

**Timon van Merriënboer**

**S4265947**

# **Racism and Sinophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic**



**Rodrigo Bueno Lacy & Henk van Houtum**

**Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen**

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## Preface

After months of hard work, I'm happy to have completed my master-thesis for the master specialization 'Conflicts, Territories & Identities' in the master's programme Human Geography. Before you I present my thesis "Racism and Sinophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic", carried out to complete graduation from Radboud University.

Writing a master-thesis in the strange, intense and sweeping times of a pandemic was not always easy and sometimes stressful. The consequences of the pandemic resulted in a few limitations in terms of time-management and fieldwork. However, after some changes and adaptations in the research processes, I am happy and satisfied with the finished result. Furthermore, the actuality and relevancy of the research subject made the whole process very interesting and worthwhile.

I would like this opportunity to thank everyone that participated in the interviews of this research. Finally, I would like to thank my supervisors Rodrigo Bueno Lacy and Henk van Houtum for providing me with highly valuable insights and much appreciated feedback during this period.

Enjoy.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is designed to get a better understanding of how COVID-19-related acts of racism affect people of Chinese descent living in the Netherlands. Whereas racism is a complex social and psychological concept that has gained important research contributions through history, the ways in how it is mobilized during the current pandemic of COVID-19 leaves scope for more research, contributions and answers. This is why it is particularly interesting to investigate racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to get a better understanding of its impact and social consequences. The impact that the pandemic-related racism is having on people from Chinese descent, such as their mental health, physical safety, perceptions of belonging, and political attitudes and behaviours is yet unknown. Therefore, this research aims to observe and document the acts of racism related to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands.

## 1.1 COVID-19

Since the beginning of 2020, the entire world has been affected by an ongoing pandemic of a new coronavirus<sup>1</sup>, officially known as COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). According to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the world is facing the worst global crisis since World War 2 (Guterres, 2020). The highly infectious respiratory system disease has rapidly spread over the world. On September, 17<sup>th</sup>, more than 30,2 million infections had been reported.

In November 2019, the first known infections from COVID-19 were discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Because many of the first infected individuals were workers at the Huanan Seafood Market (Cheng et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020) it has been suggested by multiple studies that the COVID-19 virus might have originated in a wet market (Anderson, 2020; Cyranoski, 2020). Other studies indicate that the virus was introduced to the wet market<sup>2</sup>, which then facilitated rapid spread of the infections (Cohen, 2020; Yu et al., 2020). However,

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<sup>1</sup> Coronaviruses are a group of RNA viruses that cause a variety of diseases in mammals that can lead to potentially lethal human respiratory infections (Fehr & Perlman, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Live-animal markets that sell live poultry, fish, reptiles, and mammals of every kind (Webster, 2020)

up to the present day, the original source of the virus remains unclear (Zhou et al. 2020). As of 21 February 2020, the virus had spread rapidly within China and to 28 other countries before its first confirmed case in The Netherlands was registered on February 27<sup>th</sup> (WHO, 2020). By February of this year, the whole world was coping with the disastrous effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a terrible number of deaths, infections, global lockdown and recession. Learned from previous experiences in controlling the spread of SARS in 2002, a physical distancing approach has now been applied globally in order to control the spread of the virus (Tian & Liu, 2020).

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, the national Dutch news network reported a number of cases of discriminatory language towards people with Chinese and Western-Asian appearance in connection with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus (NOS, 2020). A week later, the name calling took on more serious forms when a student flat was vandalised and walls were defaced with the lines: "Die Chinese" and "Chinese Corona" (Rutten, 2020). Two days later, more violent acts were reported when a 65-year-old Dutch man of Chinese descent was kicked off his bicycle in Amsterdam by two young men on a scooter (Quekel, 2020). Such violent attacks escalated on February 22<sup>th</sup>, when a Dutch student of Chinese descent was assaulted by a group of students in her dormitory in Tilburg, suffering a concussion and knife wounds, after she asked them to stop singing a racist carnival song about China and COVID-19 (RTL Nieuws, 2020). Not only in the Netherlands, but on a global scale an increased number of acts and displays of racism against people of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent has been reported (Kasulis, 2020; Gostanian et.al., 2020). In Malaysia and Singapore, hundreds of thousands of citizens have signed online petitions calling for a total entry ban on Chinese nationals (Wong, 2020). In Italy, Japan, Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia, numerous cases were reported where local authorities advised people to avoid Chinese restaurants and store-owners banning Chinese customers (see Figure 1.)(Giuffrida & Willsher, 2020). The governor of the Veneto region of Italy told reporters in February that "unlike Italians, the Chinese did not have good standards of hygiene" and "eat mice live." (Donmez, 2020) In France, the Twitter hashtag #JeNeSuisPasUnVirus ("I Am Not A Virus") was started by French Asians as a reaction to discrimination. According to many scholars, the number of reported xenophobia related incidents increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Giuffrida, A. & Willsher, K., 2020; Gostanian et.al., 2020; Kasulis, 2020; Guterrere, 2020).

According to Pieters (2020), in May of this year the number of COVID-19-related xenophobia reports received by Dutch authorities passed the three thousand.



Figure 1. Store-owners banning Chinese customers (Bae, 2020)

In the past, various diseases have been named after geographical locations such as the Zika virus and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, until the WHO introduced recommendations in 2015 to avoid geographical association in order to preclude future stigmas (WHO, 2015). Various other examples show that it is not uncommon that an illness sparked fears and xenophobia against specific ethnic groups. An outbreak of cholera and typhus in the 1880s led to discrimination against Russian Jewish immigrants, and a bubonic plague outbreak in the early 1900s led to discrimination against the Chinatown community in San Francisco (Gostanian et.al., 2020). Chinese communities were also stigmatized during the SARS outbreak in 2003, according to a 2004 study (Person et al., 2004). Despite the WHO's strong recommendation to avoid geographical naming, president Donald Trump has repeatedly associated COVID-19 with China and intentionally called it "The Chinese Virus". Brazilian lawmaker and son of the president Eduardo Bolsonaro has called it "China's fault" (Nature, 2020). The deliberateness of Trump's wording was made clear when a photographer captured the script of his speech in which Trump had crossed out the word "Corona" and replaced it with "Chinese" (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020). Repeatedly

associating the virus with China can therefore be seen as an inseparable part of Trump's political agenda by playing to his supporters' bias against marginalized groups, purposefully one of the most historically excluded ethnic groups in the history of the US. This "politics of naming" has been historically used in anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy—including toward Chinese immigrants—to stoke anxiety, fear and disgust toward people associated with that group (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020). To this day, politicians such as Trump and Bolsonaro, argue that China can be blamed for the outbreak and its control in the early stages (Nature, 2020). On March 19, 2020, for example, US Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) justified labelling coronavirus the "Chinese virus" by saying that China is to blame because it has a culture where people eat bats, snakes and dog (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020). In the early stages of the pandemic Tyler et al. (2020) discuss the possibility that Trump and other elites' frequent linking of the infectious disease to China and the Chinese would similarly activate anti-Chinese prejudices, subsequently shaping how the public reacted emotionally, behaviourally, and attitudinally to the pandemic.

## **1.2 Societal Relevance**

The societal relevance of this research can be explained by the enormous impact of the pandemic on the world today. According to a research by Egede & Walker (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic signifies the intersection of racism, social risk and health. Multiple studies suggest that COVID-19-related racism is mobilized and normalized in political strategies which purposefully attempt to normalize racist discourses through speech, images and practices (Tyler et al., 2020; He et al., 2020; Gover et al., 2020). These scholars argue that COVID-19-related xenophobia is a product of structural racism that is triggered by fear and anxiety of the virus. This argument is underpinned by the high number of political leaders blaming China and Trump's repeated framing of COVID-19 as "The Chinese Virus", to stoke anxiety, fear and disgust toward people associated with that group (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020; Tyler et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). In addition, it is a fact that past epidemics such as the bubonic plague and SARS led to social exclusion and racist attacks on members of the Asian-American Community (Person et al., 2004; Gostanian et.al., 2020). The racism that has occurred in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic can therefore be situated in a longer history that dates back to past epidemics, in which problematic stigmas



and negative impacts such as fear and anger are directed towards a particular group of people (White, 2020, p.1250). Therefore, it is highly relevant to further investigate the concept of racism and how it is normalized and mobilized.

The societal relevance of the concept of racism can be substantiated by countless violent and horrific examples through history. A recent leading example are the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests following the killing of Afro-American George Floyd (Plenel, 2020, p.1). Also in the Netherlands, Black Lives Matter protests and discussions about the character “Black Pete” are developing into an increasingly louder voice against racism. Therefore, these pressing issues evoke the notion that racism is omnipresent in the current everyday discourse, political agendas and media, and continues to raise debates and controversies (Rodat, 2020, p.130). In the Netherlands, just as much as in the rest of the EU, dominant discourses such as the historical explanations for current racism in society and connections between colonialization and slavery are generally not recognized and even denied (Weiner, 2014, p.737). Plenel (2020) emphasizes that the path that created our current world is inseparable from the ideology that believed some nations and civilisations were superior to others. Therefore, the idea that some people and cultures are inferior has been and is still being reproduced and normalized in our current world (Plenel, 2020, p.1). In order to study the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on racism it is therefore crucial to find out more about systemic and structural racism<sup>3</sup> that the pandemic is potentially promoting. These are challenging questions that benefit from new insights that this research will tend to gain. The aim of this research is therefore to get a better understanding of the effects of COVID-19 related racism and to provide a contribution to the long-term pressing issue that is systemic and structural racism. Therefore, documenting and analysing experienced racism is highly relevant in order to comprehend the harmful effects on individuals and societies. The link between political agendas and the normalization and mobilization of these racist processes is fruitful to discuss in order to gain a better understanding of this problem. The pressing global issue that is mobilized and normalized racism on individual and institutional levels

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<sup>3</sup> Systemic racism or institutional racism is a form of racism that is embedded as normal practice within society or an organization and is imbedded into institutions of custom, practice, and law (Jones, 2000, p.1212)

calls for research that contributes to give a more in-depth understanding of how these attitudes affect the targeted group.

Following the problematic social consequences of the pandemic, UN Secretary General Guterres (2020) urged governments to “*act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate*”. Van Uden & Van Houtum (2020) point out the importance of the focus on an inclusive togetherness to prevent socially problematic consequences such as divisiveness in the combat of the pandemic. In the combat of COVID-19, promoting global inclusiveness of every individual prevents social exclusion based on ethnicity, nationality, gender, age or fitness (Van Uden & Van Houtum, 2020, p.333). Based on studies following the SARS outbreak, Person et al. (2004) advise that a subgroup of the population that is at potentially greater risk of experiencing fear, stigmatization, and discrimination is required special attention from public health professionals because of its pressing social issue (Person et al., 2004, p.358) Thus, health protection relies not only on a well-functioning health system with universal coverage, but also on social inclusion, justice, and solidarity (Devakumar et al., 2020, p.234). In a pandemic, the best responses are the inclusive collaborations that protect all members of the population, thus responses that exclude others will do much more harm than good (White, 2020, p1251; Guterres, 2020).

### **1.3 Scientific Relevance**

The scientific relevance of this topic is derived from the societal relevance and lies in the discussion about normalization and mobilization of racism during a pandemic. Studies of Devakumar et al. (2020), Tyler et al. (2020) and He et al. (2020) point out that the COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered social and political fractures within communities worldwide, in particular people of Chinese and East-Asian descent. Tyler et al. (2020) argue that the early stages of the pandemic caused xenophobia to be triggered by developing concern over COVID-19. The University of California Berkeley posted a statement to comfort students who might be experiencing xenophobic thoughts and reactions, by saying bias against Asian people is common during the coronavirus outbreak. While this statement has been heavily criticized on social media, Merlin Chowkwanyun, professor of socio-medical sciences at Columbia University’s School of Public Health elaborates that xenophobia has been intertwined with public health discourse for a very long time, and that contagious disease

has often been linked to population groups thought to be outsiders (Illing, 2020). Therefore, the ways in which racialized discourse is developed through history leaves scope for a more extensive research in the theoretical framework. Studying these phenomena during the current COVID-19 pandemic is highly relevant in order to deliver possible contributions to this issue.

An important and relevant issue is the construction of the concept racism and in particular the way in which this concept is mobilized into action and by whom. Racism when being mobilized can be a direct violation of principles of freedom, democracy, international law and respect for human rights. Based on assumptions by Critical Race Theory, racism remains pervasive and ordinary, impacts all aspects of society, and is seamlessly embedded in policies and social life. As Camara Phyllis Jones (2002) puts it: “Racism is not an individual character flaw, nor a personal moral failing ... It is a system (consisting of structures, policies, practices, and norms) that structures opportunity and assigns value based on phenotype, or the way people look. (Jones, 2002, p.9)” For this research it is highly relevant to find out more about how racial inequalities are maintained by individuals and institutions in order to investigate how it is shaped and triggered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approaching racism can contribute to the understanding how racism is mobilized in a society. Several social scientists therefore highlight the importance of identity formation and the creation of in-groups and out-groups as crucial processes underlying intergroup behaviour and intergroup hostility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Fiske, 1998; Hogg, 2000). Kende & Krekó (2019) emphasize that differences between formed national identities can affect intergroup attitudes and hostility, and therefore the connection between racism and policy preferences. In addition, specifically relevant for this research is the concept of “Sinophobia”, which entails the sentiment against Chinese ethnicity, its people, immigrants, culture and tradition (Billé (2014). The scientific debate on Sinophobia gives insights in anti-Chinese sentiment in a historical and wider context and leaves scope for more insights and understandings that this research will tend to deliver. It is therefore important to construct a theoretical framework on racism and Sinophobia which serves as a foundation for this research and is applicable to the research objective and research questions. This research will therefore document the experienced attitudes of racism and Sinophobia in the

Netherlands, to tend to visualize the possible relation between existing racism and COVID-19 related-racism. Finally, this research will contribute to give a better understanding of how COVID-19-related racisms affects perceptions of belonging and attitudes and behaviours against politics and media.

#### **1.4 Research objective and questions**

The objective of this research is to provide a contribution to the understanding of xenophobia during the current COVID-19 pandemic. As elaborated in the first chapter of this thesis, an increased number of racist expressions and actions towards people of Chinese and (East-) Asian descent have been reported in worldwide media and scientific literature. The goal of this research is to find out more about the ways in which racism develops during this pandemic, how it is mobilized during a pandemic and how it is experienced by the targeted group. Therefore, it is crucial to find out more about the relation between protracted racism and COVID-19 related racism. This research is focussed on a group of people of Chinese descent living in The Netherlands, in order to investigate if and how they experience any increased racist attitudes, actions and behaviours since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This gives rise to the following research question of this master-thesis:

***How does racism following the COVID-19 pandemic affect people of Chinese descent living in The Netherlands?***

It is important to substantiate and elaborate the concepts of this research question in the theoretical framework in order to establish an applicable scope for this thesis. In this research question, people of Chinese descent are operationalised as either Chinese immigrants living in the Netherlands, as well as Dutch citizens of Chinese descent. A full explanation of the methodology of this research will be elaborated in Chapter 3. In order to give a complete answer to the main research question, the following supporting sub-questions will be asked:

- ***Do Dutch residents of Chinese descent experience racism?***

- ***What is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on racism perceived by people of Chinese descent?***
- ***How do people of Chinese descent perceive the communication about COVID-19 in politics and media?***

The first sub-question focuses on the concept of racism and thereby provides insights in how the research group experienced racism before the pandemic. This answer on this question will help to understand how the research group has experienced Sinophobic and racist attitudes directed towards them during their time living in The Netherlands. The second sub-question helps to understand the ways in which these perceived actions of racism have been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, this sub-question helps to give insights in the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on the racist attitudes that are experienced by the research group. Answering this question also contributes to a better understanding of how perceived racist was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, substantiated by international studies that are discussed in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the third sub-question sheds light on the roles of politicians and media that contribute to the COVID-19 xenophobia debate in the subjective experience of the respondents. Finally, understanding how the respondents look at the roles of politics and media in the COVID-19 pandemic will contribute to a complete answer of the main research question.

## **Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework**

Racism is a complex concept because of its scope, subjectivity and intangibility. In order to make a solid analysis of the literature and obtained data, it is therefore necessary to construct a theoretical framework to function as a foundation and scope for this research. The framework starts with a literature review, in which relevant existing research on COVID-19-related racism is examined. This will be followed with a discussion of specific literature that connects racism to identity formation, epidemic threats and mobilization. Finally, a conceptual model will be constructed that shows how the relevant concepts coming from the theories are linked and related to the research question of this thesis.

### **2.1 Literature review**

The core concepts that will be discussed in this research are racism, with an emphasis on the anti-Chinese sentiment that is called Sinophobia and its relation to epidemic threat. These concepts and theories will be explored and explained extensively in the theoretical framework. This literature review will examine and locate the relevant studies that have been done on COVID-19-related racism so far.

