



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

**Examining employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant
sector within the UK context**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield
Faculty of Social Science
Management School

December 2017

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

Abstract

Studies of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms have long been focused on the South Asian and Black communities. While the richness of these accounts has contributed much to our understanding of employment relations in small firms both relating to members of minority communities and more widely, there remains scope for engaging with a greater diversity of minority ethnic communities in the UK context. Specifically, there has not been any extensive research focusing on the ethnic Chinese community. The PhD thesis aims to examine employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context to address the current research gap.

The research is located within a rich ethnographic tradition. The fieldwork for the current study consisted of participant observation of restaurant work over a period of seven months spent in two ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. The researcher worked as a full-time front area waiter and a full-time kitchen assistant. The field work enabled the researcher to develop a nuanced understanding of workplace behaviours. By focusing on four different aspects – the product market, the labour market, multi-cultural workforces and the informality-ethnicity interaction, this research thoroughly demonstrates how shop-floor behaviours and employment relations in the two case study firms are influenced by a variety of factors.

This research contributes to existing knowledge in three respects. Empirically, it reveals the nature of workplace relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context, a hitherto under-explored area. This adds new knowledge to the study of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms. Theoretically, it draws out the concept of ‘ethnic twist’, which denotes the conflict and resistance between different group members from the same ethnicity, revealing the heterogeneity of people from the same ethnic origins. Methodologically, the research demonstrates the continued importance of the ethnographic approach in studying workplace relations.

Key words: employment relations, ethnic Chinese, small firms

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the guidance of my supervisors, Dr Robert Wapshott and Professor Jason Heyes. I have been extremely grateful for their incomparable help over the past four years. I would also like to thank all the participants in the two case study firms. Finally, I thank my family for their support.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review	7
2.1 Employment relations in small firms	7
2.1.1 ‘Small is beautiful’ versus ‘bleak house’	7
2.1.2 The impacts from external environments	8
2.1.3 The impacts from internal environments	13
2.1.4 Developing a framework – integrated analysis	20
2.1.5 Influences from laws and regulations	24
2.1.6 Summary	26
2.2 Employment relations in ethnic minority small firms	27
2.2.1 The restaurant sector and the ethnic minority restaurant sector under the UK economy	28
2.2.2 Employment relations in ethnic minority businesses in the restaurant sector	30
2.2.3 Integration of informality and ethnicity	34
2.2.4 Research trend in studying employment relations in ethnic minority small firms	36
2.3 Gaps and rationale	38
2.3.1 The Chinese diaspora in the UK	38
2.3.2 Characteristics of ethnic Chinese small firms in the UK context	39
2.3.3 Gaps and rationales	43
2.3.4 Analytical framework for the research	44
Chapter 3 Methodology	51
3.1 The research aim, questions and objectives	52
3.2 Research methodology	54
3.2.1 Empirical tradition of workplace studies	54
3.2.2 Ethnography as the approach	56
3.2.3 Research justification	66
3.3 Gaining and sustaining access	68
3.3.1 Gaining initial access	68
3.3.2 Maintaining and sustaining access	70
3.4 Introducing the firms	72
3.5 Data collection	76
3.5.1 The concept of template analysis	76

3.5.2 Data collection techniques	81
3.5.3 Note-taking.....	84
3.6 Coding and data analysis	85
3.7 Summary	87
Chapter 4 Influences from the product market upon owner-managers' choices and employment relations	89
4.1 The increase of Chinese restaurants in Sheffield.....	90
4.1.1 The demand side -- the continuous increase of Chinese students	90
4.1.2 The supply side -- savings and entrepreneurial motivation from chefs.....	91
4.2 The unstable environment	95
4.2.1 The nature of demand fluctuation	95
4.2.2 Owner-managers' choices under the unstable product environment and implications to employment relations	99
4.3 Competition, market position and owner-managers' strategies	106
4.3.1 The level of competition	106
4.3.2 Pricing strategies	108
4.3.3 Retaining customers	110
4.3.4 Moving upward.....	112
4.4 Geographic locations and the product market	113
4.4.1 The Location A versus Location B.....	113
4.4.2 Adaptive choices from owner-managers under the constraints of locations.....	115
4.5 Summary	116
Chapter 5 Influences from the labour market upon owner-managers' choices and employment relations	121
5.1 Labour supply shortage for kitchen staff and its implications.....	122
5.2 Kitchen assistants' labour market positions and their negotiation power	125
5.3 Chefs' labour market positions and their negotiation power.....	129
5.4 Front area staff's labour market positions and their negotiating power	134
5.5 Summary	143
Chapter 6 Multi-cultural workforces	147
6.1 Communication problems.....	148
6.2 Mutual adjustment and intersubjectivity.....	151
6.2.1 From guessing to adaptation	151
6.2.2 Cultural clash.....	155

6.3 The difference of owners' trust towards members in different groups.....	158
6.4 Inter-group conflicts.....	162
6.5 Summary	174
Chapter 7 Informality and Ethnicity.....	177
7.1 Organising informality.....	179
7.1.1 Informality in the two firms	179
7.1.2 Dynamics of informality and negotiated order	182
7.1.3 Scope for cheating and fiddles.....	186
7.1.4 The workplace culture	191
7.2 Regulatory informality.....	202
7.2.1 The NMW breach	202
7.2.2 Working time breach	210
7.2.3 Health regulation breach	211
7.2.4 The employment of alleged illegal workers.....	214
7.3 Summary	219
Chapter 8 Discussion.....	223
8.1 Reviewing research questions and objectives	223
8.2 Contributions	234
8.2.1 Empirical contributions	234
8.2.2 Theoretical contributions.....	242
8.2.3 Methodological contributions.....	245
Chapter 9 Conclusion.....	249
References	253
Appendices	267
A1. Information Sheet for employers	267
A2. Information Sheet for employees	271
A3. Participant Consent Form	274

List of Tables

Table 1 Rainnie's argument of external forces in determining the employment relations in small firms	10
Table 2 The recent increase of Chinese student numbers.....	91
Table 3 The ability of language understanding	148
Table 4 The ability of language speaking	149
Table 5 Hourly wage each type of worker earned in the two firms	202

List of Figures

Figure 1 Goss's model of employment relations	12
Figure 2 Open system framework.....	21
Figure 3 The process of strategic choices.	23
Figure 4 The analytical framework for this research	47
Figure 5 Field roles for researchers	60
Figure 6 The process of maintaining access in Firm D	70
Figure 7 The process of maintaining access in Firm U	72
Figure 8 The demand fluctuation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector	96
Figure 9 Analytical framework suggested for future research	244

Chapter 1 Introduction

Since the initial polarised ‘small is beautiful’ versus ‘bleak house’ debate, research into employment relations in small firms has advanced to recognise that relations between owner-managers and workers are complex and contested, rather than size-determined. Employment relations are influenced by both external factors such as the product market (Rainnie, 1989; Kinnie et al., 1999), labour market (Goss, 1991b; Scase, 2005), sectors (Curran and Stanworth, 1979; Arrowsmith et al., 2003) and regulations (Carter et al., 2009; Atkinson et al., 2016), and internal factors such as HRM practices (Bacon and Hoque, 2005; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2009), informality (Marlow, 2002; Edwards and Ram, 2010), negotiated order (Ram, 1994; Moule, 1998), mutual dependence (Nadin and Cassell, 2007; Wapshott and Mallett, 2013) and resources (Ram et al., 2000; Edwards and Ram, 2006).

Having realised the influence from both external and internal factors, an integrated approach to analyse employment relations in small firms has been developed (Harney and Dundon, 2006; Edwards et al., 2006). The core argument of the integrated approach is to focus on the interplay between the internal dynamics within a firm and their external contexts to identify a complex interaction of both internal and external factors in influencing labour management and workplace behaviours in small firms. Analyses must be sensitive to the specific environment in which small firms operate (Edwards et al., 2006). Harney and Dundon (2006) also indicates that it is important to acknowledge that while the internal and external factors that affect small firms are similar to those that affect large companies, their impact differs given that small firms are vulnerable to external environments.

Studies of employment relations in small firms have tended to focus on conflict, tension and co-operation between owner-managers and workers (Ram and Edwards, 2010). Analyses have focused on how (informal) labour management practices regulate employees and how employees challenge these rules, producing an informally negotiated order that fundamentally reflects the contested nature of the relationship between employers and employees (Edwards, 2005) and highlights classic ‘politics of production’ within the labour process (Newsome, 2010).

This PhD thesis explores employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context. Previous studies of employment relations in small firms owned by ethnic minority groups have largely focused on the South-Asian community. However, the ethnic Chinese community is different in a number of respects, both externally and internally (Chan et al., 2007; Tian and Steven, 2013). As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, all these external and internal differences have been demonstrated to have different meanings to employment relations. It is, therefore, expected that conclusions generated from the South-Asian group should not be applied to the ethnic Chinese group in a straightforward manner. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a research to explore how employment relations are experienced on the shop floor within the ethnic Chinese small firms. This thesis addresses the gap.

Methodologically, this research is located within a rich ethnographic tradition, enlightened by work such as Roy (1952; 1954), Lupton (1963), Burawoy (1979), Edwards and Scullion (1982), Scott (1994) and Ram (1994). Their work provided insights that were based on direct observation of the production process for an extended period of time. The fieldwork for the current study consisted of participant observation of restaurant work over a period of seven months spent in two ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. The researcher worked as a full-time front area waiter and a full-time kitchen assistant. The field work enabled the researcher to develop a nuanced understanding of workplace behaviours.

The thesis demonstrates that employment relations within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector are distinct from those within South-Asian-owned restaurants. For example, owner-managers' choices under the influence from the product market were largely affected according to the change of Chinese student numbers, rather than whites. Kinship ties gave way to regional ties to internally affect the dynamics between employer-employee and employee-employee relations. Shop floor behaviours were significantly shaped according to whether a worker was from north or south.

Therefore, based on the empirical data, the ethnic Chinese group is to some extent unique. This research finally adds knowledge of the ethnic Chinese group into the study of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms, a hitherto under-explored area. Conclusions drawn from the South-Asian group can never be widely applied to the ethnic

Chinese group. Conceptually, this research introduced the concept of ‘ethnic twist’. It means that ethnic minority workers cannot simply be treated as a homogeneous group, as has generally been the case in previous research. It is necessary to recognise the heterogeneity between members from different cultural origins and examine how the difference shapes shop floor behaviours. The concept of ‘ethnic twist’ does extend current understandings of dynamics within ethnic minority groups.

This thesis is divided into nine chapters and they are arranged as follows:

Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter. It reviews existing knowledge of employment relations in small firms. The chapter starts by focusing on mainstream understanding of small firms’ employment relations. This is followed by a specific focus upon employment relations in ethnic minority communities. At the end of this chapter, characteristics within the Chinese community are discussed and research gaps are identified. These gaps provide the rationale for the study.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter. Based on the gaps identified in Chapter 2, this chapter first introduces the research aim and research questions and objectives. It then describes and justifies the research design and discusses how the data were analysed. It also introduces the two case study firms. Research aim and research questions are shown below:

Research aim: To thoroughly understand how employment relations are experienced in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context and the main factors that shape this process.

Research question one: To what extent does the product market influence owner-managers’ management strategies in operating their businesses and choices in managing employees?

Research question two: To what extent does the labour market influence shop floor behaviours and dynamics between owner-managers and workers?

Research question three: How do potential conflict and resistance within multi-cultural workforces impact employment relations on the shop-floor?

Research question four: How does informality interacting with ethnicity shape management practices and workplace behaviours?

Chapter 4 focuses on how the product market influenced owner-managers' choices and shop floor dynamics between owner-managers and workers. The chapter examines influences stemming from the unstable nature of the market, the intensity of competition and the location of the restaurants.

Chapter 5 discusses how the labour market affects owner-managers' practices and workers' negotiating power. Three groups of workers (chefs, kitchen assistants and front area workers), will be discussed. The chapter will describe differences in the way each group was treated by owner-managers and show how these differences were related to the skills they possessed and their negotiating power.

Chapter 6 focuses on the multi-cultural workforces inside the two firms. It shows how workplace relations are influenced by the different languages that are spoken, different traditions and different perceptions of people from different parts of China. The chapter shows how language barriers led workers and owners to attempt to communicate through alternative means and discusses the misunderstandings that sometimes resulted. Moreover, conflicts and antagonism between members from different groups are described and explained.

Chapter 7 discusses how informality interacting with ethnicity shapes management practices and shop floor behaviours in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Organising informality and regulatory informality are examined. For the focus of organising informality, it examines general issues about how informality and negotiated order played out on the shop floor such as HRM practices and workplace fiddles. A particular focus is how the workplace culture within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector interacting informality shapes shop floor behaviours. For the focus of regulatory informality, this research explores how regulations work together with the particular environment in which ethnically-Chinese owned small firms operate to influence owner-managers' practical choices and shop floor experiences between employers and employees.

Chapter 8 is the discussion chapter. The chapter first reviews the research questions and objectives. The main body of this chapter is to discuss the contributions of this research. Empirical contribution, conceptual contribution and methodological contribution are examined.

Chapter 9 summarises the research and identifies the implications of the discussion chapter and significance of the research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will examine existing knowledge and key concepts in the field of employment relations in small firms. It will be divided into three sections. The first will focus on how the understanding of employment relations in small firms has developed. It will discuss key issues and concepts from both empirical and theoretical analysis. In the second section, the discussion will narrow down to a review of the employment relations in small firms within the ethnic minority background. Finally, the third will draw on the features of ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the UK context and identify gaps and rationales to make sense of this research.

2.1 Employment relations in small firms

This section will conduct a short review of studies in the field of employment relations in small firms. It will demonstrate how the size of the firm, together with other factors, impacts upon labour management in small firms. By identifying a number of key themes and concepts, it will offer an empirical development and analytical framework in understanding employment relations in small firms.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined by the BIS (2013) as an independent business, managed by its owner or part-owners and having a small market share. This type of firm is context-sensitive and dominated by owner-managers' interests and goals (Marlow, 2005). BIS (2013) defines SMEs based on the employment number: small businesses (1-49) and medium sized ones (50-249). This thesis will take these definitions to define small firms. It is also necessary to note that, though classifying firms based on numbers is helpful, complete dependence on numbers would be problematic because labour management of 5 employees might be expected to be different from the management of 40 employees, though they both belong to the 'small firm' category. Indeed, though numbers are introduced as the starting point, the fundamental focuses of this thesis are tensions, pressures and dynamics that are particularly relevant to this kind of size, which is different from larger businesses.

2.1.1 'Small is beautiful' versus 'bleak house'

Early studies in examining employment relations in small firms were presented as a 'universal harmony' type. This was expressed as the 'small is beautiful' scenario, where

small firms could facilitate close and harmonious working relationships. This idea suggested that small firms could provide a better environment for employees than that in large firms. The Bolton Report (1971) argued that although physical working conditions were sometimes not good in small firms, most people still would like to work in a small firm because they preferred to have fewer problems in communication. For example, an employee in a small firm could more easily see the relation between his own objectives and performance of the firm as a whole. Management in a small group was more direct and flexible, and rules and policies would be changed to match individuals. Ingham (1970) suggested that turnover of staff in small firms was generally low, and strikes and other issues were generally not frequent. As a result, employees had the chance to select a work environment with fewer financial rewards but more interesting work and satisfying social relations with their colleagues. In short, small organisations under the 'small is beautiful' view are believed to offer a number of advantages including group working, direct communications, working rules to suit the individual, a more direct relationship between individual effort and the aims of the organisation, more varied work roles, low labour turnover and infrequent disputes (Tsai et al., 2007).

This was later challenged by a 'bleak house' view. It believed that small firms were run with employees suffering poor working conditions. These inferior working conditions could cause a variety of problems in running the business. Indeed, many of these firms paid their employees less than larger companies (Cully et al., 1988). The flexibility in small firms was regarded as instability because there were few formal procedures or systems within which to work (Goss, 1988). Kuratko (1995) argued that smaller firms could hardly formalise and develop integrated human resource management strategies. This was partly because of the lack of resources and the absence of professional managers. As Sisson (1993) stated, good human resource management in small firms was hard to find.

2.1.2 The impacts from external environments

These two opposite views were later argued to be too deterministic. Wilkinson (1999) noted that although size might be a factor, it alone was not sufficient to interpret patterns of employment in small firms. Atkinson (2008) also mentioned that understanding the process and mechanism of employment relations in small firms requires more than the focus of firm size. A variety of factors, both external and internal, contributed to shape

behaviour in small organisations. Studies should explain how size interacted with other influences such as labour and product market influences, ownership, dependency and relationship with customers and suppliers to explain behaviour. Size, however defined, would act as a contingent factor, rather than a defining one, dependent upon labour management practices in small firms (Marlow, 2005).

Shutt and Whittington (1987) argued that the small firm sector should not be regarded in isolation from the wider economic process. When connecting the relationship between small firms and large companies, Shutt and Whittington defined two types of small firms: one is in the dependent sector, and the other is in the independent sector. Those dependent small firms complement and serve the activities of their counterpart large companies, such as sub-contracting. For small firms within the independent sector, there are two sub-types: those that compete with large firms by intense exploitation of labour and those that do not directly engage in competing with large firms, but are confined to 'niches', focusing on small local or specialised markets. For each type, they take at least one of three forms of fragmentation production strategies caused by large firms. The three categories are categorised as:

- 1. Decentralisation of production: large plants are broken up, but retained under the same ownership, by hiving off into smaller plants or by certain subsidiary companies*
- 2. Development: large firms cease to own unites directly, but retain revenue links with them i.e., licensing or franchising*
- 3. Dis-integration of production and innovation: large firms cease to own unites of production or innovation, but retain control through market power (especially in the case of vertical dis-integration) or, latently, through the power to repurchase the units.*

(Shutt and Whittington, 1987, pp.17)

Shutt and Whittington concluded that the control over labour in small firms was conducted by various strategies to combine these three types of fragmentation. In this model, labour control and management practices in small firms were indeed the result of large firm fragmentation strategies.

Rainnie (1989) developed Shutt and Whittington's (1987) points. He emphasised the significance of external factors, notably the level of product market competition and the dependency of small firms on large clients. He argued that the employment relations in small firms were determined by the extent of their dependence of larger companies, which squeezed the margins of small firms' choices. Such market positioning critically affected the natures of employment relations in small firms. For example, the dependent relationship between smaller firms and large companies decided that larger companies had the power to determine the parameters of price, quality and delivery based on their powerful social status. This then set down the criteria by which owners in smaller firms could pay and measure labour. For firms which located in niche areas, the nature of the market limits upon their operational scope and their survival under such constraints would lead to specific and exploitative approaches to labour management. As a result, the dominant market positions from large companies essentially dictated owner-managers' options in smaller firms. It was, therefore, clear that labour management practices within different types of small firms would be determined by their larger counterparts, as Table 1 illustrates.

Table 1 Rainnie's argument of external forces in determining the employment relations in small firms

	Features
Type 1: Dependent relation	Large parties such as customers and suppliers have strong control
Type 2: Dominated relation	Small firms compete with large parties based on low price or worse product quality
Type 3: Isolated relation	Small firms run in niches seen as few profits by large parties
Type 4: Innovative relation	Small firms innovate into new markets with high risk

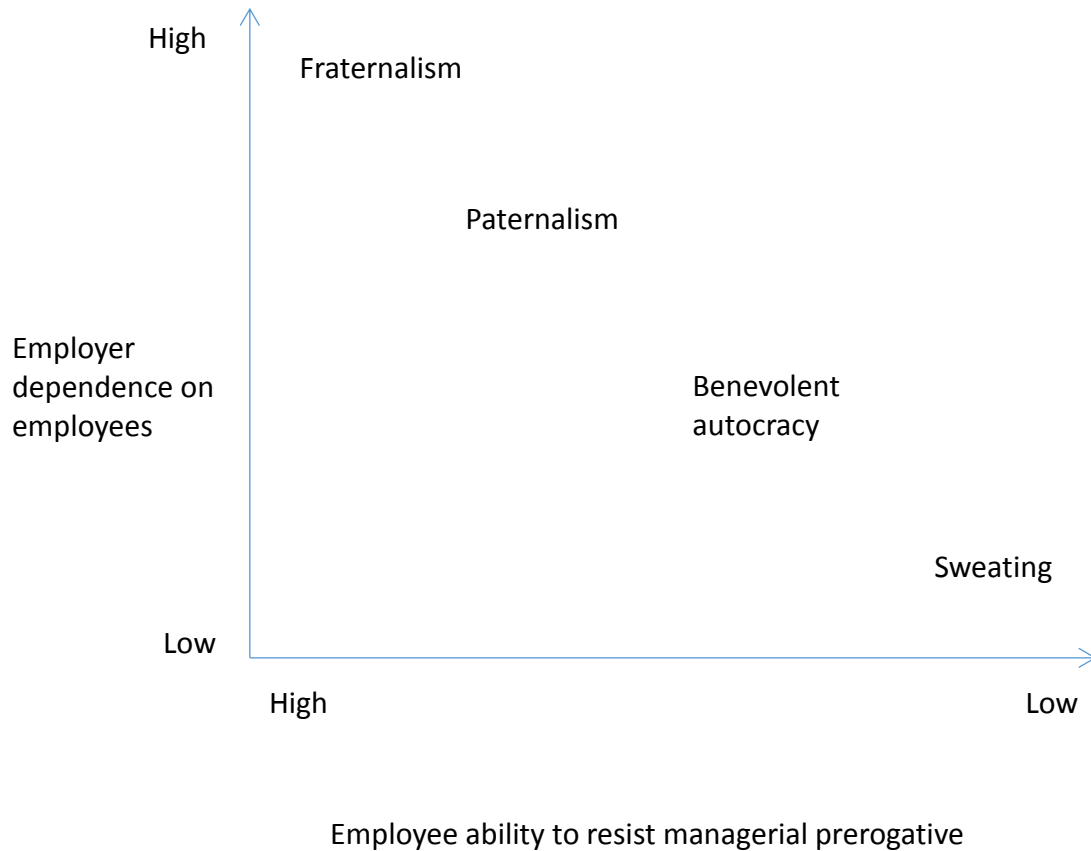
Source: Rainnie (1989)

These two pieces of analysis indeed broadened the debate to locate small firms within the wider market environment. They examined how the ‘small’ size interacted with the particular markets where small firms operated to influence management practices and employment relations in small firms. Later research aimed to connect the size and external environments from a variety of factors.

The competition from product markets has been demonstrated to have a variety of knock-on effects upon small firm owner-managers’ choices (McMahon, 1996; Marchington and Parker, 1990; Harney and Dundon, 2006). Employment relations are subsequently influenced either directly by the change of particular labour management practices such as recruitment and selection, rewarding and employee dismissal, or indirectly by the change of work organisation – mainly with the consideration of competitive pressures on costs, and the social and economic resources a firm has. Moreover, Kinnie et al., (1999) suggested that employment relations in small firms are more influenced specifically by customers. Customer requirements, especially from significant customers, might have various effects upon small firm management. Customer pressures might directly affect management approaches to controlling labour, or indirectly influence organisational structure in small businesses so that management practices needed to match the change. The matching of customer demands and internal policies and practices, as a result, would have degrees of implications for the experience of employment relations based on the particular organisational context and the choices taken by owner-managers.

By drawing on a firm’s labour market conditions, Goss (1991b) developed his typology of labour management in small firms. In his model, there were four possible employers’ strategies in small firms: fraternalism, paternalism, benevolent autocracy and sweating. Under different situations in relation to labour market position and the dependence of the employer upon particular employees, owner-managers might choose different patterns of management. Figure 1 shows the model of this typology.

Figure 1 Goss's model of employment relations



Source: Goss (1991b)

The vertical axis refers to the extent of employers' dependence upon employees; the horizontal axis refers to the ability of employees to resist the exercise of owners' prerogative. The balance of power between these two parties is affected by these two factors. For example, as Goss (1991b) suggested, the 'fraternalism' pattern reflected a high level of employer dependence upon employees, where labour was both crucial to the success of the business and in short supply in the labour market. These skilled and scarce workers then had strong power to challenge practical labour management practices and supervision control strategies. By contrast, in the 'sweating' pattern, workers were in a highly dependent position with basically no alternative employment from the labour market. Under this situation, employee resistance to owners' options was difficult. They generally had to accept managerial control passively.

The importance of sectors has also been demonstrated to shape types of employment relations. Kitching's (1997) study investigated three different sectors: computer services, employment and secretarial services, and free houses and restaurants. He noted that there were different types of 'culture' within these businesses. These cultures had diverse implications to the relationship between owner-managers and workers. In computer services, there was a 'work' culture: job satisfaction acquired through the content of work roles was an important feature of employment relations. This contrasted with culture of employment services firms, where money was more oriented, and the culture in free houses and restaurants, where sociability dominated. Wapshott and Mallett (2013) indicated that small professional service firms (SPFs) represented a distinct type of employment relations compared to traditional labour-intensive or even general high-tech small firms. In SPFs, specialist workers working closely with customers is central to the success of these businesses. This, as a result, gave them strong position to negotiate for their interests and exert influence on the development and growth of the firm. Therefore, employment relations in SPSFs are characterised as aiming to be more contingent and fluid to employees, especially those sharing good relationship with key customers.

2.1.3 The impacts from internal environments

There is no doubt that Rainnie's (1989) research advanced the understanding of employment relations in small firms by considering the influences of both size and external variables to challenge the notion of homogeneity based on size alone. However, it also has been criticised as being extremely deterministic by stating that employment relations were completely autocratic due to the fact that the product market, especially the dominant larger companies, determined management practices in small firms (Ram, 1994; Moule, 1998; Edwards and Ram, 2006). A group of authors and workers (see below specifically) demonstrated that the dynamic forces inside small firms are also notable. Understanding the employment relations in small firms required sensitivity to market constraints while acknowledging how the internal dynamics within the firm led to heterogeneity, revealing how employees experienced their work in small firms and were in fact able to negotiate for their own interests to different degrees, to understand how the employment relations were constructed, changed and challenged in small firms.

In Ram's (1994) study of small Asian clothing firms, he found that the negotiation of order was used there to indicate the central processes at work on the shop floor. He illustrated how order was negotiated between owners and workers during the day-to-day life on the shop floor. He portrayed the employment relations under this situation as 'dynamic' and this 'dynamic' relationship between employers and employees created the process of continuous bargaining on the shop floor. It signified a concern with informal aspects of workplace relations and stressed the importance of accommodation. The struggle between owners and workers existing during the bargaining process was inherent in small firms, and negotiation between employers and employees was continuous and contingent upon diverse situations. This finally influenced how labour process was organized, as a result forming the day-to-day run of a small firm.

Ram's research found that the resources such as workers' skills and knowledge were deployed in the context of bargaining relationship with owners. The organisation of the labour process was a much complicated affair shaped by a range of pressures that simultaneously served to constrain and provide opportunities for management. Management did not simply impose direct control over the workforce in order to stay in business; workers might have the power to influence the managers' decision when they had a strong position. The relationship between the two 'sides' was one of mutual dependency: owners depended on workers' skills but also needed to exert control over the ways in which employees were exercised. As a result, resources and labour under this process were seen as uncertain and contestable.

Therefore, Ram (1994) demonstrated that employment relations in small firms were not entirely determined by external factors. The market-based autocracy, as argued in Rainnie (1989) did not adequately convey the bargained nature on the shop floor. Though external factors would have some effects to some extent, there still had the scope for both employers and employees to affect the relationship.

Moule's (1998) study developed Ram's focus upon the dynamic interplay between social relations of product and market influences. The firm he worked in was a small manufacturer operating in a niche market providing buttons and trimmings. It had a diverse customer base with M&S as a main customer. He found that though its relationship with

M&S was very significant and had major impacts upon its labour management practices, the social relations at the firm was not externally determined. The impact of external structures was mediated through the shop floor dynamics on a bargaining basis. Work organisation and management approaches were largely based on an ad hoc, negotiated, order contingent upon the frequently changed employer-employee positions around the labour process. The impact of external structures was mediated through the shop floor dynamics on a bargaining basis. As he said:

'Findings from Button Co. lend some support to Ram's suggestion that the informal negotiation of consent tends to predominate in very small firms.'

