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Breaks in Motion: Understanding Self Loss and Self-making of recent Chinese Migrant-workers in the catering industry in the Netherlands.

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Breaks in Motion:

Understanding Self Loss and Self-making of recent Chinese Migrant-workers in the catering industry in the Netherlands.

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Abstract

This research sees the act of "going abroad for work" from two perspectives. One is leaving home and then conducting a cross-cultural life. The other is the expansion or adjustment of a career trajectory. This research examines how recent Chinese migrant workers cope with their overseas life when working in the catering industry in the Netherlands. By doing so, I have tried to understand what is the "social world" of my participants and how they interact with it.

During 3 months of fieldwork, I talked with 8 participants and closely yet remotely studied social media content from this group. Our online conversations were based on getting along even virtually. The outcome comprises a written text and a film. The text discusses how these migrant workers engaged with labor and explores how the self was lost and rebuilt. As a trajectory pursuing success, and through daily practices in break times, I gradually gained insight in these migrant workers' migration journey and witnessed their awareness and sacrifice of self. Sacrificing leisure life and prioritizing work, men I engaged with, can hardly think of their own feelings and needs or reflect on who they are. Yet their practice and narration indicated a certain expectation on self-presentation.

The film portrays narratives of "labor migration" from several perspectives as a polyphonous testimony. Overall, the key findings are that for recent Chinese migrant workers who come to the Netherlands and work in the catering industry, the act of migration and adjusting to cross-cultural life are reported to be experienced as a "normal" process: It is experienced as natural that one needs to adjust to different co-workers and to the new work environment. As it is for money that they came overseas, they perceive it as normal to bear difficulties. Rather than entering in a process of trans-national transition and adjustment as I imagined, their journeys can be seen as a continued precarious yet independent career trajectory that illustrates how they, as labor migrants, do not relate more than necessary with their new environment. At the same time, these labor migrants seek and create breathing space for themselves in their daily break-times, and single free weekday, to maintain a sense of self. Also, bearing the uncomfortable, their tendency is to normalize it, and tend to talk about the self in a positive and independent way, together composing a sense of self.

Keywords: Self, Body, Mobility, Labor, Chinese labor migrants in the Netherlands.

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Prelude

"For the gods keep the means of life concealed from human beings. Otherwise you would easily be able to work in just one day so as to have enough for a whole year even without working, and quickly you would store the rudder above the smoke, and the work of the cattle and of the hard-working mules would be ended." (Hesiod <Works and Days>)

My youthful Marxism was thus a vector for a kind of social dis-identification: I glorified the "working class" in order to put more distance between myself and actual workers. While reading Marx and Trotsky, I imagined myself at the avant-garde of the people. But really, I was finding my way into a world of people of privilege, into their kind of temporality, their modes of subjectivation: the world of people who had the leisure time available for reading Marx and Trotsky. (Eribon, <Returning to Reims>)

She had explicitly forbidden me not only to write about her but also to use persons and episodes of the neighborhood. When I had, she always found a way of telling me—even if painfully—that the book was bad, that either one is capable of telling things just as they happened, in teeming chaos, or one works from imagination, inventing a thread, and I had been able to do neither the first thing nor the second. (Ferrante <The Neapolitan Novels>)

Introduction

"We just came here to the Netherlands because we do not want to only live from paycheck to paycheck in China. Those who had the capability won't go to work overseas. [...] If you do not like it, try to work for a Dutch boss." [...]

"Honestly, we are still Chinese people, we are not Dutch. " (anonymous, May 2021. author translation)"

This anonymous speech is cited from a group chat I was in which was made by and for Chinese labor migrants working in the Netherlands. It was intended to support migrant workers especially on issues like negotiating salaries in case the boss would skimp on some percentage. The cited conversation happened when they were discussing whether it is possible to argue or even report in case they feel being treated unfairly. One person thought they should argue for what they deserve. Then another person who apparently preferred to bear all the unfairness, said the sentence cited above.

The group admin. posted the link of the group chat online as a public group. I joined in with the intention to look for potential research-participants. Even though I finally did not manage to do any research with people in this chat, these words still stayed with me after the fieldwork was already done. This person's seemingly compromising tone precisely illustrated what I felt confused about after working in kitchens last summer and led me to perform this research: Why did their way in which the work itself is perceived not change after migrating to another country and probably another welfare system and work culture?

About Work and Migration

This research started from my curiosity to the nature of work, job, and labor.

In the summer before this master - the only summer I ever had in the Netherlands as a non-EU student, I got the chance to work in the kitchen of a seasonal food stall on the beach.

Surprisingly, I was surrounded by cool people and things. My colleague at the bar usually saves the remaining drinks for me before I have to wash the juice machine. There are always "extra" fries in the oil pan for staff. I have a colleague who is a teacher in a college in the daytime. Another colleague paused one whole year of career and travelled

all over the world. After work, we drank by the sea in the moonlight. I had several trial weeks at another sushi restaurant during this job, where the chef taught me how to roll the sushi. I could play with it and then take it as my dinner. I enjoyed working at both places, because I can clearly see how my work contributed to the food, and how I am connected to the place personally.

Physically it was tough, of course. I had many times woken up with my arms unable to move. But I did not really care. We only worked for dinner hours. So, I was totally free till the late afternoon. I visited almost all the opened museums in that region when having trial days in that sushi bar. I even have enough time to have serious reading - probably one of the most luxury privileges of full-time students and scholars.

I was almost to celebrate this flexible, free, independent relationship with a job in this way. I do not need to worry about anything that does not “belong” to my creativity after accurate work hours. Even though, in my previous years in China, essential, physical, non-skilled jobs always gave me the impression that by choosing such jobs, life would be occupied by mindless, repeated, meaningless work. It was the first time I had a job as an expat. It is also the first time I was working as kitchen staff. Therefore, it became easy to say that maybe something embedded in the “Dutch system” that enabled me to not being alienated from the person I was supposed to be, according to all standards.

But in a more universal way, how to perceive those who’s labor in these kinds of physical jobs? And for people performing these works for the longer term – even as a lifelong career – how do they perceive themselves? Through this question I paid attention to Chinese people working temporarily in the Netherlands in the catering industry. Coming to this essential physical work after migrating from China, what changed for them, and what not? How would they perceive the trans-national process, and accordingly, how they perceive themselves if the work environment changing?

Therefore, I addressed my research question as:

How do these recent Chinese migrant workers cope with their overseas life and work in the Netherlands, especially as a follow up of the career trajectory they had gone through in China? And what kind of self-awareness they had built in this process?

Flexibility or Precarity?

When I was working in the kitchen during the day and enjoyed museums at early mornings, a lot of people were bounded only by a temporary contract to earn their living.

Especially after Covid-19 pandemic, more attention has been paid to essential jobs and people performing them. Because during lockdown, their vital role finally become more visible. In a Chinese case, the public discussion started from take-away deliverers and then expanded to various types of flexible and low-end workers. I, probably so did many Chinese readers, firstly knew the situation of delivery men's working condition: This is a type of flexible job, only registering on the take-away food app is needed to be able to work on it. Accordingly, insurance and benefits are not as guaranteed as in standard employments. Limited delivery time forced them to take the risk of going wrong direction or enter blocked road. While the flexibility in entering this position and work hour time schedule is attractive for people even have extra caring responsibilities.

Li's (2019) film <We Were SMART> screened in 2020, occasionally, for me seemingly like joined in the discussion on short term workers' subjectivity. His protagonists, performers of a subculture "Shamate" – transliterate from the word "Smart" – which was popular 10 years ago, were rural-urban migrants based their living in assembly factories. This subculture "Shamate" was featured by its members colorful, weird hairstyles. But further, as the film showcased, hairdressing also led to the sense of friendship and community. Started to be migrant worker so young and being afraid of the unfamiliar and lonely city, the colorful hairstyle seemingly indicated these youngsters' manifesto in stay against boring, repeating factory work, even as well as endless and hopeless future.



Li's documentary screening on the accompanied exhibition, and the Shamate hairstyle example
<https://www.feiaritecture.com/arts/24.html>

Ge's (2021) exhibition and art project <Doing something, helped Nothing> took the idea of appreciating staffs' labor in creative industry, namely museums. He planed several staffs' 3 rounds of paid holiday and take over their daily executive work during their holiday. The outcome in the exhibition hall was the artists' own working notes. While the invisible outcome is those staffs' creativity in their holidays.



