

Being a Mother in a Strange Land

Being a Mother in a Strange Land:

*Motherhood Experiences of
Chinese Migrant Women
in the Netherlands*

By

Shu-Yi Huang

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Being a Mother in a Strange Land:
Motherhood Experiences of Chinese Migrant Women in the Netherlands

By Shu-Yi Huang

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2019 by Shu-Yi Huang

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3204-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3204-5

To my mother, Mrs. Li-Jen Chen and my significant other Shu-Wen Cheng, for making me a better person with strength and freedom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One.....	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two.....	27
Methodology	
Chapter Three.....	40
Motherhood Discourse in Western Feminism and Chinese Confucianism	
Chapter Four.....	72
Running a Restaurant Downstairs and Raising Children Upstairs: Working-class Chinese Mothers in the Netherlands	
Chapter Five.....	105
Language Issues for Chinese Migrant Women	
Chapter Six.....	134
“Too much rice, no potatoes?”: Dealing with Everyday Racism and Discrimination	
Chapter Seven.....	172
First-Generation Chinese Immigrant Women’s Experience of Using Kraamzorg (Maternity Care Service) in the Netherlands	
Chapter Eight.....	181
Drifting Lilies without Roots: Diasporic Subjects and Reflection on Motherhood	
Chapter Nine.....	199
Conclusions	
References.....	205

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Significance of the Rise of Chinese Migration to the Netherlands

It was a coincidence that 2011, being the first year and the first time of my arrival (January 3rd) in the Netherlands, marked the anniversary of one century of migration for the Dutch Chinese immigrants. One hundred years ago, a group of Chinese seamen were brought to a Rotterdam dock to fill the labour shortage because of a union strike (van Heek, 1936). During that year, several celebratory activities were held,¹ with the peak of the celebration being the One Hundred Lions Dance Festival in Dam Square in Amsterdam on July 9th, 2011. It was a beautiful sunny day; I was really excited while standing with people from all over the globe. With the drums and gongs exploding into sound, the city was bustling with life. Following the Lions' parade to China Town, I was surrounded by various languages, such as Mandarin, Dutch, Cantonese, and English. The variety of languages represents the various origins of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands.

My research motivation was a spinoff from this Lions' Dance and March, as if it came to me all by itself. I was following the march and taking several photos when I saw a lion resting on the sidewalk. After taking off the lion costume, to my surprise, it was a woman and a teenage boy (See figure 1-1). This woman then passed a bottle to the boy: I presumed that they were mother and son. This scene immediately drew my attention and intrigued my curiosity. Observing the parade closely until the

¹ The celebration activities included a special exhibition in the Amsterdam History Museum, the 100 Lions' Dance and Parade in Amsterdam and some public speeches. A website built by The Foundation 100 Years Chinese People in the Netherlands, <http://www.100jaarchinezen.nl/>, introduced the rich cultural values and business success of Chinese people who have successfully integrated into Dutch society. Unfortunately, when I rechecked this website in 2013, it had already gone offline.

end, I discovered couples of mothers and children, or fathers and their daughters, dressed in pairs as lions. I had watched lion and dragon-dancing during festivals several times a year in Taiwan; however, this was the first time I had seen women performing the lion dance. Traditional Chinese folk dancing, such as the lion and dragon dance in Hong Kong and Taiwan, is considered a very masculine activity. The scene I witnessed was a breakthrough of a gendered social custom. The more exciting discovery was that it occurred in Western Europe. These migrant Chinese women participating that day were not only writing a whole new chapter of history by passing down the culture but also deconstructing the male-dominant custom at the same time. From that moment, I started to think about migrant Chinese motherhood practice in the Netherlands. I am curious about their real life experiences as migrant Chinese women in a non-English speaking Western European country where the size of the Chinese community is smaller than that in North America.²

During these four years of my doctorate study, the bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and the People's Republic of China (PRC) has become closer. For instance, in November 2013, Mandarin was officially made one of the optional second foreign-language topics in Dutch secondary schools. In March 2014, Jinping Xi, President of the PRC, had an intensive eight-day state visit to four European countries – the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Belgium, and Xi also visited the headquarters of UNESCO and the European Union. During his visit, Xi signed bilateral trade contracts worth nearly €1.5 billion.³ It is noteworthy that the Dutch government is eager to develop and secure more cultural and economic reciprocity with China, which indicates the significance of the PRC as a rising global power. It suffices to say that Chinese migration research in the Netherlands has more contemporary importance than before.

Chinese migration study has become an important aspect of global migration trends. With the increasing numbers of Chinese migrants

² According to the Netherlands' Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), until 2011 the total number of Chinese in the Netherlands was 76860; see later in this chapter for more information. As for the number of Chinese immigrants in the USA, according to the annual report of Migration Policy Institute (MPI), the number of Chinese immigrants in the United States had reached an estimated 1.8 million in 2010. See <http://migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states> (access date July 28, 2011).

³ News resource: Dutch News.nl, Monday March 24, 2014. See: http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2014/03/dutch_and_chinese_firms_sign_1.php (access date March 25, 2014).

crossing borders to settle down or sojourn in major European cities whilst building up their own communities, several researchers have studied Chinese immigration and emigration in Western Europe under various perspectives, e.g. Chinese migration chains (Pieke, 1998), Chinese identities (Flemming, 1998),⁴ Chinese labour (Griffin, 1973), Chinese emigrant ties (Watsons, 1977) and Mandarin learning among Chinese migrants in Western Europe (Liber, 2013).⁵ Chinese migration to the Netherlands, according to Pieke, has a unique pattern. “The Netherlands is at the crossroads of at least five migration waves: its Chinese community includes Cantonese, Zhejiangese,⁶ Southeast Asians (from Indonesia and Vietnam), and a rapidly growing group of Fujianese⁷” (1998: 8).

