic, given the possible weak effects of grandparents' presence on the household workload. Daniela, for instance, describes how, in her view, her house is a more sustainable alternative because her care better meets the children's needs than grandparental or fatherly care. In the following quote, it is noticeable that her care extends from practical matters of safety and physical necessities to educational needs, and, according to her, it differs from the care the grandparents and the Chinese family give:

“So, being him [the granddad] relatively old with the children... I remember that when I would visit [name of the child], he was not even 1 year old, 7 or 8 months old, because her mother lived nearby, I would see him, and he was sitting in the high chair, and his father would cook and do other things. It is different. Since he has been staying with us, I took all the toys out. I had a lot of toys from my daughters [when they were little], and I created a little library with all the books, because even though we use the computer and the phone now, it is nice to read books, like they do in kindergarten, right? Like they have in schools. Infact, when the town gives away books, I take them and put them here. Because I still have a lot of books from when my daughters were little, but I gave many of them away because they are adults now, right? (...) (page 20, appendix 4)

In this quote, Daniela emphasizes her attention to the children's learning needs. By using the phrase “it is different,” she compares how children are cared for in a Chinese family context versus an Italian one, which manifests an ‘othering’ discursive process. In her speculation on diversification of care, it is, however, not entirely clear why the family has decided not to pursue grandparental childcare further. She only emphasized the granddad's age, which may have influenced the need to find a suitable alternative. In this situation, Daniela wishes to establish a supportive learning environment that follows the structure of an Italian institution. This dynamic suggests a process of ‘conduit’ in which her role is to recreate an environment that the children can relate to in Italian institutions. This case of ‘conduit’ role aligns with the conclusion of Mortier et. al.'s budding program analysis, where to act as ‘conduit’ presupposes extensive knowledge of the host society institutions and services. In this case, Daniela uses her knowledge of school institutions to actively facilitate Chinese children's adaptation to the school system, recreating a familiar environment between home and school.

When referring to the childcare alternative of hiring a Chinese nanny, Daniela explains that the nanny couldn't manage three children, so the family had to hire someone to help with the housework. The decision to hire Daniela was then both economic and practical, based on trust. She emphasized how they knew her and that she had already taken on the care of other Chinese children. She also mentions that her house is a warm and safe environment for the children and that it is essential to her that they speak Italian when they play together (page 6, appendix 4). According to Carlotta, Chinese families had difficulty finding Chinese nannies because they wanted to have their children babysat in their own homes. In her case, Carlotta mentioned that the mother didn't like the Chinese nanny to stay at her house and therefore found an alternative by searching for an Italian nanny (page 5, appendix 1). Partially, the decision was also made based on the family's wish for the child to learn Italian. Carlotta reflects that the child's mother has been living in Italy for a long time and wishes for the baby to be fluent in both Italian and Chinese (Ibid.). Alice explicitly states that the family expects the child to learn Italian so she can translate for them (page 2, appendix 2). Beatrice also mentions that the Chinese father was born in Italy and strongly believed the child should learn Italian (page 3, appendix 3). Thus, these dynamics suggest a role as a 'conduit' for language information and opportunities to exercise and improve the children's Italian in a supportive environment. The same positive influence on language skills is concluded in Jaschke et al.'s analysis of locals' 'brokerage process' towards newcomers, although the influence is only mild, according to their study.

Another reason the Chinese families mentioned for hiring Italian nannies was the possibility of socialization for their children by living with other Italian children. Alice mentions that one of the reasons they chose them was that they had children of their own who were similar in age to the Chinese children (page 3, appendix 2). In this case, the nannies play an intermediary role, serving as a 'conduit' for opportunities for Chinese children to socialize and practice their language skills with peers in a mother-tongue context. Similarly, Jaschke et al. elaborate on how local brokerage influences social connections. Aligning with their findings, Italian nannies' interactions in brokerage are consistent with this analysis, favoring opportunities for social connection between their own children and the Chinese children, opening up the host society.

