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Navigating the Dutch Standards: Chinese Restaurants in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This thesis is conducted under the debate of work exploitation in the Chinese catering industry in the Netherlands. By focusing on one family-owned traditional Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands, this thesis shows how the sense of family participates in the restaurant's work relations through cultural practices, thereby, why the Dutch definition of work exploitation fails to represent correctly the perception of people working in the Chinese catering industry. Combining perspectives and experiences of individual Chinese across generations throughout the Netherlands, this thesis discusses how racial stereotypes and social exclusion in Dutch society create a social environment where the Dutch Chinese diaspora have to navigate and negotiate their place in Dutch society through Chinese restaurants. Furthermore, this thesis also investigates the relationship between changes in Chinese restaurants and the reclaiming of cultural identity of the young generation Dutch Chinese. Through this thesis, the author points out the problematic static stereotypes around the Chinese catering industry to the community in both public and legal discourse in Dutch society have significant effects on the community's life, highlighting the need for attention and further research for a more comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the field.

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Introduction

This research on Chinese restaurants is carried out in collaboration with FairWork, an NGO dedicated to fighting human trafficking and worker exploitation in the Netherlands. The need for such research comes from the recent increased awareness and tension in Dutch society on illegal work arrangements, namely work exploitation and human trafficking, in the Chinese *Horeca* industry. A high number of relevant cases were reported during the covid pandemic lockdown: Statistics show that the pandemic lockdown had a destructive impact on the *Horeca* industry in the Netherlands, resulting in a rising number of reports on worker exploitation in the Asian *Horeca* industry, within which cooks from China turned out to be the main victims (*De Groene Amsterdammer*, 2021; *Trouw*, 2021; *Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie*, 2022). However, from their empirical research conducted pre-covid, Hiah and Staring (2016) point out that people working in Chinese restaurants often do not agree with how the Dutch authorities define their work relations as exploitation, because instead of the Dutch labour regulations, they follow informal agreements between employer and employees in a moral economy. This study shows the gap between etic and emic perspectives regarding work relations in Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands.

In this thesis, building up on the study of Hiah and Staring (2016), I zoom into post-pandemic Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, aiming to bring out the emic perspective of the current work relations in Chinese restaurants, trying to understand why people accept these work relations, as well as the social-economic factors behind their behaviors. To do that, I conducted a three-month ethnographic fieldwork by working part-time in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands. To gain a coherent insight, besides participant observation and small talks at the workplace, I conducted interviews with people both in and outside of the restaurant, covering a diverse population of Chinese migrant cooks, Chinese restaurant owners, NGO workers, academic specialists and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs. To understand the complex relations within Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands,

Though various studies have discussed Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, to my knowledge, there are no recent studies that approach this topic by working in a Chinese restaurant, neither is there any report that focuses on the lived experience of working in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands. Here, I invite readers to enter the field of Chinese restaurants with me, and look at it from the eyes of Chinese restaurant workers.

Vignette

It was still winter. I arrived at Restaurant Red by bike, but still am feeling a bit chilly in the weather. But as I was reaching out for the door handle, I already took off my jacket. Looking at the line of customers, I knew that everything is running already, and I would be warm soon from work. While squeezing through the people with puffy black jackets, I changed my default language setting from English into Cantonese. Loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, I said: “*ZouSan!*” (早晨 in Cantonese, as “(Good) morning”) I officially checked in at my workplace, Restaurant Red, an authentic Chinese (Cantonese) restaurant in the Netherlands.

“*ZouSan, Rui!*” Frank stood at the reception as always, as he had been waiting. He is the oldest son of the owner, the young and handsome to-be-owner, and current

manager of the restaurant. He had his back straight, shoulders wide opened, organizing reservations of the day while occasionally checking if everything is fine in the front dining room. I still remember how surprised I was to learn that Frank only turned 22 that month.

“*ZouSan*, Jimmy!” I said to Jimmy, as this man with gray hair walked by with plates in his hands. “Coming to work today?” he asked. “Yes!” I replied as I quickly walked past the reception to the dish-cleaning session. I put my head into the door frame to search for faces. “*ZouSan*, Yana! *ZouSan*, Mr. Senior!” “*ZouSan* beauty!” “*ZouSan*~” replied cheerfully the two small busy figures with slightly hunched backs while continuing rinsing the dishes. We joked that they are too old to age-shrink anymore. Then I turned around, hurried up to the bakery, again stuck my head in to see who was around: “*ZouSan*!” Gorge was rolling dough, Madam was cutting cakes, Felix was filling the pastries and Francis was checking the mixing machine. They turned their head around and acknowledged my presence: “*ZouSan*!” They replied, with a light smile, a few seconds of eye contact, and then turned back to work. “*ZouSan*, boss!” I would not forget to greet Francis specifically. Francis no longer involves with the restaurant management, yet is till the current owner of Restaurant Red, parent of Frank. “*ZouSan*, Rui.” Francis said, with a nod of the head.

I left the bakery, walked through the hallway to the back of the restaurant. As exiting the hallway, I saw Dung and Coen rapping up chopsticks at a table. “*ZouSan*!” I said. “Hm, *ZouSan*.” They looked up at me, and then dived back to the conversation between themselves. “Rui!” I hear Francisca, walking to me from the back of the restaurant. “Morning, Francisca!” We greeted each other with a hug, as I do with all of my Dutch friends. Francisca is the eldest daughter of Francis and sister of Frank, together they are taking over the restaurant gradually from Francis. I turn left, rushed across the delivery session, and straight to the kitchen door, shouting loud enough so everyone even at the end can hear: “*Zao-ya!* (早呀, in Mandarin, good morning)” with my hand waving high. For greeting the kitchen staff, I need to wait a few more seconds for confirmation: I saw Jip giving a chin up while cleaning the wok, Yuan smiling back through the thick steam from the dim-sum session, I saw a nod from Cathy, a wave from Pao in the very back of the kitchen... As I did not expect any conversation, I swiftly turned around and head to the back of the restaurant. Almost running, I changed into my uniform and walked back to the reception while tying the apron.

“What’s my job today?” I asked Frank. “Running at the kitchen.” Frank replied. I looked at the clock: There were five minutes until my shift officially start, enough time to make a coffee. When making a cappuccino for myself, I felt more at ease and managed to slow down. Conversations also started to flow. “Did you finish your exam? How was it?” Jimmy asked as he walked back from delivering dishes. “Well, thesis, technically. But the assignment went well.” I replied, stirring my coffee. Marijn walked out of the basement. “Hey, Rui, *zao!*” “*Zao-ya!* Do you want a coffee, too?” I asked. “Sure, also one for Jip. You know what, right?” I do indeed: black for Jip, black with sugar for Marijn. With two coffees in hand, I slowly left the front area. Jip came out of the kitchen. “Thank you, just leave it there,” he said while opening the fridge door and pointing at a small paper bag in it. “Remember to take it tonight!” he gave me a wink and then walked away. Those are pastries Jip saved for me from yesterday’s teatime. I sometimes forget to take it home, but not this time. I decided to take a break from the restaurant as a closure for my fieldwork.

The next time I revisited Restaurant Red was a few weeks after. “You finally

finished your exam now?” Jimmy asked. I did not correct him this time. “*I almost call the police!*” I guess this is Jip’s way of telling me he missed me. “Drop by and eat with us sometimes!” Frank and Francisca said. To which I reply: “Of course.” At that moment, I realized that Restaurant Red, which started merely as my workplace and research field, had become a place I am deeply attached to, a place I want to visit from time to time. I know when I arrive at mealtime, there will be food and caring people waiting for me. It almost felt like home.

Context and research question

There is no Dutch Chinese community without the Chinese catering industry. The Chinese, one of the most ancient ethnic migrant groups in the Netherlands, settled in the country in the early 20th century. Together with their arrival, Chinese restaurants started to appear. They gradually became popular across the country, bringing great influence on Dutch eating habits (Pieke & Benton, 1998, p125). The normalisation of the Chinese catering business in the Netherlands reflects the gradual establishment of social position for Chinese migrants in Dutch society, transforming from unemployed seamen abandoned by Dutch and British companies to peanut-cake traders that were associated with the image of begging, and eventually to restaurant owners whose business is officially recognized and welcomed by the Dutch authority (Pieke & Benton, 1998; Li, 1999). In this sense, beyond its economic function, the success of the catering business allows the Chinese diaspora to establish their social status in Dutch society, extricating themselves from the label of “economically useless” Chinese (Pieke & Benton, 1998, p129). The boom of Chinese restaurants, at the same time, started a big wave of chain migrants and family reunification, which introduced a large amount of undocumented Chinese workers in the catering industry (Hiah 2019, 155). The entanglement of the catering business and migration wave results in a long history of the Dutch government associating the Dutch Chinese community with illegality, “categorizing Chinese as a special group of migrants that has to be dealt with” with specific measures (Li, 1999; Hiah, 2019).

Nowadays, the Chinese catering industry continues to be a place of friction between Dutch regulations and Chinese standards. In 2014, confronted by the protest of Chinese restaurant owners and workers, the Dutch government released a specific immigration agreement, the *Convenant Aziatische Horeca* (Asian Catering Covenant, referred to as the Asian cook policy in the following text), to facilitate oversea recruitment for Asian restaurants to solve their labour shortage issue (Hiah and Staring, 2016). However, this policy was cancelled in 2022 due to the high report of work exploitation and cases of human trafficking in the Asian catering industry during the past few years. Among these cases, workers of Chinese origin constituted the largest percentage (*Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie*, 2022). The most recent relevant academic publication by Hiah and Staring (2016) focuses on the employment of undocumented workers in Chinese restaurants. The authors approach work relations in Chinese restaurants from the perspective of moral economy, suggesting that the informal agreements between owners and undocumented workers are a result of the need for survival for both sides (Ibid, 2016). In Hiah’s (2019) Ph.D. thesis, she further highlights the dependent relations between restaurant owners and workers. Hiah (2019) encourages future studies to examine work relations and the concept of exploitation in Chinese restaurants from a migrant labour approach. She suggests that this approach allows researchers to value the strong agency demonstrated by the workers, as well as Chinese restaurant owners’ complex position in the Dutch labour market (Ibid, 2019).

The above two studies offer insights into Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. However, in the post-covid period, the discussion of work exploitation and human trafficking switched from undocumented workers to the Chinese cook with single-permit visa¹ granted through the Asian cook policy. With the change in legal status, the new dynamic in Chinese restaurant work relations remains unclear. During my research, however, I realized the work relations between cooks and owners are situated in a broader work relations co-created by all members of the restaurants. Moreover, two key words: “family” and “money” showed up repetitively in discussions of their motivation and perception of working in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands. Therefore, I decided to put “family” and “money” at the centre of my thesis. The research question I try to answer through this thesis is:

How do people working in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands construct a system of work relations around the concept of “money” and “family”, and use it to navigate and negotiate with the Dutch standards?

To answer this question, I approach my data by referring to studies of family business in anthropology and the hybridity theory in studying diaspora identity.

Theoretical framework

- Anthropology of family business and Chinese kinship

Restaurant Red is a family firm that has been passed to the third generation. As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, the concepts of family and money are closely intertwined in this setting. To understand how these two concepts are implemented in this Chinese restaurant business mode, I turn to the anthropology of family business. Tobias Koellner (2022) provides a general reflection on cross-discipline studies of family business, with a leaning towards anthropological approaches, arguing that examining family firms from an anthropological approach enables scholars to 1) analyse the mechanisms of how the core family applies the kinship system into business; 2) provide new empirical insights into family businesses; 3) reveal the essential role culture plays in economic activities. For instance, through studying Italian silk family firms, Yanagisako (2010) argues that in the discussion of the economic anxiety in Italy, instead of holding the state’s fading welfare system completely accountable, Italian people’s strong emphasis on family relations in work relations plays an even more essential role. Following the path of these insightful studies that make sense of the connections between kinship and capital, in this thesis, I borrow theories and methodology proposed by anthropologists of family business and enterprise.

Koellner (2022) urges researchers of family business to pay attention to the “doing” of family/kinship relations in a family firm and how these actions successfully, or not, include employees outside of the core business family into a kinship system created within the business. They also underline the importance of cultural elements when understanding bonding behaviours (Ibid.). Koellner’s emphasis on cultural specificity is commonly agreed by anthropologists in the field (Steward, 2013; Wong, 2023; Rutherford, 2010). In their article, Wong Heung-wah (2023) highlights the importance

¹ A single permit combines the residence permit and the work permit (*Immigratie-en Naturalisatiedienst*, 2023), meaning that the right of living in the country is tied to the individuals’ work contract.

of the cultural meaning of “family” when examining the mechanism of family business, arguing that the study of this field is “emic all the way.” To support his argument, he compared the different understandings of “family” and the division of family wealth between Chinese culture and Japanese culture, explaining why the daughters’ marriage is more serious in Japanese business families than in Chinese family business: though the father is often the master of the family in both cultures, in Japan, the father is merely a manager of the family resources, and these resources will be passed down to the next male family master – where all male member including son-in-law that adopt the family names – as a collective whole; while in Chinese culture, the father is the owner of family resources, and his wealth will be divided equally between all his sons who share the same *qi* (气) – literally breath, referring to the biological bond – with him. The biological bond determines kinship relations and entitles the sons’ possession to their father’s wealth (Wong, 2023). It is evident that to understand a family firm, one must first investigate the meaning of “family” and kinship in its cultural background, in my case, the meaning of kinship and family in Chinese culture.

In the mentioned study by Wong (2023), they apply the concept of *qi* in explaining the definition of the Chinese family system. This is a concept they propose in their earlier study titled “What is Chinese Kinship and What is Not?”, in which Wong (2017) discusses some major indigenous/native concepts in analysing Chinese kinship, specifically its genealogical bond. One main set of concepts Wong introduced is the *Fang* (房, house)/*Jia-zu* (家族, family tribe) concepts proposed by Taiwanese anthropologist Chen Chi-nan (1986). Similar to *qi*, Chen (1986) suggests that a traditional Chinese family starts with a father, the master of the family. *Fang* refers to the unity of the son and the son’s core family. When the father passes away, his sons will divide his wealth, *fen-jia* (分家, divide the family), and start their own family as a father. By separating the meaning of *jia* – a co-resident, commensal group, and *zu* – the genealogical bond within a family (*jia*), Chen counters the idea proposed by Freedman, arguing that Chinese kinship should be understood genealogically instead of functionally (Wong, 2017). The genealogical concepts of *fang/jia* shed light on the division of wealth in a Chinese family. Shuzo Shiga (1978, cited by Wong, 2017) suggests that as *jia* is a shared household where all members share a “joint account.” Family members are discouraged from keeping private money by the core familial ethic of being supportive and sharing among all members because “the family as a whole will offer financial help to any member when situations require.” Though the whole family ethic is built upon an unselfish mentality, Shiga sharply pointed out the hidden power relations within this system. Wong explains this by combining Shiga’s finding with the *fang/jia-zu* theory:

However, while members of the *jia* can draw money from the account for daily expense, not all members have right to the surpluses left over from the account, which will be accumulated as household property, to be apportioned equally among “brothers” only. [Shiga 1978:113]. Because once the surpluses become *fang/jia-zu* property, whose sharing and ownership are defined not by *jia* but *fang/jia-zu* membership which only includes sons [Chen 1986:130]. (Wong, 2017:87)

Wong’s (2017) article shows how the financial division in Chinese kinship is depending on familial hierarchy determined genealogically. According to both the *qi* and the *fang/jia-zu* theory, in a Chinese family, only the core members, in this case the male members, are entitled to the division of familial wealth, while the extension

members with no access are yet equally obliged to the contribution of collective familial wealth. Here, I point out the role of sex within kin theories, not with the attention to discuss gender/sex as a topic, but to point out the structural hierarchy in a Chinese family system, and how it affects its members' relations to the familial wealth. This concept will be used later in Chapter One where I try to analyse how the concept of family is applied to the restaurant business and its employees.

