

Chinese Communities in the Netherlands

Report >
China

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'The Research Network on Chinese Communities in the Netherlands' meeting proved that interest in its activities has greatly increased, not only among researchers but also among representatives from non-governmental organizations, state organs, and the general public. The (morning session) presentations of research on young and single asylum seekers from China and on the Chinese community in Batavia during the nineteenth century were attended by people related to the Chinese communities in the Netherlands (including its former colonies and Belgium) in many different ways: as police and immigration officers, interpreters, workers in social welfare, and of course as researchers. During the afternoon symposium on 'China in the Netherlands', three public lectures and discussions were held in addition to video showings.

By Leo Douw

Mirjam Blaak and Frenny de Frenne (the Pharos Foundation, Utrecht) dwelled on the present life situation of young and single asylum seekers from China, and on how the asylum seekers themselves experience this situation. They made clear that lit-

tle systematic knowledge on these comparatively recent arrivals exists and that research on such a group informs us on the group itself, but also on the treatment that Dutch public organizations give them. Leonard Blussé and Menghong Chen (both of Leiden University) focussed on the so-called Kong Koan archives from Batavia in the Netherlands East Indies, which covers the administration of the Chinese community in Batavia from the mid-eighteenth until the mid-twentieth century. Its materials allow an often-perplexing view on how the Dutch colonial administration ruled its cul-

tural minorities, and how that experience may serve discussions on present-day migrant politics and society.

The public lectures in the afternoon intended to counteract the ingrained manner of thinking, which views globalization processes as a one-sided movement extending Western culture, ideology, and organization to the East. Paul Geense (Erasmus University Rotterdam) pointed to the dangers of this approach by positing that the infamous Dover Incident in the year 2000, in which 58 Chinese were killed, was not sufficiently followed up by the Dutch authorities. These authorities consistently ignore that Chinese entrepreneurs, also those residing in the Netherlands, have an interest in human trafficking. Barend ter Haar (Leiden University) provided a handful of telling examples of how artifices of Chinese culture, such as Chinese traditional medicine, and the practice of geomancy are misinterpreted by Dutch 'adepts', who adapt them to their own uses. Christiaan Jörg (University of Groningen) nicely illustrated the overwhelming Chinese

presence in the Netherlands in the shape of massive porcelain imports and uses from the seventeenth century onwards. The lectures were alternated by the showing of Yan Ting Yuen's impressive documentary *Chin.Ind.*, which deals with the experience of a Cantonese migrant couple who survive successfully but rather unhappily in the Netherlands by working in a Chinese restaurant.

During the past few years, a new stage in the situation of migrant communities has been reached, due to the rise of the leftist anti-globalization movement and more recently the rightist anti-terrorism rhetoric. The increased interest in the research on Chinese communities in the Netherlands is an apparent result of these changes, warranting a follow-up meeting, which is to provide a broadly based forum for discussion. <

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