Ge's exhibition hall. (<https://www.feiaritecture.com/arts/24.html>)

These media information and public discussion surround it as I received, just based on my own interest, of course could not indicate a collective atmosphere of the time. But these public discussions I witnessed, kind of like a montage, led me to think about the essential connection among several groups that I previously thought as unrelated: take-away food deliverers, artists, staff in creative industry, and short-term factory workers. Although in stereotypes artists are seemingly more “independent” than deliverers and factory workers, all of them showcases a position at the outside of the standard employment and capitalism system.

In a practical and social intervention sense, I was seeking for the proper perspective in describing these “people out of the system”. In a theoretical sense, I was curious to individuals' subjectivity and how it is maintained in lower-end, flexible jobs.

Become Yourself at the Outside of the System: Inspiration from Mushroom Pickers.

Tsing (2015) started describing a world by centering matsutake hunters in Oregon. Seeing them as self-motivated mushroom pickers, rather than being hired by anymore, Tsing states a network outside of the commercial matsutake market – the capitalism system, yet inscribed in the process of the original accumulation of capitalism era.

Inspired by this art of perception, this research addresses my interlocutors – Chinese labor migrants working in the catering industry in the Netherlands – as ones in similar positions with matsutake hunters.

In above discussions and artistic expressions about lower-end flexible workers, those who going abroad for a work seemingly being ignored. Rather, this overseas Chinese people are more likely to be researched within their migrant communities. Many previous ethnographers worked on pointing out how the migration communities are integrated (Song, 2017; Li, 1999).

These labor migrants could be compared to mushroom pickers, because they are also in a status of not being in the capitalism system. In this article, I will firstly further explain the background to locate Chinese migrants in the Dutch life. Then I will explain my journey in looking for “the material culture” through interview. After that I will explain what is my interlocutors’ own social world. Last but not least, in the last section I will explain what kind of consistence in perceiving the self is built by people like my participants.

Background: snap shots of Chinese migrants and context and locate participants.

It is necessary to define several controlling conditions of the research population in this project. Because there are various pathways to approach social scientific discussions about overseas Chinese people. Who are people coming out from China? And what is featured for the case of the Netherlands?

Migrants from China are usually not that visible in their western host societies. Some stereotypes about them include hard working, bearing the language barrier, rarely interact with their neighborhood and join the social life of the host-society. However, among ethnographies about overseas Chinese in various countries, this group of people are largely described as a subgroup expanded the culture and social structure from their home society.

In this section, I will explain how I wish to posit this research next to existing ways of writing about Chinese migrants. Also, this section will portrait some common features of my research population as background knowledge for this research.

Overseas Chinese Communities: Continued Network Pattern and Beyond.

Anthropological attention paid to migrants firstly as groups of people come from one culture

and living in another one. In this way, these groups provide great cases to discuss how one culture negotiate and maintain itself in the process of cross-cultural interaction. (Watkins, F (2012) One example from this perspective is Redfield's work on Mexican rural-urban migrants. He argued that migrants maintained and expanded the folk culture in their urban life. In this way

Researches on overseas Chinese communities could be related to Redfield's idea about the relationship between "the little tradition" and "the great tradition". elites in villages How the "little tradition" implement and respond to the "great tradition"? For a context of modernization in China and the worldwide globalization process, this question could be

transited to "how Chinese rural societies which provides large amount of exodus embodied cosmopolitanism from below"? (Song, 2017)

Following the Chicago school of sociology, Paul Siu (1952) did ethnographic research with a group of Chinese laundrymen in America. Unlike other migrants, they have less interaction with their American neighbors than with their Chinese family and friends, seemingly never have a rest from work, did not experience the culture-shock in their even three or four decades in America. Siu defined "sojourner" - migrants who arranging their overseas life based on the social and cultural rule in their home society. They were financially supported by their parents - who migrated to the United States earlier and also working as laundrymen - before coming to the United States. Their hardworking in the United States is therefore based on the responsibility in support younger family members. For these laundrymen, the belongs to a social world of migrant community even before migration. (Siu 1952)

Siu's ethnographic insights could have been related to discussions on the connection between Chinese migrants' performance and the social structure of their home community. But theoretically emphasized the term "sojourner", Siu's work was located more in the discussion on how the host society - in this specific case, the modern urbans - integrate and isolate marginal groups. (McKoewn, 2001)

Today's Chinese migrants' overseas performance are not too different from laundry men portrayed in Siu's work. Take my participants for example, all of them do not speak English or Dutch. They work with Chinese colleagues and do not have too much contact with their Dutch neighbors. While later researches furthered details about "what are there back in China", how it formed a transnational space in which migration stories taken place (Song 2017), and how the overseas communities are organized. (Li, 1999)

For people from Fujian province, south east China by the sea, the overseas communities are organized through the principle of kinship and regional ties. The obligation to contribute to the hometown - namely the village united by kinship and folk belief - motivated migrants' overseas practices.

For people from Wenzhou, a city in east China which is famous by its people's skill in operating business, going abroad means make full use of the overseas kinship network. (Kuhn, 2009) The achievement migrants gained from overseas could be converted into the social capital in their home town (Li, 1999)

How do my participants perceive the network featured in these researches? During my fieldwork based in the Netherlands, however, the network behind in China are more likely to be simply described as "I have a friend." This research will not further discuss where this "friend" come from: from kinship, from the regional fellow group, or united through folk religious believes.

Nor do the network behind in China associated the sense of identity by my interlocutors. I frequently referred these researches as "Fujian modes" and "Wenzhou modes" of migrating when talking with my interlocutors about their sense of self and how they describe themselves. I intended to invite them to compare themselves to stories told in these ethnographies. "We do not have such kind of kinship network in north China." Several of my interlocutors once said (Tian, Yuan, Xiaolou).

Therefore, I note that the social life before their going overseas, unlike previous migrants from peasant society in south China, are more complex than family tie or regional connection. Maybe they will be involved deeper into the Dutch-Chinese network after they decided to stay for longer in the Netherlands. But this research will focus more on labor migrants stayed here less than 5 years - the minimal residential duration to get the permanent resident permits.

As Emigrants: Development and Modernity

Who are leaving China for work? Xiang (2014) used the term "would-be migrants" to describe the population behind migrants from north China who have already gone overseas. "Would-be" migrants refer to people who are seeking for opportunities, have tried, or even failed in achieving the intention of working overseas. Complex moral schemes were assigned to societies where "would-be migrants" come from. On the one hand, the dreams of earning quick money overseas suggests the ambition to live a life "better" than the average. This is encouraged by hometown fellows. On the other hand, once one has indicated not having extra capabilities to realize this extra ambition, they would receive negative feedbacks (Xiang 2014).

This interpretation about capability was, from another perspective, confirmed by my interlocutors and their fellows, as well as online content produced by overseas workers from China. On the social media app "Kwai", where I found most of my interlocutors, there were several video posts talking about "what kind of people are the best for working overseas". Going abroad is seen as a good option especially for

“average” people in China. The average here refers to both income and capacity. For those who can earn a lot in China, going overseas is not necessary. For those who do not have capabilities at all, they cannot do the job overseas.

During the fieldwork, I once discussed the relationship between being rich and being successful with Xiaolou. I asked him whether it is important to earn a lot of money, with reference to Li (1999)'s research in earning quick money overseas. "I do not have to be rich, but I have to manage to do something, to showcase that I can do it" he said. And the easiest and the most obvious way to showcase that is capability

Likewise, Diressen's (2019) research showcased the tension that Chinese construction worker in Ethiopia faced. Their road construction project is described as “in supporting” Africa's development, while these workers being sent to Ethiopia, in a Chinese context, are “extra labors” at the post-industry era.

Therefore, I would like to highlight that this research concerns labor migrants coming to the Netherlands, but in parallel with their fellows who are working in factories, or working as delivery men, or in other forms of informal employment. In the next paragraph, I will further explain why domestic labor migrants and transnational ones shared the same social process.

"Dagong": Consistency Between Domestic and Trans-national Migration in a Chinese context.

The above text seemingly mixed Chinese domestic rural-urban migrants and transnational labor migrants from China. Of course, if migration means leaving home due to family obligations, domestic and international migrants share the same dynamic. However, I would like to note in more detail, how these two social processes resonated with each other in the Chinese context. Because this research worked with Chinese labor migrants, with the intention to understand their situation and the nature of their jobs and careers.