(Moule, 1998. pp. 652)

Ram et al., (2001) defined the informality as the working process of workforce engagement, collective and/or individual, based mainly on unwritten customs and the tacit understandings that arise out of the interaction between employers and employees at work. Gilman and Edwards (2008) explained that informality might be interpreted as an absence of rules and structure, with formality signifying strategy, rules and a more developed organisation. It is possible to identify that informality distinguishes employment relations in small firms from those in larger organisations. Informality was seen as the nature of employment relations in small firms, and so informality was used as the basis of analysis (Ram, 1994). Marlow (2003) explained that management within large firms always exhibited as construction through formal policies, while in small firms, this was always conducted through informal methods, such as ad hoc, face to face communication and word of mouth. Small firms generally had little in the way of formal policies and a lack of formal control systems. Working practices showed procedural informality in small firms (Barrett, 1989).

Recruitment in small firms was mainly through the networks of family and employee friends; word of mouth was the main recruitment source to get the right worker (Marlow, 2003). She described this method as 'grapevine' and found that over 80% of the owners in her research used this approach. What they were looking for was someone who was just like the current employees because they knew the job, knew their place, and did not create problems. Informal recruitment was seen as an effective way by small firm owners, and

they believed that it was not only cheap, but also created a sense of responsibility for the new starter and reduced the familiarisation period (Ram, 1999b). Selection in small firms is mainly based on the employers' perception, without clear rules to decide who is eligible for particular work. Few respondents actually used a consistent set of questions when they select new staff. Normally, this process was finished by simple chatting and then the owners decided whether the person was eligible to do the job (Marlow, 2003). The owners of small firms rarely reviewed applications and investigated candidates' backgrounds from previous employers (Kotey and Sheridan, 2004). Staff development training in small firms was rare and limited (Barrett, 1999). Staff development had been defined as informal and on-the-job, with little or no provision for management development (Marlow and Patton, 2002). In assessing employees, employers mainly relied on their subjective perception. They had few objective measures against which to test their perceptions (Wapshott and Mallett, 2013). The reason is that the close relationship with employees enables owners to observe and correct wrong performance almost immediately. The day-to-day close working relationship provided employers with the basis to judge their employees (Ram, 1999). Furthermore, payment systems in small firms were common to be ad hoc, especially with the influence from market pressures in different time (Gilman et al., 2002). Pay determination was often based on owner-managers' perceptions with 'gut instinct' and 'prejudice' (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2006).

Though informal practices largely dominated employment relations in small firms, owners generally believed that this might create flexibility and therefore enhance efficiency (Marlow and Patton, 2002). This is in line with the nature of small firms. They are on the one hand lacking in resources to build a systematic internal control system, and on the other hand have to respond to external conditions quickly to ensure their survival. It was, therefore, essential that flexibility was placed as the first necessity for employers (Nadin and Cassell, 2007). Flexible practices can enable small businesses to operate more effectively and efficiently (Kotey and Sheridan 2004). Indeed, due to the fact that most small firms were founded and operated based on personal links such as friends or family members, this, in turn, facilitated flexibility in their management practices (Ram, 1999a).

Flexibility in small firms is mainly exhibited in two aspects. The first is work arrangement

flexibility. Ram (1994) illustrated how workers needed to frequently change their task to match owners and customers. For example, for a machinist, apart from sewing, she also needed to prepare fabric to be sewn, trimming, folding, creasing, marking and disposal. Ackroyd (1995) noted that swapping staff between teams was frequent in small firms. Fluidity was dramatic in the membership of operating teams. The boundaries of jobs were not always noticeable. By contrast, this would rarely happen in a larger organisation, where workers are allocated according to the clear policy and responsibility. The second is time flexibility. For example, employees might be granted flexibility around working-hours in return for effort or task flexibility (Tsai et al., 2007), creating ongoing, everyday processes of negotiation. Moreover, small firm owners are used to employing part-time workers. This could not only enable the businesses to quickly adjust to frequent changes caused by their customers but also reduce the fixed cost when there is spare time (Marlow, 2003).

Ram (1994) suggested that employment relations in small firms should be portrayed as dynamic, with the interdependency between workers and employers in shaping day-to-day life on the shop floor. This indicated the mutual dependence nature of employment relations in small firms. Though mutual dependence between owner-managers and workers was regarded as widespread in small firms (Marlow, 2003; Bacon and Hoque, 2005), heterogeneity exists based on different levels of dependence. Scase (2005) defined three types of small firms according to the extent of owners' reliance on workers: craft-based enterprises, entrepreneurial enterprises, and creative and professional small firms. Among the three types, employers are least dependent on employees in craft-based enterprises. Craft employers generally undertook specific job tasks and then integrated these through personal supervision and control. Management function is exercised through authority based on hierarchical structured control. For the entrepreneurial enterprise type, considering its variety of jobs and tasks compared to craft-based enterprises, management is less imposed. However, there is still the classic autocratic approach within this type. Decisions are generally made based on owners' perceptions. This style is often found in the hotel and catering, cleaning, textile and clothing, and subcontracted low-skill machine tool industries, where businesses require very low employee skills and labour market conditions enable employees to be readily hired and fired as well as being employed irregularly or on a part-time basis. Finally, in creative professional and high-tech small

businesses, work is generally broken down into projects and activities which are organised according to customer needs, managed by particular individuals or groups. Owners largely relied on these skilled employees. Flexible work roles are, therefore, considered important and employees are given more autonomy.

Based on the Scase's (2005) classification, the significance of the dependence relationship is related to control and consent between owner-managers and workers in small firms. In a position where there is a high level of employer dependence upon workers, workers may have strong power in negotiating for their interests and resisting managerial control; by contrast, if owners have a low level of dependence upon workers, workers have little option but to accept owner-managers' instructions, with weak negotiation power. For example, in researching a small manufacturer, Moule (1998) found that because dependence was explicitly related to respective skill levels in different departments, 'dye house' workers enjoyed greater autonomy than 'despatch' workers. Negotiation over the effort bargain was more obvious in the dye house than in despatch where tasks were simpler and labour was less skilled. In Goss (1991a)'s research to explore employment relations in the printing industry, he found that the industry contained two contrasting sectors. The instant print sector largely consisted of employees from the secondary labour market, with no previous experiences; while the colour print sector was highly dependent on skilled craft workers. Therefore, due to the lack of alternative employment opportunities, wages in the instant print sector were determined by employers. However, in the colour print sector, workers had the ability to question the payment system.

Small firms are generally operated in a limited circumstance, providing a sense of physical proximity. Furthermore, a preference for informal labour management in small firms fosters the social proximity of the employment relations. Because order is negotiated in an informal environment characterised by close spatial and social proximity, these ongoing, everyday interactions produced forms of mutual accommodation, adaptation and struggle (Ram, 1994; Nadin and Cassell, 2007). Due to the lack of formal managerial policies, orders are achieved by word-of-mouth on an ad hoc basis. Both parties understand each other under frequently changing situations. Ram (1994) therefore demonstrated that mutual adjustment was developed from informal negotiated bargaining processes between

employers and employees. Mutual adjustment reveals the understanding for both parties under the informally negotiated working relationship of everyday organisational work. Working practices and employment relations in small firms are complex and heterogeneous, involving ad hoc solutions and compromises, producing particular, unwritten practices, routines and tacit understandings (Ram, 1999a). The struggle and balance between the two parties were largely achieved through the process of mutual adjustment with tacit understandings (Ram et al., 2001).

Further, in exploring the underlying processes of mutual adjustment, the concept of intersubjectivity played an important part in shaping behaviour in small firms. Intersubjectivity is derived from the interactional communications in organisations in which individuals sought to understand others, to make themselves understood and to hold one another accountable for these understandings (Reich, 2010). It focuses on the unspoken side of communication that determines forms of accommodation and adaptation. Norms could develop between different work groups under this particular type of unspoken interpretation and prediction, and that non-vocal coordination of organisational environments and practices could take place (Eden et al., 1981). By examining three small professional service firms, Wapshott and Mallett (2013) argued that the negotiation of employment relations, especially in ambiguity-intensive small professional service firms, frequently drew on the perception of others' value or interests instead of on any direct communication with them. Therefore, within the small firm context, where informal negotiation dominates, intersubjectivity is a very important factor to underlie the process of mutual adjustment, and meanwhile it might also undermine the informal negotiation process with tacit understandings.

In summary, these studies illustrate the interaction between markets, owner-managers and employees, which then, in turn, shapes the manner in which labour is managed in small firms. The findings support the notion that it is simplistic to argue that the employment relations in small firms are determined solely by a firm's market position. This, however, does not deny the influence of the economic context, but equally, the social relations of production generated within a context of smallness will facilitate differentiated degrees of negotiation, informal practices, flexibility, mutual adjustment between employers and

employees regarding terms and conditions of employment. As a result, employment relations in small firms arise from the interplay of these dynamic factors.

2.1.4 Developing a framework – integrated analysis

So far, from an empirical understanding, we already have a few insights into the dynamics of employment relations in small firms. As Barrett and Rainnie (2002) called for, there is the need to have an ‘integrated’ approach to the study of employment relations in small firms. The core argument is to focus on the interplay between the internal dynamics within the firm and their product and labour market contexts to identify the labour management in small firms. Harney and Dundon (2006) also argued that there had to be an approach which had particular utility for analysing employment relations in small firms to identify a complex interaction of both internal and external factors. This approach needed to facilitate the linkage between external influences and their associated internal forces. They suggested that the integrated theory should be a combination of the ‘institutional theory’ and the ‘resource dependence theory’. The ‘institutional theory’ depicted pressures arising from social and economic connections among firms and provided explanations for practices from institutional and political influences. Complementary to institutional analysis, resources dependency analysis focused on available resources inside small firms.

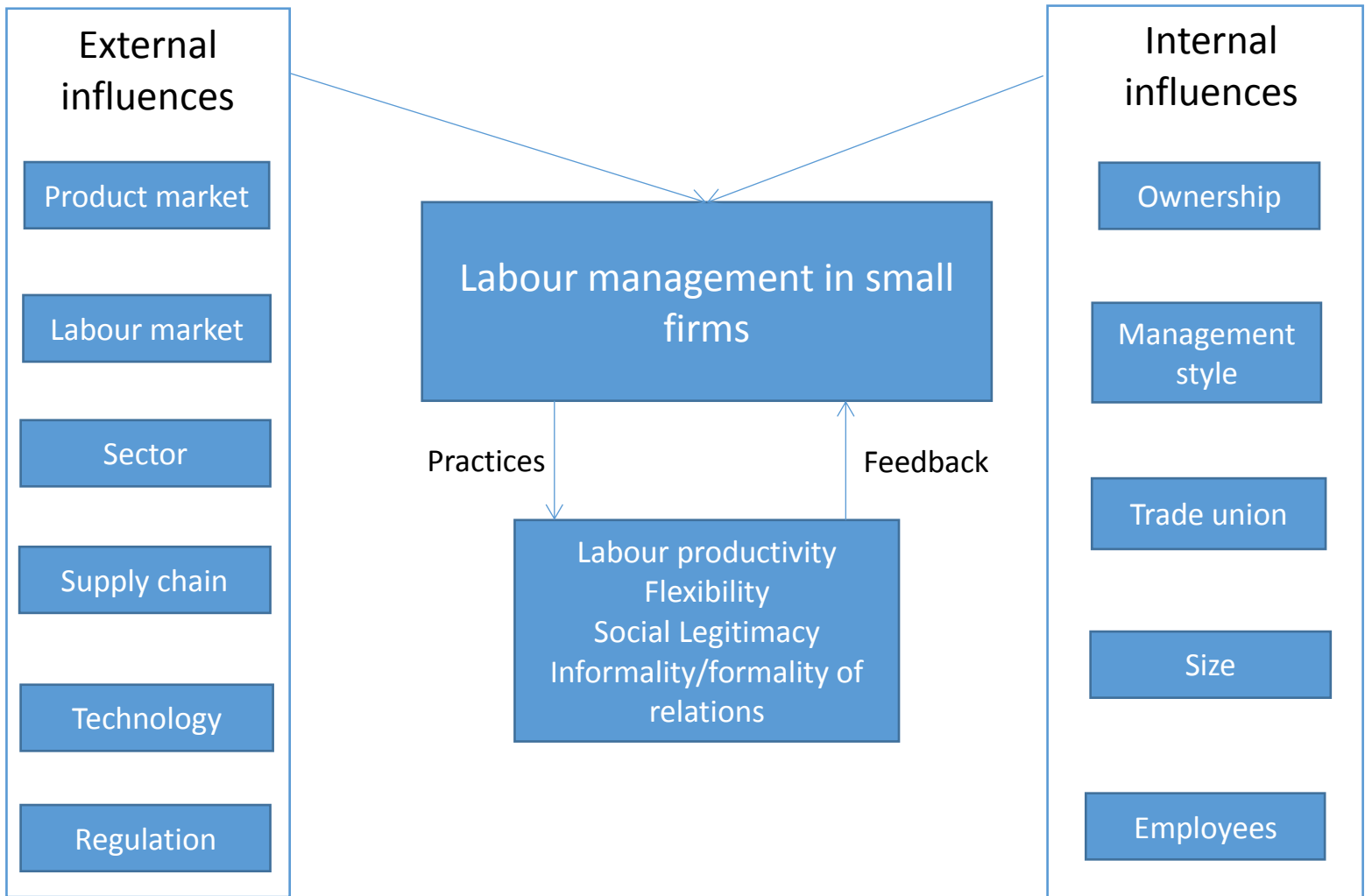
Based on this, an ‘open system’ conceptual framework with a more holistic approach for examining employment relations in small firms was developed. Figure 2 shows the open system framework.

Harney and Dundon believe that analysing labour management in small firms from an open systems perspective provided the potential for a more theoretical and analytical research contribution. The model could be served as the framework to guide empirical investigation in the field of small firms. Specifically, the conceptual framework indicated how firm size interacted with other factors such as labour and product market influences, ownership, managerial style, dependency and relations with customers and suppliers to shape employment relations. While the framework emphasised that external structural factors might shape the parameters of labour management in small firms, it also suggested that the actual labour management practices were likely to be contingent on firms’ responses based on their internal dynamics. In this way the analysis should be able to capture complexities

while developing a more integrated approach to understanding why employment relations in small firms had been noted for its heterogeneity, complexity and high unevenness.

Furthermore, Harney and Dundon (2006) also indicated that it was important to acknowledge that while the internal and external factors identified in small firms were similar to those affecting large firms, given small firms' vulnerable position to the external environment, it was the way in which these factors impacted on small firms that made the situation for small firms different from that of large firms. It was these complex interactions that had been cited as theoretically weak in much of the extant literature in the field of small firms (Barrett and Rainnie, 2002).

Figure 2 Open system framework



Source: Harney and Dundon (2006)

Edwards and Ram (2006) also believed that there was the need to develop a framework to combine both the external factors and internal factors to analyse employment relations and management practices in small firms. Externally, the product market had major impacts upon pricing and setting up business strategies. The labour market influenced the availability of labour. Internally, the nature of informality and negotiated order rooted in small firms mediated external circumstances to shape behaviour. Furthermore, the human resource, as they suggested, also needed to be considered to examine how control was practised by owner-managers in small firms. As such, they believed that a framework needs the following:

- ‘1. It must incorporate internal and external influences.*
- 2. It needs to see firms’ resources in terms of bargaining, context and uncertainty.*
- 3. In contrast to some of the extant models discussed above, it needs empirical application.*
- 4. It must understand the firm in its specific environment.’*

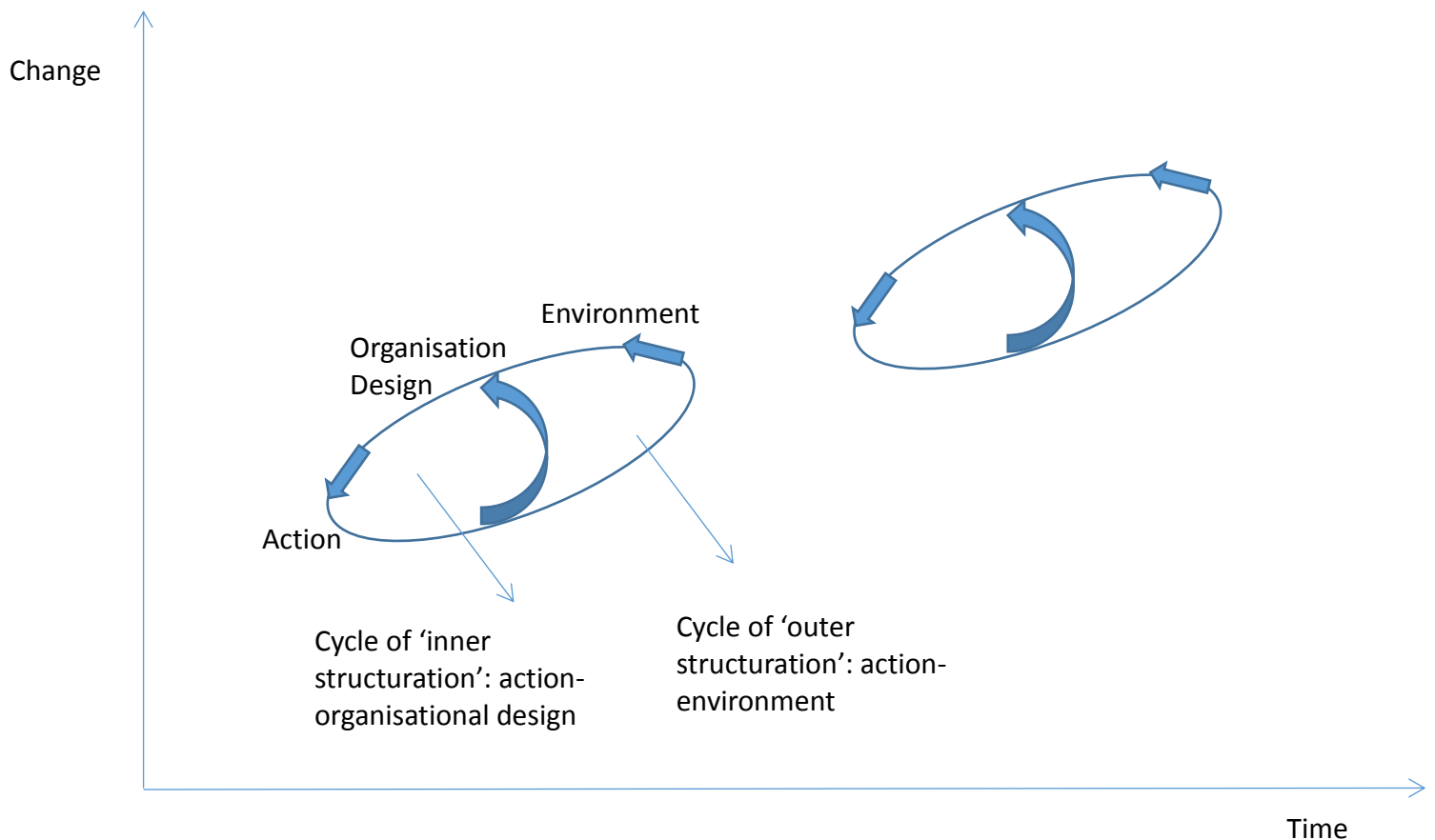
(Edwards and Ram, 2006. pp. 900)

A framework was then developed by the authors in another paper (see Edwards et al., 2006). The analytical framework combined structural variables including product market, labour market and regulation, and internal variables including resources, management styles and strategic choices to examine the dynamics of employment relations in small firms. By combining these factors, the authors suggested that it enabled the location of small firms in a particular context to develop the linkage between structural influences and action and choice to analyse employment relations and firms’ behaviour.

If the integrated analysis was examined from a view of organisational studies, Child (1972) called this process ‘strategic choice’. It means that agents may have some power to direct their organisations. When examining these strategic and political factors, it cannot regard contextual factors as a sole influence in organisational structure variation. In Child’s (1997) paper, he showed the diagram (Figure 3) to explain the process of strategic choice.

According to the figure, it can be found that there are two constituent cycles. The first circle represents the 'inner construction'. Within this smaller cycle, organisational power agencies on the one hand work upon the structure, and on the other hand, they are largely restricted by the existing organisational structures and routines. The second cycle is the 'outer construction', which extends to the environment. In this larger cycle, organisational power agents are able to either influence or accommodate with certain groups in the environment and other general environment conditions. During this process, they have the chance to capture the opportunities which external circumstances provide for them and simultaneously they would also meet the constraints that environmental conditions place on their room for action.

Figure 3 The process of strategic choices.



Source: Child (1997)

Thus, the two cycles are dynamic and continuous in character. Each one has the potential possibility to cause change. This develops in two steps. First, it is the process that agencies

need to evaluate the situations where they locate themselves and then understand the issues related to those environments. The second covers the process of communication between agencies in different organisations so as to reach a collective direction. Because circumstances are themselves constantly changing, it will as a result stimulate actors to respond. This in return will be influenced by internal situations. Thus, this dynamic feature of the two cycles will then continuously lead to the evolution of organisations through time. Continuous changes are accomplished through the two linked cycles of inner and outer structure.

2.1.5 Influences from laws and regulations

As already mentioned above, one of the key components within the integrated analysis of employment relations in small firms was the regulation. This section will focus on how laws and regulations impact labour management in small firms.

Since the introduction of the Working Time Regulations (WTR) in 1998 and the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 1999, a number of research studies have examined how laws and regulations influence small firms' behaviour (Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Heyes and Gray, 2004; Carter et al., 2009; Atkinson et al., 2016). These studies examined how and why small firm owners adapted to regulatory change and the subsequent consequences on labour management practices and employment relations. Among these works, the impact arising from National Minimum Wage (NMW) has been mainly discussed. Influences from the Working Time Regulation (WTR) and Value-added Tax (VAT) were also assessed. Edwards et al., (2004) noted that there were two main structural reasons that explained why small firms, compared to large companies, might experience significant consequences following the introduction of regulation laws. Firstly, small businesses are likely to pay lower wages than larger firms. As a result, it is expected that particular laws, such as the NMW, would affect small businesses more significantly. Secondly, because small firms have little to deploy in terms of capital investment in face of the pressure caused by employment regulations, that is why, compared to larger companies, small businesses would be more vulnerable to dealing with subsequent problems caused by types of laws. Furthermore, Ram et al., (2007) noted that the decision to operate formally and conform to official laws was closely dependent upon firms' profitability, which itself was a rather rare condition in these areas of the economy.

According to Kitching (2006), regulation affects small firms directly or indirectly. Direct influences occurred when management practices changed following the introduction of a law. For example, wages changed following the introduction of the NMW. Indirect effects were those where small business owners adjusted their practices as the result of the change of other agents' behaviours. For example, with the introduction of a law, a firm's suppliers adapted their practice to regulatory change. The change from suppliers might subsequently cause adjustment in the firm.

However, whether it is direct influence or indirect influence, as Kitching (2006) argued, consequences caused by regulations depended on how owners and other agencies (competitors, suppliers, employees and the regulation itself) responded to the laws based on their particular contexts. In other words, the regulatory impact interacted with the specific character of the business context. Their power also mediated with the firm's particular situation, such as the business's profitability and the estimates of compliance costs. All these factors exercised their power to affect the extent of regulatory adaptation. Adaptation changed relations and practices inside the firms to different degrees according to the level of regulation insertion into existed business relationships and practices. Edwards et al., (2004) suggested that three factors needed to be focused to understand how laws shaped the small firm practices. The three factors were: the nature of the law itself, the competitive context of a firm, and relationships inside the firm. Similar to Kitching's (2006) explanation, Edwards's (2004) model also indicated that the law interacted with the firm's external economic context and the social relations within the firm to shape the effect. For example, Arrowsmith et al., (2003) showed that for small firms operating on the margins of the economy with extremely low profits, the arrival of NMW added product market pressures. As a result, stress caused by the NMW might lead many of them into illegal operation by manufacturing counterfeit goods. Meanwhile, internally, if workers were willing to accept cash-in-hand payment and there was a lack of rules to regulate working hours, the pay rates might stay the same with little influence from the introduction of the NMW (Ram et al., 2001).

In practice, influences arising from laws and regulations upon small firm labour management practices and employment relations were examined from a variety of aspects.

Ram et al.'s (2001) research indicated that there were basically three types of reactions on managerial choices and labour management practices under the introduction of the NMW and the WTR. First, there were situations where the NMW had little effect. Under this 'business as usual' response, existing informal practices remained largely intact, with some minor adjustment. Both owners and employees adapted to, rather than wholly adopted, the regulations. Second, new laws can 'shock' firms into more efficient labour management practices, which may reflect to move toward up-market. Third, firms may intensify work in an effort to compensate increased costs caused by these regulations. Under this scenario, it was identified that firms would move down-market towards the employment of illegal workers into grey areas of business or entirely out of the market. In exploring how small firms responded to the introduction of the NMW in the service sector, Gilman et al., (2002) illustrated that pay arrangements, with the introduction of the NMW, were affected by labour market structures, product market pressures and firms' particular pay structures. Pay varied based on the social context in which the NMW was embedded. Evidence from Carter et al., (2009) suggested that there were dramatic differences among small firms within different sectors in adapting to employment regulations. Arrowsmith et al., (2003) argued that impacts of the NMW upon small firms' practical management practices and pay determination were significantly mediated with the informality. Firms' individual influences and variations were contingent upon the nature of informality.

2.1.6 Summary

The brief overview summarises the recent development in understanding employment relations in small firms. The literature has moved forward from the dichotomy view of the 'small is beautiful' or 'bleak house' scenario to acknowledging more detailed and more sensitive issues of heterogeneity and dynamics around labour management in small organisations. The process of effort bargaining and negotiation is an outcome of the interaction between the external market positioning of the firm and the internal dynamics of the enterprise. Informality facilitates a flexible mechanism in response to changing environments and so is positively advantageous to firm survival. In the meantime, informality and negotiated order also leaves uncertainties, in which mutual adjustment between the two parties happens.

Ram and Edwards (2010) suggested that informality needed to be understood under different situations. It is necessary to capture variation and understand how they are played out in a variety of contexts and the significances to employment relations. Smith (2006) emphasised the indeterminacy of the effort bargaining process. The context in which both parties negotiate to each is constantly shifting under challenges. It has to focus on the changing environment to explain various control strategies from owner-managers and resistance from employees. This reflects a need for a more balanced, context-sensitive understanding of employment relations in small firms (Harney and Dundon, 2006). While external influences and sectoral factors may shape and potentially constrain employment relationships (Rainnie, 1989; Barrett and Rainnie, 2002), they are not deterministic (Ram, 1994; Holliday, 1995). Influences inside the organisation must be considered, and neither owner-managers nor their employees are passive in this interpretation (Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Gilman and Edwards, 2008). It is this contested nature of employment relations that is the focus when studying labour management in small firms (Wapshott and Mallett, 2013).

As Edwards et al., (2006) summarised, the study of employment relations in small firms should focus on two aspects. The first is simply empirical: it is to address the ways in which control over, and the consent of, employees is negotiated. This empirical focus throws light on the ways in which employment relations in small firms are created and maintained, and how they reproduce themselves. The second aspect of the focus is analytical. It needs to draw on insights of industrial relations tradition, where conflict and consent are focused. Employment relations in small firms entail both the negotiation of order and co-operation between owner-managers and employees. However, conflict and consent do not just plainly exist; they are socially constructed and not stable. And meanwhile, the employment relation is embedded in a circuit of capital embracing the realisation of value in the market. As a result, the potential conflict and negotiation of consent will be partly shaped by its wider economic context. As a result, an integrated framework (Harney and Dundon, 2006; Edwards, et al., 2006) can identify both of these factors to explain dynamics of employment relations in small firms.

2.2 Employment relations in ethnic minority small firms

Given that the focus of my research is the ethnic Chinese group, specifically the employment relations in the restaurant sector, this section will examine issues within the

context of ethnic minority small businesses. This section will be divided into three parts. The first part will set out the general picture of the restaurant sector within the whole economy, and will also particularly focus on the ethnic minority restaurant sector. The second part focuses on the employment relations and business practices in South-Asian small firms in the restaurant sector. It will examine how the key issues discussed in Section 2.2 played out in South-Asian small firms within the restaurant sector. The third part will examine the recent research trend within the field of ethnic minority business studies.

2.2.1 The restaurant sector and the ethnic minority restaurant sector under the UK economy

The hospitality industry makes a significant contribution to the UK economy and employment. Below is the summary of the UK hospitality industry and the restaurant sector according to the British Hospitality Association (BHA, 2017).

The hospitality industry is the fourth biggest employer in the UK, accounting for 3.2m jobs through direct employment in 2016. In terms of the growth employment rate, it has outperformed both the economy overall, and the faster growing services sector. The industry generated over £73bn of Gross Value Added directly to the UK economy. The hospitality industry has grown GVA faster than any other industry since 2009. Furthermore, the hospitality industry is the major constitution of SMEs, which make up over 99% of the number of businesses, and over 50% of the total turnover and GVA of the industry.