Multiple studies suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered social and political fractures within communities, in particular people of Chinese and East-Asian descent (Devakumar et al., 2020; Tyler et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). These authors state and substantiate that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused racialized responses to fear, excessively affecting minority groups of Chinese and East-Asian descent. Tyler et al. (2020) argue that the early stages of the pandemic caused developing concern over the virus to intensify already widespread racism against Asians. The increasing worry about the virus developed in ways that manifest in racist policy sentiment, which influences the mobilization and normalization of racist expressions (Tyler et al., 2020). The research carried out in middle March 2020 by Tyler et al. (2020) is substantiated by a survey of 4311 respondents and focused on COVID-19 driven attitudes towards Asian-Americans living in the US. Data results in Figure 2. confirm that there is a relation between rising anxiety about COVID-19 and increased levels of xenophobia. The graph also shows that

anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiment are positively correlated with anxiety about COVID-19.

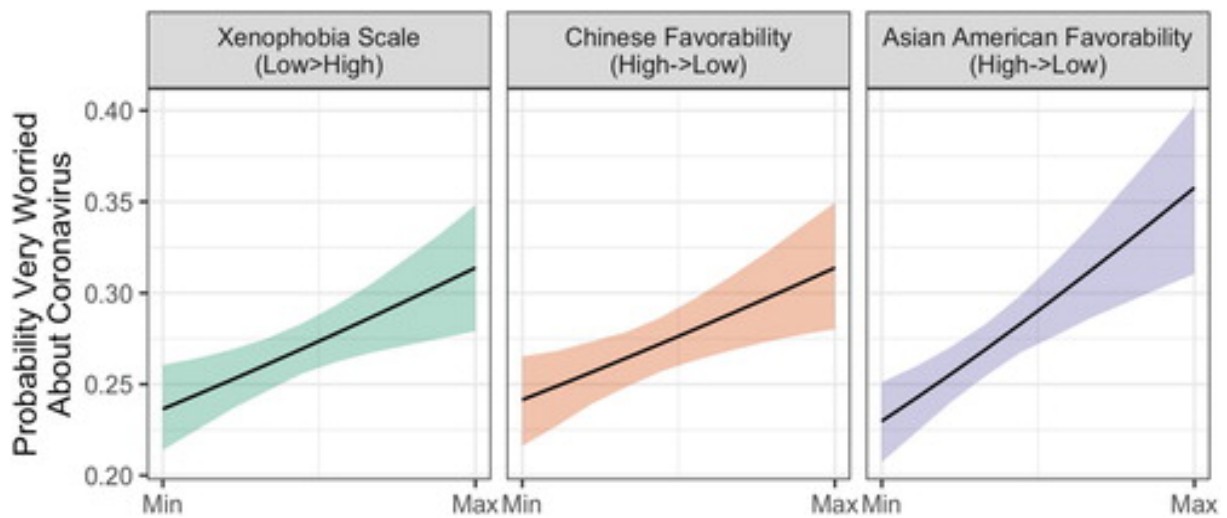


Figure 2. Correlation between COVID-19 concern and anti-Asian sentiment (Tyler et al., 2020)

He et al. (2020) conducted a global survey in February 2020 that reached 1904 Chinese residents overseas across 70 countries. Of the respondents, a considerable 25.11% reported to have experienced different forms of discrimination, including losing their job without proper cause, rejection of rental housing and commonly reported abuses in public spaces (He et al., 2020). The studies by both Tyler et al. (2020) and He et al. (2020) visualize that there is indeed a significant relation between anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and xenophobic expressions in the form of anti-Asian sentiment. Besides avoidance of people with Asian appearance by Americans, other effects that are investigated by Tyler et al. (2020), Vachuska (2020) and IPSOS (2020) are the likeliness of people to avoid Asian and Chinese restaurants and products. A research by IPSOS in February of this year, seen in Figure 3., shows that in a number of countries, people were more likely to avoid contact with people of Chinese origin or appearance than to avoid handshakes, whereas the latter is in fact scientifically proved as a contamination risk (IPSOS, 2020). An important conclusion of all authors is that there is strong evidence of a relationship between COVID-19 and an increase of anti-Asian attitudes, including discriminatory treatment towards the Asian community (Vachuska, 2020; Tyler et al., 2020; Gover et al., 2020; He et al., 2020).

	US	Canada	France	United Kingdom	Australia	Germany	Japan	Russia
Avoid travel by airplane for business purpose	34%	25%	19%	23%	29%	25%	16%	25%
Avoid shaking hands with others	33%	30%	19%	26%	26%	27%	25%	21%
Avoid travel on subways or buses	29%	20%	18%	22%	26%	17%	24%	20%
Avoid contact with people of Chinese origin or appearance	17%	11%	12%	14%	23%	28%	28%	37%
Avoid eating in Asian restaurants	18%	12%	13%	10%	20%	15%	8%	30%
Avoid travel by taxis	16%	10%	7%	9%	16%	9%	8%	5%
Not go to school or work	7%	4%	3%	7%	8%	3%	4%	5%
None of the above (Exclusive code, anchor)	7%	10%	11%	12%	7%	12%	7%	6%

Figure 3. Gathered data on avoidance regarding COVID-19 (IPSOS, 2020)

The collection of the relevant research about COVID-19-related racism emphasizes the wide spectrum of verbal abuse and violent attacks since the virus outbreak. Numerous examples of media-covered incidents include violent attacks on people wearing face-masks (Gover et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). He et al. (2020) highlight that an important component of such mobilized racism is that, prior to the pandemic, wearing a face mask implied sickness in the West. In contrast, wearing a face mask has been common in the daily life of many Eastern Asian countries to an extent that it has even been viewed as a fashion statement (He et al., 2020, p.2). This cultural difference and the persistence of it may have interacted to contribute to the increased discrimination. In addition, the influence of social media is often mentioned for its ability to spread verbal abuse like hateful speech and fake news anonymously (Gover et al., 2020, p.659). The fact that individuals globally have more and easier access to online communication is considered a key factor in the widespread of xenophobic attitudes. However, an empirical study by Yang et al. (2020) also emphasizes on the ability of social media to become a particularly important tool for Asian people to cope with racism. Yang et al., 2020 explore that experience with discrimination is associated with more social media use among Asian people and how adaptive social media use was for their well-being during COVID-19.



White (2020) argues that the COVID-19 related incidents can be placed in a longer and wider context of racism during pandemics and epidemics. As past epidemics have shown, it is not uncommon that an illness sparked anxiety and led to racist expressions directed at particular out-groups (White, 2020; Gostanian et al., 2020). In terms of anti-Chinese sentiment, the bubonic plague outbreak in the early 1900s strengthened the discrimination against the Chinatown community in San Francisco (Gostanian et.al., 2020) When looking further into more recent epidemics, a research by Person et al. (2004) gives insights in the stigmatization of Asian communities as a result of the SARS outbreak in 2002. The research documented the impacts of fear, stigma and discrimination of the Asian community that occurred during this epidemic. Relevant findings by Person et al. (2004) include the documentation of hundreds of cases that reported intentional and unintentional racist attitudes towards people of Asian descent. An important recommendation of this research included that public health professionals must understand the necessary balance needed to protect the public's health while at the same time preventing fear, stigmatization, and discrimination of specific segments of the population (Person et al., 2004, p.362). However, when looking at the problematic social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still an urgent call for inclusiveness during the combat of the pandemic (Van Uden & Van Houtum, 2020; He et al., 2020; Guteress, 2020).

Besides the understanding that racism is related to epidemics and pandemics that is argued by White (2020, p.1250) and Person et al. (2004), these authors also address the dependence on pre-existing racism in a historical context. Tyler et al. (2020) substantiate this by stating that blame-rhetoric in the early days of COVID-19 amplified and promoted protracted racism and anti-Asian sentiment. The reproduction of deep-rooted ethnic and racial inequality during COVID-19 is also highlighted by Gover et al. (2020), in which is described that COVID-19 has strengthened racism on individual and institutional levels. Gover et al. (2020) argue that COVID-19 enabled the spread of racism and created national insecurity, fear of foreigners, and general xenophobia, which may be associated with the increase in anti-Asian hate crime during the pandemic (Vachuska, 2020, p.2). The roles of political agendas are widely considered crucial in the mobilization and normalization of the pandemic related racism, but also in the already existing deep-

rooted racism that can be understood as systemic racism. According to Devakumar et al. (2020), political leaders have used the COVID-19 crisis to reinforce racial discrimination, doubling down, for example, on border policies and unifying public health restrictions with anti-migrant rhetoric. He et al. (2020) also argue that stigmatization of COVID-19 led by some politicians such as Donald Trump might have reinforced such discrimination and social exclusion. It would seem undoubtable that Trump's language by purposefully and repeatedly framing it as "The Chinese virus" would lead to COVID-19 being more strongly associated with China and Asia. Thus, by making use of a *cartopolitical imagination*<sup>4</sup> and framing China and everything associated with it as undesirable, it is highly probable that this has an impact on how people of Chinese and Asian descent have been treated (Vachuska, 2020, p.3).

An important conclusion of the discussed literature on COVID-19 and racism is that this phenomenon can be placed in a context of historically increased and intersecting individual-level and institutional-level racism (Gover et al., 2020; White, 2020; Vachuska, 2020). However, a limitation of the fieldwork by Tyler et al. (2020) and He et al. (2020) that solely COVID-19, and in the case of Person et al. (2004) SARS related incidents were documented. In order to make a solid comparison between COVID-19-related racism and protracted racism, it is necessary to consult more research on the perceived racist and xenophobic attitudes before the virus outbreak. This will give more insights in the ways how racism has been present in the experience of the targeted group. Therefore, it is crucial to approach the research problem by consulting theories on racism, xenophobia and nationalism in order to provide an understanding of underlying processes of reproducing racial inequality in intergroup behaviour. In addition, it is crucial to create a theoretical framework that provides a better understanding of how racism is constructed, normalized and mobilized through history. The theoretical framework will then provide a lens to approach racism on both individual and institutional levels that will be applied to the main research question of this thesis.

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<sup>4</sup> Political technology that consists in carto- graphically defining political territories and empowering them with meaning. Geopolitical imaginations that evoke a map, like "the Orient", "The Muslim World" etc. (Bueno Lacy & van Houtum 2019, p.5).

## **2.2. Racism**

As resulted from the literature review, COVID-19-related incidents such as violent attacks and name-calling can be placed in a wider context of protracted racism. In the societal and scientific relevance of this research was pointed out that the concept of racism is widely present in the current everyday discourse, political agendas and media. However, the scientific understanding of racism is complex because the terms on which it is based, specifically "race", and the spectrum of different ways it is constructed in a society (Rodat, 2020, p. 130). To analyse and encounter the racist incidents in the COVID-19 pandemic it is therefore crucial to consult a theory that approaches not only the concepts of "race" and racism, but also investigates how racial inequality is shaped and maintained by individuals and institutions.

### **2.2.1 Race**

An important understanding of the concept of "race" is that it does not have an inherent physical or biological meaning but is merely a human construct (Harris, 1994; Hirschfeld, 1998; Weiner, 2004). Barnshaw (2008, p.3) defines race therefore as "a grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society". An important understanding is that the construct of "race" is often based on phenotype (Jones, 2002, p.9), which includes skin colour, facial features, bodily constitution as well as fashion gestures and specific accents or dialect. Furthermore, this implies that race and racism are not exclusively bound to the ways people look, speak and dress but also their socio-economic status and cultural identity. In addition, Harris (1994) elaborates that race is a dynamic and relational cultural process that is constantly being transformed by political struggles. Therefore, a full understanding of race also requires an understanding of political and economic systems that construct it (Harris, 1994 p. 777). Thus, categorization of race is not only based on observations of physical difference but also on a social and historical construction, deeply invested in power-relations (Hirschfeld, 1998). Through power-relations, the construct of race assigns groups to different categories reflecting the perceived cultural and biological differences that are maintained by social policies and practices (Weiner, 2014, p.732). Thus, highly important in the scientific approach of race is that the categorization of this concept is not only about visual appearance, but also about

the imagination and association of physical, cultural and social characteristics. It is clear that the concept of race cannot be understood without taking into account the institutions that shape, amplify, promote and cultivate it.

### **2.2.2 Critical Race Theory**

In order to provide a solid scope for this research it is necessary to consult a theory that is able to examine how systemic and structural racism appears in our current world. Critical race theory (CRT) provides insights in the ways in which racial inequality is mobilized and normalized by power systems. In addition, a widely understood assumption of CRT is that the power systems in our world are inherently racist. As Camara Phyllis Jones (2002) puts it: "Racism is not an individual character flaw, nor a personal moral failing ... It is a system consisting of structures, policies, practices, and norms that structures opportunity and assigns value based on phenotype (Jones, 2002, p.9)." The early ideas of Du Bois (1897) about the importance of protecting dehumanized groups from European and American imperialism can be understood as one of the pillars of CRT. In the work of Du Bois, an influential approach for future Critical Race Theorists is the idea that we must study even dehumanized human subjects in a humanistic way in order to recognize the dehumanizing practices that besiege them (Gordon, 1999, p.24). Another pillar of CRT is the prominent work by Frantz Fanon (1952) which emphasizes the tensions between lived identities and structural identities. In his work, Fanon critiques the national and economic dependence and advocates a reawakening from a cultural and intellectual point of view (Gordon, 1999). Crucial assumptions from both Fanon and Du Bois highlight the structural dehumanization and political violence against people of colour, and are therefore highly influential in CRT. Finally, CRT provides an approach that examines how society and culture relate to the categorizations of race, power and law (Gordon, 1999, p.92).

Similar to postmodern critical theory from which CRT is derived, CRT argues that social problems as racism are influenced and created more by societal structures and cultural assumptions than by individual and psychological factors. Thus, CRT is utilized as a critical lens to analyse dominant systems of racial inequality and oppression. In addition, CRT provides an understanding of how victims of racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves in the response to racism. Therefore,

CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice. Beyond simply identifying processes of categorization and othering, CRT highlights the significance of investigating social and cultural forces that shape the ways in which humans perceive, experience and react to racism. In addition, the framework on CRT suggests that racism is a sophisticated ideology that serves a certain political economy and thus promotes certain economic, moral, political and social dynamics motivated by certain interests.

Delgado & Stefancic (2007) distinguish three broad principles of CRT, in which the first one is the construction and understanding of the concept of “race” as a categorization that individuals and institutions invent for particular purposes. A second important feature is the determinism of interest that plays an important role in maintaining racism. Delgado & Stefancic (2007, p.136) elaborate that because racism can advance the interests of both ‘white’ elites as well as working-class people, large segments of society have little incentive to address and change it. The third principle that is elaborated is the understanding that racism is not exceptional but ordinary. Its ordinariness makes racism hard to recognize, hard to address and most importantly, hard to change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, p.136). The next paragraphs will focus on the characteristics of these principles that have been widely studied in the framework of CRT. Finally, I will connect these concepts to other relevant literature in the context of xenophobia, nationalism, identity formation, normalization and mobilization.

### **2.2.3 Systemic racism**

CRT suggests that the concepts of race and racism are inseparable of the power systems that shape them (Harris, 1994). Camara Phyllis Jones (2000) emphasizes the importance of these power systems in racism and defines systemic or institutionalized racism as: “the structures, policies, practices, and norms resulting in differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race.” Systemic racism is normative and structural, and is embedded into institutions of custom, practice, and law (Jones, 2000, p1212). This thrives on the understanding of CRT that racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that people create between races to maintain their interests in labour markets and politics. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that race is a social construct based

on phenotype but is also dependent on the social and historical constructions that are infused in power-relations (Hirschfeld, 1998). Thus, systemic racism comprehends the racism that is embedded as normal within society and is understood to cause many problematic outcomes such as discrimination in employment, housing, health care, political power, education and criminal justice (Harmon et al., 2020).

While many CRT provide an understanding of systemic and structural racism in the US, it is necessary for this research to emphasise this phenomenon in the Netherlands. In the book “White Innocence” by Gloria Wekker (2016), the presence of systemic racism in the Netherlands is extensively discussed with numerous examples, one being the case of “Zwarte Piet” or “Black Pete”. Highly significant in the case of “Black Pete” and in systemic racism in general is the complexity of perceived innocence and unintentional racism shaped by cultural history. The presence of systemic racism in the Netherlands is also discussed by Weiner (2014), who argues that the use of ethnicity in the Netherlands changes unequal power relations rooted in Dutch colonial history and triggers racial ideologies and inequalities (Weiner, 2014, p.737). An important insight that derives from these considerations is that concepts of race and racism are deeply embedded in Dutch society despite the common upholding that it does not, except when it is by radical (i.e. Nazi) extremes (Weiner, 2014, p.738). Particularly significant for this argument is the presence of an anti-racist popular discourse that continues to deny the existence of race and racism in the Netherlands (Weiner, 2014, p.737). This is a clear indication of the issues caused by systemic racism in the Netherlands, in which links between historical colonialism and racial inequality are underestimated, neglected or denied. Therefore, both Wekker (2016) and Weiner (2014) argue that the nearly four hundred years of Dutch colonization left traces of racism in culture, history, language and the portrayal of self and other in institutions that are still present today (Wekker, 2016; Weiner, 2014).