Kohn (2008) described the shared dynamic between rural-urban migrants within China and trans-nationally: whether going abroad or go to the suburban factory nearby depends on the family's strategy and the talent of each of its children.

The TV series *"Family on the Go"*, which is recommended by one of my interlocutors, Yunhao, exemplified this strategy. Yunhao comes from Wenzhou, the city featured in this TV series. He felt familiar with the story of the people depicted in this story. The featured family has a son and a daughter. When they decided to explore more ways of earning a living and left their home village in 1980s, the daughter was sent to Italy following a relative who is already settled down there. The other members of the family finally settle down in the city by selling extra products from a former state-owned shoe factory.

Family on the go is the story of the 1980s-1990s, with the background that China was in transformation from the communism economy to the market system. A more recent example provided by my former flat mate during an informal chat exemplifies a similar story. He is from a fishing and aquaculture-based village in Fujian province. Around 10 years ago, fishing areas, which belonged to individual households since his childhood, were gradually rented by the local government and companies. Larger scale seafood planting could be performed. The products could be sold as commercial products, rather than only by individual villagers at the local market. However, not everyone could be hired as a company staff and do the same aquaculture operation as before. Most people could only receive the rental paid by the government and company, but have to find a job by themselves. It is common for youth in the village to have nothing to do, hang around on the street all the day and being involved in gambling. Till when they feel needing to be an adult, the common option is to find a job in a factory. Or, make use of the overseas network, and look for opportunities in another country. This was how my former flat-mate came to the Netherlands.

During the fieldwork, people I encountered from my targeted research population prefer to call their situation "going overseas and work" or "working abroad" [*Chi: Chuguo Dagong*], rather than migrating. The word "*Dagong*" means "Working for the boss", usually used for rural-urban migrants finding a job in the factory.

At the very end stage of my fieldwork, I got the chance to work at Jun's workplace as an applicant for part-timer. And worked with Jun during my two trial days. After that, people I know from that kitchen asked me when I will come back again. They used

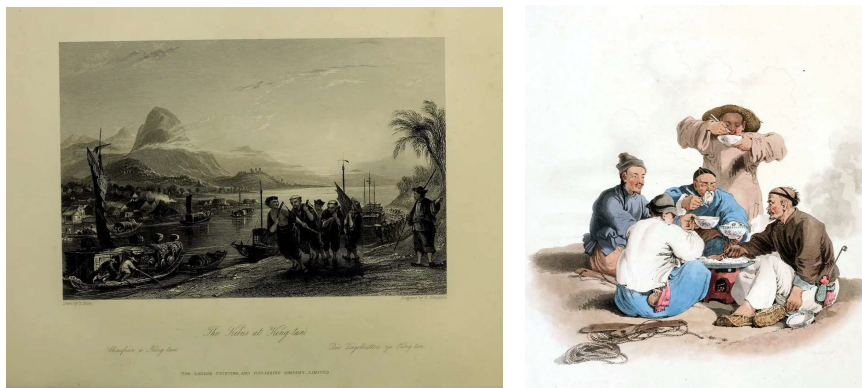
the word "*Zuogong*" [means "doing the labor"], rather than the expression that I initially prefer to use, "*Shangban*"[meaning "go to work"]. The latter could also be used in occasions like when commuting to the office. These two examples indicated how my interlocutors perceive what they are doing. Therefore, it is valid to put them in a row with rural-urban migrants and other flexible workers.

Theoretical Context

To reach labor emigrants' own language in describing their situation, this research followed the concept of self through the approach of embodied knowledge or knowing through the body.

What is labor: A concept towards an accurate language?

During my fieldwork, I saw a pair of pictures on social media which I can relate to in relation to what I was doing my research on:



Both pictures are portraying boat trackers. One looked like a harsh and tough career, another noticed boat trackers' humorous, cheerful personality. Of course, none of them are "wrong" portrays. But which one would be preferred by boat trackers' themselves, and how missing of one of these tones could influence our understanding to this group of people?

The parallel discussion is about how to locate laborers and how should laborers locate themselves in relationship with their social network and with employment. As described in the background section, labor migrants from China, like my participants, did not expect too much of being involved in the social life in the host society, but paused and expanded their life in previous society to earn more money. So do their fellows who used the rural-urban trajectory in migration and find a job.

This situation, in the term by Xiang (2021a, 2017) was described as suspension, or displaced from the present. (Xiang, 2014) Migrant workers in the situation of suspension changed work frequently. Due to the lack of belonging and identity to the job, they are less likely to change the situation at their workplace. They are more like a self-branded

company, rather than an employee of someone else. With the analysis based on this, Xiang responded to the question "why in the 'work-factory' -namely in China, - there is no mature work class" that these kinds of employees could be united and be guaranteed with their welfare. (Xiang, 2021b)

I can relate to this situation by thinking of other forms of labor, especially informal and flexible employments. For example, digital nomads based their working on remote contracts. That enabled them to travel all over the world and gain that freedom. But on the other hand, that is also the result of lesser job opportunities in Europe and the fact that living in developing countries is financially more affordable. Also, we can not ignore the lack of involvement in the social welfare system of these people. (Thompson, 2018) Another example is "playbors" - a word combined by "play" and "labor" - the boundary between work and play is blurred. This word refers to those who enjoyed a certain video game, creating modes or plug-ins for fun. Their random products composed the meaning of this game per se, profited the game company, while their efforts are not necessarily recognized as "labor" or work but "play" by default. (Julian Kücklich, 2005)

As there are so many opportunities to do flexible work, one could be "hired" temporarily as short as several hours for a certain task, Trebor Scholz (2017) called the current era: the "end of employment". Tsing (2015) noted that more people are not doing standard jobs. Employment relationships did not cover their ways of living. At the same time, value is created in occasions where it is not seen as effective production in the capitalist way.

Therefore, the way of telling stories matters. In the case of my research, it matters for understanding the nature of labor migrants' labor and migration. How can I write stories of people like the ones of my interlocutors? Which kind of tone represents their own perception of the world and what does this world look like? or in other words, on the practical level, what kind of narration is needed for this group in our public discussion? Can we celebrate this flexibility with no worries? Do we need to feel pity for their precarity?

With the intention to respond to these questions, this research uses the concept of self. In this chapter, I will explain how the self is defined in anthropological discourse and how it is related to culture and bodily, pragmatic, daily practices. Using the arena of self as the departure point, this research celebrated the idea to use a phenomenological approach to anthropological research of labor.

In this way, I posited my interlocutors in parallel with their fellows in China. Just like factory workers changed jobs frequently, as I will further describe in the following text,

my interlocutors experienced a similar trajectory in their previous career. This led them to the step of working overseas essentially as they are doing now. I will further describe how that happened to my participants in this thesis. But at this moment, what I am concerned about is how to reach the discussion about self and what the self can teach us about culture.

The Self *in* and *across* Culture

Anthropological debate on the concept of self could be traced back to Mauss's article (1938, in Michael Carrithers, 1985), in which he compared how the concept of "person" is situated in the pattern of various cultures. In this sense, the word "person" has its origin from the word "persona", indicating that its meaning here is not "the person as an individual", but refer to "an actor as a role on the stage". By doing so, he proposed that the seemingly self-evidenced concept of "self" is actually an artificial "role" of history of the community long times ago. The person is "the locus of different rights, duties, titles and kinship names in the different clan". (Carrithers, 1985) This state suggested that different cultures could have various discourses about "the self". It is thus distinguished from the western psychological idea that the self, as an ego, could be seen as a "discrete and well-bounded unit" and analyzable based on a universal proto-human. (Douglas Hollan, 1992) Similarly, Harris (1989) defined the self as the "existential I", as a locus of experiences. Later scholars emphasized his attention to the cultural perspective of the individual person, but argue that more attention could be paid to the notion of self and personal experience, discussing on the self as an agent with subjectivity. Rather than focus only on how the law, moral and social normative disciplined the "self". Authors like Myers(1986) and Wikan (1990) provided ethnographic examples of this way of writing (Carrithers, M., 2012). That is to say, "who am I" could be answered not only by how should I behave as a member of the culture, but also by "how I feel" and "what I experienced in the relation". These concerns on the notion of the self has been used to argue against the over attention paid to the culture, the community and the society as a collective, structural concept. Introducing 28 the concept of identity into anthropology made the arena of "self" not neglected. People share the same history are not necessarily share the same identity. Also, people come from the same "culture", that is to say, same community or kinship group, do not necessarily behave in the same way. While on the other hand, this idea did not deny that the society would make "selves" into the social image. (Cohen, 1994) For example, Individual selves need to experience the process of socialization. Margret Mead's research about Bali exemplified this socialization process. Taking the continuous tradition in symbolic interactionist, Erving Goffman (1990) presented a vision of self that is intentionally performed according to the social and cultural context. The idea of "symbolic interactionist" here refers to the theorization of interpersonal interactions. This concept explained interaction as a process of interpreting symbols presented by people's manner. While the shared culture defined the meaning of a certain behavioral symbol. So that people with a common culture could understand each other. By behaving in a certain way, people are presenting his/her personality, such as "a docent waiter" or "a wife with respect to her husband". And at the same time, one's unconscious behavior might suggest his/her cultural background.