The application of indigenous concepts, *qi* and *fang/jia-zu*, in Chinese kinship analysis points out how familial hierarchy in Chinese kinship is both structurally embedded and actively re-produced by the division of resources. However, its heavy emphasis on biological relatedness limits the discussion of other possibilities for establishing a family within Chinese culture.

Charles Stafford (2000) argues that drawing a clear boundary according to genealogy fails to truthfully represent the lived experience of Chinese kinship. Opposed to the popular approach of seeing Chinese society through the “lineage paradigm”, he proposes to examine Chinese kinship through relatedness, because he considers social relations that could be defined “as ‘formal kinship’, ‘informal kinship’, ‘fictive kinship’, and ‘friendship’ are often very malleable” (Stafford, 2000, 56). By choosing the word “relatedness”, Stafford aims to stress the fluidity, inclusivity, and creativity of the practice of Chinese kinship, where female members’ and non-biologically related members’ contributions can also be examined. Stafford draws attention to two, as they described, “equally forceful, and relatively incorporative systems of Chinese relatedness”: the cycle of *yang* (养, raising or keeping something alive) and the cycle of *lai-wang* (来往, come and go). The former provides a useful method of analysing kinship relations within a core family, namely the parent-child relationship.

Yang, literally raising or keeping something alive. With phrases such as “keeping plants”, “having a pet” or “raising a child”, *yang* can be the verb of all three actions. The cycle of *yang* refers to the switching obligation between parent and child to provide for each other. More specifically, parents have the obligation to provide for their children until they grew up. What should the parents provide? Everything. From money, food, medicine, to the opportunity of a job and access to a future partner. Everything until the children grow up, which is commonly recognized when the children either start earning money or get married and start their own family. At that point, they are obligated to return *yang* to their parents (Stafford, 2000). Stafford (2000) uses the expression “debt of *yang*” to make sense of the payback of children. From my personal experience as a Chinese growing up in Chinese culture, a more widely accepted Chinese expression is the “grace of *yang*”: *yang-yu-zhi-en* (养育之恩). Essentially both refer to the same obligation children owed to their parents, but the latter highlighted the emotional bond in this relationship. Stafford (2000, 61) underlines this bond by describing the duty of children to parents as *feng-yang* (奉养), as “care with respect”, emphasizing the emotional attentiveness they are expected from the parents. Stafford also explicitly points out that despite the daughter being considered “transferred” to the groom family, therefore detached from the cycle of *yang* with her biological parents, in practice, she usually still provides care to them, because “it is women who normally shoulder (often ‘on behalf of’ their husbands) the actual process of providing *yang*: in many cases for their parents-in-law, their parents, their children and their grandchildren” (2000, 64). This cycle of *yang*, according to Stafford, is an “involving system of mutual obligations between parents and children, which centrally entails the transfer of money and the sharing of food”. The descendants who fail to fulfil their obligation of *yang* will

be expelled from the realm of family. Following this logic, when the mechanism of Chinese kinship is the practice of the cycle of *yang*, such kinship can be reproduced in social relations that adopt the same system, regardless of their biological bond. During my fieldwork, *yang* is a word repetitively brought up by my informants. Stafford's (2000) theory sheds light on the cultural elements behind this word.

The above discussion offers a relatively comprehensive picture of the mechanism of Chinese kinship and family. The question is, how is it related to the business and money aspect of a Chinese restaurant? In the book *Confucian Capitalism*, Yao Couchou (2002) dedicated a chapter to discussing how the concept of family and business are closely intertwined in Chinese business, focusing on a case study of a big provision shop owned by a Chinese migrant family in Belaga, Malaysia. Yao (2002) specifically focuses on how the application of familial ideology in business management of Chinese enterprise, on the one hand, (historically) successfully helps business owners with business management and to achieve economic success; on the other hand, fails to establish stable management control of power, allowing workers to constantly practice their resistance through the emphasis on familiar connection. Yao (2002) focuses on two phenomena observed in the field, one of which is the system of *huo-ji* (伙计, mate, or employees, sometimes collaborator).

Yao (2002) considers the *huo-ji* system a way to include external labour that is not directly related to the core business family. The position of *huo-ji* is similar to an apprentice: compared to "normal" workers, they receive a low payment in return for learning to do business from the owner. *Huo-ji* is usually very close to the business family. In the case study of Belaga, the *huo-ji* lives, eats, and sleeps with the owner's family. A *huo-ji* "enjoys the benefits and comforts of being a part of the towkay's family", at the same time, is "bound within the same ethics of obligation and loyalty that are prescribed for family members" (Yao, 2002, 91), reflected in its low wage and possibly hard working conditions. Many times, this agreement between *huo-ji* and owner is arranged by the *huo-ji*'s parents and the owner, adding an extra bond between the worker and the owner. Yao (2002) points out that the promise of "learning to do business" or "becoming something more than a worker" is not always fulfilled in practice, domestic comfort and personal attachment to the business (family) will become the key factor of keeping *huo-ji* to stay. He pointed out that a *huo-ji* often has to seriously weigh between this comfort received and the reality of unfavourable working conditions before accepting a job offer elsewhere with better conditions.

- Diaspora and hybrid identity

Another significant element for understanding Chinese Restaurants in the Netherlands is to understand their relations to their identity as the Chinese diaspora. But first, why "diaspora" instead of "migrant"? The meaning of diaspora has changed over time with increasing interest in the field. The word "diaspora" comes from the Greek verb "diaspeiro", meaning spreading out, first used to describe the Jewish diasporas and black diasporas (Stephane, 2008). Its original meaning indicated a forced departure from the homeland and settling outside of the country, emphasizing an imaginary heavenly homeland that one always wanted to return to but could not (Sales et al., 2011). From the 1980s onward, diaspora studies also started to include people who voluntarily migrated to other countries (Duru, 2017). The broadening of its meaning was under the influence of globalisation and postmodernism theories, corresponding to the increasing transnational communication facilitated by modern technologies (Stephane, 2008). By mapping out the root of the development of this term

in the late twentieth and late twenty-first century, Brubaker points out that the deviation of the definition of diaspora raised questions in academia about whether the term “diaspora” is becoming a “promiscuously capacious category” (Tölölyan, n.d., cited by Brubaker, 2005).

Facing the challenge of how to define diaspora, Brubaker (2005) suggests three key elements that are still commonly recognized as the constitution of diaspora: 1) Dispersion, referring to groups of people living outside or away from their host country or ethnic group 2) Homeland Orientation, as the conceptual or real “homeland” trigger the sense of “value, identity and loyalty” in the collective group. Several discussions around the meaning of “homeland” for diaspora point out that the connection of homeland does not necessarily indicate the desire to return, but instead emphasizes how the communities recreate their culture in different locations. 3) Boundary-Maintenance. Referring to Armstrong, Brubaker (2005) highlights the importance of boundary maintenance for the diaspora in relation to identity construction. He argues that the boundary-making process is key to creating connection and relativity among members, creating a distinctive single transnational community that can be categorized as diaspora. He also underlines that it is crucial that such boundary maintenance occurs across generations, as the long-lasting characteristic is identified in classic diaspora studies yet unclear in the modern context (Brubaker, 2005).

The choice of the term “Chinese diaspora” in this thesis adopts its use in referring to a collective while unified identity of people of Chinese descent that live outside of China (Ang, 2003). In her article, Ang (2003) defines the “Chinese diaspora” as an “ideological and emotional” concept that holds power to its audience “through imagination” of a shared nationality/ethnicity, offering a collective narrative to the Chinese people with different origins (within China) who live all over the world. Benton & Gomez (2014) describe oversea Chinese communities as a diverse diaspora with members widely spread worldwide, constituting members of different classes, as well as a long history with generational depth. Their study points out the diversity among members and transformation across generations within the Chinese community is “rarely valorised by the state” (2014, 1159), and was treated as a static category. This results in identity denial in the second or utter generation of Chinese, where their identification with the host country is constantly denied and othered by the majority ethnic group (Ibid, 2014). Various studies suggest that the young generation Chinese integrate the culture of the host country while actively selecting the appealing part of their Chinese identity, reclaiming their Chinese identity (Ibid, 2014).

To process the diversity within Chinese diaspora, Ang (2003) proposed the concept of “hybridity” in corresponds to the concept of “diaspora.” According to Ang (2003), the latter creates a solid boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” solely depending on biological ethnicity, while the former focuses on the constant exchange and interweaving of the “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” creating an in-between-space for diasporic groups to negotiate their identity. Hybridity, according to Ang (2003), allows researchers to identify differences within an imaginary whole, addressing connections between two isolated categories (Felski, 1997, cited by Ang, 2003). Because of this characteristic, hybridisation also contributes to breaking down fundamentalism and essentialism. It allows minority and marginalized cultures to interject themselves into the dominant culture of a nation, challenging the idea that national identity is essentially connected to the hegemonic race of the country (Hall, n.d., cited by Ang, 2003). It allows researchers to also examine how the dominant

narratives of a group can be challenged from the inside out.

The theory of hybridity provides methods for researchers to analyse the different understandings of Chinese identities among the young generation. By applying the theory of hybridity, Lucille Ngan (2008) points out that for ABCs (Australia-born-Chinese), “Chineseness” is a subjective experience that differs depending on their surroundings. She further suggests that how the young generation associates themselves with the “homeland” is greatly influenced by their families’ attitudes and education. Tao, Essers and Pijpers (2020) applied hybridity to understand the identity construction of second-generation entrepreneurs of Chinese origin in the Netherlands. By summarizing three modes of identity construction strategies, the authors show how ethnic and cultural identity, on the one hand, partly shape the young Chinese entrepreneur’s business mode, on the other hand, provide them with cross-culture innovative business ideas. From their finding, the authors further argue that over-focus on ethnicity while discussing entrepreneurship might be harmful as it overlooks the important quality for business success, such as self-reflection and creativity behind the use of one’s ethnic and cultural background.

Settings, Methodology and Moral Concerns

- Settings

My pre-fieldwork research showed that gaining access to people working in a Chinese restaurant is very difficult, as both the owners and workers are extremely busy due to labour shortages. Therefore, to obtain access, I started working as a part-time waiter in a Cantonese restaurant. When choosing restaurants, I focused on medium-large scale Cantonese restaurants. First, as a Chinese growing up in the Cantonese-speaking area in China, my familiarity with the cultural background and dominance of the Cantonese language facilitates my communication with the workers. Secondly, compared to small-scale businesses, medium-large scale restaurants have more employees with potentially diverse backgrounds, providing me direct access to various informants for the research. Restaurant Red was the first one that reacts to my request and offered to apply for my work permit. It turned out to be one of the oldest family-owned Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, whose workers consist of Chinese diasporas from various generations and individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. In this thesis, I focus on the work relations built among the owner family and workers of Chinese descent. I divided my informants into three categories according to their social backgrounds.

1. The Chinese migrant workers: cooks who work in the Netherlands with temporary work permits;
2. The Dutch Chinese: second and utter generation Chinese born and raised in the Netherlands, usually identify as both Dutch and Chinese;
3. Chinese diaspora: first and utter generation Chinese migrants with Dutch citizenship who have their lives based in the Netherlands.

Though all three groups fall under the definition of “Chinese diaspora”, this categorisation allows me to easily inform readers about the personal background of mentioned informants, smoothening the reading experience. With the same purpose, I anonymize members of Restaurant Red’s owner family with names starting with “F”. In this thesis, the expression “owner family” specifically refers to the biologically

related family of the owner of Restaurant Red.

- Methodology

To collect data, I conducted participant observation during work time. I pay attention to the conversations, jokes, and non-verbal communication among workers and between workers and owners. I kept a field diary after work or on the other day, with the support of small notes taken during work time. The diary includes an auto-ethnography of physical and emotional feelings from restaurant work. I also conduct semi-structured interviews with people related to the Chinese catering industry in the Netherlands: in total, 23 interviews with notes or audio records, 14 of which with individuals outside of Restaurant Red, including Chinese restaurant owners, in-service or former Chinese restaurant cooks, experienced NGO workers and a member of the Ministry of Social Affairs; 9 of which with people working in Restaurant Red, from members of the owner family, waiters, to cooks. Some interviews are conducted in focus groups.

During fieldwork, I relied heavily on small talk. As suggested by Driessen and Jansen (2013), making small talks allowed me to build and maintain friendly relations with my colleagues while gaining concealed information such as work arrangements and business finance. With the busy schedule of people working in the restaurant, small talk is also the most feasible way to collect information from them, as they are always happy to engage in short conversations between work while hesitant to commit large amounts of time outside of working hours. Sensitive topics such as semi-compliance, complaints, and secrets are easily shared through small talk, providing me valuable insights into the Chinese restaurant that could not be obtained otherwise.

At the same time, having informal conversations without audio records is also a frequently applied method during my research. This is mainly for two reasons: First, many insightful conversations with informants happen during mealtime or at the end of work. Recording would interrupt the conversation and make talkers conscious of sharing. Another reason is that many informants specifically request not to be recorded for the interview or conversation. In both cases, I take notes on phone or paper, and later complete the story in field notes.

My interviews are conducted predominantly in Mandarin and Cantonese, with only a few in English. For data processing, I manually coded interview transcripts, field diaries in digital documents, and written field notes. All data was processed in their original language and translated into English during thesis writing.

- Moral concern

In the discussion of researching clandestine practices of ethnic minorities, Hiah (2022) pointed out the risk of reinforcing stigma and racialisation of the Chinese community in the Netherlands, as this minority group has been historically associated with crime and illegal employment in the Dutch discourse. She further points out that shared ethnic researchers should be cautious about discussing clandestine practices, as sensitive information might be obtained specifically due to the shared ethnic background with informants (ibid, 2022).

Reflecting upon Hiah's argument, I follow two principles in my fieldwork and data analysis. First, I remain open with my identity as a researcher. Except for the cooperation between FairWork, my informants, including those in Restaurant Red, were informed about my research topic and its relation to the debate of work exploitation in

the Chinese catering industry from the beginning, during our interactions, and before every interview, formal and informal ones. Second, anonymisation. Being anonymized is crucial for Restaurant Red and workers who experience work exploitation. Specifically for the former, though I tried to write empathetically, discussion on its work relations and business practices might still raise moral or even legal debates around the restaurant. In order to conceal the restaurant's identity when concrete details are given, following the suggestion of my informants, I anonymised the location of Restaurant Red and the gender of some crucial members.

Regarding the risk of reinforcing the stigmatisation of the Dutch Chinese community through discussion of informal practices, I dedicated two chapters to the lived experience of stereotypes of people working in Chinese restaurants. Through attentive discussion, I hope to bring awareness and understanding of the origin of biased images, how they can be reinforced through social interactions, and profoundly influence people's lives.