Throughout this book, I use the phrase Chinese migrants or immigrant Chinese instead of the term “ethnic Chinese” to indicate Chinese people in the Netherlands, unless scholars use “ethnic Chinese” in their work. I find the definition of “ethnic Chinese” to be controversial and very Dutch, for two reasons. First, most Chinese migration studies in English-speaking countries use the country’s name in front of Chinese, such as “American Chinese”; “Canadian Chinese” or “Australian Chinese” instead of “ethnic Chinese”. Second, there is an inconsistent definition of “ethnic Chinese” between Dutch academic usage and Dutch official usage which lacks a thorough elaboration. For instance, in the recent doctorate dissertation by Cha-Hsuan Liu, ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands is defined as “all people of Chinese origin born in Chinese-speaking regions (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau) or coming from other countries (such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Surinam), as well as the later generations of ethnic Chinese born in the Netherlands” (2014: 17). Liu explains later that her definition of ethnic Chinese follows Pieke & Benton’s 1995 work. Yet Liu also indicates that this definition is different to the Dutch official usage in which only people originating from Chinese-

⁴ Christiansen, Flemming. 1998. “Chinese Identity in Europe.” Pp. 42–63.

⁵ Liber, Marylène. 2013. ““When You Look Chinese, You Have to Speak Chinese”: Highly Skilled Chinese Migrants in Switzerland and the Promotion of a Shared Language.” Pp. 134–159.

⁶ Zhejiang is an eastern coastal province of the PRC and it is a rather wealthy province with 18 economic and technology development zones. Because of its coastal position and economic advantages, most upper and middle-class families take the opportunity to emigrate abroad for a better life or education. It is also a famous *qiaoxiang*, the home county of Chinese immigrants.

⁷ Like Zhejiang, Fujian is a coastal province of the PRC. Because of its geographic position, from the 18th century, increasing numbers of Fujianese emigrated to Taiwan or South Eastern Asian areas to escape from famine and war. Fujianese are famous for their international trade and pirate business.

speaking regions are taken into account. Thus, I tend to use Chinese migrants or immigrant Chinese interchangeably in this book.



Fig.1-1 Mother and son resting during the lion parade. Field note September 07, 2011 shoot by Shu-Yi, Huang.

This research is located at the crossroads, and the intersection, of three disciplines: gender studies, Chinese migration studies and Dutch migration studies. The very structural intersectionality of first-generation immigrant Chinese women's lives is never elaborated and/or systematically illustrated either in the field of gender studies or in Dutch migration studies. This research aims to 1) rewrite history from a gendered perspective, 2) hear migrant women's voices on motherhood practices, and 3) conceptualise migrant women's experiences through a critical reading.

In the field of gender studies, this research places women and gendered politics in the centre to challenge the methodological foundations of traditional migration studies, which continue to treat women as "additional historical subject matter" (Scott, 1991: 53),⁸ marginalising women's voices and experiences in the representation of migration from their

⁸ Scott, Joan. 1991. "Women's History." Pp. 42–66.

country of origin as well as in the host country. From the data I gathered, gendered power had immersed itself in migrant women's life cycle before and after emigration. Before emigration, in contrast with others, the working-class women in this study had to give up the opportunity to continue their higher education because of their gender and class. They were expected to enter the labour market at a very young age to contribute financially to their families. Most of them came to the Netherlands through quick match-making marriages because of the shortage of young single Chinese females in the Netherlands, and because of the gendered expectations from their natal families. Moreover, they are not only care-givers and domestic workers in the private domain but also non-paid family business employees. In order to combine their work and motherhood, these Chinese women often managed their restaurants downstairs while raising their children upstairs. They also developed mutual cooperation by either preparing a nursing room at the back of the restaurant or babysitting for each-other in order to fulfil their responsibilities as mothers and as wives.

I argue that my study shows the gendered characteristic of Chinese chain-migration means women outnumber men from the second stage of Chinese migration to the Netherlands, and emigration does not liberate women from their gender roles. From the shared experiences of ten working-class migrant women, I found that one male Chinese would bring two female Chinese to this country, one as his spouse and the other as his mother or mother-in-law, brought here to take care of her grandchildren and share the domestic chores. Although working-class migrant women still took the gendered responsibility for children, as time went by, they often became much more autonomous in decision-making in their conjugal relationship. For example, I found migrant women were more willing to learn Dutch because of the financial benefits to their business; when their Dutch proficiency passes that of their husbands; they become the main information collector in the household. They not only control the household and business management but also make decisions about their children's education. Furthermore, migrant Chinese women indeed have the potential to reverse gendered inequality through Dutch learning and individual hard work.

Meanwhile, the experiences of the middle-class Chinese migrant women were different. These women were treated relatively more gender equal before marriage and emigration, as well as being financially independent and more career-oriented. However, most of them had to face a career-downward situation after emigration. They soon found out that, unlike their working-class counterparts, they were hard pressed to find an

ideal job in the Netherlands because of the language barrier and racial discrimination in the labour market. They became financially and emotionally dependent on their husbands, and most of them felt they were losing even more bargaining power in their conjugal relationship. Hence, most of them focused on their motherhood practices and paid close attention to their children's education. Because of their perception of Dutch society, middle-class Chinese migrant women took their children's academic performance and language education very seriously and they had the time and financial resources to be able to do so. They hoped that their children would change their cultural capital of bilingualism into material capital in the future; thus, they valued the children's English and Mandarin proficiency more than Dutch. They expected that their children would be able to benefit from both Western and Chinese cultural capital through learning English and Mandarin, which would lead to promising possibilities for them. As one middle-class woman said about her small daughter, "She can be anyone, the world is her stage". Also, on the basis of women's retirement plans, I found that the *quanxi* (personal network), instead of country of origin, is the decisive factor for Chinese migrant women. They plan for their retirement according to their care-giving roles in the family. This dissertation shows that attention to gender allows researchers to point to such patterns in both experiences and expectations.

