

**International  
Institute of  
Social Studies**



**Chinese Undocumented Migrants in The  
Hague:**

**Precarity, Work and the Search for Autonomy**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Social Policy for Development**

Specialization:

**Population and Development**

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December 2016

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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## List of Acronyms

ISS	Institute of Social Studies
NGO	Non-Government Organisation

## **Abstract**

This study is about Chinese undocumented migrant workers living in The Hague. The study looks at their living conditions and working situation, and how their 'illegal' stay in the country influences their 'precarity' and sense of autonomy. Rooted in the belief that more research is needed on undocumented migrants in particular, the study is also aimed at trying to find out how the daily lives of undocumented Chinese migrants exhibit 'precarity', in relation to their own experiences of balancing risks with the search for autonomy. The study was based on informal conversations with undocumented migrant workers, most of whom were contacted through Wereldhuis in The Hague, a church-run advisory NGO operates for undocumented people in the city. Through the interviews, and secondary literature, the study was able to reconstruct the historical phases of migration from China to The Netherlands. In addition, informal conversations allowed participants to give feedback on the scope of the study and the study focus. This contextualised my own research on the present-day situation of the undocumented. The key findings were that although undocumented migrants do experience precarity at work, they can help themselves towards greater autonomy through acquiring language skills, and through creating wider social networks. One obstacle they face is that being concentrated in the catering industry, there were few contacts with trade unions for most of the research participants.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Migrant workers from China to Netherlands is the line to see the individual and their international mobility under the economy development and society changes.

## **Keywords**

Undocumented, migrant worker; Chinese; Netherlands; precarity; work; life conditions; autonomy

# Chapter 1 Researching undocumented Chinese Migrants

## 1.1 Introduction

Studies regarding the living conditions of undocumented migrants emerged in the 1970s in the United States and has transformed since then. Undocumented migrants Originally the purpose was to understand the cause and find the solution for the “problem” incurred by migration. Starting around the 2000s, more attention was redirected to the consequences of migration and its effects on local employment and wage level (Van Meeteren 2014). Recently, migrant workers’ double exclusion from social-legal status and labour market was seen and put into further discussion (e.g. Zou 2015; Lewis et al. 2015; Woolfson et al 2008).

The undocumented people in the Netherlands have been put in “illegal” status since 1970s. (Leerkes 2009). The 1994 Compulsory Identification Act requested all the employees to have valid proof of their legal working status in order to enter the formal labour market. These policies ruled out the undocumented of both social protection and employment opportunities. In contrast, the need for cheap, low-skilled workers to fill in the so-called “3D” (Dangerous, Demanding and Dirty) jobs remained. Migrant workers were thus pushed toward the unattractive jobs, making them “useful” for the receiving country. The decline of welfare state and the increased deregulation for capital further reduced wages and worsened the already exploitative work conditions. (Pajnik 2016).

With this hyper-precarious background, the insecurity in every perspective of migrant workers’ lives is unavoidable and highly affecting. The limited abilities and ways the migrants participate in the other society lead them to adopt different coping strategies and living conditions. Many studies mentioned that the lack of autonomy differentiated the undocumented migrant workers’ decision making from the documented. The distinct cultures, additionally, make different dialogue and dynamic process and the different level of autonomy for undocumented migrants. The combined circumstances correspond to Lewis’s statement, “the viscerally lived unfreedoms within some migrants’ working lives brought about by a layering of insecurities produced by labour and immigration regimes is better conceptualized as hyper-precarious rather than ‘merely’ precarious.” (Lewis 2015).

Although Chinese migrants have a long history of immigration to the Netherlands, starting from the early twentieth century, relevant studies are rare, except in the 1990s (Pieke 1992; Pieke and Benton 1998; Li 1999). Official and NGO reports are available on the integration of the Chinese population (Gijsberts and Dagevos 2010; Mandin and Gsir 2015). or those focusing specifically on this population and are more recent, but with a few exceptions (Hiah and Staring, 2016). Most of the recent work is not strictly academic (Gijsberts, Huijnk, and Vogels 2011). Hiah and Staring (2016)’s work is one of the first serious studies of undocumented Chinese migrants, a hard-to-research group,



even though they have played an important role in immigration history both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

The wave of Chinese migrants coming to the Netherlands after the late 1990s is different from the previous ones. Through buying service with smugglers, aka “snake-head,” in their hometown (mostly from Fujian and Zhejiang provinces in south-eastern China), the migrants moved to the Netherlands and other western European countries through informal channels (Pieke 2004; Latham, Kevin 2013). Thus, they are mostly undocumented staying and working in the Netherlands. As culturally shared expectations about reciprocity, hiring undocumented people is not only for reducing the labour cost but helping the “young fellows” from the same region or country. The complete ethnic economy provides newcomers more possibilities to stay in the Netherlands within the Chinese social network, especially in the catering business and caregiving services in the household. However, the risk of punishment leads employers to provide lower wages and worse labour condition for balancing their benefits. Long working hours and the stay within the Chinese community also isolate the migrants from other local networks. The reality of lowered quotas and fewer possibilities for legal entry and stay in Europe makes Chinese undocumented nowadays face more precarious living condition than it was before.

This paper attempts to understand how the illegal stay and working status formed the precarious living condition of Chinese undocumented people who live in The Hague; furthermore, how their ethnic background affected their life experiences.

## **1.2 Research Question and Objectives**

This paper is a descriptive study focusing on the living condition of Chinese undocumented migrants in The Hague, the Netherlands. The central research question is “How do the Chinese background and the undocumented migrant working status affect their living condition and coping strategies?” Following the main question, there are two specific objectives for this paper: first, to understand how the legal restrictions of the migrants’ work status and stay shape Chinese people’s living condition; second, to find the factors that trigger different results of their living conditions.

## **1.3 Chapter Outline**

This paper used two main conceptions to construct the lens to analyse the undocumented people’s living condition and coping strategies. One is Hyperprecarity, which helps view how migration, work and welfare regimes combine to create the “demand and supply” of migrant forced labourers who are subject to multidimensional insecurity and exploitation. The other one is the theory of human needs and wellbeing, focusing on how individuals recognize their sense of security and physiological needs, and how they motivate their own autonomy to respond to the surrounding and the current state.

## **1.4 Outline of Methodology**

This paper analyses the data acquired from unstructured interviews and conducts literature review of the topic. From June to September 2016, I had informal conversations with eight Chinese undocumented migrant workers and observed their opinions of work and life issue. The understanding of their living environment was mainly constructed on the review of related history, government documents, studies and articles. While the data of recent years is lacking, I interviewed three local NGO workers to supplement the part of the migrants' utilization of social assistance in the Netherlands.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This research paper aims to understand the self-decision pattern from undocumented Chinese migrant workers who are put under

due to their social-legal status and work. The two frameworks, theory of needs and wellbeing and the concept of hyper-precarity, provide the structure to view these Chinese undocumented migrants and their own autonomy and examine the surrounding limitation. The data was collected mainly from 32 unstructured interviews with eight participants from June to September 2016 in The Hague. Literature review and three interviews with local NGO are included to review the migrants' living background. The finding from this research is that while undocumented migrants do experience precarity at work, they are able to help themselves towards greater autonomy through acquiring language skills, wider social network and increase the alternative resources for their lives. One major obstacle is that being concentrated in the catering industry, most research participants barely have contacts with trade unions and civil societies.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical Lenses and Key Concepts

### 2.1 Introduction

To conduct the foundation of analysis in Chapter Four, the analytical framework here focuses on two parts: Hyper-precarity and Wellbeing and Needs. With concept of hyper-precarity provides a clear pattern to see how work and legal regimes combine together and form the precarious lives of migrant workers. The second section focuses on the discussion of the need and wellbeing of human being in conditionally limited environment.

### 2.2 Hyper-Precarity and Migrant Workers

“Precarious work is a means for employers to shift risk and responsibilities on to workers” (Evans and Gibb 2009). It includes of instability and insecurity that workers facing in their working condition, no matter in formal or informal economy. Nowadays, the workers are no longer tied to the single position or single company, they are replaced by temporary or task-based employment. Accompanying industrial globalization, employment segmentation is now an issue, both within the national sphere, and as a feature of international labor markets.

The deconstruction of work increases the mobility of employers to find “potential cheap labor pool” (King and Rueda 2008). In this background, the migrant labor is involved in the local labor market for maintaining the same productive forces with lower labor costs. It is necessary to give the highlight of migrant workers’ precarity in low-paid sector, they are subject to the restrictive framework of the government’s “managed migration” policies that only can stay for limited period (Pajnik 2016). The notion of dependence is typically regarded as an employee under a contract of service. This direct link between their resident right and work creates the extra dependence in this employment relationship. The Hyper-dependence refers to migrant workers’ independence and autonomy are diminished in this migrant work relation. (Zou: 2015)

Therefore, “the enhanced willingness to accept such low-status employment often stands in proportionately lower numbers than migrant labourers” (Waite 2009) This willingness is not based on the satisfy of the work, yet the high dependence to the employer and the limited choice since the migration control. This ongoing interplay of neoliberal labour market and restrictive immigration regimes has a greater force to refused asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, who not have legal staying status in the moment. The destitution that resulting from lacking the right to work or access to any government support or benefits is their main driving force to immerse into exploitative work. “Hyper-precarity” this term starts to be used in characterized these migrant workers’ lives in recently years. (Lewis 2015)

This precarious work also interplayed with other areas of life, such as social network, individual circumstances, and welfare position, precarious live is “unable to predict one’s fate or having some degree of predictability on which to