Structure

Danilyn Rutherford (2010) suggests that when examining family firms, anthropologists should pay attention to three points in order to provide a coherent picture of the case. 1) provide a truthful emic background by paying attention to what the people of study are interested in 2) contextualize the case and try to understand the people's lives in a broader setting: social, historical, etc. 3) take nothing for granted, and identify the phenomenon in the field that provide extra layers to the case of study. This thesis is structured according to the above three points Rutherford (2010) suggests.

In Chapter One, I explain how work relations are constructed around "family" and "money," the two main reasons that motivate Chinese people to work in restaurants in the Netherlands. In Chapter Two, I contextualize Chinese restaurants in Dutch society, examining how stereotypes of the Dutch Chinese diaspora originate from their catering business history, and how these stereotypes continue to influence the social life of contemporary Chinese catering practitioners. In Chapter Three, I zoom into the story of the young managers of Restaurant Red, focusing on the changes they, as a new generation of Dutch Chinese entrepreneurs, brought into the industry. Between each chapter, I use interludes to introduce cases that, despite not aligning with the main story, are nonetheless crucial for a coherent understanding of the field of Chinese catering industry in the Netherlands.

Chapter One: Family-business work relations in Restaurant Red

- Frank: You have to think for the restaurant, because we are a ——
Francisca: A Family! Actually.
Frank: No, we are a business, right?
Francisca: Business as well.

My task of the day was “running”. “Running” is a very accurate description. As a “runner”, my task today was to deliver dishes from kitchen to the customers. As usual, I stood at the delivery window. Soon came a new order, a small white paper printed with dishes’ name in Chinese and table number: four dim-sum dishes and two mains for table seven. I reached out to the box with “7” and took out six clips with the same number: one dish one clip. As I finish “decorating” the order paper, I put it at the window, shouting to the kitchen: “Dim-sum!” so that the dim-sum cooks standing in the back of the kitchen know they should come collect the order. As I was shouting, a Teppan dish – a dish served with a burning hot iron pan – with a clip of “1” came out of the window. It needed to arrive at the customer when it was still sizzling! I took the dish and walk as quickly as I could to the front of the restaurant, where table one is. On my way back to the kitchen, a customer stopped me, wanting to make a new order. “Leave him, let him write down the order himself!” Jimmy shouted at me in Cantonese, stopping me from wasting one more second. “There is a traffic in the kitchen!” That was not good. I almost ran back to the kitchen, and there it was, a huge line of hot dishes lining up at the window, waiting to be delivered. The kitchen was ringing the bell rapidly. “Coming, coming!” I said as I walked, picked up as many dishes as I could, and then dashed back to the dining area. Back and forward with no stopping for almost half an hour, I finally delivered every dish the kitchen prepared. I could feel sweat coming out of my forehead and the subtle pain from my back, like someone just finished their running session – I supposed this is why the position is called “runner”. Francisca came and asked how I was feeling. I told her that it was tiring but felt good for getting through the hard work. She told me that it would feel even better when I receive the payment. Later that day, Francis handed me my pay slip. “Thank you so much for helping out, Rui!” Francis said. At that moment, I did not know how to reply. When people thank me for the help I offered, I would say “You’re welcome”, but in this situation, Francis was wording my paid work in the form of “help”, which left me speechless.

Similar moments of confusion happen frequently in Restaurant Red. The interactions and choice of words many times make me feel like I am not sure if I am at work, or I am simply helping out a relative with their big events. Looking back at the conversation between Frank and Francisca at the beginning of this chapter, it already shows how blurry the boundaries between business and family are for people in Restaurant Red. As Yao states (2002), family and business are two closely intertwined concepts that built on each other, support the running of a (migrant) Chinese enterprise. In this chapter, I try to uncover the work relations that sustain a Chinese restaurant, how they are built around “money” and “family”, how people of different positions understand, accept, resist, or make use of it, and how the entanglement of family and business create room of negotiation within and outside of the restaurant. Before I dive into explaining how the system works to keeps the restaurant alive, I will present stories from four different perspectives of how people understand their relationship with the restaurant.

- The Chinese cooks / the perspective of migrant workers

“But, the reason I came here from *soo* far away is just to earn some money. Otherwise, nobody would’ve come, right?”

Cho, 40+ Chinese male, originally from Mainland China,
cook in the Netherlands for around 4 years

Cho, the first Chinese cook I talked to, is not from Restaurant Red. I got in touch with him through FairWork, who helped him get out of a severe labour exploitation situation during the Covid lockdown. When I met Cho, he was still waiting to get his salary back from his previous employer. During our interview, he repetitively brought up the frustration of not getting his money back, constantly evaluating whether his salary in the Netherlands is worth leaving China. For Cho, working as a cook in the Netherlands is a temporary stage of life. As he said, all he wanted is to make and save money. For this reason, he cut down almost all entertainment or extra expense in his life in exchange for the opportunity to save as much money as he could in “a few years”. But how long is this period of time? How much money is he trying to earn? Cho could not give me an answer:

Cho: Well, just spend a few years making money, and then go home and do something myself. Ze, ai, my parents are getting old, my mother is 75 now, she is getting health issues and need to be taken care of. Ai, I wanted to work for two years and then get home, who could’ve thought of this happening?

Rui: Do you have a goal for saving? Like a number.....

Cho: No, no, no. No such thing.

Rui: So just trying to make money, and see how much you could earn/save?

Cho: Yes! See, life is quite expensive in China now. Like a kid, who has to go to school and stuff, do you know how much it costs?

Cho does not have a concrete number, nor a concrete timeline. However, he has a very concrete goal: to fulfil the obligation of *yang* (养, provide) to his parents and children. The cycle of *yang*, as proposed by Stafford (2000), is a mutual obligation to provide in a Chinese kinship system, the most central form of maintaining a parent-child relationship. Cho, as he described, is in the middle of two cycles of *yang*: he is a grown-up child of his parent and should *feng-yang* (奉养, care with respect) the aging parents, at the same time, he is a parent with the responsibility to *yang* his children. On his shoulders, is the heavy financial pressure of dual provision. What he is required to provide, however, is fluid: it depends on how much his family back in China needs for living, which school his kid will go to, how much his mother needs for medical care... This provides the reason behind Cho’s statement at the beginning of this section: he came to the Netherlands with the core mission of fulfilling his obligation of *yang* to the family. With the fluidity of requirements, it is hard to draw a number or a timeline for his stay in the Netherlands. Another aspect worth mentioning is that providing money through working in the Netherlands also stops Cho from performing the full obligation of *yang*, specifically *feng-yang* their parents, where emotional care is also emphasized (Stafford, 2000). This is reflected by Cho’s explanation of his mother’s health issue. In other words, despite not knowing when, he is expected to go back home.

Cho is not the only one. Most Chinese cooks I talked to have a family back in China,

thereby money is the biggest concern in their life. A big part of their salary will be transferred back to China for supplying their family. As for the rest, they will save as much as possible to prepare for returning home. Following this logic, many cooks ask their employers to provide housing and food to maximise their disposable income. They call these accommodations *su-she* (宿舍), meaning dormitory, where they live for free at the restaurant owner's property, usually sharing a room or an apartment with their colleagues. It is also a normal practice for Chinese restaurants to cover their food expenses. In Restaurant Red, the dorm is located right above the restaurant, enabling cooks to eat at the restaurant even on their off days. Yuan, the dim-sum cook of Restaurant Red, is famous for being the stingiest of all, as he would never miss a meal from the restaurant. With this persistence, he is getting closer to his time of returning home for the long-term. Compared to Cho, Yuan has a clearer vision of his goal.

Well, at least, you must have a house. After all, you [I] got married, you [I] at least need a house, so your family has a *wo* [窝, cocoon, here means home and house, emphasizing the emotional rather than physical conform of home]! House, car, and about 100,000 RMB [30,000 euro] saving in hand. Because *shang* [上, above] you have old parents [to provide for], *xia* [下, bellow] you have your kids [to take care of], you at least need to have some disposable cash in hand. I think that will be it.

Yuan, 30+ Chinese male, originally from Mainland China, cook in Restaurant Red, in the Netherlands for over six years

Yuan's expression of *shang* and *xia* comes from the Chinese colloquialism “*Shang you lao, xia you xiao*” (上有老, 下有小), meaning “having elderly above and young below”, with the indication of the responsibility/pressure to provide for both sides. This is an accurate description of the in-between position of the cycle of *yang* where people like Yuan and Cho are situated. Luckily, Yuan told me that with the saving from all these years of work in the Netherlands, he managed to buy a house back in hometown already. After getting a car and some extra saving, he is “good to go home”. Yuan could not hide his excitement while talking about the plan of going home. He told me that after getting everything he needs, he would find a job in his hometown, so he could be close to all his family members, spending time with his kids and taking care of his parents. He had not been home for almost three years, since the Covid pandemic, and he really missed his family. He told me his son was born right before Covid hit.

I was back [in China] in 2019. [My wife] just gave birth and was in Yue-zi². [My son] was still in swaddling. Now he is three-four years old, already! He can jump, he can run, he can talk! And yet I have not talked to him in person. Just through the phone, like this..... We have zero attachment built up.

Both Cho and Yuan talked about the reason of them returning home in relation to their family members' situation, and how their physical absence will stop them from engaging with familial activities. Here, I want to draw attention to the emotional aspect involved in the cycle of *yang*. It is obvious that Yuan's motivation for returning home does not merely come from family obligation, but also come from the eager of wanting actively to engage with his family members' lives and enjoy domestic comfort. Thus, the goal of “returning home” is not merely an obligation, but also a goal that the cooks

² Chinese postpartum confinement, usually last for a month after the mother giving birth.

proactively work towards.

Together with the “should” and “want”, “money” and “time” come in: these cooks have to, or want to earn as much money as possible in the shortest period possible. The outcome of this mentality is that many cooks are willing to work for long hours, or tolerate intense working conditions as long as it pays off financially. This practice is confirmed by another Chinese cook I’ve talked to: Qi, who I contacted through FairWork. He was very critical when talking about how Chinese employers do not follow the Dutch labour law, but also admitted to the one advantage of working for a Chinese-owned restaurant: the choice of earning more money through informal arrangements.

(...) The advantage [of working for a Chinese owner] is that [the owner will say] you work more, I report less tax for you, and [instead] give you more money.

Qi, 40+ Chinese male, originally from Mainland China, cook in the Netherlands for almost five years

Although this informal arrangement between cooks and owners is repetitively presented to me during fieldwork, very few of these people admit to me their own involvement in such practice. Neither does Yuan. All I know is that as I am writing his story, he is already on his plane back home. Secretly, I hope that next time we talk, he can show me a one-way ticket back to China.

- The owner family / the perspective of restaurant owner

It was a busy weekend working at Restaurant Red during Chinese New Year, I was leaning on the reception for a quick rest from the whole day walking and standing. Francisca came to check with me. She told me that the restaurant used to work with the same level of busyness with only half of the staff they had at that time. Labour shortage is still one of the main concerns for this restaurant. A few days later, I witnessed the restaurant being forced to temporarily close down during peak dining hours. That day, some of our cooks were sick, and the kitchen had failed to deliver any dish for more than an hour. “There’s no other way,” said Frank “We don’t have enough people. It is also very hard to find more people at the moment.” Frank told me that many cooks went back to China during the covid pandemic, and very few new cooks is permitted to come back afterwards. Being aware of the debate of work exploitation, I confronted Frank with the cases of labour abuse on Chinese cooks during covid, and how it resulted in the cooks leaving China and the cancelation of the Asian cook policy. Frank first made it clear that he did not agree, and believed people should be treated fairly. Then, he told me that I should ask Francis because he knew very little about it. I managed to discuss this topic with Francis in an informal conversation.

I explained to Francis how exploitation in Chinese restaurants results in the cancelation of the Asian cook policy, and asked how it affected Restaurant Red. I tried three times asking the same question until they finally gave me a direct answer (...) Francis specifically react to my description of “owners do not follow the contract and underpay the workers”, saying that what they heard from other restaurants is cooks would demand restaurant owners to pay part of their salary in cash in order to avoid high taxes. I further asked if Francis had encountered such situations. Francis denied it instantly, stressing that they are stories they heard from other restaurants. Meanwhile, Francis told me it is

understandable because some cooks have the pressure to *yang-jia* (养家, provide the family). (...) Francis also highlighted that the work relations in Restaurant Red are built on collaboration and mutual assistance. They further explained that instead of “working for me”, it is “you help with my business, and, in return, I take care of you” (...) Finally, Francis concluded that the biggest challenge is to provide cooks with accommodations and food. They told me that if taken away the money for rent, food and tax, there will be not much left for them. “They also need to *yang-jia*” said Francis. The word *yang-jia* shows up multiple times during our conversation. (...)

Fieldnotes, 30th March 2023

Two things are outstanding from the conversation with Francis. First, as restaurant owner, they are very aware of the migrant workers’ pressure of fulfilling the obligation of *yang*. Second, the family duty is a significant and good enough justification for them to (morally) accept the semi-compliance request by the workers. The understanding of the importance of fulfilling family duty is shared among the owners, because historically speaking, improving familial life is the core motivation behind Chinese migrant enterprises (Yao, 2002). Moreover, as Chinese, restaurant owners themselves also participate in the cycle of *yang*: as Francis said, they “*also need to yang-jia*”, indicating their own duty of *yang*. Of course, as Qi explained, more money in return for longer working hours. Recalling the financial pressure on cooks, it seems like this informal arrangement creates a win-win relationship between them and the owners. According to Dutch tax regulations: more work, higher salary, but also higher tax. The mentioned informal agreement allows both sides to go around the Dutch standards and obtain what they need from each other. Furthermore, the shared risk of engaging in semi-compliance practices reinforces the definition of help between the two parties, emphasizing the feeling of collectiveness through mutual assistance.

However, such relationships can easily fall apart when money is no longer available in the system, which was the case for almost every restaurant during Covid. The Covid pandemic hit the Dutch *Horeca*³ industry heavily: according to a study from *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (2021), during the lockdown in 2020, the Dutch *Horeca* industry shrank by more than 40%. Restaurant Red also struggled with immense financial pressure. According to one tenured colleague, the restaurant is still trying to pay back loans they got to survive the Covid lockdown. At a certain point, the restaurant could not afford to pay all the workers. Struggling with selecting people to fire, Francis proposed two options: stay in the restaurant with a salary cut and they can get through the pandemic together, or they have to leave. “Leave for good.” A cook told me. As a result, many people left: half of the chefs they found from Hong Kong, the waiter team leader who has worked since the founder’s generation of the restaurant, etc. This mass reduction of staff led to a huge labour shortage issue after covid lockdown, confirming what Francisca told me earlier in this sector. Knowing the financial pressure on the cooks, it is not difficult for me to understand why they left. Frank and Francisca also do. “The people who are working with us, they are very loyal.” Said Frank. “What we have here is a family.” Said Francisca.

Francisca: You rely on everyone here.....The people who have been working here for a long time, I feel like they also see us like a family. We’ve been through hard times, like Covid. We’ve been through stress, like not

³ Horeca: hotel, restaurant, cafe

[having] enough employees.