In the field of Dutch migration studies, this research aims to bring women's voices and gender in women's daily experiences into the centre. Early Dutch studies of Chinese migration focused on fact-finding, which mainly concentrated on its estimated numbers, areas of origin, residential distribution, and occupations. In contrast, this research aims to offer an alternative example for Dutch migration studies by making sense of migrant people's reception by the host country by conducting interviews and participant observation. Two Dutch scholars, Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako (2006), remind us that Dutch minority/migration studies are intensely lacking in independence from governmental policy and are slanted towards dominant interests without critical reflection and intersectional thinking. Hence, Dutch migration studies become majority-interest oriented; as Essed and Nimako call it, a "minority research industry". Unlike the projects of the mainstream Dutch migration studies, the subject of this research is Chinese migrant women. I put their post-emigration life experience and narratives in the front and centre. In short, this research is part of an ongoing Chinese migration history in the Netherlands on the one hand; and on the other hand, it breaks with that tradition to present Dutch Chinese migration studies from a gendered, transnational, grassroots, Critical Chineseness perspective. In sum, this

research speaks from the margin to the centre, from minority to majority, with feminist and intersectional perspectives.

Here I want to give a brief review on the mainstream Dutch Chinese migration studies. The first Dutch study on Chinese migration was published in 1936 by van Heek, who roughly described the Chinese neighbourhoods and occupations mainly in Rotterdam. Benton & Vermeulen (1987) analysed the diverse geographical origins of Chinese migration. Pieke & Benton (1998) described the general demography and migration patterns of Dutch Chinese overseas. Besides, as minority ethnic groups, comparative studies were being conducted between Dutch Chinese and South African Chinese to evaluate the differences and degrees of their social integration or segregation (Pieke & Harris, 1998).⁹

Within the past two decades, scholars have started to pay attention to the internal dynamics and power relations within Dutch Chinese communities; however, this kind of research required Mandarin or Cantonese linguistic skills to acquire insider information. For instance, Minghuan Li, a native Mandarin-speaking government-sponsored researcher from southern China, who is capable of speaking in English, Mandarin and Cantonese,¹⁰ studied the isolated *peranakan*¹¹ Chinese in the Netherlands; she argued that because of the language and cultural loss of Peranakan Chinese, in general, they have little interaction with other Chinese who come from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. Later, Li investigated the development of voluntary Chinese associations (1999) and the number of Chinese students and scholars in academic fields in the Dutch higher education system (2002 in Nyiri & Saveliev).¹² Meeuwse (2010) reviewed Chinese migration history from 1911 and described daily life in Chinatowns in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. However, due to her Mandarin linguistic limitations, Meeuwse was only able to conduct interviews with second or third-generation Dutch Chinese. Recently, the issue of senior Chinese health care (Liu et al., 2008) and mental health (Liu et al., 2011) were investigated. Nonetheless, the number of Dutch Chinese migration studies is still rare. I have noted only one publication that studies the beliefs on mental illness of the Chinese in the West (Liu et al., 2013)

⁹ Pieke, Frank N. & Harris, Karen L. 1998. "Integration or Segregation: The Dutch and South African Chinese Compared." Pp. 115–138.

¹⁰ Li, Minghuan. 1998. "Living Among Three Walls? The Peranakan Chinese in the Netherlands." Pp. 167–183.

¹¹ The so-called *peranakan* refers to those Chinese descendants born in Indonesia and Malaysia who later emigrated to Western countries.

¹² Li, Minghuan. 2002. "A Group in Transition: Chinese Students and Scholars in the Netherlands." Pp. 173–188.

within the last three years.¹³ In spite of social, historical and economic research, there are two missing pieces in Dutch Chinese migration studies: one is the contested concept and definition of Chinese minorities, which has long been ignored or considered a natural, primordial and homogenous category. Another is the daily life analysis from a gendered perspective. I will elaborate on the definition of contested Chineseness discourses in respect of the field of Chinese migration studies. The themes emerging from interview texts will be presented and analysed accordingly in every chapter of this book.

In the field of Chinese migration studies, this research aims to break through the mainstream socio-political-oriented tradition by making migrant women visible. The blind spot of mainstream Chinese migration studies points to a political minefield: the words an author chooses can strengthen or contest political ideological economic discourse without including gender perspectives. In this respect, there is a similarity with Dutch migration studies: very often the questions and answers of researchers become part of policymaking and ideological support for migration policies. In addition, this research also seeks to initiate a dialogue with Chinese migration studies in English-speaking countries from a Western-European context. Moreover, considering the strong cultural embodiment, metaphors and political connotations in the use of Chinese characters and spoken language (Link, 2013), this research also pays a lot of attention to linguistic analysis of gendered politics and relationships in Chinese culture and narrative analysis. My study opens an innovative perspective for researchers to combine Chinese migration studies and linguistic analysis.

Within Chinese migration studies, different ways of describing Chineseness can be found. Until recently, most studies partook either in the Greater China discourse or in the Cultural China discourse. I am aware that the subject of the particular jargons and terms defining Chinese migration is politically highly sensitive. Somehow, I feel the words sticking in my throat: every step could be a trigger for a landmine. Nonetheless, I found that no previous Dutch Chinese migration studies mentioned the complexities of Chinese migration, thus it is necessary to clarify some terms and concepts that circulate concerning this topic before further analysis can be done.¹⁴ It is also helpful to deconstruct the long-term myth or taken-for-granted assumption that sees Chinese minorities in

¹³ See: <http://www.ercomer.eu/publications-2/>, accessed date 2 April, 2015.

¹⁴ I thank Professor Dr. Yuk Wah Chan for her remarks and feedback on my initial conference paper presented at the Asian Migration and the Global Asian Diasporas Conference on 6 and 7 September 2013 at City University in Hong Kong.

the Netherlands as a homogenous and persistent group, especially in political orientation, which is dominantly the case in Chinese migration studies. Schematically speaking, Chinese migration theory nowadays can be divided into three discourses, namely the Greater China, the Cultural China, and the Critical Chineseness discourse. They are highly contested in ideology as well as infused with political and historical intricacies. Among them, the Greater China and the Cultural China are the two mainstream discourses when speaking of Chineseness. I will talk about the Critical Chineseness discourse later in this chapter. Given their paradoxes, the various terms referring to Chinese immigrants also have different connotations.