According to her experience, Beatrice was recruited to help another child change schools before taking care of the current child she is living with. She explains the process in this manner:

“Before [name of the Chinese child she is currently living with], I was looking after another child. I helped him with the process of starting a new school. I took him out of the school he was attending because they mistreated him, not the classmates, but the school context. So he started a school here, and I followed him in this process. He would come back from school and be with us, doing homework, and then in the evening he would go back home” (page 1, appendix 3)

In this quote, Beatrice clearly states that the child was mistreated not by classmates but by the school's teachers. Beatrice reflects on the school's discriminatory behaviour, which indicates anti-Chinese sentiment, as briefly mentioned in the first chapter. She agrees with the family to support the child's transition to a new school. In this situation, Beatrice acts as 'tertius iungens' in two ways: first, by acting as an intermediary between the old school and the child, and second, by facilitating the transition to a new school. In this case, Beatrice is not only acting as a 'conduit', but also translating institutional norms to foster a more collaborative relationship between the family and the school, thereby creating a triangular network of collaboration to promote a safe learning environment for the Chinese child.

5.2.2.1. 'Tertius gaudens' - Carlotta's role as passive enabler of unfamiliarity

Carlotta mentioned a dynamic that is essential to be analyzed. She explains that the Chinese family has never scheduled an appointment with the Italian pediatrician for a physical check-up of the child. She describes the Chinese family choice in the following quote:

“The [Italian] pediatrician... they never took him to see the [Italian] pediatrician. Because she said they had the Chinese pediatrician, so the few... because, you know, the first year, every month, the first months of the child's life. The child has a monthly appointment with the [Italian] pediatrician. This child... he saw the pediatrician like maybe 2 or 3 times (...). No, the child is not vaccinated. They are against it. In fact, I asked [name of the mother], “Are you gonna vaccinate the child?” “No, no, no. We don't do vaccines. We use this.” And she would give me a liquid that he has to drink every 15 days. I don't know what kind of liquid it was. Everything was written in Chinese; I didn't look into it, because the child is not mine. I do what the mother told me to do. I would give this liquid, and she said that it was like getting a vaccine. So I don't know, it was *their* thing, I don't know.” (page 16, appendix 1)

In this quote, Carlotta suggests a discourse of 'othering' as she describes how the Chinese family mostly takes appointments with the Chinese pediatrician and uses *their* medicine. She

also explains that the child is not vaccinated, though she does not mention the Italian institutional norms regarding vaccination. Under Italian law, children must comply with a mandatory vaccination program to attend elementary school. The family may incur fines and be required to vaccinate the child before registrations (“DECRETO-LEGGE 7 giugno 2017, n. 73 - Normattiva,” n.d.). In this dynamic, Carlotta's role suggests a failure to translate institutional norms and a deferral of responsibility for conflict resolution to the Chinese family and to Italian institutions for later. Carlotta manifests a ‘tertius gaudens’ role between the two actors, where she is passively enabling unfamiliarity between the Chinese family and the institutional norms.

5.2.3. Sub-conclusion - nannies’ role as brokers

Section 5.2.1 in this sub-chapter analyzes how nannies act as ‘conduit’ and ‘tertius iungens’ of opportunities, meeting the needs of Chinese families for childcare and thus, allowing them to access the Italian labor market. In this section, manifestations of (anti)discourse of ‘othering’ for the Chinese family childcare choices and struggles to find childcare are discussed. It is suggested that ‘othering’ is inherently linked to their role in the ‘brokerage process’. ‘Othering’ (anti)discourse is also examined in section 5.2.2, which relates strictly to nannies’ role acting as ‘conduit’ and ‘tertius iungens’ for language skills improvement, socialization opportunities, and familiarity between the Italian school norms and environment and the Chinese children. Finally, Carlotta's role as ‘tertius gaudens’ is examined, suggesting an act of enabling unfamiliarity between sanitary Italian norms and the Chinese family.

6. Nanny’s role in a gendered labor familiaristic regime

The feature of unemployment is linked to three out of four nannies. Daniela was in her 50s when she started working as a nanny, working for 8 years with the current children and other Chinese children before that. Carlotta and Alice are unemployed, and Beatrice mentioned working in a supermarket. The Chinese family does not pay her a salary, suggesting she took the supermarket job primarily for economic reasons, after taking the Chinese child in. Carlotta describes her reason for searching for a job as a nanny in this way: “Yes, that [a job that permits me to continue to attend to my children] is what I am looking for. But a lot of companies, a lot of workplaces, when they hear that I have three children and I am 37 years

old, they¹⁰ [cut me out] (...). That is why I did this, nanny of Chinese children.” (page 1, appendix 1). In this quote, an incompatibility between a full-time job and motherhood is suggested. Carlotta discusses how this possibility would help the family's finances, which were problematic when she began searching for a nanny job (page 9, appendix 1). Aligning with Carlotta's reasoning, Suralová's findings indicate that Czech nannies choose to work as nannies to be present mothers for their own children. Daniela also describes how the Italian mothers keep their jobs not for economic reasons, but to maintain their position in the company and the labor market. She talks about it in the following quote:

