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Prof.dr. K.J. Cwiertka

Chinese innovation force in the Dutch restaurant scene

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Laura Buijtenhuis
l.buijtenhuis@umail.leidenuniv.nl
S1544810

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Introduction

Today, it is impossible to imagine Dutch culinary culture without Chinese food. The 'Chinees', Chinese-Indonesian restaurants serving big portions - mostly for takeaway - are a part of many celebrations by Dutch families, such as birthdays and public holidays. One could almost say that the Chinese-Indonesian food has become part of the Dutch culinary tradition, as intertwined with Dutch family-life as it has become. This is an impressive achievement of a cuisine that has not even been around in the Netherlands for a century. The Chinese are the non-European migrant group that have been in the Netherlands the longest (Van Pinxteren & Pieke, 2017). The Chinese-Indonesian restaurant is not the only type of dining that the Chinese have popularized in the Netherlands. Think about *sushi*, a Japanese dish, or the all-you-can-eat restaurants that have popped up throughout the Netherlands. In 2019 there were about 1600 Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands - a number that is declining slowly but steadily - (Van Spronsen & Partners, 2019a) while there are 71 'wereldrestaurants' - which tripled in numbers in three years - and about 300 'wokrestaurants' (Van Spronsen & Partners, 2019b). Since their arrival in the Netherlands, the Chinese have continuously innovated and diversified themselves and the Dutch restaurant scene. This thesis will explore the circumstances of this development and argues that Chinese innovation has enriched the Dutch restaurant scene, but this happened at the cost of exploiting Chinese workers[1]. In my analysis I will focus on three examples: Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, which were the earliest format, non-Chinese restaurants such as sushi bars that began to develop during the 1980s, and, finally, all-you-can-eat restaurants that have increased in numbers in the last two decades. By putting these three case studies in a theoretical framework of innovation, this thesis aims to assess the impact of Chinese entrepreneurship and labour in the Dutch restaurant scene.

Sources that have been key in this research include *Etnisch ondernemerschap: De Chinese horecasector in Nederland en in de Verenigde Staten van Amerika* (1998) by B. Rijkschroeff on the development of

[1] Instead of a research question, I am using this argument to explain the area of research of this thesis.

Chinese cuisine in the Netherlands; *From Ethnic to Hip: Circuits of Japanese Cuisine in Europe* (2005) by K.J. Cwiertka on Japanese cuisine in Europe and the Netherlands and *Labour trafficking in Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands and the role of Dutch immigration policies: A qualitative analysis of investigative case files* (2019) by M. van Meeteren and E. Wiering on exploitation of Chinese workers in the Netherlands. The framework of innovation that this thesis uses to compare the three types of Chinese innovation with, is the Oslo Manual (third edition, 2005). The Oslo Manual is a guide for research on innovation, which includes four types of innovation: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation and organisational innovation. Using the guidelines that the Oslo Manual provides, it will be determined what types of innovation have been used in the three types of Chinese innovation in the Dutch restaurant scene and if they are new to the firm, new to the market or new to the world.

This thesis consists of three main chapters and the introduction and conclusion. In chapter one I provide the context of the Chinese migration to the Netherlands as well as the Dutch restaurant market. I also provide the literature review on the concept of innovation and describe the theoretical framework used in the next chapter, where I analyse the innovation force of the Chinese in the Dutch restaurant scene on the basis of three examples mentioned above. After this, the downside of the Chinese innovation force will be investigated.

1. Setting the stage

Within this chapter, I will provide general information on the immigration process of the Chinese to the Netherlands starting in the early 1900s as well as information on Dutch food and eating out in the Netherlands. This will serve as a background for the next chapters. Next to this, the framework of innovation is discussed and the Oslo Manual will be explained, which will set the stage for the second chapter.

The Netherlands was not the first place in the world where Chinese immigrants landed. Already in the fourteenth century, Chinese traders came to the Indonesian islands and settled down there. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Chinese moved further away from home and expanded to for example the United States and Europe (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Reasons for this expansion include an increasing population in the Chinese countryside, the fact that China became less of an isolated place and the interest of the Chinese people in products such as gold in the United States (Rijkschroeff, 1998). The Chinese have revolutionized the restaurant industry worldwide. For example in the United States, the Chinese cuisine has a long history and the first Chinese restaurant was opened in 1849 in San Francisco (Liu, 2015). The Chinese have left their mark in the restaurant sector all over the world and this thesis will take a deeper look specifically at the Dutch restaurant scene.

1.1 Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands

According to a study that was conducted by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), it is estimated that in 2011 there were “71.500 Chinese migrants and their descendants living in the Netherlands originating from the People’s Republic of China and Hong Kong” (Gijsberts et al., 2011, p. 182). Indonesia is another country where large groups of Chinese living in the Netherlands come from. According to Frank Pieke, up until the year 2000 there were two distinctive groups of Chinese migrants living in the Netherlands. The first group originates in Southeast China and has come here to work in the Chinese restaurant sector. The

second group has moved here from countries that used to be Dutch colonies and does not work in one specific sector. Migrants from the second group are often more invested in Dutch society and have made more of an effort to become a part of society (Pieke, 2021). A study that Statistics Netherlands has conducted in 2020 shows that in 2019, 37.000 people with Chinese nationality were living in the Netherlands. This study has only included people with Chinese nationality, which gives a bit of a distorted picture, however it is the most recent study on numbers of the Chinese society in the Netherlands (Pieke, 2021).

Chinese workers found jobs on European ships starting early in the twentieth century and Amsterdam and Rotterdam became places where Chinese seamen were picked up and dropped off (Rijkschroeff, 1998). This meant that the first Chinese immigrants came to the Netherlands around this time as shipping personnel (Gijsberts et al., 2011). Both in Rotterdam and Amsterdam there were labour disputes between the navy personnel union and the shipowners. This resulted in the shipowners not being able to take Dutch seamen and taking Chinese seamen from London instead. During World War I the Dutch fleet had increased in size and more workers were needed on the ships, which led to a growth of the Chinese population in the Netherlands (Rijkschroeff, 1998). However, the workers on the ships - especially the stokers - were experiencing very bad working conditions and also less stokers were needed because of technological developments (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Next to this, the economic crisis of 1929 hit the shipping companies hard, which also influenced the number of workers needed on the ships. Chinese seamen were hit particularly hard, because they could not fall back on government support as Dutch seamen could (Wubben, 1986). They primarily worked on the ships that were hit the hardest, which were the ships on the Dutch East Indies route (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). All of this left the Chinese seamen in a horrid position and poverty was widespread. In order to make some money, a business in peanut biscuits emerged and expanded quickly throughout the Netherlands. Because the salesmen were increasing in numbers quickly, they spread throughout the country and also small towns were visited, which meant that Chinese immigrants were spreading across the Netherlands (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Even

though there was some resistance in the Chinese community, the salesmen had no choice in order to survive (Benton en Vermeulen, 1987).

As the economic crisis persisted and the peanut biscuits became less of a novelty, the business could no longer help the impoverished Chinese seamen. The Chinese workers fell out of grace with the government and the government wanted to deport them (Rijkschroeff, 1998). The navy personnel unions were not in favour of the Chinese seamen being in the Netherlands either, because they were afraid that the 'cheap' Chinese seamen, who asked less money for work than the Dutch did, would take up all the jobs (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). Next to the low pay for the Chinese workers, the shipping companies also favoured them because of the fact that they agreed to work under bad working conditions and with no legal security. This meant that the navy personnel unions and the shipping companies were continuously conflicted on the issue; the shipping companies made choices based on their economical gains, the navy personnel unions wanted to safeguard the employment opportunities of their own seamen (Wubben, 1986). This remained an issue until the economic crisis came along. In the following decade, most of the Chinese workers left the Netherlands, some unwillingly and some because they did not have a choice (Rijkschroeff, 1998). The Chinese seamen and salesmen of peanut biscuits have been important for the development of the Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. When the Chinese workers came to the Netherlands, they had to live somewhere, which resulted in Chinatowns emerging in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Here the housing of the Chinese seamen was located, but also the first eateries were opened. Even though the number of Chinese in the Netherlands decreased in the 1930s, the eateries that were opened during this time would mean the start of a flourishing Chinese restaurant sector after World War II (Rijkschroeff, 1998).