The Greater China Discourse

In general, as Kao (1993) and Lin (1994)¹⁵ argue, the so-called Greater China discourse is a hegemonic political discourse that has been emerging with rising Chinese nationalism in the PRC since 1978, calling for the solidarity of global Chinese migrants and awareness of Chineseness to fight against the Japanese imperial invasion, on the one hand. On the other, by reconstructing the very Chineseness ideology, the real purpose behind this Greater China discourse is to attract capital from global Chinese migrants, especially from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and Singapore, to invest in the aftermath of the Open and Reform Policy in the economic zones along the coastal provinces (Hoe, 2013). Furthermore, the handover of Hong Kong and Macau to the sovereignty of China in 1997 and 1999, respectively, reinforced the intensity of the construction of a political Greater China, which imposed that the designation by the Republic of China that Taiwan become “a sacred and inseparable part of China” regardless of Taiwan’s de facto autonomy (Mangelson, 1992; Pegg, 1998; Fan, 2007; Sun, 2010) for over one century. With these three comparatively more modernised and advanced districts (Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau), a wealthier and stronger Greater China is envisioned. To view overseas Chinese as an important national resource is not new,

¹⁵ Some Taiwanese scholars divide The Greater China discourse into two concepts, one is economic China; the other is political China. The former emphasises economic integration through the cooperation of overseas Chinese while the later manifests the PRC’s One China Policy on Cross Strait issue. However, both economic China and political China adherents all agree that the One China principle will be the ultimate solution.

according to Gungwu Wang (1998),¹⁶ who argues that from the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese government in Beijing began to be aware that the Chinese living abroad could be a significant source of investment, a commercial and intellectual asset, and a useful bridge to import new knowledge from the more advanced industrial countries. Thus, the government created several categories to include and upgrade the social status of overseas Chinese and reverse the negative and inferior images regarding Chinese emigrants as malcontents¹⁷ or desperately poor coolies during the Qing Dynasty (p.18).

From this perspective, several terms were being used literally to create an imaginary of China and thereby the imaginary extension of family kinship. The most ambitious and controversial one is the use of *qiao* (僑). From Wang's viewpoint, the concept of *qiao* means sojourning. The combination word *huaqiao* (華僑) originally referred to Chinese nationals (including those of the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong residents) who have temporarily left to live abroad. However, with the rise of Chinese nationalism, *huaqiao* and *huaren* (華人; Chinese people), which China insists on using as a kind of continuum, extend the meaning to refer to all overseas Chinese and their descendants, no matter whether they are Chinese nationals or not (ibid.: 23-24). Under the Greater China discourse, those living in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are neither *huaqiao* nor *huaren*; they are named as *tongbao* (同胞; compatriots).

The term *tongbao* refers to brothers and sisters coming from the same parents, which indicates that people from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan share the same bloodline with people in China and are siblings. Wang criticises the Greater China discourse as an expansionist and imperialist term (ibid.: 28). Moreover, as pointed out by Hongkong sociologist Yuk Wah Chan (2014), despite the fact that the Beijing government does not accept that Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan are described as being "overseas", judging by the migration regulations and relations, "these three places are definitely three separate territorial entities" (p.10). As

¹⁶ Wang, Gungwu. 1998. "Upgrading the Migrant: Neither Huaqiao nor Huaren." Pp. 15-33.

¹⁷ In order to prevent anti-Qing rebel forces entering into China from coastal provinces, from 1662, Emperor Kangxi started to implement the so-called "Sea Ban" policy, which not only forbade people's freedom to sail, fish and trade but also forbade emigrants to return to China and treated them as traitors to the Qing Dynasty. Not until 1684 did Emperor Kangxi reopen a few ports for international trading. To know more about Chinese monetary policy, see Von Glahn, R. 1996. *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

China transforms to a more pluralised society, this discourse needs to be polished over time with the leadership alteration. Take for instance the intensity of the nationalist propaganda that began to extend to the commercial mass media from the 1990s onwards. The state-run mass media transform patriotism and nationalism as a commodity to the rising middle-class. Its discourse is anti-American imperialism and corrupted Western capitalism (Huang & Li, 2003). Recently, one of the main assertions of President Xi's propaganda *zhongguo meng* (中國夢), "Chinese Dream", campaign is through cooperation among all global Chinese to restore the nation's glory, to bring grace to "our" *zuguo* (祖國; motherland).¹⁸ It is of course a continuum of the Greater China discourse to call for ethnocultural integrity domestically and internationally. In my reading, the Greater China discourse has at least two purposes. Firstly, it functions as a collective Chinese identity formation which makes China a magnet, an authentic symbol for all worldwide overseas Chinese to attract and build their collective identity through historical, cultural, economic, and imaginary nostalgic glory. Secondly, its political ambition is to impose a single and hegemonic Chineseness on its target groups, which also affects the general perception of Chinese immigrant-receiving countries *per se*; namely, that the majority in the receiving countries will treat Chinese immigrants as forever outsiders and temporary sojourners who will never be loyal to their countries of immigration. Moreover, in respect of the debate of being a Chinese, those who have a second opinion about that are seen as a menace and a barrier against the ongoing modernisation project of Greater China (Sorman, 2008; Link, 2011; Gutmann, 2014). Women are considered the indispensable "educators of the next generation", "mothers of the nation" or "symbols and virtue of Chinese people" in China's modernisation and nationalisation project. The definition of patriotic Chinese women is constructed and defined by male elites; although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) keeps saying that women support the other half of the sky, they are still excluded from the political decision-making mechanisms.¹⁹

The Cultural China Discourse

To respond to and resist the hegemonic Greater China discourse, Chinese scholars from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the USA propose the Cultural China discourse; among them, the most important scholar is Wei-

¹⁸ About the construction of *zuguo* ideology, see chapter seven.

¹⁹ For further discussion, see chapter three.

Ming Tu. His article, “The Meaning of Being a Chinese Today” in *Daedalus* (1991) provoked a heated debate about the Cultural China discourse, and the term Cultural China soon became a catchphrase in mass media and in academia.

