“I Get to Be Who I Am When Abroad”

An Ethnography of Independent Highly Skilled Chinese Female Migrants in the Netherlands

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04 October 2019
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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory research on the experiences of independent highly skilled Chinese female migrants in the Netherlands. While existing literature on migrant women often frames them as dependent actors, this study aims to understand these women as independent actors with agency and examines their lives in both personal and professional domains.

The focuses are placed on their motivations for migration, their experiencing racialized and gendered stereotypes in the Dutch society and their transnational family relations. There are three threads of desires behind the motivation for their migration: for the West, for self-actualization and for mobility. Regarding their experiences of race, I argue that racism toward this group of migrants in the Netherlands is in the form of everyday racism and that their social class has shaped their encountering of racism. Lastly, by examining how they practice their gender, I contend that social norms and patriarchal culture from the home society would follow the migrant across the border. These migrant women are often looking for a balance between exploring the freedom in the Netherlands and reacting to the sense of responsibility of being a daughter.

Keywords:
highly skilled female migrant, Chinese migrant, gender, race, the Netherlands
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Chapter 1. Introduction

It was a sunny afternoon in October. Fion and I were meeting in the Utrecht center. She was waiting for me under the sun and gave me a big hug when I arrived. I am always amazed by how few clothes she wears in this cold weather since she also comes from a subtropical climate like me. “I have been here for ages. You will get used to it one day,” she said. I met Fion during my exchange in the Netherlands a few years ago. She was a Ph.D. candidate and I was a student in her class. Both landing in the Netherlands from a big East Asian city, she Hong Kong and I Taipei, we became friends after the course and have visited each other a couple of times afterward.

We sat in a café, updating each other’s lives. She was about to finish her Ph.D., searching for her next step, and preparing for her wedding with her Dutch partner of seven years. I was fairly new to Amsterdam and still settling down. We talked about our plans and dreams in the Netherlands or somewhere else, and our parents and family at home. Then, in a rather easy tone, she said:

   I may go back to Hong Kong at some point to take care of my parents - which is something my Dutch partner would never understand.

If I am ever asked about who the most independent, ambitious and go-for-it woman at my age that I know is, Fion would probably be my answer. I was shocked by her idea of returning home, especially right after we talked about the wedding she was going to have in six months.

Motivation and Relevance

In the last one to two decades, the number of highly skilled female migrants from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong who choose the Netherlands as their destination has been increasing. Different from the more discussed migrant wives in academia, most of these women migrate on their own and for themselves. They do not make the decision based on romance or marriage. They move for their career and self-actualization.
They can be understood as economic migrants as many of them have an expectation for more and better job opportunities abroad. More precisely, in the Dutch context, they are categorized as “highly skilled migrant1 (kennismigrant in Dutch, literally means ‘knowledge migrant’)” for the visa they hold. However, due to their relatively high social class background and education level, they do not migrate in order to be able to financially support anyone, including their family members and themselves. In fact, many of them were still financially supported by their parents in the first years in the Netherlands, especially the ones who arrived first for education. That is to say: their migration is colored by dreams. They can be described with terms including lifestyle migrants and cultural migrants (Sooudi, 2014).

As a Taiwanese woman myself who arrived in the Netherlands to pursue my academic training and career, I have gradually become surrounded by these women both consciously and unconsciously. We speak the same language and share similar struggles. These “older sisters” have always been attentive to me, offering advice and help which made me feel secure in this foreign land. But the conversation I had with Fion induced a crack on the image I have created for them. Though they now appear to be navigating in the Netherlands effortlessly, the path to chase one’s dream was/is/will be always hilly. People leave their original home, try to settle down, build a new home in the host country, and later they may keep on moving to another destination, a new place or even back to the old one. I started to wonder, what kind of drives were so strong for them to migrate?

What hit me the most in Fion’s words was the comparison she made, that her “Dutch partner would never understand” her reasons to go back to her parents in Hong Kong. For women who have been raised in Chinese culture in which family concept and responsibility are strongly rooted traditionally, to what degree do they still orient back to their family and society of origin even after years away pursuing and realizing their own goals?

A trip to London made me realize the difficulty which may be faced by the Chinese migrants in the Netherlands, a less chosen destination. As soon as I got on the tube after landing, I saw many Asian faces and heard many people speaking in Mandarin around me. Some were tourists and some were people who lived there. This is something I have hardly experienced in the Netherlands.

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With fewer compatriots in the host country, this may mean fewer resources and networks for the newcomers to fall onto and less social capital to mobilize (Hellermann, 2006). Compared to the English-speaking countries which are well-traveled by Chinese migrants, Dutch society offers fewer resources in English and Chinese. To some extent, these women could be pretty much on their own after arriving in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the fact that Dutch society has a lower understanding of the Chinese-speaking world influences how these Chinese migrants are perceived. Therefore, I ask, how do these women develop racialized and gendered identities in the Dutch society?

In the existing literature in anthropology and other academic disciplines, the studies on migrant women mostly focus on dependent migrant wives or migrants for love (Brettell, 2017; Constable, 2003; Constable ed., 2005; Man, 2004), and low skilled labor migrants (Constable, 2007; Hellermann, 2006; Lan, 2006; Lutz, 2002; Parreñas, 2015[2001]). There is a lack of understanding of highly skilled independent female migrants.

With all these curiosities in mind, the research question of the thesis inquires:

How do independent highly skilled Chinese female migrants in the Netherlands negotiate among their desires for transnational mobility, racialized and gendered stereotypes and cross-border family relations?

This exploratory research is to contribute to the ethnographies of highly skilled female migrants in the Netherlands, with the focus on the Chinese women from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. By examining their stories from both private and professional domains, they are understood as multi-dimensional persons with agency, rather than merely migrant labor or dependent actors.

Theoretical Framework

Racialized and Gendered Desire: For the West and From the West

Many studies on migrant women deal with marriage migration through which women cross the borders via marriage (Brettell, 2017; Constable, 2003; Constable ed., 2005), as well as with the migration of accompanying their husbands (Man, 2004). Cross-border marriages
have become common because of globalization and time/space compression. Yet, these marriage-scapes are influenced by the cultural, social, historical and political-economic elements at both local and global levels. (Constable, 2005) In this sense, women’s agency is then often assumed to be absent as most of them move to husbands’ residence after marriage. Kelsky even argues that women “are rarely seen as cosmopolitan agents in their own right, but rather as the wives and daughters of cosmopolitan men.... if they travel at all they are said to do so unwillingly, always anxious to maintain the traditions of home (2001:16).”

However, Constable (2005) contests this assumption and argues that, in the cases of women in Asia, marriages may stem from familial strategies for mobility, it can be used by the women as a means to escape familial control and patriarchal gender expectations. Barber (2000) also argues for the agency of the Philippine female migrants, as this group of middle-class-to-be women chooses to emigrate in spite of reasons not to, although she recognizes that their agency is shaped and limited by culture.

In this thesis, I put these migrant women at the position of actors with agency. They migrate alone with no husband or husband-to-be await. In fact, this group of women often have no conscious plan to get married in the host society before they emigrate. However, their agency is not only shaped by their home culture, but also by their social class background which guarantees them a certain amount of financial resource, social and cultural capital.

Apart from economic and practical reasons, desire also plays a role that leads to such migration, especially in the marriages between Asian women and Western men (Constable, 2005; Kelsky, 2001). Asian women look for the Western modernity and less traditional moral values, or constraints, and marrying Western men is a measure to fulfill the search. Meanwhile, paradoxically, Western men expect more traditional characters from an Asian wife and to enhance their masculinity by wedding “obedient” Asian women.

The racialized desire and racial stereotypes are hence mutual from both the non-Western and the Western actors. The interaction between stereotypes may strengthen each other. Ghorashi (2001) argues the Europeans victimize the Iranian female refugees even though these women are highly educated activists who fought for their rights back in Iran. By doing so, the image of the non-Western Other is constructed and the European is shaped to be the powerful one.
Kelsky (2001) researches the intersection of race, gender and class in shaping Japanese women’s desire for Western men. In Asia, the narrative of Western modernity and subsequent desire for the West have the origin in its history of being colonies, the relations with the Western countries, especially the U.S., during World War II and post-War period, and the global dispersal of Hollywood movies. It is noteworthy that the West is not a strictly geographical term. Instead, it is more of a concept. As Said argues, “the Occident is not just there either (1979:4).” It is man-made as the Orient has been.

In the following chapters, I will show that Western modernity attracts Chinese women partly for its more liberal gender expectations and social norms. But Western men are often absent or excluded from the methods they choose to realize their desires. I will also examine the intersectionality of race and gender which influences the experiences of the Chinese women in the Netherlands. I contend the notion of class would affect the racial and gendered stereotypes they are assigned by the Dutch society.

Similarly, cultural identity and the exotic elements of the home country can be translated into economic capital when there are demands in the market of the host country, such as the Chinese restaurants in Germany (Leung, 2006) and Japanese style designer brands in the USA (Sooudi, 2014). In Chapter 3, I will examine how the women take advantage of their cultural identity and the relatively not “problematic” racial stereotypes for their own benefits.

My work builds on Kelsky’s research on racialized desire and challenges the existing stereotypes of Asian women in Europe. I shift the focus of the women’s desire for Western masculinity to transnational mobility, opportunities to advance their career and freedom in the West. Likewise, Sooudi (2014) argues that Japanese artistic migrants arrive in New York, seen as the “World Stage”, for its diverse career opportunities and vigorous art industry and for the sake of “jibun sagashi (自分探しの旅 in Japanese)”, or self-searching, and self-reinvention.

**Highly Skilled Female Migrants**

Another bulk of migrant women studies focuses on low skilled labor migrants. (Constable, 2007; Lan, 2006; Lutz, 2002; Parreñas, 2015[2001]) Hellermann (2006) argues that the Eastern European women who migrate alone to Portugal for low skilled jobs suffer from
stigmatization as being assumed as prostitutes by the locals and their compatriots. This leads to and worsens their sense of loneliness and inability to gain or utilize their social capital as their social circle is restricted among other single migrant women.

The existing studies on highly skilled migrants are gendered, focusing mainly on men. (Blitz, 2010) Research on highly skilled female migrants has been relatively few in anthropology and other disciplines. Many of them still share the premise of marriage migration and the presence of a male partner and deal with highly skilled women’s “de-skilling” in their career or “re-domestication” from workplace to household (Aure, 2013; Man, 2004; Meares, 2010).

De-skilling takes place among highly skilled migrants mostly due to the different accreditation systems for their existing skills and professions. They may need to receive retraining in order to be recognized by the field to again work as, for example, physician and teacher (Man, 2004). Some highly skilled women suffer from de-skilling because of, according to the immigration law, their status of being dependent migrants of their husbands, who are usually the principal applicants in the migration registration. Man (2004) argues that the neoliberal restructuring and the immigration policies of the receiving countries, therefore, grant women, the dependent applicant, disadvantaged job opportunities and legal rights.

Their skills would also be understood through the lens of race. In the cases of Iranian refugee women in the Netherlands, Ghorashi (2001) argues that due to the stereotypes in the Netherlands of the non-white, or the “black other”, these women are assumed by the Dutch to be inferior, backward and low skilled.

My research will fill in the place of understanding independent highly skilled female migrants and their individual experiencing in the personal and professional domains. Many of my research participants bypass the de-skilling issue by, for example, receiving a degree from a Dutch education institution (Hong et al., 2017). Apart from the skill-related struggles they may suffer, they have trouble acquiring a sense of belongings and inclusion by the Dutch at both their workplace and private social network.

**Transnational Family Relations and Social Norms**

Many studies upon transnational family focus on the relations between the away-mother and
the children who are left behind. Yeoh et al. argue “the realm of the ‘family’ continues to retain its significance in the face of distance, dispersal and translocality (2005:308).” The Filipina migrant mothers are always around with the help of technology communication methods, such as phone calls and text messages, and the physical packages and remittances (Parreñas 2005).

At the same time, other studies show that women (e)migrate in the hope of escaping from traditional gender roles (Constable, 2005; Yeoh et al., 2005). However, it is unclear that if they may succeed. Yeoh et al. (2005) argue that the patriarchal cultural tradition within a Chinese family may continue across the borders, which sometimes transnationalism “may fail to transcend”. The power within the parent-child hierarchy and the persistence of family influence are hence exercised through the continuing bond and intimacy in a transnational context. Not only the women may not be able to get away from the original gender expectations, but the gender roles can also even be reconfigured and re-enforced at the same time.

Marriage, again, and the familial expectation are issues female migrants need to deal with outside the border. For career-oriented women, they also need to respond to the gender expectation that, as Medina (2011) argues, “women have jobs and not careers due to the constraint of domestic responsibility”. It can be seen on highly skilled female Indian migrants, if not more evidently, that women’s marital status is closely followed and arranged by the parents even when they are abroad (Kōua and Baileya, 2017).

In a transnational context, cultural and ethnic identities, and bonds with and responsibility for the family of origin are contested and reworked. Transnationalism sees identity as dynamic, fluid and socially constructed. As she examines the second-generation Chinese in Germany, Leung (2006) argues that identity formation of the migrants is connected to both the host country and home country and influenced by members within and without the local (Chinese) community.