The first and biggest reason to move to the Netherlands was work-related; many found jobs in one of the Chinese restaurants. Later, family migration increased and after this studying in the Netherlands became more popular and knowledge migrants found their way to the Netherlands (Gijsberts et al., 2011). Many

first-generation Chinese migrants have trouble speaking Dutch, because of the fact that they had to work long hours when they came to the Netherlands and never had the time to learn Dutch. Next to this, they believed their stay would only be temporary, so there was no need to put effort into learning Dutch. Second-generation Chinese have a much better proficiency in Dutch (Gijsberts et al., 2011). Rotterdam, Amsterdam and the Hague are the Dutch cities with the biggest Chinese population. Family is a very important entity in the life of the Chinese. This includes following traditions, always keeping the good family name in mind, worshipping of ancestors and also thinking of future generations (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Family is the place where individuals learn the family values that are important in life.

The restaurant sector is the sector of employment that is most common for the Chinese in the Netherlands. In 1999, 81% of Chinese in the Netherlands worked in the restaurant sector and 92% of Chinese-owned businesses were in the catering industry (Vogels et al., 1999). However, the numbers are decreasing. In 2011, 43% of Chinese worked in the restaurant sector and two thirds of Chinese-owned businesses were in the catering industry (Gijsberts et al., 2011). The number of Chinese who are dependent on social assistance benefits has increased somewhat since the 1980s, before this time Chinese migrants who became unemployed were reluctant to ask for help from the government. If it was possible to manage the situation by asking help from friends or family, this was the chosen option for most Chinese. This also had to do with the fact that the Chinese saw themselves as guests in the Netherlands (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Next to this, many first-generation Chinese simply did not know about any social assistance benefits and how to apply for them, which meant that the option was not considered (Gijsberts et al. 2011). Now that second-generation Chinese that have been raised and educated in the Netherlands are aware of the rights once one becomes unemployed, the number of requests for social assistance benefits have risen slightly. It is lower than the numbers of requests for the four largest non-Western migrant groups in the Netherlands (Gijsberts et al., 2011).

The history of Chinese migrants in the Netherlands as depicted in this chapter, shows the resilience of the Chinese community that has had to adapt itself continuously in order to survive. In the second chapter, in which three Chinese innovations in the Dutch restaurant scene will be highlighted, we will again see this resilience at play.

1.2 General overview of eating (out) in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands people eat many different types of food such as pasta, tacos and curry, but the Dutch kitchen itself differs much from all these dishes. The Dutch cuisine is simple in essence and in preparation and products that are produced in the Netherlands itself shine, such as potatoes and legumes (Westerlaken, 2020). Dishes such as *boerenkool* (kale with potatoes and sausage) and *erwtensoep* (sturdy soup with peas, carrot and sausage among other ingredients) are typical winter dishes that are still greatly enjoyed throughout the country. In 2015, the Dutch meal *AVG* or *aardappel, vlees, groente* (a meal that consists of potatoes, a vegetable and meat) was on the table almost half of the meals of the Dutch population in a week (NU.nl, 2015).

During the 16th century - and before - the Dutch diet mainly consisted of grains, tubers, meat (or fish) and cheese and starting in the early 17th century, the Dutch East Indian Company brought spices and Asian products to the Netherlands that became more popular as time progressed (Otterloo, 2001). People drank beer or water, but coffee and tea became increasingly popular during the 18th century - first in the upper classes, later it spread throughout the entire Dutch society. Coffee and tea played a big part in the change of the Dutch eating pattern to what is still known today, such as cold breakfast and lunch and a coffee break in the morning for tea with a snack or sweet (Otterloo, 2001). During the 19th century, Dutch domestic agriculture provided the Dutch with most of their food, partly due to a huge boom in potato agriculture (Wintle, 2006). At this time, food was still merely viewed as a necessity instead of it having social functions as well. Foreigners often perceive Dutch eating habits to be uninteresting and repetitive, with potatoes, vegetables and meat - if people could afford it - being a part of daily meals. Meals were

shared only with the family - so no outsiders welcome - and 'eating out' was not a general habit, except for a small group of people in the upper class (Otterloo, 2001). Next to potatoes and vegetables, people would eat bread, fish and sometimes some milk. For most people below the middle class, it was mostly bread and potatoes that was eaten (Wintle, 2006). Once the Netherlands became more prosperous and increasingly urbanized, the diet expanded (Wintle, 2006). Starting mid-twentieth century, eating out became more popular, which had to do with multiple factors. One example is that the city centre became the place where daily life was organised, with it turning into a central place where people would find their shops, schools and offices and also leisure places such as museums (Otterloo, 2009). This resulted in more places to eat opening up in the city centres, where lunch became the first meal that was occasionally eaten out (Otterloo, 2009). During the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the Dutch started embracing more food from abroad and this expanded throughout the entire country and in all layers of society (Otterloo, 2001, p. 164-165). This included spices and herbs but also full dishes, like the Chinese-Indonesian cuisine that will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Indo-Dutch women who had come to the Netherlands started cooking meals for order or even tried to open a small eatery[2] in their homes, where Indonesian expatriates could eat homely meals. The meals were cheap and the eateries informal, which led to Dutch people also visiting these eateries that in time transformed into restaurants (Otterloo, 2001).

Eating out became more normal and today it has become a leisure activity in the Netherlands. Next to the foreign food, snacks - and the consumption of them outside of the home - increasingly became popular in the Netherlands (De la Bruhèze, 2000). Snacks changed the Dutch eating habits of three meals a day, and 'eating from the wall', snack automats on streets where people could extract ready-made snacks which emerged during the 1970s, became a new way of eating out (De la Bruhèze, 2000). Today the Dutch diet includes not only typical Dutch food, but also food from all over the world. During the week, a Dutch

[2] A difference between eateries and restaurants can be established, with eateries being more informal than restaurants. Some eateries later shifted and became restaurants. The difference between eateries and restaurants is not taken on further in this thesis and eating establishments are called restaurants for convenience.

family will alternate between potatoes, meat and vegetables and pasta and foreign dishes. Food habits also changed in the sense that food is not only a means to survive, but it also gives a sense of culture and identity (Wintle, 2006).

1.3 Innovation and the Oslo Manual

First, it is important to start with the definition of the word 'innovation' that will be used throughout this thesis. According to the Oslo Manual, an innovation is "the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations" (OECD, 2005, p. 46). A product, proces, marketing method or organizational method can be labelled as an innovation when it is at least new or notably improved (OECD, 2005).

Innovation in food and eating out is a topic that has already received a lot of attention from researchers throughout the years, with *The Uncertainty Mindset - Innovation Insights from the Frontiers of Food* (2020) by Vaugn Tan being an example of this. According to Tan, "nearly everything we eat today - ingredient, cooking method, flavor combination, dish - had to be invented, whether that inventor was credited or not. However, until as recently as two decades ago, innovation was rarely seen as a good reason for a restaurant's existence" (Tan, 2020, p. 7). Being innovative and presenting guests with a new menu every once in a while did not used to be a priority. Quality of the food was key and there were few restaurants who presented themselves as being innovative as an important characteristic. "From the guest's perspective, a restaurant is a place where food is cooked and served, and where someone else has to make sure that everyone is having a good time. This is accurate, but it is also incomplete. From the restaurant's point of view, it has to be a factory that reliably produces exactly what its customers want to buy" (Tan, 2020, p. 7-8). This is not only accurate for high-end cuisine, as the second chapter of this thesis will clarify that the ability to innovate and give customers new experiences is important for any restaurant's survival.