Edwardes (2019) explained the self by several modes. The actual self is not-knowable, while the self that we can talk about could be defined with several models. For other modes of self, the social self is the one individual is assigned to be, yet one would doubt whether should believe in the assigned role. Social selves various, while we need several models of self to integrate and interpret all of them. The

Episodic self is shaped in the personal history, the narrativity self located in the sphere of conversation talking about the past. While the cultural self is the one as self-motivated and as self-aware "the ideal self I can be". Moreover, the projected self is the figure want others believe you to be.

Van Meijl (2008) used the term "dialogical self" based on his research with Maori youngsters about their identity in between Maori transitions and daily practice in New Zealand (van Meijl 2006). The concept of dialogical self is in response to the limitation of cultural identity in the context of globalized era. Because individuals are not only bounded with one culture, but multiple ones. (van Meijl 2008) Similarly, Sokefeld (1999) has argued that people can mediate between the role "kinship identity" expected him to behave and the role "religious identity" expected him to be. This ability to mediate suggests one's agency. Van Meijl (2006) argued he was following the theory that self could be shifted and changing, rather than stable.

Self, Body and Practice

The body could be both objective and subjective (Baas and Yang, 2020), both a representation and a "being-in-the-world"(Csordas, 1997). As an object or representation, the body is representing social and cultural world around it. While in a subjective perspective, or as a being-in-the-world, the body is an agent that is experiencing things independently. Though the definition of self could not emerge without the pre-existed culture, they are not only the products of the objectification of the social realities. (Baas and Yang, 2020. pp:11) Marcel Mauss(1973) described a frame of the relationship between the body and the society in which techniques of the body suggested the tradition of a society. It is the tradition, discipline, and the ways of education of a society that shape the way its members behave. Geertz's idea about ethnographic writing also indicated how body and emotion be narrated as "a presentation". (Csordas, 1997) He defined culture as a system of symbols. Each of the embodied behaviors could be depicted as one symbol in the system of a certain culture. This way of thinking, according to Csordas (ibid), draws out dichotomies between the cultural and the biological, as well as between the public and the private sources of information. Both Mauss's idea about body techniques and Geertz's way of ethnographic writing suggested how the body and bodily experience are used as an information converter inscribing the culture to the self in the process of socialization. Into the personal body by society and culture as 'the structural' in the individual agent. This concept bridged the relation between structure and individual practices. The society normalizes its members' way of practice. While at the same time, social members conducted and thus shaped the meaning of "the normative" of a society by act as they are.

On the other hand, from a subjective experience perspective, Csordas introduced phenomenological methods to the Anthropological discourse. He thus reached an approach to the embodiment with the pre-assumption that the body is the subject of culture. (Csordas, 1990: 33) The phenomenological approach works on how people perceive, experience and comprehend the social and material world surrounding them. (Kalpana Ram and Christopher Houston 2015) Whilst Bourdieu (1990) referred to the concept of "habitus" to bridge societal structure and individual practice, at the same time, social members conducted and thus shaped the meaning of "the normative" of society by acting as they do. This concept overcame the dualism between the mind and the physical body, as well as that between the social and structure. (Lock 1993)

According to Bourdieu, the division of people according to "social-classes" through income is not enough to position/situate a person in society. Rather, therefore, the concept of "social space" was created to describe the arena where "similar" people gathered together (Bourdieu 1989). And with a critical attitude towards Marxism "class" defined by income, the "similarity" here, not only refers to the economic capital but also cultural, social and symbolic capitals. A "social space" is demonstrated by the overlapping occupation of diverse types of capitals. According to Bourdieu (1987), people are grouping by, and forming groups with, the shared 'habitus'. The 'habitus' here refers to both the shared body language, ways of behavior, but also to the ways to deal with the feelings towards and making distinctions between others: What kind of people are seen as "with proper manner", what kind of behaviors are nuisances and annoying?

Welcome to the kitchen!

I did not come to this research without any knowledge about how working in a kitchen could be. As mentioned in the introduction, I had weeks of work experience in both a seasonal restaurant and an Asian restaurant, without the context of doing research.

The sushi restaurant was far from The Hague - the city I have been living in since I came to the Netherlands. The boss allowed me to stay in the loft when I worked for three continuous days. I was also allowed to use all the cookware and stoves if I wanted to make something for my own lunch. But I set a rule for myself that I won't use the kitchen in non-working hours. So that I can "preserve" a relatively private space out of the working hours for myself, even though this space was just the storage room behind the kitchen.

I worked for longer time and more officially at the seasonal restaurant in Scheveningen as a dishwasher. I noticed with longer time standing at the same spot, I started to create meaning of the space. There was a small window behind the cupboard. Standing in the kitchen from late afternoon till midnight, I frequently looked out of that window to know the time. It is also mentally relaxing to guess the color of sunset that day. I also gradually found out the easiest way for me to hold a pile of bowls. I looked at my chef colleagues from time to time. They so easily walked on the slippery ground, hanging ladles at the edge of the range hood, taking care of the oven and the oil pan at the same time. They looked like dancing among objects and machines in the kitchen, as if all facilities were a part and expansion of their body.

Due to these experiences, I was surprised that I was knowing the kitchen through my body. I also appreciated how my experienced colleagues used their body movements to practice the meaning of "working as a chef". Of course, this is a way of thinking and seeing for a newcomer who is not familiar with any kitchen. For my interlocutors who are experienced chefs, I was curious how they would interpret the kitchen and how they would relate themselves to this space.

In this section, I will describe pieces of knowledge about Asian restaurant kitchens -

the work place of my participants - and shed light on what kind of work they are doing. Also, continuing the idea of making meaning of a space, I will describe the living space of the

I call it "pieces of knowledge", because none of these interlocutors once gave me an overall description about how his kitchen looks like and how they relate themselves with this space. Rather, my knowledge about kitchens come from fragmental conversations about a daily schedule, about what kinds of food they like to make, about objects they brought from China, etc.

I will further reflect on the process in which I got these pieces of knowledges and how I pieced them together. This process challenged my previous assumption but also encouraged me to adjust it by modifying my understanding of self and body. As I will explain later, the lack of overall speech about the kitchen, still, indicated the relationship.

The kitchen space itself, however, is still important. It is the space where my participants spent most of their time in the Netherlands. Trying to understand how a kitchen looks like is also the starting point for me to maintain the idea of participant visualization, even remotely.

1.1 Objects and people

After talking for 2 hours about how he left his poor family in Wenzhou when he left to the Netherlands in 1993, working hard in restaurants owned by Cantonese people, how his own experiences echoed what he later learnt about migrant history from a Dutch school, how he was crazy for earning more money and finally in Christianity found meaning of life other than economical ambitions, Fu finally understood what I wanted to know about the kitchen. Compared to his passion in explaining how to read the Bible, he referred to the knowledge of the kitchen as the easiest part: "I can summarize everything for you in 5 minutes."

Based on his around 20 years working in, operating, and owning Asian restaurants in the Netherlands, he emphasized the diversity of types of kitchens where Chinese labor migrants might be working at. As described in the background knowledge section, Chinese food restaurants followed up the style established by the last generation of Cantonese migrants. Besides these restaurants, there are also places offering Japanese food, offering buffet with sushi and fried food as one type, offering Korean BBQ and

self-service sushi, etc.

For Chinese food restaurants, where Fu and his wife Jinfeng worked for most of the time they have been staying in the Netherlands, positions of restaurant staffs include the following ones. I later learned that in other types of Asian restaurant, the division of labor are similar.

"Oil pan"[*Chi: Youguo*]: Staff working on fried food. This is an easier position. The staff need to remember how long time each food needs to be in the oil. The skillful part of this position is to make full use of the time and space in the pan when it is busy.