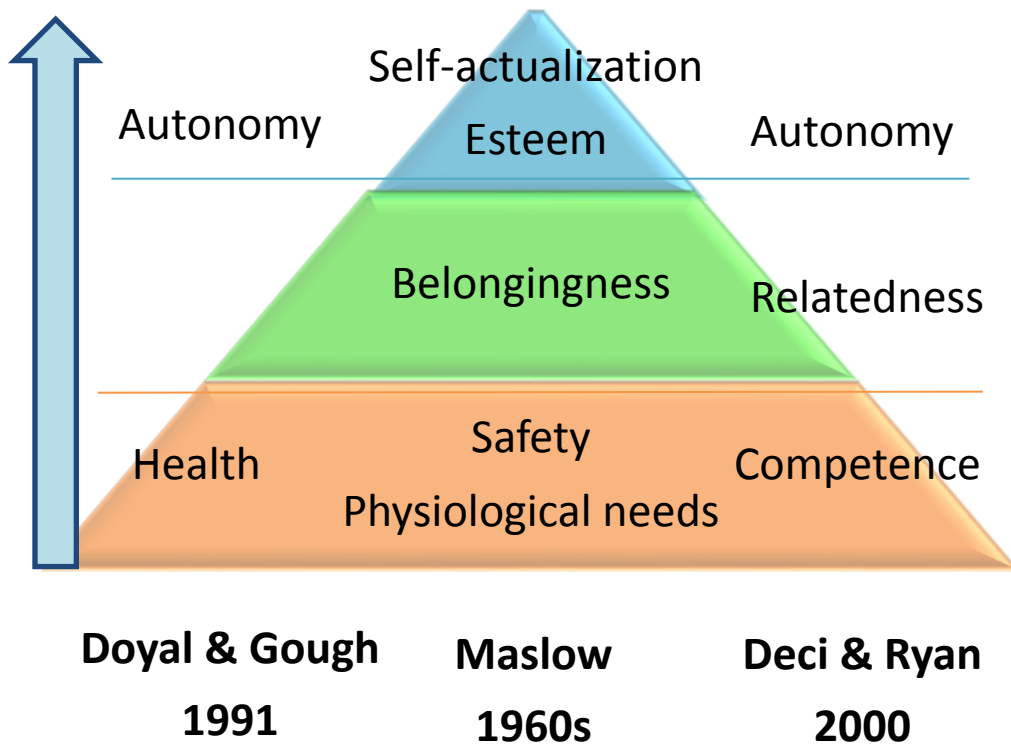
build social relations and feelings of affection” (Oudenampsen and Sullivan 2004). With this notion, precarity resembles self-insecurity, more recently unpredictability is as a response to differential exposure to violence, it leads people to choose higher risk decision and more recently life plan. (Katz and Stark 1986) ILO report in 2012 dedicated to five standards that a work should provide to every worker: Security, Predictability, Health and safety, Pay and benefits, and Access to social security. (Internationale du Travail Organization 2012) The link from precarious work to precarious live help this research to see how the working condition to wide effect on broad lifeworld. Fear of deportation, is a powerful threaten for undocumented migrant workers that not only the practice of state migration control, but penetrates migrant labour spaces. This “deportability in everyday life” also be reported in Lewis and Watie’s study about Asylum, Immigration Restrictions and Exploitation in 2015. (Lewis and Watie 2015)

Similar conclusion that also showed on the study of “Exploitation of Chinese migrants in Italy” (Ceccagno et al 2010), through studying Chinese migrant workers in garment workshops run by Chinese employers, Ceccagno further discussed the work exploitation within Ethnical economy. Those family-run garment workshops look for cheap labor were rooted on responding of the fashion industry for flexibility and rapid manufacturing. In the same time, through getting help from social network to find the job and the guarantee of resident permit, it turned out more dependence of work and fragile social-legal status, rather than more security of working condition. Besides, this overloading manpower payment accompanies with the health issue and their precarious work condition (Ceccagno et al 2010). Therefore, the conception of self-exploitation from migrant worker voluntary traded their manpower with social-legal status that Ceccagno conclude in the end of his research actually is reflected to the oppression of labour market and migration policies.

### **2.3 What we need for building autonomy and Security?**

As the forgoing section, Dependence and insecurity that under undocumented migrants’ precarious living condition forced they only could select the indispensable necessities for their lives. In here, through comparing with the framework both needs and wellbeing, to see how individuals define the necessity of human being under the limited condition.

Figure 2.1: The Comparison between Need theories



Source: created by author

In this part, Doyal and Gough indicated that “Health can be deceases, lack of basic living requirement or threaten, creates our nature of avoiding harm.” (Gough 2014) Instead, Maslow’s safety and physiological needs are more narrow on the physical satisfaction rather than the general definition of dangers. (Maslow et al 1970) For the first level of human being needs, all these three perspectives about human needs mentioned the satisfaction of physiological need and free from the physical harm as the priority of any other needs.

Overall, making choices to reach the conscious goals is regards to fulfill the need of autonomy, even is an informal choice. There was various explanation of ‘Autonomy’, it is the balance between identifying personal goal and obeying the cultural and social norm (Doyal and Gough 1991), or abstractly described it as being in control of one’s life (Deci and Ryan 2000). In Maslow’ view, it about become better one’s self and self-esteem. The similarity between these views are two main things, one is Self- achievement, the other is acceptance from themselves and the society. (McLeod 2007)

However, in Wood’s study in 2007, talking about the other form of well-being. Since poor people in developing country facing the incomplete political environment and fragile economy situation, their way of defining the wellbeing is different from their living environment. Security in his context is focus on the informal and social conditions for predictability of wellbeing. Through asymmetrical loyalty to, or dependence on other powerholders, whether formal or informal, many poor people globally achieved their wellbeing in reality.

However, this dependence strengthens the unpredictability due to the decision to give is to others. When the more autonomy that poor people they get, it makes the risk averts to become more certainty, and it direct to wellbeing. it can conclude that risk-averts and autonomy are the two key factors for achieving personal wellbeing. (Wood 2007)

## **2.4 Conclusion**

To conclude, undocumented migrant workers face the insecurity and instability in their working condition, it is due to the deconstruction of work form and the shifting of security responsibility from employer to employee. Meanwhile, the exclusion from welfare state regimes also put migrant worker out of the social protection as well, and it deepens the dependence of work to migrant workers. Hyper-precarity is the vision to analysis this dynamic of work exploitation.

Then, researchers used the theory of wellbeing and needs to see how individual identify their own lives and priority. Although the measure criteria differentiate by each theory, they mostly include economy, security, psychological and one's autonomy as the essential human being needs for their lives even in precarious situation. It helps this research to further discuss their concern of lives and their personal will during the decision making process. As the view of wellbeing theory, migration is the choice that individual made for pursuing their needs. (De Haas 2010)

# Chapter 3 Methodologies, Choices and Interviews

## 3.1 Introduction

This section explains the choices and strategies taken to select the target groups and data generation techniques, as well as the approaches, experiences and challenges of conducting and analyzing fieldwork. I also situate myself in the context and describe the effect my positioning may have had on the participants and the results.

As the main topic of this research paper is undocumented Chinese people's living condition and their interaction with the living environment, this research was used literature reviewing and interviews to collect data, then used the field note analyzing method to study the data. There are two main data that I would like to collect for starting the analysis: One is the understanding of the key factors of their living environment, Chinese community history and Dutch policies of undocumented migrant workers. This part is conducted by literature review and three informal interviews with local workers in NGOs. The other one is understanding their present living condition and their own experience, it collected by the notes that I made after every time conversations between me and eight participants.

**Table 3.1: Data Collection Methods**

Purpose	Employed Method	Details
<b>Understanding the background:</b> History, Policies and Current situation	literatures Review	Websites, Online chatting groups, Official Documents, Historical documents and related researches.
	Semi- structure Interview	-IOM officer -Fair work worker - Social worker of Haags Welzijn <sup>1</sup>
<b>Migrant workers' world and experience</b>	Unstructured Interview	32 Unstructured interviews with eight participants

**Source:** Created by Author

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<sup>1</sup> Haags Welzijn is a non-profit organization for Chinese workers in the Hague, the service is provided by a Chinese speaking worker.

### **3.2 Why Chinese undocumented migrants in The Hague?**

As what have mentioned in the forgoing section, the double exclusion of labour market and social protection for migrant workers. Besides, the culture background of individual gives every ethnical group respond to the reality situation in different actions and visions. Therefore, migrant worker without valid documents in this moment and have had working experience are two main identities that I set up in the first step. As I expected migrant workers from one same ethnical group, so that the interaction between their own culture and Dutch culture can be compared.

Chinese undocumented migrant workers became my main studying group. As the Chinese community is composed by social network and same ethnical background rather than actual geographical territory, a native speaker is a “golden key” to get into their community. It was easier to contact with them and understand their interaction dynamic between Chinese and Dutch culture due to my language advantage. In the other hand, the booming Chinese restaurant business in The Hague have attracted many migrant workers gathering here for working and living, it is an existing group that can examine the undocumented migrants’ living condition and how the ethnical background influent their lives.

During the process of research design, I had thought about data collecting from multiple sites, as the fact that Chinese migrants are scattered in all over the Netherlands. However, the social assistance and informal network to undocumented migrants is often implemented at the municipality level, one site is benefited to erase the divergence of the accesses. Due to I also have known several Chinese migrants and the related organizations in The Hague, thus doing the research in The Hague was a choice based on opportunities to reach participants and the existing Chinese ethnical economy.

To be more relevant to the main theme, through the background studying, undocumented Chinese migrants, they mainly came from Mainland China through smugglers. Their arriving mostly after 2000s, which after the Linkage Act was started. they had no access to getting the resident permit through formal accesses, expect of asylum procedure. Thus, people from this mobility background is my first selection. Secondary, the participants are expected to have working experience, so they can contribute knowledge of work condition. In here, the sector of working place was tended to focus on Catering and Homecare industry, which are two main sectors that most undocumented Chinese working for. But in the result, the empirical data also included in Shopping service and other services (translation, casino services, lending, etc.).

### **3.3 Knowing Chinese Community and Dutch policies**

People’s behavior and decision making is based on their own culture background and the result of culture interaction. (Doyal and Gough 1991) The dif-



ferent situations conduct their own unique life style and way of thinking. For this paper, it divided to two parts to sketch the background of Chinese undocumented people in the Netherlands.

The first half of this chapter provides an overall vision of Dutch immigration policies for undocumented migrants and their working conditions. The data is collected from the official documents and the working papers from Europe Union, Dutch government and NGOs. The second part of the background understanding is provided through a brief overview of Chinese undocumented people and their historical emergence as a specific group of migrants in the Netherlands. This part is conducted by literature reviews, website and online data. In addition, informal interviews were conducted with local workers in NGOs and these have provided insights into how social assistance is channeled to Chinese undocumented people (and the problems such support NGOs encounter).