Within the hospitality industry, there are four general sectors: the accommodation sector, the restaurant sector, the catering event management sector and the cultural & recreational activities sector. Among all these four sectors, the statistics from the restaurant sector is the most dramatic. The restaurant sector accounts for over half of the employment of the hospitality industry with 1,615,000 of a total of 3,044, 000 in 2016, and has been the highest levels of employment growth, with 12% employment growth since 2013. The restaurant sector is also the largest contributor to GVA. It generates 45% of the hospitality industry's total GVA in 2016.

The UK's restaurant sector is diverse. According to Warwick Institute for Employment Research (WIER) (2007), the restaurant sector is basically comprised of four types of business establishments – fast food establishments, cafes and coffee shops, mainstream

restaurants and fine dining restaurants. Fast food establishments refer to those such as McDonalds, Burger King and KFC, as well as traditional outlets such as fish and chips shops and sandwich bars. Mainstream restaurants are generally high street restaurants which tend to be mid-price and include many branded and themed chains such as Pizza Express. Fine dining restaurants are those which tend to be more expensive, providing unique dishes and exquisite cuisine.

Among all the employment in the restaurant sector, ethnic minority restaurants accounted for one quarter of the employment (WIER, 2007). According to the 2011 Census, South-Asians, mainly Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, made up the major employment among all the ethnic minority groups.

Indeed, there has been a tradition for ethnic minorities working in the restaurant sector, especially for South-Asians, such as Indian, Pakistani and Bangladesh (Ram et al., 2000; Barrett et al., 2002). The reason why so many South-Asians engaged in the restaurant sector was believed to be the result of a historic disadvantage and the discrimination that ethnic minorities had been facing. Westwood and Bhachu (1988) stated that the social relations of ethnic minority groups had been historically saturated with the racism of social formation. Ram (1992) argued that among all the constraints Asian employers had faced, one of the most persistent was racism. Without an appreciation of the impact of racism, the dynamics of ethnicity cannot be fully understood (Ram, 1994). Due to the kinds of racism and discrimination, ethnic entrepreneurs often found their choices constrained by the racism of white-dominated society (Ram and Hillin, 1994). These ethnic minority groups had been prepared to take over the jobs and premises left by white workers and employees, and tolerate low wages and poor conditions in order to survive. The high proportion of self-employment by members of ethnic minority groups was seen as a reaction against racism and limited social choices, a means of surviving at the margins of white-dominated society (Ram, 1992). Due to the historical reason, operating within this framework, it was clear that Asians were pushed into particular sectors because of the absence of alternatives; the restaurant sector was one of them (Ram et al., 2002). Therefore, the racial context functioned and influenced the traditions of ethnic-minority small firms.

2.2.2 Employment relations in ethnic minority businesses in the restaurant sector

According to Ram et al., (2000), the market competition that ethnic restaurants faced was mainly manifested in three ways. First, there was competition between ethnic food outlets in the same region. Second, there was competition from ‘non-ethnic’ restaurants providing related and similar food in the immediate locality, such as ‘fish and chip’ shops, which served similar food of traditional ‘Balti’ cuisine. The result would decrease the customer base for ethnic restaurants. Finally, the competition was from other types of restaurants in the eating out market that influenced the social trends of eating such as McDonald’s and Pizza hut. Such outlets contributed to the increasingly intense competitive environment in which ethnic owners operated.

Among all these three types of competition, the first one, that was the competition between ethnic restaurants, was most dramatic. Saturation in the ethnic restaurant sector has been a major problem (Ram et al., 2002; Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2006). There has been a consecutive increase of ethnic restaurants across the UK over the past decade. The result was that the demand has indeed been outpaced by the excessive expansion, which created a chronic over-supply. The research cited above into ethnic minority restaurants revealed that respondents mentioned the problem of excessive numbers of fellow-Asian restaurants leading to market saturation, complaining of too many firms in the same area with similar quality, similar service and similar food. An avoidable consequence of this was that ethnic owners had to operate in an environment where businesses were of low profit margins. In Ram et al.’s (2006) research, they found that under the condition of high levels of competition, most of these restaurant owners largely relied on kinship ties with cheap or even free labour, and were forced to respond in price competition.

Indeed, employment in these ethnic minority restaurants was basically organised by kinship and family ties (Ward, 1987; Ram et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2006). ‘Family’ was the critical constitution to shape these firms. Kinship and family ties were regarded as a main resource to the development of ethnic enterprises. Influences from the family members and family culture were seen as dramatically significant for ethnic minority businesses. The importance of family in supporting ethnic minority enterprises was confirmed. Firstly, family members worked as providers of capital and labour. This was vital to prepare and launch a restaurant (Ram et al., 2000). Familial networks could

effectively facilitate the firms to cope with the competitive and unpredictable pressures from the product market and the uncertainties deriving from labour supply (Ram et al., 2007). Secondly, family members often occupied managerial positions in these ethnic minority firms, which would ease the problem of managerial control (Ram et al., 2000). Due to the comparatively vague allocation between family members, each member had a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the business (Ram, 1992). Moreover, employing family members led to labour flexibility and low cost. This was seen as an important factor for ethnic minority firms to survive due to lack of resources (Ram and Holliday, 1993). Family labour was cheap and relatives were prepared to work for long hours. Therefore, family members and kinship ties, externally, were a means of overcoming racial obstacles in the market. Internally, it was a source of cheap and flexible labour and means of managerial advantage.

Apart from the support from family members, another key feature within the ethnic minority restaurant sector is the ethnicity network and community support. Co-ethnic workers were widely recruited within South-Asian restaurants (Ram et al., 2000). Werbner (1990) demonstrated that the establishment of networks in these ethnic-minority enterprises was always largely dependent on the community itself. The social networks inside the community had often been associated with the success of ethnic enterprises. In the case of Asians at least, the businesses context offered considerable scope for the utilisation of community resources to secure a competitive position over whites. Members of their communities shared common needs and cultures, which helped to consolidate employer-employee relationships to ease the management (Ram and Hillin, 1994).

One of the dramatic features arising from their social networks and community support was 'trust'. Trust between group members was a vital factor within ethnic minority firms. Individuals within the same ethnic community generally had positive expectations to other group members such as honesty and respect (Putnam, 2007). Group members with low levels of trust may have fewer social connections and as a result the quality of the social ties in terms of the availability of social resources would be constrained (Tong et al., 2001). Further, the existence of trust would, in turn, facilitate the fulfilment of community development and network building (Portes, 1998). For example, Werbner (1984)

contended that the success of Pakistani entrepreneurs depended to a high degree on 'trust' which served to build the extension of credit and guarantee inside the group. Members of the community were expected to provide labour for the businesses and exemplify the Pakistani ethos of self-sacrifice, self-denial and hard work in order to ensure its success. Trust was generated by shared beliefs among the members inside the community, through it was argued that the type of moral bonds might be specific to the members of the group and exclude outsiders. Co-ethnic employees were often deemed to be more 'trustworthy' than other employees; and this eased the employer imperative of labour control (Ward, 1991).

As discussed within the general context of small firms, owners in ethnic minority small firms also preferred informal employment relations (Small Business Council, 2004). For example, recruitment was generally conducted through recommendation from friends and current staff by word of mouth, which was believed by owners that employees recruited in this way could be more likely to fit. Grievances were solved by informal discussion rather than formal processes because owners believed that they were part of the same ethnic community so that people could better understand each other's' perceptions based on the informal negotiation. Staff were allowed to work flexible hours as long as they were able to finish their work effectively. According to the Ethnic Minority Small Business Report (EMSBR, 2004), most ethnic minority small business owners described their relationships with workers as being 'like a family'. The relationship was largely based on mutual respect and mutual understanding, rather than rules or other management approaches. Ethnic owners generally believed that by working with employees in an informal way, they could earn more commitment and loyalty.

Compared to non-ethnic minority small firms, ethnic minority small firms operating in the restaurant sector were more likely to be influenced by laws and regulations. As already discussed above, there had been intense competition within the ethnic restaurant sector. Jones et al., (2006)'s study of the impact of NMW in small firms within the catering sector suggested that owner-managers' choices, and subsequent structural changes within these firms and the change of employment relations were primarily explained as their capacity to face product pressures. The most common response in this research by owner-managers

was that the introduction of NMW largely increased their operational costs, especially labour costs. The result revealed that the decision to operate formally and conform to official rules was closely, arguably entirely, dependent upon firms' profitability, which itself was a rather rare condition for this type of business.

The NMW did lead to movement up-market or down-market. The variation of responses in these patterns was largely connected to their external context. It referred to degrees of adjustment to external pressures on firms' own capital and human resources (Ram et al., 2007). For example, those with low profitability and limited resources competing in an intense environment would respond by shifting to a niche market. As a result, this would lead to employee dismissal, longer working hours and intense management. While for those in a good condition, with sufficient capital and human resources, the introduction of NMW and subsequent pressures from product market would make them invest more on technology and management practices to move up-forward. As a result, the change of employment relations was experienced differently in these senses.

A very important concept within the study of employment relations and entrepreneurship in ethnic minority small firms is 'mixed embeddedness', suggested by Kloosterman et al. (1999) and Kloosterman (2000). The key point is that ethnic businesses must be examined under the wider political-economic environment as well as in the social-cultural capital of their own communities. Kloosterman (2010) defined the opportunity structure of ethnic firms as the meso-level, in relation to the micro-level of ethnic cultural resources and the macro-level of institutional-political influences. At the meso-level—opportunities and constraints upon ethnic entrepreneurs' choices — he argued that the main focus was the supply and demand sides of the product market. It is affected by a variety of factors, mainly including the demographic situation, the state of the local or regional economy, the direct competitive environment and the relationship with the financial resources.

The concept of the 'urban space' within the meso-level highlights the role of the urban space-economy in the shaping of ethnic businesses. According to Ram et al., (2006), the urban space concept measures the scale of market opportunities available for ethnic business owners. It examines whether the geographical location can help to determine access to the demand potential. A key element within the geographical location analysis

identified by Reckers and van Kempen (2000) is neighbourhood. They suggested that access to markets and their growth potential differ not only from city to city, but from neighbourhood to neighbourhood within cities. Both Rechters and van Kempen (2000) and Ram et al. (2006) demonstrated that space economy influenced both the demand side and the supply side of the product market. The urban spatial structure laid down constraints upon ethnic owners' choices. Owner-managers in the ethnic restaurant sector had to set up locational strategies to face the constraints, which shaped the employment relations to a large extent.

2.2.3 Integration of informality and ethnicity

Section 2.1, in analysing employment relations in non-ethnic minority small firms, has discussed the extent of informality in small firms, including the lack of explicit rules and limited use of written policies. Labour management practices, such as recruitment and dismissal, are largely conducted through informal direct oral communication. Informal negotiations tend to be more frequent than in larger organisations. It is generally acknowledged that there are greater degrees of informality in smaller firms than large companies.

Having discussed employment relations in ethnic minority small firms, particularly in Section 2.2.2, it has been found that the role of informality within this particular context is more prominent than in non-ethnic minority small firms.

Firstly, because ethnic minority small firms are generally organised with family and kinship ties, these firms exhibit the characteristic of organising informality. With the employment of family members, general labour management practices such as recruitment and selection, which themselves are largely conducted in an informal way in non-ethnic minority small firms, are practiced to an even lower degree (Jones et al., 2006). Family businesses also enable informal work arrangements. Ram et al.'s (2000) research revealed that in many family-owned South-Asian small firms, both husbands and wives tended to play an active role in the running of the enterprises. Working in family-owned small firms was generally informal and unpaid for them. It was common that wives worked as assistants while in full-time employment. Apart from the key role of husbands and wives, their children worked as part-time workers. They normally worked after school and on

weekends. Their working hours were indeed ad hoc and not specified with clear rules, and they were generally unpaid as the support to their family businesses, which, as a result, facilitated a more flexible control of labour. Ram et al., (2007) reported that respondents generally stated that order was largely communicated in a direct way with family members. Tacit understandings strongly shaped their behaviours and their interpretation of their responsibilities. Family members contributed primarily to this type of informal management.

Section 2.1.5 discussed how laws and regulations have generally impacted upon labour management practices in small firms. With the introduction of the NMW, apart from following the rule to raise wages, there are types of adjustments in relation to management practices, such as tighter control of labour and increased flexibility (Gilman et al., 2002; Kitching, 2006). Arrowsmith et al., (2003) summarised that the impact of regulations upon small firms' practical management practices and pay arrangements were significantly mediated by the nature of informality. The law interacts with the firm's external economic context and its informal social relations within the firm to shape the effect of regulations (Edwards, 2004).

Within the context of ethnic minority small firms, informality interacting with ethnicity affects management practices in more diverse ways than in non-ethnic minority small firms. Section 2.2.2 mentioned that ethnic minority small firms generally operated in marginal sectors with strong market competition and low profitability, which largely constrained their ability to pay workers with a relatively high wage. Under this particular context, few of them had the resource to move up-market (Ram et al., 2002). Additionally, low-paid ethnic minority workers generally had either no, or very low-level, formal qualifications. They faced substantial barriers in the labour market and so were forced to accept a low wage. Some of these ethnic minority small firms were therefore able to pay workers less than the NMW (Ram et al., 2007). Some businesses have responded to the NMW by employing undocumented workers from the same ethnic minority backgrounds as the owner (Jones et al., 2006) and paying them significantly less than the NMW. The breach of law to employ illegal workers gave these firms the opportunity to survive in the industry. It was regarded as their last defensive choice (Jones et al., 2006).

In summary, management practices and the degrees of variation in these ethnic minority small firms owed much to the particular ‘informal’ characteristic of employment relations (Ram et al., 2001). Informality took different forms and suited many purposes in responding to the introduction of NMW and other external pressures, ranging from intense use of family members to illegal employment of cheap labour (Ram et al., 2007).

Based on these discussions, it can be found that the context of ethnic minority small firms allows informality to shape management practices and employment relations more profoundly and in some unique ways, which suggests that it is then necessary to draw out the concept of informality and integrate it with ethnicity to understand the ways in which informality and ethnicity interact with each other. According to the above analysis, organising informality and regulatory informality are the two key areas to examine the dynamics between informality and ethnicity in exploring employment relations in ethnic minority small firms.

2.2.4 Research trend in studying employment relations in ethnic minority small firms

Studies of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms have long been focused on the South Asian and Black communities. Insights generated from studies of businesses, owners and workers in these contexts have contributed to understanding of employment relations in small firms generally as well as those characterised by minority ethnic status (Ram, 1994; Jones et al., 2006). However, the number of businesses owned by members of other ethnic minority communities has grown substantially during the past few decades (Ram and Jones, 2008). Despite increased interests in migrant and ethnic minority businesses, academic research has yet to extensively explore these new groups and, as such, we currently have a poor understanding of their business development and employment structures (Jones, et al., 2010). A number of questions arise. What is the nature of these new migrant small businesses and how can it be conceptualised? How does the interplay of a variety of context-related factors affect the setting up and business development? What are the challenges these new migrant enterprises may face under their particular rationale and choices of employment to existing legal and institutional frameworks (Ram et al., 2008).

Vertovec (2007) notes that Britain has experienced dramatic change in immigration over the past 10 years. There has been significant rise of multiple immigration in terms of their ethnicities and countries of origins. Ethnic minority communities, therefore, in the UK has been into a situation of multiple origins. He introduced the concept of 'super-diversity' to describe the increasingly diverse ethnic groups. The formation of 'super-diversity' was both because of more people migrating from more places, and interactions among these groups leading to new factors arising from these new ethnic minority patterns. In seeking to understand the significance of these new ethnic groups, Vertovec (2007) sought to capture degrees of complexity in the constitution of the British ethnic minority population. He suggested that the conventional understanding of Britain's migrant and ethnic minority population that is characterised by large well-organised African-Caribbean and South-Asian communities should give way to an increased number of diverse groups.

In order to understand ethnic businesses from diverse groups, Sepulveda et al., (2011) drew on the 'super-diversity' concept to focus on six newly arrived communities within London, in an effort to improve empirical and conceptual understanding of diverse new migrant enterprise activities within its particular urban and regional contexts. They identified a range of variables which interplayed with wider economic and political contexts to affect diverse new migrant entrepreneurial activities. The analysis demonstrated the importance of how contextual factors shaped the formation and development of ethnic minority business in London, which revealed the social and spatial influence for the development of minority businesses in the 1990s and early 2000s. Sepulveda et al., (2011) suggested that there was the need to develop existing theoretical approaches to combine social, economic and demographic factors to understand the changing nature of ethnic minority businesses with diverse origins within the context of super diversity.

Specifically, Jones et al., (2010) examined the dynamics of Somali business activity in Leicester. The co-ethnic connection within the Somali community played as a very important resource for developing their small enterprises. However, it argued that although familial and co-ethnic ties had significant impacts for their business development, the political-economic context imposed harsh constraints upon the integration of Somali small businesses. Sources such as family labour and community link were not sufficient for them

to get entry into mainstream markets, but only the poorest markets in low-value sectors such as small retail outlets. Their urban locations and sites were largely to be confined to deprived areas, constituted of a depressed customer base of low-income local residents. Furthermore, due to the largely dominant informal economy among the group, it was believed to be hard to integrate into the government's supporting plan.

As Jones et al., (2006) noted, future studies to explore ethnic minority businesses should focus on wider range of sectors and compare the experiences of different ethnic minority groups. The next section will examine the features of ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the UK context and discuss the gaps in existing research.

2.3 Gaps and rationale

2.3.1 The Chinese diaspora in the UK

The Chinese in Britain have diverse origins and cultural backgrounds. Seamen were the first group of Chinese to the UK during the 1850s. They were recruited to develop the maritime trade in Asia. It was not until after the Second World War that more Chinese people from Hong Kong's rural areas came to Britain. Most Hong Kong immigrants arrived in Britain between the late 1950s and the late 1960s. They came to Britain mainly to earn a living. This was shown by the close association between the immigration wave and the deteriorating economic conditions in rural Hong Kong and the rise in demand for ethnic cuisine in post-war Britain (Chiu, 1991). Against this background, Hong Kong people became the largest Chinese group in Britain (Chan, 1996). According to the 1991 Census, the total number of people with Chinese origin in 1991 was 156,900. Those who were born in Hong Kong were the largest group and account for one third of the population. British born Chinese accounted for 28%. The percentage of people from mainland China was only 12%.

The UK Chinese community has become more diverse in recent years. In 2001, official figures showed that there were 247,403 Chinese people in the UK (National Statistics, 2001). It revealed that the Chinese community had been the fastest growing ethnic group in the UK, with 9.9% annual growth between 2001 and 2007. In 2006, the total number rose to over 400,000 (ONS, 2009). This is explained first as a result of more Chinese people being born in the UK. Furthermore, it was due to the increasing number of Chinese students

from mainland China and the arrival of middle class Hong Kong people in significant numbers (Chan et al., 2007). Of all the groups, students had the highest proportion—about a third (ONS, 2006). The Chinese student population generally kept stable from 1995 to 2000, around 5000 per year. However this number significantly increased from 2001: from 20,000 in 2001 to 50,000 in 2004. In 2013, this number jumped to 87,895 (UKCISA, 2015).

An important characteristic of UK Chinese people is that they generally lived in big cities such as London, Manchester, and Liverpool and were scattered or dispersed in smaller towns and large villages (Chan et al., 2007). This choice was largely due to their survival strategies of working in the restaurant sector. For those who moved into small towns and large villages was to avoid or reduce competition. In the big cities, UK Chinese people tend to concentrate more in the inner city areas, particularly in areas that have become internationally labelled ‘Chinatowns’. The largest concentration of Chinese people is in Greater London (39 percent), the rest of the South East (23 percent) and Yorkshire/Humberside (8 percent) (Modood et al., 1997).

2.3.2 Characteristics of ethnic Chinese small firms in the UK context

Self-sufficiency

Compared to other ethnic minority groups within the UK context, the Chinese community was believed to be unique because it was generally regarded as a relatively ‘invisible’ community (House of Commons, 1985). The ‘invisible’ was represented as the sense that the Chinese were more generally viewed in British society as being seen but not heard, lacking participation in social and political connection to the main society (Yu, 1991). Furthermore, the Chinese were identified as rarely utilising social services (Rochelle and Marks, 2011). As a result, Chinese people have always been perceived as having sufficient resources to meet their needs (Tina and Steven, 2013). This is explained mainly by two reasons.

First is their cultural background. Watson (1977) made the point that the UK Chinese group was not interested in interacting with people outside their community because they generally believed that other cultures were inferior to their own culture. This was confirmed by Chau and Yu (2001), who noted that the Chinese community in the UK were

rarely concerned to develop social relationships outside their own community. This was largely attributed to the cultural tradition of the Chinese with its emphasis on self-help and mutual aid, which led them to a reluctance to look outside the immediate family or, at most, the Chinese community for assistance (Secretary of State for the Home Department, 1985). Runnymede Trust (1986) noted that the Chinese community was a silent and self-sufficient community; they preferred self-reliance and mutual aid within the family and community. This specific cultural nature to a certain extent suggested that the Chinese group was responsible for their 'social exclusion'. Due to following their traditional values, the Chinese group took the initiative to exclude themselves from mainstream society. This may also reinforce the view that the 'social exclusion' experienced by Chinese themselves was not a problem—it was merely a result of ethnic self-determination (Chau and Yu, 2001).

The second reason relates to economic considerations. According to the 1991 UK Census, 70 percent of Chinese men and 50 percent of Chinese women were defined as economically active. Of these, 88 percent of men and 90 percent of women were in paid jobs (Cheng, 1996). Unemployment rates in the Chinese group were among the lowest when compared to other ethnic groups (Modood et al., 1997). Furthermore, the average earnings of working Chinese people were higher than any other group, including the white group (Berthoud, 1998). While examining the inside structure of their economic position, it was found that 90 percent of Chinese workers took part in the catering industry with a family base (Home Affairs Committee, 1985). In large cities, they located together to form a group-based 'China Town' to mainly attract Chinese customers; while in small cities, they were scattered to largely focus on non-Chinese customers (Chan and Chan, 1997). Chan et al. (2007) demonstrated that by organising their businesses in the catering industry in this way, they could basically generate long-term stable profits. The supply and demand relations for Chinese working in the catering industry secured the advantage of their market position, which kept them at a distance from the mainstream market. With the growing number of students in the past couple of years, there has been increasing customers, especially in University cities, to maintain a stable demand. This, as a result, explained why 'ethnic penalty' was not a serious problem in the Chinese community; a fully satisfying market position in the catering sector gave them no need to move to a mainstream market and compete with whites (Tong et al., 2001).

Weak community connection

The community connection within the ethnic Chinese group has been found to be much weaker than has sometimes been assumed (Chau and Yu, 2001). Leung (1987) found that, although most Chinese people identified themselves as being members of the same group, solidarity was undermined by conflicts of interest. This is basically explained by two reasons.

First, their sense of community link and mutual help was negatively influenced by the strategies they chose to operate their businesses. While the owners of Chinese take-away and restaurants are no doubt the members of the same community, they are at the same time potential competitors for the same group of customers. This strongly influenced their approach to communicating with their community members (Herald Europe, 1998). Due to the competitive relationship, Chinese restaurant owners tended to hide information from one another. They attempted to avoid visiting their potential rivals' work place and interacting with them (Taylor, 1987). In fact, they always held the idea to prevent potential rivals from gathering information about their market situations. Information was rarely disclosed because this might threaten their market position (Cheung, 1975). Surviving in the same market made Chinese restaurant owners isolate themselves both physically and socially from each other. The Chinese community only maintained limited degree of contact with each other. The Chinese were not only geographically divided but also socially divided (Chau and Yu, 2001). Therefore, the difficulty to connect to each other within the community was largely due to the reason that most of them worked in the same restaurant sector (Ruby et al., 2001).

The second reason was that the ethnic Chinese group mainly operated at family level. This lead to a minimal interaction at the community level. According to Chau and Yu (2001), few Chinese shared their interests on a community level and they generally dealt with their problems domestically. Their concerns were mainly limited to their families, and most of their attentions were paid beyond this boundary. Though they generally believed that high levels of trust between family members could positively facilitate their business, this was indeed a hindrance to build their social connections. The social network size within the Chinese community was, therefore, very small (Tina and Steven, 2013).

Consequently, many Chinese within the UK context experienced ‘double social exclusion’: they were not fully integrated into the social mainstream and maintained a distance from each other. They had a foot in both camps but lack the full support of either (Chau and Yu, 2001).

Multi-cultural constitution

The Chinese community in Britain is not homogeneous. It is made up of members from diverse origins with different cultural backgrounds and speaking different language. People from Hong Kong and Guangdong province in Southern China mainly speak Cantonese and for most of them they can understand Mandarin and speak fluent Mandarin. People from mainland China speak Mandarin. They typically cannot speak Cantonese and few of them can understand Cantonese.

Because the first group of Chinese immigrants was mainly from Hong Kong, the earliest Chinese organisations were established by Hong Kong people who used Cantonese in social activities. The challenges to these Hong Kong people based Chinese organisations started when new Chinese immigrants began to arrive from mainland China. Between 2000 and 2004, 9,785 mainland Chinese people were granted permanent resident in the UK compared to 3,125 from Hong Kong (Home Office, 2005). Meanwhile, the influence arising from the students is dramatically high. The issue is that over 90% of these students speak Mandarin. The result was that Cantonese was regarded as the problem in communication by people from mainland China who speak Mandarin. Significant problems emerged between the two groups of people in speaking different language. In Chan et al., (2007)’s research, there were examples to reveal the conflict. A respondent from Cardiff explained:

People from the Cardiff Chinese Christian Church asked me to join their activities several times. Because they are Hong Kong people, we found it difficult to talk with them. Another respondent in the same city was disappointed that Cantonese was the only medium of instruction at the local Chinese school: Unfortunately, Chinese people here are mainly from Guangdong and Hong Kong. It is difficult for me to understand them. People from Cardiff Chinese Christian Church are mainly Hong

Kong people. The church has set up a Chinese school where Cantonese is taught. Our children don't go there because they can't understand.

(Chan et al., 2007, pp. 521)

A respondent from mainland China simply put it:

Hong Kong people run take-aways and restaurants. We are studying here. It is difficult to communicate, [because there is] a social and language gap.

(Chan et al., 2007, pp. 522)

According to the empirical data, the gap between Cantonese speakers and Mandarin speakers was from two aspects. Firstly, it was reflected as a direct communication problem due to the reason that different languages were spoken. Secondly, there seemed to be a social status difference between the two groups because Cantonese speakers, mainly Hong Kong people, normally run a restaurant, while Mandarin speakers worked for them. Therefore, at the end of their research, the authors found that there was very little communication between the two groups, and conflicts occurred between the two groups of workers.

Problems arising from the multi-cultural workforces, as a result, was another factor which substantially weakened the solidarity of the UK Chinese community as a whole.

2.3.3 Gaps and rationales

When referring to the external environment, after examining the basic features of the Chinese economic position and community connection, it should be clear that this is fundamentally different from previously analysed South-Asian businesses. As already mentioned in section 2.3.1, the understanding of racism is the basis to interpret the employment relations in South-Asian firms (Ram, 1994; Jones et al., 2006). Features such as working in marginal sectors and lack of resources are all the outcome of the experience of racism. With traditional discrimination, South-Asian small firms were largely forced into the low-wage sector with limited choices, such as retail and restaurant sectors. They had to compete with whites with marginal profits and intensive use of labour. In other words, this historic factor set the parameter of employment relations in South-Asian small

firms. By contrast, for most ethnic Chinese restaurants, they mainly attracted Chinese customers (Chan and Chan, 1997), and meanwhile the supply and demand relations could secure their stable profits (Chan et al., 2007). As a result, their particular product market position was completely different from the South-Asian restaurant sector because the Chinese restaurant sector had little influence from racism and had little influence from mainstream market competition.

Internally, kinship ties were believed as the key factor to support South-Asian businesses (Ram et al., 2000; Kitching et al., 2009). Solid kinship ties and strong community connection created trust between group members, contributing to co-operation between employers and employees with shared beliefs. Ram (1994) revealed that trust is always behind the actual business operation under an extremely informal process in businesses. This is because of the solid community co-operation sharing common cultural beliefs. Unlike a solid community of South-Asian businesses, there is potential hostility within the ethnic Chinese businesses due to the multi-cultural workforces. Workers together with owners in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector were mainly composed of three different groups, with different language being spoken and different cultural background. Instead of trust and co-operation, the consequence was that there were widely conflicts and resistance between different group members (Chan et al., 2007; Tina and Steven, 2013).