Broadly speaking, the Cultural China discourse has two arguments. First, it argues that the term *zhongguo* (中國) be equalised as the country’s representation; the sovereign unit known as China nowadays is constructed, not primordial (Tu, 1994; Wang in Sinn, 1998; Ning, 2009). One must understand that there is a difference in how foreigners name China and how Chinese name themselves. Chinese do not call their country China; foreigners named this nation thus because of its fine porcelain and pottery. Ancient Chinese called themselves *zhongguo*. Originally, *Zhongguo* meant Middle Kingdom or Central Country; it was to distinguish the Han ethnic groups from the non-Han nomadic ethnic groups. It is a dynamic, constantly changing landscape rather than a static structure (Tu, 1994: 4). It was only until the late Qing Dynasty that *zhongguo* as an incarnation of the nation was established. In this view, *zhongguo* should be understood as a cultural area, a cultural unity where people follow and practice Confucianism and Taoism, rather than as a political term. Secondly, this discourse resists imposing a nationalist label on Chinese people, who are then equated with China, in particular for Chinese outside China. In other words, Chinese people should be seen as a cultural entity not a political entity. For instance, in reviewing the historical trajectory of Chinese identities in Southeast Asia, Gungwu Wang (1988) argued that Chinese in Southeast Asia were more inclined to individual dialect communities than to a homogenous Chinese nation before the 20th century. There is no single term that can represent all Chinese in Southeast Asia, not even *huaqiao* or *huaren*. These constructed and imposing nametags are foreign and dangerous to them since they became a political excuse for local governments to oppress and suppress Chinese communities, such as the 1998 Chinese massacre in Indonesia, and anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam during May 2014. In sum, scholars of the Cultural China discourse think that only through referring to and reinterpreting classic Chinese philosophy can the Taiwan-China issue be solved. Hence, the single and hegemonic Greater China can be transformed into a plural but united Cultural China (Lin, 1994).

As a feminist, I think that unfortunately both the Cultural China and the Greater China discourses are male-defined speech. They are elite, politically inspired and androcentric. In respect of the Cultural China discourse, it lacks reflection on gender inequality and prejudice, which has long existed in Chinese culture and society. Besides, the Cultural China

discourse is still an imposing ideology which denies the individual free will of all Chinese people who do not want to be “Chinese” either politically or culturally. In short, although it promotes a democratic and plural political discourse in interpreting the concept of a still-single *zhongguo* and a homogeneous Chineseness, the Cultural China discourse remains a top-down, patriarchal and gender-blind ideology. A similar ideology is revealed in Dutch Chinese migration studies; I will review it from a historical trajectory and demographic background in the following section.

1.2 Historical Trajectory & Demographic Background

Firstly, let me briefly describe the historical trajectory and demographic background of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands. To appreciate the variety of origins of overseas Chinese in the Netherlands, one has to draw a picture of East Asia going back to the golden history of the Ming Dynasty²⁰ (1368–1644).²¹ According to *The History of Ming*,²² between 1405 and 1433, the Ming government sponsored a series of seven naval expeditions. Ho Cheng was assigned by the Ming emperor as a commander and he successfully completed these hazardous missions. During these seven naval expeditions, the Ming government not only developed transnational trade as far away as India but also established systematic mass emigration for Chinese to build trading colonies in Southeast Asia. Roughly 108,000 Chinese emigrated. They settled in the areas known today as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Burma, and Cambodia.

In 1602, the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (United Dutch East Indies Company) was formed, through which the Dutch empire began to broaden its impact in Asia. In 1604, the first Dutch fleet, led by Wijbrant van Waarwick, arrived in Penghu but failed to successfully obtain the right to trade. In 1619, the Dutch took Indonesia then in 1624 southern Taiwan and built het Kasteel Zeelandia (The Zeelandia Castle). Indonesia officially

²⁰ For the difference in Mandarin spelling systems between China and Taiwan, I put Chinese traditional characters for specific words that Mandarin speakers can understand well.

²¹ On the exact time of Chinese migrations to Southeast Asia, Chinese historians have diverse perspectives. The origins of Chinese migrations to Southeast Asia should be traced back to the South Son Dynasty (1208-1224); however, at that time, the emperors of the South Son Dynasty did not pay much attention to the situation in Southeast Asia.

²² *The History of Ming*, Chapter 325.

became one of the Dutch colonies and remained so until 1949.²³ From the 17th century onwards, according to Li-Jen Kao (2010), Chinese migrants in Indonesia played an important role as mediators for the Dutch East Indies to develop international commerce with Asian countries. However, the business relationship between Chinese Indonesians and the Dutch was not an equal partnership; it was military dominance through which the Dutch could control and suppress locals and force cooperation with them.

Although the Dutch had political and economic interaction with the Chinese from the 17th century, it was not until 1911 that the first group of Chinese were brought to the Netherlands by Dutch shipping companies because of the strike in the Rotterdam port. Most were poor seamen from Guangdong. They were very different from the Chinese migrants who came later in the 20th century. According to Minghuan Li (1999), Chinese seamen came mainly from Guangdong and settled earlier than the Chinese entrepreneurs who came from Wenzhou and Qjngtian and had more financial resources. These two groups were sometimes in an intensive situation because of mutual competition in business (p.45). In the next section, I will briefly illustrate the historical background of overseas Chinese immigration to the Netherlands.

There were several ways that Chinese immigrated to the Netherlands. Li (1999) summarised the pattern of Chinese immigration as having occurred in three phases:

- a. The first Europe-oriented migration: before 1949.
- b. The second Chinese emigration from outside China: 1950–1975.
- c. A sudden rise of emigration from China: after 1976.

a. The inception of the first Europe-oriented migration (before 1949)

There were two groups of Chinese immigrants in the first phases: one was a re-emigrant group, which came from the former Netherlands East Indies; the other group came directly from China.

