

From China to the Netherlands

A multifaceted picture of the China-related diaspora communities in the Netherlands

February 2026 Helan Digest Foundation

This is a translated, expanded and updated version of the *Van China naar Nederland* report in Dutch from January 2025, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment



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Foreword

This report was written by the Helan Digest Foundation. The foundation aims to organise and stimulate public discussions on political and social issues within Chinese Dutch communities and with other stakeholders, such as interested parties focused on following and analysing political, economic and social developments in China.

Helan Digest Foundation is a relatively young foundation that started its social activities such as organising meetings and lectures in 2021. Through these activities, Helan Digest has increased its brand awareness and network within Chinese Dutch communities and reaches a diverse audience.

Between November 2023 and May 2024, Helan Digest Foundation commissioned four dialogue sessions within Chinese Dutch communities by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). Through the dialogue sessions, SZW aims to gain insight into current developments within the communities.

The findings from these sessions are described in this report. As the participants, with their backgrounds and views, represented only part of the overall landscape of Chinese Dutch communities, the findings in this report are also limited to this group of participants. It is not a representative study. The Appendix further describes the composition of this group. This expanded and updated version includes the remarks of participants in one of the sessions on their experiences with the interference of China's authorities in the Netherlands.

We were pleased to learn during the sessions that participants felt better heard thanks to this activity. Our thanks go to everyone who participated in these sessions. Furthermore, our thanks go to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, which initiated this project as client.



Management summary

The report "From China to the Netherlands" was written by the Helan Digest Foundation (HD) on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). This report offers a reflection of the interviews conducted with members of the Chinese Dutch communities during four dialogue sessions organised by HD from November 2023 to May 2024.

There are a number of reasons for organising these dialogue sessions. First, more structural contact with the Chinese Dutch communities can increase the insight into the communities. The structural contact with these communities in the form of the National Consultation on Minorities (Landelijk Overleg Minderheden, LOM) stopped in 2015. This consultative body had been active since 1997. The Rutte 1 cabinet repealed the Minority Policy Consultation Act, which eliminated the LOM consultation process. In addition, the Chinese Dutch communities have become even more diverse, which may change its internal dynamics. Through dialogue sessions, SZW wants to gain insight into current developments within the communities.

I. Target Audience

The participants are not a sample representation of the entire Chinese Dutch communities. Although they are a diverse group regarding age, year of emigrating to the Netherlands, gender, preferred language, occupation, ethnic group and place of birth, there is nevertheless overrepresentation of certain groups. Participants are over-represented in the categories: women, migrants who emigrated in the past 15 years, migrants under the age of 45 years old and highly educated migrants.

After the LOM was discontinued, opportunities for structured engagement and the public visibility of ethnic minority communities in Dutch society declined, which may not be widely recognized. This report offers insights into the diverse Chinese communities in the Netherlands.

One of the conclusions is that the Chinese-Dutch communities are very diverse; therefore, they cannot be viewed and treated as a single community. This sensitivity requires attention when the government approaches these sub-communities.

II. Prevailing Sentiments

Participants believe they are made up of several sub-communities, with little structural interaction between them in practice. Some participants experience tensions between different sub-communities. In participants' experiences, not all government agencies seem to be aware of these tensions. Participants stressed the need for more community connections and dialogues to bridge these gaps. Participants recognised that there are shared norms and values between the sub-communities and discussed how this impacts their daily lives. Political participation by members of Chinese Dutch communities in the Netherlands is perceived to be low. However, participants noted that networks, especially among new migrants, do now emerge.

Discrimination and exclusion are widely experienced by Chinese Dutch communities and affect many aspects of

participants' lives. Participants report



experiencing very limited support to help them cope with discrimination. Language and cultural barriers remain a significant obstacle to participation in Dutch society and access to social services. Participants feel there is a shortage of culturally competent mental health professionals. Language barriers and discrimination, which participants experience in their personal and professional lives, are two persistent obstacles that hinder the integration of Chinese-Dutch communities into Dutch society. These call for support and countermeasures.

III. Recommendations

This report recommends that the government: (1) establish structured, sustained engagement with these communities; (2) support initiatives that strengthen community self-reliance; and (3) implement measures to reduce discrimination and language barriers. To help migrants overcome language barriers, the report further proposes establishing independent Chinese-language media so that migrants can access reliable sources of information.