In my research, the transnational familial bonding is embodied in the parent-child relationship in which the daughter left home and the parents are left behind. I argue that social and cultural norms would follow the Chinese female migrants across the border while they are constantly torn between challenging and conforming with them. In Chapter 4, I
examine how patriarchal culture and gender expectations are practiced in the transnational context by the daughter herself with the influence of their parents, home society and culture.

Setting and the People: Who are the “Chinese”? 

Before I introduce the setting of my field and the women who have participated in my research, I first need to clarify the usage of the term “Chinese”. In the daily usage of the English language, the term “Chinese” is commonly understood as “belonging to or relating to China, its people, or its language”, according to the online Cambridge Dictionary. However, there are in fact multiple terms in the Chinese language that have also been loosely translated into one same English term “Chinese” (or the Dutch term “Chinees”).

Firstly, I single out the term for the language. In this thesis, I will use the term “Mandarin” to refer to the linguistic language they speak. Mandarin is the main language spoken in Taiwan and Mainland China. While the mother tongue of people from Hong Kong is Cantonese, a dialect under the Chinese language family, most of them have learned Mandarin at school.

Secondly, throughout the thesis, the term “Chinese” is used as an adjective and/or a noun in the sense of culture and ethnicity, as in “Chinese culture”, “culturally Chinese” and “ethnic Chinese”. To be more precise, it refers to the terms “huá rén (華人, means people of Chinese origin)” in Mandarin. This also means that, to avoid confusion, the term “Chinese” in this thesis never exclusively denotes the citizen of the People’s Republic of China.

Thirdly, the Chinese people I included in the fieldwork are originally from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Ethnic Chinese consists of the majority in these three societies. And due to the entangled geopolitical relationships interwoven among each other, the juxtaposition of the three can often be seen in academia (for example, Lau et al., 2012; Lien, 2010; Yeh, Kuang-Hui et al., 2013). Additionally, even though Hong Kong is officially part of the People’s Republic of China, in this thesis, when the term “China” appears, it usually refers to Mainland China excluding Hong Kong.

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Even though there are debates over the claim of a shared Chinese culture and Chineseness across the borders of the modern nation-states (Chun, 1996), this thesis and the criterion for selecting research participants are based on the acknowledgment of the existence of a loosely shared Chinese culture, largely due to the shared racialization of these women as “Chinese” in the Netherlands. However, I also make the distinctions among the Chinese from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. It is partly because of the women’s own self-identification and partly to emphasize the heterogeneity within the Chinese identity. Additionally, owing to the divergent political and social developments among these three societies, the Chinese from the three places have cultivated each of their own identities which are connected to its regional/national politics and society, rather than a homogenized Chinese culture.

To specify the origins of the research participants in the thesis, I use the terms including “Taiwanese”, “from Taiwan”, “Hongkonger” and “from Hong Kong”. When referring to the people from China, that is the citizen of People’s Republic of China (but not from Hong Kong), I would use the term “Chinese” but with the emphasis of “from China.”

**Chinese Migrants in the Netherlands**

Chinese people are now the fifth-largest non-Western migrant group in the Netherlands, according to the report from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* in Dutch). They started to migrate to the Netherlands in the early 20th century and there have been four immigration waves of Chinese people (Gijsberts et al. ed., 2011).

The first wave was in the 1900s with the arrival of Chinese seamen. Afterward, when World War II ended, Chinese people from the Dutch East Indies and other Dutch colonies came to the Netherlands. Thirdly, between the 1970s and 1980s, labor migrants from Hong Kong (which was then a British colony) and Mainland China settled in the Netherlands. Lastly, the fourth wave has emerged since 2000 with business and student migrants.

Not only these ethnic Chinese people migrate at different periods and for different purposes, but also their origins diverse (Pieke and Benton, 1998). The main origins include Mainland China, Hong Kong and Indonesia. Among the people from the first to third waves, Chinese from Mainland China and Hong Kong formed the two most established Chinese groups in the
Netherlands. The domination language among the Chinese communities has been Cantonese. Some communities that primarily used Mandarin picked up Cantonese as well to facilitate communication and business. Additionally, there have been ethnic Chinese people from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Surinam and Vietnam (mainly as refugees) in the Netherlands.

The Chinese migrants from the fourth wave since 2000 have different characteristics: around half of them are student migrants, along with some knowledge migrants. Unlike the previous waves in which family migration played a significant part, these migrants are mostly single (Gijsberts et al. ed., 2011). My research participants belong to the fourth wave and are originally from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Compared to the Chinese (im)migrants from the previous waves, they have a higher social and economic background. According to the accounts I collected in the field, the student migrants from Mainland China in the last decade are likely to come from wealthier families than the ones emigrated in the 2000s due to the economic development in China in recent years.

The data from 2011 showed that 30% of the student migrants stayed in the Netherlands for work. Hong et al. (2017) found out that the decision making of migration among Chinese students has a limited correlation with the social network in the Netherlands. They argue that most of the student migrants after 2000 are from Mainland China, while the current dominated ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands are of Hong Kong and former Dutch colonies origins. The phenomenon is caused by the linguistic and historical differences between them.

The images of the Chinese migrants in the Dutch society have undergone changes since the early 20th century. The rhetoric of “Yellow Peril” emerged during the World Wars as Chinese seamen who accepted low wages were seen as rivals by Dutch seamen. On the other hand, in the 1930s, Dutch people sympathized with the poor Chinese peddlers who were polite when doing business.

After the introduction of Minorities Bill (Minderhedennota in Dutch) in the 1980s, the Chinese community tried to be recognized as an ethnic minority in the hope of receiving government funds to support their medical care and Chinese schools. The request was declined as the government decided that the Chinese “were not sufficiently underprivileged in terms of income, employment, education and housing (Pieke and Benton, 1998:158).” Not only did the attempt fail to bring in funds to the community, but it also attracted the attention
of the Dutch public and politics to them. Years before that, the Chinese were seen to be model minority who were well off and, therefore, invisible. With the display of their societal issues in order to be recognized, the image of the Chinese community was harmed as well.

According to the report from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau in Dutch), the Chinese migrants in recent years are in general understood to feel accepted in the Netherlands and they report less discrimination compared to other migrant groups. (Gijsberts et al. ed., 2011) The mutual images between the Chinese(-Dutch) people and native Dutch people are positive. Chinese people are also generally positive about living in the Dutch society.

Different from the Chinese (im)migrants of earlier generations who held the primary goal to settle down in the Netherlands, my research participants have displayed a more complicated migration trajectory. Mostly being first as a student migrant and later as a highly skilled migrant, they came to the Netherlands in search of the opportunities for transnational mobility, rather than a final destination. Their stronger desires for mobility and flexibility have created different experiences when it comes to their sense of belonging in the Dutch society.

Research Participants and Method

The women who I aimed my research on are the culturally and ethnically Chinese biological female who originally came from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. They migrated to the Netherlands independently for their education, career and/or self-actualization, rather than accompanying or reuniting with their partners or family.

During my three-month fieldwork, I recruited 19 Chinese women as my research participants. Age-wise, 13 of them are in their 30s, 4 in 20s and 2 in 40s. As for the duration in the Netherlands, 9 of them have been here for between 6 to 10 years, 7 women between 0 to 5 years and 3 women between 16 to 20 years. Regarding their place of origin, 11 of them are from Taiwan, 7 from China and 1 from Hong Kong (see Table 1). I recruited them via my personal networks, social events and Facebook groups of related organizations (such as Taiwanese people in the Netherlands [台灣人在荷蘭]) and snowballing.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Age (years old)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>40~49</td>
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<table>
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<th>Duration in the Netherlands (years)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
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<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Demographics of the 19 Research Participants

My research participants are mostly based in the area of big cities in the north and west part of the Netherlands. Most of them are in the area of Amsterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht, Rotterdam, while one in Leiden and one Breda. Many are in a long-term relationship or married, but only 3 out of 19 women have children.

All 19 of them received Bachelor’s or above education in the Netherlands, their home country or a third country. 11 women have a Master’s degree as their highest degree, 6 a Ph.D. degree and 2 a Bachelor’s degree. The occupations they hold are mainly in the sectors of business, academia, media, and education and freelancing. Two in the art and fashion industry, one in technology and one in psychology.

At least three of my research participants are “not heterosexual”, which I quoted from how they frame their sexual orientation. I did not include sexual orientation in my interview questions. These three women took the initiative to inform me because it is relevant to their experiences in the Netherlands and to their answers to my questions. I did not ask these three women to further label their sexual orientation, such as if they are lesbians or bi-sexual. In Chapter 4, I will examine how my research participants practice their female gender and will
include the cases of LGBTQ+.³

I conducted at least 26 sets of participant observation with my research participants. I visited and stayed over at their houses, met their partners and family members and followed them to social events. I also went to work with a few of them and met the people at their workplace. Lastly, I carried out 18 sets of semi-structured interviews (including 2 with the Dutch partners of the female participants), 3 group interviews and 3 life histories.

All the interviews and conversations I had with the Chinese female research participants were conducted in Mandarin, which is the mother tongue of me and all of the women, except the Hongkonger. The interviews I had with the two Dutch partners were in English. On most of the occasions where I did participant observation, Mandarin and/or English were the main languages, while a handful of them was in Dutch.

To protect their privacy, all the names in the thesis are aliases. I chose English names, instead of Mandarin names, as the alias to reduce the obstacles for the flow of reading. Also, almost half of my research participants have already been using their Western English names in the Netherlands, rather than their names in Mandarin.

Limitations of the Research

Before the fieldwork, I planned to recruit an equal number of women from Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. In the end, I could only find one Hongkonger who meets the criterion I set. Noteworthily, all the Hongkongers I have met in the Netherlands told me that they know almost no other Hongkongers in this country. Meanwhile, Taiwanese women take up the biggest part of my research participants. Due to my own positionality, a Taiwanese woman, it was easier for me to find potential participants via the networks I have been aware of and to get responses and agreement by the women.

The primary location, their professions, relationship status, duration of the stay in the

³ The term “LGBTQ+” is to include all the communities of sexuality and gender, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. Source: What Does LGBTQ+ Mean? OK2BME. https://ok2bme.ca/resources/kids-teens/what-does-lgbtq-mean/ (accessed 19/8/2019)
Netherlands, and whether they have children, these factors have shaped the experiences and accounts of my research participants. Had I recruited more women who base in rural areas or other parts of the Netherlands, women who work in different industries, women who have children or women who have stayed here for longer period of time, the data I collected might have been different, especially regarding their experiences in the Netherlands regarding race, gender and class.

I take up the stance that Taiwan, China and Hong Kong are three different political entities with their own individual historical, cultural and political development. Even though for this thesis, I chose the premise of a shared Chinese culture, I am highly aware that, due to the political conditions and disputes among Taiwan, China and Hong Kong, there would be people from these places hold disagreement against my standpoint. It is also likely that among my research participants, their political view and national identity of their home country override their cultural identity and background even when they are now in the Netherlands. In this thesis, I choose to emphasize the cultural and social part rather than the political. Had I taken the political factor into consideration, the ethnography would have provoked different discussions.

The quotes and vignettes I selected in the thesis are written in English, which were translated from Mandarin by myself. Although it is difficult to have a completely accurate translation, I have tried my best to maintain and represent the original meanings. At the same time, the emic terms in either Mandarin or Dutch used by my research participants are kept and put in the brackets behind the English words.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis contains five chapters in total, including Chapter 1 Introduction and Chapter 5 Conclusion. In the following Chapter 2, I examine the Chinese women’s desires and motivations of the migration. First, I introduce the Western influence in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong in their political and historical development, which have helped shape the imagination of the West in the East. Later I unpack their desires into three categories: for the West, for self-actualization and for mobility.

In Chapter 3, I focus on their experiencing of race and racism in Dutch society and discuss
the contradiction emerged from the accounts of migrant women: is there racism in the Netherlands? In Chapter 4, I explore their interaction with social norms from both their home society and in the Netherlands regarding their female gender. I aim to understand their conflict between self and individualism versus family and collectivism, as a daughter being away, a self being here, and a woman after all.
Chapter 2. Desires for Migration

In her new apartment, Yvette stood on a chair getting rid of the wallpaper from the previous house owner. She said to me, “I always wanted to leave my hometown because I have a more outgoing personality.” In the past few months, she acquired her permanent residence permit in the Netherlands, bought her very first apartment and quit the job of two years. And she was only 25 years old.

Born and raised in a city in the central part of China, Yvette initially wanted to go to the US. “I think I do have an American Dream.” The US for her is where people can be free and can do and become whatever they want. She compromised for the Netherlands because it was too expensive for her family to send her to the US. At the age of twenty, she started her Bachelor’s program in the Netherlands.

My hometown is an intermediate-level city. I could have a life there but now I have been out here and my horizon has been expanded, I don’t want to go back there for good. But I don’t know if I will live in the Netherlands forever either. At least I will stay for another three to five years.