The re-emigrant group was basically comprised of students who were known as Peranakan Chinese. In 1908, the so-called Holland-Chinese school, a primary education, was established in the Netherlands East Indies. Since early 1905, with the increase of local-born Chinese descendants who grew up in the Netherlands' East Indies and received a Dutch education, entry into the Netherlands for secondary and tertiary

²³ However, Indonesia declared independence in 1945. One should notice that there is a different historic interpretation between the two nations.

education became an overriding ambition for some literate Chinese, even though it was a very expensive and difficult undertaking.²⁴ In sum, according to the statistical data offered by *Chung Hwa Hui* (中華會),²⁵ there were about 900 Peranakan Chinese who studied in the Netherlands between 1911 and 1940.²⁶

The first Chinese group that came directly from China to the Netherlands was the Guangdong or He On group. Most of them had worked for Dutch shipping companies in Hong Kong. The history of Chinese employees hired by Dutch shipping companies can be traced back to the 19th century; ocean-shipping enterprises were already a well-entrenched economic sector of Britain, the Netherlands and some other Western European countries. From the middle of the 19th century, after the cession of Hong Kong to Europe, in a bid to seek higher profits, British shipping companies, followed by the Dutch and other Western companies, began to hire cheap Chinese labour on ships leaving from Hong Kong. If we take this historical background from the Dutch perspective, the hiring of cheap Chinese labour on ships not only allowed circumventing the labour regulations but also lowered personnel expenses. An investigation by the Dutch seamen's trade union in 1930 showed that the wage accepted by Chinese seamen was only about two-thirds of the pay that was offered to their Dutch counterparts.²⁷

Life in the Netherlands was arduous for these Guangdong seamen. Besides the low pay, these workers endured segregation in prejudicial living environments; Dutch seamen saw them as rivals and scabs. The Rotterdam seamen's union, De Volharding, ran an inflammatory campaign against the "yellow peril",²⁸ a degrading term derived from the supposed skin colour of those Chinese seamen. Until the Second World War, this racist "yellow peril" rhetoric remained a trump-card in the hands of the shipping companies.²⁹

²⁴ Minghuan Li, 1999, pp.28–29.

²⁵ According to Li, "Chung Hwa Hui was an association organised by the Peranakan Chinese youth who studied in the Netherlands. It was set up in 1911" (ibid: 261). It was the first officially recognised Chinese voluntary association in the Netherlands and it was considered an extension of the Chinese nationalist movement (Pp. 53–54), which was named after the Mandarin pronunciation of the ROChina (Chung Hwa Min Kuo).

²⁶ Tan, 1986, p.2, cited from Minghuan Li, 1999, p.29.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 30.

²⁸ Pieke & Benton, 1998, p.127.

²⁹ Heek, 1936; Pieke & Benton, 1998, p.127.

The situation became much worse during the economic depression in the 1930s. The majority of the Chinese seamen had no work, they gradually became desperately poor and ill, and the Dutch government forbade them from working on shore. In order to survive, these Chinese men sold peanut-cake, *pindakoeckjes*³⁰, illegal cigarettes and sometimes condoms in nearby neighbourhoods. At that time, the Dutch police considered them a potential threat to public security and hygiene.³¹ In a nutshell, the situation for the first Chinese seamen who came directly from China to the Netherlands was difficult. Dutch society treated them as rivals or inferior, dirty outsiders. They survived on their own and through group solidarity during the Second World War period. In short, the early history of Chinese presence in the Netherlands is a gendered one, which mainly consisted of men.

b. Chinese emigration from outside of China (1950–1975)

There were two groups of Chinese immigrants in the first phases: one was a re-emigrant group, which came from the former Netherlands East Indies; the other group came directly from China.

As the Chinese adage “*ku jin gan lai* (苦盡甘來)” goes,³² post-war reconstruction activities brought new opportunities for Chinese residents in the Netherlands. The Chinese catering business came to the fore with perfect timing. In 1947, there were only 23 Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. Towards the end of the 1970s, the total number had reached about 2000.³³ The rapid growth of Chinese restaurants created a large number of jobs; however, the chaos of the civil war³⁴ between the ROC, Taiwan and the PRC severely restricted emigration abroad for citizens. People were monitored on both sides of the Cross-Strait political confrontation. People could not go abroad freely let alone emigrate. Those who had families or relatives outside the country were tightly monitored and their daily communications (letters, telephone calls) censored. They were labelled traitors of the motherland or suspected of espionage by the ROC or the PRC. At that time, the best show of loyalty for both governments was to stay in China and Taiwan and work hard to construct the future new “China”. Thus, Hongkongers became the largest Chinese

³⁰ Pieke & Benton, 1998, p.128.

³¹ For more information, see chapter six.

³² It means that when things are at the worst, they will mend.

³³ Minghuan Li, 1999, p.34.

³⁴ Especially from 1945 to 1950, the second Chinese Civil War.

emigrant group during the second phase of Chinese emigration. Part of this migrant group also found their niche doing catering and restaurant business in the Netherlands.

c. A sudden rise of emigration from China (after 1976)

After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and the more open political attitude towards overseas Chinese in the last quarter of the 20th century, the flow of emigration to Europe was far greater than anything experienced during the first three-quarters of the century.³⁵ The new PRC leader, Xiaoping Deng, regarded overseas Chinese as the bridge between China and developed Western countries. He welcomed foreign investment to the coastal provinces³⁶ in China and intellectual cultivation and overseas business competition between Taiwan and China motivated him.³⁷ The prosperity of democratic Western countries became the dream of middle-class Chinese, willing to spend every penny on emigration, legal or illegal. According to an unofficial statistic, more than 70,000 Wenzhou people emigrated between 1984 and 1995, most of whom went to Europe.³⁸

Given the diversity and origins of Chinese immigrants, the actual number of Chinese in the Netherlands is difficult to estimate accurately. According to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (2001), there were roughly 80,000 overseas Chinese in the Netherlands in 2001. According to Li (1998), Chinese association leaders and diplomatic officials of the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands usually say that there are 100,000 Chinese living there.³⁹ As of 2011, figures from the Netherlands' Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS) show⁴⁰ the total number of Chinese is 76,860, as follows,

³⁵ Minghuan Li, 1999, p.37.

³⁶ These comprise the so-called “experimental zones” such as Wenzhou and Fujian.