Another interesting example of research on innovation in the eating out-sector is *Food trucks and food parks as a social innovation of eating out practice: A study in João Pessoa - Brazil* (2020) by Marcelo De Souza Bispo and Larissa Lucena Almeida. They explore the popularity of food trucks and how this type of eating out has developed and how it has innovated the market and food consumption itself, focusing on the social aspect of eating out. Alas, their research was not found relevant for this thesis.

The Oslo Manual distinguishes four types of innovations: product innovations, process innovations, marketing innovations and organisational innovations (OECD, 2005, p. 47). "A product innovation is the introduction of a good or service that is new or significantly improved with respect to its characteristics or intended uses" (OECD, 2005, p. 48). The characteristics mentioned can range from technical specifications to materials used and accessibility. A product innovation therefore includes products that have been made up from scratch, but also includes existing products that have been improved by using new technologies to update the product to the demands of that moment, or new products that have been created by combining already existing technologies. The second type of innovation mentioned in the Oslo Manual is process innovation. "A process innovation is the implementation of a new or significantly improved production or delivery method. This includes significant changes in techniques, equipment and/or software" (OECD, 2005, p. 49). There are several reasons to implement process innovations, which include the decrease of production costs and the increase of quality of the products. Next to this, whenever a new product is manufactured, this also includes process innovation because the equipment or software must be able to produce the new product (OECD, 2005). The third type of innovation highlighted in the Oslo Manual, is marketing innovation. "A marketing innovation is the implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in a product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing" (OECD, 2005, p. 49). As for marketing innovations, reasons for implementation include aligning the product with customer needs and situating the product of the business on the market in a new way, in order to increase sales of that product. A marketing innovation could also result in a product suddenly speaking to a newly acquired audience. A key part of marketing

innovations is that the new marketing method must be new to the business and cannot overlap with a marketing method already previously used by the business, although it does not matter whether or not the new marketing method originates in that business or that it has been taken over by another business and implemented (OECD, 2005). The fourth and last innovation from the Oslo Manual, is organisational innovation. “An organisational innovation is the implementation of a new organisational method in the firm’s business practices, workplace organisation or external relations” (OECD, 2005, p. 51). Reasons why a business would implement an organisational innovation include reducing costs in order to increase profit and ‘improving workspace satisfaction’, which would lead to more productive employees (OECD, 2005). Again an important factor is that the new organisational method must be new to the business, just like with the marketing innovation. It can be very difficult to categorise the types of innovation, because in many cases multiple types of innovation apply. Next to this, innovation is continuous and that makes it difficult to distinguish between different types of innovation. The biggest reason as to why a business would decide that innovation is necessary or is the best step ahead is that businesses want to enhance their performance. If a business wants to innovate, there are several ways they can decide to proceed. The simplest examples are either to reduce the costs or to increase demand (OECD, 2005).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, & Statistical Office of the European Communities (OECD) is an organisation “where the governments of 30 democracies work together to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalisation” (OECD, 2005, p. 2). With an increasing importance of measuring innovation and a need for proper guidelines to measure and analyze innovation worldwide, the Oslo Manual was developed and the first edition was published in 1992. I have chosen to analyze the three Chinese innovations using the Oslo Manual (2005), because it provides clear guidelines for using data on innovation and it is the leading international source for research on innovation. The guidelines are inclusive, provide an opportunity to look at a certain innovation from different angles and also take into account linkages between different types of innovation, which has proved to be particularly useful in this thesis.

2. From take-out to all-you-can-eat

In this chapter, the guidelines that the Oslo Manual provides for determining what type of innovation has been implemented, will be tested on the three big innovations in the Dutch restaurant scene that have been produced by Chinese business owners: firstly, Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. Secondly. non-Chinese catering businesses with Chinese owners, such as sushi restaurants. Lastly, all-you-can-eat-restaurants. In order to determine which innovations have taken place for each three phenomena, the characteristics per type of innovation will be analyzed and it will be established whether or not an innovation is new to the firm, new to the market or new to the world, using the guidelines that the Oslo Manual provides. Although the guidelines that the Oslo Manual provides are to analyze the innovations of a firm which makes the purpose that this study uses them for slightly different, the outcomes of this research can be a useful start to more thorough research on the subject. I have not included quantitative analysis and data in this research, for which the main reason is a limitation in time for research. The Oslo Manual recommends that in order to analyze innovation for example through surveys with in this case restaurants, the observation period should at least be one year, but preferably between one year and three years (OECD, 2005). This simply surpasses what is feasible to do in this thesis. By using the guidelines that the Oslo Manual provides for comparing and analyzing innovation, this thesis studies three innovational developments focusing on three types of restaurants.

2.1. Chinese-Indonesian restaurants

In the vicinity of supermarkets and hairdressers in the Chinese neighbourhoods in Rotterdam and Amsterdam that had been established in the years when Chinese seamen came to work in the Netherlands, restaurants were opened. The biggest part of the clientele at that time was Chinese, but also people with small budgets found their ways to the Chinese restaurants (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). As mentioned in the first chapter, during the 1930s many Chinese left (or were forced to leave) the Netherlands, but a small number of people stayed. When Indonesia became independent in 1949, large numbers of

repatriates and Indonesian-Dutch people came to the Netherlands, together with ex-military men who had served during the Indonesian War of Independence (Rijkschroeff, 1998). This resulted in a growing number of clients for the Chinese restaurants, because the repatriates and military men were used to the Eastern cuisine and flavours.

The Indonesian and the Chinese cuisine are different in a lot of ways; not only different ingredients and spices are used, but also the method of preparation is different. The Chinese restaurant owners showed off their resilience and quickly adapted their menus, adding Indonesian style dishes such as chicken satay. The dishes on the menu that were Chinese, were domesticated[3] to match the Dutch taste, which meant that methods of preparation were altered and that Chinese ingredients were replaced with ingredients that were familiar to the Dutch and more easily available (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). At this point, most of the restaurant owners started naming their restaurants 'Chinese-Indonesian' instead of just 'Chinese'. One of the key factors that helped build the awareness and popularity of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, was the fact that the food is cheap and is served in large portions (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). More changes were made to the menu of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants during the years and the 'rijsttafel', a combined order which includes a few (often standardized) dishes, together with rice or noodles, became a popular part of it (Rijkschroeff, 1998).

During the 1950s, the Dutch were increasingly finding their way to the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. Along with the repatriates from Indonesia, this increase in clientele meant that the business was open for growth. Chinese immigrants noticed that the restaurants were becoming more popular, which led to more Chinese restaurants being opened in the following years (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). In the year of 1960 there were 225 Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands while in 1995, this number had increased up to almost 2000 restaurants (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Before the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant,

[3] The domestication of foreign food is an interesting topic and has been studied and dealt with extensively already in the past. It is not a topic that will have my focus in this thesis.

there was not really a restaurant scene in the Netherlands and going out for dinner was not embedded in Dutch culinary culture. The Chinese-Indonesian restaurants have changed this and have popularized getting dinner in the Netherlands (Rijkschroef, 1998). Next to this, after World War II, people in the Netherlands increasingly had more to spend, which also played a part in the upcoming restaurant scene. Becoming a restaurant owner does not require skills that take a long time to acquire, which means that once the other requirements to open a restaurant (such as funds) are available, it does not take long before a restaurant can be opened (Rijkschroef, 1998).