Frank: (...) They were here during Covid. There are hard times, good time, bad time, they were always..... The time when we didn't have enough people, there were standing.

Francisca: Even on their free days, they also came to help us.

Frank: [When] we were renovating [during Covid lockdown], they came back here to help us out and stuff. So yeah, that's why..... the stronger [/est] part of this business, is everybody that is still here even after or during Covid. That's what I call family.

How the concept of “family” participates in the mentioned work relations can be examined in two ways: On the one hand, the voluntary labour workers provided shows their agreement with the familial spirit of being selfless and helping each other unconditionally; On the other hand, the requirement of stay for a salary cut down is also an implementation of the familial ethic of financial collectiveness (Shiga, 1978, cited by Wong, 2017). I do not suggest any causal relationship between the former and latter, as some workers accepted the decreased salary and did not provide voluntary help. Instead, I argue that the “stay or leave” moment selected the workers who accept and agree with the application of familiar values in work relations. Some of them committed to the restaurant just like any other business family members did: joining the restaurant renovation. This group of workers later turn out to be, as the siblings said, what Restaurant Red relied on heavily to survive Covid, and what they now refer to as “family”. Of course, the “financial help” was soon returned by the restaurant to the workers: after covid lockdown, everyone received their normal salary with a yearly increase much higher than the usual rate, plus an extra bonus at the end of the year.

I want to point out that Restaurant Red does not practice family values on workers only when the restaurant is in need of help. The sense of family is cultivated in everyday life practice. Through his study of a Chinese family-owned grocery shop in Malaysia, Yao (2002) pointed out that the shop *is* the family, because all familial activity took place in the shop. This is the same in Restaurant Red: the restaurant is the family. Frank and Francisca live separately in the city where Restaurant Red situates, while Francis moved to a village outside of the city with the rest of the family. Restaurant Red became the place of family reunion. I saw them having family meetings when the restaurant is not busy. I witnessed Felix (cousin of Francis) bringing a large bouquet of red roses to his wife at work (in the restaurant) on Valentine's Day. I vividly remember celebrating Frank's birthday at Restaurant Red when Francisca and I were on shift, so we briefly joint them during lunch break, having quick conversations and sometimes a few sneaky bites from the dishes we just put on Frank's table. Besides Frank and Francisca, Francis has three younger kids that are still at school. Because they study in the city, most of the time they come to the restaurant after school, waiting for their parents to get off work and go home together. When the restaurant is busy, they stay in the bakery with Francis; when it is not busy, they usually sit in the back and play with their phones. Occasionally, they have extra pocket money to get bubble tea, and they would ask me if I also want one. In this sense, Restaurant Red is the home of the owner family, where most of their familiar activities take place. This makes it inevitable for workers to participate in their family events, which easily lead to the development of familial attachment. The following story of Marijn shows the process of “doing family” and its effect on workers.

- More than “*huo-ji*” / an in-between perspective

Marijn is one of the most tenured cooks in Restaurant Red. He is in his mid-thirties, single with no kids, good-looking and earns good money working as a Chinese cook. He sometimes comes to the restaurant during his day off to do preparations, wearing all kinds of fashion brands from top to bottom. His father back in China is a locally influential public sector officer, with a high pension and is well taken care of by Marijn’s brother. Marijn left China when he was nineteen to escape his father’s control. Now, he is planning to buy a house and settle down in the Netherlands. In short, Marijn is a rich man free from almost any familial duty. When I asked how much he has saved, he told me that he does not know because Francis is in control of his bank account. Marijn explained that he gave Francis his bank account because he used to have a serious gambling addiction, spending almost all his money on it. Francis tried to stop him but failed, until one day they got into a huge fight. Marijn and Francis eventually settled to the current agreement: Marijn stops gambling and Francis takes care of his money.

Marijn could not stop talking about Francis. He told me that he knows every emotion of Francis: crying, laughing, anger, etc. Marijn also told me that Francis would yell at him in front of everyone as a way to tell what other cooks should do without hurting their ego. He does not mind because Francis considers him as *zi-ji-ren* (自己人, my people). He told me he always receives birthday gifts from Francis. He said that Francis is the strictest at work, but is also the first to notice his emotion and check if he is okay..... I joked that Francis sounds like an extra parent to him. I do not remember how Marijn reacted, but he did not fire back. According to Frank, Marijn used to be “a very close part of the family” before he got addicted to gambling. The family used to live one floor above the cooks, and they regularly have meals together even outside of work. The family also took Marijn and Yuan together on family holidays. Till today, Marijn still occasionally joins family activities. Marijn told me he has thought about leaving Restaurant Red multiple times, but he eventually did not because he feels morally obligated to stay and would only feel comfortable leaving when he is no longer needed by the restaurant.

According to Marijn, instead of a worker at Restaurant Red, he considers himself part of the owner’s family, as *zi-ji-ren*. This self-identification demonstrates a strong sense of collectiveness. This emerged from the domestic comfort Marijn received through the care given by Francis and the frequent engagement in familial activities. As a result, he shares the same sense of responsibility and level of loyalty as the owner family does toward the restaurant, working extra time to ensure good business. Marijn’s situation is very similar to the *huo-ji* position Yao (2002) identifies in his study of Chinese enterprise. *Huo-ji* refers to young single men who work in oversea Chinese enterprises through family arrangements (Yao, 2002). They usually work for a low salary, in return they became part of the family, sharing domestic comfort together with ethic obligations as members of the business family (Ibid., 2002). Yao (2002) pointed out that domestic comfort is an important factor to keep *huo-ji* from leaving for a better-paid job. This shows that familiar attachment is the key attraction to keeping oversea Chinese workers without their own core families. Its significance is highlighted in Marijn’s case, where money is not his concern. It is exactly the domestic comfort Marijn received from Restaurant Red that cultivates his familiar collectiveness, motivating him to provide extra labour, and keep him staying during a financial crisis.

Combining all the stories above, I argue that the emphasis and practice of kinship

relations in Chinese restaurant work relations started with the co-dependency between the restaurant owner and workers. For workers, they rely on restaurant owners to provide a job with stable income, and for some, to earn a high salary that could not be obtained other than joint participation of semi-compliance together with the owner. From the owners' side, due to the instability of the Chinese restaurant business, they depend on workers who are willing to provide extra labour with low or no cost to keep the business alive. The application of family values/kinship system upon people working in the restaurant creates an extra layer of emotional attachment and a sense of domestic collectiveness. This extra bond allows restaurant workers and owners to establish a system of work relations beyond the standard labour-capital exchange according to Dutch regulations, obtaining resources through informal agreements that regular Dutch work relations do not provide. Yet, through the practice of kinship, in reality, a real family bond is cultivated among the owner family and workers. Thus, "family" also became an accurate description of the emotional attachment among members of Restaurant Red.

Stories until now mainly focus on how the cooks negotiate with the restaurant owners in family-work relations. The participation of other workers, for instance, the waiters and cleaners, are still unravelled. In the following session, I will show how non-cook workers engage themselves in the family-work relations by focusing on the story of Jimmy, a full-time waiter at Restaurant Red for more than ten years.

- The full-time waiter / perspective of the Chinese diasporas

I always remember what Jip said: "We are here to *zuo-gong* [做工, work], not to *mai-meng* [卖命, sell life]." He made a lot of sense. I kept that [the sentence] in mind ever since.

Jimmy, 60+ males, full-time waiter at Restaurant Red,
first-generation Chinese diaspora

This is one of the very first sentences Jimmy said to me during our lunch interview at Restaurant Red. *Zou-gong*, literally "do work" in Cantonese, refers to working as an employee; *mai-meng*, literally "sell life" in Cantonese, refers to working very hard for others, as if they owned the person's life, often with an indication of the person being used, tricked or forced to do hard work. Jimmy kept on talking about the history of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands. When he told me about the hard living condition the earliest Chinese migrants endured, he even reminded me to take notes because that would be interesting for my research. He soon got distracted by the notification of him winning money from betting on a football match. As a gesture of generosity, Jimmy ordered extra six scallops, telling me that he won more than enough to cover this meal. He said that Mr. Senior, the eldest worker in the restaurant, would be at work soon. Mr. Senior arrived at the restaurant when six giant scallops were served: the kitchen specifically pick them for us. Jimmy invited Mr. Senior to our lunch, asking him to share his "legendary stories" as one of the earliest Chinese migrants in the Netherlands. Mr. Senior laughed, started to tell me how he sneaked into the country with a fake passport; how he worked twelve hours a day seven days a week in the restaurant; how he needed to arrive at the restaurant at seven a.m. and start with watering the sprout; how he was always constantly yelled at and bossed around by the senior chefs... Mr. Senior was laughing as he told these stories, Jimmy nodding with respect, telling me that my generation is spoiled.

As our conversation proceeded, the restaurant started to get busier. Mr. Senior could not stop looking at the direction of the cleaning session, where he would be working in an hour. He is constantly distracted by big piles of dishes and the collision sound when they were poured into the sink. He said to us that he needed to get started. “Otherwise, it wouldn’t get done!” He was no longer smiling. Jimmy tried to stop him: “Don’t hurry. If it’s not done, they [the owner family] will find a way to get it done. It is not your concern. Come on, have one more scallop!” Jimmy put a giant scallop in Mr. Senior’s bowl. “Nah, nah... I should start working.” Said Mr. Senior. He did not pick up his chopsticks. After a few times of similar conversations, Jimmy could not keep Mr. Senior any longer. “Well, work, work!” Mr. Senior stood up. “What can I say...” Jimmy sighed, shaking his head as he watched the back of Mr. Senior heading towards the washing session.

Apparently, Jimmy is aware of his vulnerable position as a worker and the potential power abuse from the restaurant owner under the family-work relation (system) in Restaurant Red. How he differentiates *zou-gong* and *mai-meng* demonstrates that he is consciously trying to draw boundaries between a fair amount/intensity of work and what is an unreasonable expectation from the owner. This boundary of definition became crystal clear when Jimmy tried to stop Mr. Senior from voluntarily working overtime. Though he understands the sense of responsibility and obligation Mr. Senior has for Restaurant Red, he still disagrees with doing unpaid work without a clear request from the owner. However, witnessing this scene, a vivid memory of how Jimmy, this now firm fighter of worker’s rights, turned around and actively contribute to the reinforcement of “selfless family obligation” in Restaurant Red’s family-work relations.

It was a late Saturday night, after a full day of work at Restaurant Red. Jimmy already got changed, seating at the chair near the Restaurant entrance, ready to go home. Francisca came, trying to put cash into Jimmy’s hand. “Ai [shouting]! You don’t have to! Take it back, take it back! If you insist, I won’t come to work anymore!” said Jimmy. I heard from other waiters that earlier that week, Jimmy helped out at the restaurant on his day off. He was originally having lunch with his wife at Restaurant Red. Seeing there the restaurant is under staff to cope with the busyness, he cut his lunch short and started to work. And at this moment, Jimmy was rejecting the cash with his whole body: one hand pushing back Francisca’s hands with cash, the other hand protecting his pocket in case she sneaks the cash into his clothes. To end this push-and-pull game, Jimmy eventually stood up and dashed out, escaping from the restaurant.

Knowing Jimmy’s disapproval of unpaid work and his ability to resist, I did not interpret his behaviours as a result of the pressure to fulfil familial obligations. I translate it as a moment of Jimmy maintaining and reinforcing his family bond with Restaurant Red. He did this by actively rejecting the owner’s attempt to pay him back, labelling his action as selfless help that he should offer as a family member. But why would he do so? What is the benefit to reinforce the family bond when his job and payment are secured by the need for more labour in the restaurant? I argue that it is because reinforcing the family-work relations are beneficial to Jimmy himself, for instance, the tips division system.

Restaurant Red has its unique way of dividing tips: the total tips are shared between full-time workers according to work hours, within which, Frank and Francisca’s tips are re-divided among them and the young part-time workers. Young part-timers only get tips because Frank and Francisca consider the tip division system unfair. Actually, even though the siblings started working full-time before 2019, they were not allowed

to share tips until 2022 because they were considered part of the owner family instead of the waiter team. Despite being the authority in the restaurant management, in order to get access to the tip pool, the siblings had to negotiate with the full-time waiters and gain their approval. Frank and Francisca found it annoying, but they said getting themselves in the tips pool is already a big progress in confronting the traditional system.

This tips division is extremely interesting in the context of Restaurant Red, as it reversed the power position between the owner and workers by applying, within the whole waiter team, the same financial distribution system embedded in the family-work relations in Restaurant Red. Theories presented by Wong (2023) show how wealth distribution in traditional Chinese kinship is structurally unequal: all members are obliged to contribute to the collective family resources, but only the core family members are entitled to the distribution of surplus (Shiga, 1978, Chen, 1986, cited by Wong, 2017). This structural inequality is crucial to sustaining the family-work relations in Restaurant Red. In the family-work system, on the one hand, as a member of the family, workers are willing to work hard and work with low or even no payment for the collective well-being of the family – Restaurant Red. On the other hand, the workers are also aware of the unfairness in this system, thus the fact that despite working equally hard, only the owner family has access to the surplus of the restaurant's revenue. As the story of Jimmy shows, there are conscious attempts on drawing boundaries between two sides. Here, the financial distribution in the Chinese kinship system allows the owner family to justify their possession of surplus on both the familial level and the business level: In the context of Restaurant Red, the core family member is the owner's family, Francis and their children. Their possession of the restaurant surplus is determined by their position as being the employer in labour relations, at the same time, entitled by the financial arrangement in a traditional Chinese kinship system.

The same logic is applied to the tips division system. In the Netherlands, it is universally accepted that restaurant tips should belong to the worker, usually among all waiters. For decades, Restaurant Red only has full-time waiters and they had full control of the tips. Part-time waiters joined recently, shortly after Frank and Francisca took over. Because most part-time waiters only show up at their shifts, they are not considered as the core member of the waiter team, nor part of the family-work relations. Though they accepted Frank and Francisca access to the tips, the full-time waiters rejected sharing it with the part-time waiters, because the part-timers are not part of the core team, but an extension. The siblings argued that the part-time workers are also an important part of the team. "But they [the full-time waiters] said they are only earning a minimal salary, so, yeah..." Frank did not continue his explanation. I think what happened here is that Frank was confronted with a statement made by the full-time waiters: they are also important members of the big Restaurant Red family, but only earn a minimal salary, yet the owner family have the surplus. I understand Frank's speechlessness, as the full-time workers use the same justification Restaurant Red used for surplus control to justify their control on tips. Frank could not challenge one of the fundamental elements that sustain the family-work relations.

- Discussion

In Restaurant Red, the engagement of family and labour relations produce, what I referred as, family-work relations that create room for every participant to negotiate for what they want, even including requirements that are not supported by Dutch legal regulations. It seems to be a win-win system for all participants of the family-work

relations. However, the close interweaving of kinship and work relations in family firms is criticised by Marxists. From the Marxist approach to labour relations, the application of family relations is merely another form of labour surplus extraction. Exploited workers might not consider themselves victims of exploitation because of a lack of “self-identification” (Hiah, 2019). In family firms specifically, self-identifying as extended kin of the business family became a psychological barrier for workers to arrive at such self-identification, thereby failing to recognize the exploitative essence of family-work relations (Harris, 1983, cited by Yao, 2002).