Most of the current literature introduces a Chinese history of mobility and of difficult living condition from the beginning of 20th century to the mid-2000s. (Pieke and Benton 1998; Li 1999; Hiah and Staring, 2016) From a review of these studies, it emerges that there may be gap or mismatch between the current situation of undocumented Chinese migrants, and the literatures about them. This present research uses two alternative kinds of resources to complement the required data to start to fill this gap. One is three informal interviews with local NGO workers, who provided their working experience with the undocumented and some cases of work exploitation through examples from their own experience with undocumented clients. All three NGO workers were selected through personal contacts and introductions, especially through working and on-line network, which put me in touch with those working with Chinese migrant workers, including the undocumented. One of these NGO workers specifically provided social service to Chinese migrant workers, and the other two, due to their working with particular projects, also came in touch with migrant worker issues. All three were Chinese speakers, but one is a Dutch person who learned Mandarin, the main language spoken in The Hague. Lastly, this background studying also involved the two websites of the Chinese community in the Netherlands (GoGoDutch and Asian News, both in Mandarin) and two online chatting groups among Chinese people based in the Netherlands. This part of the study focused on the pages of job hunting and housing information, to gain a clearer picture of the daily lives and working and living conditions of the Chinese migrant community living in Netherlands.

### **3.4 Knowing Chinese undocumented migrants' worlds**

As the existing data needs to be updated and lack of knowledge about undocumented Chinese migrants, it is necessary to find primer data to fulfill the whole pattern. I chose the qualitative method to make my studies about their own life stories and the opinion about daily lives. As "Qualitative method ex-

presses the assumptions of a phenomenological paradigm that there are multiple realities that are socially defined.” (Firestone 1987) It provides rich description that helps the reader to have the sense of the situation. Through this exploratory method, it gives this research more space to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of undocumented Chinese’s life stories.

Several failing experiences I had during the journey to find the qualified participants. I posted the online and empirical advertisement in the Asian supermarket and most-used website, but only got the requests for sex service in the end. Through the gatekeepers was the other idea, yet no one responded since I am a stranger for them. By the suggestion from my first participant, I started to be a volunteer in the Wereldhuis, a church-run advisory NGO for undocumented people in The Hague. From the end of June until the middle of August, I contacted most of participants of this research in Wereldhuis. Within these eight participants, five participants were referred from the institution; the other three were introduced from their social network.

I had been hesitated between ethnography method and interview for the method of this research conducting. Through completely immersing oneself in other’s lives to understand other cultures with rich detailed insight, this is what ethnography study attracted me a lot. Yet, I finally decided doing interview with ethnographic approach. It was based on the time, people and the research purpose. Due to undocumented status is a ‘taboo’ to touch before the relationship be made, it required more time to find the willing participants to join my study. Interview is “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 3) Thus, it is a method that particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. This possibility to pursue in-depth information around topic in one-time or several times meeting, gave me more flexibility and time control to acquiring same good quality data (McNamara 1999)

Using unstructured interviews was a challenge to me in the beginning, but in the end, it turned out of rich contents. There are several terms to describe the same method, like informal conversational interview, in-depth interview and unstandardized interview, but they all have the same definition:” an interviews in which neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant” (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009) As a good interviewer should be able to” generate rapid insights and formulate question quickly and smoothly”, so that the interview direction can follow the actual situation and personal in-depth information (Patton 2002:343) While in the field and doing the interview, there was no supervisor to adjust me that whether the response was correct or not. The notes were the tool to help me note down all the details in the day, reflected to myself and provided more hints for the next time meeting.

In the way of unstructured interview also empowered the participants themselves during the talk. Seeing that they are the experts of their lives, it gave more power to the participant to describe their own story rather than limited in the researcher's frame. My position not only as a researcher, also was a volunteer and a friend. Therefore, this informal conversation way was easier for them to speak out, both their needs and life stories. After we were more familiar with each other's, they also automatically provided the information that they think it may enrich my data, or further discussion about their rights. Thus, in this research, I used "participants" rather than interviewees, it is because they questioned and find the answered of the theme with me as well. (Atkinson 1994)

For my framework, I proposed a systematic structure to guide the line of questioning in the interview (as Appendix 2), The expectation for the future and challenges. Until the beginning of September 2016, totally 32 interviews have made with eight participants (as Table 1) also their families and friends. All the interviews have transcript to the notes after every time meeting, I had the agreement from all the participants to use all the content to utilize in this research. All the interview were no audio records nor putted down their names, it was due to the request from the participants, this is based on the discussion between the researcher and participants.

**Table 3.2: Number of sessions with participants**

	Sex	Original Region	Age	Numbers of sessions
<b>Dong</b>	M	Shanxi	40	4
<b>Renan</b>	M	Zhejiang	60	2
<b>Mrs. Wen</b>	F	Zhejiang	55	6
<b>Lily</b>	F	Zhejiang	53	4
<b>Zhi</b>	F	Fujian	32	6
<b>Jing</b>	F	Anhui	32	4
<b>Fei</b>	M	Fujian	29	3
<b>Mr. Wen</b>	M	Zhejiang	57	3
<b>Total</b>				32

**Source:** Created by Author

All the notes here were followed the guide from Bernard's (2011) chapter on field notes. I made the logs before every meeting, it noted down the place, the time I had expected and actually spent, the main things that I was going to help them with in the Wereldhuis, and related issues that we might touch upon in our informal interviews. The notes were written up right after the interview, since I found writing notes during the conversation made people nervous and

broke our conversation. I made descriptive and short analytical notes after each of the interviews, usually immediately after the interview so that I could remember as many as possible of the words and small details of the conversation, and what we had talked about. Even so, the process of producing notes does involve also a process of information selection. I was able to start selecting more relevant information important to the theme of this study, and this produced a possible bias in my jotting and notes, yet helped to keep focus in subsequent interviews, which were also informed by my notes on previous discussions (Ryan and Bernard 2003) The coding of field notes is a method further recommended for analysis of the interviews, and I also did this. Facing a lot of descriptive material in the form of notes, I started with eight research issues from my research design and used these to categorise all the data I had collected. I then improved on the categories by digging through all the notes again, and reflecting on the best way to categorise what I had. Lastly, the results were linked back to the background contexts of both Dutch polices and Chinese migrants' history from the literature review and the three interviews with NGO workers. I shared my initial categories with these three key informants, and this resulted in a more holistic view of the way to interpret hyperprecarity and identify coping strategies of Chinese undocumented migrants in Dutch society, and specifically in the context of the city of The Hague.

### **3.5 Limitations and Reflexivity**

This data collecting had two shortcomings to cover the whole pattern of Chinese undocumented migrant workers I have known from the literature. One is hard to reach the workers in beautiful salon, since their position is more sensitive and closed. The second is lack of participants who staying in the Netherlands more than two years but less than fifteen years. As the feature that people only gather with those Chinese people from similar arriving time and background, this data only included two main groups, one is people have come in these two years, and the other is people who have come over 15 years.

“If I introduce you to my friend, they still don't say anything to you since you are just friend's friend! Being a volunteer, at least you help them and they know you are good” (cited from the notes) my first participant such suggested. The positionality of my role actually was only made by myself, also on participants' needs and perspectives. My multiple roles (volunteer, student, friend or researcher...) shaped our relation and distance, and the knowledge be produced. Being a volunteer was a quick way to contact with participants, yet it also created the asymmetrical power relationship between us. As power/knowledge nexus, how and who decide the knowledge is need to be discuss when the knowledge be produced. The objectivity that Marshall defined in The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology “a researcher must be detached, unprejudiced, open-minded, neutral, etc.” (Marshall 1998) Yet, the knowledge from studies actually is partial truth within “specific circumstances, places and histories (it is

situated) and appreciating that those factors shape it in some way” (Rose 1997:307)

Reflecting on my positionality, indeed the volunteer created the imbalance relationship between us, it forced participants share all the details about their life stories and needs since they need my helps. In the other hand, it also created the question mark that which parts were reshaped for gaining more attention/resources? Besides, as a “Chinese” migrant who staying here but can’t speak Dutch neither, this position also made us close to each other’s since the similar background. The similarity between us, especially young female participants, also triggered comparison and projection their needs in my life story. Those subtle perceptions were involved into the notes to keep question myself.

### **3.6 Concluding Reflections**

“Do you believe what they have told you?” a NGO worker asked me during our meeting, it was a question to reminder me double check the data from observation, also stimulated me to rethink the reason why they shared all this information to me.

I have asked them the reason why accepted my keep asking, the answers from them was quite different view “I think you are nice, so I want to help you” “It was good to do something that benefit the knowledge” or “I like play [talk] with you” In the other hands, they also fulfilled their own needs through these interviewing process, and it was part of this research I would like to feedback to them as well. As this unstructured interview with ethnography approach is based on literature review, it should benefit the knowledge both the side of academy and in the field.

# Chapter 4 Historical Overview of Chinese Migration, and the Dutch Context

## 4.1 What we need for building autonomy and Security?

Chinese people with their strong restaurant business tradition form a socially vital ethnic group in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek), up to 2012 there were 80,198 ethnic Chinese people living in the Netherlands, which formed 0.42% of the total population of the country as the fifth biggest minority ethnic group. (Dutch SOPEMI-Report 2011) There is a huge diversity among the Chinese migrants in the Netherlands, not only concerning their place of origin, but also regarding their different times of leaving China. Through introducing the brief history of Chinese undocumented people in the Netherlands, it gained more understanding of their current situation, also the attitudes of local Chinese community and the Dutch authority.

## 4.2 Dutch Internal Control Policies

In the first official document to formulate the general immigration policy, the 1970 memorandum on Foreign Employees, it clearly mentioned that the Netherlands was not a migration-receiving country. The need of migrants is based on the economy trend; migrants provide sufficient manpower to cover the shortage of local labour market. It estimated 112,000 to 163,000 people are living in the Netherlands every year (focus Migration, 2008), of whom 65,000 to 91,000 originate from non-European countries.