Therefore, it can be found that whether it is from external or internal considerations, ethnically-Chinese owned small firms have dramatic differences from South-Asian small firms. As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, all these external and internal differences have been demonstrated to have different meanings to employment relations. It is, therefore, expected that conclusions generated from South-Asian small firms should not be applied to ethnic Chinese group straightforward. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a research to explore how employment relations are experienced on the shop floor within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

2.3.4 Analytical framework for the research

Having examined how external environments (product markets, labour markets, industry) and internal forces (informality, negotiated order) have affected shop floor behaviours and employment relations in small firms, Section 2.1.4 discussed two conceptual frameworks

– Harney and Dundon’s framework (Harney and Dundon, 2006) and Edwards and Ram’s framework (Edwards and Ram, 2006). They develop from the traditional debate around how employment relations in small firms are shaped by a variety of factors. Early studies (Goss, 1999a; Rainnie, 1989) emphasised the importance of external factors and suggested that management practices and workplace relationships are determined by structural forces such as product market pressures and sector differences. However, later research (Ram, 1994; Ram and Edwards, 2003) demonstrated that internal forces such as the nature of informality interact with external forces in shaping shop floor behaviours and labour management practices in small firms.

Indeed, these two frameworks are similar in the way that they each demonstrate that there is a range of competing factors, both externally and internally, that have impacts upon employment relations in small firms. Fundamentally, these frameworks all reflect the concern that there is interaction between the external and internal environments in shaping management practices and employment relations, not determined by either internal forces or external contexts. Within certain contexts, some might be more influential than others, which also reflects the context-sensitive view (Ram and Edwards, 2010) in understanding how different contexts have different meanings to employment relations in small firms. It is, therefore, necessary to develop a framework to guide this research.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, influences from product markets, such as the relationship between small businesses and larger organisations (Rainnie, 1989), customer demands (Kinnie et al., 1999), competition (Ram et al., 2000) and regional development (Jones and Ram, 2007), and from labour markets such as the relationship between owner-managers’ reliance on employees and labour market conditions (Scase, 2005), labour demand and supply (Ram et al., 2002), have been demonstrated to have effects in shaping employment relations in all types of small firms. The new framework, therefore, needs to incorporate these two key structural forces.

High degrees of informality have largely shaped management practices and employment relations in small firms (Ram, 1994; Marlow et al., 2005; Ram and Edwards, 2010), which differentiates small businesses from large organisations. Section 2.2.3 has specifically examined how informality integrated with ethnicity in shaping employment relations and

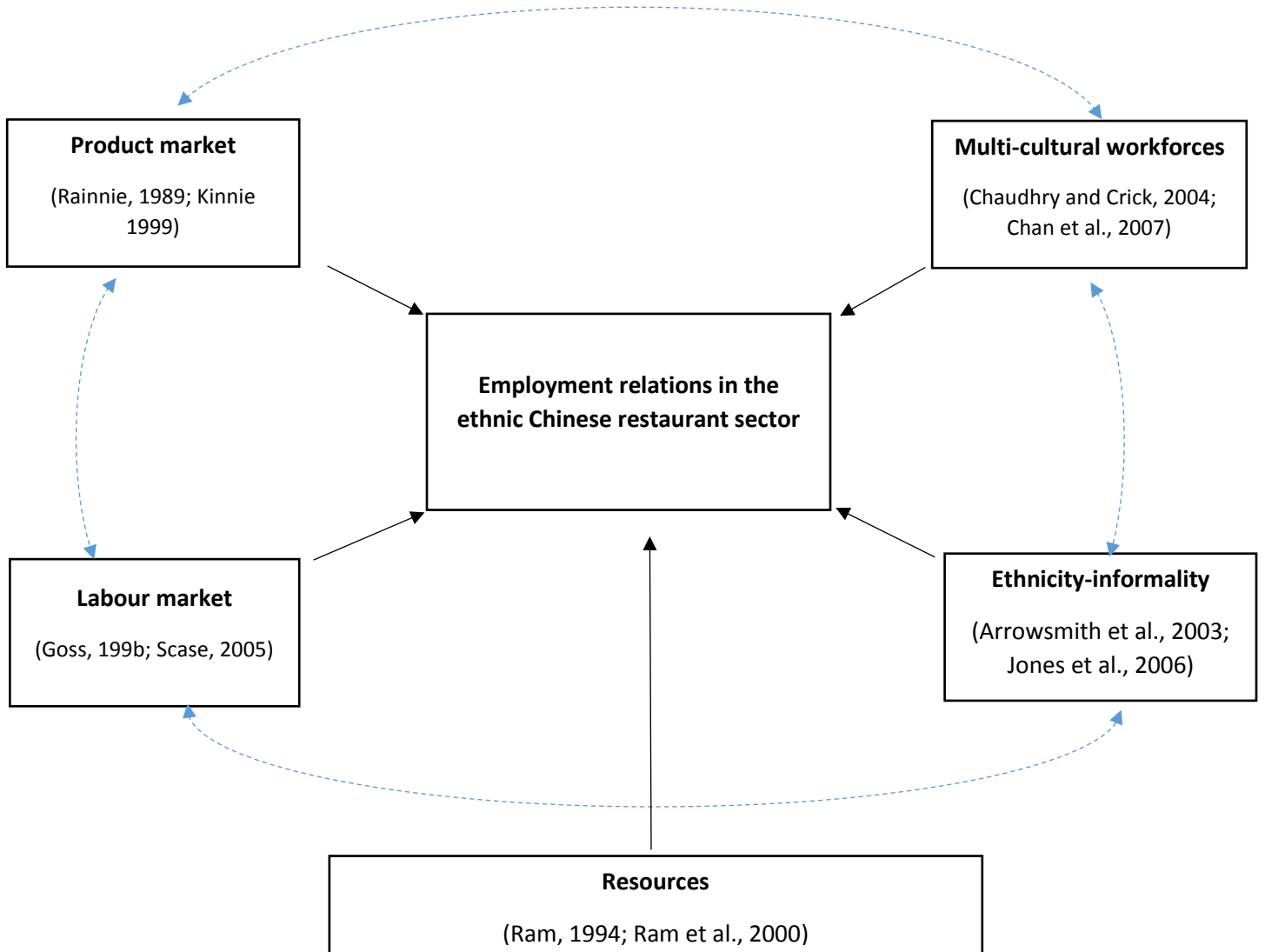
shop floor behaviours in South-Asian small firms. Within the South-Asian context, there were greater degrees of informality, mainly reflected as organising informality and regulatory informality (Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). It is, therefore, necessary to draw out the concept of ethnicity and informality and integrate these two concepts to explore how informality interacting with ethnicity affects employment relations in the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

Furthermore, for ethnic Chinese businesses operating in the UK context, Section 2.3.2 has illustrated that features in relation to ethnicity within this group are different from those in South-Asian groups from a variety of aspects. The most dramatic point is that people are from different cultural backgrounds. Instead of having strong and consolidating relationships between colleagues with shared cultural backgrounds, in Chinese-owned small businesses there can be explicit communication problems and conflicts between workers from different parts of a vast country such as China (Chan et al., 2007). As a result, a framework that is used to explore employment relations in ethnic Chinese small firms needs to cover this contextual factor. As discussed above, it is necessary to include features in relation to ethnicity to understand employment relations in ethnic minority firms. Within the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, 'multi-cultural workforces' fits into the model.

Additionally, existing research has demonstrated the importance of women's labour to the success of ethnic businesses (Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). Female labour was a useful resource for South-Asian small firms. Firstly, the supply of ethnic female labour from the labour market was generally cheap because of their lack of skills and dependent relationship to men. It was, therefore, important for these South Asian ethnic enterprises to employ cheap female labour to compete in labour intensive industries, such as restaurant and clothing sectors. Secondly, female workers were frightened of management due to their weak labour market position. This gave small firm owners the opportunity to ruthlessly exploit the workforce (Ram, 1994). Examples in these studies illustrated that the survival of South-Asian small businesses was sustained by the exploitation of female labour to expand their value as a resource. Based on this, the new framework needs to discover what might be the particular resource for ethnic Chinese restaurants.

According to the discussions above, the explicit framework designed for this research develops, as Figure 4 shows:

Figure 4 The analytical framework for this research



The framework consists of five key aspects that are believed to have major impacts upon management practices and employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector:

product market, labour market, multi-cultural workforces, informality-ethnicity and resources.

Product market: This is to examine to what extent the product market influences owner-managers' management strategies in operating their businesses and choices in managing employees. Aspects such as competition and customers' demands will be particularly examined.

Labour market: This is to focus on to what extent the labour market influences shop floor behaviours and dynamics between owner-managers and workers. It will examine the supply of labour in the sector and how the dependence relationship influences shop floor dynamics.

Informality-ethnicity: This is to integrate the concept of informality and ethnicity to examine how informality and ethnicity interact with each other to shape employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

Multicultural-workforces: This is to understand how those groups of workers with different cultural and language backgrounds experience their day-to-day work horizontally with each other and vertically with the owners. The main focus is to discuss how tension and struggle between people from different backgrounds affects shop floor behaviours.

Resource: This is to consider which particular resource in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector might have special influence on management practices and workplace relations.

The dotted lines refer to the connection between different factors. These factors relate to each other to some extent through potential influences. For example, Goss (1991b) demonstrated that workers with scarce labour market skills might have the ability to actively bargain with management instead of being driven by the product market alone. For low-value added (LVA) ethnic minority small firms, because they largely operated in a marginal sector with heavy competition, the labour supply was, therefore, significantly constrained (Edwards and Ram, 2006). These factors, therefore, do not exist independently of each other. With the focus on the relations between these themes, the framework aims

to draw out the connections between different factors within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

In summary, this analytical framework develops from existing models, and it is a speciality developed for this research. It will be used to guide the methods in collecting data and structure the data analysis.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Chapter 2 examined the recent development of the field of employment relations in small firms. A context-sensitive view has been emphasised throughout the analysis (Edwards, 2005; Edwards and Ram, 2010). Particularly, in studying employment relations in ethnic minority small businesses, research has moved from pure ethno-cultural analysis to identifying the importance of impacts upon owner-managers' choices and subsequent strategies in managing labour from social, economic and political factors (Kloosterman, 2010). The concept of super-diversity leads researchers to realise that it is necessary to examine more ethnic minority groups rather than traditionally focused South-Asian and Black communities. Jones et al.'s (2002) research into Somalis in Leicester represents an example aiming to address the gap to explore the diversity of integration of ethnic groups within a wider political-economic context.

Based on this guidance, Section 2.3 examined features in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the UK context. It revealed that from both external environments and internal constitution of labour forces, there are obviously a variety of differences compared to the representative South-Asian group. Several clear gaps therefore have been identified. Consequently, it is necessary to examine how employment relations play out in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the UK context to understand the dynamics within this group. By doing this, it may throw light on explaining the integration of diverse minority groups in the UK, providing some new knowledge in the field as the potential contribution. An analytical framework was presented in Section 2.3.4, which will guide how this research is structured.

Building on these understandings, this chapter will describe and justify the research design employed in this study. It starts by presenting the research aim, and the research questions and objectives. Section two will discuss highly-influential workplace studies that demonstrate the value of ethnographic approaches to workplace studies. These studies laid the foundation to explain workplace behaviours and to explore shop floor relationships between management and workers. Section three will discuss the nature of ethnographic approach and justify this research. This involves highlighting a number of methodological

concerns relevant to the study. The rationale for selecting case study firms and the process of gaining and sustaining access are then discussed in section three. Section four will introduce the case study firms, providing detailed information about each firm's background and issues in a wider context. Section five will discuss the process and technique during data collection. Finally, in section six, the steps and methods used in data analysis will be examined.

3.1 The research aim, questions and objectives

In light of the research gaps discussed above, this section will discuss the research aim, and research questions and objectives.

Research aim: To thoroughly understand how employment relations are experienced in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context and the main factors that shape this process.

Research question one: To what extent does the product market influence owner-managers' management strategies in operating their businesses and choices in managing employees?

Research objective one: Chapter 2 has demonstrated the importance of product markets in shaping owner-managers' strategies upon labour management and employment relations. There are different types of influences from the product market, such as the relationship between small businesses and large organisations (Rainnie, 1989), customer demands (Kinnie, 1999), competition (Ram et al., 2000) and regional development (Jones and Ram, 2007).

Based on these discussions, the objective, therefore, is to discover how the product market in this particular context influences owner-managers' strategies in managing labour and the shop floor experiences between owner-managers and workers in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms.

Research question two: To what extent does the labour market influence shop floor behaviours and dynamics between owner-managers and workers?

Research objective two: As also discussed in Chapter 2, labour markets affect employment relations and shop floor dynamics significantly, as well. Influences from

labour markets, such as the relationship between owner-managers' reliance on employees and labour market conditions (Scase, 2005), labour demand and supply (Ram et al., 2002) and family and kinship ties (Ram et al., 2007) have all been illustrated to have effects in shaping management practices and employment relations.

As such, this objective is to explore how the labour market shapes management choices and the shop floor dynamics between owner-managers and workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

Research question three: How do potential conflict and resistance within multi-cultural workforces impact employment relations on the shop-floor?

Research objective three: As already discussed in Chapter 2, workforces in ethnic minority small firms are generally composed of three groups of people: people from Hong Kong and Guangdong (a province in Southern China) who mainly speak Cantonese, people from China who speak Mandarin and British-born-Chinese (BBC), for whom English is their first language. Language and cultural clashes have been identified to have adverse impacts on communication, understanding and adjustment among these three groups of workers (Chan et al., 2007). However, existing research rarely contains analysis on how multi-cultural workforces influence the employment relations on the shop floor.

Therefore, this objective is to understand how these groups of workers with different cultural and language backgrounds experience their day-to-day work horizontally with each other and vertically with the owners. Owing to different language being spoken, one of the key focuses is on how the communication problem is solved and how mutual adjustment is experienced on the shop floor. The main focus is to discuss how tensions and struggles between people from different backgrounds affect shop floor behaviours.

Research question four: How does informality interacting with ethnicity shape management practices and workplace behaviours?

Research objective four: Informality has been demonstrated to be a major factor in shaping management practices and employment relations in small firms (Ram 1994; Marlow, 2005). With a particular focus within the context of ethnic minority small firms, informality had even more significant impacts upon management choices and shop floor

behaviours (Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). As discussed in Chapter 2, it is mainly reflected in two aspects: organising informality and regulatory informality.

The objective, therefore, is to integrate the concept of informality and ethnicity to examine how informality and ethnicity interact with each other to shape employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. For the focus of organising informality, it will examine how informality and negotiated order play out through basic management procedures such as recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, wage payment and staff exit. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how much scope employees may have in facing management practices and negotiating for their interests. This will be discussed by focusing on fiddles and management's tolerance to understand the meaning of the individual experience of employment relations. For the focus of regulatory informality, this research is to explore how regulations work together with particular environment in which ethnically-Chinese owned small firms operate to influence owner-managers' practical choices and shop floor experiences between employers and employees.

3.2 Research methodology

This section will examine several issues within ethnographic research and discuss the theoretical positions of this research. Section 3.2.1 will review the highly-influential and fundamental workplace studies. It will explain the significance of ethnographic approach in exploring workplace studies and how these studies informed how I structured my PhD research. Section 3.2.2 will justify how ethnography is a suitable research strategy for this research by focusing on its nature. Section 3.2.3 will discuss how the research was conducted in relation to a few practical choices.

3.2.1 Empirical tradition of workplace studies

The section will review the highly-influential and fundamental workplace studies. The first aim is to discover the insights these pieces of work provided because they are all fundamental research to explore management-worker relations at the point of production. Theories generated from these studies had significant influential impacts upon how conceptual ideas were developed in later research. Secondly, there has been the workplace empirical tradition in these pieces of research. Data were collected empirically by researchers saturating themselves into workplaces. For most of the authors, they worked as

a fully functioning member in the organisation. This enabled them to collect in-depth data and capture casual mechanisms to understand the dynamics between management and workers. Participant observation and ethnography were basically the approach they employed. This workplace empirical tradition indeed largely influenced how I designed the research method used in this PhD research and how I structured the data collection and data analysis process. For these two reasons, it is necessary to start from examining these key studies within the field of workplace relations.

Roy (1952; 1954) worked as a machine operator in a manufacturing factory to explore workplace behaviours. One of his main focuses was the 'restriction of output'. He aimed to find answers to questions such as: Why do workers resist managerial efforts to make them work hard; How do workers limit the production; What causes their resistances? With eleven months working in the factory, Roy was able to calculate the time workers wasted during production, capture the tricks they used in resisting production and understand workers' perceptions about why they conducted output restriction. His close proximity to the shop floor finally enabled him to explain in great detail both the context and the rationality within which workers restricted output.

Burawoy (1979) also became a machine operator to explore the labour process in the workshop. In contrast to Roy's focus, in understanding shop floor behaviours and effort bargaining, Burawoy asked, 'why do workers work as hard as they do?' By working closely with shop floor workers, Burawoy had the chance to fully observe and explore the process of making out, which enabled him to explain how the consent was developed in the workplace as a fundamental aspect of capitalist labour process and ultimately the mechanism of capitalism. Shop floor activities such as 'making out' were treated as concrete examples of the way employers secured surplus value while simultaneously obscuring exploitation. Even when workers found methods to avoid the routines and to exert degrees of control over their working lives, they were also within the process of 'generating consent'. Burawoy's study was thus able to develop linkages between specific workplace relations and the structural requirements of capital accumulation. His research produced illustrative examples of how capitalist social relations are reproduced over time.

Lupton (1963) spent a year as a worker in two factories to explore social factors influencing outputs. By working extensive time in the two plants, Lupton recognised that the two factories differed in almost every aspect and this finally enabled him to identify substantial differences in workplace behaviours. By focusing on the product system, the nature of the workforce, the nature of the product market, the scale of the industry and various other features of management-work relations, Lupton presented a series of contrasts between the two workplaces, and managed to explain what caused the differences in workplace behaviours.

Specifically, in the field of small firm studies, Ram (1994) spent four months in three firms in West Midlands to explore shop floor behaviours and workplace relations. By intensive field work, Ram presented the picture of how small firms operated on a day-to-day basis with rich and detailed empirical data. The discussion included how work was organised on the shop floor, how changes in a turbulent environment were handled and the implications of gender and ethnicity at work. Most importantly, by direct observation and contacts with owner-managers and workers, Ram illustrated that there had been continuous bargaining on the shop floor. The relationship between owner-managers and workers was largely shaped by informal negotiation under diverse situations, instead of dominated by external forces. This account challenged the notion that employment relations in small firms are necessarily autocratic and determined by structural forces.

In summary, these studies provided intensive examinations of management-worker interactions based on an ethnographic empirical tradition. By directly engaging in workplaces and observing events that occurred within a particular context, they generated in-depth understanding of behaviours on the shop floor. The identification, portrayal and explanation of shop floor behaviours such as ‘effort bargaining’, ‘fiddles’, ‘custom and practice’ and ‘workplace resistance’ has played a crucial part in illuminating shop floor relations between management and workers for later research.

3.2.2 Ethnography as the approach

Ethnography is one of many approaches that can be found within social science research. Ethnography originated from the approach where researchers spent a period of time in fieldwork living with a group of people to understand their community or culture, similar

to anthropology in the nineteenth-century. The ethnographic approach usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions through informal and formal interviews and collecting documents – gathering whatever data are available – to throw light on the issues that are the focus of their research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). According to Hammersley (1998), a typical ethnographic research study has the following characteristics:

1. The behaviour of individuals is studied in its natural setting rather than through conditions created by researchers.
2. Observation and informal conversations are the principal research tools.
3. Ethnography is unstructured in the sense that the researcher does not start with a detailed and fixed plan. Moreover, the categories used for interpreting people's behaviour and perceptions are also not pre-given.
4. The focus of ethnographic research tends to be on single, relatively small, social groupings.
5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are perhaps linked to wider contexts. It is therefore an exploratory approach to generate explanations and theories.

On the basis of the above definition, the key principle of the ethnographic approach is the belief that the social world can be better understood through studying people in their natural environment as opposed to specifically created situations by researchers such as experiments or highly structured interviews. By engaging directly with the environment, it gives the chance for researchers to collect data in 'natural' settings. Participant observation is, therefore, seen as the central approach to the process of ethnographic research. Researchers immerse themselves into the environment they are interested in to observe participants' behaviour. Moreover, informal conversation with participants is also the main resource in data collection. Data are analysed to interpret the meaning of people's actions to develop relations between people's behaviour. Conceptual ideas and theoretical

explanations are, finally, generalised. From this sense, ethnography is an exploratory approach to examine a research setting and generate explanation.

As stated in Section 3.1, this research is a piece of exploratory research aiming to explore and understand employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms. It interprets people's behaviour and explains people's views. Theories are generated based on empirical data, instead of being tested. According to this, the epistemological position should be interpretivism. The particular context of the research is ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the restaurant sector in the UK context. As already discussed in Chapter 2, within different contexts, the social meaning of people's behaviour and shop floor experiences may be significantly different, such as employment relations in the printing industry versus employment relations in the electronics industry (see Curran and Stanworth, 1979), or employment relations in South-Asian small firms versus employment relations in Anglo-Saxon small firms (see Ram, 1994). It is a series of interactive processes between humans and the particular context. In this sense, the particular context and the external setting must be taken into account to construct the analysis to interpret people's behaviour. And meanwhile, the explanation of people's behaviour must be connected to the particular context to examine how the interactive process between humans and the context shapes people's perceptions and actions. Bearing this in mind, the ontological position should be a social constructionism view.

Point 5 above indicates that the ethnographic approach interprets meaning and functions of human actions and generates explanations. As a piece of exploratory research, this thesis follows the nature of ethnography used in social science – unravelling and revealing the relationships and meaning of a group of people. Furthermore, it is expected that the behaviour of people should be explained from a theoretical level based on particular empirical connections. This is also in line with the nature of ethnography, where an ethnographic approach gives researchers the opportunity to detect emerging practices and develop theories to explain phenomena, not just those that are already fully developed. As Edwards and Ram (2010) suggested, the study of labour management in small firms needs to be understood *in contexts*. It is necessary to capture variation and understand how they are played out under different situations and the significances to employment relations.

With an application of this view, it is possible to grasp the *complexity and heterogeneity* of compliance and consent between employers and employees.

Chapter 2 identified a variety of contextual factors which may shape the employment relations, and examined how the change of contexts both externally and internally would subsequently impact upon employment relations. As already examined above, ethnography is a context-sensitive approach. With this nature, it gives researchers the chance to identify contextual factors in the organisation and then to understand how those environmental features influence people's behaviour (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). As already demonstrated in Section 2.4, there are huge differences between the ethnic Chinese group and the South-Asian group, in both external and internal environment. As a result, it is necessary to focus on the contextual features of the ethnic Chinese group to understand types of employment relations, so as to compare and contrast it with other groups. As a result, with the application of ethnography, it can be believed that it is helpful for a better understanding of the context where particular forms of practices and behaviour emerge within the ethnic Chinese group.

Researchers have recognised the complexity and heterogeneity of employment relations in small firms, challenging the over-simplified depictions presented by the 'small is beautiful' and 'bleak house' scenarios (Atkinson, 2008). As Ram et al., (2001) mentioned, though informality was seen as the basic feature in small firms compared to large companies, it was necessary to understand its meaning to employment relations in different ways. Informality may be shaped by a variety of factors, such as the relationship to product markets, the existing labour forces, structures of work organisation and technology. Once circumstances change, the nature and extent of informality would adapt to these changes. Therefore, understanding employment relations in small firms requires capturing the complexity and heterogeneity within this process in a dynamic manner. Ethnography provides researchers with the opportunity to closely observe participants. This enables researchers to capture subtle changes of people's perceptions and behaviour under a particular environment, which is helpful to explain meanings with the recognition of complexity and heterogeneity. When considering my research, the research managed to capture continuous changes in people's behaviour and opinions within even slightly

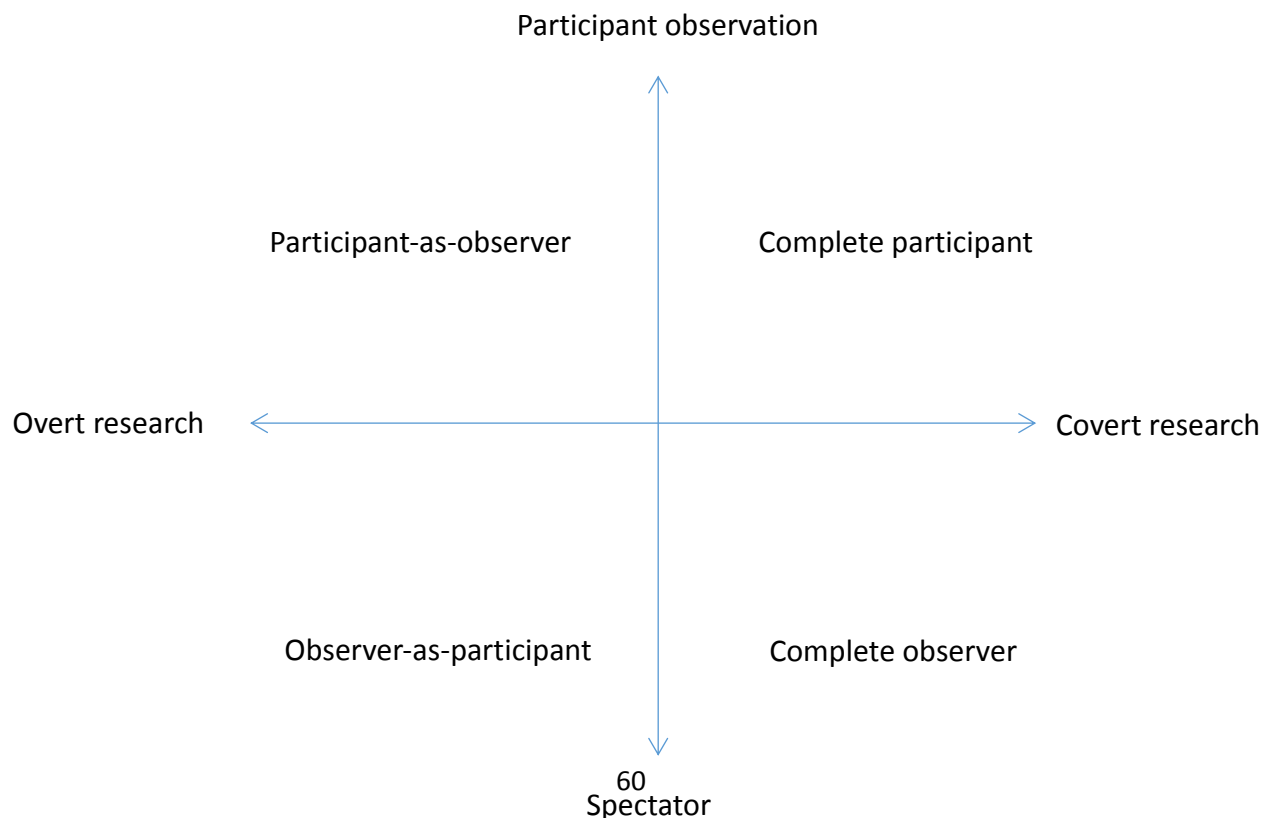
different contexts to explain the dynamics between employer-employee and employee-employee relations. Consequently, ethnography can help to identify both people's actions and factors that influence those actions in exploring the complexity and heterogeneity of employment relations as a continuous process. Specifically, Chan et al., (2007) identified that most of the existing studies in researching the UK Chinese communities relevant to workplace studies used survey and questionnaire as the research method. There has been a lack of in-depth research to explore the dynamics between owners and workers at the point of production.

Therefore, based on these analyses, it is proper to employ ethnography as the research approach in this study.

Field roles for ethnographers

Figure 5 shows the ideal-typical classifications developed by Gold (1958). It combines two central issues related to field roles of ethnographers: the extent to which researchers participate in the social environment and whether the role of a researcher is overt or covert. According to the classification, there are four roles, one in each quadrant.