These recommendations focus on addressing urgent challenges faced by Chinese communities in the Netherlands, strengthening the resilience of different Chinese sub-communities, and promoting stronger connections with Dutch society more broadly.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Chinese Dutch communities have a long history in the Netherlands and are often seen as isolated and reclusive. The last published report on Chinese Dutch communities in general¹ was now more than a decade ago.

Since then, these communities have become even more diverse, which may alter its internal dynamics. Since the abolition of the National Minorities Consultation in 2015, there is no further structural contact with these communities from the central government. The current state of mind, new trends and developments, social and political concerns within these communities are relatively little known. Further, the changing relations between China and the Netherlands also impact China-related communities.

To renew insights into the Chinese Dutch communities and improve contact with the communities, Helan Digest (HD) has organised a series of four dialogue sessions with the China-related diaspora communities in the Netherlands on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) in 2024.

1.2 Reading guide

Chapter 2 explains the methodology used for the dialogue sessions.

Chapter 3 summarises the experiences, opinions and suggestions shared by the participants of the dialogue sessions. This chapter relates exclusively to the perceptions of the participants themselves. In text boxes, possible solutions to the issues are suggested by the participants.

Chapter 4 contains the conclusions based on the dialogue participants' experiences and opinions shared.

Finally, Chapter 5 offers recommendations on how to approach China-related diaspora communities most effectively for future contact and how to address pressing issues.

¹See 2022 Social and Cultural Planning Office report 'Chinese Dutch People'
<https://repository.scp.nl/?atabase=eyJzZWYyY2hfYWxsIjoY2hpbmVzZSIsImI0ZW0iOiI5ZWlwYzk3NS0yMWRkLTQxNjUtYjU1Yy1lNWYxMTg2YjdjOWYifQ==> (retrieved on February 2026)



2. Methodology used for the dialogue sessions

From late 2023 to summer 2024, four dialogue sessions were organized with different topics such as discrimination, identity, work and language barriers. These sessions consisted of two general sessions with a wide audience and a large number of participants, and two smaller sessions with focused groups and a smaller number of participants.

2.1 Recruitment of participants

The aim of recruitment was to have the most diverse group of participants in the dialogue sessions. Several channels were used for this purpose. Participants were recruited through social media and the internet channels such as emails and newsletters. Personal invitations were sent to HD's network consisting of members, volunteers, newsletter subscribers, and cooperating organisations.

It is important to note that to some extent this involved *snow ball sampling*² because the initial interested/invitees also forwarded the invitation to their own networks. This led to an over-representation of certain group, namely like-minded people from the initial invitees. However, HD did specifically target diversity such as age, migration year, gender, preferred language and profession within the group. Note that participants were thoroughly informed about the use, sharing and protection of their (personal) data via a consent form. By signing the form, they agreed to share their data for this project. Confidentiality is strictly guaranteed throughout the project according to de Algemene Verordening Gegevensbescherming (AVG).

2.1.1 Recruitment Process

HD has targeted recruitment in communities where it normally has less reach, including first-generation migrants who arrived in the Netherlands before 2000 and who work or previously worked primarily in the hospitality sector; their second- and third-generation descendants; students and highly skilled migrants who have arrived more recently; Dutch Chinese individuals adopted from China; migrants from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, as well as from ethnic minority regions and groups such as Uyghurs and Tibetans; and refugees..

HD also invited experts in specific fields, such as researchers studying the working conditions of Chinese in the hospitality sector or migrants in general, and a qualified child and adolescent psychotherapist with extensive experience in mental health problems. In addition, professionals were invited by SZW, such as municipal employees and police officers. These professionals were able to raise broader issues to complement the participants' personal experiences and opinions, which increased diversity.

² 'Snowball sampling' is a sampling technique in which researchers start with a small group of initial participants who then designate other members of the target population, and this process repeats itself to obtain a larger sample. It is especially useful for reaching hard-to-reach or hidden populations, but can lead to bias and limited representativeness.

2.1.2 Distribution of participants across dialogue sessions

Overall, the participant group is diverse. Participants vary in age, migration year, gender, preferred language, occupation, sexual orientation, place of birth and ethnicity. In dialogue sessions 1, 2 and 4, however, certain categories are overrepresented: women (69%), migrants who came to the Netherlands in the past 15 years (76%), and migrants under 45 years old (84%). Participants' occupations are diverse, with students (20%), activists (16%), business and financial services (15%), workers in the technology sector (12%), education (teachers) and research (11%). Other sectors such as hospitality, culture, healthcare and the public sector are also represented, but each with less than 5%.