"Frying rice and noodles [*Chi: Chao fanmian*]": Staff working on fried noodles and rice. During busy hours, there could be several portions of rice or noodles in the pot. So this people should make sure all the food receive similar amount of heat, which means stirring the pot with a certain way of strength. So that several portions will be finished at the similar time.

The (master) chef [*Chi: Dachu, Zhongchu*]: the Chef is the manager of the kitchen team. This person plans the material storage in the kitchen. During working hours, chefs finish the main part of cooking and organize other staffs.

"*Laohutou*" - literally translated as "the tiger head", means coordinator. This person needs to be familiar with components of all types of dishes offered by this restaurant. After getting the order, these people divide the dishes into elements to be prepared and assign them to each section. When finished dishes come from the chef, these people need to match sauces and toppings of each dishes and match dishes within one order.

Cashier - In the field and among online content I had ever seen, this position is just called "Kassa" also by Chinese restaurant owners in the Netherlands. Besides being the cashier, they are the ones to pick up calls for ordering and reservation and matching orders with the table.

"Drinks bar" [*Chi: Shuiba*]: At the bar working on drink making.

Waiter. Waiters and waitress are translated in these Chinese restaurants by

its pronunciation "*Weida*". According to Jinfeng, both waiter and drink bar staff are called "working outside". And these two positions were usually performed by females.

This categorization still works in today's Asian restaurants. Among online group chats and forums for Chinese people in the Netherlands, vacancies were posted with these names.

But in my fieldwork, the division of labor of each position could be different from place to place. When I was working for the sushi place the last summer, I was "the people in the kitchen". Most of the time, I should operate the oil pan. But at busier hours, everyone should join in cooking the rice for sushi and preparing pre-made materials. The place offered warm fried food and sushi.

What is Continued? Bing a chef and migration within career.

In the last section I introduced the space of kitchen and the living space of my interlocutors as an establishment for imaging where this kind of overseas life physically taken place. While talking about the self, it is hard to see how the self perceived the space in the kitchen nor in their overseas living sphere. In this section, I will explain why the self is not associate with the trans-national process and not with the kitchen-where my participants spent the most of their time and performed the most of their skills. For my interlocutors, the trans-cultural process did not lead them to change habitus in an essential way. Even though adjusting to the Dutch life is not easy, it is a normal process to bear it. Therefore, what shaped the continuity between my participants' life and work in China and overseas here in the Netherlands? Like laundrymen in Siu's research (1987) holding family obligation, or like how migrants from Fujian province bounded with the kinship network (Li, 1999; Song, 2017), for my interlocutors - shorter-term labor migrants from north China where although kinship and regional network is not as visible as south China - do they also have some social world more important than crossing the national and cultural boundary that led them to become a labor emigrants?

Experienced

"Experienced" is a word frequently mentioned in conversations with my interlocutors. When asked "how you adjusted to these differences when living in the Netherlands", Zhao said, *"I am used to it. I am a chef, working with different kinds of food all the time. So I do not mind different food. In my previous work, I also have experience in communication with people from other countries or living in another country myself."* After left the hotel he worked for before, Zhao had years of experience in investment of construction industry. During those years, he visited various countries for his project. It was because he failed in one investment and needed to pay his former employees that he decided to come overseas for working.

My discussion with Xiaolou detailly explained how previous experiences helped in current work, even though the dishes he now working on is different from what he did before.

"Of course, being experienced is helpful. I know how to deal with things. Like how to get along with people and how to finish your working task." [...] "For example, tools and materials are set like this. But I need to go around to fetch it everytime. As I am experienced, I can say, why not put these things together? Or they (note: senior colleagues) taught me to do something like this. But I would like to say, that way could be easier. If they do not agree, I would say, isn't the final outcome the same?" [...] "Of course, when just joining this kitchen, it is good to follow the routine. But later you should express your idea. Following their way for everything would make you more tired." [...] "for example, making noodles. We make one pot at around 11.00 am, when we starting up the day's work. And we make another pot at 7 pm, after the busy meal hours finished. Well, I thought why you cook like this? I think there is enough time during the midday. Why should we do it after 7.00? We have a lot of other things to do then. Isn't it better to just use that pot to finish at once in the morning? In the evening we still have to clean up." (Xiaolou, fried food chef in Chinese food restaurant, 31)

With experiences, he knows the supposed final outcome. Therefore, he could be confident in adjusting the sequence of steps or finish the same task in an easier way.

The experience is also helpful in getting along with people. Why getting along with the team in the kitchen needs skills and how it influences the nature of the work that is performed in the kitchen? Let me try to understand Xiaolou's meaning according to the life history he told me parts by parts in several times of conversation:

Xiaolou started to work in a kitchen since his teenage. His first job was introduced by a friend: being referred to a master chef and working for him, in his hometown Fushun, Liaoning province in China. "The kitchen was his. As in, he had a contract with the owner and he was in charge of the whole kitchen. Our salaries was decided by him." At that time, Xiaolou as the trainee was not paid but only receive some living expenses. He started from learning cutting food. *"But you need to be*

hardworking. That is to say, if you have a chance to try cooking when you were at the cutting position, you should go to practice it." After mastering the basic skills for cooking, he left that kitchen and find another job at the position of cooking.

He forgot which year it was, nor did he remember how old was him at that time. But *"at least over ten years, maybe almost 20 years"*. In a learn-by-working pattern, it was common for him to change work place every 2-3 years. He once worked in big kitchens in hotels, so did he worked in smaller restaurants with only 3 people in the kitchen team. *"People are closer at the smaller restaurant. The restaurant owner and their family were very nice. They would give us gifts at festivals as if we were also family members."*

With frequent changing, he thus had experience in getting along with colleagues and leaders with diverse personalities. This experience helped him to be involved in different kitchens, so do the new one in the Netherlands.

For Yuan, the experience in getting along with diverse kinds of people means from local to national. He came from Shenyang, Liaoning in China. Before coming overseas, he once worked in Beijing and Tianjin, both are bigger cities than his hometown with colleagues from all areas of China. Before, in his hometown working as a chef, as Yuan told me, *"people are from our region. They do not compete so fiercely in getting higher salaries or being jealous if others earned more."* But in Beijing, people were seemingly more aggressive. *"Sometimes you did more but just not that good at showing off your work in front of the leader, probably you did nothing."* He left his last job in China, chef in a Cantonese dessert restaurant chain, because it was not that comfortable getting along with the leading chef working together.

In his current working place in the Netherlands, the restaurant owner is the older generation of Chinese migrants from Wenzhou. So do most of his colleagues. The boss's wife is also Chinese but born in the Netherlands. Yuan had been there for over 3 years. As he remembered, at the start, the most difficult thing was to get used to the boss's style of talking. *"They talk in a way different from people in my region.(note: I am not sure whether Yuan means accent or just personal style. He could not tell what*

the difference it is neither.) Sometimes when working, there would be some miscommunication. But with longer time, I can understand them now." He also learnt some local food from Wenzhou from the shop owner. *"Just like you come to a new school, new class. You need time to be familiar with your new classmates. Maybe you girls getting closer by discussing about new lip sticks. We just have other topics."*

Therefore, for Yuan, the process of "leaving home" and getting used to new people, happened much more earlier than coming overseas.

Besides there are previous experience of being a chef supported Yuan and Xiaolou to cope with their new working environment in the Netherlands, there are shared daily life of working in kitchens in China or overseas. No matter being overseas or working in China, the daily schedules of a chef or a restaurant owner are equally intense.

Tian was a restaurant owner before coming to the Netherlands. For him, operating the restaurant is a tiring work. He needed to go to the market early in the morning to purchase fresh materials. The lastest costumer could leave after 9 or 10 pm. *"Being the chef means you can not keep regular meal hours for yourself. ... Every time others are having a rest, we are working."*

Yuan also explained to me how it feels like living for a long time in this schedule. According to his experience working in restaurants in China, it also interrupted the social life of people working as chefs for full time. *"You do not have time to join any social activities. Otherwise you can not sleep that day."* I once asked Yuan whether coming overseas ended this kind of life. I thought at least *"Not really,"* he answered, *"It is just one job in China and another in the Netherlands."*

Experiences in working as a chef means gained the habit in getting along with diverse kinds of people and being familiar and more flexible in the working content. It also means tolerance to the daily schedule of a chef. Keeping in mind these features that connected the past and the present, now let's move to the meaning of being a chef for my participants. What kind of career trajectories were indicated by "being a chef"?