Through this chapter, I argue against this statement, as it overlooks the agency of workers, denying their ability to be self-aware of their position, while navigating, or furthermore, making use of the family system for their own benefits. It is also problematic to put Chinese restaurant owners in an absolute power position in this context. This is not a novel discovery, as Hiah (2019) had already pointed out the dependent relationship between the owners and the workers in her previous study. In the post-covid period, the labour shortage issue continues to be a big issue in the Chinese catering industry. Starting from the Chinese migrant cooks’ perspective, this chapter shows how these cooks use the mutual understanding of Chinese family duty to negotiate for joint semi-compliance practices with the restaurant owners. In some cases, these workers are even the initiators of informal arrangements. The story of Restaurant Red demonstrates how the sense of “family” is cultivated by involving workers in their daily familial practices. Marijn exemplifies the strong bond created through these familial cultural practices. The care and attention Marijn received from Francis demonstrate how using “family” to describe work relations is, instead of a form of manipulation, an accurate representation of the complex interactions and feelings among workers and the owner family. Jimmy’s case shows that workers are capable of using the structural inequality embedded in the traditional Chinese kinship system to maximize their own benefits within the possible extent in Restaurant Red. Furthermore, how the full-time waiters negotiate for their control of surplus highlights the business element in this relationship. Thus, the power relations in a Chinese restaurant are fluid and constantly re-negotiated through the intertwining practice of kinship and business. Thereby, I argue that the family-work relations in Restaurant Red is a system created, maintained, and consciously reinforced by all restaurant members to maximise their benefits around the Dutch standardized practice.

Interlude: When the system goes wrong

Based on the dependency relations between cooks and Chinese restaurant owners, many Chinese restaurants rely on mutually beneficial informal agreements to keep the system working. Restaurant Red creates a family-work relations system to facilitate emotional attachments beyond contractual agreements. However, this cannot be generalised to all Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. A system based upon informal agreement is far from perfect, specifically when the dependency relations disappear, such a system can go wrong very quickly in many ways.

The Covid pandemic lockdown was a time when dependency relations broke down: many cooks stopped working due to the obligation of staying home and, more importantly, the lack of customers. During that period, the owner's dependency on the workers dropped tremendously due to the lack of business. Furthermore, the responsibility of paying the worker while money is lacking became a financial burden for the company. In short, the mutual dependent relations between owners and workers became one-sided relations where the workers heavily relied on owners for recourse (either money or a valid resident permit) while the owners needed nothing from the workers and might consider them as unnecessary expenses. As mutual dependency fell apart, family-work relations also started to collapse. I talked to several of these cooks, trying to discover, from an emic perspective, how the system failed its members.

Cho, a Chinese cook I met outside of Restaurant Red, and three colleagues of his were trapped in the dormitory provided by the restaurant owner during the Covid pandemic. I used the word "trap" because they could not go anywhere during that time: first of all, everywhere was closed; second, they did not speak Dutch, which limited their access to facilities; third, and most importantly, they had no money: their owner stopped paying soon after the complete lockdown.

Everybody was on holiday after 15th October [2020], because the restaurant closed. We all stayed at the dorm. The boss ordered something like cabbages, potatoes, chicken wings, and dropped them there [at the dorm]. [At a] Later [phase] he didn't even order food. At a later period, we almost had nothing to eat, we had to chase after him and ask for it! Not to mention that he did not pay us. We were so close to starving!

Cho, 40+ male, cook in the Netherlands for three years

According to Cho, he caught fever during that winter, when the heater of the dorm was broken. The owner ignored their request of repairment, together with the information of Cho being sick and needing medical care. Cho told me that without his colleagues' care during that time, he could be dead. This survival crisis pushed them to find police and reach out for help. When reflecting on the situation, Cho's colleague, Winter, told me that before reporting to the police, they did try to solve it among themselves:

It's just that that owner is too selfish, too bad [a person]. (...) You at least need to have consciousness [*liang-xin*⁴]. (...) At that time, we told him that "we don't want your part of 30% of the salary, just the 70% subsidy from the Dutch government. As long as it's enough for our daily expenses." Even if

⁴ *Liang-xin*: 良心, "consciousness" in English. referring to people's ability to tell right and wrong and act accordingly

he could just give me 500 euros, enough for me to survive, I would be okay to get through that hard time with him. But you see, [light laughter] [Rui: He gave nothing?] He gave nothing! Not even a penny.

Winter, 20+ male, cook in the Netherlands for almost five years

Looking at Cho and Winter's testimonies, arranging informal agreements between the workers and owners was still the main form of communication. Only after not resolving the problem through this method, that they decided to turn to the police.

Outside of the sudden hit of covid pandemic, another cause of the breakdown of dependent relations is the aging of workers. This is particularly outstanding among Chinese cooks who are first-generation migrants and do not know the Dutch language. Guo, a specialist dedicated to helping the Chinese elderly in the Netherlands, told me why he found the hard working conditions a crucial problem of the industry:

...Once you get old, when you reach fifty years old or more, it will be very difficult to keep up. If the restaurant is busy, or it's a big restaurant, and the cooks are not old enough to retire, then they will be in a very miserable situation. For people that are older than fifty but not yet at retirement age, what can they do? It's also a dilemma for the owners: these cooks helped them build their business from zero, but now with their (health) situation, they can't do what is required for the work anymore. Then what should (the owner) do to them?

Guo, Dutch Chinese male,
specialist in helping Chinese elderlies in the Netherlands

Guo pointed out one of the inevitable breakdowns of the dependent relation: as the cooks age, their labour value decreases, until a point where they turn from labour resource to financial burden for the restaurant. In Restaurant Red, the solution was found in allowing previous cooks to work in less labour-intensive positions in the restaurant, such as Dung in the waiter team and Mr. Senior in the cleaning session: they both used to be cooks in a Chinese kitchen. They now earn less than the cooks, but in return, they work fewer hours without the heat, oil, and pressure in the kitchen. This is not a standard practice in the industry. According to Guo, many of these old cooks were tricked into signing a resignation statement by the owners and forced to leave their job without getting any subsidy. Echoing back to the belief in informal arrangements, I assume the possibility of changing position depends on individual negotiations and the personal moral standards of the restaurant owner. Furthermore, for many of these cooks, losing their job is both a financial and a mental strike.

Hui, a social worker dedicated to helping Chinese people in the Netherlands told me that it is not uncommon for these elderly cooks to suffer from depression after stopping working.

Hui told me that many elderly cooks have dedicated most of their life in their job, strongly attached to the restaurant as if it is their own. When they are too old to keep on working, the feeling of not being needed anymore is hard to accept, not to mention those who were tricked by the owner to resign: they feel like they spend their whole life (on the restaurant) but have nothing in return when they are old.

Fieldnotes, 27th February 2023

To help me understand the meaning of the restaurant for these cooks, Hui gave me more examples. She told me that sometimes, it is the workers themselves who approach her, asking if there are ways to get the government to pay for their sick leaves completely because they do not want the restaurant owner to pay for them. One previous client of Hui worked 30 years in a restaurant before he got too sick (from aging and hard labour work) to continue. Despite the restaurant owner continuing to pay for his sick leave, the old cook personally could not accept it. “He collapsed.” Hui said. From Hui’s perspective, restaurant work has been such a central part of the old cook’s life, once this part is gone, he had nothing to fill the emptiness and fell apart.

From the above stories, it is evident that regardless of Chinese restaurants, workers hold moral expectations of the owners, and often even emotional attachment to the restaurant. Hiah (2019) considers these extra expectations as part of the moral economy. In *Restaurant Red*, the moral bond is embedded with the practice of family relations. However, such practice is not applicable to every restaurant. The above cases show that although mutual dependency usually keeps both parties accountable to fulfil their moral obligation, when the dependency breaks down, the workers can quickly become the side that got abandoned, being cornered to a position where they are vulnerable both financially and mentally.

Chapter Two: By Force – Being Chinese in the Dutch

Following the structure suggested by Rutherford (2010), in this chapter, I contextualise Chinese Restaurants in the Netherlands, thus, examine its relations with the Dutch society. Due to a profound history between Chinese restaurants and Chinese community in the Netherlands (Tao, Essers & Pijners, 2020; Hiah & Staring, 2016; Li, 1999), many ethnic stereotypes of Chinese diaspora in Dutch society are created around and about Chinese restaurant: a restaurateur, the perpetual foreigner, model minority (for their economic success through catering), docile and weak, etc (Yeung, 2013, cited by Tao, Essers & Pijners, 2020). As discussed previously, the image of Chinese restaurant is, at the same time, also closely related to illegal practices such as work exploitation. In this chapter, instead of discussing whether the stereotypes are true or not, I present the effect and mechanism of these biased images through the lived experience of people working in Chinese restaurants. To do that, I investigate the reasons why people work in Chinese restaurants, through which I show how they understand the stereotypes in relation to their personal situations and social status, how they experience and feel about them, and how they react to them through Chinese restaurants.

- As means of survival

Worker in Chinese restaurants, even those in Restaurant Red, a heart-warming place where people call home, often do not consider their job the best career in the world. I overheard a conversation Jimmy had with a Chinese customer while paying the bill. “You have a Dutch job? That’s good..... Working at a restaurant? It’s hard! I always say that if there is another life, I would never work in a restaurant [again].” said Jimmy. He has one hand propped on his waist, and the other hand leaning on the counter, trying to relax a bit from the whole day of standing. As I watched the conversation, I attentively hid behind the kitchen wall, twisting my waist out of the view of customers. Feeling my back’s old injury hurting again from the whole day of work, I silently agreed with Jimmy: Not even mention another life, no restaurant job in this life! With the pain I was feeling already, I could not imagine how Jimmy feels, working more-than-ten-hour shifts five days a week in his fifties.

In Restaurant Red, people come to work for different reasons. As discussed in Chapter One, migrant Chinese cooks mostly work for the economic benefits they could not otherwise obtain by working in China. It is usually their active choice; some even pay a high amount of agency fees to work in the Netherlands (HaiAn, 2021; Hiah, 2019). Yet, for Chinese diasporas – those who are Dutch citizens and have their lives and family in the country, like Jimmy – working in a Chinese restaurant is often not their first choice. Jimmy told me that he was forced by his parents to migrate from Hong Kong to the Netherlands right before entering university. He missed his chance to access higher education due to this sudden life change, but luckily, he found a job at the Dutch post office. For over 30 years, Jimmy worked as a small team manager and interacted with local Dutch people on a daily basis, until the 2000s when all post offices in the Netherlands were closed and replaced by service points. Since he was at that time already working part-time in a Chinese restaurant during weekends, he fell back into the restaurant and became a full-time waiter after losing his main job. A similar situation applies to Auntie Fei, a relative of owner Francis. Auntie Fei lost her full-time job at the airport during the pandemic layoffs. When I asked why she did not try to be re-employed by the airport after the pandemic, she told me that having night shifts in the

airport is no longer suitable for her because she needs to take care of her two kids. However, the money made from daytime shifts is not enough for the whole family. There is also Yana in the cleaning session, who used to own her own Indonesian Chinese fast-food restaurant; Dung in the waiter team who closed his small Chinese restaurant due to back pain from hard kitchen work... In these people's cases, Restaurant Red became their financial safety net, providing economic and social support when they could not find their place in Dutch society.

I specify the position of these non-cook workers in Restaurant Red, Yana and Dung, partly to open up the following discussion. In the job hierarchy within Chinese restaurants, cook is the highest job among all because it pays the best. In Yana and Dung's case, they both work as a cook until their body could no longer catch up with the job's physical demands. However, even the most favourable job – the cook – is also considered far from ideal. Before coming to work in the Netherlands in early 1990s, Jip was a teacher of politics back in China. He left the country and worked in the Netherlands to provide for his family. For Jip, being a cook in the Netherlands is not intellectually challenging: it is all about doing hard work. Wu, a former Chinese cook I interviewed outside of Restaurant Red, has a similar definition of this job. Different from Jip, Wu has little education. He migrated at a very young age to work for his relative's grocery shop in the Caribbean region. In his 20s, he got the chance to obtain Dutch citizenship and migrated to the Netherlands, starting his life as a cook by working for another relative in the country. He tried to learn how to speak Dutch but failed. Therefore, he has only been doing kitchen work for Chinese owners. I asked Wu what he thinks about Chinese cook as a job, specifically what he thinks about the image of long working hours in Chinese kitchens.

Oh, the government held seminars before on this issue and asked us about it. So, how should I put it? It's because us Chinese, we are used to working for long hours. If we put it in a nicer way, we say we are hardworking, right? [Wu laughs] In a less flattering way [light laughter again] compared to the Dutch locals, it means we are being exploited, the flesh hurts a bit more [literally translation of 肉痛啲]. Those bosses, according to the law, can only [ask employees to] work for eight hours a day, right?

Wu, 50+ male, originally from Canton province, former Chinese cook, Dutch citizen, in the Netherlands for more than 30 years

Though Wu clearly noticed the unequal work conditions between him and “Dutch locals”, he urged me to think in the shoes of restaurant owners:

But you also need to look at it this way! Actually, as Chinese working in the kitchen, [although] our working hours are longer than those eight-hour work, our wages are higher. (...) They [the cooks] require, usually, [a monthly salary] is at least 2000 euros (...) Except for those in higher positions, like those with technical skills, and specialised ones. Yeah, like the IT industry, those that require high technical skills or higher education. *Those* are different.

But in terms of working as *coolie* [苦力, literally painful/bitter force, meaning hard manual labour]. Working in the kitchen is considered *coolie*, right? However, their wages are not low, right? Usually, working in grocery stores or Chinese supermarkets, for eight hours, [the monthly salary is] around 1800 euros or so... Those jobs are much easier. But in the kitchen, because of

the industry requirements, it's difficult [to do only eight hours]... I think we can't complain, we shouldn't blame the owners for this.

Wu, 50+ male, former Chinese cook

Wu categorised Chinese cook as *coolie*. This is a tremendously interesting choice of word, as its meaning of hard manual labour comes from a specific group of Chinese migrants with a hard history. Studies about *coolie* is often discussed together with the *coolie* trade from the mid to late nineteenth century, when a large amount of Chinese people were traded to South America as cheap labour. Because of its high profitability for traders (Farley, 1968) and extreme cruelty to the transported people (Young, 2015), the *coolie* trade is often considered another form of slave trade. Records show that Chinese *coolies* were transported to South America by exact ships that were used to transport African slaves, with a significantly higher death rate due to the long distance (Ibid, 2015). Nowadays, the word "*coolie*" is used to refer to low-status workers (Young, 2014), echoing the poor social economic background of the nineteenth-century Chinese *coolie*, whose origin is from the peasant or poor-working class (Wang, 2006, p35-36). Describing himself as *coolie* reflects Wu's understanding of the social position of Chinese cooks: they are workers with low social status who, in order to survive, have to endure hard labour work that is undesirable to others.