I spent a few days at her place helping while she tried to renovate the house herself. “This is my 25. You are here to witness my growth and breakdown,” she said, after realizing both her kitchen and shower room were leaking water.

In the chapter, I will examine these migrant women’s desires for the West, self-actualization and mobility. What kind of drives led them all the way to the Western side of the world? What roles do the societal, cultural and political development and colonial history of their home society play in shaping their desire? What do their desires contain? Why did they end up in the Netherlands? And is this their final destination?

The West in the East: Politics, Colonial History and Mass Culture

Taiwan has a long history of receiving American influence. During the Cold War, the US government regarded Taiwan as a crucial location for military and political purposes. In 1949,
Taiwan was secured by the Republic of China (ROC), a democratic regime, while Mainland China was taken over by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), a communist government. Therefore, the US government later included Taiwan, which located right next to Mainland China, into their protection to prevent communism from continuing to spread.

In the wake of the outburst of the Korean War in 1950, Taiwan was protected by the US Seventh Fleet and received numerous loan and supply of daily commodities from the US government. One collective memory of Taiwanese children from the 1950s is the bags of flour shipped from the US and the bags were made into underwear and clothes for children. “There was an American flag on my butt,” my dad once told me. On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, the PRC and the US remained rivals during the Cold War with a “closed door” policy (Constable, 2003), until the 1970s. In 1972, the then US President Nixon became the first US president ever to visit the PRC.

In 1971, the United Nations removed the ROC as a member and instead recognized the PRC as the representative of the legitimate China. Additionally, in 1979, the US cut the official diplomatic relation with the ROC and recognized the PRC. These caused a massive panic among the people in Taiwan as they saw a blurry future of their country. It led to massive migration abroad and the US was one of the main migration destinations.

At the same time, in the 1970s, there was a popular narrative formed in the Taiwanese society that the US was the place for higher achievement. A saying went, “Come come come, to the National Taiwan University. Go go go, to the United States of America (來來來，來台大；去去去，去美國 in Mandarin).” The National Taiwan University has ranked as the first university in Taiwan. The saying underlines the popular trajectory of the elites back then: You get into the best university in the country and/or go to the best country in the world.

Apart from the political influence from the US, its mass and pop culture, including movies, TV programs and music has been popular in Taiwan and common among people’s daily life. For instance, American movies have been imported to Taiwan since the 1930s and welcomed a surge in its market share after World War II. In the late 1940s, more than 90% of the movies screened in the theater in Taiwan were imported and the American ones took up the majority (Liu, 2007). The distribution of American pop culture has largely shaped Taiwanese people’s impression of the US, as well as the Western world as a whole.
Violet, from Taiwan, was eleven years old when the movie Titanic was released in 1997:

I totally remembered that day! I couldn’t breathe after I came back home from the theater. I went with my cousin to the movie at 11 am. I arrived home at 2 pm and sat on the couch panting. I had no understanding about love back then, so I was shocked that there was stuff like that! Even though there are stratum and oppression in society, people can break through them in the end.

I started to listen to Western music when I began junior high school. During that time, many people were listening to Japanese pop and watching Japanese drama. But I already realized that I’m into Western stuff. I think that was when I started to have longing for the West.

Meanwhile, in Mainland China, the PRC welcomed the economic reform in the late 1970s and the economic relations between the PRC and the West have been revived. The cultural and academic exchange also accompanied foreign investments into the PRC. The state relaxed the control over the Western popular culture and this in return enhanced the consumption of goods from the West (Constable, 2003).

In comparison, Hong Kong had a rather different development than Taiwan and China. While the latter two were newly founded nations in the 20th century and were highly embedded in the international political arena of the Cold War, Hong Kong was a British colony from the mid-19th century almost until the new millennial. It was called the British Hong Kong between 1842 to 1997, for approximately 153 years. Not only did the British largely defined the notion of modernization for Hong Kong, but they were also the regime that directly modernized the society of Hong Kong (Carroll, 2005).

Desire for the West

Yvette’s story at the beginning of the chapter is an epitome of the migrant women in my research. They were not satisfied with the condition in their home society and even felt the push from it, including the social structure, working environment and culture. They have wanted to see the world and had a curiosity for the West. Some of them have desired opportunities and wanted to achieve higher in their careers. Some call themselves outgoing, wild or independent, and some were even told explicitly by people around them, such as teachers and co-workers, that their personality would “suit better in the Western countries.”
Many of them wanted to go to the US or UK but strategically came to the Netherlands in the end, while others specifically chose the Netherlands as their destination. However, almost none of these women is certain that this would be their final stop on their journey, no matter if they have a family or even child now in the Netherlands. To stay or not, these women are on their journey pursuing their dreams and practicing self-actualization.

Often when they talk about working or studying abroad, the terms they use in Mandarin are “overseas (國外 in Mandarin)” or “foreign countries (外國 in Mandarin)”, which have the implication of the Western countries. It is not quite clear at first, or even at all, that which Western country they refer to. The West is frequently imagined as a block.

In *Women on the Verge* (2001), an ethnography about Internationalist Japanese women, Kelsky argues a similar narrative for the West and the Occidental longings of the Japanese women. The West is formulated as “a site of rescue (ibid.:4)” by the women whose professional ambition is constrained and limited within the traditional gender expectation in the Japanese patriarchal society. However, “when women speak of ‘the foreign’ as the object of their desires, it is almost invariably ‘the West’ that they mean. Yet, this is not a West divided into specific countries, but rather a generic ‘West’ that is made to contrast with what they consider a backward and benighted ‘Japan’ (ibid.:6).” She finds that the women have trouble pinpointing where in the West exactly they long for, or even distinguishing between Europe, the US and other countries.

Said (1979) argues that both Oriental and Occidental are man-made concepts instead of geographical terms. Foucault (1978) contends that “[w]here there is desire, the power relation is already present.” That is, the longing per se for the West is built on and intertwined with colonial, political, social and cultural factors.

What makes the Chinese women I studied different from Kelsky’s internationalist Japanese women is how they perceive the West and how they realize their longings. Kelsky’s women view the West through the racialized and sexualized lenses. They desire the Western modernity and often fulfill this desire through white Western men. Marriage is frequently deployed as their access to the West while they fantasize the Western masculinity and gentlemanliness, which are different from the weak, chauvinist and patriarchal image of the Japanese men.
By comparison, the Chinese women I met, they desire the West for the West itself and do not fancy a Western man (and their Western masculinity) to fulfill their search for Western modernity. Their independence is embodied in their personality, their way of migration, as well as how they reach the West. None of them anticipated arriving and achieving in the West with the help of a male partner or any partner at all. Even though they do not reject the possibility of finding love and getting married in the foreign land, it is never their primary goal. Finding a partner is only one regular thing that would naturally happen (or not happen) along the life course.

Summer, a Taiwanese woman in her early 30s, arrived in the Netherlands around five years ago. She is now married to her Dutch partner whom she met in her first year in the Netherlands.

My friends in Taiwan couldn’t believe that I didn’t plan to find a foreign boyfriend when I left for Europe. Most friends around me don’t have experience studying abroad, so they have some fantasies over living abroad or having a foreign boyfriend.

Summer recalled it also with surprise when we were preparing for the Chinese New Year’s Eve dinner. Her Dutch husband would join us for the gathering later after he finished his evening work shift. From her account, it can be seen that finding foreign (male) partners in the West is still fantasized by people in Taiwan. But the desire is related to one’s experience and imagination of the West. It also implies the role of cultural capital would play in the formation of desire. In Taiwanese society, studying abroad requires economic and cultural capital. The ones who lack these capitals and the opportunity tend to view the West through the imagination of Western masculinity.

Furthermore, when it comes to the matter of staying long term in the Netherlands, many of my participants have had difficulties accepting the idea to acquire residence permit through marriage or partnership, even when they are already in a stable relationship with a local partner. They have specifically tried to get a job which granted them residence to prove their own capacity and value, instead of being treated as a dependent and subordinate actor.

The West stands for where higher knowledge in academia is produced and where more
advanced technologies in industry and better and more opportunities for the career are present. The system of Western society is also imagined to allow more freedom. Kelsky (2001) argues that “space” is used as a metaphor in the narratives by the women to describe how they are limited in Japan and how they imagine the numerous opportunities in the West: “Japan is a ‘pond’ that keeps its women stunted in size and forever swimming in circles, whereas the West is a vast lake in which women may finally grow to their full proportions and capabilities. (Michiko, 1993)”

Fion, from Hong Kong, has experienced the difference in space both as a metaphor and in a literal aspect. She finished two Master’s degrees and one Ph.D. in her ten years in the Netherlands. Intellectually and professionally, she has been granted more freedom and possibility. Physically, she has access to the relatively spacious environment in the Netherlands compared to Hong Kong, which is one of the most densely populated places in the world.

When I was in middle school, many teachers told me, ‘The education system in Hong Kong doesn’t suit you. You should consider studying abroad.’ Is foreign land really more suitable for me? Actually, it is, hahaha. The teachers weren’t wrong. Here is more space, space for thoughts. More physical space too. I can see the sky here. You can’t see the sky in Hong Kong which is packed with skyscrapers. And Hongkongers are also more narrow-minded when it comes to career choice. I wanted to get away from that mindset.

Meanwhile, sometimes the most important implication of the West to these migrant women is that it is simply “elsewhere” than the place they grew up in and are too familiar with. Bonnie, originally from China, first arrived in the Netherlands for her Master’s study. Back in China, she had been frustrated by the political elements in the curriculum and education system since middle school. She then got disappointed again that the society and the industry do not treat respectfully nor seriously the legal profession, which was her Bachelor’s major. “I was very unhappy when I was in China. I really needed to find other ways out,” she said. For her, the West is her best getaway.

In this section, I examined the women’s desire for the West. They desire the West for its abundant opportunities, freedom and modernity, even though they often refer to the West as a whole block without aiming their longing at a specific country or society. Different from
Kelsky’s (2001) study which examines Japanese women’s adoration for Western white men, my research participants focus less on the racialized and sexualized desires. Instead, they emphasize more on individual personal development. In the next section, I will discuss their desire for self-actualization.

**Desire for Self-Actualization**

‘Had you ever thought that you would get married here?’ I asked Fion after she told me the love story of her and her partner.

‘Not at all. I came here to study and search for self. Studying and self-development belong to you, but boyfriends or girlfriends would basically die at some point, hahahahaha. So, I was here all for myself,’ she replied.

In the previous section, I argued that these women migrated to the West with the expectation of more opportunities and freedom in order to achieve higher or just leave the old home society. In their accounts, apart from the desire for the West per se, there is another strong drive which led them here: self-actualization.

In *Japanese New York* (2014), Sooudi argues that the goal that Japanese migrant artists move to New York is to reset their life and to reinvent one’s self. This is in response to “jibun sagashi (自分探しの旅 in Japanese, meaning ‘search for self’)”, a discourse which has become popular since the Japanese economic recession in the 1990s. The anxiety in the society triggered by the recession was at work, and the life trajectory of the middle class started to shake. More crucially, “jibun sagashi” is driven by the dissatisfaction of one’s current life. For example, the Japanese artist migrants of Sooudi migrated due to the limited artistic market in Japan and with the hope to find more professional possibilities in New York.

Most of my research participants left home in their early 20s and arrived for their next stage of education, mostly Master’s degrees while some Bachelor’s. The beginning of their self-searching via independent migration to some extent overlapped with their entrance into the next stage of their life course, to adulthood and their maturing. This characteristic of them differs from the Japanese migrants of Sooudi, most of whom migrated after the failure of their artist career in Japan in order to reinvent themselves in the same profession in New York where more opportunities are present.

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One feature of self-searching via migration is displacement. As I pointed out previously, sometimes the destination itself matters mainly for the fact that it is elsewhere. Similarly, Sooudi (2014) argues that when one migrates to search for self, the desire behind is to be “somewhere, not here”, and by being in a new place, remaking of self becomes possible. And especially for those women who call themselves having an outgoing or wild personality, their hometown or home society does not have the capacity to contain them.

Violet left Taiwan at the age of 24 after she finished her Bachelor’s degree. She has now been in the Netherlands for almost ten years. In the past decade, she has been pursuing her studies and working in academia and media.

My decision to study abroad seemed to come naturally - the family of civil servants would expect their kids to study abroad, to be washed with the Western ink (喝一下洋墨水 in Mandarin). I didn’t think too much about it either. But recently I realized that, consciously and unconsciously, I have been running away from home because what I got at home couldn’t satisfy my curiosity nor suit my personality. Running away from it allows me to finally explore myself and the society.

While it seemed to be a natural path to take advantage of her family background to pursue her studies abroad, her motivation of migration was in fact rooted in her desire for self-actualization, as she desired the world out there and has been practicing to be herself only when outside the supervision of the family. Leaving home is the method she had to take.