“But you tell me how an Italian dad or mom can pay 1000 (...) euros. It is better to stay home and not work. If some moms continue to work, it is because they want to maintain their jobs. Because they have good jobs (...), but it has to be an excellent job; otherwise, a lot of people, a lot of women, stop working. They think, “I go to work to earn... what?””(page 19-20, appendix 4)

Daniela compares the economic resources of Italian and Chinese families to pay for a full-time nanny, favoring Chinese families' higher incomes and better means. Linking Daniela's statement to Carlotta's, the statistical inference of resigning because of work-motherhood incompatibility becomes, thus, relevant in searching for paid care provision in a Chinese migration context in Prato. This incompatibility suggests that the Italian labor economic structure is influenced and shaped by gender roles. The same experience is reported in Suralová's article, where the nannies perceived a gendered labor market with inadequate work-life balance. Furthermore, as Lightman and Trappolini et al. suggest, the Italian gendered labor structure is itself created within a familiaristic regime, which aligns with the positionality of Italian women as unemployed and with their search for informal agreements with Chinese families, who serve as primary providers of domestic care labor. The Chinese gender division of roles may further affect the positionality of Italian women in care provision, as Murphy and Daniela suggest in section 5.2.2. Thus, while Chinese mothers have the means to keep working, thanks also to the support of Italian nannies, Italian women take on the role of caregiver of Chinese children, being themselves unemployed. Thereby manifesting how the deficit of care, as the global care chain also refers to, is influenced by local gendered labor regimes.

¹⁰ She makes a gesture with her hands as cutting the air.

7. Conclusion and final remarks

In this chapter, the research findings are outlined to answer the following research question:

Why do Italian nannies perform a role in Chinese migrant households in Prato?

The findings are displayed on different levels, starting with the role of nannies as caregivers towards the Chinese children, intermediaries for the Chinese families, and lastly within a context of division of labor based on gender roles.

Nannies' role in Chinese migrants' households holds a more hands-on perspective of 'caring for' the Chinese children, which is encapsulated in treating the Chinese children as simply as the other members of the Italian family. The act of 'caring for' them overlaps naturally with the act of 'caring about' them, as shown in meeting the children's physical, emotional, educational, and social needs. The nannies provide food, transportation for their activities, a warm and safe place to sleep, peers to play with, but also hugs, kisses, the possibility of reading Italian books, and help with homework. 'Caring about' is, however, not a solo act that nannies provide. The collaboration between Chinese parents and nannies creates a 'transnational household' in a post-migration setting, where the roles of caregivers and decision-makers are negotiated relationally. The interactions between the nannies and the Chinese families partially follow an (anti)discourse of 'othering'. The nannies' role is not rigid and is influenced by the process of creating 'us vs. them' boundaries and by the search for common qualities with *i Cinesi*. The latter is suggested and shaped by actions of 'tertius iungens', as the nannies' objective becomes, through translation of Italian institutional norms, the collaboration between the Chinese families and the Italian institutions. The nannies' interactions align with Chinese families' needs and offer opportunities as a 'conduit' in accessing the Italian labor market, improving children's language skills and socialization. Even though the role of the nannies is primarily collaborative with the Chinese parents, actions of 'tertius gaudens' are evident. They follow a logic of 'othering', leaving the role of conflict resolution to the Italian institutions and the Chinese families, thereby fostering unfamiliarity between the communities. The role of the nannies is ultimately shaped by gendered labor logics, in which young Italian mothers find themselves unemployed and seeking paid caregiving opportunities in Chinese migrants' households to contribute to the family economy while maintaining their role as mothers. Nannies' role in Chinese migrant households in Prato is therefore performed to respond to both Chinese families' needs of care

and brokerage, and to Italian nannies' economic and mothering needs.

For future research, the case of Prato needs to be understood from the perspective of Chinese families regarding childcare provided by Italian nannies. Italian nannies and secondary data, based on cases resonating with the Pratese dynamics, offer a partial understanding of Chinese responses to these interactions. The Chinese perspective would help fully grasp how much paid caregiving shapes the intercultural encounter between the two communities, underscoring the relevance of this form as a local manifestation of the transnational care deficit. Further research on Italy, Prato, and Europe is a crucial objective for authors seeking to investigate the global care chain.

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