The acceptance of being treated unequally compared to "Dutch locals", as well as the active differentiation between Wu's "*coolie*" job and other "higher position" job indicate an inferiority complex regarding his profession as Chinese cook. The comparison of himself as *coolie* also reflects the unprivileged social economic origin shared by many Chinese cooks in the Netherlands. This self-identification is commonly observed among Chinese cooks, reinforcing the barrier between them and mainstream Dutch society. Many do not believe they could learn the Dutch language: when cooks explain why they hardly speak any Dutch after living in the Netherlands for years, the most commonly given answer is that people like them "won't be able to learn it", in Chinese "*Xue-bu-hui* (学不会)", literally try learning but unable to. Some, like Yuan, tried and even took Dutch lessons, but gave up later when they found it difficult to balance between studying and working. Some, like Marijn, hardly tried because they consider themselves "not the material of studying anyway" back in China, usually presented together with the statement "otherwise I wouldn't be here [working in the Netherlands]."

Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands provides a room of survival for Chinese people who is hard to find work anywhere else in Dutch society because of various reasons: language barrier, lack of higher education, poor health conditions, etc. The flexibility in its work relations allows them to negotiate for conditions that best suit their situation and support their lives in the Netherlands. The stories shown above also demonstrate the attempts on learning Dutch language and connecting the mainstream Dutch society. However, it is proven to be difficult. These workers are self-aware of themselves being the marginalised group in Dutch society, and their lack of resources to build broader social networks in the country. Their marginalised position also discourages them from connecting to Dutch society, giving little hope of social status improvement, thus no motivation to put in the hard work of learning the language. One might consider this passive assumption of their relation to the Dutch society is merely an excuse created from Chinese workers' imagination. Here, I want to point out that although there is a lack of communication between the Chinese and the Dutch, there are abundant networks and active information exchanges within the Chinese diaspora

community. Such negative assumptions might be constructed through stories shared by other Chinese who overcome the barriers of language and education, yet still find themselves excluded by the Dutch. Christian's story is one of them.

- As a weapon of resistance

Christian, Dutch Chinese man, recently retired from his role as a Chinese restaurant owner. When I learned that he actually has a master's degree in medicine from a reputational university in the Netherlands, I was surprised and could not understand his decision of taking over his family's restaurant. He explained to me that he did so because he only realised, after graduation, that in order to find a job in a hospital in the Netherlands, a degree is not enough. He needed to have the correct networks. All of his classmates had family members or relatives that can lead them to the right recourses, except for him, whose family's network is limited in business. It was too hard for Christian to start from scratch. He decided to take over his father's restaurant as a temporary thing, which later turned out to be his lifelong career.

The difficulty of finding a medical job reflects a small part of the social isolation Christian experienced in his life in the Netherlands. In his experience, being Chinese is many times not accepted by the Dutch standards.

Because people in these places are in their *own* countries, right? Those Dutch people always think "The Netherlands is *ours*." It's the same all over the world, those white people, the British, every country. "When you come here, you follow our rules." "Our law is like this, and you do it *our* way!" It's a mean of control. But we are always... For instance, [at] work. Now you go to those banks, those funds. It seems like all those institutions are full of people with black hair, right? But what about higher positions? They are all blonde, right? No black-haired, never, it will never change! So, even though they say they have... [Rui: Diversity policy?] They have diversity policies and such, it's all fake!

Christian, 50+ male Dutch Chinese, grew up in the Netherlands,
former Chinese restaurant owner

Though the above quote does not indicate a direct experience of discrimination, it is clear that Christian has a strong feeling of being isolated and othered by Dutch society. He expressed his feeling of being controlled and pressured to change because of his Chinese ethnicity. He pointed out how, regardless of integration, the Chinese are treated as an outsider due to being the "visible difference" from the Dutch prototype (Benton and Gomes, 2014). He further highlighted the "bamboo ceiling" that prevents Asian ethnic minorities to gain authority in the host country's institution (Yu, 2020). According to Christian, being an entrepreneur and owning his own business allows him to detach himself from these constant judgments and demands from Dutch society, freeing him from the necessity to change his Chineseness. He believes that he would always be seen as a "perpetual foreigner" (Young, 2013), therefore, choose to have a career in business.

Even though I was born and raised here and can speak Dutch, [Dutch] people will always see me as a foreigner with black hair. As Chinese people living abroad, we must learn from the Jewish people: We have to do business! To do business, you can "*bo*" /fight [搏, Cantonese, literally gamble, fight, combat]! You have the freedom. You can be like "Now you are not being nice

to me, [it] doesn't matter, I can go back to China." We have the choice to leave.

It is hard to translate the verb “*bo*” in this context. Here I use “fight”, as *bo* can mean to obtain something, fight against something, or fight back, all with the emphasis of a huge amount of effort in the action. In this context, Christian could be referring to all these meanings: to gain freedom, to fight against the demand of changing himself according to Dutch standards, or to fight back the social discrimination he experienced in the Netherlands. Facing these unfair treatments, Christian reacted with resistance, fighting back against the enforcement of Dutch standards while maintaining his Chinese identity. In this context, owning a successful Chinese restaurant becomes his way of resistance.

Christian's narrative of social exclusion is also shared by some young Dutch Chinese. It is specifically outstanding for Freya, another daughter of the owner family in Restaurant Red. Unlike her siblings, she came to the Netherlands when she was fifteen years old. After living in the Netherlands for five years, Freya now speaks fluent Dutch. She started working in Restaurant Red right after graduating from Dutch high school. A few months after we met, she told me that she bought a one-way ticket back to China. Every family member asked her to stay: They told her how bad the working condition and political situation is in China, worrying whether she could make a living back there. But Freya had made up her mind. She told me that after five years in the Netherlands, she still did not feel belonged. She said that from her experience at school and in the restaurant, “pure Dutch people” are essentially racist. Freya told me that it is still common for kids of Chinese descent to get bullied at school because they are “different”. She said most Dutch people would not understand, or more often, would not even think of trying to understand the Chinese mindset, because they prefer to stick to their own believes. Even Frank, a third-generation Dutch Chinese that has predominantly ethnically (white) Dutch friends, admits that Dutch people could be very uninterested in other cultures, thereby, only know how to act in the Dutch way.

This enforcement of Dutch standards on non-Dutch others is also experienced by me while working in Restaurant Red. One time, I encountered a Dutch customer who insisted on ordering *babi panggang*, an originally Indonesian dish of roast pork, commonly seen in Indonesian-Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. I told him that Restaurant Red does not have the dish, suggesting him to describe what he wanted or show me with the menu. The customer got mad and ask me to find a full-time waiter. Jimmy stepped in. Turned out that the customer wanted the Cantonese roast pork belly. I felt uncomfortable about how he mistook these two dishes and expect people in Restaurant Red, a restaurant that thrives on providing "authentic Chinese food", to understand it. However, Jimmy asked me to let go. He told me that the customer is one of our regular and they are used to the name dating back to the popularisation of Indonesian-Chinese restaurants in the country.

The story of Christian, Freya, and myself shows that language barrier and education background does not correctly represent the origin of social isolation of the Chinese diaspora. It is the continuous “othering” of the Chinese community and the constant enforcement of Dutch standards corner them to a marginalised position in society. In this situation, Chinese restaurant became their weapon to resist discrimination, defending their Chinese identity under the Dutch pressure. Another outcome of such discrimination is that Chinese restaurant owners become reluctant to share information about their business with the Dutch society.

- Closing up

Zhang owns a small Chinese restaurant in one of the biggest cities in the Netherlands, working as the owner and the chef at the same time. He used to work in a Dutch international trading company but realised the instability of transnational trading due to its heavy reliance on diplomatic relations. He, therefore, quit his job and started his own restaurant. Zhang used to have a vice-chef, but he returned to China during the pandemic. Since then, Zhang has been the only full-time worker in the restaurant. We only managed to schedule an interview during his lunch break. Zhang told me that he has been going to bed at around three a.m. for the last few weeks because of the labour shortage.

When we started our interview, Zhang was very open about sharing information with me, until I mentioned the ongoing debate on work exploitation in the Chinese catering industry in the Netherlands. He told me that he would share what he knows, but I needed to be careful of what I write about, that I must know what I “should write” and what I “should not write about.” Zhang said work exploitation is a sensitive topic because any discussion of this would influence the image of Chinese people in Western society, regardless of the original intention. He told me that he himself as the owner works from before opening, around 10 a.m. till 3 or 4 a.m. the next day. If I wrote about it, even though there is no work-hour limit for entrepreneurs, the Western media would “have something to say about it”. “They have their own beliefs and judgment,” Zhang said. He also mentioned that having long working hours is a common practice in the catering industry. I questioned Zhang if it is the norm in the whole industry, why the discussion of it would bring trouble to the Chinese catering industry specifically. Zhang did not answer directly. He started to talk about the tense international relations, the China threat debate, the rise of nationalism, and a variety of Chinese-related diplomatic issues that he was concerned about. He shared with me that essentially the Asian cook policy is beneficial to the Dutch people, as it is a way for them to attract cheap labour, doing the job local Dutch do not want to do, while enriching the leisure life of the locals. When I left Zhang’s restaurant, he again stressed that I should be careful about what I would write about, and not to bring negative impact on this already hard-to-survive industry. “You can give your thesis to me and let me go through it before you publish it.” He said.

Regardless of the credibility of Zhang’s statement, one thing is for sure: Zhang was determined that no matter what he, as a Chinese, was doing would not be accepted nor understood by the Dutch. He was cautious about any discussion that risks giving the Dutch reasons to further marginalise the Chinese community, as well as their vulnerable restaurant business. Combining Zhang’s opinions on Chinese migrant workers’ social status, the quotes showed his feeling of not being included in mainstream Dutch society as ethnic Chinese, and furthermore, being “used” to improve the life standards for the Dutch yet are still constantly under attack by them. These all become reasons for him to close up the discussion of work exploitation.

- Discussion

In this chapter, by investigating the reason for becoming Chinese catering practitioners in the Netherlands, I highlighted how ethnic stereotypes, and social exclusion are closely intertwined, how they constantly reinforce each other through daily application. For some migrant workers and first-generation Chinese diaspora, language and education barriers directly lead to social exclusion in their life in the

Netherlands. With the lack of social capital, they often find themselves in a vulnerable position where they must rely on the ethnic network for survival. This dependency on ethnic networks led to stereotyping of the Chinese community in Dutch society, reinforcing the alienation of Chinese from the Dutch. At the same time, changes happened within the Chinese diaspora: with the financial and social status improvement through the catering industry, many overcame the barriers of language and education. However, when these Chinese try to connect and join the Dutch mainstream society, they are confronted with exclusion resulting from the long history of racialisation. What Christian encountered, according to Benton and Gomez (2014), is identity denial and prescription: although his Dutch citizenship is guaranteed legally, the expectation of equal treatment was let down by ethnic determination and discrimination. He was discouraged from engaging with the mainstream Dutch values and redrew back to the Chinese diaspora network and their catering business. Christian is certainly not a single case. The denial of Dutch society affects the self-identification of the Dutch Chinese diaspora and their relations to the Dutch. It demotivates their integration, and for some, such as Zhang, they react to it by cutting down communication. This lack of connection further contributes to the stereotype, in other words, the othering of the Chinese to the Dutch, which reinforces the social exclusion between the two sides.

Interlude: When They Want to Leave

The exclusion from Dutch society to the Chinese community in the Netherlands does not only pressure people to work in Chinese restaurants but also cut off the path for those who want to, or need help to leave the ethnic networks. I got in touch with Dragon through NGO An, Dragon was one of their previous clients. Dragon came to the Netherlands as a Chinese cook about five years ago, and has been waiting for the result of his case of work exploitation in a Chinese restaurant for nearly three years. He is now working in a sushi takeaway shop with an ethnically Moroccan owner. Before he connected to An, Dragon had multiple attempts to get help from outside of the Chinese community.

Dragon told me that he was treated very badly when he worked for a Chinese owner. The owner did not pay him as much as they previously agreed to, and they had several minor conflicts because of that during his stay. Maybe because he was not the “owner’s favourite”, he was forced to be transferred to another restaurant of the (co-)owner without consent. After being transferred, he and his colleagues were moved to live in a basement. The basement situates under a bank, with no window nor individual exit/entrance, therefore, if the bank is closed, they either lost access to the dorm or get trapped in the basement. The moment when Dragon and his colleague decided not to tolerate anymore was when they found out that their owner is taking money away from their bank account. According to Dragon, the owner opened their bank accounts for them when they first arrived at the country, therefore, also had access to all of their personal information, including PIN. After having no result from confronting their owner, they decided to run out of their basement and seek help.

The priority, at that time, was to get their money back. Dragon and his colleague first turned to police officers for help. He vividly remembered that there were two policewomen who received them. After hearing their story, the police told him and his colleague that there was nothing they could help without proof, asking them to leave after making a record of the case. Dragon told me he felt very sad.

After the rejection from police, they turned to the bank, requesting to check CCTV so they have proof of the owner stealing their money. The bank refused to help, too, saying that they need permission from the police. They returned to the police and got in touch with the bank, but once again were told to wait for news at home, only to receive a rejection after a few weeks.

Then, Dragon also tried contacting a lawyer for help. Dragon couldn’t recall the exact reason, he just remembered that the lawyer said they could not help and referred him to NGO An, from which he finally got the help he needed to leave the previous restaurant.

When I asked Dragon if he had tried getting help from the Chinese community, he told me he did try reaching out to, according to Dragon, a very reputational Dutch Chinese young politician. With the promise of help from this Dutch Chinese, Dragon shared every detail with him, only to receive no reply afterward. Dragon told me he was deeply hurt and got so furious that he blocked this person.

Dragon’s story map out partially the abundant barriers for Chinese restaurant worker to get help from the Dutch society. The repetitive rejections from institutions, such as bank and police, reflect the Dutch society’s general ignorance of the Chinese restaurant worker population. Not even the police can identify the signal of work

exploitation/human trafficking for these workers, nor can they direct them to the right people for help if the issue is out of their jurisdiction. The ignorance, as well as inexperience in dealing with cases of the Dutch Chinese community is also manifested in the long procedure of defining Chinese cooks' work exploitation cases. Many workers told me that they feel like "nobody cares about us [the workers]". Looking from their perspective, this feeling has its own justification. Most of my informants connected through NGOs, including Dragon, have been waiting for the result of their cases for more than two years. Many of them know for sure that the restaurants that treated them wrong are still running the business without trouble. It is not difficult to understand their complaints when they did not receive the justice they have been expecting.

Through Dragon's story, I showed from another perspective how Chinese people in the Netherlands experience social exclusion. In the case of migrant labour, the lack of attention and infrastructure in Dutch society for them to get help further solidifies the already exist isolation of the Chinese community in the Netherlands by overlooking the attempts of communication from the inside out.

Chapter Three: By Choice - (Re)claiming Identity

In this chapter, I investigate the extra layer of a family-owned Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands by focusing on what attracts people to work, or more specifically, to stay working in a restaurant. In Hiah's (2019) article, second-generation Dutch Chinese that continue working in the *Horeca* industry is often drawn by the financial benefit of the industry. In this chapter, by closely analysing the story of Frank and Francisca, a third-generation Dutch Chinese sibling, I shed light on the cultural and symbolic attraction of working as a Chinese restaurant owner. I further argue that being a Chinese restaurant owner allows the siblings to challenge the stigmatisations of the Chinese community discussed in the previous chapter. Through the restaurant, the siblings are able to reclaim their identity as third-generation Dutch Chinese, creating a space that stimulates cultural bonds for both their Dutch side and the Chinese side.