To be a chef

What it means being a chef? When asked about the proud techniques you mastered as a chef, several of my interlocutors quickly turned to complaining about how easy it is nowadays to get a chance to learn cooking skills, and how kind today's master chefs are when treating new comers.

One of my interlocutor Jun (40), for example, although with passion in food making, started his training as a chef as a chance to feed the life. Coming from a poor rural family, Jun treasured the chance to learning this skill and having a job afterwards. Zhao started his chef training in one of the biggest hotel in his hometown, Weihai, Shandong province. *"We learnt much more things than young students nowadays and than what we do now. We were trained as the kitchen managers. Besides the food, we also learnt how to deal with financial things in the restaurant, manners in different feast occasions, etc. We worked very hardly. That is a job that others would admire."*

Similar for Musa, learning cooking was an obviously accessible option for him to start a career.

"I hate studying in my elementary school. I was only active in sports. Even in the first grade, I once got a fail in exam. I just don't like it. So I left school before finishing elementary school." Musa once told me, *"I do not like studying, but I need to learn something. What can I do? Then I started to learn making beef noodles from our hometown."* (Musa, beef noodles chef, 30)

In this way, being a chef, at the years my interlocutors joined this industry, meant a hardworking training process, but also indicated a brilliant, high-skilled career future. Or at least, it was the best and satisfying option they can have at that time.

Another encounter confirmed this interpretation, but also further suggested the hierarchy in kitchens and in this industry, which probably shaped how my interlocutors' perception about their job.

At the end of the fieldwork, I joint a lunch together with Jun and met his friend Wang at his place in Haarlem. Wang also works in a restaurants in Utrecht. He had been in the Netherlands for over 2 years. Before that, he worked in German for 4 years.

Wang and Jun was gossip about various job opportunities. During that random chatting, I introduced the book about Sichuan food by Fushia. She is a British anthropologist. The book noted her experience in getting interest to Chinese food and had further exploration learning and doing research in China. She once enrolled in a chef's school in Sichuan. In the book she describe months in the chefs' school with - at least how I feel - a passionate and joyful atmosphere.

"When she went to China? 1990s?" Wang asked after heard my summarize of Fushia's book, *"That was the hey day of chefs"*. He later told me, at that time how he was appreciate to have the chance to study in the kitchen, even as a trainee with no salary. Because being a chef, or being included in the pathway of becoming a chef, at least means your living and food are guaranteed, no mention you can gain a skill from it. Trainees were very polite to the master chef. *"We even sometimes will serving him. Everyone wanted him to teach more. ... At that time, after working, chefs just put down the pan and spoon and leave. Staffs will clean up. Unlike what we are doing now and here in the Netherlands, we chefs also need to join cleaning process."*

Through Wang's comments, I understood as that the imagination on, what people can expect from, and the social meaning of being a chef changed over years. As how he felt it, things started to change since 2008. Further exploration would be needed to understand the economical context in those years. But it was an economical and historical process that trapped and brought people like my interlocutors to the next step in their career trajectory.

The Decision of going abroad

Being chefs means being the capacity to be flexible in different kinds of kitchens and getting along with diverse types of kitchen team, being used to intense schedule as a chef, and experienced the changed situation of being a chef in general. This profession made my interlocutors experienced ups and downs.

In Tsing's book (2015), marginal people in their own societies like Asian refugees came to the forest of Oregon and became mushroom pickers. At the same time,

human intervention to forests resulted in the growth of matsutakes. Mushroom pickers' story is a one several trajectories entangled in one assemblage.

Similarly, I understand my interlocutors' career trajectory also in this way. And these encounters in their diverse career trajectories led them to the decision of going abroad. Let's focus on the moment of going abroad. How going abroad works and how migration happened? Through this moment, we can better understand how the continued career trajectory expanded from China to the Netherlands for my interlocutors.

In general, the employer overseas could hire new staffs from China by asking people he/she knows in person, or through the "labor dispatching" companies - namely, migration agencies. For the case in the Netherlands, as mentioned before, previous generations of Chinese migrants settled down by (F. Pieke, 1998) operating Asian restaurants. Therefore, it is now mostly restaurant owners who are hiring new workers. Xiang's research (2017) detailly explained how these agencies located in the social context in north China. He argued migration is mediated space where former labor dispatch as a national practice, the commercial agent companies working on migration service, friendship and family network, the policy in the host-society, etc. worked together. I believe, my participants also benefited from this network. The option of going abroad appeared to Zhao because of a neighbor. There was a migration agency's service point in the neighborhood he lives. For Yuan, this option came from his brother, who worked in Cyprus for years. He started to consider about it when quitted the job in Beijing. For Changfeng and Jun, both come from Hengshui, Hebei province, they introduced me several "migrating villages" in their province. It is not difficult to think of "going abroad". Jun started to think of going abroad when he was about to have the second child and the restaurant he owned in his hometown worked not that well.

In all, being a chef and to become a chef as how they are today, for my interlocutors, is not an easy journey. The hierarchy in the kitchen, the toughness of performing the daily schedule as a chef or a restaurant owner, the long working hours, the tight connection with the specific kitchen and specific team. These features are not new

ones only after coming to the Netherlands. Learning cooking appeared in my interlocutors' career trajectory occasionally as a result of the poor family, the career options they have at that time, and as how this profession looked like in that decade. On the one hand, with these previous experience and profession, my interlocutors do not think those slight modification in work settings in the Netherlands are essential ones that influences their sense of self. On the other hand, these life histories illustrated a consistent precarious career out of which going abroad and to the Netherlands is just one stage.

Therefore, I state from here that labor migrating for my participants is not only a trans-national or cross-cultural process. Rather, encounters in their previous life demonstrated a world with their own self promotion at the center. In the next section, I will explain how my participants, as individuals, feeling, respond to, and negotiating with this assemblage.

Entering Another World

In the last chapter, I explained the meaning of being a chef in China for my interlocutors. The professional training as a chef, the complex social environment of being a chef, and the precarity of this profession career together led my interlocutors to the decision of working overseas and to a situation of feeling normal and unsensitive to the differences in another country. This explained the continuity of the social and economical situation of my participants.

Therefore, the story seemingly could close at the point that, even though the interaction between body and meaning, between self and culture, did not happen in the kitchen - the work space, for these labor migrants like my interlocutors, they have their own world surrounding them, which is different from the trans-national one. Therefore, how to cope this overseas life and how to locate a self into it, this is not the valid question to approach the self becoming and maintaining process of my participants.

However, what this world looks like and how my participants perceived it?

It is not a new conclusion to say migrants already have their own network in hometown to have the tendency of migrating. As I described in the background section, scholars like Siu (1952), Li (1999) and Ong (year check, flexible citizenship. underground empire) had already argued a similar conclusion with the case of overseas Chinese community from East and South east of China. They even went further, depicted the logic of how the society is integrated in their hometowns and how then this logic expanded to the migrant community. Here, however, my interlocutors did not agree that they were belonged to a kinship network, nor do they think they are part of some migrant community.

Another example I used a lot in discussion with my interlocutors is the story of female Philippine migrant workers in Hong Kong (Chen, 2015). These girls worked as domestic workers and are requested to live in the employers' house except for the only break day each week, made use of the Sunday break to attend and host activities. Beauty pageants they produced, for example, is a long-term project with preparing the performance, setting the place and organize the crew. To support these activities, clothing designing stores in their home town in Philippine connected to their Hong

Kong-based fellows regularly. Even election in Philippine could not ignore these voters in Hong Kong. These workers are usually imagined as girls working out from the Philippine because of poverty. And they are usually expected to be hard-working and seen as "just maids". However, the beauty pageants celebrated an coherent social network beyond Hong Kong and Philippine. It also celebrate the agency of these female labor migrants.

I once presented this case with Xiaolou, Yuan, Changfeng and Tian, but none of them felt being evoked by Philippine girls and thought of new things they wanted to say about themselves or their current life: They do not have an activity to join like those girls' beauty pageants. Therefore, if there is a "*their world*" for my participants - namely a sphere where career trajectory, the national development, the family obligation, the informal network in the Netherlands, the Dutch daily life, etc. entangled together - how will they experience and perceive it? What is the "beauty pageants" for my interlocutors? What is the culture for my interlocutors to locate a "self" and how the "self" respond to that?