Even though there were few immigrants from China or their colonies in the early twentieth century, the Netherlands was hard to be called migrate country before the 1960s. After the World War Two, the manpower needs from agriculture and construction induced the system of seasonal worker hiring. Many seasonal workers from south Europe and north Africa had come to the Netherlands during that time, then kept staying after the working contract was finished, the immigration policies started to be discussed since this time. Starting from the 1970s, the down economy made the need of manpower decreasing, the surplus labour from other countries became the problem rather than spontaneous manpower, it led the stricter boarder control and immigration control for blocking immigrants out of the country. Meanwhile, the 1974 Memorandum of Reply explicitly stated that the Netherlands had responsibilities towards guest works and that a policy to accommodate them in Dutch society was imperative. This policy sought to give guest workers and people without legal staying status improved access to public services and social security and to provide cultural support. During 1974 to the early 1990s, although the illegal staying status started to be seemed as a problem, the access to tax-

supported public service and labour market remained open to undocumented migrants. (Siegel, M. and C. De Neubourg 2011)

Since the 1990s, the exclusion of undocumented migrants from both external and internal control policies started to block migrants out of the Netherlands. Constructing a 'fortress Europe' began to expand during this period: the stricter visa requirements and physical barriers were erected along the land borders of Europe in order to keep people out. The part of internal control policy; In 1991, the government tied the sofi number to a legal residence requirement, thus barring the route to legal participation in the labour market. The Compulsory Identification Act of 1994 has started to request all the employees should be identifying themselves in company. An important centerpiece of such policies is Koppelingswet ('Linkage Act') of 1998, it excluded irregular migrants from tax-supported public services such as social assistance, public housing, education for adults and nonemergency health care. (Broeders & Engbersen 2007, Siegel, M. and C. De Neubourg 2011, Meeteren, M.v. 2014)

Since 2014, their irregular staying has been decriminalized. (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2014) In the other hand, on 16 September 2011, the Cabinet approved several policy intentions proposed by the Minister for Immigration and Asylum. It highlighted three points for the undocumented immigrant's policies: The first, the strong punishment to smugglers and human-trafficking. The second, the decriminalization of undocumented minor residents and people who helping illegal migrants. The last but most important, the high fine and serious punishment for the employer who providing work to illegally residing immigrants. It has led that undocumented migrants' working place alerts from formal market to invisible place.

#### *4.2.1 Amnesty, Detention and Returning*

Facing the risk of being stopped by the police and random check from the authority is other part of their living condition due to the control policies that have mentioned in previous paragraph. The main purpose of the authority is expelling undocumented migrants from the country, yet the reality is fewer than half of them were successfully deported. "As undocumented migrants can be deported only when identity, national and migration history can be established" (Broeders & Engbersen 2007). For the side of migrants, it is possible to avoid the deportation if they hide their real name or personal identity in the Netherlands. It also can be the possibility during this process, the original country denied the document and rejected to accept the migrant back.

A way out of undocumented staying either return or grant a residence permit. So far, the strong returning policies has implemented from European Union to the national level, also IOM in the Netherlands is executing the returning project for helping undocumented migrants back their original country. Returning is the mainstream of the authority nowadays, the financial aid of returning also give the choice for determining their own future plan. Granting

the residence permit is the other way-out for their situation, family reunion, employment, studying and asylum procedure are the four ways for getting legal staying. In the Netherlands,” the last general regularization schemes date back to 1975 and 1979. After that there were no more general amnesties” (Meeteren, M.v. 2014) In 1990s, ‘six years’ agreement’ allowed the undocumented migrants who had legally worked over six years could acquire legal document, to compensate the labors who be excluded from renewed labor policies that time.

In 2007, the other one-time amnesty was implemented for former asylum seekers who met one of these criteria: had applied asylum procedure before April 2001 and can approve that their staying in the Netherlands even already be rejected; Or the one who had not been rejected yet. Some of undocumented migrants had not applied this amnesty due to they hadn’t applied for asylum procedure. As the immigration policies are more completed than before, there is merely chance to acquire resident permit through special way like before.

#### *4.2.2 Exclusion from public services*

The Linkage Act in 1998 is a significant piece for restricting undocumented migrants into the access to public institution. Through linked access to public and semi-public provisions to a valid identification, it excluded the people without valid resident permit from tax-supported public services such as social assistance, public housing, education for adults and nonemergency health care (Broeders & Engbersen 2007). The public social cares that remain maintain in the system are those services which be guaranteed of international human rights and agreements that it has signed, such as the emergency healthcare and labour right.

As undocumented status is regard of illegally residing situation, the problem of their continuing living is falls on local government. In the Netherlands, it forbids any level of authorities to provide aids to undocumented migrants. Local organizations provide their service to homeless people and to provide food to people in need, but those services only for people who reside legitimately since it is based on government subsidy. The aids through non-public sector and voluntary works are the

sources to undocumented migrants. Any aid provided has to be privately financed, mostly it is organized by local churches or voluntary works. Organizations also tend to be secretive about the help they provide and to only provide such assistance in locations tucked away outside city centers and out of sight of the general public. However, it is harder in recently years since all the aids started to double confirm personal identification before entering the helping system. (Meeteren, M.v. 2014; Rusinovic et al. 2002)

Meanwhile, basing on the human right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (ICESCR, Article 12 (1)) that highlighted in the international and European convention, every country provides different level of medical care for people irrespective of their



legal status. In the Netherlands, the impetrative medical care is provided to the undocumented migrants. Since 2009, health care providers can seek reimbursement for 80-100% of the cost of care, depending on the treatment and therapy from the special fund. The reimbursement should be based on a premise that undocumented migrants cannot afford the bill. As this result, a wide range of health services is available. However, the high financial burden and practical challenges remain exist. This referral system from primary to secondary care is possible to be refused, even with the referral letter of GP. A study from Doctors of the world pointed that 29% of undocumented migrants did not receive the medical service they needed. (Biswas and Dan 2012)

For the part of housing, excepting of asylum seekers, the migrants without documents are blocked from formal housing market and public housing since 1998. It results in only short-term housing is the available choice. The shortage of decent housing is the main issue that most studies focus on. In addition, illegally sub-let rooms from other people, this sub-tenant situation makes their staying more instable and precarious.

### **4.3 Chinese people in the Netherlands**

Taking Chinese undocumented migrant worker in the Netherlands as the center, this section describes the changing of their living condition through the timeline, in this way to introduce their short history, working condition and the community they stay in the moment.

#### *4.3.1 The end of 19<sup>th</sup> century until WWII*

The series of chaos in China in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century pushed Chinese migrant workers to the stage of history. Opened the boarder to big scale foreign firms brought serious collapses of small scale manual industries and farms, also the possibility of mobility. In the other hand, the demand of 'Coolies' - low-skilled and cheap labours, pulled them to all the factories and harbors in all industrial countries. From the late 19th century until the time before World War II, it estimated ten million Chinese migrants had been working in other countries. This push-pull factor brought them to the harbor of Rotterdam as warehouse helpers and sailors. (Fu 2008)

The ferry companies had hired them as contacted workers to complement the lack of manpower. Since only employer can apply returning visa for them once the contract be completed, it created highly dependence relationship for them. The impossibility of money saving and job losing during the Big Depression made them became the problem of the destitution. Facing this foreign poor population around the harbors of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, in the view of the sociologist in that moment, Frederik van Heek, suggested in his report that Chinese migrants should be categorized them to two groups: useful labour force and surplus Chinese people. (Idema 2013; Li 1999:46), the authority in that moment refused to give any social assistance since those homeless

Chinese workers were “unworthy” “yellow” foreigners. Without any protection of employers and the authorities, the Chinese migrant workers were complete passive in this relationship and faced the discrimination from the social image and ethnical background.

However, the strong entrepreneurial spirit inspired the starting of peanut biscuit business. This small scale manual business helped them go through the Depression, and even accumulated the funding to start their own catering business. This entrepreneurial orientation is one of the Chinese migrants’ characteristics that several studies have mentioned. (Li 1999; Gao 2010)

#### 4.3.2 *After WWII to the 1990s*

More Asian immigrants from the former colonies after the war, like Suriname and Indonesia, brought the revolution of Dutch dining table, Asian flavor has started to be popular all over the Netherlands (Pieke 1998) The booming catering industry established the complete ethnical economy for Chinese people in the Netherlands.

By the rapid expansion of the catering sector and by the fact that the immigration of the first Chinese migrant generation from Guangdong and Zhejiang was more difficult due to the Peoples’ Republic of China’s emigration restriction measures “(Mandin, Jérémy 2015) It had provided more job opportunities for Chinese people from all other countries (Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, etc.) since the need of Chinese speaking manpower. Meanwhile, the long working hour in the catering industry, 12-14 hours per day and 4 days off per month, made the Chinese migrants hardly have chances to develop other social network and Dutch language skill, the “isolation” from this working background made them have difficulty to intergrade to the Dutch society (Pieke and Benton 1998; Gijsberts, Huijnk, and Vogels 2011) And this working condition also copied to the young fellows who had come from the same region nowadays.

“...hard to judge my parents’ generation. It [hard working style] was how they been through and “earnt” the stable lives; In the other hand, they are doing the same to young fellows now. They cannot speak Chinese and working like dog. I feel sorry for those workers, but my parents believe those young kids are simply lazy...”<sup>2</sup> (Interview with EUR student).

In the 1980s, the Minorities policy was introduced to all the ethnical groups for maintaining their culture identity and integrating them into the Dutch society. This was mainly focus on eliminating the racial discrimination on employment and education, undocumented migrant workers had access to

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<sup>2</sup> According to the overall studies about Chinese people in the Netherlands in 2011 (Gijsberts, Huijnk, and Vogels), over half of first generation cannot speak either English or Dutch, and relatively high proportion of low incomes. As the result, cheap, hard working and Chinese speaking labour is the demand for this catering industry.

education, labour market and social assistance based on tax payment. This policy was replaced by the new immigration control policies since 1990s, the elimination of undocumented migrants from labour market and social assistance

“...he [Landlord] got the luck, arrived here [The Hague] around 1990, so he got this beautiful house from the government. I had heard about good life here, so I moved here from Italy, however it was too late [after 1998] ...” (From interview with Mrs.Wen).

During this transition period, China implemented the Reform and Opening policy in 1978, it opened the access for Chinese migrants move to the Netherlands again. Excepting of family reunification of Zhejiang and Guangdong people, Chinese people from ‘DongBei’ provinces<sup>3</sup> moved to the Netherlands during the 1990s through smugglers (Snake-Head in Chinese) as the solution of economic crisis in their hometown. Except of working in the catering and service industries, the need of caregiver in households was also increased. For releasing the female family members into labour market, their family role was replaced by female migrant workers who from the same region. They preferred undocumented migrant workers is due to the expectation of long hour working and the control of their household. Dongbei female workers fulfilled this market demand.