Along with the increase in Chinese-Indonesian restaurants came an increase in demand for skilled employees to work in the restaurants. This was a more difficult task in the Netherlands, because the Chinese owners wanted Chinese employees to work for them, for multiple reasons. One of the biggest reasons is the fact that the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants offer cheap meals in large portions, which means that their revenue is not that high. If employees were paid a lot of money, this would result in loss instead of profit. Because of this, Chinese restaurant owners often let family come to the Netherlands to work in the restaurant or hire someone else directly from Hong Kong or China, because they can be paid less and are willing to work long hours (Rijkschroeff, 1998). At first it was mostly people from Hong Kong that were brought over to the Netherlands, because during the time that Mao Zedong was in power and especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), people from China were not allowed to emigrate. After China opened up, people migrating from China overtook people migrating from Hong Kong in numbers (Rijkschroeff, 1998). With low-cost (sometimes illegal) employees and family working in the business, the Chinese restaurant owners were able to keep the costs low.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the explosive growth of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants came to a halt. There are a number of factors that can explain or have influenced this stagnation. Firstly, the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants had spread across the country in such a fast manner in the previous two decades, that almost every city and town had at least one close by. This meant that there was no demand for more

new restaurants, as the market was already saturated (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Secondly, in the 1980s the economy was not in a good condition; there was an economic recession. Because of this, people did not have as much to spend as the years before, which resulted in luxuries such as going out for dinner being put on the back burner (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Thirdly, the revenues the restaurants were making were not large, which meant that the risks when unexpected costs came along or when a new Chinese-Indonesian restaurant opened in the same area were big and this left the restaurants in a vulnerable spot (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Negative reports also did not help the Chinese-Indonsian restaurants, not only reports on the quality of the food and hygiene of the restaurants, but also the owners of the restaurants that were changing every once in a while did benefit the reputation of the restaurants (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Lastly, the government tightened control in several areas affecting restaurants, such as ordering products on the black market. When a restaurant was caught with for example missing receipts, fines were issued by the government (Rijkschroeff, 1998). One other major factor that has influenced the stagnation of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants is the problems that have arisen with finding skilled employees. Because of changing culinary manners that became custom in the Netherlands, such as eating healthier and eating less food that contains a lot of fat, the traditional Chinese cooks that came to the Netherlands as the first generation were not skilled anymore to cook the food that was necessary to live up to the clients wishes. Next to this, the first generation Chinese cooks at that time were not only fired because of outdated knowledge and because they could be replaced by cheaper, younger cooks, but they were also quitting working because they often physically were not able anymore to keep up the hard work in the kitchens. Since coming to the Netherlands the employees had worked long hours with little free time, not rarely under bad working conditions. Because of this, already at a relatively young age (early forties), employees experienced physical problems, which made them work in a slower pace and eventually forced them to stop working because they were declared incapacitated to work (Rijkschroeff, 1998). In the 1980s Chinese restaurants were increasingly having a hard time finding new employees; the restaurants were unable to fill in approximately 80% of the job openings. Unlike before it was also getting harder to employ Chinese workers directly from abroad, because the government put legislation in place regarding

employing foreigners in the Netherlands. This put an end to the supply of cheap labour for the restaurants (Rijkschroeff, 1998). All of this meant that the restaurants were struggling to find suitable employees to keep the business running, while at the same time unemployment among Chinese restaurant employees was at an all time high.

When looking at the types of innovation for this phenomenon, multiple types of innovation that the Oslo Manual describes can be attributed to the introduction of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands. First, the product innovation type. Both the goods and the service are innovative. The type of food that was served in the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, which is a mix of Chinese and Indonesian dishes adapted to match Dutch taste, was the first of its kind in the Netherlands and also the first to mix foreign dishes together. The service was also new, as there was not truly a restaurant scene in the Netherlands before the time that the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants became popular. Eating out was a new sensation and this changed the way that food was perceived. The second innovation type, process innovation, also matches the innovation process of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. The introduction of this kitchen has meant that different preparation methods and different cooking equipment were needed. Next to this, it was the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants that started the takeaway-trend, which led to the name '*afhaalchinees*', or take away Chinese. In this example, the characteristics of the food, the service that is provided and the methods and equipment used to make it were new, which makes it both a product and a process innovation (OECD, 2005).

The Chinese-Indonesian restaurants have opened up a new market in the Netherlands and therefore, the third type of innovation which is marketing innovation also applies. The food that the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants were serving was cheap and large portions were served, which was new. The cheap, large portions by themselves are a product innovation, but the way the restaurants were marketed and attracted the Dutch people can also be called a marketing innovation because it was used to attract new customers. It was not just the food that was used to attract customers to the restaurants, it was the whole experience

that came along with eating in a Chinese restaurant. The decorations and ambiance in the restaurants were much different than anything the Dutch had experienced before. The Chinese-Indonesian restaurants have used their difference and their etnic diversity to create a new niche in the Dutch restaurant scene, which has made them stand out from the start (Rijkschroeff, 1998). Etnic food is profiled as an object of consumption, which enables consumers to obtain cultural capital (Hirose & Pih, 2011). In this sense, the cultural meaning of the food is changed into someone else's cultural capital. This is strengthened by the fact that the food is already adapted to Dutch taste, which makes it less part of Chinese or Indonesian cultural capital and more a part of Dutch cultural capital. This is clear from the fact that the Chinese-Indonesian food culture has gotten the label of Dutch intangible cultural heritage in February 2021 (Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, n.d.). In the beginning the Chinese restaurants primarily served Chinese people living in the Netherlands, but as the kitchen fused with the Indonesian kitchen and started profiling as Chinese-Indonesian, the Dutch became the primary customer. According to Hirose and Pih (2011), "ethnic food is 'ethnic' only to the extent that it is served to those who are not 'ethnic'. It is this process of decontextualization that renders Chinese food distinctively 'Chinese' outside of China" (Hirose & Pih, 2011, p. 1485). In this case it is the Chinese who produce the food and it is the Dutch who consume it. This proves that the type of marketing innovation applies to this example.

The fourth type of innovation that the Oslo Manual describes is organisational innovation and this type can also be discovered in the example of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. A phenomenon can be called an organisational innovation when it covers new organisational methods in for example organisation of the workplace, as previously mentioned. In this case, the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants were innovative in their organisation of the workplace, because they expected their family members to work in the restaurant for low wages or let cheap (sometimes illegal) workers come over from Hong Kong or China in order to keep the costs low. These strategic decisions made it possible for the restaurants to ask cheap prices for the food. It was not workplace satisfaction that made employees work hard and work long hours, but along with the dream that many employees had to start their own restaurant one day, it was often the case

that employees were dependent on their employers. The workers endured the bad working conditions and long hours because they had no other choice (Rijkschroeff, 1998)[4].

An innovation can be either new to the firm, new to the market or new to the world, or all of those combined. For a business to implement something that can be called innovative, the minimal requirement is that it is new to the business. An innovation is new to the market when other businesses in the same industry have not implemented this innovation yet and it is new to the world when the innovation has not been implemented yet by any business worldwide (OECD, 2005). The innovation of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands was definitely an innovation for the businesses. All four of the innovation types were present; product, process marketing method and organisational method, and this was the case for at least most of the new restaurants that were established because they all followed the same formula: cheap food in large portions, Chinese mixed with Indonesian food adapted to Dutch taste, and family members and sometimes illegal employees working the kitchens. The innovation of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants was also new to the market, because it was the first type of restaurant that served food like this. Before there was not even a Dutch restaurant scene to begin with - as explained in chapter 1.3[5] - which makes the restaurants innovative in multiple ways. It is more difficult to say whether or not this innovation is new to the world, because at the same time as the Chinese were opening up restaurants all over the Netherlands, this was also happening in other countries such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, the type of food that was served and the Chinese-Indonesian adaption of the food is new to the world. How the cuisine developed was dependent on the country that the Chinese immigrants moved to, because for example the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Chinese that came to France (after Vietnam no longer was a French colony) had greatly influenced the Chinese cuisine in France (Benton & Vermeulen, 1987). This is similar to the way that the repatriates and ex-military personnel

[4] I will elaborate more on this in chapter 3.
[5] See A. Otterloo (2001).

have influenced the Chinese kitchen in the Netherlands, but this naturally resulted in a difference in Chinese cuisine between France and the Netherlands.