2.1.3 Research ethics

Communication played an important role in the recruitment process. The wording of the public recruitment texts needed careful consideration. On the topic of China's interference, HD took into account concerns about participant safety and avoided politically sensitive terms or wording in the invitation. In addition, members of the Dutch Chinese community held differing views on whether the official participation of a representative from the Ministry in the dialogue sessions might affect safety, the community's public image, and the quality of discussion. For example, in Chinese culture, people may sometimes hesitate to speak freely in the presence of authorities. During recruitment, clearly explaining that the Ministry's role was to participate as a cooperation partner of HD helped to significantly alleviate potential participants' concerns. As a result, all four dialogue sessions successfully recruited a sufficient number of participants.

2.2 *Deep Democracy* as a facilitation method

The *Deep Democracy* method³ was used for the dialogue sessions. This method promotes inclusiveness and amplifies minority voices, encouraging empathy in group dialogue. *Deep Democracy* was essential because members of Chinese Dutch communities, who are not used to such sessions, often practice self-censorship and are reluctant towards authorities.

The facilitators were assigned to different groups based on language proficiency. They had to be fluent in one or more of the following languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, English or Dutch. All facilitators received training in the *Deep Democracy method*. A note-taker was assigned to each table to record the content of the sessions.

³ “Deep Democracy” is a structured approach to group dialogue and decision facilitation. It emphasizes actively eliciting and working with minority or marginalized perspectives before a decision is finalized, translating their concerns into risk signals and practical improvements, thereby strengthening the quality of consensus and implementation.

2.3 Dialogue in practice

The dialogue sessions followed a structured schedule. Each session began with a plenary session in which members of HD and SZW introduced themselves and welcomed everyone. Prior to the sessions, the dialogue facilitators ensured that all consent and pre-evaluation forms were signed and answered any questions. Post-evaluation forms were handled after the sessions. Each dialogue session lasted about 3.5 hours and concluded with a final plenary session, in which the groups shared their key insights.

At the end of each dialogue session, facilitators and participants jointly reviewed the notes to ensure an accurate representation of the discussions. Evaluation forms were collected before and after the event to gauge expectations and experiences. HD Staff meetings were held after each session to evaluate feedback and discuss improvements in procedures, facilitation and ethical measures.



3. Results of the four dialogue sessions

This chapter provides a summary of the experiences, opinions, knowledge, and suggestions of the participants in the dialogue sessions. Text boxes describe solutions to the issues raised by participants during the dialogue sessions. The Helan Digest (HD)'s conclusions following this material are presented in the chapter 4.

3.1 Participants' perceptions of Chinese Dutch communities

This section, summarised from the input of participants in the dialogue sessions, offers participants' perceptions on the composition of Chinese Dutch communities, as well as the changing dynamics within these communities.

3.1.1 Sub-communities have few interactions and even tensions between them

'We are very close locally but not outside.' (Participant on mutual contact)

According to some participants, migrants from China have undergone significant demographic changes. Initially, this group consisted mainly of first-generation migrants from Hong Kong and Zhejiang who worked in the hospitality industry. In recent decades, new migrants, such as skilled migrants and students, have increasingly joined the group and now form an important part of it. Sub-communities such as LGBTQIA+ communities have built their social networks. Participants named different groups within the migrants from China, such as Chinese entrepreneurs, calligraphy and martial arts clubs, Chinese Christian churches and feminist organisations, each with their own identity characteristics.

3.1.2 Dutch-Chinese norms and values

Chinese identity is often associated with certain norms and values, which emerged during the dialogue sessions. While some commonly recognised norms and values are mentioned here, it is important to recognise that not all participants subscribe to these values. Some participants reject these values and strive for their own individuality. Under certain circumstances, these values can also lead to stereotypes, which can result in discrimination and exploitation, as explained below. The strength of these values can then be used against this group.

I. Strong work ethic

'Honestly, it was a culture shock for me when my manager told me that work is just a part of life when I first came here.... Without work, what do you look for in life?' (Participant on work ethic)

'There are many stereotypes about Chinese people. We are hardworking, industrious and dedicated. They are "positive" but also toxic.' (Participant on work ethic)

Many participants value hard work and are proud of their contributions in sectors such as hospitality and technology. Some consider hard work a

life goal. However, this strong work ethic can also lead to exploitation by both Dutch and Chinese employers, resulting



in underpayment, long working hours or unfair contracts. Participants stressed the need for regulatory oversight to protect migrant workers from abuse of labour rights. They also noted that legal action can sometimes mean professional suicide, as workers are then often no longer accepted by their employers and colleagues, especially in the hospitality industry.