#### *4.3.3 The 2000s to Present*

Facing the increasingly strict immigration policy, amnesty and asylum procedure had been seemed as potential access to gain legal status. The amnesty in 2007 accepted few Chinese migrants’ application as refugees. It brought the light for people. In 2008, the rumor about the new special amnesty around whole Chinese community, it led hundreds of Chinese people asked for asylum procedure in one day. According to studies and interview, some of them were refugees due to religion prosecution (Mariani 2015), yet in fact mostly were economy migrants.

“They said there was a chance to get the paper, but I didn’t go! I was interested but I hadn’t applied the asylum procedure before, so going to the north[Arnhem] only wasted my time. In the end, I decided go to work that morning. Who knew it was just a joke? Those fools!” (Interview with Mr. Wen)

“Asylum procedures were possible during the beginning of 2000s, there were some people from China were persecuted due to Falun Gong. Yet recently years were almost not at all....” (Interview with IOM officer)

As traditionally Chinese restaurants are family businesses and provide big portion of food with economy price for attracting customers. The overwhelm-

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<sup>3</sup> Northeast part of China, mainly refers to Liaoning, Heilongjiang and Jilin province. In the end of 1980s, facing a series of public heavy industries closures due to the implementation of reform and opening-up policy, those laid-off workers started to emigrate all over the world for eliminating the destitution condition. This wave gradually dissipated around 2000s, they either settled in other countries, or backed to hometown since the mitigation of this economic crisis. (sourced from the interview with IOM officer)

ing number of Chinese restaurants means the highly competition of lower food price between each other. Either family member works without payment or paying less salaries to the employees for downing the prices is the surviving strategy for restaurants. Undocumented migrants who come from the same region is the alternative for this current state. (Hiah and Staring, 2016)

The undocumented Chinese migrants nowadays mainly from Zhejiang (Wenzhou and Qingtlen) and Fujian (Fuzhou and Changle) province, both are well known as hometown of oversea Chinese. The Chinese undocumented migrants mainly are peasantries and urban laid-off workers, who are not compatible in major labour market. (Pieke et nl 2004) They came after 1998 (The Linkage Act) and came through Chinese smugglers 'Snake-head' rather than the formal immigration access. Therefore, they started their lives in the Netherlands as 'illegal' residents and 'illegal' workers.

The hiring rate of undocumented migrants is not such common than before since the high fine to employers in catering and service industries from 2011. The employment of undocumented migrants has turned to be underground, both in places and hiring way. Nowadays, they only can work in the kitchen, in the country side or within the household. Being hired with oral contract (mostly temporary as well) and cash transaction as the paying way. (Van de Leun et nl 2006 ; Pieke 1998 ; Han and Staring 2016 ) Besides, their salary is much lower since the employer are facing the risk of penalty and compulsory enclosure. In addition of they are needed for labour market, hiring undocumented migrant workers still is a help to young fellows and the expectation of reciprocity that rooted in Chinese culture. It is a must-do in the culture for keeping the social network (Hiah and Staring 2016).

In addition of working in the catering industry and household, the instable employment environment makes the sideline become the alternative to fill up the gap between the works. Since the sideline is introduced through social network, it required certain familiar with local community to get involve. Although it has decreased since the restriction on milk powder purchasing from March 2013, doing milk powder purchasing service has been the most popular sideline in these recently years. It is also for other products from both the Netherlands and China, like the Body Shop' products, electric toothbrushes or electronic devices from China. The other sideline is selling information and services, like translation, Chinese teaching or introducing 'possible' access to social assistance. This sideline work not only includes undocumented migrant workers also foreign students in the Netherlands. (From the Interviews and Notes)

“...Can you see the building next to KFC? It was a big infant product mall there. like two years before. During the time, there always a long cue for buying powders, and I always found them [undocumented she was serving] there...” (Interview with Social Worker)

“Knowing Dutch is quite important for me, people sometimes hired me for going hospital or bank, then I learnt 10 euros per hour, it was good extra money.” (Interview with Dong)

“Everyone doing so, come on! It not takes a lot of time, just buy the milk power and go! ... I think I have earned at least 4,000 euros in the past year, it is a business...” (Interview with Zhi)

Another arena of labor market is masseuses who also providing sexual services in the beauty salon. there is a lot of massage parlors talk of poor working conditions. Moreover, masseuses often find themselves in situations where they are dependent on their employers, particularly in the case smuggled the women, unlawfully residing in the Netherlands, Dutch and / or English do not speak and burdened by a high debt burden. However, they are more vulnerable since their identity of sex worker is discriminated by Chinese culture and local community. (Bottenberg and Janssen 2012; Interview with NGO worker)

Talking about the present living condition is hard to avoid the using of Internet and Mobile phone. It also is the other factor reshaped their own lives and works. Through Wechat<sup>4</sup> chatting groups and the lifestyle information websites (e.g. GoGoDutch). As the higher confidentiality characteristic and Chinese using model, people gained one more access to approach job and housing information. Also it provides the communication platform for all the questions and required services. Besides, this online chatting mode also is used in local NGO workers' working model. They use Wechat to direct contact with migrant worker itself, so that it can exchange the information without the limitation of time and situation.

“I went to a massage parlor; they immediately knew that I'm going to say something since I am a woman [not customer]. The boss came and politely asked me leave with my publicity leaflets. Even though I could talk with workers, the boss was just there watching us... with wechat is better, but still problem...” (Interview with Social Worker)

#### **4.4 Overview: Chinese undocumented in NL**

For the perspective of Chinese government and their emigration policies, emigration is considered as a personal decision that individual made for their own benefits. Basing on this notion, there is no strong policy about returning project and oversea assistance from the official sector of China. (B. Xiang, 2003) However, through this historical review of Chinese migrant workers, it shows the linkage that domestic crisis led large-scale immigration moves. It specifical-

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<sup>4</sup> Wechat is an online chatting application wide used between people from Mainland China. Through organizing the chatting group by social network, it can provide the communication platform to chat and exchange information within the group. It has become to an access for job hunting and living information. E.g. “I am in NL” Group or “NL worry-free platform” Group

ly pushed the mobility of urban laid-off employees and peasantries in the countryside from China, especially those regions which have a long history of immigration. The existing migrant social network facilitated their mobility and resettlement in the Netherlands.

When it links to the Dutch immigration policies, the supports from both government to undocumented Chinese migrants are merely to see, only the basic human rights that be guaranteed in the side of Dutch government (limited medical aid, legal aid and working right). In addition, the returning project that supported by IOM is the extra resource that once they voluntarily go back to their original country. As the isolation from their working style and surrounding, the support for Chinese migrant workers mainly from their own social network or within their own community that composed by the same background.

Generally speaking, comparing to the undocumented migrants from other non-western countries, Chinese people have more chances to finding a job and staying in the Netherlands within this ethnical economy. Another phenomenon of Chinese labour market is, seldom undocumented migrant workers work for the employer in order to pay off debts. Mostly they have paid off the travel fee to the smugglers, and had freedom to choose the employers, it is same as Chinese migrants in Italy and France (Staring and Hiah 2016; Pieke 2007; Ciccagno et al 2010) However, the issue that Chinese undocumented migrant workers facing is, the precarious working condition and the isolation from the society and other social networks. The high language and culture barrier are two side reasons that making Chinese undocumented migrants more away from the Dutch society. It provides protection for their illegal staying status, in the other hand, it also blocks the access to protect their rights that be guaranteed in local policies.

Through the historical context and interviews, it clears to see that female migrant workers are more visible in nowadays. Unlike the time of family reunification, the female role is no longer an affiliation of other male migrant workers, instead Since then, an individual migrants came for their own purpose. Despite that they may have more job opportunities than male workers today since mostly working within the households today. (Guerassimoff, Carine 2006) Their payment remains less than male workers, and works more links to house work or service work.

# Chapter 5 Findings: From Precarity to Autonomy?

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is combined with three parts. Firstly, talking about the Chinese migrant worker's working condition nowadays. Secondly, discussing the basic needs that they focusing on their lives: Physiological needs, Safety and Health. Autonomy is the last but not the least part that discussed in this chapter as conclusion also view how they interact with the environment for their own better living.

## 5.2 Working condition nowadays

In fact, the difficulty of work is built on the longer job-hunting period and worse working condition than it was before. Mr. Wen's friend, a kitchen helper who has working permit told me that "the first 5 or 6 years you came without paper is fine, there is chance everywhere. Now no paper means only kitchen work is possible for you, but it is not worthy at all".<sup>5</sup>The limited access is linked with the policy that is implemented from 2011: measures such as high fine and regularly document check have changed the working environment. According to the SZW's report, the employment rate of the undocumented migrants has decreased from 33% to 20%. The amount of salary also decreased, Mr. Wen worked in The Hague for 1,700 euros as salary. However, the restaurant closed down, now he is working in Leiden through friend's introduction for 1,400 euros. His situation is much better than other younger participants since he has his own social network and skills, however he still needs to work the same long working hours at a lower wage. Different from the early time that the undocumented migrant workers came for saving money, the eight participants expect only to over their daily expense nowadays.

The catering industry and the home caring sector have a stable salary standard which is lower than the minimum wage (still with long working hours). I summarised the overall working condition in both sectors known through the interviews in Table 5.1. Comparing with the Dutch's minimum wage standard at 1,537.2 euros per month for people above 23 years old with general working hours is 36-40 hours (Gov. of Netherlands 2016 Jul. 1<sup>st</sup>), the conventional wage standard within Chinese community shows the reality of the unfair working condition. As the employment relationship is built on oral agreement, it creates uncertainties for their work security. This wage table also shows that the invisible ceiling for undocumented people. "Chef is the thing for the documented" Mr. Wen replied when I asked about the difference between cook and chef, responding to Bloch et al's observation, "The disparity between workers with and without documents, in terms of wages and conditions, as a consequence of status, was keenly felt, understood but accepted." (Bloch et al 2015)

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Wen and her friend (7 September 2016)

The invisible ceiling in their context is not only the working condition but also the career development. “Girls go for the house; guys go for the kitchen”<sup>6</sup> they expressed the labour market with this type of slangs. The limited workplace also shrinks the potential development of their lives, also degrades the skilled worker to the unskilled. “I have no child and relatively young. I had no idea that it would be a problem for me to find a job one day. People like old mamas who have experience to be their nannies rather than a young lady who has accounting work experience.”<sup>7</sup> The same observation as Bloch et al (2015) ‘s paper that the labour market in the minority community only narrowed to several specific sectors, there is merely space to jump out of this scope especially when the individual is not documented in the moment. The wage range and working hour are not much changeable even finding the work through different channels (internet, social network, walk-in, etc.)