³⁷ Due to the political confrontation, it is very hard to find open information online about Taiwan's emigration history. I wrote a letter to the embassy, hoping they could tell me where I might find detailed information, but I never got a reply. Moreover, there is statistical inaccuracy of the official number of immigrants. For example, Guochu Zhang (2003: 76) found a statistical issue while reviewing the trends on highly skilled Chinese migration to Europe. He pointed out that the exact number of Chinese emigration is impossible to get because of “the recent dramatic increase in self-supported students who are not controlled by the Ministry of Education.”

³⁸ Minghuan Li, 1999, p.37.

³⁹ Ibid.: 42.

⁴⁰ Internet Resource, accessed on 27 July 2011:

First Generation:

38,988 China-born persons (18,173 men, 20,815 women)
 9,763 Hong Kong-born persons (4,876 men, 4,887 women)
 85 Macau-born persons (31 men, 54 women)
 2,213 Taiwan-born persons (808 men, 1,405 women)

Second generation:

16,892 persons with at least one parent born in China (8,651 men, 8,241 women)
 8,398 persons with at least one parent born in Hong Kong (4,290 men, 4,108 women)
 36 persons with at least one parent born in Macau (18 men, 18 women)
 485 persons with at least one parent born in Taiwan (253 men, 232 women)

As one can see from the CBS data, the first-generation Chinese female migrants outnumber the males, especially from China and Taiwan. However, until now I have not seen any Dutch Chinese migration studies discuss this matter or pay attention to these women's real experiences while adapting to post-emigration life. This scholarly gap is the missing piece that I aim to find,⁴¹ to bring women to the centre and contribute further to the rewriting of Dutch Chinese migration history through a critical intersectional lens with regard to gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, and nation of origin.

The Dutch government defines ethnic Chinese as a "person who has an actual relationship with China, because the parents were or the person was born in China"⁴²; the geographical areas of China include China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Other Southeast Asian Chinese who re-emigrated to the Netherlands are not included in the CBS data. It suffices to say that the Chinese groups in the Netherlands are heterogeneous and

<http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=37325&D1=1-2&D2=1-2&D3=0&D4=0&D5=46,90,129,218&D6=0,5,14-15&HD=110428-0914&HDR=G2,G3,T,G5&STB>; however, the figures did not contain the overseas Chinese originating from Southeast Asian countries.

⁴¹ I have discussed this phenomenon with my interviewees. Most of them felt very surprised at the fact that female migrants outnumber the males. Some of them considered it is because of the difficulty for single male Chinese to find female spouses in the Netherlands. Thus, male Chinese must go back to China to look for wives and bring their mothers to the Netherlands later to look after their children.

⁴² The definition in Dutch is "Persoon die een feitelijke verwantschap heeft met China, omdat de ouders of de persoon zelf in China zijn geboren." The definition of Chinese comes from *Sociaal-economische kenmerken Chinezen in Nederland* (2008) by Marleen Geerdinck & Nicol Sluiter.

miscellaneous based on the Greater China and the Cultural China ideology. It is impossible for any researcher to overgeneralise all the Chinese groups with a single argument. Thus, it is necessary to clearly define the research scope and key terms in the beginning.

1.3 Target Group and Research Questions

In this research, I adopt the Critical Chineseness discourse as my standpoint in dealing with interviewees' Chineseness. I found that they felt sometimes culturally Chinese, sometimes politically or economically connected. For example, in regard to Mandarin learning, all women see it as a way to turn cultural capital into economic capital for children. However, when I asked them if they could introduce me to their Chinese friends from different regions, for instance, women from Taiwan said they always have trouble making friends with women from China; they do not see eye to eye on the territorial and political issues. Or, women from China revealed their resentment towards women from Hong Kong as they complained that Hongkongers in the Netherlands consider themselves superior to people from China because they are often the owners of catering businesses and they treat people from China as their employees. Although these power dynamics are not directly related to motherhood practices, the complexities show the differences and inconsistencies of women's perceptions about their own Chineseness.

The Critical Chineseness discourse emerged contemporaneously with the Cultural China discourse from the 1990s. Most of its advocates are second- or third-generation Chinese descendants living outside China, and their works are seldom translated into Mandarin given their political sensitivity.⁴³ To put it briefly, Critical Chineseness discourse rejects both Greater China and Cultural China discourses and criticises them on three dimensions. First and foremost is the theoretical fault of using the terms *zhongguoren* or *huaren* to define Chinese people. Eugene Kheng-Boon Tan condemns the development of Chineseness as "a convenient conflation of the concepts of race and ethnicity" (2013: 2). Since the former is based on biological appurtenances and the latter refers to its social and cultural practice, the terms *zhongguoren* and *huaren* attempt to invent a "pure Chinese" identity to establish and naturalise the hierarchy

⁴³ Readers can find some of the Critical Chineseness discourses in Mandarin from an academic database in Taiwan, for example, Hyread Journal Database: <http://www.hyread.com.tw/>. Unfortunately, it is not a free open resource; one must apply for membership first and pay the annual fee to gain access.