II. Family values, expectations and responsibilities

Family often recurred as a theme in the dialogue sessions, focusing on the cultural obligation to care for parents. Second-generation participants indicated that they are called upon to often be held responsible for regularly visiting their migrant parents. In addition, as the only child⁴, many (new migrant) participants bear significant responsibilities to care for their ageing parents for long periods of time, regardless of whether the parents live in the Netherlands or in China.

In addition, participants expressed concern about the current duration of Dutch visas for family visits, which is considered too short, and the strict perceived application requirements. They suggested extending the visa duration and easing the application procedure to ease the burden of care.

III. Food as a cultural element

Food was mentioned by some participants as a unifying element, although others were less enthusiastic about it. During holidays such as the *Mid-Autumn Festival* and Chinese New Year, some enjoy food-related events that highlight cultural heritage and bring people together. Others, however, feel that to integrate better and faster into Dutch society, traditional festivals and eating habits should give way to Dutch traditions.

IV. LGBTQIA+ Acceptance

'There is a clear difference between China and here. Here in the Netherlands, the Chinese LGBTQIA+ community feels comfortable organising events to celebrate their sexuality.' (Participant on LGBTQIA+ acceptance)

It was argued that Chinese Dutch communities have become more open and generally more accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community. Participants discussed that younger community members are often more tolerant than the older generation. The LGBTQIA+ sub-community is actively building its network to empower LGBTQIA+ individuals, both within Chinese Dutch communities and in the wider Dutch society. Nevertheless, some LGBTQIA+ participants reported that they still experience homophobia, transphobia

⁴ Due to China's 'One child policy' instituted since 1980, many (new) migrants from China are the only child of their parents.

and marginalisation in the Netherlands, being discriminated against on the basis of both their Chinese background and their LGBTQIA+ identity.

3.1.3 Political participation

'There has been no Chinese (politician) for the past 100 years, so I must vote for him.' (Participant on NL Plan's political leader)

Political participation, such as voting, joining a political party and involvement in party campaigns, is low among participants. First-generation migrants rarely vote, and many new migrants have no right to vote or insufficient knowledge to vote. Many participants expressed their lack of trust in the Dutch government and political parties, feeling that their small group is not taken seriously. There is a lack of clarity about which party or candidate can represent their interests.

Nevertheless, there are some people who do become politically active. For example, one participant works on the campaign team of NL Plan and regards this new political party as focusing on the interests of Chinese Dutch communities. Although the party failed to win a parliamentary seat and reportedly⁵ participated in China's diaspora governance agenda, some participants say it garnered considerable support, especially from "first-generation" migrants in the hospitality industry.

Other forms of low-level political participation, such as participation in protests, do feature prominently within Chinese Dutch communities, according to participants. There is strong interest in and support for social movements and community-building efforts, such as the LGBTQIA+ movement and anti-discrimination initiatives.

The dialogue sessions show that many participants have similar policy preferences. They call for looser migration policies, fairer employment opportunities, greener environmental policies and stricter anti-discrimination measures. Anti-migration and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments are perceived as particularly worrying by many participants. Participants of the third dialogue session also suggest that the government should support community activities for ethnic minorities.

Participants from the second-generation and adopted children from China subgroups, a small number of participants, expressed concern about their perceived lack of transparency in Dutch politics, the spread of "fake news" and the rise of populist parties and rhetoric.

⁵ https://irp.cdn-website.com/e843fd98/files/uploaded/Nederlandse_nieuwkomer_bij_de_Europese_verkiezingen_heeft_banden_met_de_lange_arm_van_China_-_Follow_the_Money_-_Platform_voor_onderzoeksjournalistiek.pdf

3.1.4 Emergence of networks among new migrants

'Since Covid, more and more Chinese organisations have been established. I think this is a positive development.' (Participants on new networks)

Participants note that a new wave of community organisations and networks is emerging with the arrival of new migrants, such as students and professionals. More and more formal and informal networks are emerging, each with its own specific needs and agenda. Many participants are members of several of these networks.

According to participants, many new migrants experience difficulties integrating into local society and seek connection in their professional or academic environments. Some join or create new informal networks based on specific interests or professions, such as entrepreneurs or academics in psychology. They do this in search of more meaningful exchanges and support.