Nevertheless, education plays a crucial role in these women’s self-actualization after all. All my participants, except one, landed in Europe first for their higher education. Two of them came for their Bachelor’s degrees, while the other 16 for graduate studies. On the one hand, it is part of their imagination and plan for the self which is related to Bourdieu’s capital. These migrant women who come from relatively middle-classed families are equipped with a certain amount of economic and cultural capital, which exposes them to the idea of, for example, pursuing graduate study or job abroad and in turn helps shape their goal for the self. They are also provided with these capitals to migrate in order to accomplish the self they aim

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4 The common version of the saying is “喝洋墨水”, literally means drinking Western ink. It is a metaphor for studying abroad in Western countries.
to search for and to reproduce their middle-class status in the Netherlands. These can be seen in Violet’s account. Her middle-classed family has granted her the cultural capital, as in the lifestyle of the class, and the economic capital, which were necessary for her migration. Only children from the middle class can afford to search for the self via migration.

On the other hand, education in Europe is a strategical measure to take: to avoid de-skilling in the job market in the host country. De-skilling is more often seen among female migrants, which has been discussed by scholars in migrant studies (Aure, 2013; Kõu and Baileya, 2014; Man, 2004; Meares, 2010). The institution of the host country may set obstacles for women in the migration application of the host county. Meanwhile, women tend to work in a less international profession, such as teaching and law, of which the skill is highly locally oriented and less transferrable when they cross the border. In addition, women are more likely to take the role of caretaker within the household, especially in the cases of couples migrating together. By receiving education in Europe, the migrant women can prepare and familiarize themselves with the local job market before entering it. At the same time, European employers are more likely and easy to recognize their competence with European degrees.

Additionally, their strong motivation for self-actualization can also explain the fact that they do not intend to arrive in the West via a local partner. As Fion pointed out, the self is central to her migration as everything else is external and can be unreliable. To respond to the arguments on the agency of female migrants, this group of independent career-oriented migrant women has shown their agency through the decision making, method and aim of their migration.

**Desire for Mobility: An Ongoing Journey**

Growing up with American influences, combined with the fact that the US dominates the top rankings in the universities around the world, many women have had their “American Dream” when choosing the destination of migration and education. But how did they end up in the Netherlands? Among my participants, some randomly picked the Netherlands as a possible alternative, while some specifically chose the Netherlands.

As most of these women began their migrant lives as a student migrant, much consideration about education, including application and tuition fees, was taken during their decision-
making process. Even though the US is often pictured as a dream destination for the international prestige of its schools, the costly tuition fee of American universities lays a huge obstacle for the migrants-to-be. The UK presents similar issues with its relatively high tuition fee compared to other European countries. Interestingly, a number of my participants mentioned their opposition against the GRE or GMAT exams which are required by most of the applications for American universities, which is one reason why they did not consider American schools.

In the end, the Netherlands stands out for its cheaper tuition, and English-speaking environment in academia and everyday occasions. In addition, even though few of them already had the plan to stay in the host country for good when preparing for migration, most of the women did have the expectation to stay as long as possible to gain the experience of working in a foreign country. Therefore, the welcoming and friendly regulations, including the orientation year visa (zoekjaar in Dutch) after graduation, and the relatively international job market in the Netherlands create a bigger attraction for these future knowledge migrants.

However, around half of my participants, especially the ones who migrated based on the abovementioned decision making, hardly knew anything about the Netherlands. It almost became a recurring self-entertaining joke for me every time I asked about their understanding of the Netherlands before or even upon their arrival. The answers I received include:

‘The level of my understanding of the Netherlands was zero.’
‘I thought it’s in Nordic Europe.’
‘I didn’t know what language the Netherlands uses, I thought it was German. I learned German for my second foreign language, so I told myself, “Yea, no problem!” It was hilarious.’

While their decision to come to the Netherlands appeared to be realistic and strategic, they prepared themselves ironically little for the society. The Netherlands or the Dutch society per se as a destination did not play an intriguing role for them. To these migrants, the Netherlands is more as a means through which they get to arrive in the West, carry out their self-actualization and/or their desire for mobility.

Meanwhile, there are other migrant women who were attracted by the unique charm offered
by the Dutch. Violet had been a rebellious daughter and woman ever since she remembered. She found out how to skip school at the age of seven, kept skipping classes during her teenage years to watch movies and to hang out with her first secret boyfriend. Later she moved out of her mother’s place saying that her university campus had moved to somewhere else, while in fact, she moved in with her second secret boyfriend.

I didn’t want to go to the US because I didn’t want to take GRE. You know my personality; I hate exams and this kind of institution. My best friend went to Leiden for her exchange and told me that it is very common to challenge authority in the Netherlands. ‘Wow, this is the place I want to take a look!’ I was happy that this expectation was verified during my first year in the Netherlands.

Melody is from China and studied for her Bachelor’s degree in Beijing. She also arrived in the Netherlands first for her Master’s study.

I did my Bachelor’s exchange in Taiwan. The experience made me notice the difference between how a small society like Taiwan and a big one like China function. So, I wanted to go to a small country with few people (小國寡民 in Mandarin) to see how the society runs effectively. And I heard that Amsterdam is described as ‘the place where is the closest to and also the most far away from the God’ which intrigued me. We also had some scholars visiting from the Netherlands in my home university in Beijing, so I already had some network and understanding of the academia in the Netherlands.

In some sense, Dutch society creates a niche market with their culture, such as a relatively mild hierarchy, tolerance, open-mindedness and progressiveness on social issues. Apart from being part of the West which fulfills the migrants’ curiosity of the bigger world out there, the distinctive images of the Netherlands correspond with the personality and the pursuit of some of my participants, which also sustain their self-actualization.

However, no matter they chose the Netherlands intentionally or not, almost none of my participants had the plan to stay in the Netherlands permanently before their migration, and only a few are certain that she would stay and settle here as her final destination.
Baas (2016) points out in his study on the Indian student migrants in Australia that, despite acquiring the Australian permanent residency (PR), they do not necessarily plan to reside in Australia permanently. Rather, the possibility of being mobile which comes with the PR is what really matters, as the limit of their residence within Australia imposed by the regulations would not be applicable anymore and that they would become more internationally mobile compared to holding an Indian passport.

He also emphasizes the importance to recognize the ongoing individualized trajectories of migration and mobility of the migrants, which may involve multiple locations along their timeline. He proposes to understand the migrants in terms of “migrancy”, where is a lack of “true home” for them and “being a migrant” would become a permanent state. Similarly, Kõu and Baileya (2014:113) argue that “migration is a process, rather than an isolated event,” and that every happening at a different stage of the migrants’ life would shape how they make the next decision on their migration.

In the cases of the Chinese female migrants of my research, they do not need Dutch permanent residence in order to migrate within the country or between the countries. Instead, they must hold certain types of residence and working visa which would allow them to stay in the long term and work legally. However, for many of them, acquiring a permanent residence is important to fulfill the current condition and needs to reside in the Netherlands. Like the Indian migrants in Australia, it is unclear that if they would settle or where they would head to later.

Kõu and Baileya (2014) also propose that, in their study of the highly skilled Indian migrants in both the US and the Netherlands, the Netherlands would be considered as an escalator region or a steppingstone along the trajectory of migrants. For the job opportunities and the imagination of the country, the USA is still often seen as the ultimate destination which they would reach after their stay in the UK or the Netherlands.

Even though it is true that some participants of mine chose the Netherlands as a realistic compromise, they do not intend to reach “somewhere higher” through their migration to the Netherlands. Yet, as Yvette said at the beginning of the chapter, they regard here as one stop along their path and are open to future migration. While only a handful already see herself settling and call the Netherlands home, some others consider to follow the job opportunity to
hit the road again, some plan to move back to Asia to stay closer to their home country while
still being away, some are willing to return migration eventually, and some just still have no
solid idea at all.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the formation and content of the desires of the migrant women
and intended to show the agency of them. The political, colonial and cultural influences from
the West in the society of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong shape the people’s imagination of
the Western world. While the women desire the West for more opportunities, it is often
unclear which country exactly their longings aim at. The West is understood as a block.
Different from Kelsky’s (2001) arguments, these women migrate independently in the hope
to arrive and achieve in the West without the expectation to have a white Western (male)
partner. Their strong motivation for self-actualization can partly explain this will as they
focus much on personal development through this migration.

Education plays an important role in their self-actualization. It is part of their imagination of
the self, which has been shaped by the cultural capital of their social class. It is also a method
which helps them reproduce similar class in the Netherlands and avoid the issue of de-skilling
in the Dutch job market. Lastly, it is unsettled, also insignificant, for the women that if they
would keep migrating in the future. The mobility itself is also what they desire. The
Netherlands becomes their (current) destination for it being a more financially affordable,
internationally oriented market and environment and the unique characters of the society.

In the next chapter, I will examine the lives of these migrant women in the Netherlands
regarding their experiences of racism and being an outsider and discuss how racism is
understood by these women and by Dutch society.
Chapter 3. Being Chinese in the Netherlands

‘Have you ever experienced racial discrimination here in the Netherlands?’ I asked.
‘No,’ Rosanne answered me firmly.
‘So, you’ve only had people on the street yelling fake Mandarin at you.’
‘But that is not racism! What I’ve encountered more are cultural differences - Some things we believe or take for granted are weird or just bullshit in other people’s eyes. People often consider the differences stem from cultures. But in the end, I think it is just between individuals. People are different anyway.’

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‘The Dutch is perceived to be progressive and inclusive. But in fact, their [Dutch] culture isn’t like this. I find the social hierarchy between the Dutch local and (im)migrants very serious,’ Esther said.
‘Especially because they don’t think they have the issue of racism anymore. They think they have won the battle against racism. “How can you call us racist? We are not racist at all!”’ Tammy added.

In this chapter, I will examine these women’s experiences regarding their racialized identity in the Netherlands as Chinese, Asian-looking, non-Dutch and non-white. Have they encountered racism as a racial minority? How do they understand and interpret the absence and presence of race in their daily experiences? Is this a color-blind nation or is there actually racial discrimination in the Netherlands?

Rosanne, originally from Taiwan, is in her late 20s. She has been in the Netherlands for five years, within which she obtained a Master’s degree and has been working in the business sector. In the first few years, her social and professional circles were very international. She befriended the international students from her Master’s program and was hired by international companies. Last year she changed to a new job and she has been the only non-Dutch in her team. She has also become active in the association of Taiwanese in the Netherlands and taken major positions.

Esther and Tammy are a lesbian couple in their early 30s, both from China. They met back in Beijing before they left for different European countries to pursue their own studies. After
being geographically apart for years, they both found jobs in the Netherlands and reunited. Their social circle in the Netherlands is mixed with Dutch and internationals. Esther studied and worked in three other European countries for eight years in total before arriving in the Netherlands. Therefore, her accounts, different from the ones from other participants in this research, sometimes imply the comparison between what she has encountered in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, rather than only between the Netherlands and the home society.

During my fieldwork, I was told by many women, in a rather easy tone, that racism towards them in the Netherlands is mild or even absent. At the same time, other women shared their experiences of racial discrimination with great frustration and/or anger. What makes this contradiction more intriguing is the fact that some women reported both kinds of experiences and attitudes as our conversations developed. In the following sections, I first introduce the concepts of microaggression and everyday racism which are useful to understand the racism they have encountered. Afterward, I present and analyze the accounts from my research participants which embody the contradiction and try to explain why there is this discrepancy.

Microaggression and Everyday Racism

The notion of racism is commonly understood as the belief that certain groups of people are superior to others due to their races (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). People would receive different treatments according to their race, which is racial discrimination. Racial discrimination may include violence and explicit language, and racial segregation is an institutionalized form of discrimination. When my participants dismiss the existence of racism in the Netherlands, they are based on their lack of experience of blatant racial discrimination.

However, apart from the more traditional understanding and practice of racism, there are concepts of racial microaggressions and everyday racism, which theorize racism in a less visible and more subtle setting. According to Sue et al. (2007:72), racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group.” That is, racism is not necessarily loud or violent. Racial discrimination could also be deployed without an extreme racist act. Microaggression is sometimes trivial and pervasive and its accumulation may as well cause substantial negative effects on the target.
Meanwhile, Essed (2002) argues that everyday racism manifests that racism can be both from the institution and individuals. It is embodied in recurring daily events and is often taken for granted therefore difficult to pinpoint. People might not have racist intentions but their racist behaviors which, for example, based on cultural stereotypes, demonstrate the inequality within the society and contribute to the suffering of the target.

In this chapter, I would make a distinction between racism as a discourse and racism as lived experiences. While my participants dismiss the existence of racism as a discourse, their experiences often relate to microaggressions and everyday racism.

**Racism as Discourse: The Dismissal**

When I asked my participants if they have experienced racial discrimination in the Netherlands, a common first answer was “It is okay.” And it is usually followed by comments such as “Sometimes people on the streets would shout ‘Ni Hao (你好 in Mandarin, which means hello)’ to me but that doesn’t really bother me,” as Rosanne indicated above.

Few of them have encountered explicit racial discrimination directly against them. Being reluctant to directly call it “racism,” they usually describe the treatment from or friction with Dutch people derives from “cultural difference”. Esther said to me with a mixture of frustration and gentleness:

> They [Dutch people] just don’t know about our culture, and I don’t blame them for that. Growing up here, what they have seen is the mainstream culture of white people.