of cultural superiority among various Chinese communities (ibid.: 5). For Tan, *zhongguoren* implies a single identity that is a Chinese national, a subject loyal to and belonging to the PRC, while *huaren* implies broader and plural identities linked to Chinese culture and global Chinese diasporas. Second, Critical Chineseness discourse criticises the essentialism within Greater China and Cultural China discourses, namely the Han-centralism. According to the criteria of these discourses, an authentic Chinese is one who can speak *Hanyu* (漢語; the Mandarin dialect), write *Hanzi* (漢字; Chinese characters), is able to read *Hanwen* (漢文; the Han language) and follows and practices Confucianism in daily life. However, these criteria are ahistorical and anachronistic in three ways. Firstly, they ignore the other ethnic minority groups living inside and outside China, those who are included in definitions of *zhongguoren* or *huaren*. Only the majority Han ethnic group and its culture is selected to represent so-called authentic Chineseness (Chun, 1996 & 1999; Wang, 1998 in Sinn; Ang, 2001; Chow, 2000; Ben, 2004; Tan, 2013), which is exclusive of other minorities and is taken for granted. Second, it lacks historical insight and knowledge of Chinese history. There are an estimated 129 dialects in China alone⁴⁴ and 55 officially recognised ethnic minorities with their own languages. Mandarin is only one of 129 dialects and it is very different to the original *Hanyu*, which is more similar to the southern dialect spoken during the Tang Dynasty. Paradoxically, now the so-called *Hanyu* is mistaken as Mandarin or Chinese, which is actually a northern dialect in China. Furthermore, it does not take into account the social transformations among Chinese emigrants who have integrated into local societies and gradually developed localised and unique cultures. For instance, the mixed language (mostly Fujianese and indigenous language) spoken and used by *peranakan* from Indonesia and Malaysia (Wang in Sinn, 1998; Ang, 2001), or the ancient pronunciations spoken during the Tang Dynasty, preserved in Cantonese and Taiwanese. Ien Ang (2001) argues that this imposed Chinese identity and its criteria are a practice of discrimination to those “unqualified” Chinese, and it also denies its own cultural diversities.

Take my family history, for instance: According to my grandmother’s narrative, my ancestors were from Fujian; they moved to Taiwan because of their unwillingness to be ruled by the Manzu regime (Qing Dynasty). Within our family, there were people who were Mongolians. That could explain why I was born with a birthmark, which is considered to be

⁴⁴ Generally speaking, they are divided into seven linguistic groups: *Guan*, *Wu*, *Yue*, *Min*, *Xiang*, *Kejia*, and *Gan*.

evidence of having Mongolian ancestors. Also, after they moved to Taiwan, my ancestors married indigenous Taiwanese from Pingpu (Plains aborigines). The Pingpu tribe was a matrilineal society belonging to the Austronesian linguistic group. The generation of my grandparents (both my mother's and father's sides) were raised as Japanese; they once had Japanese names and spoke both Japanese and Taiwanese as their mother tongues. Thus, who am I? Calling me a Chinese under either the Greater China or the Cultural China discourses is far too simple. From this perspective, one should have the right to claim, using Ang's words (2001: 36), "if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*."⁴⁵ Thirdly, the last argument of the Critical Chineseness discourse is against the sexism and totalitarianism within both the Greater China and the Cultural China discourses. Sexism, on the one hand, refers to the male-defined and male-dominant speech, as if women were absent and insignificant within China's 5000 years of historical trajectory (Ang, 2001). Moreover, it considers that neither the Greater China nor the Cultural China discourses reflect critically on the sexism and gender inequality within classic Chinese philosophy and Chinese patriarchal society (Yang, 2005). Besides sexism, the Critical Chineseness discourse also points out the totalitarianism in both the Greater China and the Cultural China discourses for their top-down and elite-dominant characteristics. As I mentioned earlier, the Han ethnic group is merely one of the 55 ethnic groups inside China; without any democratic method and process, their (male Chinese elites and political leaders) legitimacy of defining what is China, who is Chinese, and how to be a Chinese is questionable. For example, in the famous article, "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity", Allen Chun (1996, 1999⁴⁶) questioned who could speak on behalf of all "Chinese"? For what purpose and in whose interest? Rey Chow (2000) later echoes Chun by pointing out that the construction of Chineseness or "standard Chinese" is a kind of monopoly; the definition of what Chinese means and what it is considered Chineseness are regulated and controlled by political elites who dominantly belong to the Han ethnicity. This kind of speech, thinking control and autocracy have hindered the facility of self-expression of other subgroups. They also diminish the agency, creativity and achievements of Chinese emigrants who have been struggling to integrate into, or assimilate into, local societies and cultures over generations. Yet, the

⁴⁵ Italics emphasised by Ien Ang.

⁴⁶ In 1999, this article was translated into Mandarin and published in Taiwan. However, the word "fuck" was translated into *jiegou* (deconstruct). After closely examining the two versions, I think that the Mandarin translation was softened.

Critical Chineseness discourse is still very immature. It needs to be a more theorised argument to sustain its concept. Until now, we know too little about ordinary peoples' viewpoints on what Chinese is or what China means to them. It lacks a safe public forum to let everyone self-express freely without fear. Furthermore, we need to be aware that in academia we pay little attention to the intersectionality theory on China or the Chineseness discussion. Simply stated, more empirical data needs to be collected; more dialogues between academia and society need to be created. Unless scholars start to take intersectionality (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, region, dialect, religion) into account while dealing with Chineseness research, the speech authority will always stay in certain male elite groups.

In this research, I focus on the first generation of migrant women from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. I call them neither *huaren* nor *huayi* but overseas Chinese, Chinese emigrants or migrant/immigrant women. Given the complexity and diversity of Chinese groups, I only chose migrant women from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China for their cultural and ethnic proximity, since they grew up in milieus where Confucianism and Taoism are dominant social norms, and where the Han ethnic group is in the majority. However, women from these three regions came to the Netherlands in various periods because of their class and social-historical backgrounds. By paying intersectional attention to these three groups, this study can deepen the academic understanding of Chinese migrants in a non-English speaking country, and it is also an innovative work that aims to deconstruct the homogenous myth of Chinese minorities.

Now I shall state my research questions of this book. Being a mother is not easy but being a mother in a foreign country far away from home, surrounded by alien languages, environment, religion, food, social customs, ethnic people and groups, is much more difficult. From the pilot interviews with two Taiwanese women who have been married to Dutch men for several years, I concluded that motherhood practices do not begin after giving birth; it is a process that begins the moment a woman decides to be the wife of her chosen one, regardless of whether the husband is Chinese or not. Importantly, the Chinese migrant women in my study are embedded in a Confucian cultural background and faith about the meaning of marriage and mothering, which has a deep impact on their daily lives. In addition, the interaction with and discipline from their natal families and their in-laws also greatly influence the mothering environment. To date, the lived experiences of motherhood among Chinese migrant women in the Netherlands – which I will call the Chinese motherhood diaspora –