Often, these networks are not formally established as an association or foundation. They are based on practical needs and emotional support, but show great fluidity and fragility. Members often do not maintain contact once their needs are met. Therefore, the contact within communities through these network is neither structural nor sustainable.

While other common applications such as WhatsApp are available to community members in the Netherlands, Chinese social media application WeChat⁶ plays a prominent role as a means of communication by communities. Indeed, Wechat is the only social media application for keeping in touch with family in China. Other common western social media applications are banned in China. In participants' experience, people often maintain contact with other migrants from China also through WeChat. Many informal networks also organise their activities through WeChat.

However, this way of organising has drawbacks. The temporary and unsteady nature of many informal networks, together with the use of social media as a communication channel, often leads to a lack of depth in mutual connections. The lack of formal associations complicates lasting support for each other.

⁶ WeChat is a versatile messaging, social media and mobile payment app developed by Tencent, a Chinese technology company. Launched in 2011, it has become one of the world's largest standalone mobile apps in terms of user numbers, especially popular in China and among migrants from mainland China.

3.2 Discrimination and inequality are pervasive

'...The belief among white Dutch people is that the Netherlands is tolerant and non-discriminatory, while in reality there are subtle and systematic prejudices (of discrimination).' (Participant on discrimination)

Discrimination is clearly a shared experience for the participants. These experiences take place in personal lives, educational institutions and workplaces.

3.2.1 Experiencing discrimination in personal life

In their personal lives, participants face discrimination ranging from stereotyping to blatant racial insults. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many members of Chinese Dutch communities (of all generations) facing racial labelling, unfair treatment and even being publicly called "Corona".

3.2.2 Discrimination and inequality in educational institutions

'Once my son came home crying because the teacher said the Chinese birthday song was "Hanky Panky Shanghai". He said this is not the Chinese birthday song. But the teacher said, "This is the Chinese birthday song we sing in the Netherlands." (Participant on discrimination at school)

During the dialogue sessions, some participants indicated that they and/or their children experienced discrimination during primary or secondary school. Some were bullied for speaking Chinese. Despite their bilingualism, some members of second-generation communities were repeatedly questioned about their knowledge of Dutch. Some participants also specifically mentioned children adopted from China at a very young age. They grew up in small towns with white parents in predominantly white schools, and experienced substantial discrimination in early childhood.

3.2.3 Discrimination and inequality at work

'I work in the financial sector...I was asked publicly by my colleague 'was last night's dog meat stew tasty?'(Participants on discrimination at work)

'I hear from the HR department that 'this person is very competent, but the management level of Chinese is not good'. This comment has a negative influence on me. I wonder how much effort I should make to neutralise this influence.'(Participant on inequality at work)

Participants reported having to endure discriminatory jokes from colleagues because of their background as migrants from China, leading to feelings of isolation. Some faced abuse of employment rights due to the stereotype of the hard-working Chinese. They are often seen as "temporary" workers with fewer chances for a permanent job or career. In job interviews, some participants were asked questions that challenged their expertise because of their background as migrants from China. According to participants, such obstacles lead to more unemployment in Chinese Dutch communities. Because migrants leave the Netherlands if they fail to find a job, their jobless situations remain outside official Dutch unemployment statistics, making their challenges harder to recognise.

During the dialogue sessions, it was stated that Asian women often face sexual harassment and discrimination (based on both their gender and ethnicity) at work and in their social environment. LGBTQIA+ participants also shared that they felt marginalised because of both their ethnicity and sexual orientation.

3.2.4 Reluctance and lack of support of Dutch organizations

When dealing with discrimination and exclusion, participants stressed the importance of support from government, employers and educational institutions. Many participants feel helpless due to a perceived lack of resources and support. Although the younger generation seems better equipped to deal with these problems, traditional Chinese values of avoiding conflict and "not making a scene" often lead to reluctance to make formal complaints. This reluctance is partly due to the fear of social repercussions or of being seen as making a fuss over minor issues.

In addition, participants noted that formal complaint channels exist but are often ineffective. Complaints about discrimination are often not taken seriously by educational institutions or employers. Moreover, existing discrimination reporting channels are often considered insufficiently culturally sensitive, making them ineffective for many.

Participants underlined the importance of discussing discrimination and inequality and raising awareness of the importance of inclusion. They believed that education and dialogue are effective tools to address discrimination and inequality at the societal level.