The normalization and reproduction of racialized discourse is signified by the often heard argument: “It is not racist because it is our culture and our tradition” (Wekker, 2016, p.154). This quote signifies the large percentage of individuals and institutions not being aware of the presence of racism and therefore denying it, as Weiner (2014) refers to as an anti-racist popular discourse. These ideas are crucial in understanding the ways in which

systemic racism is cultivated, shaped, and perceived to eventually become “normal” and common sense, and thus innocent in the experience of the individual that is mobilizing it. Furthermore, important roles for the way in which racializing discourse is maintained are fulfilled by media and textbooks that construct and reconstruct the stereotypical portraying of “others” as being distant to the homogeneous Dutch “white” population (Weiner, 2014, p.733). The perception of this “white” population requires further explanation, as Weiner (2014) argues that Dutch racism is heavily dependent on ethnicity and phenotype, which explains the notion that to be ‘Dutch’ is to be “white” (Weiner, 2014, p.733). Furthermore, this explains the possibility that someone with a “non-white” skin colour who is born and raised in the Netherlands, only speaks Dutch, acts culturally Dutch, and is a Dutch citizen, to “white” Dutch, this person could be considered an ‘other’ because of the way this person looks (Weiner, 2014, p.733). Furthermore, the anti-racist popular discourse is also shaped by the inability to recognize historical wrongdoing in the colonial past, which impacts current conceptions of national history, identity and thus contributes to the continuous denial and underestimation of racial inequality (Weiner, 2014, p.737). This contributes to the possibility that people who do not consider themselves racist may actually enforce racist power structures unintentionally and thus be immune to critique because, in their eyes, they have done nothing unusual and therefore nothing wrong. It is thus crucial to emphasise that racism is much more difficult to recognize or to address in a society where many are in denial of its continued existence and impacts (Jones, 2002, p.20).

The importance of cultural archive is prominently discussed by Edward Said (1993), and is referring to deep structure of inequality and thought and affect based on race (Wekker, 2016, p.2). An important idea is that this structure of inequality was established in nineteenth century European imperial populations, when a sense of self and others was formed (Wekker, 2016, p.2). Furthermore, the institutional and geopolitical aspects in maintaining group-based inequality have been prominently discussed in the book *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978), which gives insights in the practices and expressions of out-group exclusion through history. Orientalism, being highly influential in post-colonial theories, focusses on the continued dominance of Western culture in de-colonized territory in the East. Said (1978) critically discusses the West's historically dehumanizing representations of the Oriental world, which he describes as an exaggeration of the

perceived differences between West and the “other” East. The idea of an ‘Orient’ has played a central role in constructing a European identity and helped to define the West as its contrasting image and ideology (Said, 1978, p.134). Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness (Said, 1978, p.6). Thus, rather than a study of the East, Orientalism comprehends a system of thought that shapes the practical and cultural dehumanization that was applied to non-European societies in the East. An important aspect is the distribution of power that plays a role in the creation of the image of the West, by culturally representing the East as subordinate (Said, 1978, p.133). These cultural representations often include stereotypes, prejudices and other negative exaggerations that represent the East as primitive, violent and native. Similar practices are part of Dutch cultural history, where racist images of Africans have been part of popular cultural forms such as art, music, advertisements, architecture, and holiday iconography for centuries (Weiner, 2004, p.734). Therefore, understanding the study of Orientalism provides useful insights in the racist discourse that is imbedded in power systems and the way systemic racism is present in cultural perceptions today. Furthermore, it contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which Dutch colonial history is intrinsically connected with the systemic racism that is relevant today. Finally, the dehumanizing imaginations of Oriental "others" that were normalized in the minds of Western citizens through cultural representations, thus contributed to the development of modern day racist views and assumptions.

In order to get a better understanding of the cultural associations of Orientalism, it is crucial to elaborate on the particular imaginations that play important roles in the continuation of systemic racism. In *Geographical Imaginations*, Derek Gregory (1994) gives attention to the role of geographical imaginations in reproducing colonial norms in for example mapmaking, art, scholarly writings, math, and sciences. Gregory (1994) states that the geographical imagination functions as a visual practice of representing space and place and contributes to the associations of what characterizes a specific social group (Giesecking, 2017, p.3). Therefore, the geographical imagination is closely related to a person’s understanding of race, class, gender, sexuality, and sense of embodiment and privilege. Seamlessly connected with the concept of race, these imaginations comprehend the association of physical,



cultural and social characteristics. Geographical imaginations can therefore be understood as an important tool to describe and analyse the different ways in which people imagine and render space, but also how they imagine “other” cultures and societies (Giesecking, 2017, p.7). In addition, the geographical imagination is prominently used in regards to nationalist discourses, and helpful in critiques of colonialism and imperialism. An important concept of Imaginative Geographies by Said (2000) is the idea that an individuals' geographical imaginations can be manipulated and exploited to portray a fashioned social political history of the state (Giesecking, 2017, p.6). In the same way, these practices also shape the associations and imaginations of residents in Western societies when thinking about other countries, cultures and people. Geographical imaginations can thus be characterised by the association or ignorance about other spaces and cultures, as well as the possible perception of the racial inferiority of that culture. Therefore, geographical imaginations play a significant role in systemic racism and the ways in which it is mobilized.

#### **2.2.4 Personally mediated and internalized racism**

Closely interconnected with systemic racism are the concepts of personally mediated racism and internalized racism (Jones, 2000; Edgoose, 2017). Personally mediated racism comprehends the racial discrimination and prejudice that is practiced between individuals, and refers to the kind of behaviour that most people think of when they hear the word ‘racism’ (Jones, 2000, p.1213). Therefore, this level of racism refers to intentional racism which can be understood as explicit and conscious bias, and unintentional racism which can be understood as implicit and unconscious bias (Edgoose, 2017, p.213). This type of racism manifests in practices such as a lack of respect, suspicion, everyday avoidance, scapegoating and dehumanization such as abuse (verbal and violent) and hate crimes (Jones, 2000, p.1213). Whereas explicit bias is easier to name and to address because it is directly expressed as prejudice by the perpetrator, implicit bias is often expressed subtler and is therefore harder to name and address. As individuals are generally unaware of these thoughts and actions caused by implicit bias, they are often in a poor position to critique their own shortcomings and often feel defensive regarding this discussion (Edgoose, 2017, p.213). Therefore, the concept of implicit bias is crucial for understanding the ‘innocence’ and anti-racist popular discourse that Wekker (2016) and Weiner (2014) extensively discuss.

The concept of internalized racism refers to acceptance by members of the discriminated “races” of negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth (Jones, 2000, p.1213). Internalized racism is defined as:

The situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominant group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviours, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power and privilege and limits the oppressed group's own advantages (Bivens, 1995, p.45-46).

Therefore, internalized racism could manifest in a sense of poor self-worth and confidence caused by racial stereotypes and prejudices. It is characterized by accepting limitations to one's own full humanity, including one's right to self-determination, and one's range of allowable self-expression (Jones, 2000, p.1213). However, it is necessary to emphasize that this is not just a problem of individuals but it is a structural and systemic issue of a racist system. Internalized racism for example manifests in an embrace of ‘whiteness’, such as use of hair straighteners and bleaching creams in order to adjust the phenotype to that of the privileged white group (Jones, 2000, p.1213). Thus, internalized racism is a complex phenomenon that contributes to the continuation of racial inequality in social structures and limits the advantages of the racialized groups.

Critical race theory helps to give insights in the interconnected relationship between the three levels of systemic, personally mediated, and internalized racism. While acts of personally mediated and internalized racism are practiced between individuals, practices of systemic racism are deep-rooted structural issues that are difficult to recognize and address. Therefore, Jones (2000) highlights the idea that systemic or institutional racism is the most fundamental of the three levels and must be addressed for important change to occur. Finally, a fundamental argument is that once systemic racism is addressed, the other levels of racism may cure themselves over time (Jones, 2000, p.1213). In order to provide more insights how racism occurs on these three levels, it is highly relevant to explore theories that pay attention to xenophobia, nationalism and identity formation.

### **2.2.5 Xenophobia**

Closely interconnected with implicit and explicit bias is the concept of xenophobia, coming from the Greek “xenos” and “phobos”, the fear and hatred of foreigners. Xenophobia is an idea associated with a distinct set of attitudes and affects, along with beliefs, that are about inclusion and exclusion of out-groups (Sundstrom & Kim, 2014, p.30). The general understanding explains that fear of losing national, ethnic or racial identity are important factors that play a role in the concept of xenophobia and could lead to certain expressions or actions of violent nature (Odiaka, 2017, p.41). Xenophobia cannot be discussed without taking into account normative concepts that approach an in-group and an out-group, such as race, culture, ethnicity and nationality. These concepts are significant in the understanding of how an individual classifies something as ‘own’ or ‘other’, based on their own level of identification with one or more of these normative concepts. In addition, fear and hatred are two emotional states included in xenophobia that also indicate a reliance on subjective experience of an individual (Wicker, 2001). Thus, objectification of ‘the other’ is the first step towards constructing the object to which xenophobic and racist attitudes and actions can be directed (Wicker, 2001). Thus, the objectification of the ‘other’ is closely related to the concepts of Orientalism, geographical imaginations and systemic racism in which dehumanization of out-groups categorized to a certain race are used as a means to exclude that same specific out-group. Furthermore, there is such historical overlap between racist ideas and events and xenophobic ones that these ideas are co-dependent and at times blend into each other. An important explanation for this is that the ‘others’ that are excluded are also racialized, and that this racialization then serves as one of the reasons offered for their exclusion (Sundstrom & Kim, 2014, p.34). However, it is important to emphasize on the understanding that xenophobia is not so much intertwined with racism as it can merely be seen as a possible aspect of it. In contrast to the concept of racism that is elaborated in CRT, the definition of xenophobia limits to explain its connection to power systems and embeddedness in political economies. Therefore, through a lens of CRT it highly relevant to consult more literature on nationalism to find out more about how such potential xenophobic and racist ideologies are constructed in power systems.

### 2.2.6 Nationalism

As described in the last chapter, the fear of losing a national identity is an important factor in the concepts of racism and xenophobia. However, it is still unclear how this national identity can be defined. Therefore, it is crucial to find out more about the concept of nationalism to get a better understanding how this is connected to racist and xenophobic ideologies.

Hobsbawm (1990, p.9) defines nationalism as the ideology that political and national units should coincide. He describes the concept of “the nation” as a changing, evolving, modern construct that is created by nationalism, and not the other way around. Smith (1996) contributes to the understanding that nationalism is not solely based on the requirement that all members of a nation should be alike, but is dependent on an intense feeling of solidarity towards a certain nation and other people that share that same feeling or connection (Smith, 1996). An important idea is that the concept nationalism is both historically and sociologically prior to ‘the’ nation (Smith, 2009). It can merely be understood as being a social construct than it is actually dependent on a nation or country. Thus, nationalism can be considered as a principle inspired by an ideology of the nation as a historically grown sociocultural system (Smith, 2009).

Furthermore, nationalism is strongly dependent on particular imaginations about what the nation is exactly, and the perception of who belongs to it and who does not. An important concept that is seamlessly connected to geographical imaginations (Gregory, 1994) and Orientalism (Said, 1978) is the idea of *Imagined Communities* discussed by Benedict Anderson (1983). Anderson (1991) defines a nation as a socially constructed ‘political imagined community’ that is imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group (Anderson, 1991, p.6). Hence, ‘the nation’ is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know or meet most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1991, p.6-7). Therefore, the formation of a particular ‘national’ identity can go hand in hand with the imagination of “others” as being contradicting to this particular identity, and the exaggeration of the perceived differences between these identities. Similar to practices of Orientalism and geographical imaginations, imagined communities therefore rely on particular representation, objectification and even dehumanization of “other” contradicting nations, cultures, identities and peoples (Said, 1978, p.134). Finally, this is also closely related to the

cartopolitical imaginations (Bueno Lacy & Van Houtum, 2019) used by politicians such as Donald Trump in order to frame nation-states as hierarchically organized (e.g., “America first”), and thus creating the notion that ‘other’ nations such as China are subordinate.

Another important concept in the construction of a national identity is the concept of ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This implies that traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p.1). Therefore, by referring to a distant past, a national identity is created that promotes national unity or legitimizes the existence of certain institutions or cultural practices. The invented tradition thus also plays an important role in the construction of an imagined community, and therefore is highly relevant for the understanding of nationalism. In the Netherlands, the importance of tradition is signified by the example of “Black Pete” that shows how a particular tradition can become part of a national and cultural identity because of the high degree of normalization and reproduction (Wekker, 2016, p.154). This does not directly mean that a tradition is invented for nationalist purposes only, but it helps to understand the ways in which cultural heritage and tradition can become interconnected with particular systems of thought. Furthermore, the concept of invented tradition helps to understand the particular degree of meaning that people give to certain national traditions or practices. Therefore, it also gives insights in the difficulties of transforming or renouncing these particular traditions and habits, and thus the difficulties of addressing issues such as systemic racism.

Thus, nationalism can derive into racism and xenophobia because of the rejection of other groups based on the imagination and categorization to normative concepts such as “race” or “nation”. Hobsbawm (1990) elaborates on the concept of race and emphasises that “physical differences are too obvious to be overlooked and have too often been used to mark or reinforce distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, including national ones” (Hobsbawm, 1990, p.65). Thus, Hobsbawm (1990) understands race as a tool of nationalism that divides societies and is particularly driven by political powers. Therefore, nationalist and racist ideologies can be an influential part of politics in order to mobilize stigmatization and discrimination in policies and electoral campaigns (Rutaree, 2016). It needs to be stressed that nationalist agendas are closely intertwined with systemic racism that contributes to the

exclusion and rejection of others that are perceived to threaten the national identity. In the concepts of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, there is a relation with identity formation that goes to the heart of how individuals define themselves and others based on social constructs such as nation and race. The political programme that is nationalism is thus closely interconnected with processes such as identity formation that I will elaborate further in the next paragraph.

## **2.4 Identity formation**

In order to comprehend the identity formation processes that can derive into nationalist, xenophobic and racist attitudes, it is crucial to find out more about how in-groups and out-groups are constructed. The social identity theory, formulated by Henri Tajfel & John Turner (1979), proposes that a social identity is created by an individuals' sense of who they are based on their membership to a particular group. In this case, a group can signify a certain nationality, religion, culture, ethnicity and gender, basically any social group that an individual can identify themselves with and therefore perceive as relevant. As originally formulated by Tajfel & Turner: "Social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

### **2.4.1 Categorization, identification and comparison**

Tajfel & Turner (1979) propose that the belonging to a certain group creates a sense of social identity and a sense of belonging to a social world. An inseparable process is the distinction of in-groups and out-groups, consequently dividing the world the world into "us" and "them" through three processes. Tajfel & Turner (1979) explain these three processes as social categorization, social identification and social comparison. Social categorization refers to the categorization of people in order to understand and identify them. By understanding to which group an individual belongs, an individual can define appropriate behaviour based on this particular group. Social identification signifies the process of adopting the identity of the group of which someone thinks they belong to as a result of the categorization process, and subsequently act and behave within the norms of that group. An important aspect of this process argued by Tajfel & Turner (1979) is that an individual will develop an emotional attachment to a group and therefore self-esteem will become bound with group

membership. The third and final process of creating in-groups and out-groups is the stage of social comparison, elaborated in particular by Michael Hogg (2000). After an individual categorizes themselves in a group and identifies as being a member of that particular group, often a comparison is made between groups. According to Hogg (2000), these social comparisons are key to understanding group norms, group structure and intergroup relations. Hereby, social comparisons are heavily influenced by the perceived differences between one's in-group and the out-groups.

An important aspect of the social comparison process is the idea of in-group favouritism, which can be understood as a process of favouring in-group members over out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In-group favouritism can therefore be considered as a pattern to enhance self-image and a way of sustaining social identity. An important aspect of this concept is that in order to enhance self-esteem and self-image, members of an in-group are likely to negatively evaluate the out-group (Hogg, 2000). Therefore, an important aspect of in-group favouritism is ensuring that the in-group is positively distinctive from the out-group. Thus, according to social identity theory it is expected that members of an in-group will often attempt to find negative aspects of an out-group. This phenomenon has been extensively researched by Billig & Tajfel in 1973, in which they found empirical evidence that when participants were categorized into groups based on visual judgements, they clearly discriminated against members of an out-group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). In terms of in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination it is understood that members of an in-group tend to maximize the differences between both groups, in order to maintain the positive identity out of both compared groups (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). In maximizing these particular differences, exaggerations and simplifications are made to increase negative thoughts about the out-group and enhance positive thoughts about the in-group. Therefore, objectification of the out-group takes place, often through naming and labelling (Wicker, 2011). Constructing an object of the out-group which is perceived as strange and different is an important aspect of stigmatization of the 'other', which lies at the basis for directing xenophobic attitudes (Wicker, 2011). It is thus hypothesized that the perceived dissimilarity in social identity between groups is an important factor for xenophobic tendencies in intergroup behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Hogg, 2000).