Figure 5 Field roles for researchers



Source: Gill and Johnson (2002)

The social roles of 'complete participant' and 'complete observer' are two forms of 'covert research', where researchers conceal their identities during field work. In the 'complete participant' role, researchers become a fully functioning member of the social setting, working and living together with participants. For the moment, their positions as a researcher are not revealed. The 'complete observer' role means that researchers do not take part in the activities of participants. A researcher does not interact with people. This method largely relies on forms of observation to collect data. In contrast to the 'covert research', there are also two forms of 'overt research', where members of the social setting are aware of the researcher's status as a researcher and a researcher is an overt observer. In the 'observer-as-participant' role, a researcher has very little involvement with the participants though s/he observes in their activities. There is some connection to the setting but the observer is not normally part of the social setting. The 'participant-as-observer' role is largely the same as the 'complete participant', where the researcher is a fully functioning member of the field. However, the true purpose and identity of the researcher is revealed to the members of the social setting. With this role, a researcher is engaged in regular interaction with participants in their everyday lives and closely involved in their everyday activities. In workplace studies, this involves taking either paid or unpaid work in the organisation. The emphasis under this strategy is that researchers have to establish trust with people so as to be permitted to observe behaviour and ask questions.

As for the field role of this research, ethical considerations rule out a covert field role. As a result, the two positions of 'covert research' – 'complete participant' and 'complete observer' should be ruled out at the beginning. For the 'observer-as-participant' position, Bryman and Bell (2011) stated that, though the interaction exists between researchers and participants, it is believed that the concept of 'participation' is more or less missing. Therefore, this would make ethnography rather restrictive, which might lead to a researcher failing to be fully immersed in the context. This then leaves one role – participant-as-observer. This role is overt, so it raises fewer ethical concerns. In addition, it provides the chance for researchers to become closely involved in the research setting, thereby enabling them to closely observe people's behaviour.

The review of fundamental ethnographic studies in Section 3.2.1 has demonstrated how directly engaging in the field can enable researchers to generate in-depth understanding of behaviours on the shop floor. This research, therefore, took participant observation as the research strategy. As the ‘participant-as-observer’ role emphasises the involvement of researchers into the field and participation in the workplace, the approach in this research was, therefore, aligned with the ‘participant-as-observer’ position.

Going native and reflexivity

As discussed in the previous section, researchers adopting either a ‘complete observer’ or ‘observer-as-participant’ field role may be unable to participate sufficiently in the field setting, resulting in them being unable to capture the meanings of human behaviours and develop connections between human actions and settings. By contrast, the ‘participant-as-observer’ role enables researchers to become immersed in the field and thus collect in-depth data. However, this field role is not risk-free. ‘Going native’ and ‘reflexivity’ are the two most important issues an ethnographer might face.

‘Going native’ refers to the possibility that ethnographers may lose their sense of being a researcher and become influenced by the world view of the people they are studying after prolonged immersion in the field (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Engaging in the setting for a long time and communicating with participants regularly lie behind this risk. First, the perception of a researcher is probably influenced within a particular culture. By frequent contacts with participants and asking questions to explore participants’ views about workplace and the world, a researcher may lose sight of his position as a researcher and subsequent neutral view in the field. Second, when working in the field, especially for a researcher as a fully functioning member of the organisation, they sometimes have to make decisions whether or not to support a person, a policy or to take sides, which would arguably influence their view on particular participants or behaviour, and position themselves with subjective understanding, instead of an objective and neutral view. Once a researcher is trapped into a situation like this, the validity of data analysis will be hugely suspect. For example, Beynon (1975) described how he was criticised by reviewers for ‘going native’ following publication of the first edition of his book *Working for Ford*. It was suggested that he finally became a spokesman for the Ford factory workers, and his

sentimental and emotional involvement was believed to go too far. Therefore, the accuracy and validity of his account of working experiences in the plant were called into question. His study was finally dismissed by some as being too subjective (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

If 'going native' means the recognition of influences from the environment upon researchers' perceptions, 'reflexivity' is more concerned with how a researcher, as part of the organisation, influences the working process. 'Being reflexive' is believed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) to be the fundamental difference between ethnography and positivism and naturalism, because both of them fail to take into account the fact that researchers are part of the social work they study so that it is impossible to isolate data unmediated by a researcher and eliminate the effects of a researcher on the data.

Therefore, reflexivity on the one hand recognises the effects from researchers upon the data, and on the other hand, it requires that a researcher must be sensitive to their effects on the behaviour of others (Gill and Johnson, 2002). It is impossible to avoid the researcher-as-participant influence, but it is necessary for a researcher to be always aware of their potential impacts. Researchers are required to be 'reflective' during the period of his field work, and to understand their roles as a social participant and the effect that this has in shaping behaviour around them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

There would have been strong impacts upon findings without realising the importance of 'going native' and 'being reflective' during my research. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, there are three different groups of workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector with different cultural background. Chapter 6 illustrated that there were explicit conflicts between Mandarin speaking workers and Cantonese speaking workers. I myself is a Mandarin speaker. Having worked in the field for a period, I began to realise that Mandarin speaking workers sometimes would like me together with them to resist Cantonese speaking workers' management. Under the situation like this, my perception was influenced to some extent. I soon realised I had to keep a balanced view towards these two groups as a researcher without being drawn into their struggles. I, therefore, managed to minimise my influence in co-operating with Mandarin speaking workers to work against controls by Cantonese speaking workers.

Another example was the risks associated with my participation in fiddles on the shop floor. One day when I was planning to deliver take-aways, the manager asked me not to take money from one order because that order was from his friend. He instructed me on how I could conduct the fiddle without the driver (the male owner) noticing. Having received this information, I hesitated for a short while and was extremely conflicted. The fiddle was clearly unethical. On the other hand, the manager was the one who introduced me to the job. He was my friend and a research informant and I did not want to make him feel unhappy. Eventually the manager decided to take the delivery himself because he wanted to finish his shift early. I felt relieved that I did not need to participate in the fiddle. This example clearly demonstrates that a researcher always has to be reflexive to see his effects on the environment and participants' behaviours.

The discussion of 'going native' and 'reflexivity' suggests that ethnographic researchers cannot assume they are simply neutral in the field, instead they need to acknowledge the potential for influence and interpretation but crucially be aware of this. Therefore, recognising the importance of 'going native' and 'reflexivity' was crucial throughout my field work.

Generalisation

Ethnography studies are often criticised on the grounds that their findings are not generalisable to wider contexts and populations because of their small number of instances (Steinmetz, 2004; Gerring, 2007). It is common for ethnographic research to be accused of weakness when it comes to what are termed 'reliability' and 'population validity' considerations (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Reliability refers to the extent to which the research strategy, the findings and the theories thereby generated can be reproduced. Population validity concerns the extent to which how well the theory generated from relatively small samples can be generalised to a wider population. Against these criteria, ethnography is criticised because researchers are unable to effectively control variables within its unstructured nature so that reliability and population validity are simultaneously reduced. Capelli (1985), for example, argued that:

‘the weakness of case studies is that they do not provide adequate tests of theories because sample sizes are small (e.g. a single case) and the results lack external [population] validity’.

Indeed, it was argued that the criticism was mistaken and based upon a limited understanding of what it means to ‘generalise’ from particular case to the wider situations. Mitchell (1983), for example, argued that criticisms pointed at the limited population validity of ethnographic data confuse research techniques which are appropriate to quantitative research with those involved in qualitative research. Quantitative research normally involves two major processes: firstly, statistical inference, which means the likelihood that observations drawn from small samples will occur in larger populations; and secondly, scientific inference, which means the probability that theories used to interpret relationships between observations in small populations can also work in larger populations. In intensive research, by contrast:

‘...Statistical inference is not invoked at all. Instead the inferential process turns exclusively on the theoretically necessary linkages among the features in the case study. The validity of the extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning’ (Mitchell, 1983. Pp. 211).

Generalisation from ethnographic findings does not mean the representativeness of events but relies on the strength of the analysis. As Mitchell notes:

‘There is absolutely no advantage in going to a great deal of trouble to find a typical case...For general purposes any set of events will serve the purpose of the analyst if the theoretical base is sufficiently well developed to enable the analyst to identify within these events the operation of the general principles incorporated within the theory’ (Mitchell, 1983. Pp. 204).

Generalising from ethnographic research indeed means something different. Ethnographic research does not aim to demonstrate how common a particular phenomenon is, but rather to explore and explain why situations work in the way they do (Hammersley, 1998). Yin (2009) also noted that ethnography is to discuss analytical generalisation. It is not an

approach that focuses on empirical or quantitative generalisation. In other words, the approach of ethnography is not from sample to population; it is aiming to examine the principles in the particular environment to develop conceptual and theoretical generalisation based on empirical data. By focusing on one or two cases, ethnography aims to capture the mechanism of the dynamics.

For example, by focusing on ‘making out’ in one factory, Burawoy’s (1979) study was able to develop linkages between specific workplace relations and the structural forces under capitalism society. Moreover, Ram (1994) conducted ethnographic research in three small firms. By close observation and intensive interviews, he concluded that informal negotiation and bargaining largely shaped the employment relations in small firms, especially influenced by family and kinship ties. By working for an extensive period of time on the shop floor, he found that relations with large firms did shape the practices of labour management, but not in a deterministic way. It was mediated by complex relationships inside the firm between managers and workers through informal negotiation and degrees of mutual dependence. This proved too deterministic a traditionally believed ‘market domination’ view of employment relations in small firms.

Therefore, ethnography is not weak in generalisability. By trying to understand the mechanism in one case, it can throw light on issues in another particular context with detailed and well-reasoned justification to demonstrate that the insight and general principles are common to a wider context where similar mechanisms operate (Tsang, 2014).

3.2.3 Research justification

Chapter 2 has illustrated with several examples how sectoral differences shape employment relations in small firms. Arrowsmith et al., (2003) summarised that the analysis of small firms should benefit from the ‘firm-in-sector’ approach that has been used in larger companies. Sector factors, especially product market pressures and labour market availability, will interact with internal features in shaping employment relations in small firms. In Ram et al.’s (2000) research, the authors explained that the choice of the restaurant sector to study ethnic minority business activity was deliberately focused. The reason was that the restaurant sector represented one of the classic ‘niches’ occupied by ethnic minority groups and was an area where cultural influences had significant impacts due to offering

their own unique national-regional food. Furthermore, firms in the restaurant sector were particularly sensitive to environmental forces. As a result, most researchers aiming to understand business activities in the South-Asian group chose the restaurant sector. Section 2.3.2 already mentioned that, based on numerical data, the restaurant industry accounted for an extremely high percentage of all the small businesses among the ethnic Chinese group. Therefore, based on a 'firm-in-sector' view and the specific character of the catering sector in ethnic minority small firms, plus a particular significance of the restaurant sector to the Chinese group, it is sensible to choose this sector to conduct my research.

Once the sector is fixed, the remaining questions are: how many cases should be chosen and to what extent should they differ from each other? Edwards (1995) concluded that a research study focusing on only one workplace would be 'comparatively weak on causal analysis and on what kinds of generalisation can be drawn'. There can be no doubt that various case studies could enhance the analytical power of ethnography significantly, in contrast with one single case, such as Lupton's (1963) and Edwards and Scullion's (1982) comparative researches. A comparative study within the tradition of ethnography can give researchers the chance to draw on the similarities and differences among a variety of contexts to increase the power of analysis.

When considering the aim of this research— to thoroughly understand employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector—, if only one case had been chosen, a 'variation' would have been missing. Then, the understanding of a holistic picture would be only partial. Chapter 2 has demonstrated that there were obvious variation in management strategies between high-end restaurants and low-end restaurants according to their different product market and labour market positions (Jones et al., 2006). By focusing on one case, it is, therefore, unlikely to capture how the difference of the two external factors under the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector affect different patterns of shop floor behaviours. When considering specific features inside this group, such as multi-cultural workforces and cheap part-time student employees, the resulting choices from different external environments may influence owner-managers' practices in regulating these particular types of labour, which may identify different internal dynamics. Therefore, based on this analysis, it is

proper to choose one up-market restaurant and one down-market restaurant as research sites.

In summary, this research took the position of interpretivism as the epistemological consideration and the position of social constructionism as the ontological consideration. Ethnography was chosen as the research method with a participant-as-observer position. The restaurant sector was the focus of this research. An up-market restaurant and a down-market restaurant were examined as the research settings.

3.3 Gaining and sustaining access

Gaining access is one of the most important steps in ethnographic research in organisational studies. By drawing on a variety of personal resources and links, researchers aim to get consent to allow them to study in the field. The negotiation of access, therefore, involves gaining permission to enter any organisation and establishing relationships with owner-managers and employees. However, access includes not only securing the initial physical access but also the problem of ensuring continued access. This idea in organisation studies is conceptualised as a process to reflect how sustaining access, once granted, requires ongoing consent by participants throughout the data collection process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Based on this, this section will discuss issues around access from two aspects. The first part focuses on gaining initial access to the two sites; the second part discusses how to build relationships in the field and sustain the access. Some practical problems during this process will be emphasised to further the understanding.

In the following sections, the up-market restaurant is labelled as ‘Firm U’, while the down-market restaurant is labelled as ‘Firm D’.

3.3.1 Gaining initial access

Firm D

Securing the access to Firm D was largely based on my personal relationship with the manager, Jack. Jack had been working in Firm D since I came to Sheffield in January 2011, when I did my Master’s degree. Because I was a regular customer of Firm D, we later knew each other very well. Whenever I went to eat or order take away, we would have pleasant chats.

When the research strategy was first formulated in January 2014, I immediately considered Firm D as the potential choice for the down-market restaurant because it had been one of the busiest restaurants in Sheffield. I then went to meet Jack and expressed my desire to be a waiter for a period of time. Jack responded extremely positively. He agreed to give the chance to conduct my research once my plan was fixed. Finding a job there, as he promised to me, would not be a problem.

In November 2014, after the ethics form had been approved, I went to find Jack, telling him I was ready to work. He asked me how long I could work. I told him it was probably about two or three months. He thought this would cause some difficulties for me because the owner would like to recruit a long-term waiter. With my close relationship with Jack, I expressed that I would like him to have a negotiation with the owner. On that evening, he texted me saying that the owner agreed to meet me at 11am the next day. I then met the owner the next day at 11am and did a three-hour trial. After that, the owner agreed to offer me the job. I finally gained the access largely based on the informal network, which was the personal relationship with Jack.

Firm U

Gaining initial access in Firm U was also largely based on direct communication, together with the support of shared ethnicity. It was a Sunday afternoon when I first went into Firm U. I asked the front area manager whether they recruited any front area staff. She told me that they might not recruit any service staff. However, they did need someone working in the kitchen area. She asked me to come back again at 10pm because the owner would be there around that time and I would be able to speak to the owner directly.

I then met the owner in the evening that day. After greeting each other, the owner quickly identified that I was from Beijing, adjacent to Tianjin municipality where he came from, both in the north of China. It felt obvious that this created a close feeling between us at the start. The owner also confirmed that he did need kitchen staff. Though I doubted that whether I had the capability to take a chef job, he seemed to be very confident. He then quickly offered me the chef job without requiring a trial period and any wage negotiation. The access was thus successfully secured in an unanticipated way.

One thing that has to be highlighted is that, except from an initial introduction to the research by me, the owner asked me nothing about my research. It is then clear that he had no interests at all in the research. It felt that it was urgent for him to recruit me to fill the vacancy in order to keep the business running, though I knew nothing about that particular cooking technique. Later on, after being in the field for a while, I knew that the reason why he recruited me as a chef was that two out of the total of three chefs in the kitchen were planning to leave. At the same time, due to the shortage in the labour market, the owner could not find any qualified person immediately. The owner needed someone working for him to continue running the business: I was just the one who applied for a job at that particular time. That is why I could quickly secure the access apart from a shared ethnicity with the owner. The reason why he gave me the access was because I could work for him at that time, genuinely having no relationship with my background and my research.

The specific working periods were: the field work in Firm D was from 23th November, 2014 to 14th March, 2015; the field work in Firm U was from 29th March, 2015 to 4th July, 2015.

3.3.2 Maintaining and sustaining access

The last section explained how the initial access was secured in the two firms. Indeed, sustaining access was not an easy task. Below shows how I sustained my access in the two case study firms.

Firm D

Figure 6 The process of maintaining access in Firm D

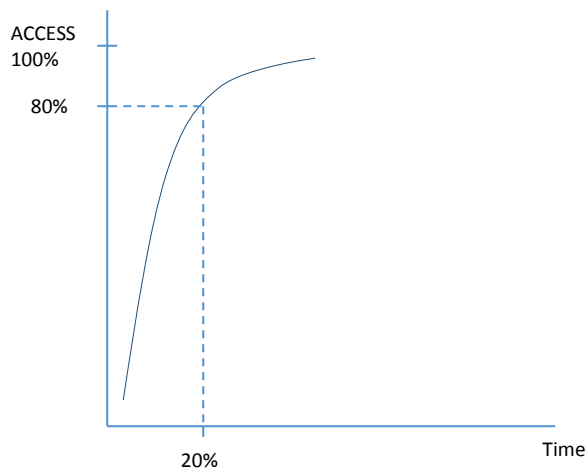


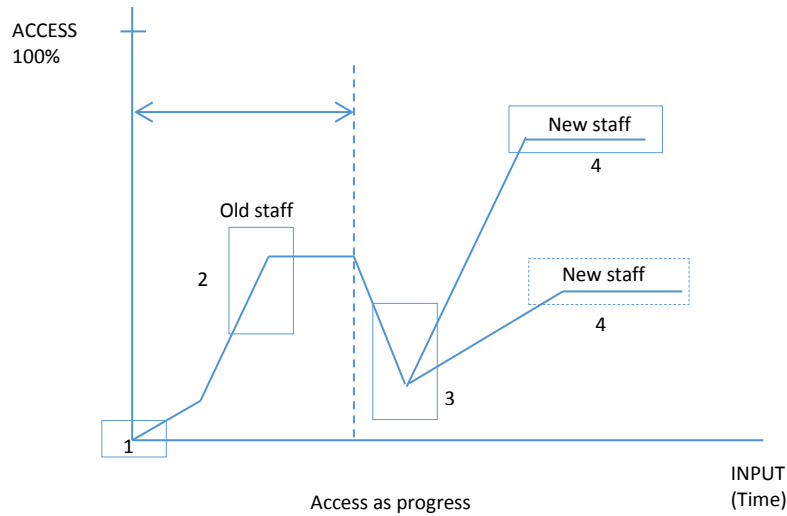
Figure 6 shows the process of maintaining access in Firm D. This clearly shows that the ongoing process of maintaining access was through continuous overtime. It basically followed what Gummesson (2000) called – ‘the 80/20 rule’, where, with more time and input spent in the field, a researcher got higher trust and more access. The process of maintaining access in Firm D was fluent. The low labour costs (further analysis in Chapter 5) combined with the owner’s character and the ways of management (further analysis in Chapter 6) mainly led to this. Moreover, my hard-working contribution and the nature of the work, which did not require any special ability, were also helpful in successfully maintaining the access. The only pressure was from some kitchen staff due to different cultural backgrounds (further analysis in chapter 7).

Firm U

However, maintaining access in Firm U created a few problems. Figure 6 shows this process.

It basically consists of four stages. First, it started from gaining initial access. This was conducted by direct communication with the owner-manager, which was achieved by successfully applying for a job. At this stage, it was mainly concerned with building trust with the owner. Once the initial access was secured, the next stage was to develop access with the staff. Because the owner rarely appeared on the site, what I mainly focused on here was to fully build trust and relationship with employees. After this, it moved into the turbulent stage – the third stage. Due to the change of the external forces and the internal employment problems, the business experienced a huge staff change. Furthermore, Firm U had a three week refurbishment during that period. After the refurbishment, the staff were almost completely changed. Due to the significant staff turnover, especially the departure of my informant, the level of the access dropped considerably. At stage four, I had to re-develop relationships with new staff. Because the staff changed a lot, this meant that I needed to build my relationships with the new staff from scratch. The challenge at this stage was to build trust with new workers.

Figure 7 The process of maintaining access in Firm U



After examining the entire process of gaining and sustaining access, negotiating access in Firm U fluctuated. Under this environment, there was a variety of overtime. Successfully sustaining research access was far more complicated than the 'accumulative model' as achieved in Firm D. Reduction existed throughout the process. It meant that access could not be always continuous and constant. This discontinuous process was largely attributed to the firms' particular business position in a turbulent environment (further analysis in Chapter 4) and the negative influences and conflicts from the conflicts between Northern and Southern people due to different languages, cultures and traditions (further analysis in Chapter 7).

3.4 Introducing the firms

In this section, the detail of the two restaurants involved in the study will be introduced.

Firm D

Firm D was founded in 2007, and at that time was one of few Chinese restaurants near the university area located on Location A. In 2011, it moved to a larger property next door due to continuously increasing customers. The main service of Firm D was rice served with meat and vegetables, and noodle soups. The average price for each dish was £6.50. The food amount was sufficient for a normal person for a meal. It also provided stir fry dishes and a few dishes specifically for British people. The owners of Firm D were a couple, both

from Hong Kong. The female owner worked in the front area as a full-time waiter, while the male owner worked in the kitchen as one of the head chefs.

Physical location was the biggest advantage of Firm D. A unique geographical location had enabled it to become one of the busiest Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. It was located in the middle of Location A. The surrounding area was the centre of the city and, most importantly, its location was near the University of Sheffield and the Sheffield International College, which provided the fundamental customer base. Indeed, over 70 percent of all the Chinese students in these two organisations lived within a one mile radius from Firm D; over 50 percent of these students lived within a 500m radius. Therefore, a location near both of the organisations, and a large number of students living nearby, created a huge advantage for Firm D. This was particularly obvious before 2012 because there were few Chinese restaurants in this region. Since then, though, many more Chinese restaurants have developed, which lead to increasing competition., There was no doubt that the physical location won Firm D a considerable number of regular customers.

Apart from its geographical advantage, Firm D also relied on its variety of dishes to attract customers. It had more than 100 choices of rice served with meat and vegetables, and soup with noodles. There was no restaurant providing so many choices of these types of food. Compared to these two types of food, its choices of stir fry dishes were limited. Indeed, before 2014, it had never had a stir fry dish menu. At that time, all the dishes, except for some particularly designed for non-Chinese, were entirely made up of those two types. Its aim was to fully satisfy the customers who had needs for cheap and simple meals.

Among all the customers, less than 10% was non-Chinese. Most of the group of non-Chinese customers, were university staff and students. They typically had lunch there and then went back to continue their afternoon's work. There were also a small number of regular customers living nearby.

For Firm D's Chinese customers, over 90% of them were students from the University of Sheffield and the Sheffield International College. Its customers could be generally divided into two groups: lunch customers on weekdays, and evening and weekend customers.

Lunch time was typically from 11am to 3pm. There were generally two periods of busy time on a typical weekday in lunch time: 12pm to 12:40pm and 1pm to 1:40pm. For the first period, customers mainly comprised of students who had either already finished their morning's classes or were going to take their afternoon's classes. For the second period, customers were mainly those who had already finished their early morning classes. Furthermore, for both periods, there were also a number of students who needed to continue their afternoon classes after an hour's break, after having finished morning classes. As mentioned earlier, because Firm D was near the two organisations and most of the students lived near Firm D, if they chose not to cook lunch at home, Firm D would be definitely a potential choice.

Students who had dinners on weekdays or meals at weekends might represent another group. Firstly, there was basically less pressure when it was in the evening compared to time constraints during lunch time. Secondly, for those who lived far from the university area, especially for those who only had limited hours of break between morning classes and afternoon classes, it was unlikely that they had time to go home to cook and come back to continue their classes. However, when they finished their afternoon's work, there was no need for them to necessarily choose a restaurant near the university. It was similar to what happened on weekends. Indeed, for those who had dinners on weekdays and meals on weekends, most of them ordered more expensive stir-fry dishes, eating for an extended period of time, rather than cheap and simple food. For students who had meals at both these periods of time (dinners on weekdays and meals on weekends), they were either living extremely near Firm D or particularly fancying food in Firm D.

Indeed, if we could examine the income of Firm D in different periods, it may reveal a clearer understanding of its customer base. In term time, during lunch time on a typical weekday, it basically sold at least £1000-£1200; at dinner time, it normally took around £500, and at weekends, it generally earned less than £1000 during an entire day. Therefore, it was clear that the main customers of Firm D were students who had classes on weekdays during lunch time. The high income was achieved by both its geographical advantage and its strategy on the types of dishes it provided.

Firm U

Firm U was founded in 2013. It located in the middle of Location B, which was traditionally regarded as the ‘China Town’ of Sheffield. As an up-market restaurant, Firm U mainly served hot pot and skewers. At the beginning of 2015, in order to enhance its competence with continuously increasing pressures coming from the product market and inferior physical location, it introduced the Korean barbecue as a supplement to hot pot and skewers. There were two owners in Firm U. The female owner was previously a Master’s student in the University of Manchester, while the male owner had been a chef before he earned enough money to start his first business in Manchester. They knew each other during the period when the female owner did her Master’s degree, and they later founded this business.

As an up-market restaurant, good decoration and comfortable environment should be basic requirements. These were done very well by Firm U. Its top was well decorated by suspended ceiling, which could be rarely found among all the Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. With well selected dim lights, it created an extraordinary relaxed feeling. Tables were all made of marble, compared to wooden or even plastic ones in almost all the other Chinese restaurants. Distance between tables was spacious, and there was sufficient room for walking. Even when it was full, it never felt awkward, in contrast to most other Chinese restaurants, where customers always ate in an extremely narrow space. There was no doubt that it was the best decorated restaurant on Location B.

Firm U also relied on its types of food to build its advantage. Though Firm U was not the first to operate hot pot, it was the first to operate hot pot in the form of a buffet with a reasonable price. Furthermore, its skewer buffet had a famous reputation. Though a few restaurants also introduced skewers later on, none of them had as many varieties as Firm U provided. If anybody wanted to eat skewers to the full, they had no other choice apart from going to Firm U. All of these at the beginning helped Firm U to develop its regular customer base.

Firm U’s customers were nearly 100% Chinese. Before the owner decided to remove set dishes designed for non-Chinese and stir-fry dishes from its menu, there had been some non-Chinese, though this number was few. However, since it completely operated hot pot and skewers, I could hardly see any non-Chinese customers there. Though some non-Chinese occasionally tried hot pot there for some reasons, I never recognised any who went

again for the second time. Therefore, this basically demonstrates that these types of food might only fit the taste of the Chinese.

As was the case in Firm D, students accounted for over 90% of all the customers. However, while customers in Firm D were mainly students who needed to have a simple and cheap lunch on weekdays, customers in Firm U represented something different.

Firm U's average income during term time was: Monday to Thursday: less than £500 per day; Friday to Sunday: over £1200 per day. There were two shifts a day: afternoon shift from 12pm to 4pm and evening shift from 5pm to 10 pm. For each shift, its average income was: afternoon shift from Monday to Thursday: less than £100, which meant that the evening shift was about £400; afternoon shift from Friday to Sunday: less than £300, which meant that the evening shift was about £900. Therefore, it was not difficult to understand the main constitution of Firm U's customers: those having meals at dinner time, especially at weekends.

3.5 Data collection

In this section, it will first introduce the process of data collection I used and the problems I encountered in my field work. The second part will discuss the process of note-taking.

3.5.1 The concept of template analysis

According to King (1998), template analysis is a research technique for the process of organising and analysing data based on themes. Researchers produce a template with a list of codes representing themes and then put the contents collected in the field under each code used for future analysis.

Some of these codes are defined prior to field work, but they may be modified and added to as the researchers understand and interpret the context. Therefore, the template approach has been seen as being a philosophical position between content analysis (Weber, 1985), where codes are all pre-set and the subsequent analysis is conducted statistically, and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where there are no pre-defined codes. Sitting somewhere between these two extremes, there is scope for degrees of variation in analysis, from those which are very close to content analysis, where codes are largely predetermined, to those with only a few defined codes.

Crabtree and Miller (1999) identified a few advantages of template analysis in organisational studies. First, the template analysis is a highly flexible way to produce an interpretation of the context. It allows for modification in the themes and codes with a researcher getting more understanding of the field. Second, based on these themes, it is useful for exploring relationships in the data which helps to explain meaning and compare perspectives of different participants, which is in line with the nature of ethnography. Furthermore, template analysis can be used to analyse textual data produced for different purposes in different contexts.

According to the features of template analysis, together with the nature of ethnography and the research aim, template analysis was used as the method of data collection and data analysis in my research.

Section 2.3.4 has developed an analytical framework that structures the research. This analytical framework develops from existing literature, and it has its speciality for this research. The analytical framework structures the design of the template and is indeed closely related to the template. Under each theme identified in the analytical framework, there are a number of sub-themes to be examined. These sub-themes derive from existing literature and highlight the key concepts in the field of employment relations in small firms, especially in ethnic minority small firms.

The role of the template is, therefore, crucial to developing the research and field work. Themes from the template explicitly build the link between literature and this research; and the themes help to form the basis of data collection and structure the data analysis.