Even though the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants have encountered a decrease in numbers in the last decades, it is impossible to think of the Dutch restaurant culture, as well as the Dutch food culture generally, without including the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant. It is notable that even though the restaurants have placed themselves in quite a vulnerable position, keeping the costs low but at the same time also keeping the revenue low by asking low prices for the food they served, that a lot of Chinese migrants have been able to make it work in the Netherlands, start a new restaurant and that new generations of Dutch-Chinese are being raised in the Netherlands. This has to do with the entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese and that they are willing to sacrifice a lot to work long hours for low wages, in order to be able to realize their dream of opening up a restaurant (Rijkschroeff, 1998). The next two subchapters will show how the Chinese immigrants have taken on the struggles that came along with the stagnation of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands and how their innovative mind has yet again changed the Dutch restaurant scene.

2.2. Restaurants in non-Chinese niches: sushi boom

Ever since the stagnation in growth of the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, Chinese entrepreneurs have been looking at possibilities to start new businesses or new restaurants in different sectors of the restaurant scene. Two examples of niches in which Chinese own large amounts of the restaurants are sushi restaurants and Dutch snack bars[6]. This is an interesting development, because sushi is not similar to the Chinese food they have come to the Netherlands with.

[6] In 2019, four out of ten snack bars in the Netherlands were run by a Chinese owner. When the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants hit their limits, the Chinese entrepreneurs began looking for different opportunities. Second-generation Dutch-Chinese often do not wish to take over the family restaurant for various reasons, but a snack bar is less of an investment financially and there are no specialized chefs needed, which makes it an easier choice than a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant (Aalbers, AD, 2019).

Sushi is profiled as a traditional Japanese type of food and is extremely popular across the world. The way we eat it now is not how it started out, at first it was used as a way to preserve fish. The fish was put between rice with salt and a stone was placed on top, until after a few weeks it was ready for consumption. The rice was not to be eaten, but was thrown away and only the fish was eaten (Feng, 2012). The predecessor of sushi was developed continuously throughout the centuries until in the early 1800s. Hanaya Yohei from Edo (which is the name for the current city of Tokyo) came up with a version that is the closest to what is served in restaurants today. He sold sushi made from raw fish and sushi rice as a snack from sushi stalls that could move throughout the city. The sushi stalls became popular until this popularity started fading in the 1920s. Tokyo was becoming more modern and food stalls where one had to eat standing up did not fit into Japan's idea of modernity (Feng, 2012). Sushi turned into a luxurious product, with only the well-off being able to go have sushi to eat. There was a special etiquette that went along with having sushi and prices were extremely high, which made sushi a dish which was not in reach for the average Japanese consumer (Cwiertka, 2005). This changed again, when in 1958, the kaitenzushi, or 'rotary sushi' was established. At a kaitenzushi, people would sit throughout the restaurant and food would come to them on a circulating conveyor belt. This change in the way sushi was delivered made it available for everyone. A customer could decide by themselves how many pieces of sushi they would eat, which made them able to decide the total price of their meal. The kaitenzushi were cheap and also a convenient place to eat and they spread all over Japan, but they were not held in high esteem. During the 1990s the views on *kaitenzushi* changed and became more positive. Not only did the economic recession make the cheap way of dining more appealing, but the restaurants also began taking more care of their image, by for example changing up the interior of the restaurant or making the conveyor belt into some sort of entertainment (Cwiertka, 2005). In Europe, sushi bars were set up in similar ways, sometimes with the conveyor belt, but the European versions of the Japanese restaurant were more expensive and more high class. The convenience and entertainment of the Japanese restaurants remained, but its formula was upgraded a notch (Cwiertka, 2005).

The first Japanese restaurant in the Netherlands was called Toga, and opened in 1971. During the 1970s and 1980s, Amsterdam was the place where most Japanese restaurants were situated, because this was where most of the Japanese expatriates were living (Cwiertka, 2005). Most of them were Japanese-owned and with Japanese chefs in the kitchen. It happened often that the Japanese food industry or Japanese trading companies that were dealing with food-related business were supporting them financially. The restaurants tried to bring Japan to the Netherlands within the restaurants by using music, decorations and typical Japanese dress code for the waiters (Cwiertka, 2005). The development of Japanese restaurants in the Netherlands was similar to the development of these restaurants in other European countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, more Japanese expatriates came to Europe and settled down, which led to an increasing need for restaurants where they could eat familiar food. This led to a growth in Japanese restaurants (Cwiertka, 2005). There were almost no non-Japanese clients who ate at the restaurants, because it was too expensive for the Dutch locals and the Japanese kitchen was still too unknown to be of interest for them (Cwiertka, 2005). However, because the staff in the restaurants were Japanese and most of the customers were also Japanese, this brought up and at the same time verified the idea that the restaurants were authentic and serving high quality food.

The situation stayed like this until the 1990s, when the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants stagnated in growth and the Chinese entrepreneurs began looking for different ways of attracting customers. They saw the reputation of the *teppanyaki*, a style of dining which specialized in beef from the griddle, and sushi and the prices that were asked for these meals, and saw opportunities to increase profit for their own businesses (Cwiertka, 2005). This has resulted in most of the sushi (and *teppanyaki*) restaurants being owned by Chinese entrepreneurs today (Pieke, 2021). When the Chinese became involved in the sushi business, it started gaining in popularity quickly. This meant that instead of most of the customers being Japanese, the customer ratio shifted to most of the customers being non-Japanese (Cwiertka, 2005). The rise of sushi in the Netherlands (and in Europe) has also been influenced by other factors: Japan was

becoming a global economic power, sushi was seen as a healthy option (eating fish is considered healthy) and sushi was extremely popular in the United States. What is popular in the United States easily reaches Europe through sitcoms and Hollywood movies, which added to the rise of the popularity of sushi also in the Netherlands and Europe (Cwiertka, 2005).

Going out for dinner has become a part of life, a type of consumption which also creates a relaxing moment for the customer. This activity is available for large parts of society and has become more informal (Cwiertka, 2005). Fancy dinner with high prices is still possible, but it is also possible to dine and have a good evening out on a low budget. Not only the food is a factor that makes a customer choose a certain restaurant, but also the entertainment that a place offers and the novelty of it and the excitement this brings. A restaurant cannot stay 'new' forever, and therefore entertainment is a very important aspect of eating out and keeping customers satisfied. The sushi bar (with a conveyor belt) offers this entertainment through giving the power to the customer as to what food they want to consume, in what order and at what speed (Cwiertka, 2005). Nowadays, sushi bars still use the conveyor belt design, some in a literal sense that there is actually a belt, some use just the concept but use waiters to quickly serve the food to the tables. In the last example, the freedom to choose what you eat and at what pace stays intact, just the delivery of the food has changed.

There are two types of innovation that are clear in this example: product innovation and marketing innovation. Just like with the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, both the product and service are innovative for the new sushi bars. Even though many Chinese entrepreneurs that start or take over a sushi bar have owned a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant before, which means that they have previously used rice, the way that rice is used for sushi is different. The sushi is a new combination of existing ingredients for these new businesses. For the Chinese owners that have led Chinese-Indonesian restaurants before, the service is not necessarily innovative because the idea of giving people food in a speedy manner and interior and ambiance playing a big part in the entertainment of the customers remains with the sushi bars. However,

restaurants that use a conveyor belt or a service design based on the conveyor belt are innovative in the sense that this type of service has not been used by the businesses before.

The second type of innovation which is process innovation also applies to the example of sushi bars. Preparing sushi takes different equipment and different skills. Chefs needed to be re-educated or newly hired in order to be able to prepare the different dishes that a sushi bar brings along with it.

As for marketing innovation, which is the third type of innovation, this is also a type of innovation that can be discovered in the new sushi bars. The sushi bars use a new way of marketing their products, especially in the cases that use a conveyor belt or a similar service design, through offering a different kind of experience for the customers. Instead of having to order a full meal, customers can put together their meal themselves and decide how much they want to order and eat. This novel way of eating out aims at increasing market share, by attracting more customers through making entertainment an important part of the dining experience, which should attract customers to the sushi bar.