Not have mentioned in Bloch’s study, as the sharing of local NGO workers in Fair work described, there is not much space for them to bargain the working condition since the catering industry actually holding on several big families and they all are fellows from same region. Once you have any bad reputation, it is hard to find a job within all Chinese community. The limitation of labour market is also rooted from social network due to the family business character of catering industries in the Netherlands. It reemphasises the importance of social network for stable working opportunities.

**Table 5.1 Working condition within Chinese Community**

	<b>Catering industry</b>	<b>Home care service</b>
<b>Entry Level</b>	<b>Kitchen Helper</b>	<b>Child Care</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 800-1,200 Euros</li> <li>- 10am – 10pm (12 hours)</li> <li>- 4 days-off per month</li> <li>- Meals and Room included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 800-1,000 Euros</li> <li>- 10am – 8 pm (10 hours)</li> <li>- 8 days-off per month</li> </ul>
<b>Middle Level</b>	<b>Cook</b>	<b>Maternity Matron</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,200-1,600 Euros</li> <li>- 10am – 10pm (12 hours)</li> <li>- 4 days-off per month</li> <li>- Meals and Room included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1,000-1,600 Euros</li> <li>- All day service</li> <li>- Meals and Room included</li> <li>- 4-8 days-off per month</li> </ul>
<b>Management level</b>	<b>Chef</b> (Only for documented)	

Source: made by author

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dong (23 Jun 2016)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Zhi (11 August 2016)



“One afternoon, they just walked into kitchen and fired me due to the upcoming government’s regular check, but they ‘forgot’ to pay my salary of that month”.<sup>8</sup> In the definition of precarious in work, expect of working condition, the form of work, the employment status and dimensions of labour market insecurity, also formulate the worker’s situation (Hennebry 2014). The employment through oral agreement doesn’t guarantee the security of employee. And similar case also happened to Dong, he was reported to the authority as a undocumented worker while he was working for a Chinese company. The person reported him was his working partner, so that they didn’t have to give him the commission per oral agreement. The precarious work condition is based on high dependency and loss of self-protection. Jing is a nanny for a Wenzhou family, the first day she started her work, her employer told her “if anything happens, don’t mention my name! We don’t know each other in the outside”! The words gave her very deep impression about her employer’s fear, but what’s more, her unprotected surrounding.

Rather than questioning their working condition, the migrants view the high instability and the oral agreement as the result of having “insufficient” legal-social status. Most of the participants have the faith to oral agreement. Hearing the cases described earlier, they mostly concluded it as “Bad luck” or “Met wrong person”. Chinese people usually gathered to several small groups, and within the small group there is a strong linkage among the fellows (Fu 2008; Mariani 2015) that helps shape this high faith. However, some real cases showed that the oral agreement may still be risky, and the migrants mostly didn’t have any other resources to copy with the risk. The “Bad Luck” is the conclusion from them in this situation.

“Why should I fight with my boss? They haven’t beaten me or locked me in the cage. I mean they are good”. In the perspective of Fair work worker, he believes that it is part of Chinese culture to “吃苦” (Enduring affliction). Another opinion of a volunteer in Wereldhuis is that “he just likes Buddha”. During my interview, the strong image that the Dutch NGO workers has from the working experience, is Chinese migrant workers’ tolerance of heavily-laboured work and their silence for work exploitation. “People from Morocco or Turkey speak out, even the reality is not such serious as their words. But the Chinese are usually quite silent, they only show up when they are really in trouble”.

However, the main reason is what Fair work worker indicated, the fact that silence is the best protection for all the workers since the catering industry is under the control of the same group of people. The other reason is the insufficient information that the workers acquired. “Actually, before you, no one have told me about this”. It is the same phenomenon that has been mentioned in the historical review: the language barrier and isolation from other social network makes the acquisition of information is insufficient. Secondly, only selected information is distributed within the Chinese community, as Dong (participant) said “[The employers and the old fellows] fear that it would lead

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Fei (4 August 2016)

others to go astray”. Lastly, the language barrier is the factor that they have difficulty reporting for themselves. There was one case in exception that was addressed in Hiah and Staring ‘s study (2016). A kitchen helper bargained the working condition with his employer by posing threat to file reports to the police rather than claiming it through labour right.

## 5.3 Finding a sense of Wellbeing

### 5.3.1 *Hyper-dependence on work: For basic physiological needs*

Comparing with other non-western migrant workers in the Netherlands, the Chinese have relatively higher employment stability. The unemployment rate of the Chinese community was 6.4%, closer to the Dutch’s at 5.8% and much lower than the Turkish’s at 11.8%. In fact, even though less job opportunities were out since the Netherlands implemented the stricter policy of controlling the undocumented employment from 2011, a certain level of labour market remains open to undocumented migrant workers. However, newcomers have to face longer job-hunting period and worse working condition. From participants who came to the Netherlands in recent two years, it took 3 to 4 months to find a long-term job; the working compensation is lower than not only the Dutch statutory standard but also the previous wage level within the Chinese community.

“Just enough for food is fine.”<sup>9</sup> From their definition, “food” in this context means food, daily necessities and housing. This sentence is highly used when they told me about their living condition. These words signify the difficulty in earning more extra money, also in acquiring basic needs that were highly stressed.

I further asked the difference in material conditions between here and China. When Mr. Wen talked about “enough for food,” and “food price here is cheap, he also said that it is hard to live in China now. “We have houses but there is no good job in our small town, but food price is double than it is in the Netherlands, what’s the point to go back home?” he kept saying “I am a cook in the restaurant, everything is the same but they paid me 1,400 euros, it is not a lot, normally should be 2,500- 2,900 euros. [Sigh~] that’s the price they pay everywhere, but it is enough for food and sometimes extra” Actually, this money is only enough to cover the living for two in The Hague, seldom have spare money. This balance of income and living cost push them to keep working since there is never much saving.

As a friend of Zhi told me “Earning money! Or who gives me the next meal?”<sup>10</sup> The lack of social assistance in both the Netherlands and China (more discussed in Section 5.3) leads to the fact that work has become the only resource for getting basic physiological needs, which in their word “Food”. The

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Zhi (14 August 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Zhi, Jing and their friend (07 August 2016)

reality of worsened employment environment for undocumented migrant workers made them adjust their criterion of working condition. From their self-calculation, a job that can pay over 500-600 euros and “doable”, it can be considered. High dependence on work is based on away from destitution, which means away from the insufficient of physiological needs for themselves and their families in the Netherlands. Thus, the meaning of work is more about their own living cost rather than the debt or family support for these eight participants.

It is more about the tie between the undocumented status and working condition, rather than the tie for trading-off the legal status in their context. As emphasised in the previous paragraph, work, as the only solution to support the migrants’ basic needs, deepens their compromise to the existing situation.

Today’s strict immigration policies and high instability of employment relationship make it hardly possible for undocumented people to get working permits through their employers in reality. A case between Fei and Mr. Wen’s son is a good example to explain the mislinkage between gaining legal status and precariat for undocumented people. Both males came in the beginning of 2014, 29 years of age, living with their families and started working as a kitchen helper in the Netherlands. The difference between them is the legal status: Fei is undocumented, while Mr. Wen’s son is documented. Mr. Wen negotiated with the restaurant owner (his Wenzhou fellow), so that his son could come with working permit but in lower working condition. Fei knew clearly that it is impossible for trading-off his time to get the document from an employer since he is undocumented and has no relationship with them. He was in Arnhem that moment, earned 1,000 euros monthly, including the salary and the housing benefits. “They hired you just because you are cheap, what is the point to get you the paper? Besides, there are other documented there! I have my family with me, and I need money.”<sup>11</sup> He said. As their employment is constructed on their ‘cheap labour’, most employers are not willing to support them to get the working permits. Instead, the employer uses it as a bargaining chip to pay back their debt of gratitude. The son of Mr. Wen is the example here. He works the same working hours in a restaurant in The Hague through his father’s referral, getting only 700<sup>12</sup> euro’s salary per month for exchanging the annual working visa with employer. “He is working like a dog for small money, but it is better for him, they paid all the tax and others! He got the visa because the owner knows us (Mr. & Mrs. Wen)”<sup>13</sup>

Through this case comparison, we see a similar conclusion as what Lewis (2014) cited, it is “the ongoing interplay of increasingly deregulated labor markets, characterized by employers’ demands for low-cost ‘flexible’ labor and highly restrictive immigration and asylum policies”. It removes and trade-off the basic work rights and the welfare of the undocumented in the receiving country. It is just for “Food.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Fei (04 August 2016)

<sup>12</sup> Generally, for a kitchen helper in Chinese restaurant, the salary is 1,200 to 1,400 euros per months. Non-documented worker is around 800- 1000 euros. (source by interviews)

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mrs. Wen (11 August 2016)

### 5.3.2 *Personal safety: Police and housing*

As the explanation of safety in the definition of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it includes physical safety, living and economic stability. Basing on it, the studies after Maslow (1970) added the sense of security into the discussion. Doyal and Gough (Gough 2014) used "Health", which touched the mental health part as well. In the conception of Deci and Ryan (2000), they elaborated more on the feeling of satisfaction in their living condition and daily lives. When this question was posed to my participants, safety mostly is about two things: one is avoidance from the police, the other one is housing. It shows that staying in the Netherlands is part of their sense of safety as they prefer living in the Netherlands to living in China. The other thing about their safety needs is the legal status in the Netherlands. Housing and the possibility of legitimate stay, therefore, shaped their sense of security rather than possibility of violence and social harassment.

Fundamentally, meeting their expectation for security is nearly impossible since at this moment their staying is considered illegal in the Netherlands. During our conversation, my participants and I discussed about how to lower the possibility that certain situation may happen and the actions should be taken once at an emergency moment. This part also ties to Doyal and Gough (1991)'s conception of security, and one of the dimension of wellbeing in Narayan's conception (2000): Behaviour and Risk. In their perspective, the linkage between the social-legal status is more about safety, instead the unfair working condition that they have had which has been discussed in the previous section, this section focuses more on their own feeling of security.

"At least the lawyer should put me in the asylum procedure, it is better than nothing!" Ms. Lily expected to reapply with the asylum procedure even it would fail again, I asked what the difference will be as she has already been undocumented staying in the Netherlands over 15 years. In her perspective, nothing will change in her life, but free from the fear of police is the point that she would like to try. "Control[ling] over one's environment" (Nussbaum 2000) is one of the key concepts to build our own wellbeing, the issue of polices is more about finding the control of their life and pursuing their own ideal lives in another country. For people who came to the Netherlands with the reason of religious evacuation, they fear more about the potential risk of sending back China. "I cannot go back China now; the life here is everything to me".