To this end, participants recommended more proactive measures by educational institutions and employers, such as anti-discrimination training.

In addition, participants see an important role for public authorities. These should be responsible for providing information and materials on how to tackle discrimination and inequality. Furthermore, they should provide clearer and more accessible mechanisms for reporting discrimination and ensure that complaints are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

Box 1: Solutions to discrimination and inequality suggested by participants

3.3 Challenges for communities

Participants in the dialogue sessions shared their experiences about the challenges they face in Dutch society.

3.3.1 Major language and cultural barriers

'Chinese have to learn Dutch in a much more difficult way (than Europeans)For me, it's so difficult even with the help of English.... I felt so incompetent.' (Participant on learning Dutch)

'You never feel 100% Dutch and you never feel 100% Chinese.' *'I feel like a fellow citizen'* (Second-generation participants on identity)



Participants reported experiencing significant difficulties in accessing government and administrative information because of language barriers. In their experiences, many official documents, including those for social assistance and visa applications, are only available in Dutch and sometimes in English. Although some municipalities offer information in other languages, Chinese translations are rare. According to the participants, this is especially a problem for older generations who prefer physical booklets to digital sources because of their limited technological skills. Although younger generations can use online translation tools, these solutions are often not fully effective for detailed or technical information, leaving a large gap in accessibility.

'...we are used to finding everything on Xiaohongshu (Chinese social media app), but that is not enough.'
(Participant on using Chinese social media out of necessity)

In the absence of official government and administrative information due to language barriers, many participants turn to Chinese social media platforms to create, such as Xiaohongshu⁷ and WeChat, as sources of information. These fragmented information sources make it difficult for participants to keep abreast of community activities and government information.

'...At least my Dutch friends don't have to translate Dutch forms for their parents, like I did when I was eight years old. It's not normal to do that as a child. Our struggles are not seen...It affects my daily life in a negative way....' (Second-generation participant on effects of language barriers)

Participants shared their experiences of language barriers. In their experience, language barriers significantly affect participants' personal lives. First-generation migrants, who often worked in the hospitality sector, did not have time to attend language classes due to their busy jobs. They therefore often had to rely on their children to act as translators, which can be stressful for the younger generation, the experiences of some second-generation participants showed. For other participants, the language barrier prevented them from accessing the mainstream labour market or fully integrating into local society. Learning Dutch is also a particular challenge for many 'new migrants', especially when it comes to expressing complex ideas and using Dutch as a working language.

Besides the language barrier, many participants also struggle with cultural challenges. They experience a state of cultural duality, wanting to preserve their cultural roots while seeking a sense of belonging to Dutch society. This cultural clash leads to considerable psychological stress, especially when they have to deal with cultural misunderstandings and prejudices from local people. The feeling of being "between two worlds" causes identity confusion and a sense of alienation. This was highlighted by some participants who identify themselves as "medelander" (fellow Dutch person) but still feel like outsiders despite their long-term stay in the Netherlands.

⁷ Xiaohongshu, also known as Little Red Book, is a Chinese social media and e-commerce platform. It is often described as a combination of Instagram and Pinterest, with a focus on user-generated content and product recommendations. It is an influential player in the Chinese digital landscape.

Participants suggested workshops and initiatives to help newcomers understand Dutch values and integrate better into society. They also suggested setting up alternative information channels that bridge language gaps and reduce reliance on Chinese social media. At the municipal level, it was recommended to provide information in Chinese in areas with many members of Chinese Dutch communities.

Box 2: Possible solutions suggested by participants regarding language barriers

3.3.2 Lack of (mental) health care support

'It usually takes four years before a psychiatrist gives you gender-affirming care in the Netherlands. The GP always refuses to refer you to the second step, and many of them are even transphobic. Therefore, I have to get my medicine from Hong Kong under very dangerous conditions.' (Hong Kong participant on psychological stress)

'People working in the hospitality industry (such as owners, chefs, etc.) are also a heavily affected group when it comes to mental health problems.' (Participant on mental health problems in hospitality industry)

"...They suggested that I should relax, or find ways to release the stress. But my situation is far more complicated than that. The psychologist asked whether I stay in touch with my parents, and every time it is hard to explain: my family is not here, because they have been put in an internment camp." (Uyghur participant on psychological distress)

Participants also stressed the importance of care staff who are culturally competent and can communicate effectively with Chinese Dutch communities. Moreover, the need for nursing homes suitable for the communities was mentioned, given the increasing pressure to care for older migrants as the first generation of migrants retires. Cultural and language barriers make it difficult for these elderly people to live in mainstream nursing homes.