Apart from cultural differences, terms such as “ignorance”, “stereotype” and “prejudice” are often used by my research participants to label their experiences. Catherine, a woman from China and now in her early 40s, has been in the Netherlands for almost twenty years since first arriving for her Master’s study. After her study, she worked in a few Dutch organizations with international working environments. Now she runs her own company, works for multiple institutions at the same time and has two children with her Dutch husband. On the term “racial discrimination”, she commented:
I don't like to use the term ‘racial discrimination’. I find it a bit heavy. I think it is instead ‘stereotype’ or ‘prejudice’. I have a Surinamese friend and what he experienced really was racism. Some young white Dutch threw stuff into his ice cream shop and called him ‘nigger’. I have never experienced anything this serious.

From her argument, it can be understood that she acknowledges the existence of racism against blacks in the Netherlands. But she, being Chinese or East Asian, is not the target or victim of it.

**Lack of Sense of Belonging**

While these women dismiss their own experiencing racism, they often talk about their lack of sense of belonging in the Netherlands. It shall be kept in mind that, though a few of them have started to identify more with the Dutch, most of the women are also at ease with their identity as Taiwanese, Chinese or Hongkonger. These women acknowledge their status as a foreigner and outsider in the Dutch society. As migrants, the time they have spent in the Netherlands is still shorter than the one in their home country. Therefore, here, the sense of belonging refers to whether they feel accepted by the group or environment they belong to, such as the workplace or the society in general, rather than being recognized as a Dutch person.

One reason they mobilize to explain the lack of sense of belonging is their command of the Dutch language. One of the most commonly asked questions within the circle of expat-to-be is “Do I need to learn Dutch?” It is possible to find a job and live a life in the Netherlands without being able to speak Dutch, people always reply. But to some of my participants, even at the workplace, their lower proficiency in Dutch prevents them from easily creating bonding with their Dutch colleagues or becoming part of the group.

Isabel, originally from Taiwan, has been in the Netherlands for seven years. Her first job was in a big company where almost everyone was Dutch.

Language has always been an issue for me. My Mandarin and English are already not that good and now there is Dutch. My poor Dutch has built some barriers in my life, including interpersonal interactions. The barriers are not huge, but I can feel them and sometimes hope they don’t exist. For example, during my first job I would wonder: I
am as competent as my colleagues, why would I deserve to go through all these struggles [caused by language]? Even the work itself was ok for me, at lunch breaks everyone would naturally chat in Dutch.

While it is relatively easy to restrict the working language to English, the omnipresent Dutch language at the workplace marks the non-speaker as the Other. “When they start to speak Dutch, they are basically building a wall without noticing it,” another woman told me. Language as a tool for communication, without being well equipped with this tool, the migrants often feel a distance or an invisible gap between them and the Dutch speakers.

On the other side of the coin, Kyle acknowledges that learning some Dutch helped her to be accepted by her team faster. Kyle is the only research participant of mine who landed in the Netherlands without getting a Dutch degree first. Instead, she was hired directly by the company when she was still in Taiwan. The company is a European office of a Taiwanese corporate, but she was the only Taiwanese, non-European and non-Dutch speaker when she started the job.

They didn’t trust me much in the first few months. So, I had to prove that I was useful. I signed up for Dutch courses within my first two months. After one month, I started to understand a bit when people spoke Dutch and I would try to cut in. Then they realized, ‘Ah! She understands Dutch!’ It made them respect me from the bottom of the heart. My boss really appreciated that I made an effort to blend in. I find this very important: You are the one who came to their territory, so you have to figure out how to integrate. Whether you can be respected by others, you have to win the respect yourself, instead of waiting for it.

However, even though most of my participants agree with the difference it would make by mastering the Dutch language, the degree of effort they have been able or willing to make varies. While all who have gained permanent residence passed the mandatory language exam⁵, most of them still have trouble speaking Dutch fluently in a daily environment.

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⁵ The current requirement is to pass the level of A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (Source: Integration in the Netherlands. Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). https://ind.nl/en/Pages/Integration-in-the-netherlands.aspx (accessed 25/9/2019)) The regulations, however, have been changing over the years and the previous requirements which were applicable to the earlier
Their reasons also differ according to the effort they make. Some are rather preoccupied with their jobs with no time left to advance their Dutch. Bonnie, who has been in the Netherlands for eight years, did not start to learn Dutch until her 7th year. During her first six years, she was always under pressure of not being able to secure her job, hence losing her visa. Consequently, she used all of her focus on making sure she could stay in the Netherlands and so far have had gained at least four different kinds of visas for her residence. In this precarious situation, she did not find it practical either to learn the language since she would be asked to leave the country at any minute.

Some women are rather content with the current condition of not having many Dutch friends, such as Rosanne. After working at a few international environments, she is the only non-Dutch worker in her current team.

I think you can’t really do anything with the issue of language. It is what it is, unless you pick it up thoroughly. It is very difficult to integrate completely. So, the more Dutch my professional life is, the more Taiwanese my private life is.

In addition to language, another common complaint about the lack of sense of belonging is a criticism of the so-called “Dutch open-mindedness”, or a blame that Dutch people are hard to befriend. Even though she made efforts by learning Dutch, Kyle still recognized the difficulty around the Dutch people:

Dutch people appear to be open-minded from the outside, but actually, they are pretty close-down inside. They don’t need to expand their network nor want to befriend foreigners.

As the Netherlands has gained its popularity as a destination among the expats worldwide, many surveys outside and inside the country have been conducted. The results point out that this is not a friendly land when it comes to befriending locals. In the report “Expat Insider 2018”, published by InterNations, a network for expats around the world, the Netherlands migrants may differ.

ranked 56 out of 68 countries in “Finding Friends”. Meanwhile, research by three student networks, Dutch Student Union (Landelijke Studentenvakbond in Dutch), Dutch National Student Association (Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg in Dutch) and the Erasmus Student Network, shows that over 75% international students “miss contacts with their Dutch peers”.7

Out of my 19 research participants, less than half have a private social circle with Dutch friends being the majority. Most of the women socialize with their compatriots, Chinese migrants or international expats primarily. The ones who have a Dutch partner would mingle with the Dutch friends of the partner but still consider them as “his friends”.

Judging from their personal social circles, I argue that they are still marginalized in the Dutch society as the people they are associated with are also rather outside the majority. This also confirms their own acknowledgment of being an outsider in the Netherlands. However, it is difficult to clarify the relation between cause and effect and it is possible that their outsider status and social circle re-enforce each other.

From another angle, Esther interprets that her feeling of exclusion, or even inferiority, comes from the different life- and workstyle.

We used to work on fulfilling the expectations of finding a good job with good pay, getting a house and a car of our own. But I found that the expectation from the Dutch society is different: You have to be interesting. So, you need to do interesting things otherwise you have nothing to talk about. ‘Oh, you have a 9 to 5 fulltime job? That’s sad,’ they would say. I want a fun flexible job too, but I can’t get a work permit from it and I won’t be able to stay here anymore!

The underlying frustration here is not directly caused by being a racial minority or an outsider. Instead, it is the limit due to being a migrant and a non-permanent resident. Profession-wise, highly skill migrants need to be hired by the organizations which are sponsored by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst in Dutch) in order to obtain the visa and residence. Outside their job, the migrants also need

to handle stress from and daily tasks of, for instance, settling down and forming the network. All of my research participants have, at least at some point during their stay, suffered from the pressure of how to remain and function in this country. To Esther, this ongoing burden has not only rendered her less free, but it has also contributed to the othering of her from the Dutch people.

In the above sections, I have looked at the women’s dismissal of racism in the Netherlands by talking about cultural differences and lack of sense of belongings. However, is there really no racism in their daily life experiences? What is the understanding and criterion of a racist act in these women’s eyes? Are they actually talking about racism while not using the word “racism”? Before I answer these questions, I will examine some women’s indictments of blatant racism.

Racialized Stereotypes: Dealing with the Dutch Gaze

The common stereotypes regarding Asian or Chinese women include being more obedient, feminine and traditional. The stereotypes are not only racialized but also gendered and sexualized. As these women are very much aware of the stereotypes held by the Dutch, they often consciously act against it and avoid being taken as a cultural representative for her people or even the general “Asian”.

On her experiences of encountering racialized stereotypes, Esther shared:

> Once I went to a gay sauna, I felt like it was the first time for the people there to see a Chinese woman on such occasion. Often when I go to some places, I have the feeling that I’m breaking some records. At first, it was interesting that I can ‘broaden their horizon’ but then I got tired. Why do I always have to open up and prove something to them? Why can’t I just chill and be cozy and comfortable with myself?

Not only does the stereotyping of these Chinese women prevent the Dutch majority from understanding them as real human beings, but it also imposes a chain around these women which impacts how they should behave. Whether the women choose to disapprove of the stereotypes by consciously acting against it or not, it requires them extra effort to react, which can be exhausting. It may also restrain their subjectivity as they focus much on deliberately acting something different from the existing stereotype. This, to a certain extent, has limited
their free expression of themselves both physically and verbally.

Next to the racialized (and gendered) stereotypes, there are also stereotypes regarding nationality. Within this group of culturally Chinese people, there are different sets of national/regional identities, including namely Taiwanese, (Mainland) Chinese and Hongkonger. However, in the eyes of the Dutch people, they are all simply “Chinese” or even “Asian” from their racial appearance. While many Chinese women find it derogatory, it is interesting to see how they (re)interpret and leverage the labels imposed by the Dutch people.

Due to the political disputes between Taiwan and China, many Taiwanese people regard the English word “Chinese”, or the Dutch word “Chinees”, a sensitive term to be associated with. While in my thesis, I use the term “Chinese” as culturally or ethnically Chinese, in most scenarios in daily life, it refers to the nationality of the PRC. Therefore, one reaction from Taiwanese people towards being called “Chinese” is to clarify the difference between Taiwan and China. However, beyond the political dispute, Rosanne interprets it differently when she is seen as Chinese:

Many people don’t like Chinese people and some Taiwanese would get unhappy if they are mistaken as Chinese. But my attitude has been changing gradually. I have started to think that if I get irritated by being mistaken as Chinese, that would be because the stereotype and impression of ‘Chinese’ is still bad. If someday the implication of this label becomes positive, actually I wouldn’t be upset [by being mistaken]. I am always ok with being mistaken as Japanese because the stereotype of them is better.

The interplay of the racial stereotype and the image of a nation can be seen from her account. Rosanne redefines the meaning of the supposedly simplified label imposed by the Dutch people and takes advantage of the stereotype when it does her benefit. In contrast to the limit felt by Esther, Rosanne exerts more command in her own agency and subjectivity and is able to distance herself from the external stereotyping.

Catherine, a native from the city of Nanjing in China, shared a similar reading, even with a stronger sentiment. Nanjing (or Nanking) is the city where the Nanking Massacre by the Empire of Japan took place in the late 1930s.

When I first came to the Netherlands, maybe it was because I was more integrated,
open and virtuous, many people thought I was Japanese. It happened to my dad too when he visited me. But we are from Nanjing and we hate Japanese! I told him not to get angry because it was actually a compliment, which means that people find you well-behaved with good manners.

A hierarchy within the “Asian stereotypes” appears here, the Japanese are placed at the top while the Chinese are somewhere below, which also highly connects with the national image in the international society. The Dutch Other understands Asian people in this logic, and the Asian people validate, accept or at least play along with it.

**Racism as Experiences**

At the beginning of this chapter, I presented the conversation from Esther and Tammy. I finally met them together in Amsterdam on a windy evening after I had had interviews with each of them individually. We first went to a restaurant in Jordaan, a ten-minute cycling distance from the Amsterdam Central Station, talking about their upcoming holiday back to China and my dating life. After we finished dinner, we decided to continue our conversation at the public library next to the Station. I did not have my bike with me, so I walked there to meet them up.

‘Someone just yelled “Go home!” at her on our way here,’ Tammy told me. ‘I blocked his way but only because there was a scooter blocking the cycling path. He called me to go home?! I wanted to call him a motherf*ucker!’ Esther said.

Esther has only arrived in the Netherlands to work for two years but has already had her second burn-out. Compared to her previous years in other European countries, this place has specially made her feel like an outsider.

‘In the Netherlands, they really think they are way better than you,’ said Esther. Tammy added, ‘When they ask you to not do something, for example not smoke or not put your feet on the chair across you on the train, they don’t say “this is bad to do.” They say, instead, “We Dutch people don’t do that.”’

The racism experienced by these women is often built on the stereotyping of the minority and the Dutch’s sense of superiority. Without explicitly pointing their fingers at the non-Dutch,
the Dutch engage in the othering by restating the norm, differentiating “we the Dutch versus you the non-Dutch” and strengthening the racial hierarchy.

Another source of racism lies in the extended private network from the Dutch partners, especially their family and relatives. As I showed in the previous section, these migrants are mostly surrounded by migrants and expats. They meet and associate with these people rather organically due to their shared international attributes. Meanwhile, the relatives of the Dutch partners are more likely to be less sensitive to the condition of the internationals and the issue of race.