If comparing with the improvement of gaining the self-autonomy and risk management that suggested by Wood (2007), few people like Ms. Lily, trying to apply asylum procedure to exchange temporary stability, as the way of "de-clientelisation". Mostly their coping strategies are focused on "Preparation of hazards" and "scattering the risk". For example, keeping away from polices and Dutch people, obeying all the traffic rules, or changing their own personal data (e.g. name and date of birth). It is interesting to see that the education background may be the factor that links with seeking help from the outside resources. Within these eight participants, Dong, Lily, Zhi and Fei have higher education background (Secondary graduated or BA degree), they all had the experience of actively asking help from other organizations and advocated their own rights (e.g. appealing the decision of asylum procedure, negotiating their own right with police and landlord). The other group of participants,

mostly are more passive in terms of approaching the new resources, are only open to this possibility when their other fellows already had good experience and someone trust worthy.

This risk avoidance consciousness widely affected their living condition, especially the housing part. As housing is the fundamental safety need that all the theory emphasised, it is not only the sense of safety but also the physiological needs. However, since the Linkage Act from 1998, the tenants that reside in the house were required to be documented. Even though within Chinese community, there are many resources that would sublet housing to the undocumented through social network or website, yet the similar instability as working condition, this housing contract is based on oral agreement and cash transactions, making it the undocumented vulnerable to any accident. This asymmetrical power relationship is similar to the employment relationship they are facing as well. Moreover, this housing relationship may tie with the employment relationship for some undocumented migrant workers, like kitchen helpers and homecare within households. It is hard for the undocumented to be secured from their double instability from economy and residence. This tie with the social-legal status and the housing right, directly links with the precarious lives that they have. During the discussion, I suggested that they seek legal aid to fight for their right, “How do I speak with the lawyer? They don’t speak Chinese”. The language problem again emerges.

The coping strategies for the housing issue are quite similar with legal-social status issue, mostly focusing on “Preparation of hazards” and “scattering the risk”. Like staying outside of house during the daytime to avoid the contact with neighborhood and unexpected check from the authority, staying with one or two documented migrant workers, or other prevention way to decrease the risks of being found by the authority.

Discussing about their sense of safety, it is not only about the physiological security, moreover, for the participants they mostly focus on the satisfaction of their lives and risk prevention. Facing the unbalanced power relationship and the limitation from the reality, the coping strategies mostly focus on the preparation from the hazards and asked favours from existing social network. Higher education background may facilitate the participants to be more open to the new resources. However, only when the new information be experienced by others, the possibility of self-right advocacy and connecting with other resources can be added into their risk management.

### *5.3.3 Health and Insurance*

Health in the definition of Doyal and Gough (Gough 2014) is the most essential factor for human being, it is the need that all people require no matter of their culture inheritance, hierarchy level or other identities. The consideration of medical aid is important also based on this sense. If looking through my first intake with these eight participants, there were half of them that asked medical advices in their first time consulting with the Wereldhuis.

Except of Dong, all the rest of other participants have consulted the medical advices and accompanying services to clinic or hospital. It is because of the medical resource in Chinese community is limited, and can only help provide medicines or tooth extraction/washing service through private clinic. These information is shared between social networks and websites. However, it

is not enough to cover the emergency of physiological safety. These private medical services sometimes cause more damages for their body.

Even though after 2009, the authority has started to provide the special fund to support the emergency medical aid for people without health insurance, including the undocumented, yet according to Biswas et al (2012) and Dokters van de Wereld 's annual report (2013), "It can be problematic that adult dental care (including acute dental care) is not covered. The referral system from primary to secondary care is not optimal". Indeed, four participants came to Wereldhuis for the dental problem, and the other two have asked about the counseling for chorionic decease. Mainly due to the large amount of medical service fee and the difficulty of entering the referral system, it couldn't be resolved within their social network due to the language barrier and little knowledge about the local medical system. One other thing that hasn't been discussed in Biswas's paper and Dokters van de Wereld 's annual report is the discussion of gynecological disease for female undocumented migrant workers, all the four female participants have asked the medical advice about the gynecological symptoms.

Through the process of accompanying Zhi and Jing to reach medical service from the first intake to finish their therapies, I saw how undocumented people approach the medical system and their frustrations. As the medical consulting need a big range of oral expression of their own symptoms and their social-legal status, the fear of identity exposure in the beginning was the most difficult part for them to decide either to enter the medical system or endure their own pain. "They asked for the passport and all the details, I was really afraid of being there, and I decided to give you a fake name that time", Jing told me this a few months after we told about our first meeting. The struggle between the physiological security and the sense of security creates difficulties for undocumented people when they need to go for doctor, it turns out the medical service only will be considered when they feel "painful"<sup>14</sup>, even though the symptoms had already been there for years. Through the time to see the alteration of time preference behaviour, it managed the risk but extended the hazards to the body.

After all the process of therapies were finished, they told me the two main reasons that lowered the possibility for them to accept the medical service through public medical system. As the clinic and hospital only open during the weekdays and daytime, it is difficult for them to ask short day-off with employer, especially for completing the therapy they always need to be through several times of referrals and treatments. "It was okay to ask for a day-off in the first time, the second and the third time it became harder and harder. And I worry about what if the employer won't like this"<sup>15</sup>. The other cause of their frustration was the denial and referral systems, the distinct definition of "emergency" aid, making it hard for the undocumented migrants to be sure if they can be accepted to the medical system, especially when they are referred to the secondary care facing more frustration. Not even to mention about the language barriers between them and medical system.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Mr. Wen (07 September 2016)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Jing (10 August 2016)

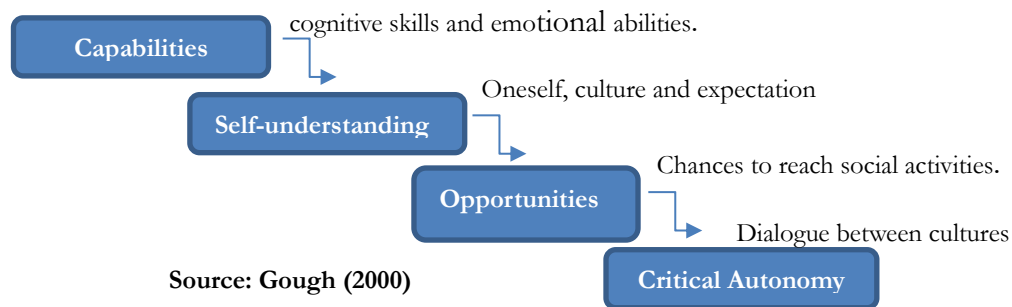
As the vague definition of emergency and some doctors may not know the special fund for the undocumented, the high expense of medical care also led Mrs. Wen to the big financial crisis two years ago. “I had saved quite some amount of money for buying a house in the hometown once I go back, but my decease took away all the money”! Disease itself is the risk for their daily lives, from their own body, social-legal status, work and their economy.

## 5.4 Autonomy and Chinese Undocumented Migrants

Different theories provided the conception of “Autonomy”. In general, autonomy is about from oneself to reach the outside world. By one’s own abilities and thought of their lives, human beings start to put in action to achieve their expectations of life. During this process, the interaction between individual and environment may benefit or obstruct the achievement of those expectations, which control their own lives. In the words of Doyal (1994), autonomy is the balance between self-achievement and obedience of rules.

To increase the autonomy to gain the sense of self- achievement within the living environment, Doyal and Gough (1991) proposed four steps to gain the autonomy within the culture communication, since the rules are based out of cultures and social norms, which is the way to gain more one’s own wellbeing. The four steps as the figure (as below). This section will use this model to analyse their autonomy and possibility of improvement.

**Figure 5.1 Four steps to gain Personal Autonomy**



### 5.4.1 Capabilities

In Doyal and Gough (1991), they mentioned about capability which is about a person’s ability to learn, have confidence in learning, have the goal. They are the ones to learn, to know the limitation of learning process and willing to be responsible for all these process. This is the fundament of autonomy for every individual.

In the view of participants, lacking of language skill is the main barrier that blocks them from the Dutch society and the daily lives in The Hague. Language skill is also considered as the main capabilities for individuals to understand other’s culture and speak out in their own voice (Doyal 1994), especially at occasions when they need to exercise their rights and approach to social assistance. Zhi after her experience of seeing a doctor and discussion with

friends, she decided to learn Dutch for her future life in the Netherlands. She believes that it is possible for her since she is still young, and she also understands that her salary may reduce since she is going to save some daytime for studying. The aim is to understand the Dutch society and deal with the emergency situation by herself. It is her way to advocate her personal better life. As capability is hard to be categorized in single definition, in front of the same language barrier of the life. Lily and Mrs. Wen chose by asking favours from their social network to achieve the same target, although they knew that relying on others may cause more time waiting or misleading “But in my age, I already can’t learn anything new, my friends can help”. With her words, through the social network, she also believes that it could be possible. Any improvement of capabilities could lead to the further steps to achieve their own autonomy.

One significant part of capabilities is mental health. It is an abstract conception of an individual in the universal sense, such as hopelessness, indecisiveness, a sense of futility and lack of energy. (Gough 2014) The rational and positive thinking is to push people develop themselves more. It also links to the conception of “Trade-off”.

“Trade-off” has been discussed in both hyper-precarity and wellbeing framework. Here, the view of needs and wellbeing is a strategy of gaining self-autonomy, the preferences listed in our mind decide which needs are the priorities for their time or manpower. However, in the view of hyper-precarity, migrant worker’s high dependence in employment relationship is rooted from the destitution and the need of legal staying. When we talk about the “rational” and “positive” mind of capability building, sometimes the definition of “rational” for the individual needs to be more noted. In the case of Dong, he is working for his friend without payment for the exchange of the residence and skill learning, so that he may gain legal status through other way, even though he has already been in Europe without valid document almost 15 years. When he discussed this topic with me and an IOM worker, we doubted about the possibility of this idea, but it is his rational and practical thinking that supports him to stay on his life in the Netherlands.