- Redefining "Chinese restaurateur"

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the history of the Dutch Chinese diaspora is closely intertwined with the Chinese catering industry. In their study, Tao, Essers and Pijners (2020) point out that these ethnic stereotypes result in an unfair underestimation of Dutch Chinese entrepreneurs in the general discourse, excluding them from the discussion of Dutch entrepreneurs. The authors challenge the general discourse by demonstrating the difference between first and second-generation Chinese entrepreneurs. The authors identify four steps of establishing identity: 1) "role mode"; 2) "escape from the kitchen" 3) "changing notions of business success" and 4) using "family and cultural resources". The pattern of "escaping from the kitchen" describes how second-generation entrepreneurs specifically avoid the traditional Chinese restaurant industry due to the tiring help-out experience and the discouragement from their parents (Ibid, 2020). Although the study successfully presents the significant changes between the first and second Dutch Chinese enterprises, the authors, in another way, reinforce the negative image of Chinese restaurant owners.

Chinese restaurant work is also heavily stereotyped within the Chinese diaspora community, labelled as a tiring and undesirable job: even in Restaurant Red, all the elder colleagues, at a certain point, bragged about their children having a college degree or not having a job in the Chinese catering industry. I interpreted it as bragging because such information was always proudly presented without me asking. Thus, on top of underestimation from the Dutch discourse, Chinese restaurant – the most outstanding type of Chinese enterprise – is at the same time suffering from self-deprecation within the Dutch Chinese diaspora.

However, despite all of the above discussion, Frank and Francisca proactively participate in Restaurant Red's management. The siblings took slightly different ways to arrive at their current position in the restaurant. For Francisca, working in Restaurant Red was her choice since childhood.

Yeah. When I was little, I always [enjoyed it]. I didn't even work for money. I just liked to help, like... I don't know. I really like working in a restaurant when it's full. I loved it.

Francisca, 20+ female, Chinese restaurant manager,
Third-generation Dutch Chinese

She told me that she always hated school when growing up. She never listened to

her other parent who asked her to pursue higher education for a “better job”. She wanted to help out at the restaurant because she saw how busy Francis was. When I pointed out that there was no obligation for her to help out with her parent’s business, Francisca agreed, while highlighting that in their family, they show affection through actions instead of words. Offering help to Francis at the restaurant is Francisca’s way of showing love. In Francisca’s situation, she redefines working in a family-owned Chinese restaurant as an expression of familial love and care.

For Frank, he returned to the family business after some exploration outside the restaurant. Before that, he tried colleague courses and other jobs. He told me that he used to only consider working in Restaurant Red as an easy part-time job for money.

But, you know, in the end, I was studying and thought, like: “Yeah, you know? It’s such a beautiful, it’s a beautiful thing, you know? We cannot live without eating and drinking, so why don’t make money off it?”

[Rui: So, it’s more like a change of mindset?]

Yeah, not even. It’s, I mean, it also of course helped because it’s a family business [for] already so long. So if we didn’t have this, my life would probably look different, of course, cannot lie. But because we have it, it gives you, like, another opportunity in the mindset to be like “Oh, Wow. Look how good it is, how thankful we have to be for [what] we have?” So just try to make the best out of it.

Frank, 20+ male, Chinese restaurant manager,
Third-generation Dutch Chinese

Instead of reproducing self-deprecation, Frank decided to appreciate the family business and make use of his position, turning Chinese restaurant from something many people “escape from” (Tao, Essers and Pijners, 2020) to a great business opportunity. The siblings’ choice gives new meaning to the negative stereotype of the Chinese catering industry. In fact, they are one of the proudest Chinese restaurant owners I have talked to during my fieldwork.

You could literally work anywhere, but we choose to work here and then, like, extend the dream of my grandfather. Like, keep going.

Frank & Francisca

They passionately shared with me the dream passed down generationally from their grandfather, the founder of Restaurant Red, and how they wanted to contribute to it.

It started with my grandfather (...) All for one purpose: to start a life in another country, which would be better condition for [his] children, and you know, finding his luck over here. (...) Because it was, yeah, I wouldn’t say it was like poor, but it used to be not so good over there [China]. So people went across the borders and tried to find [money in] another country. Yeah. So he came here. (...) He was a baker, so his ambition was to bring the culture, the Cantonese culture to the Netherlands and show people here what our culture, our Asian culture is. So that’s why he started a restaurant and a bakery.

(...)

He [grandfather] got older and, his dream was to like, live his last couple years in Hong Kong. So my parent [Francis] took over. Yeah. And also like

step by step, [Francis] just, I'm not explaining [well], but [Francis] always said like it has never come across [their] mind to run this, like take it over. But [Francis] just rolled in it because, yeah, it [the restaurant] has been for a long time and it's such a sentimental thing. The restaurant, like, [Francis] just wanted to, I don't know how it is [but], keep the legacy going.

Frank

The above quote shows that through generations, the meaning of Restaurant Red to the family has changed. Despite having a vision, it started, just like any other Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands, as a survival strategy. It was passed to the second generation as a family duty and nowadays transformed into a family pride and a celebration of Chinese food and culture. The hard work required by a restaurant job, in this sense, is no longer intense labour that marginalised migrants have to endure, but is a voluntary effort dedicated to continuing the family dream. By choosing to work as a Chinese restaurant owner, Frank and Francisca demonstrate a firm stand against stereotypical narratives – traditional Chinese restaurant is undesirable – from both the Dutch society and the Dutch Chinese diaspora. Moreover, it is also a pronouncement of ongoing changes among the young generation Dutch Chinese. Besides symbolic meaning, practical changes also took place in Restaurant Red.

- Practicing hybrid identity

That was already his [grandfather's] dream, but I am very proud to say that we keep improving the restaurant, improv[ing] his dream. Like, we also stick with the tradition, like the taste of flavours, but we also, like... [Rui: Innovation?] Yeah! We are always innovating. We are always thinking of new things.

Frank and Francisca

The two biggest innovations are restaurant renovation and service improvement. It was surprising for me to learn that Restaurant Red used to look very different because for me, the most outstanding part of Restaurant Red is how its environment corresponds with my memory of dining out back in China: wood tables, dark floor, off-white wall, scarlet painting at the lower half of the wall, while not being too bright to overtake the natural light coming through the big windows. Throughout the restaurant, there are calligraphies, small vases of flowers, warm yellow bamboo wall lights, and several Chinese paintings of landscapes and animals for decoration. Nothing eye-catching, simply adding a touch of elegance and calmness to the plain wall. When customers enter, the waiter would lead them to their seats. If a table orders a pot of Chinese tea, waiters would fill up the empty tea cups while customers are having heated debates, or refill the teapot if it is empty. For me, such a view triggers my nostalgia. However, for some customers who have been visiting Restaurant Red for decades, this view is something they need to get used to.

Restaurant Red went through a thorough update during the Covid pandemic, when Frank and Francisca took over the restaurant's management. The restaurant used to have yellow wood floors, gold wallpaper, and bright white LED lights, with pictures of ancient Chinese emperors on the wall. Instead of flowers, half-meter-tall plants in big colourful Chinese ceramic are put next to the windows, blocking sunlight from coming in. In the middle of the restaurant, covering the frame of the hallway, there used to be a red banner with "welcome" written in both Chinese and English. When Frank

showed me these old pictures, I could not stop but frown upon the overwhelming cultural elements that constantly remind me of its “Chineseness”. After all, who would like to eat under the gaze of a dead Chinese emperor? Frank pointed out that the renovation was not even the biggest change he and Francisca made in the restaurant. It was the service.

The majority of the Asian-owned businesses, restaurants, really don't have good service. People... Like, if I go out eating, I just expect my food to get thrown on my table. And when I'm done, I should leave, you know? You just don't feel comfortable. You just eat and go, eat and go, eat and go, and don't expect, like a nice conversation with your waiter. And I was like, yeah, “why is that?”

[People say] “It's always like [that], yeah, it's just how it is”, but is it supposed to be how it is? Like, we grew up in a Western country where other restaurants really provide service (...) Eating out should be an experience. (...) We're not like a super high-class restaurant and stuff, but I want people to have a good experience, like, eating traditional food, liking them, and leaving with a smile, you know? It's important, you know?

People always have like “Yeah, it doesn't matter. The Chinese people don't care.” I don't believe it! Especially for the younger generation, Asians, we also like experiences, right? The older maybe think like, “Yeah, I just go across borders and (...) we all are here to find money and that [the Chinese way of service] is how it is.” But the new generations are more like, “OK, so, my parents, my grandparents might find money, might have a business. I'm spending *my* money [in a Chinese restaurant], but I don't want the rude way, and the way it's not supposed to be,” right? (...) Although it's, yeah... [Frank hesitated] normal? People say it's normal, but...It's normal maybe, but it's not how it was supposed to be.

[Rui: When you say people, to whom are you referring?]

Yeah, like Asian people would say like “Oh yeah it's just how it is.” (...) Yeah, why all these excuses to maybe put a little bit more effort?

Frank, 20+ male, third-generation Dutch Chinese,
Chinese restaurant manager

How Frank talked about the standard of service reflects how he defines himself as a third-generation Dutch Chinese. First, Frank adopted the restaurant service in “a Western country”, the Netherlands, as his own standard as a Dutch citizen growing up in the country. Then, he challenges the norm of bad service in Chinese restaurants by pointing out it is “normal” for the old generation, but not for the young generation Chinese, represented by himself. He further explained that the change of mentality is the result of the distinct life experience and social-economic background between different generations of the Dutch Chinese diaspora. Through this negotiation, Frank did not identify purely as Dutch nor purely Chinese, but called himself “young generation” Chinese, indicating his in-between position – a hybrid identity as third-generation Dutch Chinese (Ang, 2013). The Chinese restaurant, in this case, became the materialisation of Frank's hybrid identity. Through the implementation of a new service system, he integrated what is considered “Dutch” into a traditional Chinese restaurant. Thus, the boundaries between Dutch and Chinese within the restaurant also

became blurred. In the theory of hybridity, Ang (2003) highlighted its power in enabling the marginalised other to deconstruct essentialist narratives in the dominant culture. In the case of Frank, such power is used reversely, and the host country's culture became a power to challenge the toxic norms built up through the difficult migrant history in the Chinese diaspora community.

Frank's successful challenge to the old norms in the Dutch Chinese diaspora also allows him to build a connection with the real China, instead of a conceptual homeland. Though hybrid identity allows second and utter generations of diaspora to live comfortably in-between two cultures, it can also corner them into a position of being neither of two cultures, as they do not completely fit into either of them (Ybarrola, 2012). The Restaurant Red before renovation is an example of "neither sides": it was too "Chinese" to be "Dutch", yet the abuse of Chinese cultural elements made them alien to the indigenous Chinese people, for instance me. Recalling the beginning of this session, it is exactly the innovation the siblings made that resonates with my nostalgia. In order to improve the restaurant, the siblings actively explored the culture of contemporary China. By implementing their understanding of "Chineseness" in the restaurant renovation, they successfully created a space where cultural connection can be recognised by both the diaspora and the indigenous Chinese.

On top of the renovation and service, Frank and Francisca even managed to implant innovation in food. Frank told me that they usually prefer not to make changes to the menu because Restaurant Red already offers some of the most traditional dishes. They have had enough annoying experiences of Western customers using social media content as "proof" to question their authenticity. Another benefit of insisting on their old menu is that it allows them to identify and participate in the social changes happening over time.

We want to sell like an authentic traditional experience, also [because] along the way like... like ten years ago, if you asked a Dutch student: "This is the chicken feet. Are you sure you went to order it?" "Oh no, no. I'm sorry. I thought it was like chicken wings", right? And now they order it and they were like "Yeah I know, I tried it and I liked it." So that's like a lot of good changes.

Frank

Here, Frank associated the acceptance of authentic Chinese food by the Dutch with the acceptance of Chineseness by the Dutch. Resonating the previous discussion on the historical entanglement of Chinese restaurants and the Dutch Chinese diaspora, it is reasonable to make such an association. Vice-versa, the association Frank implicitly makes testifies that Chinese catering is an indispensable part of the Dutch Chinese diaspora community. This connection Frank made is supported by studies that highlight the significant role food plays in diaspora identity maintenance: in the case of Frank, food became a transmit of his cultural identity as ethnic minority Chinese in the host Dutch society (Duru, 2017; D'Sylva and Beagan, 2011). However, despite the valuation on food's authenticity, Frank and Francisca did make some changes due to the market demand. They successfully made adjustments without disturbing the authenticity of the cuisine, and it brought surprising outcomes.

We did have to adapt to the vegetarian people here. It's getting more popular, vegetarianism. So, we added like veggie dim sum. I mean, I don't know if that's really popular in Asia, but [Chinese food] usually, is pork, pork,

pork. But Western people don't like to eat pork. So we also have to think about chicken and veggies, and this, we're selling like really good, really well. Like, a lot of people order veggie things. We did not expect it because we just want to sell, you know, the traditional things, but yeah. Sometimes you have to change.

Frank told me that there was a huge effort in implementing all the innovations. Whenever they are dining in other restaurants, they will reflect upon their experience, and think about what could be helpful to improve Restaurant Red. For new dishes, he and Francisca would look up on the internet for inspiration. They needed to consult the cooks from China about the taste and recipe. Furthermore, they also go to restaurants in Hong Kong during their familial trip to keep track of the food standards. The siblings are content that their effort paid off. They told me that after all the innovation, the average number of customers they received has doubled post-pandemic, and the growth is continuing.

Restaurant Red nowadays is a popular dining spot for both local Dutch and Chinese. As a waiter, I have seen regular customers from both sides introducing their family and friends to Chinese cuisine at Restaurant Red. There are also many young local Dutch people who visit Restaurant Red frequently. One of them is a Dutch food influencer on Instagram. He comes to Restaurant Red every few weeks, with his friends, his partner, or sometimes just himself. I can relate to his found of Restaurant Red. As a Chinese person, I, too, am very thankful for the siblings' attempts. Thanks to the active inclusion of vegetarian food, Restaurant Red became the place that I felt most comfortable introducing to my Dutch friends. I can show them the delicate food I grew up with, without worrying about isolating vegetarian members. It provides me with space to show them the Chinese table manner and history behind different gestures. It becomes the most direct and enjoyable way to share my culture with friends from different backgrounds. Here, besides a method of reclaiming identity for the young generation Chinese, Restaurant Red has also become a platform that facilitates Chinese to communicate and share their cultures with the Dutch.

- Discussion

What I present here is a successful case of reclaiming the identity of a third-generation Dutch Chinese restaurateur. As young-generation Dutch Chinese, Frank and Francisca's identity is hybrid, where they identify with both cultures. This is reflected in the innovation in Restaurant Red. As young Chinese restaurateurs, their active choice to take over the family business proves that Chinese restaurants can be desirable family firms like any other family business in the Netherlands. Echoing the study of Tao, Essers and Pijners (2020), the case of Restaurant Red shows how traditional Chinese restaurant also belongs to the discourse of intergenerational changes in Dutch Chinese enterprises. In this sense, the siblings do not only challenge the stereotype the Dutch prescribe for its Chinese diaspora but also the bias internalised by the Chinese community itself, as well as scholarly discussions on this community that commonly put their catering business on the opposite side of diversity. Furthermore, the insistence on food and active connection with contemporary China allows the siblings to remain connected to their Chinese identity. Reflecting on Brubaker's (2005) study, the siblings demonstrate how identity boundaries can be maintained for an extended time yet co-exist with its hybridity.