#### **2.4.2 Stereotyping and prejudice**

According to Tajfel (1979), the categorization of individuals into particular groups is based on a recurrent cognitive process, which can be explained by a natural human tendency to group things together. However, these categories and related meanings are more socially constructed than natural, which means that social contacts and surroundings play an important role in categorization processes and the meanings that are subjected to these categories (Powell & Menendian, 2016, p.24). Therefore, through social categorization, particular differences and similarities between groups can become over-generalized and exaggerated, which can be understood as stereotyping. According to Fiske (1998), stereotyping is considered as an inevitable by-product of the normal cognitive processes explained as social categorization in the social identity theory. Because of overgeneralization, oversimplification and exaggeration, a stereotype is not representative for every individual in a particular group and falsely increases the perceived homogeneity of this particular group (Fiske, 1998). Therefore, a stereotype is an exaggerated image or imagination of a group of people that often does not correspond to reality and is closely intertwined with prejudices to legitimate discriminatory actions.

In addition to stereotypes, Tajfel (1963) and Fiske (1998) discuss the development of prejudices, unjustifiable negative ideas, visions, and attitudes toward an outgroup the members of that outgroup. Psychologist Gordon Allport (1979) defined prejudice as: "a feeling, favourable or unfavourable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience" (Allport, 1979). Thus, prejudices influence the way in which an individual has certain expectations of other people and behaves towards other people. Similar to stereotypes, prejudices are over-generalized and exaggerated and do not correspond to reality (Fiske, 1998). Therefore, stereotypes and prejudices are strongly connected with the associations and expectations of "others", that play a crucial role in the cultural and geographical imaginations discussed by Said (1993) and Gregory (1994). Thus, prejudices have a significant influence on psychological, economic, social and political processes since these contribute to the grid through which associations and imaginations about particular out-groups are filtered (Said, 1978, p.6; Tajfel, 1963). The process of social comparison is crucial to understanding prejudice, because once two groups identify themselves as different or competing, they are forced to maintain and increase these differences by social



comparison in order for the members to maintain their self-esteem (Hogg, 2000). Prejudice can therefore take the form of dislike, anger, fear, disgust, discomfort, and hatred, and influence the attitudes towards out-groups. Thus, stereotypes and prejudice play important roles in the objectification of out-groups, which can be understood as a significant part of out-group rejection and the development of xenophobic attitudes that could derive into racism (Wicker, 2011). Finally, identity formation, stereotypes and prejudices provide insights in the explanation of racist and nationalist views shaped by geographical imaginations and associations of specific out-groups. These concepts are therefore strongly connected, and from a perspective of Said (1993) cannot be studied without acknowledging their embeddedness within power systems. Therefore, to zoom in further on racism and the mobilization during a pandemic, it is necessary to consult more specific theories on the relation between racism, power systems and epidemic threat.

## **2.5 Epidemic threat: normalization and mobilization**

What is now needed for this research is an understanding how racist expressions and attitudes are normalized and mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas CRT and sheds light on protracted systemic and personally mediated racism, it leaves more scope for the explanation how this could lead to action and the attribution of voiced blame to a specific out-group. Therefore, it is important to zoom in on the construct of racism to explore how it is shaped and influenced by epidemic threat. In addition, it is important to investigate how racist ideologies are structured in political power relations and how these processes are shaped and mobilized.

### **2.5.1 Existential threat**

The current pandemic's impact on the world leads to a lot of stress, fear and anxiety that triggers the mobilization of racist expressions, causing developing worry over the virus to intensify the already widespread racism against Asians (Tyler et al., 2020; Robson, 2020). During the COVID-19-pandemic, global reports of violence, verbal abuse, discrimination and human rights violations signify the possible problematic consequences that racism can lead to (Giuffrida, A. & Willsher, K., 2020; Gostanian et.al., 2020; Kasulis, 2020; Guterres, 2020). Kucharski (2020) discusses that past disease outbreaks have caused stigma against particular

groups and regions and suggests that these concepts are related. Therefore, similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, various disease outbreaks from the past show that it is common that an illness sparks fears and xenophobia against specific groups (WHO, 2020; Gostanian et.al., 2020; Person et al., 2004). This strongly correlates with the understanding that intergroup prejudice is related with imagining and associating a specific out-group as a threat (Fiske, 1998). In addition, Stephan et al. (1999) strongly suggest that feelings of threat and prejudice are closely intertwined, and that concern about threats plays a significant role in negatively evaluating the out-group. This means that feelings of anxiety and vulnerability can motivate negative attitudes and prejudices towards foreign people or out-groups (Faulkner et al., 2004). Faulkner et al. (2004) substantiate this with historical analysis that explains how stereotypes, prejudices and exclusionary intergroup behaviour signify a tendency to associate foreign people, the out-group, with threats such as diseases. Evidence resulting from these studies substantiated the conclusion that chronic and temporary feelings of vulnerability to disease contribute to negative attitudes toward foreign people (Faulkner et. al., 2004).

Multiple studies suggest that threat-related anxiety and vulnerability can amplify negative attitudes towards immigrants and marginalized groups, targeting those groups to blame of that particular threat (Stephan et al., 2009; Faulkner et al., 2004; Poppe, 2001). In a historical context, blaming the marginalized groups in society serves the purpose of explaining disease in a way that conforms to a specific racist or nationalist ideology promoted by a particular power-system (Hogarth, 2020). Therefore, this is closely connected to the ways in which ‘others’ are represented and imagined as threatening, as both Said (1978) and Gregory (1994) extensively discuss in *Orientalism* and *Geographical Imaginations*. This also implies that stereotypes, prejudices and other negative exaggerations of ‘others’ play a crucial role in the ways that negative attitudes are triggered during an existential threat such as a pandemic. Thus, targeting groups to blame is often shaped by the underlying social or political tensions, which relate to the imagination that a marginalized group is responsible for a particular disease, and thus members of that group are associated as threatening (Hogarth, 2020). From a lens of CRT, it needs to be stressed that prior to these amplifications is a much more complex system of systemic racism that affects these social and political tensions. In order to provide more insights on this issue, it is crucial to investigate how racist

and nationalist discourses are mobilized and normalized in a society. In order to fully comprehend the amplification of systemic racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is thus necessary to zoom in further on the roles of power systems in mobilizing particular ideologies that target groups to blame.

### **2.5.2 Dominant discourses**

According to Said (1987), ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood without their configurations of power also being studied (Said, 1987, p.133). Critical race theory emphasises these configurations of power when studying concepts of race and racism. It is thus highly important and relevant to pay specific attention to the explanation of how specific racialized discourses are normalized and can become dominant in power systems and societies.

As elaborated by Foucault (1975), discourses can be understood as ways of constituting knowledge in combination with social practices, forms of subjectivity and the power relations and links between them. Rasmussen (2011) elaborates on Foucault's theories on disciplinary power and its characteristics of racism in a society. In the work of Foucault, racism is not only a prejudice or stereotype, a form of socio-political discrimination, or an ideological motive in a political principle; rather, it is a form of government that is designed to manage a population (Rasmussen, 2011, p34). One important process that is highlighted by Foucault is the 'normalization' of discourses, which comprehends the ideas and behaviours that may fall outside of social norms come to be regarded as "normal" and thus common sense. This means that these discourses are reproduced to an extent that they become widely perceived as unexceptional and thus become ordinary in societies. The ascription of certain patterns of thought and motives is an important reference point in social identity formation, as Tajfel & Turner (1979) point out. Gotsbachner (2001) elaborates that the reconstruction of these thoughts and motives are key in the formation and normalization of xenophobic and racist ideologies. Gotsbachner (2001) explains that xenophobia and racism, being false and subjective explanations of social processes, are powerful because they possess 'practical adequacy', which means that something has sufficient appearance of explanatory validity and empirical evidence to make it work and be accepted as common sense (Gotsbachner, 2001, p.744). Normalization is an inseparable

process in the development and maintenance of these processes, as it reproduces the ideas and attitudes towards a certain group or activity (Van Dijk, 2008). Hence, normalization of discourses is a key factor in the construction of views and ideologies about out-groups and the probability of how they can be adopted as dominant by political institutions.

The political dynamics and power relations during a disease outbreak are discussed in *Discipline and Punish* by Foucault (1975), in which the principles of disciplinary power are approached by the measures against the plague outbreak in that time. Practices and structures of urban quarantine against the plague are, according to Foucault, clear illustrations of disciplinary power strategies (Hannah et al, 2020, p.2). Disciplinary techniques such as quarantining of households, physical distancing and surveillance of individuals controlled by authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic can therefore be situated in a longer history of Foucault's work on disciplinary power that is practised by political powers. Foucault's focus on governmentality<sup>5</sup> was introduced by a diagram of modern power relations, a 'triangle' formed by governmentality, sovereignty and discipline, from which the terms "biopower" and "biopolitics" have derived (Foucault, 2007). According to Hannah et.al (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic confirms the continued relevance of the term biopower, the ability to control the biological aspects of society, by measures such as dividing practices that construct different groups of human beings. Segmentation of the population into sub-groups as part of the biopolitical measures taken in response to COVID-19 has realised a series of further divisions related to nationalism, ethnicity, age and class (Hannah et.al., 2020, p.21). In times of the COVID-19 pandemic, Foucault's ideas about racism and nationalism as a form of government are still relevant. The division between 'national citizens' and 'foreigners' is dangerously leading to the kind of racial split which Foucault identified as a recurrent feature in biopower (Hannah et.al., 2020, p.21).

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<sup>5</sup> Under the term governmentality, Foucault encompasses the whole range of governmental techniques and procedures that are aimed at guiding and shaping the behaviour and actions of people and groups in a society.

Kende & Krekó (2019) emphasize the ability of a governing power to make use of dominant xenophobic discourses that could derive into ideologies of racism and nationalism, and the mobilization of action. These authors shed light on the mobilization against minorities as a dominant strategy of radical-right parties. Several studies give insights in the ways that policies legitimise narratives including racial and nationalist discourse (Idahosa & Vincent, 2014; Kenda, Krekó, 2019). The political discourse of out-group exclusion through racist strategies are highlighted as dominantly present and even ‘mainstream’ by the authors. Because of the fear of losing national identity that needs constant defending, the exclusion of ethnic and national out-groups tends to be socially acceptable and easily justified (Kenda & Krekó, 2019, p.32). The connection between these dimensions is visualized by the authors in Figure 4., in which mobilization of intergroup hostility can be understood as a vicious cycle that maintains and reinforces itself.

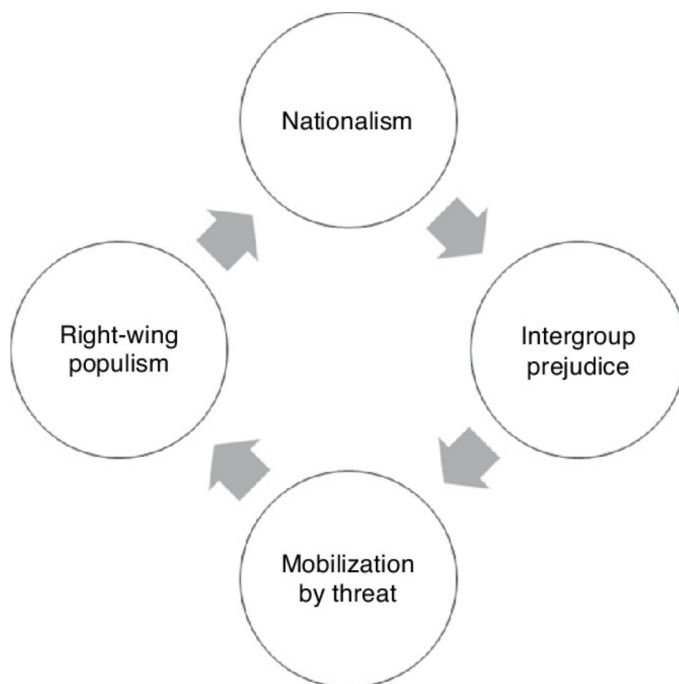


Figure 4. The circular connection between nationalism, intergroup prejudice that makes people susceptible to threat, which leads to growing right-wing populism (Kende & Krekó, 2019, p.30)

An important argument that the authors make is that in this normative context intergroup hostility is not even necessarily recognized as prejudice or stereotype because of the extent of normalization (Kenda & Krekó, 2019, p.32). This argument is substantiated by Foucault’s idea of racist and nationalist discourse in political powers that is highlighted as a form of biopolitical governmentality and thus functions as a form of government and management

strategy (Rasmussen, 2011, p.34). This argument is crucial in understanding the normalized ideologies in terms of identity formation and out-group exclusion that are imbedded in governmental policies today. This is for example a crucial explanation for the deliberateness with which Donald Trump speaks about the “Chinese virus”, which can be understood as an inseparable part of a political agenda. By framing and naming as a form of management strategy he creates anxiety, resentment, fear and disgust toward people associated with that particular group (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020).

## **2.6 Sinophobia**

### **2.6.1 Asiancrit**

Established as a branch of CRT, Asian Critical Race Theory (Asiancrit) approaches the dominant systems of racial oppression of Asian people in a historical context. In addition, an important related sub-term of xenophobia is the concept “Sinophobia”, which refers to the sentiment against Chinese ethnicity, its people, immigrants, culture and tradition. From a lens of Asiancrit, the concept of Sinophobia is important to discuss in this framework because it gives important insights in the anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiment in a historic and global context. Sinophobia concerns Chinese minorities living outside of China and involves immigration, identity formation, power-relations, colonialist legacies and racism (Billé, 2014). However, it is important to highlight the fact that Sinophobia often also includes anti-Chinese sentiment in Asian neighbouring and surrounding countries such as South-Korea, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia. Therefore, Asiancrit is a crucial lens to use in this research because it merely focusses on the dominant systems of Sinophobia in the West, and thus also gives insights in the imaginations and associations of people that are perceived to be Chinese but in reality are not. This can be explained by the Asiancrit principle that is “Asianization”, which helps to understand ways how society puts all people from Asian countries into one monolithic group and racializes them as “perpetual foreigners”, “threatening yellow perils” and “model minorities” (Museus, 2013, p.23). Claire Jean Kim (1999) visualizes the perception of the perpetual foreigner as a result of Asianization in Figure 5. Sohyun (2016) elaborates that partially because of Asianization, Asian Americans are not incorporated into the collective memory of who qualifies as an American, despite the more than 150 year-history of Asians in the United States and anti-racism efforts

(Sohyun, 2016, p.250). Therefore, Asiancrit provides important insights in the racializing of Asians by a continuation of stereotypes and prejudices through a dominant system of cultural oppression. The concept of Asianization is highly relevant in the case of COVID-19-related racism because it helps to understand racial discrimination that occurs to people from other Asian countries that are mistaken for Chinese.

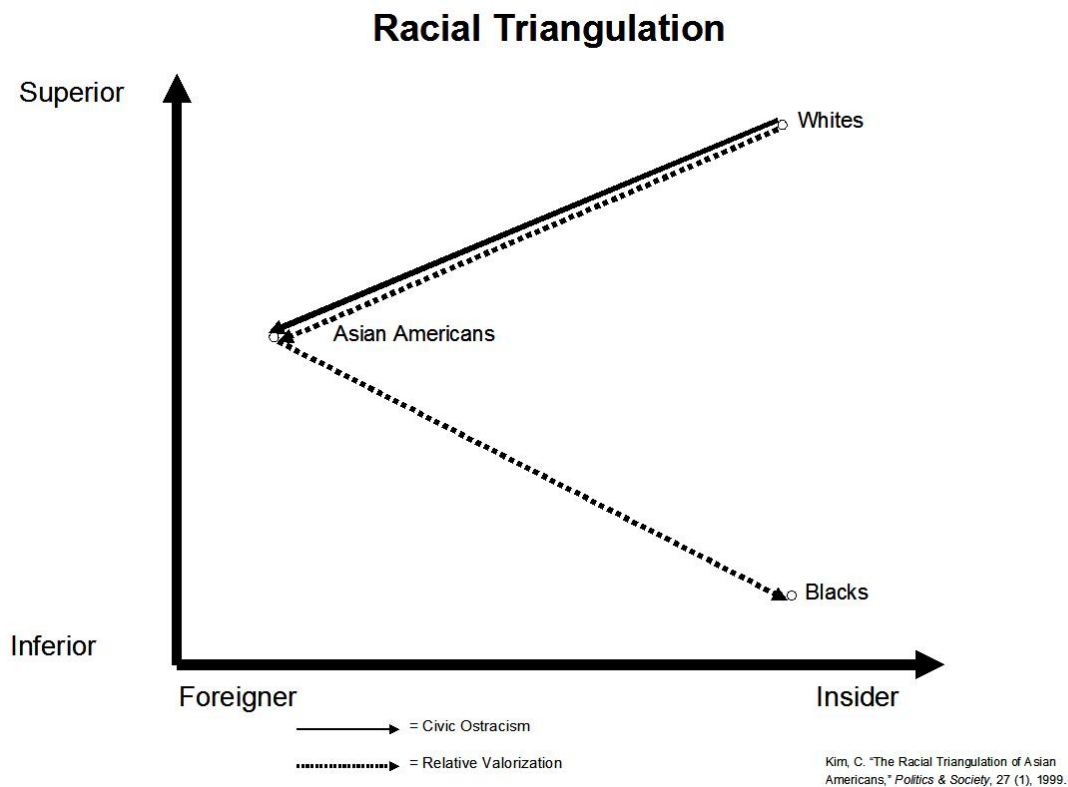


Figure 5. Racial Triangulation in the context of the US (Kim, 1999)

One of the first examples of Sinophobia in the Western world dates back to the late 1800s, in which the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) was established in the United States in order to restrict further immigration from China (Risse, 2012; Soennichsen, 2011). The early development of stereotypes against Chinese people is imaged by a cartoon of George F. Keller in 1881, portraying a caricature of a Chinese man posing as a proto-Statute of Liberty Figure, surrounded by the labels “Filth”, “Immorality”, “Diseases”, and “Ruin to White Labor” (Poos, 2020). Many imageries that portrayed the dehumanizing of Chinese immigrants and associated them as threats followed, as shown in Figure 6. The CRT tenet of the interconnected relationship between systemic and personally mediated racism helps to make sense of the ways in which racism against Asian Americans was deepened and became

more socially accepted after the Chinese Exclusion Act. The outbreak of the bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatown in the early 1900s strengthened the anti-Chinese sentiment and reignited racial prejudices and scapegoating against Chinese by linking the Chinese community to the outbreak, despite research had disproved this (Soennichsen, 2011). Through a lens of Asiancrit, the Sinophobia and socially accepted racism that followed the Chinese Exclusion Act and the plague outbreak touched off a sociocultural conflict still relevant today (Risse, 2012). In addition, Asiancrit gives insights in systemic racism by studying the racial oppression of Asian minorities that is legitimated through law and political strategies through history.