Based on the literature, the key issues and themes were identified to guide this research. The initial template for the study is given below:

Initial template

1. Analysis from the product market
 - 1.1 A recent development of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield
 - 1.2 Demand fluctuation and its implications for management practices and shop floor experiences
 - 1.3 Competition and its implications for management practices and shop floor experiences
2. Analysis from the labour market
 - 2.1 Discussion around kitchen workers
 - 2.1.1 Labour supply situations for kitchen staff and owners' dependence upon them
 - 2.1.2 The dynamics of negotiation between owners and kitchen workers
 - 2.2 Discussion around part-time student workers
 - 2.2.1 Labour supply situations for front area staff and owners' dependence upon them
 - 2.2.2 The dynamics of negotiation between owners and front area workers
 - 2.2.3 How students work as a particular source for owner-managers
3. Multi-cultural workplaces
 - 3.1 Communications problems between each group of workers due to different language being spoken
 - 3.2 Mutual adjustment and intersubjectivity
 - 3.3 Conflict between different groups of members
4. Informality and ethnicity
 - 4.1 Organising informality
 - 4.1.1 Informal management practices in the two case study firms
 - 4.1.2 Implications of informal relations between owner-managers and workers upon workplace experiences
 - 4.1.3 The scope of cheating
 - 4.2 Regulatory informality
 - 4.2.1 The actual management practices within the workplace related to regulatory laws such as NMW, WTR and visa
 - 4.2.2 Implications from regulatory issues upon shop floor experiences
 - 4.2.3 The scope for owner-managers to manoeuvre to breach the laws

As discussed above, template analysis is flexible. It has margins to allow researchers to revise the initial template once they are saturated in the context with deeper understanding of the organisations and participants. The initial template was developed and revised with the researcher closer to the researching context. New issues and problems may be identified. For example, when I was gradually immersed into the two case study firms, I found that locations in relation to the product market exerted significant impacts upon owner-managers' choices. This topic was then added. Moreover, the initial template only took NMW and WTR as the main focus relevant to the 'influences from laws and regulations' theme. However, after working in the two firms for an extended period of time, I found that there were indeed more than these two types of regulation issues arising. Each of the issues needed to be considered to understand how labour management practices were experienced and how owners and workers perceived them. As a result, the initial template was developed and refined a lot to eventually reach the final template. The final template is shown below:

Final template

1. Analysis from the product market
 - 1.1 The recent development of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield
 - 1.1.1 The increase from the demand side
 - 1.1.2 The increase from the supply side
 - 1.2 The unstable environment
 - 1.2.1 The nature of demand fluctuation
 - 1.2.2 Implications upon owner-managers' choices and management practices
 - 1.3 Market competition
 - 1.3.1 The level of market competition
 - 1.3.2 Pricing strategies under the intense competition
 - 1.3.3 Other impacts
 - 1.4 Influences arising from urban space
 - 1.4.1 The Location A vs. The Location B
 - 1.4.2 Adaptive choices from owner-managers under constraints from urban space
2. Analysis from the labour market
 - 2.1 The current situation of labour shortage in the sector (particularly for kitchen staff)
 - 2.1.1 Background and reasons
 - 2.2 Kitchen assistants' labour market positions and their negotiation power
 - 2.3 Chefs' labour market positions and their negotiation power
 - 2.4 Front area staff's labour market positions and their negotiation power
 - 2.5 The meaning of employing student workers for employers
 - 2.5.1 Practical benefits of employing student workers
 - 2.5.2. Student workers as a particular resource of cheap labour for owner-managers
 - 2.6 Ethnic Chinese restaurants as the opportunity for students
3. Multi-cultural workforces
 - 3.1 Language barrier and communication problems
 - 3.2 Mutual adjustment and intersubjectivity
 - 3.2.1 From guessing to adaption
 - 3.2.2 Cultural clash
 - 3.3 The difference of owners' trust towards members in different groups
 - 3.3.1 Cantonese speaking owners to Cantonese speaking workers and Cantonese speaking owners to Mandarin speaking workers
 - 3.3.2 Mandarin speaking owners to Cantonese speaking workers and Mandarin speaking owners to Mandarin speaking workers
 - 3.4. Inter-group conflicts
 - 3.4.1 The conflict between Cantonese speakers and Mandarin speakers
 - 3.4.2 The conflict between Mandarin speakers and Mandarin speakers
4. Informality and Ethnicity
 - 4.1 Organising informality
 - 4.1.1 Informality in the two firms
 - 4.1.2 Dynamics of informality and negotiated order
 - 4.1.3 Scopes for cheating and fiddles
 - 4.1.4 The workplace culture
 - 4.2 Regulatory informality
 - 4.2.1 The NMW breach
 - 4.2.2 The WTR breach
 - 4.2.3 Health regulation breach
 - 4.2.4 The employment of alleged illegal workers

3.5.2 Data collection techniques

Two modes of data collection techniques were mainly used in this research: observation and detailed discussion.

Note taking followed a chronological order as things happened. It followed a chronological order as things happened. The notes consisted of conversations, people's behaviours and events. These were later classified based on a variety of codes according to the template used for data analysis.

However, one of the major limits of observation was that it sometimes failed to explain 'why' something happened or 'why' they happened in a particular way. Notes like these were basically description, which might not be sufficient to understand the field. For example, in one supervision meeting with my two supervisors, I reported a case to them. The case was that one employee in Firm D took the tips into her pocket by herself and was soon caught by the owner; however the owner did not sack her finally. I explained this as a strong negotiation power the employee held due to lack of skilled staff during that period of time. The question then raised by my supervisors was 'is this the only explanation of the case'? They believed that a pure observation on this case seemed to be not fully convincing to explain the behaviour and the decision made by the owner. In order to answer this question, it required me to understand both parties' perception on this issue and the context in which it happened. For example, did this kind of cheating ever happen before; what was the owner's decision after that? What was the employee's perception on tips; why did she take the tip in her pocket, etc.? The aim of raising these questions was to make the explanation more robust and plausible. This is indeed what 'being saturated' means in ethnographic studies. Therefore, in order to go further, it is necessary to capture perceptions of people, which is facilitated by detailed discussions.

Detailed discussions were basically conducted by asking questions for explanation of particular issues. It aimed to capture 'why' questions such as—why a particular choice was made and why a case emerged in one particular way rather than another, and 'how' questions—such as how participants perceived a particular issue and how they viewed others under a particular context. It aims to fully understand meanings behind anything by direct

observation. Questions were generally asked once I had any doubt on any issue by observation.

However, after being in the field for a period of time, I found that there was indeed a clear gap between Mandarin speakers and Cantonese speakers. As a Mandarin speaker, I realised that this really created a problem not only for me to communicate to them, but also to build relationships and develop trust with them. For both sites, kitchen staff were largely made up of Cantonese speakers. Later on, it became obvious that, though we shared the same ethnicity, it would be extremely tough for me to become an ‘insider’ within their group. If this problem could not be solved, the research might be lacking in validity and reliability.

I then recalled the strategies used by Ram (1994) and Jones et al., (2012). In Ram’s (1994) research, he was himself an insider; in Jones et al.’s (2012) research, they employed a few insiders in the field. I then developed two insiders in both of the firms. In Firm D, it was Jack, the manager; in Firm U, it was Teng, a kitchen assistant.

As already mentioned in section 3.3, Jack had worked in Firm D for a couple of years. As a Mandarin speaker, he could not speak and understand Cantonese at the beginning. However, due to the reason that most of the employees, including the owners in Firm D, were Cantonese speakers, after a long time working there, he finally could entirely understand Cantonese, though he could only speak a little. Furthermore, the labour constitution in Firm D had been generally stable. As a result, he had a very close relationship with everybody on the staff. In Firm U, due to the specialty of his job, Teng had more frequent contacts with the owner and other Cantonese speakers. Because he held a key position on one of Firm U’s extension businesses (karaoke), which was believed to be very profitable by the owner, plus his origin was the same as the owner, he later became an ‘insider’ of both the owner and the firm.

First, working with these two insiders gave me the chance to gather more information than I could actually observe. Throughout the data collection process, Jack gave me huge amounts of the business's previous contextual information, such as particular employees’ backgrounds, their characters, their conflicts with the owner, and issues related to the development of the business. Furthermore, he also told me lots of examples of conversation between him and other employees. For some of them, he thought they were interesting;

while some he believed were critical on some problems to be reflected. I would have never collected these data without his help. In Firm U, because Teng had regular contacts with the owner after work, based on the speciality of his job, he could always tell me the owner's perceptions upon particular issues and employees, even including the owner's view on me. Indeed, quite a lot of the items of information the two insiders provided to me were related to my data analysis under a particular theme; some of them were even crucial in understanding the dynamics inside the firm to explain behaviour in a particular context.

Second, they could help me to explain a phenomenon I failed to understand. By examining their views, it gave me the opportunity to understand the shop floor behaviour from another angle, which helped to reach more convincing conclusions. If we still take the 'tips cheating' case as the example, which was discussed earlier in this section, it would then make sense. After the discussion with my supervisors, I went to ask Jack (he was on the scene) why he thought the owner did not sack the female employee. He told me that, though the owner caught her when she came back to the counter and the employee obviously lied to the owner, the owner was not angry. He thought this was because the owner was attracted to the employee. I later asked for explanation from the owner as well. She said:

She is young. She is still young. I would like to give her another chance. It is ok.

Erm, it is ok. I even told her I would keep the secret for her.

I then asked her whether this was due to lack of employees in the front area if she had been sacked. The owner thought for a short while and answered no. This then basically confirmed Jack's explanation. This meant that, with the help of detailed discussion and employing insiders, the real reason why the employee did not get employed was revealed. My explanation, purely based on my observation, did not go far enough.

Furthermore, though realising the difficulty in creating trust with most Cantonese speakers, I had been managing to develop relationships with them. Although I would not think that I finally became an insider with their group, the relationship between me and the Cantonese speaking workers improved a lot. For example, the head chef in Firm U at the beginning said to me that he thought I was such a lazy worker. However, he later once took on my position, arguing for me with the owner for a wage increase. This was primarily achieved by my continuously hard work and trying to understand their experiences when they were

in their hard time. The result was that it helped me to build trust with them, and most of them finally were happy to answer my questions.

3.5.3 Note-taking

Taking notes is generally not a smooth process in the field, according to existing research employing an ethnographic approach. For example, in Heyes's (1999) research, he encountered obvious resistance from shop floor workers. The workers suspected that he was working on behalf of the company and might report to the company. The open note taking he carried out at the beginning soon became a problem. Workers answered his questions in a stilted and guarded manner. In order to progress the research, Hayes then decided not to take notes in front of them, which did help him to develop trust with shop floor workers. Though he started to openly take notes again later on when trust had been built, this was only done in front of those who had indicated that they did not mind. Therefore, a researcher has to keep changing strategies with note-taking in the face of uncertainties and resistance.

My plan in the two sites originally was to take quick notes on a pad and write up full notes after finishing the day's work. However, this plan changed to some extent in both sites.

In Firm D, after just working there for one day, I realised that it was really difficult to take quick notes. First, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, it was one of the busiest Chinese restaurants in Sheffield, I basically did not have time to stop for a couple of minutes to write. This became more severe a week after due to the start of the university semester. During that period of time, I genuinely could not take one second rest between lunch time and dinner time. Secondly, I was not allowed to stand inside the counter. This then meant that I could hardly find a place to write. However, though the phone was not recommended to be used when working, the use of a phone was not strictly constrained. Therefore, I could take quick notes using my phone when working. In Firm D, I had a two-hour break after lunch from 3pm to 5pm before starting my evening shift. Therefore, all the notes from the first shift were completed within this period of time. Because it did not take long from finishing my day shift to writing my notes, I did not miss much, though arguably somethings must have been overlooked. Similarly, notes for evening shift were completed after work.

In Firm U, things were different. I worked continuously for ten hours from 12pm to 10pm. At the beginning, I encountered the same problem as most ethnographers experienced. The workers frequently asked to check my notes and they doubted that I would report to the owner given that he rarely appeared on site. Indeed, I later knew that there was really a ‘spy’ working there previously. This ‘spy’ was a dishwasher and came from the same province as the owner. She was caught once sending a message to the owner by the head chef. Not long after this, she was forced to leave due to others’ pressure. Therefore, it was really hard to get any detailed information from shop floor workers. Furthermore, it was also necessary to take consideration of the ethnicity issue. I then realised that I had to change the strategy.

The busy time in Firm U normally lasted three hours from 6pm to 9pm. Because my job was to cook skewers and hot pot, during this period of time, it was impractical for me to stop working in order to write notes. However, for the rest of the time, apart from doing some preparation work, I was almost free. I then decided to take quick notes in the toilet. After making this decision, I generally went to the toilet every 30 to 60 minutes to write my notes. After using this strategy, without making notes in front of them, I could feel that the trust had been improving. They became less alerted gradually and started to answer my ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions, as if I was a real worker there. This strategy, as a result, was used until I left the field. The full notes were completed after work every day.

Additionally, it is also necessary to explain how the language issue was resolved during note taking. As frequently discussed above, both Mandarin and Cantonese were used in the field. I am a Mandarin speaker. The short notes taken from the two sites were, therefore, written in Mandarin. When the notes were developed into full notes after my shifts, I continued to use Mandarin. However, when the data (field notes) were coded (following the themes in the template), Mandarin was translated into English. The next section will discuss the coding process and related problems.

3.6 Coding and data analysis

This section will describe the methods by which the data were analysed and introduce the steps in analysing data.

Codes were pre-defined by the method of a series of topics as shown on the template. Each focus, as a code, represented a theme or a sub-theme under a category. The coding process involved allocating contents from my notes to corresponding codes.

Firstly, when developing the full notes every day after work, I wrote them on one-side of an A4 notebook, leaving the other side blank for a bit. Each day, having completed the full notes for the day, I noted those that could be obviously linked to pre-defined codes. I noted down the number of these codes and specifically the context where it happened if that was needed, which would facilitate the systematic coding later on. Secondly, after finishing the data collection process, the data gathered from both sites were reviewed. Finally, the data (field notes) were coded according to different codes. At this stage, they were transferred into electronic versions. These data were evidence of a particular code. With the electronic version, they could be regularly checked and the analysis kept close to the original data from the notebook. However, this was not a fluent process; quite a lot of difficulties and problems needed to be solved.

As mentioned above, pre-defined codes can guide a researcher through data collection. However, codes may be developed into more refined categories or modified when researchers go into the field for a period of time with more understanding of the environment. For example, when it was concerned with a multi-cultural workforce, based on the gap identified, it was expected that there would be a problem between Northern-Chinese speaking Mandarin and Southern-Chinese speaking Cantonese. Under the code 'conflicts among the multi-cultural workforce', there were basically three sub-codes under this category: how do conflicts play out among different groups, what factors drove people from one group to engage in conflicts with another group and what was the meaning of the conflicts to those involved? However, once I had observed being in the field for a while, I found that there were also clear conflicts with people using the same language with similar cultural backgrounds, even those from the same area. Reasons causing these 'internal' conflicts were not only arising from anything related to cultural difference, they were also linked to impacts from product and labour markets. As a result, notes in my notebook related to these contents could not be coded according to initial codes. It was then necessary

to develop the template into more refined codes to cover ‘new’ knowledge gained from the field.

Another challenge of coding was the classification of data. For some of the contents, they could be classified into different codes. The analysis was then determined by which code a particular piece of content belonged to. The difficulty was to decide in which code they should be put, depending on the relevance or whether or not the data were important enough to be arranged under different codes. This then required a thorough consideration of how to make the argument more robust and convincing, and more logically consistent. For example, when discussing with my supervisors about a few separate cultural issues, I originally planned to code them into different sections. However, they believed that most of these cultural cases were related to regulatory infringement to some extent and these features exhibited within the group of ethnically-Chinese were never mentioned in existing research. Therefore, they suggested that I should synthesise them in the regulation chapter to strengthen the argument and reveal something really new in relation to the combination of cultural issues and regulation. Based on this rule, when doing the coding about ambiguous contents, if I was confident that putting them in a particular code rather than another would definitely make the argument more robust based on my empirical work in the field, I would put them under that particular code; if not, I would put them under at least both codes and mark them as double-coded so that I could compare and check them again when writing the analysis.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the methodology of this research. Building on the gaps identified in Chapter 2, it first explained research questions and objectives. The discussion then identified that ethnography was proper to be chosen to meet the research focus within its particular contesters. It then discussed the rationale on choosing the two research sites and the process of gaining and sustaining access. This was followed by introducing detailed background information of the two restaurants. Finally, the last two sections discussed the processes and problems in data collection, and techniques and methods in data analysis, respectively.

Next, discussions will move to five findings chapters, from Chapter 4 to Chapter 8. Chapter 4 will examine how the product market influenced owner-managers' choices and subsequent shop floor behaviours within the two case study firms.

Chapter 4 Influences from the product market upon owner-managers' choices and employment relations

The discussion about how labour management is influenced by the external environment, especially the product market, has been a key focus in small firm studies (Rainnie, 1989; Ram, 1994; Kinnie, 1999; Edwards et al., 2006). Though Rainnie's (1989) argument that the dominating position of large companies upon small firms essentially dictated the employment relations of small businesses, so that labour management in small firms would be determined by their larger customers, has been proved to be too deterministic, it is also necessary to admit that structural forces from product markets do set constraints on owner-managers' choices. The main concern of these studies is the ways in which management accommodates the product market pressures to which they are subject, and how they manage labour in the light of these pressures. As Edwards and Ram (2006) indicated, labour management in small firms under an uncertain economic environment requires owners to make continuous and rapid adjustments to frequently changed market conditions. Within unpredictable external environments, management needs to change its strategies of work organisation to match product market conditions. Furthermore, product markets serve to constrain, and meanwhile provide opportunities for management (Ram, 1994). It is therefore necessary to capture the complex nature of the management process within a particular product environment.

In light of the discussion above, this chapter will examine the particular product market pressures that management faced in the ethnically-Chinese owned restaurant sector in Sheffield, how they responded to them and which strategies they employed to organise the workplace. The central focus is how owners managed to control labour in an uncertain environment and how much scope they had to choose between alternative approaches. The implications of their choices upon employees will also be analysed. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide an insight into the ways in which management handles the uncertainties and pressures from the product market and its meanings to employment relations.

This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section will examine the recent development of Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. The second section will focus on the nature of demand fluctuation and analyse how this nature shapes management practices.

The third section will examine how competition in the sector influences labour management strategies. The final section will discuss how the urban space affects the owner-managers' choices.

4.1 The increase of Chinese restaurants in Sheffield

Before mid-2011, ethnically-Chinese owned restaurants could not be regarded as a significant business in Sheffield. There were only three located within the central university area. Three were located in Location C. Even for Location B area, traditionally considered Sheffield's China Town, there were just three Chinese restaurants. However, in mid-2015, when I finished my field work, there were around fifteen Chinese restaurants in the central university region and over eight in Location B. When experiencing a dramatic change like this, it is necessary to understand what lead to such a difference in four years. The increase in ethnically-Chinese owned restaurants was a result of a long-term increase in the number of Chinese students travelling to Sheffield to study and self-employment by chefs who had migrated from mainland China to Sheffield a decade ago.

4.1.1 The demand side -- the continuous increase of Chinese students

As already mentioned in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, within an inner city area, ethnic Chinese accounted for the majority of customers for Chinese restaurants, which exhibited dramatic differences compared to other ethnic minority owned restaurants such as South Asians, where customers were predominately whites (Ram et al., 2006). From a basic supply-demand view, if there has been a significant rise of Chinese restaurants as the supply side, there has to be an equivalent increase of the demand side to support these businesses. Consequently, there has to be a continuous rise in the number of Chinese to explain this result. This is indeed the case in Sheffield. It is largely attributed to the continually growing number of Chinese students over the past decade.

The number of Chinese students the university has recruited for the past several years is shown in Table 2, based on official statistics from the University of Sheffield (UoS, 2014):

Table 2 The recent increase of Chinese student numbers

Year	Number of students	Percentage increase compared to previous year
2008	838	
2009	1058	27%
2010	1662	57%
2011	2124	28%
2012	3544	67%
2013	4163	20%
2014	4152	0%

Source: UoS (2014)

It can be found that the number since 2008 had been increasing at a rate of over 20% a year till 2014. In 2014, the number was five times as many as it was in 2008. Also, according to the table, the biggest increase happened from the year 2011 to 2012, an amazing nearly 70% increase. Additionally, in 2011, the student number reached 2000 for the first time. It seemed that the year 2011 was a significant point to explore the change in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Indeed, the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector changed dramatically from 2011, which will be thoroughly examined in the remaining chapter.

In conclusion, the rise in the demand side in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield was fundamentally due to the fast increase of Chinese students over the last decade.

4.1.2 The supply side -- savings and entrepreneurial motivation from chefs

Chapter 2 already had a short review of the historical development of ethnic Chinese in the UK society. After the early 19th century, when Chinese seamen began settling in Britain, it was not until after the World War Two that an increasing number of Hong Kong people

had been coming to the UK. Against this background, Hong Kong people became the largest Chinese group in Britain. The Chinese population in the 1990s was mainly constituted of Hong Kong people and British-born-Chinese. As a result, the restaurant sector of the group of ethnically-Chinese was traditionally controlled by Hong Kong people. As Chan et al., (2007) noted, Hong Kong people were generally the owners of Chinese restaurants. In contrast, people from China mainland worked for them as chefs. This was indeed also the case in Sheffield at the beginning. For all the nine Chinese restaurants founded before 2011 and located in those core areas, eight out of nine owners were Hong Kong people. Hong Kong owners accounted for unbelievably 88.9% of all the restaurant owners. It perfectly fitted the statistical data.

However, things changed considerably after mid-2011. Of all the new Chinese restaurants, two were founded by students who had graduated. For most of the remaining ones, their owners were largely from Guangdong province in Southern China, people from Hong Kong no longer making up any large percentage. However, little existing research has focused on the issue upon the change of the origin of the ownership, let alone explaining the reasons that caused it. The next paragraphs will then discuss the reasons behind this dramatic change.

Large groups of workers from China's mainland moving to the UK started in the late 1990s. Indeed, before the late 1990s, apart from those who came to Britain illegally, there were indeed some workers from China's mainland coming to work in the UK regularly every year. However, during that early time, the procedure to apply for a work visa was extremely complicated and the fees to get the warranty from a business in the UK cost hugely. As a result, the number in the early 1990s was small. In the late 1990s, the government changed the policy dramatically so that the applying process was simplified, and meanwhile the fees to get an offer from a UK restaurant were much cheaper than before. The first agency was then developed in Taishan, Guangdong province, in Southern China after these changes. It mainly focused on exporting labour in the restaurant sector from Taishan to the UK. From then on, more and more Chinese labour forces (chefs) started to come to the UK to earn living. As Dong, a chef in Firm U, said:

I came here (the UK) in 2003. The number of labour exportations basically began to significantly increase from 2000. By the time I arrived here, it was already much more convenient to finish the applying process.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Firm U experienced a period of strong turbulence. Before the turbulence, three out of three chefs were from Taishan, Guangdong province; after the turbulence, two out of two chefs were from Taishan, Guangdong province. On one occasion, I asked Yi, who was in Firm U for both periods, why there were so many people from Taishan. Yi answered:

Because the first agency after the change of the policy was established in Taishan. I came to the UK in 2007. You know what? I can tell you that nearly half of the population in Taishan has moved to the UK. Furthermore, after the success in Taishan, the agency also established several more branches in other cities in Guangdong province. Agencies developed in other provinces were far behind. That is why there are so many chefs from the Guangdong province, not just limited to Taishan. It is not just in Sheffield. It is the same case everywhere in Britain.

This was similar to Firm D. In Firm D, four out of five chefs were from Guangdong province. They all came to the UK between 2000 and 2005. Yi's answer clearly explained the reason why chefs in Chinese restaurants were largely from the Guangdong province. The next task is to explain how and why they had developed their businesses for the past several years, and what resources they had.

One day when all the employees had lunch in Firm U, I asked Yi why buffet had not been introduced (the owner had planned to introduce buffet for a long time). Yi told me that the owner could not find any proper chefs. I then asked him the reason. He explained:

They (chefs) all want to run their businesses. See what Wen and Lin did (Wen and Lin previously worked in Firm U. They both later started their own restaurants together with their partners in Sheffield). They have been working in the UK for over ten years, saving some money. The market is there, so many students. Why not (open their restaurants)? Once my wife finishes giving birth to my second baby, I might plan to open a take-away as well.

You see, Wen found two partner chefs, both of whom previously worked with him in Firm A; Lin got one partner chef, who previously worked in Firm B. Five went for self-employment.

It is not just for him. Every owner in Sheffield cannot find any proper chefs immediately because for those who have skills, they all want to start their own restaurants.

Zha, Firm U's front area manager, was also at the table at the same time. He moved to England in 2006 at the age of 15 or 16. Since then, he had been working as a waiter in Sheffield's restaurant sector for nine years. He added:

Do you know the cost to employ a decent chef? You know this, right? Look, for them (Wen and Lin), once they started their own businesses with other chefs, they are the owner. They do not need to employ any other chefs. Their wives can help them as kitchen assistants. Do you understand how important it is to keep the kitchen staff stable for a restaurant? It also solves the problem of managing kitchen staff. They own the business. They must be responsible for their businesses.

I was then concerned with the profit because it had to be split into three if there were three owners. Yi continually explained:

This is not like what you think. I can tell you, they will definitely earn more than employed as a chef previously. But, it cannot be much more than that.

Do you know how tough our lives were in our first five years after coming here in order to get a UK passport? We had to work at least twelve hours a day. If there was no customers, we had to clean everything. We could not stop. We had to bear the owner's abuse and autocratic control. Otherwise, we would go home if the owner was not satisfied with us. It was so tough in the first five years for us.

Now, they have abilities, and they together have enough money. They have been keen to have their own restaurants after torture for years as a chef. This is important for them. Moreover, the market has been promising. They can earn a little more. That is enough for them.

Jones and Ram (2007) examined 'entrepreneurial motivation' for ethnic minority small firm owners. They suggested that entrepreneurial drive for independence should be regarded not only as an escape, but also as means of applying their resources to re-connect to the market. Within the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, the chase for self-employment from chefs benefited from their sufficient savings and social networks under a promising market. This then explained why chefs chose to start their businesses and what advantages they had.

Having examined a recent development of the Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield, the following sections will focus on how particular product market situations influenced owner-managers' choices and how the workplace practices were shaped under those particular contexts.

4.2 The unstable environment

Changing product environment within which small firms operate may lead to considerable unstable developments in the way employment relations are managed (Kinnie, et al., 1999). One of the key factors was the stability and predictability of demand. As Marchington and Parker (1990) suggested, if a pattern of demand is regular and stable, management then will have more room to manoeuvre than if demand is highly variable. In the latter situation, management is more likely to feel the pressure of the market and will be forced to adapt to changing environment continually. Owners' choices and actions may be largely determined by the nature of the product environment fluctuation. As a result, coping with the uncertainty will generally lead to greater instability to employment relations and tensions between employers and employees (McMahon, 1996).

Indeed, the demand of the ethnic Chinese product market fluctuated significantly over a year in different periods of time. This section will first focus on the demand fluctuation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. After examining the turbulent nature of the market, it will analyse how it constrained owner-managers' choices. Finally, the implications of owners' limited choices in the face of the changes caused by unstable demand upon employment relations will be examined.

