



## Beijing

### Small World

Photo / Text: Sabine Falk

And I thought shopping for baby trousers would be easy, but all I could find in this Chinese department store was trousers split down the middle, from front to back, leaving a big hole!

Empty-handed and mildly confused I decided to go to the park. And there I saw the ‘split pant’ in action – a little girl, still pretty wobbly on her feet, squatting down and peeing right

there, through that hole in the trousers. So this is what the store was selling, a no-diaper-trouser solution.

The name is *Kaidangku* (literally ‘open-crotch trousers’), the Chinese answer to western nappies and a tradition that has been around for decades. The idea is to toilet train babies from an early age by regularly sitting them down on their potty. Babies that can’t walk yet are held by their

parents in a squatting position whenever they want them to ‘go’.

Being a happy disposable-nappy-buyer myself it seems ridiculous if not impossible to think of doing it the traditional Chinese way. Just the practicalities of having your baby in the car seat, stroller or on your lap makes you wonder just how they manage. However, the Chinese generation who grew up with *Kaidangku*

certainly doesn’t think much of the disposable diaper. While us ‘diaper-mummies’ couldn’t imagine leaving those little bottoms bare during the cold Beijing winters, ‘split-pants-parents’ will probably think how dreadful it must be for our babies to sit in a wet nappy, developing nappy-rash.

With environment at the top of today’s agenda *Kaidangku* certainly

is the more earth-friendly solution. I don’t even want to start calculating the amount of diapers consumed in the world throughout the young life of our little ones (actually I looked it up – a baby will apparently use around 5,000 nappies in those first years).

Nevertheless, China’s new and fast growing middle class has already taken to the disposable diaper and thinks of *Kaidangku* as rather old-

fashioned, unhygienic, unhealthy or even uncivilised. But still many Chinese call them a valuable tradition, a comfortable and less wasteful option or simply the only right way to go.

While it’s not about right or wrong, these last little baby bottoms in the big city are a quiet reminder of the culture I’m surrounded by. Certainly something that can be easily forgotten when walking along

Beijing’s futuristic skyscrapers, brand new Audis filling the roads and with Starbucks on every corner. It’s just one of those traditions that make one smile and it is for that reason sad to know it will disappear forever one day soon. Who knows, maybe there won’t be any bare baby bottoms wobbling through Beijing parks by the time the Olympic Games are held here next summer.

Good-bye *Kaidangku* ...