Figure 6. What Shall We Do with Our Boys, by George F. Keller, published in The Wasp on March 3, 1882

The study of Sinophobia provides an insightful look at the anti-Chinese sentiments and narratives, but also contributes to understanding the deeper meanings and narratives of anxiety, fear and dislike towards this group. In this perspective, the argument is proposed that modern-day Sinophobia is often illustrated as a result of anxiety about China's massive economic growth (Billé, 2014). The circular connection between intergroup prejudice and nationalism (Figure 4.) by Kende & Kreko (2009) contributes to a better understanding of this from the perspective of competing political agendas and the imagination that China is a threat to these economies. Peyrouse (2015) argues that hand-in-hand with China's



increasing influence in Central-Asia, Sinophobia is becoming increasingly prominent. Research on Sinophobia suggests that whereas knowledge and awareness about China and its culture and traditions is still weak, anxiety and prejudices are growing. This can be placed in a wider context of geographical imaginations, in which cultural ignorance plays an important role in the mobilization of prejudices (Peyrouse, 2015; Giesecking, 2017).

### **2.6.2 Sinophobic media discourse**

Closely related with the discussed anxiety about China's economic growth is the Sinophobic discourse that is mobilized and normalized in media coverage. Both Billé (2014) and Peyrouse (2015) discuss evidence gained by in-depth analysis of media discourses in which stereotypes of China appear frequently. Lams (2016) emphasises that media realities appear to be different depending on the national interests of the particular country in which these media organizations operate (Lams, 2016, p.140). Through a lens of Orientalism (Said, 1978), Western media have been criticized since the 1960s in diverse disciplines such as cultural studies and communication studies for a biased, negative representation of the developing world (Lams, 2016, p.138). Another study by Ono and Jiao (2008) suggests that a Sinophobic discourse has risen to a dominant position in the US media. Therefore, it is highly important to point out that particular ideologies, whether they are racist or nationalist, are potentially closely followed by the particular media coverage in that country.

An extensive review of Dutch and Belgian media coverage about Chinese events points out that most coverage focused on stories about economy and conflict, often framing China in a negative way (Lams, 2016). Particularly imaging China's economic position as a powerful economic rival to the European economy and a potential danger to the world economy is considered to contribute to anxiety and intolerance rather than an objective understanding (Lams, 2016, p.152). Similar to the study about media coverage in the US is the finding that media coverage about China is predominantly negative (Lams, 2016; Ono & Jiao, 2008). Thus, for this research it is highly relevant to pay special attention to the ways in which Dutch media discourse is experienced by people of Chinese descent in order to get a deeper understanding of possible bias.

## **2.7. People of Chinese descent in the Netherlands**

In order to provide a better understanding of the represented research group, it is important to briefly describe demographic information and reflect on the migration history of Chinese residents in the Netherlands. As of today, Chinese people in the Netherlands form one of the largest overseas Chinese populations in Europe. In 2018, official statistics showed 92,644 people originating from the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of China (ROC), or people with at least one parent that was born there (CBS, 2018).

### **2.7.1 Migration history**

The Chinese presence in the Netherlands dates back to at least 1911, when Chinese people were hired by Dutch shipping companies for labour (Pieke, 1991, p. 165). Another group of early ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands were students that, rather than from mainland China, were drawn from among Chinese communities in the Dutch East Indies (Li, 2002, p.174). However, with increasing tensions between Indonesia and the Netherlands in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the number of ethnic Chinese students in the Netherlands rapidly decreased. Finally, due to the violent political situation in Indonesia in 1965, tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants were forced to leave the country. Most went to China, the United States, or Australia, but those who had been educated in Dutch preferentially chose the Netherlands as their destination (Pieke, 1991, p.164).

Despite the long history of Chinese people in the Netherlands, almost all the current Chinese residents are first-generation immigrants, their children or grandchildren that arrived after World War 2 (Pieke, 1991, p.165). The rapid growth of the Chinese community after World War 2 and the political tensions between Indonesia and the Netherlands can partly be explained by the profitable opportunities in the restaurant trade. These opportunities were caused by economic growth and the repatriation of Dutch residents after the independence of Indonesia in 1949. In addition, the absence of an indigenous food tradition made room for business opportunities, and therefore formed an important pull-factor for Chinese employers (Pieke, 1991, p.165). Often, a new restaurant owner invited family or friends from his or her home community to work in the newly established restaurant (Pieke, 1991, p.165). As a result, the Chinese community in the Netherlands grew predominantly by chain

migration and developed into a first, second and third generation that make up the population today.

### **2.7.2 Chinese-Dutch identity**

With the discussed migrated population developing into a composition of different generations, it is relevant to investigate how this affects the sense of identity by Dutch-Chinese residents. The role of Dutch-Chinese identity is extensively discussed by Kartosen (2016) and Wu (2019). Wu (2019) gives special attention to the “double life” of Chinese-Dutch people of today by describing detailed narratives of Dutch-Chinese residents that signify the difficult position of having two ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, this “double life” is resulting in compromises in language, expectations and dealing with stereotypical ‘jokes’. In addition, there is a lot of attention for the experience of stereotypes and prejudices that vary from jokes about food, language and physical appearance. Therefore, emphasis is made on the generation gap between Chinese-Dutch of his generation and their parents in terms of expectations, emotional distance and overall mind-set in dealing with racism (Wu, 2019, p.81). The latter signifies the idea that in Chinese culture it is more likely to avoid negativism whereas Dutch people are generally perceived to be more ‘direct’ and therefore more comfortable to speak up against such practices (Wu, 2019, p209). However, it is important to stress that this is mainly based on a stereotype, since a study by Labrie et al. (2020) points out that there is no particular evidence that the Dutch are more argumentative. Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that there are significant cultural and societal differences between China and the Netherlands such as freedom of speech, freedom of press, that influence the ways in which second generation respondents consider themselves more articulate than their parents (Wu, 2019, p209-216). Therefore, despite being a broad generalization, the Dutch ‘directness’ is a concept that is interesting and relevant to pay attention to in this context.

Furthermore, the ‘generation gap’ leads to the recurrent subject that high career-wise expectations of Chinese parents often go against the desires of their children. In addition, young Asians generally see the culture of their parents as too restrictive and traditional, especially compared to Western culture (Kartosen, 2016, p.9). A consequence of these complexities is that young Asians cannot identify themselves unconditionally with either of

both cultures and therefore have not developed an unambiguous 'Chinese' or 'Dutch' cultural identity that is bound to one place (Kartosen, 2016, p.9). Therefore, an important conclusion of both studies is that it is difficult and complex to fit in as a Chinese-Dutch in a Dutch society in terms of belonging and inclusion, hence the explanation of a "double-life" (Wu, 2019; Kartosen, 2016).

Kartosen (2016) elaborates on the construction of an "Asian-ness" in the Netherlands and underlines that Asian-Dutch residents are almost absent in Dutch public, political, academic debates and discourses on cultural diversity. Dutch people of Asian descent are rarely seen in Dutch popular media such as TV-shows and movies and when they are, it is often a stereotypical portrayal. An example is the Dutch TV-show "Ik hou van Holland" (I love Holland), where regular guest is Mr. Chung, an elderly Chinese man, who performs a Dutch song in "unintelligible" Dutch. The guests of the TV-show try to guess which song it concerns. According to the study by Kartosen (2016), Asian-Dutch people perceive this as contribution to the non-accurate image of the imagination that Chinese immigrants lack Dutch-language skills, and therefore the maintaining of stereotyping. This is in line with the stereotypical media discourses that construct and reconstruct a collective and homogenous modern Dutch identity (Weiner, 2014, p.734). Therefore, these media discourses portray an imagination of racialized stereotypical "others", in this case Chinese, as being distant to an imaged "white" Dutch population (Weiner, 2014, p.733).

The lack of identification and visibility of Asian-Dutch residents in the Dutch cultural environment has a limiting effect on the inclusion of this group in Dutch society (Kartosen, 2016, p.11). An important finding of the study by Kartosen (2016) is that Dutch-Asians feel partly excluded from the Dutch cultural media and society because they are so little represented. Therefore, Asian-Dutch residents have difficulties identifying themselves as Dutch, which influences their sense of belonging (Kartosen, 2016). In addition, because young Asian Dutch residents are generally not seen as "real" Dutch but as "others", it makes it harder to identify as a Dutch person, and to identify with the Dutch cultural environment in general (Kartosen, 2016, p.9). From an Asiancrit perspective, this is in line with the Sinophobic stereotype of "the perpetual foreigner", that signifies the continuous perception of Asian people and Chinese people as foreigners. Both studies of Wu (2019) and Kartosen

(2016) contribute to an understanding of the inherent “whiteness” and non-inclusiveness of Dutch national identity and cultural media, in which people of Asian descent remain to be portrayed as “the other”. This is substantiated by the argument that most Dutch media discourses portray discursive racism that emphasises the imaginative difference between the ‘White’ Dutch population and stereotypical essentialized “others” (Weiner, 2014, p.733).

Thus, with help of the literature on Sinophobia and Asiancrit, it needs to be stressed that the specific Dutch discourse of “Asian-ness” is characterized by the geographical imagination and association by cultural ignorance rather than an inclusive and realistic discourse. Furthermore, it can be understood that a lack of representation in Dutch discourse leads to a lack of identification, which plays an important role in feelings of inclusion and belonging (Kartosen, 2016, p.9). Finally, giving special attention to the identification processes during this research will give fruitful contributions to the understanding how Chinese and Dutch-Chinese residents identity and feel included in the Netherlands. In order to get a close and in-depth understanding of racism during COVID-19, it is thus necessary and relevant to pay special attention to the particular identification of people of Chinese descent in the Netherlands, since this helps to grasp how racism affects their sense of belonging.

## **2.6 Conceptual model**

With help of the theoretical framework, a conceptual model can be constructed that aims to illustrate the relation between the theories and research objectives and research question. With help of the literature review and discussion of relevant concepts, it is suggested that COVID-19-related racism and Sinophobia are shaped by an underlying system of thought that is embedded in institutions and power systems, known as systemic racism. Therefore, systemic racism refers to the racism that is present in structures, policies and practice, and has been widely spread and normalized through history (Jones, 2000, p1212). Furthermore, based on the literature review and media coverage, it seems that the pandemic is promoting, triggering and amplifying this systemic racism, leading to the mobilization of racist and Sinophobic actions, attitudes, and ideas. Therefore, the fieldwork of this research will seek to provide contributing insights and more detailed understandings of how this COVID-19-related racism is perceived by the targets. Finally, through a lens of this

theoretical framework it is crucial to provide more empirical evidence on how perceived practices of COVID-19-related racism and Sinophobia are connected to the presence of systemic racism.

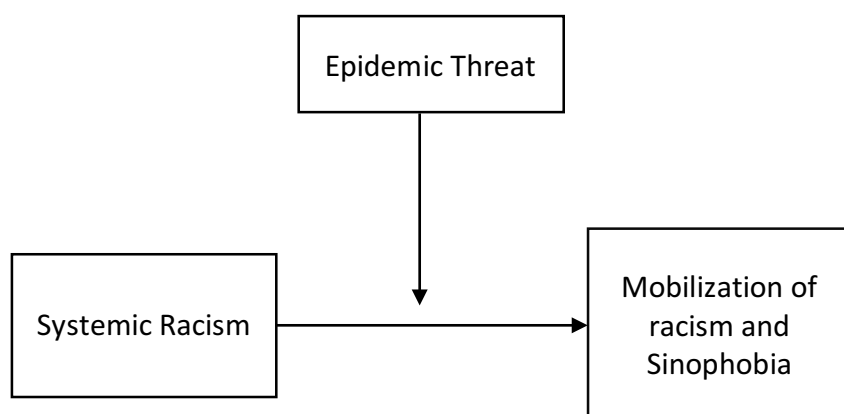


Figure 7. Conceptual model

## **Chapter 3. Research design**

In order to give an answer to the research questions, the data collection needs to be approached by a certain methodology applicable to the research subject. The choice of methodology for this research is strongly determined by the research objectives and research questions. In this chapter, the possible research designs will be explored and discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. In addition, data collection techniques are discussed and linked with the research (sub-)questions. Finally, a specific research strategy will be chosen and elaborated with help of the operationalised key concepts of the research and the theoretical framework.

### **3.1 Methodology**

Before the data-collection, it is necessary to explore which specific methods and approaches are most suited for answering the main research question of this thesis. The point of this research is to get a deeper understanding of an experienced phenomenon, in this case the perceived racism among Chinese and Dutch people of Chinese descent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its objective is to give contributing insights into how people experience and perceive certain actions and attitudes. Thus, it is not only a matter of finding out whether respondents experience racism but merely how they experience this and how it affects them. This means that the interviews serve as an enrichment and enhancement for this research, rather than merely a measurement of whether something is or is not existent. A very relevant and strong aspect of qualitative methods which is highly relevant for this research is the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (Mack et al. 2005). These characteristics are highly fitting for the research objectives and questions in this thesis, since an in-depth understanding of social issue is pursued. In contradiction to quantitative methods, the more flexible qualitative design leads to more open-ended, rich and explanatory data which is suitable for a more understanding research approach (Mack et al. 2005). In addition, a qualitative approach gives the opportunity to carry out an exploratory research, which is useful for understanding the cultural context of the research group (Mack et al. 2005) Qualitative data therefore allows to

document and explore the existence of racist and xenophobic discourses directed towards the respondents in this research, and in particular the ways how respondents perceive and experience these discourses. Thus, rather than just confirming the existence of a certain phenomenon like racism, it is necessary to find out how this phenomenon is experienced by the respondents.

For this research I will be conducting in-depth interviews because this allows for the possibility to develop a structured interview-guide with questions and topics based on the theoretical framework. Another method that I could have employed for this research is a survey, which focusses on a predetermined set of structured questions. However, a drawback of this method is that it has certain limitations in terms of how deliberate and comprehensive the given answers can be. In addition, there is no opportunity to ask for further explanation of a certain given answer when more detail is required. Therefore, a survey is limited in terms of flexibility since there is no space for the interviewer to anticipate. In contradiction to a survey, an in-depth interview gives the opportunity to conduct research through an open and detailed conversation. Another advantage of an in-depth interview is the possibility to easily anticipate on given answers and ask further in order to gain more knowledge about deeper motivations, ideas and thoughts. This type of interview creates the opportunity to carry out an open and flexible data collection by leaving space for detailed responses and asking follow-up questions. The possibility for respondents to describe complex and extensive anecdotes or narratives is therefore another highly interesting aspect of an in-depth interview approach. Finally, this research design focusses on a small selection of participants that represent a bigger group. By having a relatively small sample of respondents, there is more room and time to focus on the deeper motives, thoughts and anecdotes given by respondents.

Thus, the virtues of an in-depth interview include the deliberateness and extensiveness of observation that is required for a research on a complex social issue such as racism. Therefore, the interplay between both structure and agency is important because an in-depth understanding of both individual experiences and a larger social structure is needed in order to approach intergroup behaviour. Thus, semi-structured interviews in combination with an extensive theoretical framework will form the basis for the data



collection and analyses. The questions for the interviews will be grounded on the theoretical framework and simultaneously justified through the lens of this framework. This means that every structured topic in the interview-guide will be derived from the literature discussed in the theoretical framework. Not only is this essential for interpretation of given answers during the interviews, it is also crucial for analysing the obtained data in order to draw substantial conclusions.

## **3.2 Collection of data**

As argued in the previous chapter, data will be collected through in-depth interviews based on the theoretical framework in order to subsequently analyse given answers by respondents. A detailed literature-study is of significant importance to function as a foundation for the fieldwork. The knowledge gained through semi-structured data analysis would ultimately gain an understanding of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ways in which people of Chinese descent perceive racist actions and attitudes in the Netherlands.