The situation is particularly harsh for LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially transgender people. They report that necessary blood tests are refused by GPs because they are not yet in the official route. In the Netherlands, there is a usual waiting period of four to five years for gender-affirming healthcare. During this waiting period, pressure from the Chinese government makes these people significantly more vulnerable, as they often have to return to China or Hong Kong every few months for essential medication.

Access to mental health care was particularly challenging for participants. Based on personal experiences, a child and adolescent psychotherapist qualified in the Netherlands stated that mental health problems are common among workers in the hospitality industry and activists groups. These views were shared by participants.

The same concerns were expressed by campaigners in the third dialogue as well. Language barriers and limited access to culturally sensitive ability to receive needed care. Participants Netherlands lack cultural sensitivity and mental health services hamper their indicated that many psychologists in the often have limited knowledge of the



context and experiences of China-related diaspora groups. In particular, dissidents from non-Han ethnic communities noted that psychologists were often unable to understand the nature of their traumatic experiences. This gap in cultural competence can lead to ineffective treatments and a reluctance to seek help.

3.3.3 Barriers to accessing social services

According to participants, Chinese Dutch communities experience difficulties in obtaining social services because of language barriers. Culturally, the value of "not displaying family problems in public" prevails, which causes many community members to prefer to solve problems by themselves.

They often strive to improve their children's social status through education rather than seeking social support. Some participants noted that Chinese, when faced with physical or psychological problems in their young children, tend to solve these problems themselves instead of seeking help. In addition, people often turn to Chinese social media for information when they struggle to access mainstream sources of information.

Alternative information channels and platforms for community engagement are being developed. For example, proactively approaching Chinese groups, such as hospitality associations, can increase knowledge about social benefits and reduce the stigma around applying for these benefits. In addition, workshops and initiatives can help newcomers discover information channels and provide them with useful information.

Box 3: Possible solutions suggested by participants for better access to social services

Participants also shared their positive experiences of this series of dialogue sessions organised by Helan Digest (HD) on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), which made them feel valued and recognised by the Dutch government. They indicated that the project helps them build a sense of belonging and trust, and that it is important for them "to know what other Chinese in the Netherlands are doing". Moreover, this kind of dialogue encourages them to actively participate in community building and public affairs.

4. Conclusions

Through the dialogue sessions, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) aims to better understand current developments within communities. This includes understanding prevailing concerns, the dynamics present and focus on political and social issues. In addition, SZW aims to explore the extent to which the interference of the Chinese government is perceived as worrisome within these communities.

Participants in the dialogue sessions shared valuable experiences and opinions. Although these are personal perspectives, they provide a useful overview of the trends and dynamics within the communities studied.

I. Diverse group

Chinese Dutch communities form a very diverse group. The sub-communities among them are formed based on factors such as language preferences, generational differences and social backgrounds. Some of these sub-communities do not identify as Chinese, which can lead to tensions.

There is currently little structural contact between the different sub-communities. However, there are emerging networks and groupings within the highly educated knowledge migrants, students and activists. While members of these networks benefit from support and connection, this support is often difficult to maintain due to the informal and fluid nature of the networks.

II. Discrimination

Discrimination is an important and persistent obstacle that hinders the integration of communities into Dutch society. This problem remains a bleak reality. Members of these communities face discrimination in their personal lives, at work, and in education.

III. Language barriers

Language barriers are also a major obstacle to integration. Participants noted that few first-generation migrants acquire sufficient Dutch to function effectively in the workplace or to access information. Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, the community faces difficulties navigating the healthcare system, particularly in the area of mental health.

On the one hand, some first-generation migrants have relatively high expectations of Dutch healthcare, partly because, according to dialogue participants, medical services were more easily accessible to them in China. On the other hand, language and cultural barriers make it difficult for them to communicate with healthcare professionals—especially mental health practitioners. This is particularly the case for first-generation migrants who experience greater challenges in the process of integration.

In addition, activists felt that their traumatic experiences are not adequately understood or taken seriously. Finally, language barriers further interfere and capacity to shape and reinforce the Chinese government's control “ordinary” migrants from China.



5. Recommendations

HD makes recommendations regarding two areas. First, we make recommendations to approach and engage Chinese-Dutch communities in the most effective way. Second, we recommend measures to address the concerns raised during the dialogue sessions.