In this section, I will explain what elements are involved in the social world of my participants, according to what they once ever mentioned with me. Several activities and topics appeared more than once. They were talking about their practices, yet we can read about what are they respond to through these practices. Through my participants' talking about these activities, I got insight in what kind of assigned role they should play as a labor migrant, a people managed to come overs in this way. Therefore I will explain these activities and topics as the windows to understand what kind of life my participants are living.

"Did you go to the supermarket?"

Before explaining the daily practice of my participants that I perceived, I would like to note that all my participants, even most Chinese labor migrants in kitchens, shared an intense schedule and thus a lifestyle that is isolated from any other social connections. They were also usually at work from around 11.00 am till 9.00 pm and have one day break per week during the months I was doing fieldwork. Even, this one break day is not always stable.

For example, Xiaolou has his regular weekly break day on Thursdays. I once sent him a message to make a reservation to call on Tuesday as usual. Surprisingly, he told me

his waist was hurt on Sunday, and he could not really work on Monday. So he had used out of the break chance this week to have a rest. I had similar text conversation with Yuan weeks before the Easter. He originally had regular break day on Mondays. Once I text him to schedule the next talk, he told me "*the next Monday will be the Easter holiday, I will lost my break again!*" Likewise, once I reserved a conversation with Jun on Monday, his regular break day. But he called me on the Friday night before, because his son in China was about to join the army, for which a lot of forms need to be filled by him on behalf of the family. He needed a whole day to do that on Monday.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that, for my participants, the environment for them working in the Netherlands kitchens as labor migrants is not designed for them to have too much other social connections and personal life. Even though, as I mentioned how Yuan and Tian described their working routine as a chef in China before, this socially isolated schedule is not a new thing only because of going overseas.

Multiple times talking with Yuan, Xiaolou and Jun, when I greeted "what did you do", they answered "went to the supermarket". It is not hard to understand that the supermarket is almost the only place that is still open to freely visit especially during lockdown. However, for my participants who has mentioned this, these supermarket tours are connected to the process of perceiving the Dutch life.

Yuan mentioned supermarket all three times, with 2 weeks between each other, when we met online and talk. He clearly remembered the price of each discount products, and remembered what he has bought one or two weeks ago.

Yuan also tried to practice Dutch language in supermarket with names of products when he still had the ambitious to learn Dutch. "*The language is hard to learn. If you dont use that word for a long time, you will forget it. I remembered the word for strawberry and grapes before, I could recognize it in the supermarket. But I did not going shopping for two weeks, then I forget.*" Here we can see in Yuan's time line, the supermarket tour is used as a time marker to make some difference each several weeks.

Later after introducing me his observation of today's supermarket price, Yuan shared me a lot of knowledges about the supermarket he gained in his three years in the Netherlands: it is better to reheat the milk so that the stomach will not feel uncomfortable; which kind of alcohol he likes; vegetables and fruits are good for you; where to find cheap tooth paste in Kruidvat, etc. *"Staying far from home, you should eat more this. It is good for your body."* After that conversation, he shared with me a discount information subscription app. *"If it is needed, I am happy I found that in a cheaper price. If I do not need anything, I am happy seeing around."*

Yuan shared this with me, as both expat in the Netherlands, caringly as his "experience" for staying longer than me. Getting use to the local food or locate your own food system into local market, of course, is one step to be used to this kind of life. I perceive Yuan's sharing in the way that he values the knowledge he gained in the supermarket as ones enabled himself to settle down.

“I can go to more and more places”

Hanging out is another of these activities to create a breath room that is mentioned many times during greeting and random chat.

To insert a walk into the schedule needs some effort. Musa reported that he had the intention to have a walk every morning, but not always motivated to get up early.

Likewise, on the social media app Kwai, the platform I found most of my participants, most of the posts from the Netherlands based Chinese migrant workers are ones they going for a walk, visiting the forest nearby, on the way of commuting, looking for wild vegetables like daslooks, or gathering with friends for some meal. Once I saw an anonymous user had three night view posts in the city of Amsterdam in a row. They are not made in the same day. Thus I imagined a context that he might usually have the time to hang out in the city at night after work, and for three times though it worth recording.

Hanging out is also spatial effort. Similar to getting knowledge about the supermarket as a mark of settling down, I also perceive my interlocutors walking routine exploration as a initiative effort in making control of their life.

In one of Xialou's video post on Kwai, he made a subtitle for a clip of a new place he had a walk to that *"I am more used to here, because I can go to more and more places now!"* We discussed about his walking during conversation and he explained his map expanding process.

I like to ask. I usually ask my colleagues who had been here longer: where deserves a visit? They would tell me go this and that place, through this and that route. Or, when I back from a walk, I will tell them where I went to. Sometimes I they will say, "Oh it is this or that place, you can also go there through another route."... In this way, here and there are connected for me.

It worth mentioning that hanging out is not always easy. Because some of my interlocutors are not that good at using the google app map. Also, smartphones made in China sometimes do not support GPS on google framework. Similar situation happened to my phone as well. Sometimes I depend on reading street names to recognize where I am. While for my interlocutors, they do not speak and read English or Dutch. Sometimes offline maps are more relied, for example by Xialou. This could demotivate one to hang out, but also influence how the surrounding space is perceived.

I tried to invite Xialou to have a collaborative mapping with his walking routine with google map street mode open on the shared screen. However, he could not recognize his place from the street view. *"Yes, this place is close to me."* he said when I was scrolling, *"let's see whether you can find me. I do not know the direction. When hanging out, I just walk around."* Therefore, to get familiar with the surrounding space, Xialou has his own way of thinking. I believe this is not only because of his now being overseas. When I asked Xialou to find his home in China on the map, he can not find the spot or tell the street name or name of the landmark building nearby neither. In another conversation, when I was saying how I appreciate his effort in being curious to this new environment, Xialou emphasized the importance of asking:

"All my Mandarin speaking colleagues stayed here for around 8, 9 yaers, therefore they can tell me a lot. I have a friend working at another restaurant. His colleagues are alsonew commmer, staying in the Netherlands for just couple years. He does not know so many things. It was even me who told him that your resident permit need to be update after two years!"

In this context, also given the fact that he made most of his Kwai posts about how he hang out and what new things he saw during break days, I understand Xiaolou's map expansion process as his own way of getting familiar with his surroundings. Through his efforts, I also estimate an assigned condition for labor migrants like this: The environment is not designed by nature for getting involved in local life other than work. Hanging out as how Xiaolou did is the practice by the independent "self" by which he negotiated with this assigned condition.

"I will give you some self made food!" and "I still want to do something"

As described in the first section of findings, the present work in the Netherlands are described as too easy for all my participants. Together with the different organization structure in the kitchen, several of my interlocutors mentioned their unsatisfaction in what they are doing now and how much their skills could be implemented.

Together with this fact, these interlocutors also presented a positive attitude to the food they made and their cooking skills. Therefore, from here I perceive that the professional skills as a chef and the chance in implement it is one tension these labor migrants need to deal in locate their self and the culture they are in.

Jun, who was a chef of Chinese Cuisine and good at dough made food, is now working on sushi and baked materials in his workplace. *"What are we making here? It is too easy. When backing to China, I would not dare to say I was a sushi chef when at overseas. Nobody wants to eat these kind of sushi!"* But when we firstly managed to meet in person, he generously mentioned multiple times that he wanted to give me some self made pancakes.

So did Musa. The way of making the dough for noodles and stretching noodles is featured even within China, in his home town Lanzhou, Gansu, in north west China. Before we managed to meet up and talk, he mentioned many times that he taught his roommate to make this kind of noodles and how they progressed. His roommates were also Chinese students like me, from other provinces than him where noodles are not that popular. He once made video posts of noodles making on Kwai as well. While similar to Yuan, Musa did not think his skills in noodles making and talent in restaurant operation could be fully implemented in the small noodles restaurant he currently worked. "Our boss was so unfamiliar with take-away food. "

In another conversation with Jun, we further discussed what it means for his perception about himself and these skills. I asked whether he thought he lost a sense of self when he can not fully implement his skills. *"I feel like I wasted my life working on these. I lost my hobbies, and lost my skills. That is why I planed to go to Finland. The boss there would give me space to make dough made food. My former student was working there as well. Probably we would have the chance to do something."*

Therefore, I state that, the unsatisfying condition to fully implement food making skills is in parallel with the passion in share the self made food. Being such a labor migrant could means lost the chance to working on what one is good at. While in cases of sharing food, social occasion, or making a good meal for themselves, the passionate and skill is maintained to perform.