### **3.2.1 Sampling**

In order to conduct in-depth interviews, eleven respondents will be recruited for this research. This number allows to carry out interviews that vary from 40 to 60 minutes and subsequently lead to detailed and understanding conversations. When after these eleven interviews no 'new' information is discovered, it can be concluded that scientific saturation is achieved (Boeije, 2016). I will approach the respondents for this research in my personal surroundings and they will remain anonymous for the sake of privacy. The respondents will be approached through a 'snowball' sampling strategy (Boeije, 2006), in which future respondents will be recruited from among acquaintances of the first respondents.

The following inclusion criteria are used during the recruitment of respondents:

- All respondents, male or female, are 18 years old or above. A maximum age is not specified.

- Focus on particularly Chinese immigrants living in the Netherlands, as well as Dutch citizens of Chinese descent with at least one parent born in China. This implies first generation Chinese immigrants as well as second generations. China in this case will be operationalised as the geographic area of “Greater China”, which encompasses mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.
- Respondents have sufficient knowledge of the Dutch and English language to prevent language barriers.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a bias with these inclusion criteria. I will explain and argue this bias in paragraph 3.2.3, in order to give a better understanding of the effects this has on data results.

### **3.2.2 Respondents**

Although the respondents will remain anonymous during this research it is necessary to provide demographic information in order to find out how representative they are for this research. The respondents are named with letters in alphabetical order based on the chronological order in which the interviews take place. Furthermore, the respondents are given a fake name in order to pay attention to the uniqueness of the interviewees. This also enables the opportunity of writing in a narrative structure and emphasizing on certain quotes in a humane way. The snowball sampling strategy starts with two people in my personal circles: a friend of my girlfriend (A.) and my Chinese language teacher (B.). These respondents subsequently asked persons in their circles if they wanted to participate in this research after which they are contacted via phone or e-mail.

Respondent	Age	Gender	Country of Birth
A (Alex)	23	F	NL
B (Becky)	43	F	C
C (Charlotte)	18	F	NL
D (Sophie)	28	F	NL
E (Lana)	Prefer not to say	F	C
F (James)	34	M	NL
G (Claire)	Prefer not to say	F	C
H (Stella)	29	F	NL
I (Harry)	35	M	NL
J (Monica)	Prefer not to say	F	C
K (David)	36	M	NL

Figure 8. Respondent demographics

### 3.2.3 Bias

The group of selected participants in this research comes with a possible bias that needs to be elaborated. Despite the concept of “Asianization” that is elaborated in the theoretical framework and refers to the mistaking of different Asian origins as Chinese, this research will solely focus on people of Chinese descent. An important reason is that this allows for the opportunity to explore the existing stereotypes and prejudices of Chinese culture, language and politics that might play an important role in the perceived acts of racism. In addition, politicians framing the pandemic as China’s fault and asserting blame to Chinese culture could possibly have more effects on someone of Chinese descent than on someone who has roots elsewhere. Finally, it would be too complex for this research to make a selection based on physical appearance to find out whether someone might be mistaken for Chinese when they are not. Although it needs to be stressed that COVID-19-related racism could also affect people from other East-Asian countries that are not included in this research.

Another important bias of this research is the fact that participants have sufficient Dutch and English skills and are generally well-educated. It needs to be acknowledged that people

without these language skills might be the target of worse racial discrimination given the bigger distance from Dutch society in terms of mobility and language. In addition, people that do not speak the language are possibly the target of a bigger association with foreignness. Finally, people employed in low-wage labour are underrepresented in this research. Similar to people without language skills, these people could be a more frequent target of racial discrimination given the understanding that racism is closely connected with education and socio-economic status, according to the theoretical framework of this research.

### **3.2.3 Procedure**

In this current pandemic there are a few limitations that affect the fieldwork of this research. This means that interviews can only be conducted via video calls and phone calls and are therefore slightly limited in terms of observation compared to in-person interviews. The audio of the interviews will be recorded for data analysis if permission is granted by the particular respondent. Founded by the theoretical framework of this research, an interview guide (see Appendix A) is developed with specific questions that are linked to the research objectives and research questions. Based on the specific answers that are given during the interviews, specific dimensions will be ascribed to certain recurring concepts that signify important and influential for the research objectives. Finally, relevant experiences, quotes and narratives will be noted in order to analyse the gathered information.

## **Chapter 4. Data results**

During the interviews, the subjective experiences and narratives of respondents are explored in order to measure the research objectives and provide answers for the research questions. As the social identity theory suggests, group identification plays an important role in the explanation of intergroup behaviour and intergroup prejudice. Therefore, it is important to zoom in on categorization and identification first, in order to get a better image of subjective experienced intergroup behaviour between individuals of Chinese descent living in the Netherlands. Subsequently, an analysis of perceived racism based on personal experiences will be elaborated in this chapter. Paragraph 4.2 focusses mainly on the general perceived racism in the life of respondents and paragraph 4.3 sheds light on the perceived racism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **4.1 Identity formation**

#### **4.1.1 Profile of respondents**

A total of eleven respondents were interviewed about their personal experiences. Ages varied from 18 years old to 43. All of the interviewed respondents have lived in the Netherlands for a significant amount of time, with a majority being born and raised in The Netherlands. All of the respondents have family living in China that they visit at times with an average of once every three years. In addition, all of the interviewed respondents speak a degree of basic Mandarin or Cantonese and master the Dutch language. Finally, all of the respondents also mention that they cultivated sufficient knowledge of the Chinese culture and affection for it as consequence of having been brought up in its food and habits during their upbringing by their parents. Four out of the eleven respondents were born in China and immigrated to The Netherlands later in their lives, whereas the other seven were born and raised in The Netherlands.

In order for further data analysis it is interesting to make a distinction between first generation respondents born in China and second generation respondents born in the Netherlands, because this contributes to the sense of belonging, as was elaborated in the study by Kartosen (2016). Important to mention is that the second generation respondents refer to their parents as first generation Chinese in explaining and elaborating on intergroup

behaviour. In order to construct an overview of the respondents' profile without neglecting to insure their anonymity, a graph is illustrated in Figure 7. This graph distinguishes the eleven different respondents by giving each of them a fake name and visualizing their place of birth and personal identification.

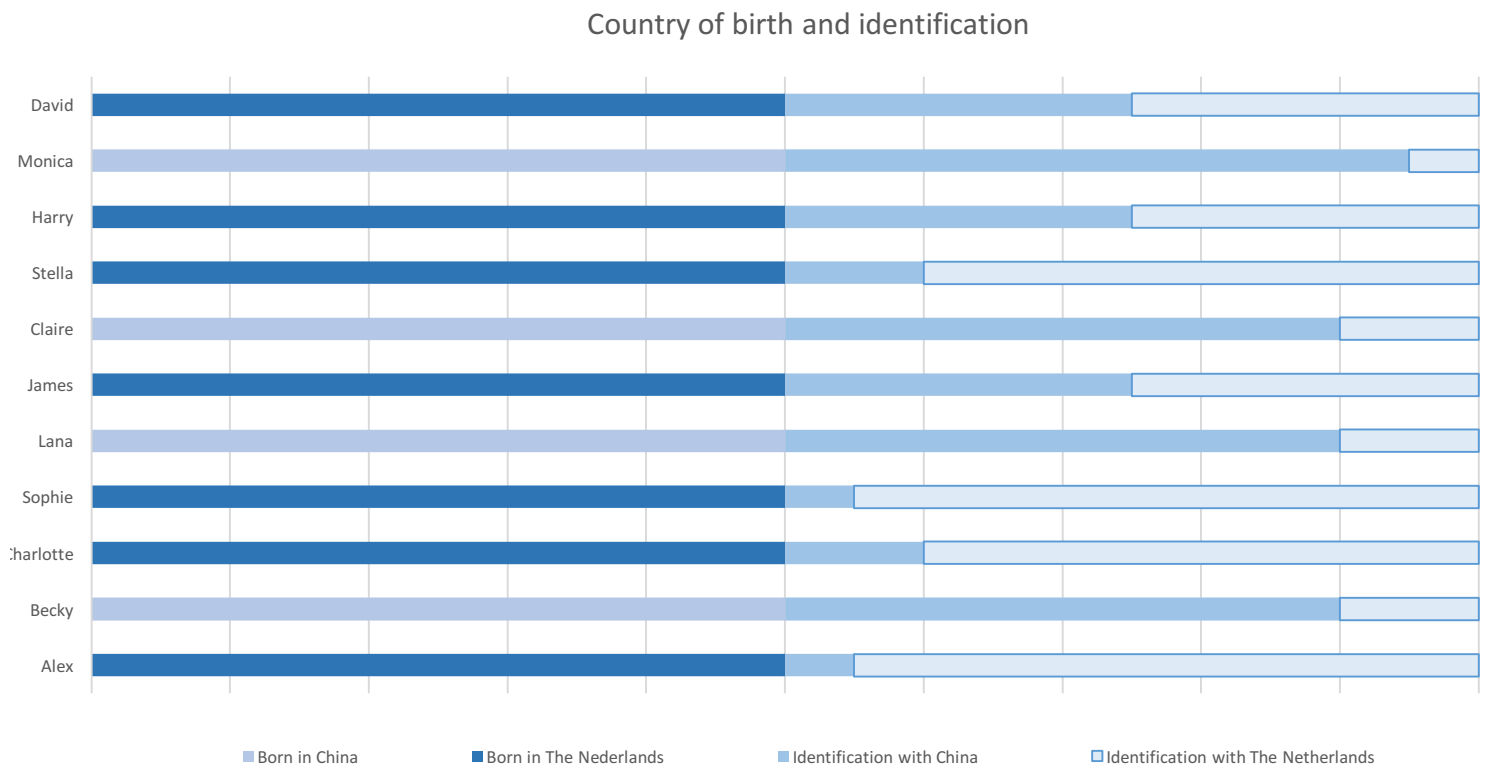


Figure 9. Country of birth and identification per respondent

#### 4.2.2 Group identification

In order to measure group identification in the interviews, a number of questions were asked about personal relation with a number of dimensions that signify identity formation. These dimensions consist of language, friends and family, culture and education. During the eleven interviews, all of the respondents explain to identify both with being Dutch and being Chinese. Harry explains: "I have always been shaped by both Dutch and Chinese culture, that's why I identify with both equally." Important to mention is that Alex, Charlotte, Stella and Sophie consider themselves more Dutch than Chinese based on identification with the illustrated dimensions. Lana, Monica, Becky and Claire identified more with being Chinese than Dutch. Notably, the respondents that identified more as being Dutch were often the respondents that were born in the Netherlands and consider themselves second

generation Chinese. A total of four respondents, Becky, Lana, Claire and Monica were born in China and have moved to the Netherlands in a later stadium of their lives. These respondents identify as first generation Chinese and still have their Chinese passports. The second generation respondents mentioned to have experienced a more Dutch oriented upbringing and education. According to the interviews, this identification is based on the fact that these respondents were born and raised in the Netherlands, have Dutch friends and study and work in the Netherlands. Alex elaborates: “I completely consider myself a Dutch person, except that my appearance is ‘slightly different’.

Interestingly, the second generation Chinese respondents explain that because of their upbringing and education in the Netherlands, they feel more comfortable with the Dutch or “Western” ways, norms and values, which they commonly understood as freedom of speech, direct communication and affection in terms of showing emotion. These respondents mention that they are more familiar to the Dutch ways, language, and social interaction than they are with Chinese. Charlotte explains: “Because my parents moved here for a better future, they are very focussed on my education and put a lot of pressure on it. I also feel that Dutch parents are more loose and open with the future of their children. That’s what I appreciate in Dutch culture.” Becky mentions that in Chinese culture, social interaction is politer and less direct. She explains: “In China it is more common to prevaricate a little bit in conversations in order to avoid being impolite, while in the Netherlands communication can be very direct and honest. In the Netherlands it is also common to show more affection compared to China, for example by hugging a person while greeting, or expressing love or gratitude”. As referred to in the theoretical framework, the ‘directness’ of the Dutch in this example implies the way in which Dutch people are thought to be comfortable with saying anything honest to anyone at any time. Commonly, this understanding could also derive into assumptions that the Dutch are verbally aggressive and argumentative. It is important to stress that there is no particular evidence for this stereotype according to a study by Labrie et al. (2020), although many people experience it that way, especially in comparison with a non-democratic country without freedom of speech.

Notably, the respondents who identify more as Chinese were born and raised in China and emigrated to The Netherlands in a later phase of their lives. Stella mentions the difference in social interaction and character between her first generation parents and her second generation friends and siblings. She elaborates: “My parents always told me to stay kind in order to prevent problems. I think that generation tried to stay humble because they felt blessed to be allowed to move here and work here. I notice that second generation Chinese are more willing to speak up, maybe because they were born and raised here and feel more Dutch and less ‘guest’”. According to several interviews, the praising of modesty is a cultural norm in China that is quite different to the direct communication in Dutch culture. Another factor that is pointed out by Harry is the absence of freedom of speech in China in comparison to The Netherlands, which could contribute to a more open and direct argument.

#### **4.2.3. Fitting in**

Very important to point out is that every interviewee mentioned to experience a degree of being ‘different’ in the identification with both Dutch and Chinese communities. As the studies by Wu (2019) and Kartosen (2016) point out, not being able to identify completely with either Dutch or Chinese has an effect on the sense of belonging in the Netherlands. As Kartosen (2016) elaborates, this also has an effect on the perceived ‘differentness’ when comparing oneself to non-Asian residents, and therefore affects the inclusion in Dutch society.

A number of second-generation respondents elaborate on the difficulties they experienced growing up in the Netherlands while having a migration background and different physical appearance. Charlotte explains: “Early in my youth I felt that I was not completely fitting in with the rest of my Dutch classmates because of my ‘different’ Chinese background. I was a little bit ashamed because I felt different than everybody else and I got the feeling of being left out in school. Later on I met people with the same struggles and started to appreciate my own roots more and more.” Alex, who was born in a smaller town in The Netherlands, shares a similar experience by mentioning that growing up in a town where they were not used to migrants or non-Dutch looking people, having a Chinese background was not always easy. She elaborates: “Growing up as the only Chinese family in a white neighbourhood in a



small village in The Netherlands felt a bit like people were not used to us". Both quotes are in line with the studies of Wu (2019) and Kartosen (2016), that give insights in the ways in which young Asian Dutch residents are generally not seen as "real" Dutch but as "others" based on the way they look. From an Asiancrit perspective, this resonates with the Sinophobic stereotype of the "perpetual foreigners" that, because of dissimilarities in phenotype, Dutch-Chinese residents are possibly not directly seen as Dutch. Especially relevant for this argument is that racism in the Netherlands is heavily dependent on phenotype, which explains the notion that to be 'Dutch' is to be "white" (Weiner, 2014, p.733). This also explains the possibility that a second-generation Chinese born in the Netherlands may only speak Dutch, act culturally Dutch, and be a Dutch citizen, to "white" Dutch, he or she could be considered non-Dutch (Weiner, 2014, p.733).

The difficulties of in-group and out-group identification with being of Chinese descent while living in The Netherlands work both ways. Becky, who was born in China and lived there for 30 years before moving to The Netherlands, mentions that Chinese friends and family think that she became more Dutch. She elaborates on the identification with either Dutch or Chinese by explaining: "It is difficult to say and depends on the situation. I feel both Chinese and Dutch but when I'm here (The Netherlands), people will say I am more Chinese. When I'm in China, people will say I became more Dutch." The feeling of not being able to identify completely with either China or The Netherlands is also being mentioned by Harry: "When people call me a Chinese, I realize again that I am not seen as a Dutchman. When people talk about China in the media, for example in the news, I don't feel appealed. But during King's Day in The Netherlands I don't have the feeling that there is really something to celebrate. I only feel addressed when people talk about 'Chinese Dutch'." This quote directly signifies the consequence of not being able to identify unconditionally with an ambiguous Dutch or Chinese cultural identity, which comprehends the explanation of a "double-life" (Wu, 2019; Kartosen, 2016). In addition, the fact that Harry is born and raised in the Netherlands but is called Chinese purely based on phenotype signifies the character of Dutch racism being heavily dependent on phenotype, which Weiner (2014) refers to when saying that to be considered Dutch is to be "white".

Claire who was born in China and has been living in the Netherlands for the past seven years mentions to identify with both groups, but feels more Chinese than Dutch. She mentions: “When I first moved to The Netherlands I felt very unwelcome because I couldn’t speak the language. I still feel unwelcome sometimes, but it helps to be able to speak the language.” As resulted from some of the interviews, some of the difficulties of identification and not fitting in led to feeling excluded and unwelcome. In order to get a better understanding of these feelings it is necessary to further investigate experienced intergroup behaviour and its effects.