Whether or not the fourth type of innovation, which is organisational innovation, applies to the sushi boom is harder to say. I have not been able to find proof that Chinese entrepreneurs have changed their organisational ways from using family members and underpaid workers in the restaurant. I expect this to be the case, but no clear evidence has come up. This leaves this thesis unable to determine if organisational innovation has taken place.

Once Chinese entrepreneurs took over many Japanese restaurants and started new ones, sushi actually became booming in the Netherlands. Because of the fact that the Chinese entrepreneurs had often led Chinese-Indonesian restaurants before, the step to start getting engaged in sushi is definitely new to the firm. Because the Chinese-led sushi bars were not the first in the Netherlands to offer sushi to the Dutch (that were the Japanese themselves), it is not necessarily an innovation new to the market. However, it could be argued that the Chinese owners changed it up from being exclusive, expensive and mostly directed at Japanese expatriates to being affordable and mostly directed at non-Japanese customers, which means that it is new to the (Dutch) market. This innovation is not new to the world. Conveyor belt

restaurants were first founded in Japan and sushi was immensely popular and growing in size already in the United States at the end of the 1980s (Feng, 2012).

At the moment, the sushi boom in Europe is slowing down and it is not as booming anymore as it was at its peak in popularity in the late 1990s. However, sushi is still a popular type of food, both in the Netherlands and across Europe, which it will likely remain in the future (Cwiertka, 2005). Today sushi is available for affordable prices in all-you-can-eat-restaurants and even in supermarkets such as Albert Heijn (Hoogendoorn, AD, 2021). Now that the hype is slowly coming to an end, there is more space for refinement and slow dining, which emphasizes quality and going out to eat for an evening instead of just quickly having dinner (Koeleman, 2017). Sushi may have had its peak in hype, but for now it is here to stay.

2.3. All-you-can-eat restaurants

All-you-can-eat restaurants have increased in numbers immensely in the Dutch restaurant scene during the last two decades. The Chinese entrepreneurs had to think of new ways to attract Dutch customers when the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant decreased in popularity. Next to going in a different direction with sushi, another way to go was buffet-style dining. Some restaurants chose to combine buffet-dining with the a-la-carte way of dining that they had been doing for years already, others completely changed up their business from a traditional Chinese-Indonesian restaurant to a buffet-restaurant, or a '*wokrestaurant'* in Dutch (Roemaat, 2003). This step meant great changes for the restaurants who switched. Instead of preparing the dishes in a closed off kitchen, the restaurants opened up the kitchens and placed them right in front of the customers so that they could see the chefs prepare their food. This concept increaed in popularity both with the Chinese entrepreneurs and the customers, and in 2009 the number of buffet-style restaurants had doubled (Koren, 2009). This new style of dining is attractive to customers because of various reasons. With the kitchens being open, customers are able to see how their food is prepared, which means they can also see that their food is being prepared in a hygienic way.

Hygiene used to be an area of concern for the customers of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, but with the food now prepared out in the open, customers did not have to worry about this anymore. They can also see that the products used are fresh and that preparation is taken good care of. The open kitchens also bring a new level of entertainment to the restaurants. The chefs can make a show of stir frying the food and the customers can have a chat with the chefs, which makes the chefs able to tell them about their food. People do not have to wait to be served, but they can choose for themselves what they want and walk up to the chefs to have them prepare it (Roemaat, 2003). This leads to a new level of involvement during the evening. Next to this, because customers can serve themselves, less personnel is needed to man the restaurant. This is a welcome change for the Chinese entrepreneurs that had been having trouble finding skilled personnel, although this has not dissolved the problem.

The Chinese buffet-restaurants, as well as the other all-you-can-eat-restaurants that will shortly be discussed, can use the same marketing design of 'offering a lot for a little money' with the cheap but large portions that they were used to in the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. In buffet-restaurants, customers can eat as much as they need for a set price and drinks (except for stronger alcoholic drinks) are included, which is part of the model of revenue. When a customer drinks a lot, they will eat less and there is a time limit of two hours. In all-you-can-eat restaurants drinks are not part of the set price, which is where those restaurants get most of their revenue (Laconi & ten Cate, 2017).

The all-you-can-eat sushi restaurants differ a bit from the buffet restaurants in style; customers do not go and get their own food, but they order their sushi a-la-carte and a waiter will come serve the food. Shabu Shabu and Sumo are two examples of restaurant chains that have grown with locations all over the Netherlands. Both started out in Rotterdam and when those restaurants were found to be successful, they quickly spread through the country. Shabu Shabu today has thirteen locations where customers can enjoy sushi and other Japanese specialities (Shabu Shabu, 2021). Sumo has ten of these 'sushi and grill'-locations excluding a sushi and noodle bar and a Sumo Oriental and Sumo (as well as Shabu Shabu)

claims to be one of the first restaurants to use the all-you-can-eat design and be successful with it (Sumo, 2021).

Next to the buffet-style *wokrestaurants* and all-you-can-eat sushi, there are many other types of all-you-can-eat that are popular in the Netherlands[7]. A new type of all-you-can-eat has been gaining in popularity the last couple of years: the *'wereldrestaurant'*, or 'world restaurant'. These restaurants offer food from different cuisines in either buffet-style or a-la-carte. *Wereldrestaurants* offer for example sushi, grill, Dutch fried snacks, different types of meat, pizza and pasta and customers can combine everything. Thig big range of options has resulted in people being able to visit with entire families, because there is something to choose from for everyone's liking (Verbeek & Smit, 2017).

With this third example of the Chinese innovation force in the Netherlands, all four of the innovation types from the Oslo Manual apply. Not all the food that all-you-can-eat restaurants serve is new to those businesses. Also Chinese-Indonesian inspired dishes are served and therefore, to the Chinese entrepreneurs that previously owned a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant, that product is not new. However, at an all-you-can-eat restaurant, especially at the *wereldrestaurants*, there are a lot of different types of food that are being served and those are new for the restaurants. Next to this, the service that is provided at the all-you-can-eat restaurants is new: instead of offering portions of food a-la-carte, customers can either get the food themselves and it only has to be prepared for them, or they order in small portions and the waiters walk by their table to bring them all the different dishes. The innovation type of process innovation applies in a few different ways. Firstly, equipment used to prepare the product is new. Not only are the restaurants designed in a different way, often with an open kitchen so that customers can see the food being prepared, also many different types of food are being prepared and that asks for different

[7] All-you-can-eat spare ribs are a popular choice and many regular restaurants choose to have one evening during the week for all-you-can-eat spare ribs, to attract customers outside of peak moments. La Cubanita is a chain tapas restaurant with fifty-three restaurants all over the Netherlands. It is also possible to eat BBQ, lobster and pancakes in all-you-can-eat style.

types of equipment. Secondly, now that the chefs are often out in the open, they have had to learn new skills. They now have to make a show of preparing the food (or at least be aware of the fact that they are being watched) and have to make a chat with customers, whenever it is initiated. This asks for a new level of showmanship and entertainment from the chefs that was not necessary before and it enhances the quality of the experience that is offered to the customers. Marketing innovation also applies. There have been changes in both product promotion and pricing, which are characteristics of marketing innovation according to the Oslo Manual. Product promotion for the all-you-can-eat restaurants has been innovative because the restaurants have been branded to be a place where there is choice for everyone: children, parents and elderly people. The focus has also been put more on the whole experience of eating out instead of just quickly having dinner and leaving again. It is not just branded as filling your belly with good food, it is entertainment. The pricing of the product is innovative, because all-you-can-eat restaurants offer an unlimited amount of food (often in the timespan of two hours) for a sharp price. Instead of having to choose one dish, customers can now choose different types of food and still pay a set price. The fourth type of innovation, organisational innovation, also applies. The factors that make it an organisational innovation are the improvement of workplace satisfaction and the reduction of costs of supplies, which both are characteristics of organisational innovation that the Oslo Manual provides. Now that chefs are cooking in front of the customers, they have more contact with those customers and receive appreciation for the work they are doing (Roemaat, 2003). This motivates the chefs and has improved workplace satisfaction. Next to this, the all-you-can-eat restaurants are often designed for the masses, they can fit a host large numbers of people per night. Because of this the restaurants are able to buy in bulk, which keeps the price for fresh produce low (Koren, 2009). This reduces the costs of supplies and makes the restaurants able to stay affordable.