4.2.1 The nature of demand fluctuation

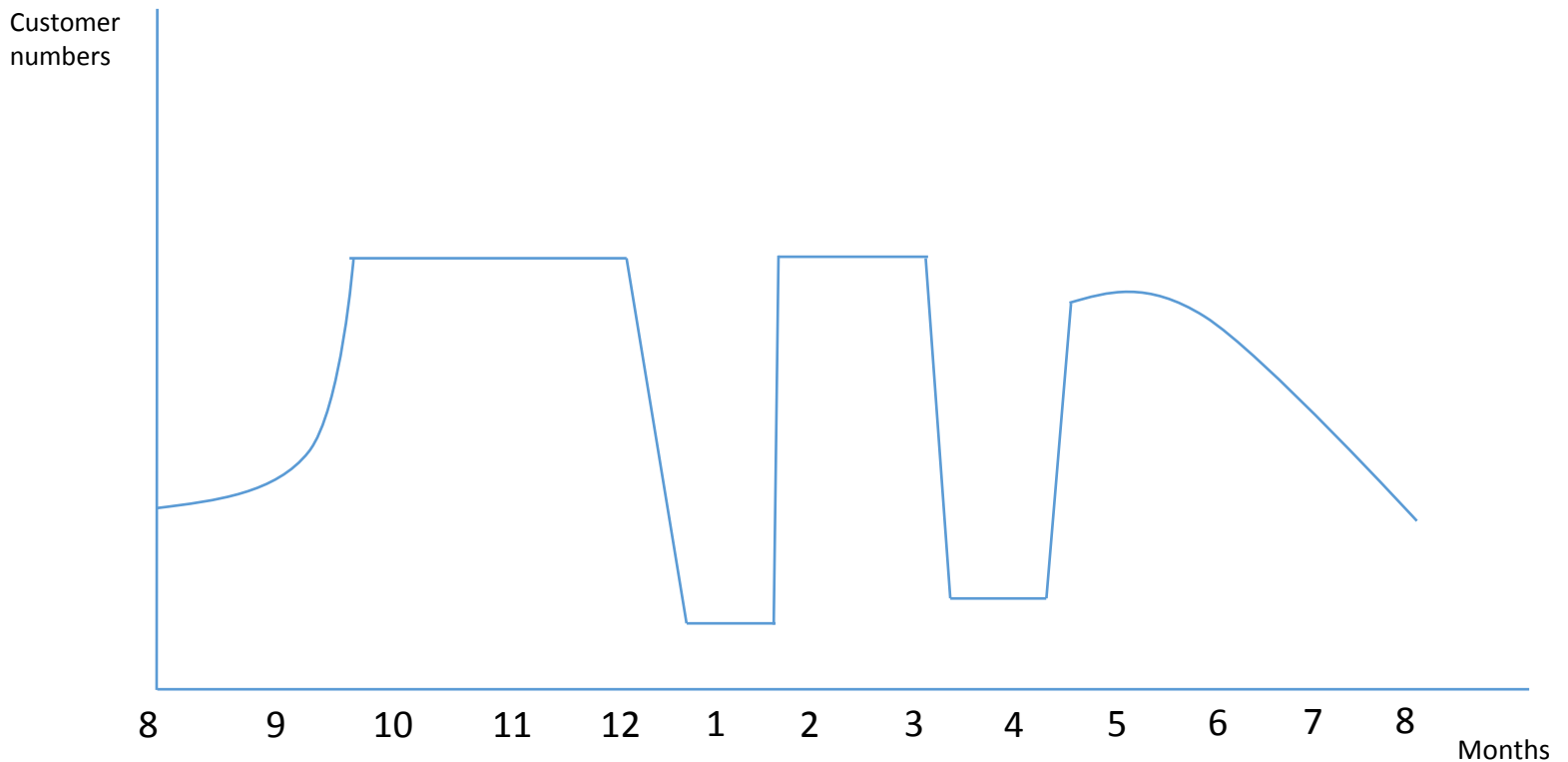
The owner of Firm D once vividly described the change of demands over a year time:

Well, just to see how many students there are in (university) libraries. We are the same as them. If they have lots of students, the business will be satisfying; if there are few students in the library, then the business is poor.

This indeed concisely indicates the nature of the demand fluctuation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. As already mentioned earlier, at least for Firm D and Firm U, they both largely relied on students to run their businesses. As a result, once the student number changed at a particular time, the demand of the two businesses would immediately follow that change. The description above actually builds a relationship between the number of students and the business conditions. The student number changed dramatically in different periods based on the university semester time. Consequently, this determined the demand for ethnic Chinese restaurants in the inner Sheffield in the same period of time.

Figure 8 roughly describes the demand fluctuation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector over a year.

Figure 8 The demand fluctuation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector



It starts from August, at which point revenue is at a relatively low level. This is because the number of students is relatively low in August. Undergraduate students are having their summer break and most Chinese students have already left the UK or are yet to arrive for the next academic year. Though a number of new students who are required to study the English course before progressing into the university arrive in late July, the student number which is left during this period of time far outnumbers new students. This, at a result, causes the demand drop in August. When it goes into mid-September, most new students have arrived. The university semester generally starts from late-September. Therefore, for the next three-month period, the demand has been stable in a high level. The first big drop happens in Christmas time. It is also the end of the first semester. During the Christmas vacation, most Chinese students either go back to China or travel abroad. The ethnic Chinese restaurant sector experiences the worst period in a year. Once the Christmas vacation ends and the second semester begins, the average demand goes back to a stable high level, as it is between September and early-December. It then falls down to another low level during the Easter vacation starting from late March. After the vacation, the trend will again return to a relatively high level till mid-June. Finally, from mid-June to August, there is another turbulence on student numbers due to the end of the second semester and the departure of students after graduation, which, as a result, leads to low demands.

Having this general feature in mind, we then examine specific revenues the two restaurants generated during different periods of time. This may contribute to a clearer understanding of the demand fluctuation.

In Firm D, for a typical day in November, its revenue in the lunch time was generally between £1,000-1,200; average revenue in dinner time was basically £400-600. By contrast, during the Christmas and Easter vacation, its average lunch time revenue was less than £400, and the dinner time revenue was normally around £200. As Jack, the manager in Firm D, explained:

We have least customers at Christmas. During Easter, the Summer School students from China and Singapore can contribute some businesses. During the Christmas vacation, an entire day revenue is only some hundred pounds.

On a day in early-January, 2015, because there were few customers, I then had a discussion with Kate, the owner of Firm D. She said:

It will get a bit better at the end of this month. However, the poor condition will last for another couple of weeks. We have to endure this. There are no other ways to turn around.

When I did my field work in Firm U, I also had a discussion with Yi, the head chef in Firm U, about Firm U's business conditions at different periods. He told me:

Look, I came here on 17th August, 2014. The revenue of first week was £2,800. Second week, £2,900; the third week, £2,900; the third week, £3,600; the fourth week, over £5,000. Since then, it had been generally around £5,000 a week till Christmas. The top weekly revenue it generated was £8,000 in mid-October. At the first week of November, it was £7,800. During the Christmas period, the average weekly revenue was around £3,000.

It was during the Easter vacation when I started my field work for Firm U. Weekly revenues during that period were around £3,000. However, in early-May, when the Easter vacation had already ended, the weekly revenue soon rose back to an average of £5,000 per week.

One day in mid-June 2015, Zha, the front area manager, talked to me with frustration:

The business gets poor again. I went to send them off (to the airport for their departure), many (students) have left.

I replied to him:

Yes, most of the students have finished their exams by this week.

Yi was alongside with us, adding:

The figure indeed already dropped at the beginning of June.

Up to this point, I already described the fluctuation of customer demands over different periods of time in a year in ethnic Chinese restaurant sector and explained the reason – the fluctuation of student numbers. The specific figures and cases from the two restaurants exactly fit into this model. Once the nature of frequently changing customer demands has

been examined, the next part of this section will focus on constraints caused by the unstable market on owner-managers' choices in labour management and the meaning to employment relations.

4.2.2 Owner-managers' choices under the unstable product environment and implications to employment relations

Running a business in such a context, one of the most affected aspects of owner-managers' labour management practices was recruitment and selection. Owner-managers had to recruit new employees in advance to face high demand period and dismiss or re-arrange labour before the business goes into low demand time. As shown above, the demand fluctuation was frequent over a year. This meant that recruitment and dismissal practices had to be correspondingly adapted to this market trend frequently. Furthermore, considering the turbulent environment, there were also particular concerns and standards for owners in selecting employees.

Indeed, the first time when I went to negotiate the access of Firm D was in mid-June 2014 when I basically finished formalising my research design. Jack told me that it was during summer vacation so that there were few customers. As a result, the owner did not plan to recruit new service people. At that time, two were enough for managing the restaurant. He worked in the day shift, while Kate, the owner, worked in the evening shift. Later, when it was in the early September, the owner posted a recruitment note on the window. As Figure 1 shows, it was the time when businesses were going to experience the high demand periods.

When I started to work in Firm D in late-November, 2014, the number of front area workers was already up to four in both lunch shifts and dinner shifts compared to one on each shift during the summer time. The four-employee structure lasted for another several weeks. In the first week of the Christmas vacation, when the roster was released, I became the only part-time worker, together with Jack and Kate. Jack told me that because it was already into the Christmas vacation, there were few customers so that Kate decided to reduce one part-time employee on both shifts. In the final week of the Christmas vacation, Kate began to contact former part-time workers. When the roster was released, the arrangement of front area workers was back to four on each shift in the first week of the second term.

In Firm U, frequent recruitment and dismissal basically happened in the same way following the demand change. After the refurbishment, there were only three, including me, working in the kitchen area. The owner soon recruited a pot-washer and a kitchen assistant based on a high customer demand during that period. When it went into June, the revenue had already started to drop significantly. The owner came to the site on 13th, June, and had a short talk with that newly recruited kitchen assistant. I later asked her what the owner had spoken to her. She replied:

He gave me a slip with his phone number. He said: We have few customers. You go to take a two-week break. When your vacation ends, just call me if you would like to come back.

She was then dismissed only after working in Firm U for less than a month completely due to the decrease of customers.

For front area employees, there had been two in each shift till 13th, June, 2015. However, on the first day of the third week, I found that there was only Zha, the front area manager, working there. I then asked him why. He said:

He (the owner) asked me to arrange one at each shift in weekdays and two at weekends because customers started to drop from early-June.

Indeed, given the unstable demand, except recruitment, selection of employees also exhibited some unique features for these ethnic Chinese restaurants.

For each potential new front area employee in Firm D, the trial period generally lasted three hours from 12pm to 3pm. During this period, tasks for a trainee were simple: cleaning tables after customers have finished their meals and place clean sets after cleaning the table. There were basically no other tasks to be completed within the three hours. The owner would normally demonstrate how these procedures should be done first and then guide a trainee through these tasks several times. For the remaining time of the trial, Kate left the trainee himself to complete these jobs. She normally stood nearby to observe and finally decide whether a trainee had the ability to work. Indeed, there was basically only one standard for the owner to measure – speed. No other factors outweighed this standard at all.

For my own case, I immediately secured my employment in Firm D after the three hour trial. Apart from the informal relationship with Jack, the factor that I could finish these tasks with a high speed was really important. As Jack explained to me after Kate had decided to recruit me:

In trial period, the only concern for her is your speed. Whether you can finish these tasks quickly is crucial. She will teach you other jobs afterwards.

On the Saturday evening in my first week working in Firm D, Jack did not come to work due to his personal reason. There were only me and Kate working that evening. As a result, I had to basically do double jobs. Finally, Kate praised me:

You are brilliant, really brilliant. Though you have worked only less than a week, you are better than most of our previous employees. You can do the jobs quickly. This is important. It is really important for working at this pace. That is good for you.

During my research in Firm D, two trainees were immediately considered to fail the trial by Kate due to low speed. One was dismissed not long after recruitment with the same reason.

In Firm U, the owner largely used the same standard to measure whether a candidate was eligible. As mentioned earlier, after the refurbishment, there were only three working in the kitchen – me as a kitchen assistant and two chefs. Yi told me that the owner would recruit another kitchen assistant soon. Later one day, when I arrived, I found that there was a new one working there. I then had a chat with him, and he told me that he had come to do a trial. After about 30 minutes, he began to pack his bag and left. I was surprised. I then asked Yi what had happened. Yi told me:

The owner phoned me just now, asking me how his trial went on. I told him that he was fine. The only problem is that his pace is a little slow. He immediately asked me to let him go.

Indeed, if recruitment and dismissal practices could ideally adapt to the change of customer demands, it would be expected that running a business at least from this aspect could fully

handle the uncertainty. However, the actual problem was that adaption could not always fit into the demand model. Given that labour costs account for one third of total income, owners had to keep labour costs down to earn more profits. One common strategy they took was that as long as the amount of work can be done by fewer people, they would never recruit more people than actually needed. This indeed explained why speed was the key measurement in selection because an employee generally needed to cover one and half people's work. However, this concept always led to two practical problems: early adjustment (employee dismissal) during transition from high demand period to low demand period and late adjustment (employee recruitment) during transition from low demand period to high demand period.

Gui was once a part-time kitchen assistant in Firm D, and she only worked on lunch shifts. Before the Christmas vacation in 2014, she was told by the owner that she need not come during that period of time. After the vacation, the owner did not call her back, though customers rose back to a comparatively high level soon after the start of the final semester. On a day in early February, it was really busy in lunch time. And meanwhile, there were also several take-away orders. The task of delivering take-away was normally conducted by Huo, another kitchen assistant in Firm D. He could earn £1 for one order. However, Huo refused to deliver because there was too much to do for eat-in customers. Only Jack and I worked in the front area at that time, Jack complained to me:

I do not know why she (Kate, the owner) has not called back Gui. There has been lots of customers since the end of vacation. Shit!

He then phoned Kate, Kate said she would come to deliver the take-aways. When she walked into the restaurant, she then began to blame Jack for taking these take-away orders. She believed that he should not have taken these orders if he knew there were a large number of eat-in customers and lack of kitchen workers. Jack was undoubtedly unhappy. He went out immediately.

When I started my field work in Firm U in late March, 2015, there were only three in the kitchen. Two chefs and one kitchen assistant. When one took his day off per week, only two were left. Later, after a discussion about the intensity of their work, the head chef complained:

You know what? We have been like this for over a month. I have not even taken a day off for the past two weeks. The owner sacked one pot washer and one kitchen assistant in early March. He believed there would be few customers during the Easter vacation. Yes, it is, but the drop is not as quick as he thought. You should at least have left one for us. I am now washing plates every day. Are you kidding? Have you ever heard of any head chef washing plates?

In late June 2015, the owner in firm U reduced the number of lunch shift employees in the front area from two down to one. One day after the adjustment, the owner went to inspect the restaurant. He had some words with Zha and Yi, and then left. Zha, the front area manager, looked frustrated, I asked him the reason. He explained:

He (the owner) walked around the dining area and indicated several problems. For example, the area surrounding the counter was not clean, tables were greasy and the toilets smelled unpleasant. Damn it! He asked me not to arrange part-time workers on the day shift. How can I finish all of these things by myself? If it was in July or August, that would be fine. However, there are still many customers now. I need to serve them. If he always behaves like this, I am leaving. Shit!

Based on these examples, it is not difficult to find that adaption to demand fluctuation always failed to match the demand change immediately based on a practical cost concern. Whether it is ‘early adjustment’ or ‘late adjustment’, it seemed to be a rational decision from owners as far as the cost is concerned. However, this often caused dilemmas to employees. As Yi, the head chef in Firm D, once said to me:

Sometimes, you think it (a large amount of work) cannot be completed, but the owner believes it can be done. You’ve got to do it.

Indeed, pressures upon employees were not only from owners’ failure to make a proper adjustment. The ways of management and control of employees were also influenced by the concept of reducing costs under this frequently changed nature of the product market due to lack of employees. As discussed below, during the high demand and transition periods, managerial strategies were largely towards the ‘direct control’ dimension defined

by Friedman (1990); labour management was largely dominated by autocratic and imposed control.

As already mentioned earlier, when I started my job in Firm D, customers during that period were already up to a comparatively high level. One service process was that if a customer did not order any drink, a waiter needed to provide a cup of tap water for him after ordering. On a Saturday evening, the restaurant was full. Kate mainly took orders and checked bills at the counter. I needed to serve all the customers. Because the restaurant was full that evening, I genuinely did not have one second to take a rest. I had to keep delivering dishes, cleaning tables and placing fresh sets. However, at a gap, when Kate had finished all her work, she found that I failed to provide tap water to a few customers. She shouted at me:

Water! Water! Lewis, water! Come to give them water!

I then went to the counter to prepare water and explained to her that it was too busy. However, she seemed to be unaware of the extremely busy environment and the condition that I was the only waiter. Even when I already got the water ready, she continued to shout:

Hurry up! Send the water to them!

On-the-job training had been the method used in Firm D because the owner aimed to reduce costs for not employing any surplus employees before ‘high demand season’ really came. Han started her job on 19th, January, 2015, the day when the second semester began. She only did the three-hour trial period previously. Three weeks later, she was sacked by the owner. During her three-week working period, these criticisms from Kate always emerged:

You need to arrange two people on a table for two, not a table for four! It is lunch time. We are extremely busy.

Chopsticks! Chopsticks! They are not Chinese. You need to ask them whether they can use chopsticks.

Be quick! Be quick! Come to deliver dishes.

How come you have not remembered the serving procedures if customers want to eat hot pot? You have been here so long.

Jack sometimes could not even bear this, speaking to me:

I do not know why she did not ask them to work another three hours when it was not busy before they serve customers at rush hours. It (The pay) would be just £15. Everything would be fine. She taught them nothing during the trial period. Now, she is unsatisfied with them.

Indeed, pressures and tension seemed to be rooted into service people in Firm D in high demand periods. Shang once worked in Firm D for a semester. She later quitted due to her personal reasons. She returned to Firm D during my field work. One day, the owner was not on site. When we cleaned a table, she suddenly mumbled to me:

If Kate was here, I would be criticised because I cleaned the table first, instead of pushing back chairs.

Next, she arranged six customers on a big round table. She soon spoke to me:

I committed another mistake. If she knew this, I would be criticised. (The big round table is normally used for at least eight people)

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Firm U's owner rarely came to the site because he owned two other restaurants in Manchester. Management was largely controlled by Zha, the front area manager and Yi, the head chef. Orders were generally passed down to them from the owner by phone. The main aim for him to regularly appear was to collect money. Indeed, he rarely interfered in any specific activities employees were involved in.

It was a Saturday evening in late-May, 2015, when it was during the high demand period. He appeared as normal to take money. When a waiter gave me an order sheet, I found that there were numbers on that order, instead of straightforward food names, such as lamb in Chinese. In the menu, one number refers to one particular food, but nobody had ever written numbers. If she wrote numbers, I, as a skewer chef, had to read the menu to find out which number referred to which food. I then asked the waiter why she wrote numbers. She said that the owner had asked her to do so. I was unhappy indeed because this created difficulties for me. I then asked her not to write numbers next time. It seemed that the owner heard our talk. He went in immediately, speaking to me angrily:

It's me that asked her to use numbers. There is a table of non-Chinese. They cannot understand Chinese. We've only got two front area staff. One is cleaning, and the other is serving. They don't have time to translate English to Chinese. Writing numbers is convenient for them. Ok? You need to check these numbers from the menu. Starting from today, we begin to use numbers!

As an employee, I had to accept. However, this was indeed largely due to lack of employees in the transition period. Late adjustment meant that two employees could hardly serve at a high speed with relatively high demands. As a result, the owner carried out autocratic and imposed control to manage the labour in order to run the business efficiently. Under this context, pressures were passed down to me, as the chef, not the front area staff themselves.

4.3 Competition, market position and owner-managers' strategies

The beginning of this chapter introduced a recent development of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. The most dramatic feature was that there had been an increase for both the demand side and supply side. This section will then focus on the relationship between these two sides and examine how product market competition influence owner-managers' strategies.

4.3.1 The level of competition

Firm C was a higher-end Chinese restaurant located in Location C, founded in 2008. Zha, the front area manager in Firm U, worked there from 2009 to 2013. One day, we discussed the current competition situation in Sheffield, he spoke to me:

I started to work in Firm C in 2009. I am telling you the change in weekends on the evening shift in Firm C since 2009. In 2009, it would be basically full. In 2010, the rate of table turnover was two. In 2011, it was three. In 2012, the number dropped a little bit. In 2013 when I left, it was less than two.

I then told him:

You know what? I went there last Saturday. There were only four or five tables of customers. It was Saturday!

Zha replied:

It has been like this for a long time. Look, see how many restaurants have been opened since 2011 (Zha then started to calculate the number of restaurants in the Location A area). There are now at least fifteen on Location A. Suppose each of them only attracts one table of customers. How many are there altogether?

I also asked similar questions to Jack about the level of competition. Jack told me:

Yes, the business cannot be compared to several years ago. The peak time was in 2011 and 2012. That is why it moved here at that time (In September 2011, Firm D moved to a much larger property next door). During that period, the average revenue in lunch shift was around £2,000. The time of table turnover in the lunch shift was at least two. Now, it is hardly full.

From the above information, the actual business condition was that the best time for ethnic-Chinese owned restaurants was in 2011 and 2012. This basically means that the demand side, at least in these two years, should outnumber the supply side. It is indeed not difficult to explain.

As noted, the number of Chinese students recruited by the university started to rise dramatically from 2009 and doubled in 2011. With the increase from the demand side, the supply side also had a huge rise. However, after 2011, the rise of Chinese restaurants was at an unbelievable speed. The result was that the number was more than fifteen only in the Location A (the next section of this chapter will deal with ‘location’; here we only focus on numbers). It rose from four to fifteen in three years within that small region. In contrast, the number of Chinese students after 2012 was basically on the same level. In other words, the supply side began to go up significantly, while the demand side kept the same after 2012.

After examining the trend over the past several years, together with the drop of customer numbers in firm C and the drop of business revenue in Firm D from 2012, it would be convincing to conclude that saturation and over-supply were the current situation for the Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. The product market had been under the condition of intense competition since 2011.

This was confirmed by Yi's comment based on the product market condition. I one day suggested him to open a restaurant. He answered:

No, I won't. It is already over saturated. There is no business at all. The meat (customers) is limited. Too many restaurants.

I then asked him, what if dishes were extremely delicious and dedicated, and there was a good marketing strategy? Yi continued:

No, these are not important at all. The fundamental problem is that the competition is too intense. It is over-supplied. Currently, if a business can generate £10K revenue a week, that would be good. Previously, it was £30K (per week).

The next section will analyse the significance of the high levels of competition on the exercise of strategic choices by owner-managers in this context.

4.3.2 Pricing strategies

As already shown in Chapter 3, Firm U had a refurbishment during my field work. Before the refurbishment, the price was £12.99 per person for hot pot and skewer buffet. After the decoration, the owner changed the pricing strategy: £12.99 on weekdays and £16.99 at weekends (including Friday evenings).

However, a week later, everyone in Firm U realised that customers seemed to have become fewer. On the Saturday in the second week after changing the price, the revenue was less than £800 (the normal revenue of a typical Saturday was around £1,200). Yi began to complain:

If he does not change the price, there will be fewer customers. Yesterday, I asked Zha to get feedback from customers. They all expressed that it was too expensive.

Zha, alongside with us, confirmed this. Yi continued:

All the restaurants operating buffet in Sheffield sell at the price of £13.99 or £14.99. He (the owner) sells it at fucking £16.99! Is there any gold in the meal? Yesterday, Zha told me that current customers were all our regular customers. Once they finish eating this time, it is impossible for them to come back.

You know what? Firm D once did refurbishment two years ago. After that, it raised all its dishes from 50 pence to £1. Customers suddenly disappeared. It then turned the price back within a month.

Then, in the following week (the third week after the price went up), the revenue on Saturday dropped significantly below £400, hardly any customers at all. The owner came to the site on the fourth week and set the price back to £12.99.

I also once discussed with Jack the strategies an owner could take in face of intense competition. Jack told me:

It is purely dog-eat-dog. In order to attract customers, Firm F (a new restaurant opening in early-2015 located in the Location A) took the 50% return strategy. If you spent £20, they gave you £10 voucher. It was utterly ridiculous. You know what? The total cost including everything for a £7 dish is £5. They basically sold at half price.

They chose to conduct the strategy at the beginning of the university semester. It lasted for a while. However, the result was that they could not generate any profits. And meanwhile, there were no customers for other restaurants. Finally, no one could earn money.

Therefore, under this highly competitive context, profit margins were very low. Due to the low profit margin, owner-managers might choose to increase their prices after improving the restaurant conditions such as refurbishment. This was indeed fair enough. However, the problem lay in the fact that customers were sensitive to the price. If the number of customers dropped as significantly after raising their prices as the cases for Firm D and Firm U, this basically meant that customers were not happy to eat in a slightly better environment with the price of spending more. Reducing prices aiming to attract new customers was another choice taken by these owners. However, given that the profit margin was already low, this would seriously hurt the business in that period. Once its price went up, it might face the same dilemma as Firm D and Firm U did. If the pricing strategy was strictly constrained by the intense competition and customer preference, what were the

owner-managers' strategies in attracting and maintaining customers under largely non-price related conditions?

4.3.3 Retaining customers

In order to retain regular customers, Firm D introduced a 'loyalty card' in early-December, 2014. Indeed, the 'loyalty card' strategy had been executed months ago by Firm G, Firm D's main competitor. Firm G was founded in mid-2012, next door to Firm D. Since the opening of Firm G, Firm D had been in a weaker position in the competition. Kate clearly understood the situation. For several times, when there were few customers in the evening, she might ask me to take a look at Firm G's situation, though for most of the time, customers in Firm G outnumbered those of Firm D. Jack summarised the key reason:

It is all down to her (Kate, the owner of Firm D). She has been using the same strategy as it was several years ago to manage the business and serve customers. A few years ago, if students did not eat here, they had no other choices. Yes, she was the boss at that time. She could dictate customers. She could serve them with no respect. Even if students were unhappy with her manner, they had no more choices. However, things have changed. It is no longer the situation when it was a few years ago. Now, they have loads of choices. If you make me unhappy, I can change with no transfer cost.

According to Jack's comments, poor service quality basically determined the disadvantage for Firm D compared to Firm G. Indeed, this was the only major difference between these two firms. They were both down-market restaurants, mainly focusing on lunch time cheap meals, with similar dishes and the same price level, requiring quick reaction and fast serving pace from employees. However, the difference on the service quality between these two was dramatic. As already mentioned in the last section, one of the main focuses of Firm D's owner was to reduce labour costs. Whether it was early adjustment or late adjustment, the management philosophy behind this was that there was no way to employ one more person than it actually needed. As a result, customers had to order at the counter by themselves because considering the amount of work and the number of service employees, it was impossible for an employee to stop to take customer orders, except in

the situation when there were few customers. This indeed seriously influenced customer experiences. As Jack analysed:

Well, apart from here, is there any other Chinese restaurant requiring customers to order at the counter? Basically, this is the principal reason which leads to the fact that there have been much fewer customers in the evening in Firm D than in Firm G. For the lunch shift, students are all busy. They only order quick meals. However, in the evening, they have time. They would like to be served well. Eating here with your ten friends means that you need to first remember the name of ten dishes you are going to order, and you tell her (the owner) at the counter. If somebody is ordering, you have got to stand there for five minutes to be served. It is absolutely absurd. If she employed one more, everything would be better.

Furthermore, the manner of Kate in treating with customers also considerably influenced the business negatively. It was in a lunch shift. There were Kate, Jack and me on that shift. After Kate delivered a dish to a customer, the customer expressed that it was the wrong dish. Next, the unbelievable thing happened. Kate forced him to eat the ‘wrong’ dish and told the customer that it was similar to what he originally ordered. The customer finally accepted the ‘wrong’ dish. Later, when I cleaned another table, Jack ran to me and told me that the customer was a regular customer and he also knew the customer. Before the customer left, he went to say sorry to the customer. The customer then told him that there was no way for him to come back. Indeed, it was the fact that Kate took the order wrongly. However, if she had asked the chef to cook the ‘correct’ meal to the customer, it would have caused extra costs. She just wouldn’t want this to happen.

Indeed, I also chatted with quite a lot of customers throughout my research in Firm D. Most of them felt that the service quality and eating experience in Firm D were unpleasant. One even told me that if they (together with her friends) would like to have meals in Firm D and saw Kate was in through the window, they would turn away immediately.

Under the context of intense competition, if raising price was a problem, reducing costs would be a fair choice for owners. However, if cost reduction took place at the price of minimising service quality, a business would struggle severely.

4.3.4 Moving upward

As noted in Section 4.1, there were two principal reasons for the increase in the number of ethnically Chinese owned restaurants: enough savings and entrepreneurial motivation from chefs. Indeed, there was a crucial factor that allowed those two reasons to happen: low threshold. As already discussed above, recently opened Chinese restaurants were generally run by at least two or three chefs as co-owners. They formed the basic structure of the kitchen. They worked for themselves. Yi once told me that another reason for them to work together was that the savings of a single person was normally not enough to open a new restaurant. However, three were enough to start. As a result, once they formed their businesses in this way, it was not difficult to achieve the entry threshold.

However, the practical problem was that though entry was easy, most of them were lower-end restaurants. Indeed, for all the Chinese restaurants (around fifteen in mid-2015 when I completed my field work) located within the Location A, strictly speaking, there was only one up-market restaurant, with elaborate decoration, cosy environment, spacious room and comfortable sofas, etc. It was indeed founded in 2009. In other words, for all the newly opened Chinese restaurants from the start of the rising trend in 2011, there were no up-market restaurants at all. Therefore, their savings could give them the chance to start businesses in the sector, but it was far lower than the minimum standard to operate an up-market restaurant.