Looking through the framework and cases, as the basic physiological need is the fundamental stone for building everyone’s basic lives, it should not be negotiable even if it is their own decision for their lives, which is what have discussed before, the focus on basic physiological needs and physical safety. Otherwise, facing the trade-off decision of every individual, it is important to know their individual motivations and seeing their situation through different visions.

#### *5.4.2 Self-understanding*

In the part of self-understanding, they emphasised the importance of “teacher” (Doyal 1994). People only know how to act by learning from others, like role model, mentor or other professionals, and this is a further step that goes hand in hand with autonomy.

Keeping Dong’s case as an example, as his language skill and other capabilities are well developed and able to speak from his own voice, yet he lacks the information such as related policies of foreign employment. Besides, he always talks about China and his family during our conversation, it was confusing sometimes what his life goal is through all his sharing, “When I double



checked that information with him, I could see in his face that he had no idea! I found out he still needs some advice from me, even though he looks quite well. He is doing for nothing<sup>16</sup>. The guidance to reach autonomy is hard to accomplish from merely one individual, it needs to go through an experienced third person who can lead the confused to see his expectation and boundary, especially what his culture background expects him to do so. In Dong's case, he actually wants to stay in Europe as a white collar, and meets the expectation of his family as a successful intellectual. Seeing the contradiction is the next step to help individual develop their further autonomy.

Different cultures also bring in the diversity of knowledge and their visions of useful/non-useful action and conception. The culture can be the difference between nations as well as different perspectives from different levels and positions. The teaching from the other might be an important lead for an individual to seek advanced autonomy, yet it may also carry their own values and perspectives, such as the Dutch workers in Wereldhuis viewed the Chinese labours as "Buddha"<sup>17</sup> kind of people, or the IOM worker viewed Dong's idea as nothing. Self-understanding is indeed important for pursuing self-autonomy, yet understanding one's self through more mirrors may even help to gain the holistic vision. As Santos emphasised, "the replacement of knowledge as regulation by knowledge as emancipation" (Santos 2007). The knowledge from different social status and forms may all be important to help us understand ourselves better.

### *5.4.3 Opportunities and Dialogue*

The last two steps to pursuit autonomy while an individual is prepared mentality and cognitively as well as understood themselves, they need opportunities to practice social activities. Social activities are a medium that gives individual a platform to communicate with other culture, meanwhile also stand by their own voice, which is the last step of Autonomy improvement: Critical autonomy.

Both in Wood's risk management (Wood 2007) and hyper-precarity suggested through unite undocumented migrant workers to advocate their own rights, since the authority and social structure is dysfunction and hard to break the social Noam by oneself. It also the suggestion from Doyal and Gough (Gough 2000) that the ability of critical autonomy is the final step to achieve personal freedom, it can be reached by themselves, or with the power from others, it is the way to stimulate the dialogue between cultures to make changes. When I putted this conception to Dong, he replied me that "trade union!? That is employers' thing!"<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the trade unions of Chinese catering industry in the Netherlands is organized from employers rather than employees themselves, besides there is no space for undocumented people get into the trade union since the employment relationship should be under the table. As most of them are not fluently on Dutch or English speaking, therefore it was hard to speak out for themselves in this situation, especially their relationship with employer combine with employment, fellowship and even neighborhood.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with IOM worker (8 September 2016)

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Renan (14 July 2016)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dong (23 June 2016)

Without the trade union, any method to improve their own right through interaction with other culture was related rare as well. When I further brought the question about asking NGOs to help them get more reasonable living and working condition, they mostly replied me is the thing out of their imagination in the beginning. “In China, there was no NGO this thing, mostly you only can solve the problem by yourself. Asking outsider’s help always need money or relationship”<sup>19</sup>. Carrying the culture from original country, asking the help from civil society and the public assistance (e.g. hospital, legal aid, etc.) was fresh and full of uncertainty, especially they also concern about their social-legal status.

Thus, opportunities to engage with social activities mostly rely on others instead with this background, mostly the strategy is through friends’ social network to approach trust worthy individual. Since many Chinese undocumented people are related isolated, asking other Chinese speaking strangers is the alternative they chose. It may be face to face, through asking the strangers in Asian supermarket or public space. Or, it may be internet, through anonymous way to ask the any possibility of resolving the problems within Dutch society. It also responds to the faith that “Own people to help their own people” and the erasing the language barrier. My “Asian face” and “Chinese speaking” also played an important role during building the relationship between civil society and Chinese undocumented migrant workers, as an experienced leader also part of their own people. Through other intermediary to achieve their interaction with Dutch culture and society, for them is the safer also more practical way to start the social activities.

For inspiring more motivation to engage social activities, it needs successful sample to display others the potential of compliance. Through their sharing, doing sideline is the other alternative for who have been staying in the Netherlands over years to achieve their own economy and living autonomy. Like shopping services (e.g. milk powder and home appliances), money lending or translation service, these out of original economy model in Chinese community brought more freedom and alternative for their life choice. It is also similar to the old history of Chinese migrants in the past, the strong entrepreneurial spirit, through selling peanut biscuits or open Chinese restaurants to break the original economy crisis since there were no other support due to their social-legal identity and their original country background.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Taking eight participants’ sharing and their own experience as the axis, this chapter intertwined with the policies, Chinese migrant history and two frameworks to analysis the cause of their precarious environment, their basic needs and their coping strategies for their own life wellbeing.

As the first section emphasizing work is the important part of their lives, it is the only resource to avoid from destitution. Within Chinese community more job opportunities were provided to undocumented migrant workers, yet also shrink the bargain spaces of working condition. In the second section, the

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Fei (04 August 2016)

further discussion of their needs of their lives, not only physiological need, also health and sense of security.

The last part of this chapter further discussed the autonomy of human being, through their cases to see how they understand the autonomy and exercise it. For Chinese undocumented workers, lack of information of their own rights and language barrier are two main issues while they want to set up their own plan. Through the experienced fellows or intermediaries to exercise their own right is the main way for them; alternatively, they would find resources from their own social network. Practically, starting from contacting with local NGOs and information spreading through internet is the first step to reinforce their autonomy is the way to break the closure of Chinese community.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

This research paper aims to understand how the undocumented Chinese migrant workers respond to the limited living environment given their social-legal status and work.

From unstructured interviews with eight participants plus the literature review and three interviews with local NGO workers, I gathered the idea that many of the migrant workers would attempt to apply the refugee status to avoid the precarity in the status. It is clear that China's open-border policy and the economy situation pushed Chinese migrant workers to come to the Netherlands to start their new lives. The booming Chinese catering industry shaped the form of Chinese community and constructed the wide but scattered social network for all Chinese people and newcomers. In contrast, it also shaped the precarious working condition for the undocumented migrant workers. Stricter Dutch immigration policies also reduced the bargaining space the undocumented have with the employers and the surrounding.

Through this research, it is shown that while undocumented migrants do experience precarity at work, they are able to help themselves towards greater autonomy through acquiring language skills, wider social network and increase the alternative resources for their lives. However, for most of the research participants being concentrated in the work and lives in the Chinese community, the obstacle that gets in the way is the limited contacts with civil societies and other people which offer the possibility to break the closure of their living surrounding.

To lift the obstacle and improve the living condition of the Chinese migrants, a better connection between the service NGOs and the community is much needed. Locating intermediary people who acquaint with the migrants as well as are able to communicate well with the social workers is a practical starting point. On the other hand, helping migrant workers gain more understanding of the resources they can use is critical. Language barrier remains to be a key issue. Very few classes permit the undocumented to enroll and lack of translators to communicate the information to the migrants. While claiming one's civil right is proposed, it is challenging for the Chinese undocumented facing hyper-precarity living condition and the closely-knitted Chinese social network within to rise for themselves.

For future research, two factors appeared to be critical for immigrants in light of unstructured interviews. Primarily, gender is perceived as a differentiator for migrants' mobility, choices and living condition, particularly in regards to intimate relationship and physical health for women. A number of discussions were about foreign marriage and female role in the household. On the other hand, to examine the way the migrants spend for leisure and living, including alcohol use, social gathering, and casino-going, can potentially lead to the discovery of migrants' overall idea about themselves and their lives in the Netherlands.

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### Appendix 1: Participants and their basic background

	Years in NL	Sex	Region	Age	Education	Dutch Level	English Level	Access to know them	Income (Monthly)	Occupation	Asylum Procedure	Reason for Immigration
Dong	15	M	Shanxi	40	BA	Fluently	Basic	Church	Not certain	Shopping Service	No	Studying (France)
Renan	17	M	Zhejiang	60	Left primary	None	None	Wereldhuis	1,200 Euros	Kitchen helper	No	Economic migration
Mrs.Wen	16	F	Zhejiang	55	Left primary	None	None	Wereldhuis	from family	Homemaker	No	Economic migration
Lily	15	F	Zhejiang	53	Secondary	None	None	Wereldhuis	from family	Part-time in Casino	Failed. <sup>201</sup>	Religion (FaluGong)
Zhi	1.2	F	Fujian	32	Upper Secondary	None	Basic	Wereldhuis	800-1,000 Euros	Domestic worker (Child)	Failed	Religion persecution (Christian)
Jing	2	F	Anhui	32	Left Secondary	None	None	Wereldhuis	800 Euros	Domestic worker (Child)	No	Religion persecution (Christian)
Fei	2	M	Fujian	29	Left BA	Basic	Basic	Introduced	160 Euros	Part-time Domestic worker (Child)	Failed	Religion (Catholic)
Mr.Wen	18	M	Zhejiang	57	Primary	None	None	Introduced	1,400 Euros	Restaurant	No	Economic migration

<sup>20</sup> 2013-2014 one-year temporary visa due to mental disease

## **Appendix 2 :The index of unstructured interview with participants**

- 1) Their lives in China
- 2) The reason and way of moving to the Netherlands
- 3) How they settled down in the beginning
- 4) Their working situation
- 5) discussion of legal status issue
- 6) Medical care
- 7) Safety: Police and Housing
- 8) The expectation for the future and challenges.

**Appendix 3 :The index of semi-structured interview with NGO workers**

- 1) The occupation and Job responsibilities
- 2) How you view the undocumented migrant workers in The Hague
- 3) What is the difference between Chinese undocumented workers and people from other countries?
- 4) Their working situation.
- 5) discussion of legal status issue
- 6) Medical care
- 7) Safety: Police and Housing
- 8) Challenges during working with Chinese undocumented migrants, sharing with cases as example.
- 9) Any suggestion for this research?