In the last chapter, I explained the meaning of being a chef in China for my interlocutors. The professional training as a chef, the complex social environment of being a chef, and the precarity of this profession career together led my interlocutors to the decision of working overseas and to a situation of feeling normal and unsensitive to the differences in another country. This explained the continuity of the social and economical situation of my participants.

Therefore, the story seemingly could close at the point that, even though the interaction between body and meaning, between self and culture, did not happen in the kitchen - the work space, for these labor migrants like my interlocutors, they have their own world surrounding them, which is different from the trans-national one. Therefore, how to cope this overseas life and how to locate a self into it, this is not the valid question to approach the self becoming and maintaining process of my participants.

It is not a new conclusion to say migrants already have their own network in hometown to have the tendency of migrating. As I described in the background section, scholars like Siu (1952), Li (1999) and Ong (year check, flexible citizenship. underground empire) had already argued a similar conclusion with the case of overseas Chinese community from East and South east of China. They even went further, depicted the logic of how the society is integrated in their hometowns and how then this logic expanded to the migrant community. Here, however, my interlocutors did not agree that they were belonged to a kinship network, nor do they think they are part of some migrant community.

Another example I used a lot in discussion with my interlocutors is the story of female Philippine migrant workers in Hong Kong (Chen, 2015). These girls worked as domestic workers and are requested to live in the employers' house except for the only break day each week, made use of the Sunday break to attend and host activities. Beauty pageants they produced, for example, is a long-term project with preparing the performance, setting the place and organize the crew. To support these activities, clothing designing stores in their home town in Philippine connected to their Hong Kong-based fellows regularly. Even election in Philippine could not ignore these

voters in Hong Kong. These workers are usually imagined as girls working out from the Philippine because of poverty. And they are usually expected to be hard-working and seen as "just maids". However, the beauty pageants celebrated an coherent social network beyond Hong Kong and Philippine. It also celebrate the agency of these female labor migrants.

I once presented this case with Xiaolou, Yuan, Changfeng and Tian, but none of them felt being evoked by Philippine girls and thought of new things they wanted to say about themselves or their current life: They do not have an activity to join like those girls' beauty pageants. Therefore, if there is a "*their world*" for my participants - namely a sphere where career trajectory, the national development, the family obligation, the informal network in the Netherlands, the Dutch daily life, etc. entangled together - how will they experience and perceive it? What is the "beauty pageants" for my interlocutors? What is the culture for my interlocutors to locate a "self" and how the "self" respond to that?

The self in talking

In the last section, I demonstrated several daily activities of my participants. The way I know these activities is not directly observing, but hearing how my participants described it. These activities indicated the environment that my participants need to experience, respond to and negotiate with as labor migrants working overseas. This environment, I stated, answers "what it means to go abroad and work" for individuals. Now in the previous section, we have defined which tensions are their for my participants to negotiate with: Working overseas, for my participants, means to be involved with diverse roles: being a chef yet excluded from the cooking skills one may be more proud of; being a people who managed to "go overseas" and see the "authentic foreign life", yet being employed and just "working for a boss"; being a expat laborer who is assigned a tight schedule, yet need this job to earn money. No mention, besides these new roles emerged or modified by the fact of going overseas, some other roles, like the bread owner of the family, still remained for my participants. This section will explain how the self respond to these dimensions as a whole, or using Van Meijl's term, what is the consistency in the dialogue. In previous sections, I depicted the world of my participants based on *what* were told. This section will explain *how* these were told during conversations.

When discussing how will you describe yourself, Tian just had a long period of rest and self reflection. As a result, he answered my questions with much hesitation:

Tian: I was more dare to say who am I or what I am good at before. But recently, I reviewed the past years in my life, did I managed to do anything? I don't think so. Now I am not dare to talk about it. I am trapped here. Sometimes I thought I should focus working on one thing. Either cooking or organize the construction team. Either working for others or be the boss myself. But what am I good at? ... I was very confident before, never thought I am worse than others. After recent reflection, I feel like I can not compete with others in all these aspects."

Me: So you mean comparing with other is important for you?

Tian: Because sometimes I want to reach a certain standard. If I did not managed to, I would think I am not good at anything.

Me: Then at what moments you will be proud of yourself, or at least give yourself a sneaky praise in mind?

Tian: That sense of achievement... If I worked on something really carefully, I tried my best, I will be happy.

For working carefully and trying the best, in earlier conversation, he expressed his passion in cooking and exploring new dishes. I invited Tian to compare his feeling when cooking for family, for restaurant, and following online tutorials to try new dishes. When asked that, Tian said all of them feel the same, he tried his best in all these occasions.

I then asked: *What do you think you are good at?*

Tian: I said I do not dare to say now. It is not modest. I am not as good as others. Before I have many good friends. They can always be helpful. In case anyone met some accident, these friends would come to help. We are close enough, but I still can not help comparing myself with them. Because I do not want to be too behind.

....

For example, sometimes I would think, my friend is also working overseas. How much he earnt, and what about me? His one year could equal to four years of mine! If there is no Covid-19, I would consider go to Australia, go to Canada. Otherwise earning less than others is too stressful.

Me: I understand, you are not competing, you just need a reference to know what you deserve.

Tian: Yes, I just do not want to be the worst. If do not need to compare with others, are you still motivated? ... Then just follow your heart, try the best you can.

In this piece of conversation, we can see when talking about self, comparing to others play a vital role for Tian to be able to describe himself. There is an ideal model of Cultural self that he thought he can play. The decision of going abroad then is one step in pursuing that.

Likewise, Xiaolou, though said he doesn't really care how my thesis will portrait him, had strong idea about what kind of vocabulary is used. I once discussed with him about the relationship network he is in as a labor migrant based on the feedback I got from my supervisory group about footage of him. And he emphasized his idea of being "idependent".

Me: do you agree that "when at home, you are strongly bounded with the family. And when being here in the Netherlands, the life is largely depend on the boss."

Xiaolou: I do not like the word depend. I am independent!" He emphasized. Even though most of social activities in the Netherlands were organized with colleagues and the boss.

Me: Then what about to say, your daily life in the Netherlands is largely influenced by your colleagues and boss, as they told you so many knowledges about surroundings, and your boss is registering the Dutch language course now?

Xiaolou: Also no. I live my life, no matter what kind of life they are living. I could even say, it is not I depend on the boss, he depends on me as well. He depends on me to work for him.

In other occasions, he furthered the idea of being independent and positive. He once told me, he was fully prepared for the overseas life. Of course it could be hard, with so many food, lifestyle, language, homesick the would uncomfortable. But he is prepared. *"If there is no covid, I even thought travel around in Europe. At least, if I do not like here, I can back home. At any time we can earn many again."*

He also mentioned he likes a positive way of talking when commenting on his former colleagues he talked with, that is what he was practicing during the conversation with me as well. Together with all these occasions, Xiaolou kept a consistent self to be told: a positive, independent figure.

Edwardes (2019) explained the self by several modes. The actual self is not-knowable, while the self that we can talk about could be defined with several models. For other modes of self, the social self is the one individual is assigned to be, yet one would doubt whether should believe in the assigned role. Social selves various, while we need several models of self to integrate and interpret all of them. The Episodic self is

shaped in the personal history, the narrativity self located in the sphere of conversation talking about the past. While the cultural self is the one as self-motivated and as self-aware "the ideal self I can be". Moreover, the projected self is the figure want others believe you to be.

During the research, I once tried several modals to elicit my participants to talk about self, but, as could be read in cases in previous sections, got answers about various other things. With reflection with inspiration from Edwardes (2019), I noticed I was inviting them to talk about different models of selves. When compared to the kinship network mode to evoke other ways of social connection that my interlocutors more belonged to, I am asking the role assigned by the society. Cultural self is the model of self where sacrificing the "self" in order to reach the certain standard which one believes as an ideal one that he/she can be. When Yuan said "*I am coming overseas for work, I do not feel anything*", or when Yunhao said "*It is too hard to draw a space to represent a comfortable space of myself. I am overseas, that means of course I will not be comfortable*", In the case with Tian and Xiaolou, both of them indicated a consistent figure that responding to the surrounded world.

From now, I would like to back to my research question: Whether the self oriented to the accurate language that depicted how the assemblage, and in which way the description of self could indicate and help us to understand the world that perceived by my interlocutors in the process of coming overseas and continued to work in the kitchen? I argue that, this question is not only answered in selves' reflection on how they interact with the culture, but also how the self is built during conversation.

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