

SE Local
HD **Formula for thriving export sector**
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Fear of tainted **milk** has turned **Chinese** families to the Australian product

EACH month, Beijing mother Christine Yang spends hundreds of dollars on baby **milk** powder that she has her brother send her from Australia to feed her toddler daughter Tuanxi.

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On **Chinese** supermarket shelves, Australian infant formula is more than twice the price of locally manufactured products, but is hugely popular among parents.

“Australian products are more expensive, but the quality is guaranteed,” Ms Yang told The Weekend Australian.

“It concerns the health of my baby and for us safety is more important than money.”

Ms Yang is one of hundreds of thousands of parents in **China** still fearful in the wake of the melamine-tainted **milk** scandal almost six years ago, in which six babies died and 300,000 were hospitalised across the nation.

The crisis prompted parents to shun locally produced **dairy** products and sent demand for international goods soaring.

Australia and New Zealand became the major beneficiaries of the shift, with **dairy** exports to **China** rising dramatically.

It is estimated Australian exports have risen from \$337 **million** a year in 2008, when the **milk** scandal erupted, to \$523m.

New Zealand sales increased from \$520m a year to \$4.57 **billion**, helped by the signing of a free-trade agreement with **China**.

Demand for overseas **milk** products has become so strong that **Hong Kong** authorities restrict **Chinese** mothers to taking just 1.8kg back to the mainland.

In supermarkets, foreign products are kept locked in glass cabinets to prevent shoplifting.

Ms Yang would **buy Chinese** products if authorities could guarantee their quality.

The strict one-child policy in **China**, which is starting to be relaxed in some parts of the country, has made **Chinese** parents notoriously careful about their children.

“I have just the one child and do not want to take the risk,” Ms Yang said.

“I want to emphasise that if the domestic formula brands could ensure their quality to us I would like to consume those brands.”

A growing number of **Chinese** parents **buy** Australian **milk** powder online, but Ms Yang relies on monthly postal deliveries from her brother.

"My friends are all feeding their children with foreign formula," she said.

"When I knew I was pregnant I started to ask my friends to **buy** formula when they were overseas and I started to stockpile it because it takes a month to arrive in **China**. I am lucky to have my brother living in Australia."

Shanghai mother Sun Jiejie said her young son preferred Australian-made infant formula over **Chinese** products.

"I have fed my baby many different formulas from **China** and abroad," she said.

"And I found that when I fed him an Australian **brand** he was much more accepting of it. He is not irritated or throwing up, which happened with some other brands.

"You have to see how your baby reacts to the formulas. They can tell you if it is good."

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