Summer met her Dutch partner through her language study. Her partner originally comes from a small town and has many relatives in the Bible Belt of the Netherlands.8

His mother and siblings are nice and treat me well. But his aunts are more like countrymen. They like making jokes including something about Chinese people. One of his aunts sent me a video of Dutch people making noises at a performance and asked me to translate what they were singing. I really wanted to bash my head against the wall when I saw the clip - that was not Mandarin. They thought they were speaking Mandarin. I found it very irritating.

She showed me another video clip of a performance of the aunt herself. The theme was Chinese people. I saw a small group of Dutch people dressed in pseudo traditional Chinese customs with their faces painted yellow-ish, singing and dancing. They reminded me of the Black Petes (Zwarte Pieten in Dutch) played by white Dutch people who I saw last year at the arrival of Sinterklaas in Amsterdam. With the face painting to act as a racial minority and the extravagant expression and movement, they make a simplified and ignorant representation of the minority and amplify the stereotype.

**The Contradiction: Racism in the Netherlands**

After inspecting the data from my fieldwork, I argue that there is racism in the Netherlands,

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8 The Bible Belt is a strip of land located roughly in the center part of the Netherlands which consist of towns and villages. Most people who live there are Orthodox Calvinists and are often depicted as holding more conservative views. (Haandrikman et al, 2008)
and there are two main reasons which give rise to the contradiction displayed in their accounts: The first is the definition and understanding of racism and the second is the social class of my participants.

With the concepts of racial microaggression and everyday racism, I argue that the racism toward the Chinese migrants in the Dutch society is present but in a lighter and recurring manner that occurs in the everyday environment and it establishes on the stereotype and lack of understanding of this group of people. Re-examining the accounts from my participants, their experiences of being yelled at in (pretend-to-be) Mandarin from strangers on the street, being limited and expected by the racial stereotypes, their sense of being excluded or unqualified, etc., in fact, can be interpreted as racist acts, no matter the effort of these women in dismissing or even defending the Dutch. Their limited understanding of the variety and spectrum of racism prevents them from identifying racism.

Additionally, in the European context, “race” has been replaced by “ethnicity” since World War II and discussions on “racism” have been seen as taboo as they would challenge the premise that there should be no more race nor racism (Essed, 2002). It is also applicable in the Netherlands, along with the Dutch colonial history at work (Weiner, 2014). These have made the Netherlands on the surface a color-blind society over race while ignoring and denying the existence of racism in the mainstream narrative of the white Dutch.

How shall we understand the fact that the non-white minority, Chinese migrants in the case of this thesis, also participate in this kind of denial narrative while they are de facto experiencing racism whether consciously or unconsciously? In his study of racial microaggressions in English first-class cricket, Burdsey (2011) argues that racial minority, British Asian in his case, would endorse and (re)produce the dominant racial discourse of color-blind ideology. Because the ideology is deeply rooted in the society, the minority either dismisses the racial microaggressions they have been targeted at or is granted fewer opportunities to resist racism without being labeled as a troublemaker.

Therefore, I argue that complicity becomes an easier option for the minority to avoid further issues. Regardless of their knowledge of racism, the minority, or the target of discrimination, tend to have a smaller voice. The fear of being victimization hinders them from standing out to, especially when this minority group is still relatively small and insignificant in the mainstream society.
The second reason contributes to the contradiction is the social class of my participants. I argue that their middle-and-above social class shields them from being targeted by blatant racial discriminations. The intersectionality of race and class plays a role here. While there is racism in the Netherlands and some of my participants do acknowledge it, there are women who do not identify themselves as the victim as they have never experienced it.

To a certain extent, these women’s social class decides what kind of people they are mainly surrounded by. The fact that they were able to migrate first as a student migrant to the West indicates that they were equipped with high economic and/or cultural capital. They had affluent financial support and/or they were equipped with their home country education and competence to meet the criterion for Westbound migration. After arrival, their status as a student and then a graduate with at least one Bachelor’s degree has granted them access to the middle-and-above class in the Netherlands. Hence, they more or less are able to maintain their middle-class status after migration. Their social class brings people with a similar background to their social circles, such as classmates at the university or colleagues from their white-collar occupation.

Moreover, their social class contributes to how mainstream society perceives them. For example, a low skilled Chinese migrant with a lower social class would be assumed to be poorer and be imposed with stereotypes such as working in a Chinese restaurant. On the other hand, a highly skilled Chinese migrant from a higher social class background would be expected to be well-educated and well-performed at the workplace.

Here I find the notion of “model minority”, which borrowed from the American context, relevant and useful. The Asian Americans in the US have been portrayed as the “model minority”, a term coined by Peterson (1996). They are understood to be the successful minorities who are hardworking and have experienced success in education, career, wealth acquisition and upward social mobility, and clean from crime (Wong and Halgin, 2006).

Even though “model minority” per se does not necessarily have the implication of one’s social class, I read the term “model” in the sense that these people have acquired the lifestyle and ethos which are approved by the majority of the middle-classed white. Applying this back to the Chinese migrant women in the Netherlands, their trouble-free profile renders
them less of a target of racial discrimination from the mainstream narrative⁹.

Or even further, they are, after all, a rather invisible group. As I argued in the previous section, these women often find themselves an outsider from Dutch society. The fact that they are seldom considered as in-group members to start with, combined with their characteristics of not causing issues and not being vocal, they are altogether more likely to be neglected in any discourse involved race and racism.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined the Chinese migrant women’s experiencing regarding race and racism in the Netherlands. A contradiction has been shown upon the presence of racism in Dutch society. The women who dismiss racism describe their experiences in terms of cultural differences and lack of sense of belonging which often result from language issues. On the other hand, the women who acknowledge racism in the Netherlands have experienced racial discrimination ranging from random people on the street to their Dutch in-laws.

While I contend the existence of racism in the Netherlands, I argue that people’s understanding of the notion of racism plays a role. The fact that many of my participants still understand racism in a more traditional and stricter fashion prevents them from identifying microaggressions and everyday racism. Meanwhile, in a color-blinded nation like the Netherlands, it could be easier to follow the mainstream narrative to avoid further victimization. Secondly, I argue that the middle-and-above social class of these women has shaped how their experience of race and shielded them from blatant racism. They are surrounded by people of similar classes and are seen by the society to fit a relatively positive image due to the intersectionality of their class and race.

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⁹ However, the notion of “model minority” is constructed on the basis of a white-against-black systematic racism. It singled out the “success” of the Asian American to reinforce the discrimination against the black/African Americans. (Chou and Feagin, 2016)
Chapter 4. Being a Woman Here and There

‘The first cultural shock I had in the Netherlands was - my eyes nearly popped out of my head when I saw it on the street - that Dutch women don’t suck in their bellies!’ Violet was so excited when she recalled this memory that she was almost shouting.

In this chapter, I would unpack their accounts of being a woman in the Netherlands and examine the social and cultural norms which are imposed on them for their gender. How do they practice their female gender and womanness and how does it compare to the situation in their home society? As a woman here in the Netherlands and a daughter being away from their original home, do they pick up the Dutch script or are they still dominated by the norms they grew up with?

Back at Violet’s place, another Taiwanese woman and I were invited for dinner on a cold winter night. We sat around the cute little table which she would move to the middle of her cozy apartment when she has people over to dine. Her heater uses gas so I could see the fire when it was on. She made sure we were all warmed up by handing us extra blankets and pouring us some Taiwanese chamomile tea. The light was dim and her MacBook was playing some soft jazz music. She cooks pretty well, especially good at Taiwanese dishes. Sometimes she would joke about leaving academia and starting a business of Taiwanese cuisine.

Born in Taiwan in the late 1980s, the time when the martial law was about to be lifted after 38 years, Violet grew up in a conservative and right-wing family: One grandpa was a police officer and the other a pastor. Her mom was a middle school teacher and her dad worked in the military. In the Taiwanese society of that time, these occupations were highly engaged in the non-democratic institution which promoted traditional Chinese cultural values.

‘I was taught by my mom to suck in my belly and sit with a modest posture.’ Then Violet climbed up to the dining chair and squat on it. ‘But squatting is always my favorite, against the wall with a cigarette in my hand. People in Taiwan would think you’re from the gangster.’

Previous literature suggests that women may migrate to escape from the gender role in the
patriarchal culture (Constable, 2005; Kelsky, 2001; Yeoh et al., 2005), whereas Yeoh et al (2005) question that if they would succeed as the social and cultural norms may follow the women across the borders. In the following sections, I argue that these norms would accompany them transnationally. But the women deploy diverse approaches, from challenging to conforming, to different sets of norms.

**Freedom: Gender Expectation and Sexuality**

‘My parents are very traditional and think girls don’t need to study too much. One contradiction was that they forced me to get good grades at school but expected me to get married right after graduation. And you have to at least get a Bachelor’s degree. I kept asking, “Then why do you want us to study?” They couldn’t answer me. They would remain silent, avoid and not answer me directly. Maybe they also know it is contradictory. Actually, they never tell others what school or major I studied. When we had guests at home, they only wanted me to stay aside and make tea. “See, my daughter behaves really well (乖 in Mandarin),”’ Summer said.

‘But if your child is well-behaved and good in school, isn’t this something worth bragging?’ I asked.

‘But I was not married yet which was a failure! Now I am married but haven’t had kids, it is a failure too. I often can’t understand what they are thinking about.’

The societies of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong have become more aware of gender issues and taken more actions to improve gender equality in general. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) of Taiwan has dropped from 0.172 in 2000 to 0.056 in 2017, which has ranked among the top ten in the world since 201110. Meanwhile, China’s GII has also decreased from 0.255 to 0.152.11 The Taiwanese society even stands out as being actively supportive of LGBTQ+ rights and became the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage in 201912.

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10 性別不平等指數 (Gender Inequality Index, GII). 行政院性別平等會 (Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan, Taiwan), 30 October 2018.
http://eng.stat.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/gender/International%20Gender/ODS/%E6%80%A7%E5%B9%B3%E7%AD%89%E6%8C%87%E6%95%B8.ods (accessed 23/07/2019)


However, the liberation for women is more embodied in the workplace compared to within the household. Also, how a woman should behave, such as their manner and body, is still undergoing gradual change. That is, women now hold more space and freedom to perform at school and work, but they are still expected to act femininely and realize the responsibility of a woman as before in other aspects of their lives.

For my research participants, finding their position and sense of belonging in the Netherlands may be complicated, but being a woman in the way they want in Dutch society, instead of the way the external structure expects, is rather easy and pleasant. Kelsky (2001) argues that turning to the West is the most important method for the Internationalist Japanese women to resist their gender expectations in Japan. These Chinese women, on the other hand, did not migrate to explicitly run away from gender expectations, though it is an additional benefit they have enjoyed. This is especially true and evident for the non-heterosexual women and can be a crucial reason they choose not to go back to their home society (yet).

In this foreign land of the Netherlands, they are challenging or even abandoning the gender expectations from Chinese culture. In Violet’s accounts, her new freedom was first gained for her posture and bodily movement. She was never the well-behaved woman her mom trained her to be and she always had to repress her “wild” side in front of her family. And because of the modest image for women which is mainstream in Taiwan, she had the idea that this side of her is considered negative. In the Netherlands among the Dutch ladies, she gets to move her body however she wishes.

Next to their liberation from gender expectations, they have also gained opportunities to explore sexuality with more and diverse options in a relatively welcoming Dutch setting. Even though Esther has struggled with the feeling of lack of belongings in the Dutch society, there is a big pleasure she has been enjoying here - sexual liberty. While making their relationship open, Esther and Tammy are also frequent to events of LGBTQ+, BDSM13 and other sex-related themes, and have befriended people who work in the sex industry. I have been enthusiastically invited to join them in these activities and even ran into Esther once


13 “BDSM” is an acronym of sexual practices including bondage and discipline (B&D), domination/submission (D/s), and sadomasochism (SM). (Weiss, 2006)
when she was on her way to an erotic film festival.

I think this is one of the positive experiences we have had here. The sexual liberty here is nice and it is part of the joy in our current life. We get to experience and to freely enjoy the environment, trying some new stuff. Like, we never thought about being a dominatrix before. But after we went to BDSM events, we found it actually quite interesting.

Meanwhile, when they went back to China for vacation this year, they found out that most of their old-time Chinese lesbian friends at their ages “went back” to the heteronormative family, got married to a man and started to have children. “We had no one to hang out with there,” Tammy said.

In China, especially in big cities, homosexuality has become more accepted by the public. However, in the recent years, the Government has taken new measures to restrict LGBTQ+ content in the media and on the internet, including censoring out the gay-related scenes from the movie Bohemian Rhapsody when it was aired in 2019. At the same time, heterosexuality is still considered to be the norm by the older generations.