## **4.2 Experienced racism**

The respondents were asked a number of questions on if and how they have experienced stereotypes and prejudices about their physical appearance and heritage. In addition, the respondents were asked about their experiences of perceived xenophobia and racism. Taking into account that these factors are heavily dependent upon subjectivity and social embeddedness, these results were analysed with help of the concepts explored in the theoretical framework. The majority of respondents mentioned to have experienced comments or actions of racist nature during their stay in the Netherlands. As was elaborated in the theoretical framework, systemic racism is a complex system of thought that is constructed by processes of categorization and identification which lead to stereotypes and prejudices. In addition, it is also heavily dependent on reproduced historical geographical imaginations and cultural associations that are shaped, normalized and mobilized by power systems. This paragraph will focus on the experienced racist and xenophobic attitudes before the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **4.2.1. Controversial jokes and stereotypes**

Ten out of eleven respondents describe that at some point in their lives they have received comments that can be placed in context with stereotypes and prejudices about Chinese people and Chinese culture, language and food. Most respondents mention that they think the overall motivation for making these comments is trying to be funny, although they are experienced as insulting and harmful. James explains: “What I do notice is that sometimes colleagues joke about the Chinese. It is without evil intentions, but you may wonder whether

or not it is on the verge of discrimination.” The problematic consequence of systemic racism and implicit bias is that people who make particular ‘jokes’ have a lack of awareness about this context. People assume that the jokes that are funny for them should be universally funny, or at least not harmful.

Five other respondents mention that they sometimes experience people on the streets that yell out the names of random Chinese dishes at them, or yell random words that are supposed to resemble Chinese language. This reveals the lack of concern that complete strangers have merely on the basis of someone's physical appearance, which is not only experienced offensive but also threatening. Claire elaborates: “I experienced a lot of stereotypes and prejudices about our food. People say that our food smells bad and that we are unhygienic, that was quite shocking to me in beginning”. The food stereotype is also experienced by other respondents. The phrase ‘Sambal bij?’ which stereotypes Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands was heard on the streets by several respondents. In line with food stereotypes and prejudices, Lana describes: “Often I get the question if I eat dog, of course I don’t. Because maybe some people in China do, it makes no sense to ask me that when I live here. China is a really big country.” While the nature of these comments is often excused as being a joke by the people making them, they still are perceived as insulting and unpleasant. Charlotte illustrates: “I think it’s very weird that people just yell ‘Babi Pangang’ or ‘Slit-Eye’ at me, it is not pleasant to hear”. With help of the theoretical framework, these stereotypes and prejudices are in line with the explanation of geographical imaginations that reflect strong notions of cultural ignorance and racism (Giesecking, 2017, p.6). The objectification and dehumanization of people with Chinese appearance by yelling out names of random Chinese dishes signify the offensive and harmful consequences that these stereotypes can have. Furthermore, these stereotypes can be placed in a context of historical and systemic racism in which non-European cultures and ethnicities are constructed as “lesser races”. The geographical imaginations that comprehend these stereotypes and prejudices lead to the association of unfamiliar foods and unhygienic habits with different cultures and ethnicities. Subsequently this leads to labelling an entire culture or ethnicity based on these stereotypes and prejudices. From a perspective of Asiancrit and its insights in Sinophobia, these racial stereotypes have been present for over 150 years and

have been normalized to an extent that the people who mobilize it are often not aware of its harmful nature.

Another example that was experienced and mentioned by five of respondents is the ways in which birthdays are celebrated in Dutch primary schools. The song 'Hankie Pankie Shanghai', often paired with slanting the eyes with both index-fingers, widely sung in primary schools and day-care is experienced as racist by respondents. Monica elaborates on the song: "They still sing it at my daughters' primary school. Maybe hundred years ago this was normal but now it should not be normal anymore, it makes my daughter unhappy." While there might be no wrong or evil intention by the young children singing that song, it does not mean that the song is not experienced as stigmatizing and insulting by people of Asian and Chinese descent. Charlotte argues: "This song should never have been normalized in Dutch culture, it is offensive to us". Lately, activists have spoken out about the negative aspects of the song and therefore created more awareness in media and online. Claire described this song as being in line with the 'Black Pete' discussion, which also concerns a tradition stuck in Dutch culture, in which people are often not aware how it can negatively affect specific ethnicities. She elaborates: "It is necessary for Dutch people to set aside their pride and reflect on their traditions in order to see that these are controversial and hurt peoples' feelings". James adds that good or bad intentions do not change the fact whether someone is insulted and experiences a comment as painful. He explains: "Thinking this way is often argued in the Netherlands with "I have no racist intentions, so it is not racist". This opinion is shared by Charlotte and Harry. James argues: "Apparently the fact that groups of people experience it as racist is suddenly not important and is also ignored or often dismissed with the reasoning 'people are offended too quickly and easily'."

The complex question whether a particular comment was born out of innocence or existing racism needs to be approached with help of critical race theory (CRT). Following the data results, it is clear that the 'innocent jokes' about people of Chinese descent are in some ways embedded in Dutch society considered the number of stereotypical comments that respondents experience. When analysing these quotes through the lens of the theoretical framework of this research, in particular CRT, all of the above mentioned examples can be understood as clear indicators of present systemic racism and implicit bias. The concepts of

innocence and unintentional racism are crucial in understanding the comments that are made without evil intentions but still reflect clear characteristics of racial discrimination, such as the continuous expression of prejudices and stereotypes. The insights provided in the theoretical framework by both Weiner (2014) and Wekker (2016) contribute to the understanding that racism is embedded in Dutch society despite the common belief that it is absent. This is a clear indication of the issues caused by systemic racism in the Netherlands, in which racial inequality is belittled, neglected or denied. The song “Hankie Pankie Shangai” is another important example of the normalization and reproduction of this discourse known as systemic racism, which is often signified by the argument that no harm is intended. By continuous reproduction in educational institutions such as primary schools, it is needless to say that children are not aware of its racist nature because it is something that was thought at school. Therefore, because systemic and structural racism are often learned in early childhoods, this shapes the only particular ‘reality’ that people see of different phenotypes, nationalities, languages and identities. Hence, people learn that such racist representations are common sense, and thus they are not likely to question and critique them. Furthermore, by growing up without being pointed to the understanding that a particular song or word is racist, it becomes harder to address this issue, which contributes to the maintenance of *White Innocence* that Wekker (2016) discusses. Therefore, the experienced incidents by the respondents are highly important in understanding the ways in which systemic racism against people from Chinese descent is shaped and cultivated in the Netherlands.

As was elaborated in the theoretical framework, an important principle of CRT is the understanding that racism is ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Another example of this ordinariness is the example given by Stella about the persisting stereotypes and jokes that are directed anonymously. Stella works in a Dutch Chinese restaurant and explains: “When I handle the phone in our restaurant I hear so many jokes and stereotypes, it doesn’t really affect me anymore. People switch the R and L for example or over-exaggerate pronunciation as if I do not speak Dutch.” The complexity of these stereotypes lies in the subjective perceptions of the distributing group and the receiving group. Through a lens of CRT, normalization of stereotypes and prejudices through frequent reproduction can eventually contribute to desensitization to these practices. This means that the person has gotten used

to the over-exposure of such comments to an extent that it developed as “normal”. This example uncovers one of the characteristics of systemic racism which can become normalized to the extent that its targets learn not to care, and might not perceive it as racist.

### **4.3 COVID-19-related racism**

As was pointed out in the literature discussion of this research, numerous authors state that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused racialized and discriminatory responses to fear, excessively affecting minority groups of Chinese and East-Asian descent (Devakumar et al., 2020; Tyler et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). Eight out of eleven respondents mention that they experienced racist attitudes during the COVID-19 period. Stella, James and Harry mention that they themselves did not experience any incidents but they each mentioned at least two incidents that were experienced by their close friends and family. Monica elaborates: “We have always lived happy in the Netherlands but since the virus something feels different, more tension.” Every respondent describes that in their opinion and experience the number of racist incidents has highly increased since the outbreak of COVID-19. The experienced racist attitudes vary from visible avoidance to aggressive behaviour such as verbal abuse.

#### **4.3.1. Avoidance**

As the theoretical framework has pointed out, the avoidance of ‘other’ people is an important aspect of implicit bias in personally mediated racism. The avoidance that occurred has been experienced by several respondents as an act influenced by ‘fear of something unknown’, as the virus. Sophie explains: “Especially in the beginning, when the virus was only in China, I noticed that people were sometimes extra distant in public transport, and were extra avoiding me on sidewalks.” The association of someone who looks Chinese with the foreign and strange virus from China and possibly the perception that this person has this virus is considered to be one of the motives for this behaviour according to the respondents. Charlotte had a similar experience: “During the corona period I noticed people kept distance from me in the train even when there was not any confirmed case in The Netherlands yet”. She also mentions that in the beginning it seemed that people thought every Chinese looking person was automatically carrier of COVID-19.

Harry was also influenced by the outbreak as was explained: “Just after it broke out in China, I became more aware of my “Chinese-ness” and feared that others would see me differently. That they would avoid me or something”. The increasing number of violent and hostile incidents directed at people from Chinese descent influenced these feelings of insecurity and safeness. Therefore, the media-coverage of COVID-19 related xenophobia incidents worldwide contributed to stress and insecurity when going outside. Monica also elaborates on these thoughts: “Before I went out I asked my friends whether it was safe to walk on the streets while being Chinese”. The months February and March, before the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in The Netherlands, was considered a difficult period by Monica because in this phase the virus was still often referred to as that strange unknown virus that broke out in China. She elaborates: “When the news was discussed on my daughters’ primary school, everyone looked at her strange because she is the only Chinese. While playing outside, other kids at school stayed far away from here because they were afraid of the virus.” As was implied in the literature review of this research, a decrease in visitors of Chinese restaurants was described by the studies of Vachuska (2020), Tyler et al. (2020) and IPSOS (2020). Charlotte and Stella, both working in Dutch-Chinese restaurants, describe that in their experience there were indeed less visitors at the restaurants in the beginning of the pandemic.

Most of the respondents noticed that the avoidance decreased in a later stadium of the pandemic. Although physical distancing is a part of normal life and everyday social interaction, excessive avoidance was experienced less by respondents as the pandemic developed. A possible reason could be the realization and sense that everybody could be the carrier of COVID-19 when the number of contaminated people increased. Because the virus changed from the ‘foreign’ disease to a more comprehensible virus that occurred closer to home and could infect basically anyone. However, in order to get a complete understanding of COVID-19-related racism, an important distinction needs to be made between nonverbal acts of avoidance and comments and actions of hostile nature.

#### **4.3.2 Hostility**

It is crucial to highlight that there is an important difference in implicit bias such as avoidance or distancing and explicit bias through violence and insults. Whereas implicit bias

can include unintentional racist attitudes or events, explicit bias is directly harmful and based on wrong intentions. The social identity theory gives insights in intergroup comparison and negatively evaluating other groups. In this context, negative stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination can be understood as downgrading means in order to enhance self-esteem. Individuals and groups tend to blame their own feelings of aggression, hostility and frustration on a group of which they think is directly or indirectly responsible. Therefore, the narratives and experiences that were elaborated by the respondents can be placed in a wider context of intergroup comparison and scapegoating. As these theories suggest, the negative social and economic consequences of the pandemic cause levels of frustration to abreact on minority groups in order to enhance self-esteem. However, CRT helps to explain that this phenomenon is inseparable from its mobilization in power systems and therefore is inseparable from protracted systemic racism against people of Asian descent. Therefore, the COVID-19-related racism needs to be approached as a sophisticated system of thought that is mobilized for particular purposes such as racist or nationalist ideologies. It needs thus to be stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic did not directly build Sinophobia and racism, but merely amplified and triggered already existing racism and brought it more to the surface.

Alex experienced an unpleasant incident in the train that signified an aggressive act of racism. She explains that in the early stages of the virus-outbreak, after seeing some incidents in the news she felt lucky that nothing happened but unfortunately shortly after, something occurred. Alex: "I was sitting in a train and three boys entered the same wagon. Suddenly one of them looked at me and said: 'Oh no, we are all going to die', clearly targeting me and coronavirus." In a hostile incident like this it is difficult to understand the motive of such behaviour. There is no flow of logic or reasoning that substantiate these actions other than racism, ignorance and perhaps nationalist ideologies. A similar incident happened to Claire in April. She narrates: "I wear a face mask on the street when it's too crowded, just for safety. One day I heard people say: 'Look at her, she must be very afraid of death'... Whenever I go out the chance is high that I hear something like that." Especially in the beginning of the pandemic, wearing a face mask has led to a lot of racist comments in the experience of Claire. This can be substantiated by the research of Vachuska (2020) and He et al. (2020) in which is described that an important component of mobilized racism is that, prior to the pandemic, face mask-wearing implied sickness or threat in the West. In



contrast, wearing a facemask has been common in the daily life of many Eastern Asian countries to an extent that it has even been viewed as a fashion statement (He et al., 2020). According to the authors, this cultural difference may have interacted to contribute to the increased violent incidents. Stella also elaborates on an aggressive attack in her neighbourhood, in which an individual of Chinese descent was attacked on the street for wearing a face mask.

Incidents like these do not only happen in public places or transport but also expand on the internet. Charlotte mentions the role of social media as a platform for aggressive racist comments. On the app 'Snapchat', she received a number of messages from friends that experienced several racist comments of explicit bias. Charlotte also experienced hostile incident, cited: "One time during corona I received a message on Instagram from someone I did not know at all which said: Go back to your own country, go tell your people that they must not eat bats." In line with the earlier discussed prejudices and stereotypes about Chinese food before the pandemic is the imaginative association that all Chinese people eat bats and are therefore directly responsible for the virus outbreak. This idea that the virus outbreak was caused by consumption of wild animals such as bats, while not even scientifically confirmed, is a recurring subject in the experience of Lana: "Sometimes when I go for a run outside, people yell 'why did you have to eat bats?' as if every Chinese person is the same".

Similar as in the previous paragraph, these bold stereotypes and comments can be understood with help of the literature on Derek Gregory's (1994) geographical imaginations and cultural ignorance (Giesecking, 2017, p.6). The notion that people in China eat bats and subsequently associating this with every Chinese immigrant in the Netherlands signifies the cultural ignorance that is inseparable from the concept of racism. These quotes can also be placed in a context of historic Sinophobic discourse in which Chinese communities are stigmatized as the perpetual foreigners and strangers. Through a lens of Orientalism, it can be understood that the negative exaggeration of perceived differences between Western or Dutch and Chinese culture makes use of practices such as dehumanization that defines the latter as native and primitive. Thus, with help of the theoretical framework and CRT it is important to understand that both the violent and hostile incidents of explicit bias and the

“innocent” jokes of implicit bias result from the same problematic cultural perceptions of race. In addition, it can be understood that the mobilization and normalization of these stereotypes and prejudices contribute to maintenance of Sinophobic discourse in Dutch society and the presence of systemic racism.

As described in the introduction of this research, food related conceptions in the form of stereotypes, prejudices and cultural ignorance were sung in the carnival song by Lex Gaarthuis that was released in the beginning of February. Claire explains how she experienced the song as very discriminative and hatred-sowing. The fact that the Dutch Public Prosecutor’s Office concluded after investigation that it was a satirical text that was not unnecessarily offensive reflects the assumption of CRT that systemic racism is embedded into law and legislation and therefore very difficult to address. James shares a similar thought and elaborates: “The creator of the song says he is joking and that he himself has no racist intentions (in my experience that song was quite racist). And if you make a comment on this as Chinese, then you’re suddenly easily hurt”. When NOS covered an item about racism against Chinese and East-Asian people as a result of the Lex Gaarthuis song, Charlotte says: “I scrolled through the comments and I saw a lot of people saying: It’s their own fault, they shouldn’t eat bats”. The backlash of the song resulting in a formal apology by the author and a lawsuit is seen as a positive development by the respondents since it caused a lot of awareness about racism and xenophobia against Dutch-Chinese citizens. The event was seen by respondents as a driving force in the increasing media attention about already existing racism against people of Chinese and East-Asian descent living in the Netherlands. Increasing publicity about racism during COVID-19 has contributed to a larger platform for Dutch-Chinese individuals and groups to form a movement against racism.

#### **4.3.3 Speaking up**

Notable is that several second-generation respondents mention that their generation is more likely to speak up about racist comments. Charlotte explains: “It’s good that we stand up for ourselves now. Our parents felt more like they were visitors in someone else’s’ country so they preferred to stay quiet”. Several respondents mention that since the outbreak of the coronavirus an increase of social media activism pages and initiatives developed in which people of Chinese or East-Asian descent shared their experiences. James

mentions the existence of a Facebook group where 3.6 thousand people of Chinese and East-Asian descent in The Netherlands share their personal experiences with racism and xenophobia and provide help and support for each other. The online group called “Asian Raisins<sup>6</sup>”, functions as a safe hotline for discrimination and racism against Asians in the Netherlands and provides counter narratives against the normalization of discrimination and racism towards Asians. In the group several petitions are signed, including one against Lex Gaarhuis and one against the ‘Hankie Pankie Shanghai’ song. About the latter, Monica mentions: “We organised a meeting with city hall and the school to prevent the song from being sung in my daughter’s primary school.” The song already received a lot of criticism last year before the outbreak of COVID-19, but COVID-19-related incidents increased the aversion to it. In this respect, the pandemic triggered the urgent need to combat systemic racism and Sinophobia by recognizing, naming, and addressing it.