I further argue it is a "successful" reclaim of identity because all changes mentioned

are made visible through Restaurant Red. Transformations within minority communities have been a continuous process, yet little of it is valorised by the state, boxing the dynamic community into a static categorisation (Benton & Gomez, 2014). However, in Restaurant Red, the restaurant is the manifestation of the siblings' hybrid identity. Such identity transformation is translated into business and cultural practices. Thus, intangible ideological changes can now be directly seen and experienced, even by customers with little knowledge of the community. With the flourishing of Restaurant Red's business, more and more people would be inevitably exposed to such transformation within the Dutch Chinese community. With this in mind, I raise the following questions: Does the growing popularisation of Restaurant Red indicates the growing acceptance of the new Chinese identity by the Dutch? Would it result in a collective awareness in the Dutch of the changes happening within the Dutch Chinese diaspora? Assuming the business continues to thrive, will a Chinese restaurant – which is closely entwined with the stigmatisation and racialisation of Dutch Chinese – become the breakthrough of social exclusion between the Dutch and its Chinese community? These are questions I could not answer in this thesis, but at the same time, they are hopeful assumptions I made based on the development of Restaurant Red. I encourage future researchers to investigate Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, focusing on the mentioned factors for an extended time.

Conclusion

In Chapter One, I map out the family-work relations in a family-owned Chinese restaurant from four perspectives: the migrant worker, the restaurant owners, the more than “*huo-ji*” and the full-time waiters to show how work relation in Restaurant Red is constructed around “family” and “money.” I highlight how members co-create familial attachments through cultural practices while maintaining agency to recognise the business element of the relations. I argue that this system is actively constructed, maintained, and reinforced by the members, as it provides room for negotiation for all members to obtain what they need to survive in Dutch society. This answers the question of how work relations are constructed in a Chinese restaurant to navigate and negotiate with the Dutch standards. However, with the research question answered, the question of why people need or have to navigate and negotiate with the Dutch standards is raised. To answer this question, I examine the reasons why people work in a Chinese restaurant.

Through investigating their reasons, in Chapter Two, I unravel the lived experience of stereotypes and social exclusion of being Chinese in the Netherlands. I argue that Chinese restaurants become their strategy to cope with social isolation. Through their lived experiences, I point out how stereotypes and social exclusion of the Chinese diaspora form an ongoing vicious cycle that worsens the division between the Chinese and the Dutch. In Chapter Three, I examine the attraction of working in a Chinese restaurant. I focus on the young Dutch Chinese restaurateurs in Restaurant Red. I discuss how they reclaim their hybrid identity and challenge stereotypes around Chinese restaurants by implementing innovations in Restaurant Red. I argue that the restaurant became the manifestation of their identity, raising the question of whether this new form of Chinese restaurant can become the key to cultural communication between the Dutch and the Chinese. These two chapters together answer the question of why Chinese people need to negotiate with Dutch standards: due to the social exclusion and marginalisation of this minority community resulted from a long history and ongoing stigmatisation and racialisation of the Chinese diaspora in Dutch society. These stereotypes constitute part of the “Dutch standards” as they are prescribed, together with formal regulations, to the Chinese. Facing the constant othering of the minority Chinese by the host Dutch, Chinese restaurants become their medium of navigation and negotiation.

This thesis shows the complex role Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands undertake for their community. In the eyes of the Dutch, Chinese restaurants have been, are still, and probably will continue to be a crucial representation of the Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands. Yet, their importance in understanding the dynamics of the contemporary Dutch Chinese community is neglected by academia and marginalised by its own people. Here, I urge future scholars, especially those who aim to study the Dutch Chinese diaspora, to stop treating “Chinese restaurant” as merely a stereotype, but instead, confront with their historical, social and cultural significance to the community and include them into the discourse of change and diversity.

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Appendix

Applied Report

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For the report, please see the following page.

REPORT:

CHINESE RESTAURANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

INTRODUCTION

This report offers ethnographic insights into customized work relations in Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, shedding light on the various social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to the establishment of this dynamic work system. The report is written based on the master's thesis of "Navigating the Dutch Standards: Chinese Restaurants in the Netherlands" from the 2022/2023 MA programme of Applied Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, in cooperation with FairWork. Besides the research project, this report also combines the researcher's (me, also the writer of this report) experience of interacting with Chinese cook clients during volunteer work as a FairWork Chinese culture mediator. Combining these two parts, this report aims to provide practical recommendations on improving FairWork's assistance for their Chinese (cook) clients, and provide possible directions for future policy-making regarding the Chinese Horeca industry in the Netherlands.

METHODOLOGY

To gain an insider perspective, I conducted three-month fieldwork while working part-time in a Cantonese restaurant - referred to as Restaurant Red in this article - in one of the biggest cities in the Netherlands. My background as a native speaker of Cantonese and Mandarin facilitates communication and rapport-building with people working in Chinese restaurants and Chinese clients of NGOs, most of whom barely speak English. Abundant data were collected through participant observation and small talks during fieldwork, recorded in field diary throughout the three months. Besides, I conducted in total 23 interviews, 14 of which were with people of various backgrounds related to the Chinese Horeca industry, including Chinese cooks - clients of FairWork and other NGOs - who experience work exploitation, specialized NGO workers, Chinese restaurant owners across the country, scholars and government officials, etc., and 9 of which were with people working at Restaurant Red.

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THESIS SUMMARY

Work relations in a Chinese restaurant

During fieldwork, the researcher observed family-work relations in Restaurant Red that reflects a mutual-dependent relation between Chinese restaurant owners and workers. Restaurant Red is a family-owned restaurant passed down to its third generation. In this restaurant, workers believe that they are not only colleagues, but also part of a big family. Many of them share strong emotional attachments and a sense of responsibility to the restaurant business that are commonly seen only on business owners.

This sense of family is cultivated in daily cultural practices and built upon the shared interests in money among different people working in the restaurant. Despite this not being the case in Restaurant Red, informants admitted that it is common for Chinese cooks to accept working for long hours above regulated time in exchange for a higher salary. This is because, for many migrant workers, their main purpose of working in the Netherlands is to make money and provide for their family. Research shows that many Chinese cooks have immense financial pressure from the responsibility to support their family, buy properties, and save up for pension. Meanwhile, they are also expected, by Chinese cultures, to provide emotional care to their parents, therefore, are under time pressure to return home. This creates a mentality of “earning as much money possible in the least time”, thus resulting in the mentioned phenomenon of working overtime. The pressure from family duty is usually empathised by Chinese restaurant owners, as they also share the same Chinese familial responsibility. Many restaurant owners agree with these semi-compliant practices as they not only understand the workers’ family duty from their shared Chinese ethnic background, but also because Chinese restaurants have been in labour shortage for an extensive time. Moreover, in order to guarantee that cooks have extra money to send home or save up, it is almost standardised that restaurant owners should provide free accommodation and food for their cooks. It is also not uncommon for restaurant owners and cooks to informally agree on paying salaries partially in cash to avoid high taxes, creating a win-win situation for both sides. This sheds light on why the Chinese community in the Netherlands value informal agreements more than formal/legal work contract.

The mutual help creates a sense of collectiveness and emotional attachment beyond regular work relations. In Restaurant Red, the owner family builds a sense of family among all workers by engaging them in their daily family activities. This connection became the key for Restaurant Red to survive the pandemic lock-down. A group of workers – that the restaurant owner now refers to as “family” – accepted a salary cut down to stay at the restaurant during pandemic and, furthermore,

offered voluntary help on restaurant renovation, even extra free labour at their day-offs during the early post-pandemic stage, when the restaurant was short of staff yet still could not pay back economically due to the huge financial shock from the covid lock-down.

In summary, it is evident that there is a mutual dependent relationship between restaurant owners and workers. This dependency can transform into a healthy system built on informal arrangements that provide room for negotiation to fulfil the diverse demands of different members in the restaurant. Furthermore, the lived experience of emotional bonds cultivated in such relations are overlooked by the Dutch labour regulations, yet in reality, crucial for a restaurant business to survive through difficult times.

However, the researcher also discussed stories of exploited Chinese cooks during covid and old cooks abandoned by the restaurant before retiring age, pointing out the vulnerability and instability of this system built upon dependent relations and informal arrangements: the restaurant owners depend on workers for business purposes, yet workers depend on restaurant owners for their income plus – in the cases of newly arrived migrant workers – daily tasks (due to language barrier), or have built strong emotional attachments to the restaurant, as years of extensive working hours have turned work into a dominant part of the cooks’ personal life. The former dependency is business orientated, thus affected by multiple figures, such as changing market demands or the workers’ physical decline, yet the latter is much more personal and long-lasting. Therefore, many cooks who experience unfair treatment by restaurant owners do not only suffer financially but also emotionally/mentally.

Contextualisation: being Chinese in the Netherlands

To understand why such dependent relations exist (instead of another form of relations), it is important to examine the broader social context of Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. The researcher does so by investigating the reasons for people working there. On the one hand, the researcher detects a vicious circle of stigmatization and social isolation of the Chinese community by mainstream Dutch society, (historically) built around the Chinese restaurant business. Some recent or first-generation migrants rely on Chinese restaurants as their safety net in the Netherlands

when they could not find a job outside of the ethnic networks due to language barriers or a lack of education. However, the researcher also underlines that social exclusion and isolation continue to be experienced by (Dutch) Chinese people who master the Dutch language and obtain higher education degrees. Some of these people turn back to the Chinese catering business as a method of (identity) resistance. Dutch society's rejection of the Chinese community further demotivates the restaurant workers' will to integrate into Dutch society. Furthermore, the researcher notices a self-deprecation attitude among the Chinese cooks: they do not believe in their ability to learn Dutch nor connect with mainstream society. This mentality emerged under the joint effect of the workers' reflection on their unfavourable social-economic background, the reality of intense daily workload, and the awareness of long-lasting racial discrimination in the Netherlands. The researcher further points out how exclusion and rejection are experienced by Chinese cooks who suffered work exploitation and took great risks to reach out to Dutch institutions for help. Before connecting to an NGO, the informant failed to get assistance from the police officer, bank, Dutch Chinese politicians, and lawyers. The lack of social awareness of the Dutch Chinese community from mainstream Dutch society and the absence of infrastructure of help deepen the barrier between Dutch society and its Chinese community.

On the other hand, the researcher presents the bright side and attraction of working in Chinese restaurants, specifically, for the young generation Dutch Chinese restaurateurs. As Dutch-born Chinese, young owners of Restaurant Red have integrated their resonance of Dutch culture and regulations into business management: from setting regulated closing time and employee benefits, to improving service standards and renovation, and furthermore, making active inclusion of vegetarian dishes, etc. The researcher argues that through implementing innovations, young generation Chinese restaurant owners are redefining what is a Chinese Restaurant and the meaning of being Dutch Chinese, transforming traditional Chinese restaurants into an inclusive platform where Dutch and Chinese culture/rules can co-exist, communicate, and appreciate each other through the enjoyment of food.

By pointing out the changes, the researcher argues that instead of discussing the Chinese catering industry as a unified static group, Dutch institutions should confront its dynamics and recognized big changes that took place over time and generations that are still undergoing.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

1. Specific vocabulary

Chinese cooks have their own Chinese vocabulary for Dutch legal documents, which usually differs from its literal translation. In this sense, they might not know the corresponding names of legal documents they have in hand. Therefore, it is important to have an in-person intake (with documents) at an early stage to clarify used terms. Learning their vocabulary is also helpful, as it can greatly smoothen future conversations with clients.

2. Remain connected

It is important to remain available and connected to clients even when there is no progress on their case. The absence of connection creates a sense of abandonment and helplessness for the clients. Due to the lack of updates, when I reconnected with FairWork's clients, they told me they "almost gave up" or "thought no one cared about us anymore". Such insecurity and anxiety echo the financial pressure and social isolation discussed previously. The disconnection was also one of the reasons why clients hesitated to refer other exploited workers to the organization.

3. Stable person of contact

Clients show immense gratitude towards individual volunteers who have assisted them for an extended period, instead of the organization. The same phenomenon is observed from clients of other NGOs. They talked about these volunteers as "they never left or deserted us". With the discussion of traumatization and the difficulty of getting help, I argue that having stable personnel that knows how to provide assistance with care is crucial for trust and confidence building, encouraging clients to go through the long legal procedure.

4. Boundaries setting

As discussed, clients tend to perceive interactions with volunteers in a personal way. Some clients I interviewed reached out to my personal account when FairWork's volunteer team delayed replying, regardless of time and date. Understanding clients' vulnerability might lead to a sense of responsibility that pushes volunteers to provide help. Therefore, it is crucial for volunteers to know how to draw boundaries, and for FairWork, to establish a system that facilitates boundaries setting while providing care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for FairWork

- Collect and build a *shared vocabulary* to facilitate communications with Chinese clients.
- Inform the clients transparently about the legal procedure before and during the process. *Maintain contact* throughout the process by, for instance, scheduling monthly (short message) updates about the case.
- Set up fixed working hours and expected reply time on all contacts to facilitate *boundary settings* (for volunteers) and *expectation management* (for the clients).
- Designed education materials according to the general language and education level, especially in terms of explaining legal terminologies.
- Used English for record-making to *facilitate case transactions* among volunteers.
- Expanding contacts and increasing exposure by inviting clients to share their sources of information in the *(Dutch) Chinese networks*.
- *Financially invest* in part-time or full-time specialists to guarantee *stable personnel*.

Policy recommendation

Redefine signals of human trafficking and work exploitation

As discussed, living in the restaurant owner's property is a standardised practice in the industry, including opening bank accounts and other administration tasks that require basic knowledge of the Dutch language or Dutch system.

Establish regulations and inspections on work packages

Instead of limiting restaurant owners from engaging in worker's private life, inspection should focus on *regulating* the standards of offered job packages, and *preventing* owners from taking advantage of workers' personal information. For instance, specifying workers' right to stay in their accommodation if they were involuntarily dismissed, methods of collecting bank PIN without passing the employer, etc.

Improve infrastructure and networks for quick access of help

This includes raising *social awareness* of social issues about *the Dutch Chinese community*, so that when potential victims reach out for help, citizens or institutions know who/where to refer to for help. This includes also strengthening the *cooperation between institutions and local NGOs* that have already established a network with the community and are experts of providing assistance.

Provide information regarding labour/basic rights and social system upon arrival

Providing such information can fill up the *knowledge gap* in the Dutch social system commonly seen in workers. This can be done at their first contact with Dutch authority (at the embassy or customs). It is advised to cooperate with related NGOs for content design. The information about *where and how to get help* in case of work exploitation and human trafficking is recommended to be included in these materials.

Invest in research projects and initiatives on Chinese community in the Netherlands

This includes *reevaluation* and *differentiation* among Chinese restaurants. Research shows that significant changes are happening in the Chinese catering industry, which Dutch legal discourse is yet unaware of. Investing in research projects or social initiatives can help institutions to gain an *updated, accurate understanding* of the community and industry, thereby establishing *effective policies* accordingly.