When looking at the example of all-you-can-eat restaurants, this step was definitely new to the firm. For the Chinese entrepreneurs that had already owned a Chinese-Indonesian restaurant before, the step to change to all-you-can-eat, sometimes with different cuisines offered together was a new move. The all-

you-can-eat restaurants are also new to the market, because they are the first type of restaurant to offer multiple types of food and cuisines, be focused on the masses in size and use entertainment as an important part of the eating out experience and all of this in combination. The 'big portions for cheap'-concept is not new but the combination of all of the factors just mentioned make it an innovation to the market. The all-you-can-eat restaurants are not new to the world, because in the United States buffet restaurants were already established (Lu & Fine, 1995).

All-you-can-eat restaurants are still extremely popular and all throughout the Netherlands there are these restaurants to be found. Even though customers are still able to find their way to popular all-you-can-eat restaurants such as Shabu Shabu, it is still just as important as before for Chinese entrepreneurs to keep an eye on new trends and always think of new ways to keep reinventing themselves. A good example of this is the restaurant Genieten in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, where the restaurant drives on a so-called 'slow-you-can-eat principle. Instead of having a time limit of two hours to eat as much as one can, customers can stay as long as they want and are able to take some time to let the food settle between rounds. This leaves the chefs able to take special care of the food, which improves the quality (Veenstra, 2014). There are also problems of food waste and overconsumption that are becoming more important to people, which are problems that the restaurants have to learn how to deal with. The owner of Shabu Shabu came up with a new rule to cut down waste and make people less likely to overconsume: consumers have to pay a small price for the dishes that they can not finish at the end of their meal. Because of this, people pay more attention to what they are ordering and how much, even though it is just a small fine (AD/rivierenland, 2009). Restaurants will keep on improving themselves and go with the wishes of the customers, in order to survive.

3. Shadowside of the Chinese innovation boom

As the previous chapter has highlighted, Chinese entrepreneurs and the innovations that they have brought to the Dutch restaurant sector have made a huge impact in the Netherlands. They have changed the eating culture of the Netherlands and have been able to keep the customers interested, by changing up their game when one concept was not working anymore. However, this was achieved at the expense of exploitation of Chinese workers.

As previously mentioned, Chinese restaurant owners wish to keep the costs of employees low, in order to be able to ask lower prices and attract more Dutch customers this way. In order to do this, they hire cheap labour forces from China. Even though hiring staff from China is allowed through the law *'Wet Arbeid Vreemdelingen'*, the Dutch government would rather see that job vacancies would be filled by Dutch citizens to increase labour force participation, instead of having foreign, in this case Chinese, labourers fill the vacancies (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). Labour exploitation is forbidden by law (Article 273f of the Dutch Criminal Code) and the Labour Inspectorate (iSZW) is in charge of keeping track of all breaches in the workspace (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019, p. 112). However, even though these regulations are in place, labour exploitation does exist in the Netherlands and both the Chinese employers and the Chinese workers are able to take the gaps that exist in the policies and use it to their advantage.

Before the Chinese workers come to the Netherlands, the workers may be in a vulnerable position. Due to possible financial issues or just because of the idea that chances are higher abroad, pressure from family members may be high to provide a good and steady income (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). When a Chinese worker comes to the Netherlands with help from a recruitment agency, often they have to pay a lot of money for their services which results in them arriving with a debt that needs to be paid off. This debt makes the employees even more likely to accept the exploitative working environment, because they cannot return to China empty handed with a debt that they cannot pay off. When Chinese workers are not hired through recruitment agencies, the usual way the worker is put in contact with the employer is

through the social network, often family or friends (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). It sometimes happens that Chinese workers (before coming to the Netherlands) have to sign two contracts instead of one: one Dutch contract and one Chinese contract. The Dutch contract matches Dutch rules as regards to income and so on, but the Chinese workers do not get a copy of this after signing and are often told a different translation of what it consists of through the phone. The Chinese contract can be either in paper or orally agreed and has very different job requirements, such as working days longer than allowed under Dutch law and no holidays. This is an exploitative agreement and the Dutch contract is only signed for Dutch bureaucracy, what counts is the Chinese agreement. The Chinese workers often agree to this, because firstly they want to take the step of migration and believe this is a part of the sacrifice they must make in order to succeed and secondly, they have no clue what Dutch terms of employment and rights actually entail (van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). This is one of the reasons why Chinese employers wish to hire employees from China: instead of recruiting Chinese workers who have already lived in the Netherlands for a while, have worked under harsh conditions already and wish to improve their working environment, they want to hire a Chinese immigrant who will accept the hard working environment and will agree to be paid less than Dutch required minimal income. Chinese employers (in the Netherlands) also prefer to hire Chinese workers against the wishes from the government to hire Dutch locals, because of multiple factors. Chinese workers are thought to work harder and be prepared to work long hours without proper time off, be loyal (or dependent) and cheap (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). Because job openings are often filled in using the social network to find good workers, this makes chances for the Dutch locals to get the job almost zero (Lee, 2019). When in the Netherlands, the Chinese employers often arrange everything for their employees: from housing to meals and from insurance to the opening of a bank account. The next anecdote explains how employers get around the Dutch rules and regulations:

“The account was then used to make the salary payments. This way, the arrangement looked completely legitimate. There was a working permit and residence permit, and salaries were paid into the victims accounts. Everything seemed accounted for to tackle the Dutch bureaucracy. However, victims could not

access their bank accounts. They were paid in cash a much lower amount then was transferred to their bank accounts. Employers also occasionally transferred money to the victim's family in China. Different scenarios then pop up with regard to what they do with surplus money that is generated in the account. In some cases employers transferred the money to their own account or a third party. Employers also sometimes use the account to make up for the expenses they made for the recruitment agency and immigration fees, so they deduct these costs from the wages of the employees" (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019, p. 118).

This shows that Chinese workers who come to work in the Netherlands are dependent on their employers for basically everything. The Chinese workers understand this dependency and know that employers have the power to take their work permit away, which would mean they have to go back to China. The employers can get away with this, because the Chinese workers are often not in a position to do anything about it. If they would even be aware of the labour rights they are supposed to have, they do not have the language skills (Dutch in this case) or the social network to make a stance (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). When the Chinese employees are unhappy with their working arrangements, they have a limited set of options: either they can stay and accept the bad working environment without complaining, they can leave the Netherlands and go back to China (which means they come back with almost no money made but money lost) or they can quit working at that employer and try to find somewhere else to work before the Dutch Labour Inspectorate finds out they are not living up to their working permit. Out of all of these options, the first one seems the least unattractive and that is why the Chinese migrants often accept exploitative working conditions (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). Next to this, Chinese employees often accept the harsh working conditions because they want to start their own restaurant in the Netherlands, or at least climb up the ladder. The working conditions are just part of the journey upwards and can even provide skills that can be useful when they are able to start on their own. This shows that Chinese workers sometimes know they are being exploited, but accept it because they believe it will serve a greater purpose. Often the migrants knew their working hours and salaries before coming to the Netherlands, but

accepted them and were unpleasantly surprised when the working conditions were even more difficult than they had expected (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). Not only are the working hours extremely long, but also there is almost no room for breaks, they are expected to work overtime whenever needed and a very high workpace is expected of them at all times.