Claire explains: “I’ve never seen Chinese people in The Netherlands so united standing up against one thing, I’m happy to see that”. This argument is supported by Charlotte and Stella, who argue that the second generation is more willing to stand up for themselves compared to their parents of the first generation. The praising of modesty in Chinese culture and the open and direct communication in The Netherlands can be understood as influential factors in this development according to the interviews. However, first generation respondents also mention that they are more likely to take action now that racist incidents seem to be increasing. Monica mentions: “I teach my daughter in primary school to speak up or call the teacher when people call her names because she is Chinese.” Harry and Charlotte elaborate on the second generations’ appreciation for the openness of communication and freedom of speech in The Netherlands. They both explain that its easier for the second generation to speak up about incidents because they are more used to the direct communication. Other important factors in the willingness to speak up are the current time-frame and the increasing number of incidents that lead to a feeling of “enough is enough”. Another important factor that plays a role according to the respondents is that individuals

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<sup>6</sup> “Asian don’t Raisin”: stereotype to describe the ‘youthful appearance’ of older people of Asian descent. Often paired with the stereotype “black don’t crack”. In this case purposely used to address stereotyping and prejudices against people of Asian descent in the Netherlands.

feel more confident to speak up when more individuals are willing to do so. Social media groups can therefore help in the sense to give individuals the reassurance that they are not alone. As was discussed in the societal relevance of this research, worldwide protests of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement signify the importance to stand up against racial discrimination. Lana mentions: "Now everywhere you see Black Lives Matter. It's a good thing but Asian Lives don't matter?" However, the BLM movement is seen as highly valuable by respondents because it contributes to the recognition and addressing of systemic racism. In addition, it creates awareness and signifies the importance of speaking up to racism that is so embedded in societies that its presence is often not recognized and understood.

## **4.4 Politics and media**

### **4.4.1 Political agendas**

The roles of media and politics in the expression of racist attitudes during the pandemic is extensively discussed during the interviews. According to the literature by Kenda & Krekó (2019) and Idahosa & Vincent (2014), politicians can possibly justify systems of exclusion through a variety of discourses used to portray the 'the other'. Through a lens of the theoretical framework, the blame rhetoric by repeatedly associating the virus with China as being done by Trump and Bolsonaro, could influence the development of anti-Chinese attitudes. The literature of He et al. (2020) and Vachuska (2020) confirm this idea by suggesting that Trump's politics of naming could have directly influenced the increase of anti-Chinese sentiment in the US. By using a nationalist frame like a cartopolitical imagination (Bueno Lacy & van Houtum, 2019), Trump repeatedly evokes the notion that everything associated with China is undesirable. Therefore, by continuously framing China as a threat, he uses historically present systemic racism as a political and economic management strategy.

When applying these theories to the situation in The Netherlands, narratives by the respondents underline these suggestions. Harry explains: "By calling it 'the Chinese virus', Trump publicly indirectly blames the Chinese for the virus... People who are ignorant or young people can get the wrong idea and develop hatred for the Chinese." According to both Harry and David, these events had an influence on their consciousness of being Chinese

and caused a slight feeling of insecurity. However, there is a large difference between Trump's naming of politics and the way the Dutch government handled the communication around COVID-19. Harry underlines this by describing: "I think the Dutch government is doing that very well. I have not heard anything negative about China or Chinese from the Dutch government". Other respondents also formulated the opinion that the Dutch government handled the communication around COVID-19 well, especially compared to examples from other countries. In addition, as resulted from the theoretical framework, Sinophobia in Dutch political agendas has been less prominent compared to for example the US. Far-right political agendas mainly frame immigration threats as caused by minority groups from the Middle-East, such as refugees that are repeatedly marginalized by parties like PVV and FVD. The immigrants from China and the far-east are in this respect less prominent part of populist agendas. However, the tenets of CRT and systemic racism point out that protracted racism is imbedded into institutions of custom, practice, and law. Therefore, the reproduction of racial inequality in political agendas can be understood as significant.

#### **4.4.2 Media**

As was argued in the theoretical framework, an extensive review of Dutch and Belgian media coverage about Chinese events pointed out that most reports were negatively framed (Lams, 2016). Whereas the respondents are generally positive about the way Dutch politics communicated about China during the COVID-19 pandemic, room for improvement is particularly perceived for the media. As was explained in the theoretical framework, Interestingly, the respondents who scored better on identification dimensions with China and Chinese culture spoke more negatively about the Dutch media coverage of China related subjects and events. These respondents opine that media contribute to the formation of xenophobic behaviour against people of Chinese descent because of the "Western perspective" in the media coverage, and therefore the lack of an objective scope. Lana, James and Claire mention the framing of China related events in the Dutch media and elaborate that Dutch media construct a negative image of China and exaggerate on the negative things that are going on. Lana argues: "Whenever China is in the news, there is always a negative load."

James elaborates with an anecdote: “I had been in Hong Kong myself in September last year and had learned a lot about the demonstrations that were going on at the time. What struck me is that what I saw and heard there was completely different from what was reported here in the media. In the Netherlands, China is always in the news as the “bad guys”, while the situation is completely different.

James explains that from his perspective the situation there was much more nuanced, and sometimes even completely different from what was reported here. Harry elaborates on the media coverage in which the Chinese measures to control the virus in its initial stages was criticized. In this case, a recent news article was titled ‘China completes Wuhan test operation, but does not count 300 infections’ (NU.nl, 2020).” James elaborates on this title: “Purely based on the title, it is strongly implied (in my experience) that China is cheating a bit with the numbers, .... such a message as this can still give it a negative twist.” Later, James elaborates: “Because the media has a certain preference for giving China's reporting a more negative colouring, the media certainly contributes to xenophobia.” The media coverage of racist incidents related to COVID-19 is however seen as a positive development by all the respondents. Charlotte explains: “It’s good that they pay attention to it and create more awareness, but for it to have an effect I think there needs to be a longer time-frame”. From a perspective of CRT, addressing personally mediated racism is an important strategy to combat of such practices (Jones, 2000, p.1213). Hence, the media fulfils an important role by raising awareness and paying attention to these particular acts of racism, which subsequently makes it more easy for people to speak up and combat this form of racism.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

Now that the research results are analysed and discussed, it is time to answer the main research question: *“How does racism following the COVID-19 pandemic affect people of Chinese descent living in The Netherlands”* Before a solid and complete answer can be given it is necessary to answer the sub-questions first.

### 5.1.1 Sub-question 1

#### *Do Dutch residents of Chinese descent experience racism?*

From the data results grounded by the theoretical framework of this research can be concluded that the respondents do experience racism in the Netherlands. A majority of 92% of the interviewees described to have encountered incidents that can be understood as racism through a lens of critical race theory. Most of these incidents were experienced in the form of stereotypes and prejudices that include negative imaginations and associations of Chinese language, culture and food. Theories on geographical imaginations, racism and Sinophobia give important insights in the construction of these imaginations, and provide the understanding that these can be placed in a wide historical context of systemic racism. In addition, most of these incidents involved ‘jokes’ and verbal abuse in the form of categorisations based on physical and cultural differences. Thus, an important finding of the fieldwork is that the experienced racist incidents are in line with the global and historical Sinophobic discourses that portray Chinese culture as different, foreign and subordinate in relation to the West.

The degree to which the experienced incidents are encountered by the interviewees as hostile or innocent can be explained with implicit and explicit bias as elaborated by critical race theory. Whereas some respondents considered particular harmful comments as being intended as jokes, the perpetrators of these jokes often did not seem aware of its offensiveness. Another recurrent example of this implicit bias is the way in which racial differences were maintained in primary schools by particular songs and stereotypes. According to the respondents, these stereotypical songs were experienced as harmful, disrespectful and lead to perceptions of not belonging and exclusion. This signifies the

presence of systemic racism in the Netherlands, in which particular cultural imaginations about Chinese immigrants have been normalized to an extent that they are perceived as innocent by the individuals and institutions that mobilize it.

### **5.1.2 Sub-question 2**

***What is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on racism perceived by people of Chinese descent?***

During the interviews, answers given by the respondents made clear that since the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of perceived racist acts and attitudes had significantly increased. This can be substantiated by the literature study of the theoretical framework, in which was elaborated that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of racist incidents. A majority of eight out of eleven respondents mentioned that they had encountered one or more incidents since the outbreak of the virus. The other three respondents did not experience any incidents but they each mentioned at least two incidents that were experienced by their close friends and family. Every respondent described that in their surroundings, the number of perceived racist incidents had significantly increased since the start of the pandemic. The experienced racist attitudes vary from visible avoidance to aggressive behaviour such as verbal abuse and even violence.

An important note is the increase in the aggressiveness of the perceived racism in the experience of the respondents. Through a lens of critical race theory, the data results illustrated many examples of implicit bias and systemic racism that occurred before the pandemic. However, the COVID-19-related racism has been experienced as much more aggressive and hateful by the respondents and their surroundings. Therefore, the racism that occurred during the pandemic more often concerned explicit bias and conscious racism. Similar to the protracted systemic racism before the pandemic, the nature of comments often relied on stereotypes and prejudices based on imaginations and associations of differences in food, language and culture. The preliminary imagination and association of the virus with wet-food markets and consumption of exotic animals was subject of a number of comments targeting people of Chinese and East-Asian descent worldwide, as was well as the interviewees of this research.



### 5.1.3 Sub-question 3

#### ***How do people of Chinese descent perceive the communication about COVID-19 in politics and media?***

In the theoretical framework was discussed that through history, political strategies shaped by systemic racism and nationalism maintained and strengthened racialized discourse on institutional and individual levels. Literature on Sinophobia provided insights in the roles of political agendas in the US, where normalized and socially accepted racism since the Chinese Exclusion Act started a sociocultural conflict which is still relevant today. In addition, in the literature discussion was described that President Donald Trump, who has purposely and repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” has helped normalize anti-Chinese xenophobia, triggering public anxiety and racist attacks by using a cartopolitical imagination. During the in-depth interviews, several respondents made clear that the political blame rhetoric of China as the fault and cause of the pandemic influenced their consciousness about their Chinese physical appearance, and therefore contributed to feelings of insecurity when going outside. However, important to point out is that there is a large difference between perceived political agendas in the US and the Netherlands. The majority of the respondents generally had positive views on the way the Dutch government handled the communication about COVID-19, as they avoided naming and blaming of China. Therefore, there are little racist attitudes experienced in political communication by the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the theoretical framework was elaborated that most media in the US and Western-Europe such as the Netherlands have a predominant negative frame when reporting about China-related news. This was confirmed by the views of several interviewees, who opinionated that often negative aspects of Chinese covered events are exaggerated. Five out of the twelve respondents critiqued that the media often contributes to the negative framing of Chinese events by not being entirely objective. Media coverage of certain events was therefore considered to contribute to the strengthening of xenophobia by framing China as ‘the bad guy’. However, out of the fieldwork also resulted that a vast majority of respondents consider that the Dutch media provided helpful and vital contributions to the combat of COVID-19-related racism. From the view of the respondents, giving special

attention to the subject in the national news contributed to the public's recognition and understanding of the seriousness of the problem.

#### **5.1.4 Main research question**

***“How does racism following the COVID-19 pandemic affect people of Chinese descent living in The Netherlands”***

After answering the three sub-questions can be concluded that COVID-19-related racism is shaped by protracted systemic racism in the Netherlands. Furthermore, based on the theoretical framework and fieldwork of this research can be explained that the outbreak of the virus promoted and amplified the systemic racism, and increased the hostility of its character. The obtained data of this research confirms that people of Chinese descent living in The Netherlands experience an increased number of racist expressions, acts and attitudes directed toward them since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Another finding that results from the fieldwork is that in the beginning of this pandemic a majority of respondents felt more conscious and worried about their heritage and physical appearance when going outside. From this can be concluded that the racist expressions that arose during the pandemic have a significant impact on the sense of belonging by people of Chinese descent living in the Netherlands.

As was elaborated in the theoretical framework, from a CRT approach it is highly important to attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice. An important finding of this research is the experienced rise of united resistance against the Sinophobia and racism. As was elaborated in the data results, increasing experienced racist attitudes triggered a movement of speaking up against the experienced racial discrimination and xenophobia. The increasing need for awareness about racial discrimination goes hand in hand with the growing Black Lives Matter protests around the world. As evidence from the fieldwork shows, respondents believe it is important to increase awareness about racism, share counter-narratives and debunk ignorance in the combat of the “hate virus”. Therefore, naming and recognizing all acts of racism is crucial in order to limit its problematic consequences. Finally, paying special attention to these practices is of crucial importance to

combat the systemic racism that, as this research has pointed out, is unfortunately still very present in the Netherlands.

## 5.2 Recommendations for praxis

Following the answers on the research questions, several recommendations can be made for future research on racism during a pandemic. Firstly, a crucial recommendation following the research is the recognition, addressing and future research of Sinophobia and racism in general. Of course, this is highly complex since this comprehends a deep-rooted system of thought that is embedded in power systems and shaped by particular ideologies. Therefore, future research could focus on identifying and documenting racism embedded in everyday life by researching textbooks, television shows, news articles, communication services etcetera. This contributes to a better understanding of how implicit bias and systemic racism are present in a particular society. In addition, identifying characteristics of systemic racism and implicit bias might contribute to bringing to light racist discourse that is strongly interconnected with perceptions of national and cultural identity. Thus, this can contribute to the awareness by people that are generally unaware of their thoughts and actions caused by implicit bias and therefore denying the issue that racism is present. From a perspective of critical race theory, it is therefore highly necessary to name and recognize all acts of racism in order to counter it.

Another recommendation is to recognize the influential roles of politicians and media in the communication around the outbreak of a new disease. Avoiding particular terminology and focussing on correct language based on accurate scientific data and official health advice could therefore possibly play an important role in the prevention of racism. Ignorance about the origin and nature of the virus, and mistakenly associating it with people of Chinese descent has pointed out to be an important factor in racist attitudes during the pandemic. Therefore, it is important to pay special attention to the avoidance of fake news and the prevention of ignorance. Tackling myths and stereotypes are important processes that can help to prevent stigmas about particular groups during a pandemic. An important way of doing so is to stimulate the communication of factual knowledge and limit the spread of insufficient knowledge. Therefore, social media with its large influence and reach can play an important role in correcting false information, misconceptions, rumours and stimulating the share of sufficient knowledge and sympathetic narratives.

### 5.3 Critical reflection

This master-thesis was carried out in order to gain insights in racism against people of Chinese descent in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter will critically reflect on this research and discuss the limitations that occurred during the process and the results.

An important bias of this research is the question whether the sample of the interviewees is representative enough in order for conclusions to be generalized. As was discussed during the methodology chapter, this research is limited in answering how racism is affecting other Asian ethnicities despite the understanding that these people are often targeted as well. In addition, this research merely focussed on respondents with sufficient English language skills and education. It needs to be stressed that there is a bias by not being able to include the people without language skills and high education, namely because these people might be possible targets of worse racism. This can be understood by the in the theoretical framework elaborated explanation that perceptions of race are also shaped by differences in class and socio-economic status. An important question that remains is how racism is affecting the people most marginalized in Dutch society, which leaves scope for more future research. In addition, future research would also benefit from including a more heterogeneous research group with not only people of Chinese descent, in order to provide more insights in the concept of “Asianization”.

Another question that remains unanswered is how racism is mobilized from the perspective of the perpetrator. It is therefore important to point out that one of the limitations of this research is that it cannot contribute to the understanding of racism in the perspective of the one mobilizing it and thus only explains the *perceived* racism. Providing a deeper understanding of racist behaviour and attitudes remains too complex for a research of this level. In addition, as pointed out by critical race theory, an important characteristic of systemic racism and implicit bias is that the people are often not conscious about mobilizing unintentional racism, and are therefore likely to deny or defend it. Thus, finding respondents that are conscious about having racist attitudes and are willing to explain their motives and behaviour is unfortunately a really difficult task and of questionable use, keeping in mind that implicit bias is regarded as common-sense.

Furthermore, it is important to reflect on the subjectivity challenges of this research. Despite of the explained bias, I believe that eleven interviews provided saturation in order to generalize results into a sufficient conclusion for this research question. However, it is important to discuss that the interviews are strongly dependent on the subjective perception of the respondent, and the degree of meaning they assign to a specific event or incident. One specific event could be perceived or experienced as very negative by one respondent whereas another respondent does not really care about the same exact event. This aspect influenced certain generalizations and conclusions to be more difficult to make during the analysis, and could therefore be a limiting factor. An important recommendation for future research is therefore to focus explicitly on what respondents define as racism in order to get more grip on different perceptions and their influence on the research. Using a larger sample would therefore likely contribute to a more reliable conclusion.

Finally, the personal experiences of the interviewees needed to be handled with respect and carefulness that required a style of interviewing that I was not yet very experienced in and therefore took some extra preparation. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, I did not want to fuel negative emotions of the respondents while at the same time I wanted to find out more about these negative attitudes and acts that had been directed at the respondents. This is an issue that requires special attention during future research, since it is an important factor in conducting research on such a complex and wide issue as racism. A wide spectrum that varies from 'innocent' jokes to violent attacks with terrible consequences, signify the carefulness and complexity that is required for future research.

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