What was said by Tammy describes one kind of decision making of the lesbians, or the LGBTQ+ people, in China. As people, especially women, are expected to get married and start a family at a certain age, and that same-sex marriage is not welcome nor legal in China, homosexuality is being treated by themselves as a temporary phase in the life course. The lesbian women would search for a man as a partner in order to fulfill the social expectation of marriage. Hence, the lesbian friends in China of Tammy and Esther have moved to another stage of life taking care of their husbands and children, while the two, whose sexuality and lifestyle have been recognized and nurtured by the Dutch environment, “still” identify themselves as not heterosexual and live a childless life.

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14 A dominatrix is “a woman who physically or psychologically dominates her partner in a sadomasochistic encounter”. Source: Merriam-Webster https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dominatrix (accessed 01/10/2019)

If we take a closer look at the target these women are challenging against, it is not only the social and cultural norms in the broader sense, but they also specifically and directly contest the values held by their parents. It is noteworthy that most of my research participants migrated in their early 20s right after they finished their education in home society. That is, before their migration, they either were still living with their parents or had not become fully independent from them, especially financially. Therefore, the opinions of their parents consisted of a large part of their lives.

“The sky is high above and the emperor is away (天高皇帝遠 in Mandarin),” June described her stay in the Netherlands. This saying means that you are being away from the authority so that you would be less restrained and controlled by it. Coming from Taiwan, June left home at the age of nineteen and has been in the Netherlands for almost twenty years:

Freedom is the biggest difference to me between being in the Netherlands and in Taiwan. I am here alone, and I am the only person whom I need to be responsible for.

Thus, freedom is not necessarily gained because they are in the Netherlands. It is, instead, largely due to the fact that they are being away from their parents and home society.

Apart from passively refusing the assigned role for women, they also actively practice the person they want to be. Kelsky (2001) points out that the internationalist Japanese women in 1980s started to refuse the demands of family and gender expectations which stemmed from its outdated patriarchal culture due to increasing popularity of individualism (個としての生き方 in Japanese).

Zola is in her early 30s and has been in the Netherlands for ten years. Unlike most of my research participants who grew up or at some point moved to the metropolis in China or Taiwan, Zola stayed at her hometown in South-Central China all the way until she left for the Netherlands.

When I was still in China, I felt like I was no one but a ‘daughter’ who could never grow up. When you are a ‘daughter’ by parents’ side, you have to do the things they want and would only get their values and views of life. I wanted to explore what values belong to myself, so I left for adventure. When I am abroad, I am who I am. I don't
know if I am a woman, a man or a whoever. But I can be the real me and do whatever I want. That is the feeling of freedom.

As Sooudi (2014) argues for self-searching, displacement is a crucial factor. When being elsewhere, one would, at last, be who he/she wants to be and should be. Not only was the eyeing from the parents was stripped away from Zola, the physical aloneness and difficulty for instant communication with her parents due to time difference also create her the opportunity to grow out from the mindset of a daughter and to invest in herself.

**Gender Roles in the Netherlands**

However, it is not to say that Dutch society does not assign certain gender roles and responsibilities to women. These women have also received “inquiries” and “suggestions” from their Dutch counterparts, especially on motherhood. According to the Emancipation Monitor (*De Emancipatiemonitor* in Dutch) 2018 of the Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* in Dutch) and to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* in Dutch), more than 4 out of 10 women work less or stop after the birth of the first child. It has been commonly accepted in the Netherlands to have the mother to take care of the children, instead of sending them to babysitter or daycare. Thus, the majority of working women in the Netherlands work part-time to combine employment and caregiving on their own (Portegijs and Keuzenkamp ed., 2008).

June is now married to a Dutch partner with whom she raised a daughter together. She sent her daughter to daycare and went back to work after giving birth to her for less than one year. She also often goes on vacation alone without bringing her husband and now-teenage daughter. Apparently, these acts have taken her Dutch colleagues by surprise, who assume a mother could be working but at the same time should be playing the main role of the caretaker of the children. While finding the comments funny, June takes them rather easily:

Dutch people comment less on how a woman should be. This doesn’t mean that they don’t have their own opinions. Rather, the Dutch or Western society values personal

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Yet, apart from being given more individual space, there is another aspect of these migrants’ lives which should be taken into consideration - they are distant from the mainstream society and gender discourse. Zola, the Chinese woman who was introduced in the section above, said:

In China, you would be more sensitive to the expectations of your parents, family members and the society. There are also expectations here [in the Netherlands] too, but you are not sensitive. Because you are outside the circle, you don’t have to accept those expectations.

Therefore, paradoxically, the sense that they are not fully included in Dutch society also grants them this freedom. They are “protected” by the “privilege” of being an outsider. Similar to my arguments from in Chapter 3, the fact that these women are often seen as outsiders in Dutch society and rather invisible somehow distances them from the gender norms in mainstream Dutch society. They are the cultural Other.

In addition to the role of motherhood, there is, however, another social gaze that these Chinese women are highly aware and cautious of “Yellow Fever”, the fetish over (East) Asian women (and men) in the sphere of romance and sex. (Zheng, 2016) In the Dutch context, the sexuality of Asian women is represented to be submissive and ultrafeminine (Wekker, 2016).

My research participants have consciously stayed clear from being targeted with this sexualized and racialized stereotype in the dating scene. “I won’t give the guy a chance at all if I learn he has Yellow Fever,” one reacted to my question. The ones who have had relationships with (white) Western men in the Netherlands have not experienced this stereotype from their partners and the social circles of the partners. At the same time, the two white Dutch male partners I interviewed for the research also reported that they have never thought about this stereotype during their relationship and none of their family or close friends ever brings it up. “I know there are people who think like this, but not in my social circle,” they replied.

This shows a gap from the previous literature (Constable, 2005; Kelsky, 2001). It argued that
by marrying (white) Western men, Asian women get to fulfill their search for Western modernity and the less traditional moral values. Meanwhile, Western men expect more traditional characters from an Asian wife and to enhance their masculinity by wedding obedient and docile Asian women.

On the contrary, in the accounts of my participants, both sides of the relationship share the same answer, “I am with this person because of this person”, not their race or sexuality. Here I return to the argument from the previous chapter - their social class status shapes the racialized and gendered experiences of these Chinese women and the intersectionality of class, race and gender shall be taken into consideration.

**Limits of Freedom: Responsibility and Obligation**

Next to the freedom which they have enjoyed in the Netherlands, there are also limits to it for being women. Esther did not come out to her mother until her mother started to worry about her marital status:

‘Why aren’t you getting married yet?’ This became the only thing we talked about on the phone. So, after a while, I told my mom that I like women - and she said she already found out herself. But then she said, ‘It doesn’t matter that you like women. You still need to get married! Marriage is a social responsibility. How can you not be responsible?’

On the agreement with her mother, Esther went back to China, bringing a gay friend of her and they “acted” out a husband-wife wedding for Esther’s father and relatives. At that time, she had already reunited with Tammy in the Netherlands.

In the previous section, I examined how these women reject the gender expectation back from home society of being feminine while exploring sexuality and self-independence. They challenge the norms they had acquired and further practice individualism and feminism in Dutch society. However, in this section, I will look at the other end of the spectrum - how they conform to other parts of the norms, especially to the family concept, due to their sense of responsibility, or even obligation to their parents.
From Esther’s fake wedding, I read two targets which the responsibility aims at: the parents (and relatives) and the home society. As I mentioned in the previous section, their parents’ opinions take up a large part of their pre-migration lives. Yet, after they migrated, the voices of the parents are still audible, no matter if the daughters act upon or against. It can be understood that the opinions of parents still influence the daughter’s life. In Esther’s case, she attended to her mother’s worry and wish, despite the fact that it was nothing she wanted for herself and that she has had a long-time partner of her choice. At the same time, her fake wedding would free herself from the monotonous international phone call with her mother.

One similar “performance” has also been given out by another research participant of mine. Melody, originally from China, has been in the Netherlands for seven years and has a long-term Dutch boyfriend. They have registered as a married couple in the Netherlands, but the initial reason was mainly to secure her civil rights and residence permit. Melody still calls him “boyfriend”:

> We didn’t intentionally label this. I still prefer to call him my ‘boyfriend’. But when I go back home to China, I would change it [to call him husband]. The act of going home itself is a show anyway. I only see them once or twice a year. As long as everyone is happy.

Neither Melody nor Esther seeks marriage, in the sense of a union to mark the relationship with their partner, at this stage of their lives, whereas they are both aware of its importance to their family back home. As a result, regardless if they are officially married to a husband, marriage is used as a means to fulfill the expectation on the surface, mainly in order to sustain the relationship with the family back home.

Another target for which they have social responsibility and obligation is the home society as a whole, or even an imagined public. Daisy, now in her late 40s and originally from Taiwan, has been in the Netherlands for almost twenty years. She arrived at first to pursue her Master’s study with the plan to study for her Ph.D. degree in the UK afterward. However, she got married almost right after she finished her Master’s program. By that time, she had received two Master’s degrees and went freshly into her 30s.

> ‘Why did you think it is your responsibility to get married?’ I asked Daisy at the porch
of her house. She, her teenage son and I were heading to the café where she works every weekend. ‘I asked your dad yesterday if he and your mom had this expectation for you, and he said never.’

‘No, they did not. But... I just thought it was my responsibility for the society... Like what it sings in our high school anthem. How do you sing that?’ Last night we found out that we went to the same girls’ high school back in Taiwan.

‘Taking good care of your family and governing well your nation (齊家治國 in Mandarin), shoulder the responsibilities... Glorify all women in the society.’ I sang out the lyrics and realized for the first time how strongly doctrinal they are.

‘Yes, that part.’

Daisy’s stories are especially fascinating and puzzling for me. She left Taiwan for her study with ambition and a clear plan for a career in academia and had no anticipation for marriage. “I never want to be a woman,” she said. But all of a sudden she chose the domestic path into marriage and motherhood when a gap between her academic timeline kicked in, after she finished her Master’s and before she applied for Ph.D., along with the fact that she went fresh into her 30s. Being in their 30s is the latest marriageable age for women considered by Chinese society. She was carrying out the responsibility for no specific person, as well as embodied the social norms and established gender roles in Chinese societies as a whole for women to reproduce and be domesticized. It echoes the character of “social responsibility” in marriage which was held by Esther’s mother when she asked her non-heterosexual daughter to marry a man.

In addition to painstakingly responding, or even approving, their parents’ wishes and expectations, these women are more likely to actively carry out their responsibility when it comes to the caretaking of their parents. It is one of the main reasons which would make them consider return migration in the long term. However, it shall be kept in mind that most of my research participants are in their 20s and 30s, are still on the way to realize their aspiration for self-actualization and career and have no children of their own. Therefore, they only see return migration as a possible option in the future. Some of them have planned to move their long-term career trajectory toward their home country, including switching to job positions that require working between the Netherlands and East Asia.
The Conflict: Self and Individualism vs. Family and Collectivism

Back in Chapter 1, Fion said she may go back to Hong Kong to take care of her parents one day, which her Dutch partner Wouter would never understand. I asked Wouter nervously for his feedback on Fion’s remark during our interview. It was the first time I met him without Fion’s presence.

‘Taking care of your parents I understand. But yeah, for her, I’d almost say ‘religious’. There’s something fanatical about it. And for me, it’s more situational. [But] I don’t think it’s a categorical difference - I think it’s a difference in degree.’ When comparing his attitude towards his parents to Fion’s towards her parents, Wouter mentioned ‘autonomy/ous’ twice. ‘This is also the way my parents taught me to think about these kinds of things. It's very different from how Fion thinks about it. My parents really appreciate individual autonomy. If [my mother] would have the feeling that she would be a trouble to me, she would really dislike it. So if I would go out of my way to be there for her, she would not like that and almost chase me away. She is an autonomous woman who is powerful. She can take care of herself.’

From Wouter’s remark, I read two concepts which are crucial to my analysis: First is filial piety (孝 [xiào] in Mandarin), which was described by him as “religious” or “fanatical”. Another is the comparison between collectivism versus individualism.

Family has been a central unit in Chinese culture while filial piety, a Confucian virtue, is deeply involved in governing the parent-child relationship. Traditionally, filial piety is concerned with showing respect and reverence, being obedient and providing care to parents, as well as continuing the family line by having children. (Cheng and Chan 2006; Li, 2011) In this sense, filial piety also implies authority and hierarchy between parent and child. (Li et al., 2010)

Due to modernization, industrialization and the development of sociopolitical structures in contemporary Chinese societies, changes have been introduced to the family structure and the essence of filial piety in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. The communist ideology in China, in principle, discards the authority of parents, which was at its peak during the Cultural Revolution between the year 1966 to 1976. At the same time, the Taiwanese government held
itself as the successor of traditional Chinese culture to distinguish the nation from Communist China. As for Hong Kong, it underwent a high degree of Westernization because of the British colonization (Yeh et al., 2013). However, despite the content of filial piety has altered and the adherence has loosened, Yeh et al. (2013) find out that the concept itself still remains important in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong.