The exploitation of workers in restaurants is not a phenomenon that exists only in the Netherlands and it is not only Chinese workers who are victims of this. For example, in Chile, Chinese restaurant owners exploit Latin American migrants because those migrants are in need of a visa - and an income - and therefore are more likely to accept bad working conditions and low wages, which makes them vulnerable (Chan, et al., 2019). Also in for example the United Kingdom, exploitative working environments exist in the food industry and among others Polish, Romanian and Somalian workers are victimized. A factor that is important to take into account, is that migrant workers are not often members of trade unions, which makes them more likely to experience exploitative working conditions (Davies, 2019). An example of exploitative situations in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands is a case in 2009, where a restaurant owner was being prosecuted for forced employment under bad working conditions of three employees. In this case, the employer was first released from his charges because it could not be proved that he had purposefully taken advantage of the employees and the employees had chosen to come to the Netherlands for work, but later he was found guilty of human trafficking. The employees had been in the Netherlands illegally and this placed them in a vulnerable position, which made them easy to exploit (Nationaal Rapporteur Mensenhandel en Seksueel Geweld tegen Kinderen, 2019). Another example is a case in 2016 where owners of a Chinese restaurant were given hours of community service as a punishment for the exploitation of a cook in their restaurant. The cook's experience is similar to what has been described above: he worked long hours every day of the week, got paid much less than what was agreed upon in the official contract, lived above the restaurant in a room that he was not free to leave when he wanted and next to this the employer kept his debit card and when the employee quit, the employer mostly emptied the bank account (De Graaf, 2016).

A factor that plays a role in this dynamic is the clear hierarchy that exists in Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. When a Chinese worker starts in a restaurant, he has to start with jobs low in rank, such as doing the dishes and cleaning. Once the worker shows he works hard and is loyal for a period of time, he can work himself up and maybe receive a higher pay (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). This has to do with *guanxi*, which is "the Chinese term for the way in which the various relationships between people are interpreted" (Hiah & Staring, 2016, p. 88). Building up a relationship with other people and keeping it nurtured is one of the most important aspects of *guanxi* and it has to do with *mianzi*, which is literally 'face' and stands for one's reputation. Once a person is able to help another person, their *mianzi* will grow and the more *mianzi* one has, the easier it is to get things done and improve *guanxi* (Hiah & Staring, 2016). In order to understand how the Chinese employers for example find employees but also how it works in hierarchy in the kitchen or between employer and employee, *guanxi* and *mianzi* are very important terms. For example, when a Chinese worker gets a job through a connection between their employer and family, the worker has to work hard and behave well (and just not cause trouble in any way), because that would lead to a loss of *mianzi* for his family and a weakened *guanxi* (Lee, 2019). The hierarchy in the restaurant that is put in place by a shared cultural background validates the exploitative working environment, according to the Chinese employers. This hierarchy is just the way it works and employees are able to get out of that environment, once they prove themselves to be loyal and hard-working employees (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019). In the eyes of the Chinese restaurant owners, one cannot speak of exploitation when discussing the working situation in the restaurants. They believe that exploitation is a very negative name for the natural hierarchy that exists in the restaurants, as help for everything the owner has done and does for the workers (helping them migrate, housing, meals etc.) to realize their own dream in time (Hiah & Staring, 2016).

Now that Chinese workers have been in the Netherlands for longer periods of time, they get a bigger understanding of labour rights in the Netherlands and how they are helping their employer succeed. The

Chinese restaurant owner needs the cheap workers in order to be able to keep the costs low and survive on the Dutch restaurant market, which makes them also dependent on their employees in a sense. This makes the relationship between the employer and the employees a tricky one: employers have to be careful to not get fined or closed down because of the exploitative working environment that is not allowed in the Netherlands, while the employers have to behave according to the wishes of the employer to not risk losing their job and working permit and have to go back to China (Van Meeteren & Wiering, 2019).

Conclusion

Within this thesis, I have argued that Chinese innovation has enriched the Dutch restaurant scene, but this has happened at the cost of exploiting Chinese workers. I hope to add to existing research on Chinese restaurants and ownership in the Netherlands in a somewhat limited, but nevertheless additional way.

Chinese workers first came to the Netherlands as employees on European ships. Rotterdam and Amsterdam became the base of these seamen and Chinese restaurants were found there, mostly to cater to the dietary needs of the Chinese seamen. When the economic crisis hit in 1929, the impoverished Chinese seamen had to sell peanut biscuits in order to somewhat survive, but also due to anti-Chinese government policy large numbers of Chinese workers left the Netherlands in the 1930s. In the early 1950s, many Indonesian-Dutch repatriates and ex-military men came back from Indonesia and the Chinese-Indonesian cuisine was born. In the next decades the Chinese-Indonesian restaurants kept growing in numbers, until that growth stagnated in the 1980s. The first Japanese restaurant in the Netherlands opened in 1971 and for the first two decades it was Japanese chefs cooking for Japanese expatriates. This changed when Chinese entrepreneurs took over in the 1990s and from that point sushi became booming in the Netherlands. Restaurants using the concept of *kaitenzushi* were opened up and it became a popular food for the masses. To this day most of the sushi restaurants in the Netherlands are Chinese-owned. Going out for dinner has become a part of life and entertainment has become a factor in eating out that is almost as important as the quality of the food itself. All-you-can-eat restaurants have become more and more popular in the last two decades and there are multiple types of restaurants. For example buffet-style restaurants where customers go pick out their own food, or all-you-can-eat sushi where customers a-la-carte decide what food they want and waiters will come serve it to their table. *Wereldrestaurants* serve many different types of food, which allows the customers to choose from and mix different cuisines in one evening out. A shadowside to the success of the Chinese innovation boom is that exploitative working environments are not a rarity and Chinese employees in the restaurants are dependent on their

employers and have to work long hours for little pay, which also has to do with the Chinese cultural ideas of *guanxi* and *mianzi*.

According to the Oslo Manual, there are four types of innovation: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation and organisational innovation, all which have different characteristics to be able to distinguish between them. An innovation can be new to the firm, new to the market and new to the world. Within this thesis three general examples of the Chinese innovation force in the Dutch restaurant scene have been described: Chinese-Indonesian restaurants, sushi bars and all-you-can-eat restaurants. To the innovation of Chinese-Indonesian restaurants all four of the Oslo Manual innovation types apply and it was new to the firm, new to the market and new to the world. To the innovation of sushi bars the types of product innovation, process innovation and marketing innovation all apply, but it is more difficult to determine whether or not the type of organisational innovation also applies. It was new to the firm, in a sense also new to the market (even though the Chinese-owned sushi bars were not the first to serve sushi to the Dutch) and not new to the world. To the innovation of all-you-can-eat restaurants all four of the Oslo Manual innovation types apply and it was new to the firm and new to the market (because of the combination of offering multiple types of cuisines, being focused on the masses in size and price and using entertainment as an important factor to the experience of eating out) but not new to the world.

For all three examples it was the case that product innovation, process innovation and marketing innovation were found and for all of the examples it was new to the firm and in a way also new to the market. This proves that Chinese entrepreneurs are able to adapt to new situations quickly and see opportunities wherever they go. Chinese entrepreneurs are able to think of new concepts themselves, with the Chinese-Indonesian restaurant as an example, but they are also able to take advantage of existing concepts or technologies and not only improve them, but also make them known with and popular with the Dutch people. This resilience and entrepreneurial spirit has made the Chinese immigrant be able to survive in a Dutch society where they did not expect to stay or become a part of as they have become and

be successful with it too. Exploitation in the working environment is a negative side that has come along with the Chinese innovation force in the Netherlands. There have been cases where Chinese restaurant owners have been prosecuted for the exploitation of their employees, but the numbers of prosecutions perhaps do not match the amount of exploitative working situations in Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands. So, since the Chinese have arrived in the Netherlands, they and their restaurants have survived by continuously innovating their ways of working and serving the customers and by bringing types of restaurant and experiences to the Netherlands that the Dutch had not experienced before. The Chinese have made a huge difference in the Dutch restaurant scene, but have not stayed away from the exploitation of their own employees in doing so. An interesting angle for future research would be to investigate whether these exploitative working environments have actually caused major setbacks for the Chinese entrepreneurs and if that is not the case, how that is possible in a country with laws against labour exploitation.

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