I. Structural dialogues and sustainable contact

Conduct ongoing and structural dialogues between the government and Chinese Dutch communities. This entails involving individuals from the target group. This is an expressed desire of the participants. Such structural dialogues give voice to members of the communities, and can reduce the risk of (further) alienation from Dutch society.

Build sustainable contact between the government and Chinese Dutch communities, with a focus on key people and organisations within the target group. All sub-communities should be approached; including those that were not or insufficiently represented during the dialogue sessions. This sustained contact can help identify structural developments. Contact can take place with existing organisations within the sub-communities, paying attention to the nature and objectives of these organisations. Here, attention should be paid to the fact that organisations that play a role in influencing the Chinese government are not always easy to identify.

II. A visibly involved government

Make government involvement visible in engaging with Chinese Dutch communities. The direct involvement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) was perceived as new and positive by participants, as they felt they were being heard.

III. Facilitate initiatives

Facilitate self-reliance initiatives within Chinese Dutch communities. The aim is to increase self-reliance. By supporting such initiatives, expressed problems can be addressed more effectively and the self-reliance, interconnection and integration of Chinese Dutch communities into Dutch society are increased. Examples include media platforms, support groups for mental health problems.

IV. Improve information provision and combat discrimination

Provide more and better anti-discrimination information, and ensure culturally-sensitive training and public dialogues on discrimination. It is essential to create accessible, multilingual



reporting mechanisms with timely and effective response capabilities. It is also recommended to organise regular public dialogues and educational initiatives to promote awareness.

V. Facilitate media platforms in the languages used by Chinese Dutch communities

Chinese-language media platforms can help bridge the language barrier and counter Chinese government interference. Such platforms can improve news coverage of Dutch society and politics and provide a forum free of Chinese government influence and interference. Communities show a clear need for, and interest in, such platforms.

These media channels can take different forms. An example of a previously successful media platform is the Chinese language website of Radio Netherlands Worldwide,⁸ Alternatively, the government can facilitate self-organised independent media within communities.

⁸ Founded in 1947, RNW offered news and information in Chinese, but was unfortunately disbanded following budget cuts in 2013.



Appendix Explanation of different groups within the communities

Chinese students

Since 2000, approximately 51% of migrants from China have been students (Gijsberts et al., 2011). This is a significant increase from only 7% between 1990 and 2000 (Gijsberts et al., 2011). This group is relatively young and has an overrepresentation of women (Ebberts, 2014).

Some of these students frequently attend events organized by Helan Digest. According to Helan Digest's experience, some of these students are proponents of democracy and the rule of law and actively campaign against certain measures taken by the Chinese government. At the same time, another group of students follows the Chinese government's narrative. This has led to conflicts between the two groups, as described in this report.

Highly educated Chinese in the Netherlands

The growing number of Chinese students in the Netherlands since 2000 has led to an increase in highly educated graduates who have stayed in the Netherlands to work. Many have built careers in sectors such as technology and higher education. A smaller group works as expats for Chinese or international companies and organizations.

The political views of this group are similar to those of students. However, Helan Digest's experiences show that they are less active in campaigning.

First Generation (before 1990)

This Chinese community consists of people who arrived in the Netherlands before 1990 and primarily worked in Chinese restaurants. This group came largely from Hong Kong and the southeastern provinces of Zhejiang and Guangdong, with Cantonese as their primary language (Pieke, 2017). In the 1970s and 1980s, the growth of Chinese restaurants led to chain migration and family reunification (Huang, 2023).

This group is less accessible to Helan Digest than students and highly educated people.

Second generation

The second generation consists of people whose parents were both born abroad (de Haas et al., 2019). Raised in a multicultural environment, this generation is often bilingual, speaking both Dutch and their parents' Chinese dialects (Yau, 2023).

Unlike their parents, who primarily worked in the restaurant industry, they have pursued diverse careers or started their own businesses (Pieke, 2017). This group feels less inclined to participate in Helan Digest events and interact with other Chinese communities, although they have established contacts to Helan Digest.



LGBTQ+

In mainland China, homosexuality was once harshly condemned as either a corrupt, decadent product of Western capitalism or a repugnant remnant of feudalism; it was also framed as a disease requiring medical treatment or as a crime to be punished (Poon et al., 2017). LGBTIQ+ migrants from China constitute a distinct group: they seek to create spaces for sexual minorities and to build their own communities (Choi, 2022). *Helan Digest* maintains strong connections with this group.

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