The sense of responsibility to the parents, as well as the society, stems from filial piety. On the one hand, children expected to take care of their parents physically and emotionally. On the other hand, children should be grateful for the parents and should strive to return their kindness of nurturing. One participant Zola said:

I think it’s hard to return the kindness (恩情 in Mandarin) of parents after all. But it wouldn’t work either just by you going back to them for good. I think the real way to return them is to live a good life for yourself or try your best to contribute to the society. If you can do something for the society, they as your parents would get honored (添光 in Mandarin) too.

Making the parents, and even the extended family, honored by one’s conduct is a way to return them. This can be understood as a character from the collectivism of Chinese culture. Hofstede (1991) argues that, in a collectivist society, people are “integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups”. Collectivists tend to see themselves as a member of a cohesive in-group, follow the social norms more closely (Sinha et al., 2001; Zha et al., 2006), and, in the context of Chinese culture, make other in-group members proud and appear better. By comparison, in an individualistic setting, each person’s independence is foregrounded and the ties between individuals are loose (Hofstede, 1991). Individualism has been seen as an essential feature in many Western cultures. (Zha et al., 2006)

Zola’s account displays the interplay of individualism and collectivism. She focuses on advancing herself while it can, in turn, be used as a method to carry out the expectations from family and society. Kelsky argues that the internationalist Japanese women in fact never fully accepted internationalism and “aligned themselves with internationalism at different points in their lives (2001:87).” Yet, I contest that, in the cases of these Chinese women, they adopt both individualistic and collectivistic approaches simultaneously and apply them respectively to different categories of their lives, or sometimes even to one same category. Many
participants throughout this thesis have shown this complexity. On the one hand, they exert their individualistic pursuit in their practice of gender and sexuality, career, self-actualization and agency of being migrants. On the other hand, they tend to respond to the sense of responsibility as a daughter to be attentive to parents’ wishes and a woman for marriage, which they have acquired from a collectivist Chinese society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on their experiences as Chinese women in Dutch society. While they explore the freedom in the Netherlands, the social norms of gender expectations from the Chinese patriarchal culture and the voices of their parents still follow them across the border. The Netherlands has provided them with more freedom to practice their female gender and sexuality. Furthermore, the fact they are away from their home society also plays an important role, as the scrutiny from the home society and the parents are stripped away. As I argued in Chapter 2, sometimes it is about being “elsewhere” in order to practice oneself. However, there is still a certain amount of gaze for the women from the Dutch society that these migrants have to deal with. Among them, the so-called “Yellow Fever”, Asian fetish, echoes the previous literature of the union between white Western men and non-Western women. Yet, the participants of mine have been cautious about and stayed away from this sexualized racialized stereotype. Here I argue that the intersectionality of class, gender and race shall be taken into consideration of their experiences.

At the other end of the spectrum, these women have faced limits which stems from their sense of responsibility for family back home and the gender social norms of the home society. Marriage is a recurring topic among them in the interaction with their parents. While they may not necessarily fancy marriage for themselves, it is an expectation they often still respond though in various ways. For a Chinese woman in Dutch society, a conflict between self and individualism versus family and collectivism is present. Filial piety in Chinese culture is still a crucial notion which highly values family. Hence, when being in an individualistic society, these women are sometimes struck between individualism and collectivism. Moreover, they may deploy different approaches in different aspects of their lives.
Chapter 5. Conclusion

Looking back this year in Amsterdam, I never expected it to be this difficult - to be miles away from home all by myself and trying to build a life again from zero. During the fieldwork, I heard stories of hardship and happiness from these migrant women. They are mostly doing well enough now but some still shed a few tears when recalling the older days. After I came back from the field, I was struck by the stress from thesis writing as well as the daily life of being a migrant. As I went back to the recordings and notes from the field over and over again, the past of the women started to become a mirror and reflect my present. I did not only hear their experiences as a researcher, but I am also living them now as well.

This project was inspired by the migrant women friends of mine. With this thesis, I have examined the experiences of independent highly skilled Chinese female migrants in the Netherlands and answered the research question: **How do independent highly skilled Chinese female migrants in the Netherlands negotiate among their desires for transnational mobility, racialized and gendered stereotypes and cross-border family relations?**

In Chapter 1. Introduction, I have presented the theoretical framework and setting for the research. A bulk of existing studies on migrant women shares the premise of migration via marriage, in which the agency of women is sometimes downplayed. By focusing on women who migrate independently, I have contended that they should also be understood as actors with agency in cross-border migration. In the cases of Asian women migrating to the West, the racialized and gendered stereotypes are often at play. While the Western society often regards Asian women as, for example, obedient and less competent, the Asian migrant women often expect to embrace Western modernity through finding a Western man, as argued by Kelsky (2001). This thesis builds on Kelsky’s work, yet the focus was shifted to the migrant women's desires for the West through self-actualization and transnational mobility (Sooudi, 2014). Meanwhile, this research departs from the literature on low skilled migrants by examining the professional and private domains of highly skilled migrant women. Specifically, I have analyzed their experiences of race and racism in the Netherlands. Lastly, within the field of transnational family relations, I have studied these women as the daughter who is being away while parents remain home. I have contended that the patriarchal culture also crosses the border with the women and that the women are constantly responding
to family responsibility and gender expectations from their home society.

In Chapter 2, the focus is placed on the desires and motivation behind the migration of these Chinese women. The Western influence in the politics, colonial history and mass culture of the society of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong has shaped these women’s imagination of the West. While the American factor has played the main role in Taiwan and China, Hong Kong was largely influenced by the UK for being its colony. I have argued that there are three threads of desires behind the motivation for these women’s migration. Firstly, it is the desire of the West. Similar to the findings of Kelsky (2001), my participants often expressed their ideal destination as the West in the whole, without particularly differentiating which country they aimed at. They desire the modernity, freedom and career opportunities in the West. What is different from Kelsky’s Japanese women is that this group of independent highly skilled Chinese female migrants do not long for a Western (male) partner in order to achieve their own migration, though they do not reject the possibility to find love and partner in the host country.

In addition, these women’s desire for self-actualization also plays a strong role. Sooudi (2014) finds that Japanese youth migrated to New York to reset themselves in the artistic career in the hope of “jibun sagashi”, search for self. By comparison, my participants’ self-actualization is often marked by their pursuit of higher education overseas. Education is a crucial strategy they deployed, as it helps the reproduction of their social class after arriving in the Netherlands and decreases the risk of de-skilling in the Dutch job market. Thirdly, they migrated also for the sake of transnational mobility. The Netherlands is not always their ideal destination but a compromise for going Westbound. Whether they chose the Netherlands deliberately or not, few of them are planning to settle here permanently. Moving on to the next destination or moving back home are both possible options. Their current stay in the Netherlands is merely one of the stops along their trajectory of transnational mobility.

In Chapter 3, I have examined their experiences regarding race and racism as Chinese women in Dutch society. I have analyzed the contradiction presented in the accounts from my research participants, whether the Netherlands is racist or not, by introducing the concept of everyday racism (Essed, 2002). I have argued that racism can be understood as both discourse and experience. Some of the women verbally dismissed the existence of racism as they have not encountered directly blatant and violent discriminations. Meanwhile, racialized
stereotypes and microaggressions are commonly experienced, and lack of sense of belonging and cultural differences can be seen as the echoes of these experiences.

I have contended that racism towards the group of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands does exist though in a milder and nuanced manner and in the everyday environment. The popular discourse of racism does not cover everyday racism since there is a color-blind narrative in Dutch society, as well as in the European context. These facts prevent this kind of racism from being identified and discussed. Moreover, the minority often engage in complicity by staying silent in order to avoid further victimization. Additionally, I have argued that the social class of these migrant women also leads to the contradiction. The intersectionality of class and race shall be considered. Their middle and above class status shields them, to a certain extent, from more blatant forms of racism. The notion of “model minority” from the American context can be deployed here. Asian migrants are often seen as hardworking and trouble-free or even acquiring a lifestyle of the mainstream White. Lastly, the fact that these women are often seen as the outsider of the Dutch society renders them more invisible, which makes them less likely to be a target of blatant racism.

In Chapter 4, I have analyzed their experiences of being a woman in the Netherlands and how they negotiate the social norms of gender and family responsibility in a transnational context. In general, they enjoy a higher degree of freedom as a woman in the Netherlands because the Dutch society places fewer expectations on how women should behave, compared to the Chinese patriarchal culture. It is noteworthy that this freedom is not only granted by the Dutch environment but also by the fact that they are being away from the home society, family and parents. However, they are also under other sets of Dutch gaze for Asian women, especially the so-called “Yellow Fever”. While these women are highly aware of this racialized and gendered stereotype, most of them only have minor experience of this kind. Here I return to the argument from the previous chapter that the intersectionality of class, gender and race matters when shaping their experiences in the Netherlands.

Next to the freedom which they have gained in Dutch society, there are also limits which are linked to their sense of responsibility for the family in their home society. I have argued that even though they are physically away from their home society, the social norms and patriarchal culture follow them across the borders, no matter they choose to challenge or obey the norms. Furthermore, often the opinions from their parents are still audible and cannot be
neglected. This verifies the finding of Yeoh et al. (2005) that transnationalism sometimes may fail to transcend the locally-oriented norms. There are also conflicts between individualism and collectivism. The former is what the migrant women have been pursuing and experiencing in the Netherlands whereas the latter is what they have acquired back in the home society and still influences their decisions. There is no clear cut between the two sets of values as the women often embody them simultaneously.

With the thesis, I wish to contribute to the ethnography of independent highly skilled migrant women with an emphasis on their agency. Despite the fact that the challenges they have faced are often ignored compared to the ones faced by low skilled migrants, they have also experienced adversity and had even doubts about the path they are taking. Some of the women expressed that they looked forward to my thesis to understand who they are and to get some answers for their own confusion. They are also seeking some kind of sense of belongings through my project.

One woman told me in tears, “It has been very difficult...” Another woman who is now content with her current life in the Netherlands said, “I think you’ll like it here too as soon as you find your place here.” With my admiration of their bravery and achievements, I dedicate this thesis to all the women who participated in my research.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Due to the lack of relevant literature on highly skilled Chinese female migrants in the West, my thesis is mainly built on the literature of Japanese female migrants (Kelsky, 2001; Sooudi, 2014) with some studies of Indian migrants (Baas, 2016; Kõua and Baileya, 2014 and 2017). Additionally, the English-language researches on the fourth wave of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands are not yet common. As much as I have tried my best to analyze my data independently, there are still possibilities that my theoretical framework is not tightly linked to the situation of my participants, as they share different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, I also had difficulty finding similar literature on independent highly skilled female migrants for my theoretical framework. I hope that this exploratory study has mapped out various aspects of the lives of these Chinese women and demonstrated several crucial issues that are relevant for future researches.
In regard to their desires for the West, I propose the possibility to further dive into the imagination of the West in the contemporary societies of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. While they long for the West for its modernity, there is also a narrative of worship. In the meantime, the Westbound migrants are often accomplices by only reporting, what Sooudi (2014) calls, the triumphalist migrant narrative. I have gained similar impressions over my fieldwork as the adversity is often described as secondary or taken-for-granted in the discourse.

Next, my arguments on their experiencing of race and racism in the Netherlands are almost solely based on their own words. This is largely due to my limited command of the Dutch language. Future researches should try to include the perspectives of the mainstream Dutch society, for example by examining how the media presents the Chinese migrants in the country or by recruiting more Dutch participants.

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, I share with my research participants the inability to speak Dutch (and a lot worse than them) even though I speak the same mother tongue as them. My A1-leveled listening and speaking skills in Dutch helped me conduct a few participant observations with more details. But there are still abundant obstacles that prevent me from getting more first-hand insights on the spot. Ironically, in a way, I also experienced the sense of being left out as my participants reported.

Regarding the setting of my research participants, I chose the group of culturally Chinese people from the societies of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong, on the premise that there is a shared Chinese culture among these three societies. My point of departure was the family concept and gender expectations in the Chinese culture, which, I assumed, make these women admirable for their achievement in the Netherlands. I recognize that this premise is debatable and worthy of challenging. As these three societies have taken very different paths of social and political developments in the past one hundred years and more, the difference has only been getting more and more severe. And people of these places have started to identify more with the nation/region. It is very likely that the findings would be different if the setting is decided upon their, for example, nationality.

While my positionality as a researcher and a Taiwanese student migrant granted me access to build rapport with my participants rather easily, it has been a challenge for me to distance
myself from the data I have collected from these women and their points of view while in the
field and during thesis writing. However, my similar background and condition have also
facilitated my access to a more insider perspective. The balance of the emic and etic point of
view is what I have strived for during the whole project.

Finally, to echo how I started this chapter, after I came back from the field, I have begun to
realize and believe that the emotions that these migrants have experienced and expressed are
very significant for studies about migration and migrants. This is something I did not expect
even after I entered the field. At least four of my research participants have explicitly
expressed that they have suffered from bad mental health at some point during their stay in
the Netherlands. As there is academic and social relevance in examining their desires for
migration, experiencing racialized and gendered stereotypes and transnational family
relations, I acknowledge that their emotions also deserve serious consideration, especially
within academia. After all, emotions are something they have to deal with on a daily basis, if
not minutely.
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