During my field work in Firm D, Jack, the front area manager, was planning to take over the business as the first step for his immigration. When it approached the end of my field work, the procedure was already into the final stage. Jack had already paid almost the full amount to Kate. Once he finished renewing his visa, he would become the owner. We one day discussed how to improve the business after his taking-over; he told me:

I already have some basic ideas. Once I take over, the first thing I will do is to refurbish it. All the current tables and chairs will be removed. Lights and ceiling will be entirely re-decorated. I will let customers clearly understand from the first impression that this is an up-market restaurant.

Furthermore, I will change the menu as well. It will be no longer a fast food restaurant. I will retain the rice served with meat and vegetables because students

have limited time during lunch time. However, at the dinner time, they prefer to eat some delicate food with plenty of time in a cosy environment. They (Chinese students) have money. They would like to eat under a relaxed environment with high quality service. Is there any other restaurant like Firm D? It is absolutely ridiculous to order at the counter. After doing these changes, I am aiming to attract students who will also eat here at dinner time, not just lunch time. I have got my plans in my mind.

If most of the Chinese restaurants provide similar food with the price in the same level and with decent serving quality, what could differentiate them? Moving up-market with luxury and pleasant decoration would be one potential choice. However, the large amount of money required denied the possibilities to carry out this strategy for self-employed chefs. By contrast, for those who had money to meet the requirement, like Jack, who was previously a student in a wealthy family, it would be a big chance for them under intense competition.

4.4 Geographic locations and the product market

The final section of this chapter will examine how the urban space influenced both the demand side and the supply side of the product market. It will discuss how the urban spatial structure imposed constraints on ethnic Chinese small restaurant owners, and how they adapted to the situation, with special reference to locational strategies.

4.4.1 The Location A versus Location B

Chapter 3 and this Chapter have mentioned several times that there were two main regions where the majority of Chinese restaurants were located—the Location A and Location B. Firm D was located in the Location A; Firm U was located in Location B. Location B was previously recognised as Sheffield's China Town. However, after 2011, with most of the new Chinese restaurants developed in the Location A, fewer customers would like to prefer to have meals in restaurants on Location B due to its long distance to the university area.

It was a day in late June, 2015, when it was in the low demand period, there was no customer at all for the entire lunch shift in Firm U. After finishing all the preparation work for the remaining days of the week, Yi came to chat with me:

Location B is dead. It is completely dead. No students would like to eat here only except those who live nearby.

Indeed, the significant drop of Firm U's revenue over the past two years also supported the point. Firm U was founded in June, 2013. According to the owner, its minimum day revenue at the beginning at weekends was over £2,000. By contrast, during the period of my field work there, its day revenue never exceeded £1,200. Its business had been encroached gradually by those new Chinese restaurants on Location A.

For Chinese restaurants on Location A, within four years from mid-September, 2011 to mid-August, 2015, the number soared amazingly from three to around fifteen. Excessive competition had been discussed in previous sections in this chapter. However, the eagerness of developing restaurants had been pursued by entrepreneurs. As Jack once told me:

Last time when I ate with the owner of firm H (a Chinese restaurant on Location B), he asked me whether there was any property in the Location A area to rent. He told me that he would like to open a restaurant on Location A. I asked him don't you know the level of competition on Location A.

I just don't know what he was thinking. See how intense the competition is. He is still planning to open another. (then smiling with scorn)

It is also necessary to mention another restaurant here – the firm I. Firm I was first founded in late-2011 located in the Location A, the booming stage of both the supply side and the demand side. In August 2014, due to the considerable fall of its profits, it was sold to another owner. Next, in less than a year time, its owners changed twice. This was mainly due to two reasons. The first is the 'entrepreneurial motivation', which is discussed earlier in this chapter. Early chefs have earned enough money. They had core abilities and they were keen to have their own businesses. The second reason is the value of Location A. It is no doubt that potential entrepreneurs clearly understood the high level of competition in this region. However, it is also obvious to everybody that Location A is directly linked to university areas and this is the area where most Chinese students live nearby. As a result, it can provide stable customers. With these two reasons, on the one hand, the locational

advantage allowed Chinese restaurants to have direct access to large number of customers, which to some extent downplay their concern over intense competition, and on the other hand, the geographical value of Location A directly led to excessive competition in this region.

4.4.2 Adaptive choices from owner-managers under the constraints of locations

Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs had been attracted to invest in the Location A for the past four years due to its geographical advantage to access customers. Enhancing service quality, setting combatively low prices and increasing eating experiences were some basic strategies carried out by these owners under severe competition, which have been examined in previous sections in this chapter. However, for cases such as Firm U, where locational constraints largely created difficulties to access satisfying Chinese students, how should owner-managers adapt to the structural constraints?

After the re-decoration, the owner was planning to introduce buffet. I once asked him the reason. He answered me concisely:

We have no customers (student customers). We cannot compete with restaurants in the Location A area. I have got to do some changes to attract those non-Chinese living in nearby areas.

This decision was also seen by Yi as the only choice to adapt to the locational constraints. Yi spoke to me one day:

He is planning to stock some food used for buffet next week. If he does buffet, it is likely that the business may get better a bit. There are basically three categories of customers: students, ethnic-Chinese residents like me and non-Chinese. It only has student customers now. You know how many students come to eat each week? He's got to change. The weekly revenue is around £5K now. We (local ethnic-Chinese, holding British passports) rarely eat hot pot. If he does something to attract local ethnic Chinese customers, he can do at least £8K a week.

He continued:

See Firm J, how awful its food is. But, you know what, even for Firm J (a restaurant also located on Location B), it can generate basically £8K to £10K revenue a week.

Do you know why? It focuses on non-Chinese customers. There are so many non-Chinese living in nearby neighbourhoods. How many students? Firm K (another restaurant operating hot pot on Location B) has failed. Why? No customers at all. If he (the owner) does not change a lot, it will be worse with no doubt. He always asked me to carefully manage the business, how can I manage under the current condition?

About two weeks later, one day, there were no customers during the entire evening shift. At about 9pm, Yi asked me to take a look at a newly opened Chinese restaurant opposite Firm U. I went out to take a look and reported to him that there were no customers as well. Yi said:

I do not know why Lin (Lin previously worked in Firm U over six months as head chef) opened a Sichuan Cuisine restaurant here. He worked here for so long. Doesn't he know that the only choice is to do non-Chinese customers? It is ridiculous for him to do Sichuan Cuisine aiming to attract students. Location B is dying. The only choice is to do businesses for non-Chinese customers.

About another two weeks later, Yi one day suddenly came to speak to me:

Hi, Lewis, did you see the note on the window of Lin's restaurant? They are now providing buffet. He definitely has got no choices.

Indeed, Firm U finally failed to provide buffet until I finished my field work. Though locational constraints made the owner clearly understand that this would be the only choice, strategies were also affected by another key factor – the labour market. The influence from the labour market upon owner-manager' choices and employment relations will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.5 Summary

This chapter examined how management in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield was affected by a variety of factors from the product market. It has been recognised that the product market has significant influence upon management practices and workplace relationships in small firms (Rainnie, 1989; Kinnie, et al., 1999; Edwards et al., 2006). The central focus in the chapter was on how owners managed to control labour

in a turbulent environment and how much scope they had on choices under different types of pressures.

The demand in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector was extremely unstable. It changed frequently following the pattern of university semesters. Customer demand was generally at a high level during semester time. In contrast, the demand dropped significantly during vacations. Edwards and Ram (2006) have demonstrated that labour management in small firms under an unstable economic environment requires owners to make continuous and rapid adjustments to frequently changed market conditions. Within turbulent external environments, management needs to change its strategies of work organisation to match product market conditions. This was the case in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Management strategies had to adapt to match the demand fluctuation in different periods. Approaches to HRM practices in small firms reflect responses to external influences (Wapshott and Mallett, 2016). The most influential aspect of labour management practices in these two Chinese restaurants was recruitment and selection. In the face of the frequent change, owner-managers had to make decisions before transition periods to decide when to recruit or sack employees. Having the ability to work fast was the most important factor in selecting employees. Because the demand change was not only frequent, but also had a significant effect within a short period of time, adaption from owner-managers always failed to match the change immediately.

Furthermore, given that labour costs accounted for a big percentage of the total revenue, reducing labour costs was seen as a 'rational' choice by these Chinese owners. The responding strategies in both Firm U and Firm D were either early adjustment (employee dismissal) during transition from a high demand period to a low demand period or late adjustment (employee recruitment) during transition from a low demand period to a high demand period. Ram (1994) demonstrated that in the face of product market pressures, the actual shop floor arrangement was behind the notion of an economic rationality. However, within a narrow view of economic rationality, they created functional problems. Under this context, the 'rational' solutions led to a major problem that in both of the firms, the number of employees was always fewer than it should have been. The consequence was thus obvious. Firstly, an individual worker was forced take more tasks in transition periods than

in stable periods, which created explicit resistance and tensions between owner-managers and workers on the shop floor. Secondly, without sufficient employees, customers' orders were often delayed. This caused disorder in organising workers to deal with different customer demands. The 'rational' economic choice in the turbulent environment, therefore, caused serious organising problems with low efficiency.

The level of competition became severe after 2011. In Location A, the number of Chinese restaurants rose from three to about fifteen in less than four years. Though there had been a steady increase on the demand side, the continuous expansion of Chinese restaurants finally led to the fact that the supply side far outnumbered the demand side. As a result, there were excessive numbers of restaurants, creating market saturation and intense competition. Strategic choices from owner-managers under competitive pressures were mainly examined from three aspects: pricing strategies, retaining customers and moving upward.

One strategy was to raise prices after refurbishment in order to expand profits. However, customers were sensitive to the price when restaurants were providing similar food. Another strategy was to attract customers at the expense of temporarily giving profits away. However, businesses would finally face the same problem when their prices returned to more normal levels. Under intense competition, profit margins were generally low for these Chinese restaurants. Price competition became the regular response for intense competition, which was largely the same for South-Asian restaurants (Jones et al., 2006). Then, enhancing service quality and retaining customers became the minimum standard if there was not enough room to manoeuvre as far as the pricing strategy was concerned. However, because of its leading market position at early stages, Firm D failed to realise the problem when it was in competition with a number of similar types of Chinese restaurants. It suffered a lot as a result.

Product markets serve to constrain, and meanwhile provide opportunities for management (Ram, 1994). Because most Chinese restaurants competed in the down-market, moving upward was another opportunity for these Chinese restaurant owners. For most Chinese restaurants, high capital threshold was the main constraint for them to go to the upper-end, especially for self-employed chefs. However, this was indeed a chance for those who had

enough capital. Chinese students would like to eat in a cosy and comfortable environment in the evenings and at weekends. Developing higher-end Chinese restaurants could be a breakthrough for these entrepreneurs.

Finally, geographical areas and locations also largely constrained owner-managers' choices (Rechters and van Kempen, 2000). If avoiding saturation by relocating was common and effective for South-Asian restaurants (Ram et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2006), this strategy could never be applied to the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. Because Chinese restaurants were heavily dependent on students, in regions which did not have access to large numbers of students, owners found it necessary to restructure their businesses to focus on non-Chinese within nearby neighbourhoods. In the face of these spatial constraints, ethnic Chinese restaurant owners generally did not have any positive strategic choices, but had to be adaptive.

Chapter 5 Influences from the labour market upon owner-managers' choices and employment relations

As already discussed in Chapter 2, the labour market exerts significant influences upon management. Management strategies towards labour and labour's negotiation power are largely decided by the level of owners' dependence upon particular types of workers under a particular labour market situation. Based on this knowledge, the first aim of this chapter is to explore how the labour market affects the day-to-day shop-floor experiences in the two restaurants. This chapter will first examine the general labour market context in ethnic Chinese owned restaurants in Sheffield. Section 2 will focus on how the features of the labour market shaped owner-managers' practical management strategies and to what extent labour could successfully negotiate for their interests and resist management practices. Conflict, consent and the dependence relationship between the two parties will be particularly analysed.

Furthermore, the importance of women or female labour to the success of ethnic businesses has been a key focus in existing research (Ram, 1994; Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). Female labour was a useful resource for South-Asian small firms. Firstly, the supply of ethnic female labour from the labour market was generally cheap because of their lack of skills and dependent relationship to men. It was, therefore, important for these ethnic enterprises to employ cheap female labour to compete in labour intensive industries, such as restaurant and clothing sectors. Secondly, female workers were frightened of management due to their weak labour market position. This gave small firm owners the opportunity to ruthlessly exploit the workforce. Lots of examples in these studies illustrated that the survival of ethnic enterprises was sustained upon the exploitation of minority women to expand their values as a resource.

In the two case study firms, all of the worker in the front area were students. They worked as part-time employees. Why did students account for such a high percentage? What were the owners' considerations and perceptions behind recruiting so many part-time student workers? Did students have similar meanings to ethnic Chinese restaurants as female workers did to South-Asian small firms? Answers to these questions are indeed the first aim of this chapter. The second aim of this chapter is to explore how students as a particular

resource influenced the employment relations in ethnic Chinese small firms. It will also examine the implications for these students of working as part-time waiters.

5.1 Labour supply shortage for kitchen staff and its implications

In Chapter 4, when discussing the increase of the supply side over the past several years, this study already identified a trend towards self-employment for chefs due to having saved enough money and the entrepreneurial motivation. This massively influenced the labour supply to the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. The available chefs, as a result, in the labour market were significantly reduced.

At the end of Chapter 4, I mentioned that due to the locational constraint, the owner of Firm U planned to introduce buffet. However, he finally failed. The reason leading to the failure was largely attributed to the labour shortage. Yi frequently discussed this with me. The first discussion happened in the second week after Firm U re-opened after refurbishment. I asked Yi whether buffet could be introduced next week. Yi answered:

No way. There is no way to do buffet next week. Now we (with another chef) need to cut and marinate all kinds of meat, which are used for skewers. If we are required to prepare buffet, it is impossible for us to do work for you (preparing stuff for skewers). There is too much work to do for buffet. Furthermore, two (chefs) is not enough at all. The minimum number for producing buffet is three. He needs to at least recruit one more.

One week later, one day when we met at the restaurant entrance at the beginning of a day shift, Yi spoke to me:

I'm dying. I've got a temperature. He (the owner) told me yesterday that he would like to start to operate buffet next week. He said he couldn't find any proper chef. He asked me to find one for him. Where am I supposed to find him a chef? If he cannot find a chef by next week and continues to ask me to do everything, I'm leaving.

Another week later, Yi talked about this with me for the third time:

Lewis, you know what? I previously worked in Newcastle on buffet for five years. I knew everything about buffet. If he believes two is OK, we can have a try. However,

he still asked me to prepare skewer meat, telling me that he couldn't find a decent chef. Anyway, if he finally decides to do buffet, I will only focus on buffet. If the meat for skewers cannot be prepared on time, that is none of my business. I do not have responsibility to find a chef for him. I already got Dong (the other chef, Yi's friend) here. I've got a UK passport. If he keeps pressuring me, I will leave. I can find a job with ease.

In the end, the owner failed to find a proper chef till the end of my field work. There had been no buffet in Firm U by the time I finished my research there.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Firm D's owners were a couple. Kate worked in the front area, while her husband Tim worked in the kitchen as the head chef. Kate indeed often interfered in kitchen management. For example, if she found the amount of a dish was too much or if she thought a dish was not prepared to be tidy before delivering, she would go into the kitchen straight away and shout at kitchen staff. One day, it was probably because she felt that the cooking speed was really low, so she suddenly walked into the kitchen from the counter and shouted: 'Be quick! Be quick!' Immediately, Tim came out and shouted at Kate at the counter:

Shut up! If you continue acting like this and cause them to leave, where do you find replacements? I'm in charge of the kitchen. You'd better only focus on the front area. Don't mess up the kitchen!

It was obvious that Tim was afraid that Kate's behaviour would lead to staff resignations. Indeed, due to the short supply of labour in the economy, the departure of kitchen staff could cause severe turbulence for ethnic Chinese restaurants. Take my own experience as the example. In Chapter 3, I discussed how I secured my initial access in Firm U. Before I applied for a job in Firm U, due to the conflicted interests between the head chef and the owner, the chef decided to leave together with his wife, who worked there as a kitchen assistant. Because the owner had already conducted 'early adjustment', which has been analysed in last chapter caused by demand fluctuation, there were only three working in the kitchen at that time. Once the head chef and his wife left, there was only one left. Due to the shortage on the labour market, the owner could not find any proper person immediately. However, he needed someone working for him to continue running the

business. I was just the one who applied for a job at that particular time. It felt that it was urgent for him to recruit me to fill the vacancy in order to keep the business running, though I knew nothing about that particular cooking technique. That was why I could quickly secure the access. The reason why he gave me the access was because I could work for him at that time, genuinely having no relationship with my background and my research.

Therefore, under the situation of labour supply shortage, departure of kitchen staff might cause huge uncertainties to these Chinese restaurants. This was probably why Tim was so angry with Kate and worried that the business would struggle if existing kitchen staff were forced to leave because of Kate's bad manner in management.

I once discussed the difficulties in finding kitchen staff with Yi, the head chef in Firm U. I asked him whether there was a weak supply of restaurant workers. He answered:

Generally speaking, it is. However, there is a difference between kitchen assistants and chefs. For assistants, it is not very difficult. Look, you can even be a proper assistant. Even for chefs, I would say finding a chef is not as difficult as you imagine. However, the most important problem is that it is really hard to find a good chef.

See Juan (Juan worked in Firm U for two weeks as a head chef before flying back to China). Because the owner at that time couldn't find a chef, he then recruited him from the web. Juan said he had previously worked in the China Town, London. Is he kidding me? If he says this to you, to customers, well, that is OK. However, I have been a chef for nearly twenty years. He is absolutely a shit. See the fucking noodles he cooked. It is impossible for a decent chef to cook like that. No flavour at all. He was also lazy. You know this, right? Watching movies for the entire day using his tablet. You know what? I would like to let him go in the first week. However, the owner couldn't find any proper chef, so he then stayed for another week.

So far, the discussion has demonstrated that inadequate labour supply created a variety of problems for ethnic Chinese restaurants and influenced owner-managers' attitudes towards kitchen staff. According to Yi's comment on Juan, there was a huge difference between finding general staff such as assistants and key staff such as skilled chefs in the kitchen

area, especially under the situation of labour shortage. Based on the difference, the next sections will focus on these two groups of people respectively to discuss the level of owners' dependence and their negotiation power over effort bargaining, wage and other issues.

5.2 Kitchen assistants' labour market positions and their negotiation power

Let us start to focus on two cases which I have discussed in Chapter 4.

The first case was mentioned in Section 4.2.2. When Firm U re-opened in late May, there were only three employees working in the kitchen area, including me. The owner soon recruited a pot-washer and a kitchen assistant because it was during the high customer demand period. It soon went into June, when the product market began to move into its low demand period. The revenue started to drop significantly. The owner came to the site in mid-June, and had a short talk with the newly recruited kitchen assistant. She was then dismissed after working in Firm U for less than a month.

The second case was mentioned in Section 4.4.2. Because the owner planned to introduce buffet to save the business, he then decided to recruit another kitchen assistant. One day when I arrived, I found that there was a new one working there. I then had a chat with him, and he told me that he came to do a trial. After about 30 minutes, he suddenly began to pack his bag and left. The reason was that the owner had a phone call with Yi earlier to get updates on the applicant. Yi told the owner that the applicant was generally fine but with a relative low working pace. The owner then asked Yi to let him stop the trial immediately.

Both of the cases described the status of kitchen assistants. Whether the adjustment was because of demand fluctuation or workers' low pace of work, they were just sacked straightforwardly, entirely based on owners' perceptions through word-of-mouth. Decision-making for sacking a kitchen assistant was largely decided by owners. Kitchen assistants were obviously vulnerable in the labour market. They were powerless to negotiate for their job security. Even under the condition of extremely shortage of labour supply, they literally had no power to argue for staying once the owner had decided to let them go based on a range of factors.

If employee dismissal for kitchen assistants was entirely decided by owners' perception based on a variety of reasons under a particular condition, did kitchen assistants have scope for wage bargaining? The answer was negative, as well.

I have already mentioned several times that when I obtained initial access in Firm U, there were three people working in the kitchen; two chefs and one kitchen assistant. The head chef and the assistant were a couple. The reason why I secured my access quickly was because they planned to go due to conflictual interests over buffet between the head chef and the owner. Indeed, I later knew that there was another reason leading to their departure – the female assistant attempted to negotiate over a wage rise and finally failed. I heard the storey from Yi. He told me that the couple felt that due to the reduction of the kitchen staff number, they had to cover lots of extra work such as washing pots. They thought they were worth more money. The weekly wage of the assistant had been £300. She applied for a wage increase to £350 a week. The owner rejected the request. She then tried £330. However, the owner did not agree to that either.

Two weeks before I finished my field work in Firm U, Yi was finding a replacement to take over my job. I asked Yi whether £300 per week was a bit low to find any decent kitchen assistants, Yi replied:

If it was a few years ago, I would say yes. For one holding a UK passport, the minimum would be £340. However, things have changed. There was a country. Erm, I cannot remember its name. It collapsed around two years ago. The UK government accepted most of its residents. Some of them are now working in Chinese restaurants. See the guy working in firm T (Yi previously worked there). He was from that country. He was paid £200 per week. He needs to work over 10 hours a day, including washing dishes, cutting meat and vegetables and cleaning everything. He has been working there over a year. He is happy for £200 a week. Many have asked me about your job. Though most of them, at the beginning, expressed that it was a little bit low, they would like to take the job finally. They clearly knew that if they did not choose the job, somebody will do. They were aware that the wage for kitchen assistants was at this level.

As Yi once said: ‘Sometimes, you think it (a large amount of work) is too much, but the owner believes it can be done. You’ve got to do it’. Based on the description above, negotiation over effort bargaining was indeed impossible for kitchen assistants. However tough or how much the work was, they had to work till the owner believed it would be necessary to recruit new workers. Negotiation over wage rise was utterly impossible. There was a wage standard set by the labour market. Once this was fixed, there was literally no room for them to negotiate. Moreover, the labour market supply for ethnic Chinese restaurants in recent years was filled with other ethnic minorities. Ethnic Chinese labour had to compete with them to get a job. However, the problem was that workers from other ethnic groups were happy to accept a wage far lower than the amount given to ethnic Chinese labour. This then further weakened their negotiation power over wage bargaining.

A further example, which supports all of the points discussed above, concerns Teng. Teng started to work in Firm U a week after I had arrived, together with his wife. His wife was a pot washer; while he was a kitchen assistant. On a Friday, it was extremely busy on the evening shift. Having finished all the order, Teng looked exhausted. I joked with him:

Go and see the owner. Ask him to increase your wage.

Teng answered:

Yes, it is necessary to speak to the owner about this. Look, he (Juan, the guy who was lazy, working in Firm U for two weeks before going back to China, as mentioned above) earns £450, I get £300. I work far more than he does. I’ve got to ask the owner what’s wrong with the kitchen.

The next day, Saturday, it was very busy again. Teng was asked to do a fruit mix for karaoke customers at about 9pm, when he just finished nearly four-hours of consecutive cooking. He spoke to me:

I need to do everything. The one who earns £450 does nothing; I earn £300, doing everything. I will phone the owner to discuss this with him. I am planning to negotiate with him for my wage increase.

The owner came to collect money on Sunday. He had a talk with Teng after work when everybody had left. I texted Teng that night and asked him whether he negotiated the wage issue with the owner successfully. Teng phoned me back, saying:

Yes, he agreed to increase my wage to £350 per week starting from next week, but it is not a 'free' rise. Juan will leave next week. After that, Yi will become the head chef. I will take over the job Yi is currently doing, as an assistant chef.

However, the fact was that Yi was paid £450 a week.

A week later, the owner decided to re-decorate. Three weeks through the decoration, I received a text from Teng, saying: 'I am leaving tomorrow'. I then had a dinner with him that evening. Teng said:

I cannot continue waiting. I need to get a new job to earn money. Nobody knows when it re-opens. I met him this morning. I said I would be leaving. He said nothing, just OK. There was no 'thanks'; there was no word trying to keep me. I told him I would like to leave my wife here. He told me that she had to leave as well.

I have been so committed to him, to the business for the past several months. But, maybe he thinks that is what I should do. I can still remember the time when he tried to recruit me. I definitely had value for him at that time. However, he, now, must believe he has enough time to find any replacement before the decoration is ready. Otherwise, he wouldn't let me go.

About a month after Teng had left Firm U, I conducted a detailed conversation with the owner, aiming to understand his attitudes behind his decision. He told me:

He only worked in the UK less than half a year. He did not understand the culture at all. He did not understand where his position was. I'm telling you, I was already very kind to him, but he was still unsatisfied. If he believed that he should get more, it's better for him to go and see what the sector is like.

Teng did negotiate for his wage once during his working period in Firm U. After that, his wage was planned to rise from £300 to £350. However, the reason behind this was that his 'new' job was indeed worth £450 a week to other chefs. As already analysed, structural

conditions largely limited kitchen assistants' effort bargaining due to their subordinate labour market position. Effort bargaining for Teng appeared to get him more pay, it indeed strengthened the system of managerial control. It reinforced the management structure over kitchen assistants. The owner kept the effort bargain strictly within his control.

Teng and his wife's departure confirmed the point that there is domination of managerial control over kitchen assistants. The owner did not even persuade Teng to stay at all under a situation where there was no available replacement at that moment. Teng's decision to leave was regarded as resistance by the owner. As a result, Teng's wife was forced to leave though she was innocent. Therefore, effort bargaining, wage negotiation and other types of resistance to management from Teng were not acceptable by the managerial structure and owner-managers' ideologies.

Based on the analysis above, it can be found that though labour shortage was the problem for most ethnic Chinese restaurants, there had been a low level of dependence of owners upon kitchen assistants. Due to the low level of dependence, kitchen assistants were in a weak labour market position, which then shaped the balance of power in these Chinese restaurants. Owners had absolutely authority over these workers. It was the employer's perception which was imposed upon the employment relations; decision-making was entirely controlled by owners. As a result, kitchen assistants' subordinate position largely constrained their negotiating power. Structural limits from the labour market meant that employee resistance was difficult. Negotiations over effort, wages and other interests were not acceptable to the owners. The fact that they could easily be dismissed and replaced left kitchen assistants with no choice but to be compliant. Consent was basically the only choice for them under the particular labour market condition.

5.3 Chefs' labour market positions and their negotiation power

Yi once described the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in one sentence:

In the UK, it is the chefs that choose owners.

This description seemed to reflect that chefs had advantages over owners and they had the option to decide whether they would like to work for a particular owner. According to Yi's

statement, chefs had the dominant labour market position over owners, which was then expected to give them strong negotiation power over effort bargaining and wage.

It was mentioned in section 5.2 that Teng, during the re-decoration period, failed to save his job in Firm U. Let us now examine what was Yi's experience, as the head chef, during that period.

Yi stayed in Firm U after the decoration. After the business re-opened, I asked Yi why he chose to stay, Yi answered:

He (the owner) frequently phoned me. I told him that I would like to leave. I have family. I need to earn money. I told him I just couldn't wait. I am telling you, two (restaurants) had been inviting me. He still frequently called me. It is annoying. I said I could not keep waiting. I've got to support my family and my loan. He later told me that he would like to offer me £200 a week till the decoration finished. He then still called me and promised to increase my weekly wage from £450 to £480.

I said to Yi:

Then, it looks like he is highly dependent upon you.

Yi replied:

He is not exactly reliant on me. Every chef knows how to do the work that I am doing. The problem is that he cannot find any proper chef. I bring Dong here (Dong was the chef Yi found during the decoration period for buffet). He has nowhere to find any good chefs. Moreover, you know what? Dong lives in Derby. He (the owner) needs to pay for his accommodation. It's about £200 a month. That means he needs to spend extra around £50 a week for his labour cost. I live here (Sheffield). That wouldn't cost him anymore.

Yi continued:

Every owner here is the same. Purely capitalist. You know what, when I worked in Firm T previously, my initial wage was £410. I said I would like to leave, the owner added £20. Next time, I said I would like to leave, he added £20 again. For the third time, I said I would like to leave. He said: Yi, don't leave; don't leave. He added

another £30. When I finally left Firm T, my weekly wage was £480. I am telling you, they are all shit. As long as you don't say you are leaving, they will never increase your wage.

In June, 2015, Dong left Firm U after finding a job in Derby. Yi became the only chef apart from three kitchen assistants. I later asked him whether the owner increased his wage due to Dong's departure. Yi answered yes. I asked Yi:

Did you negotiate for more pay or he increased your wage by himself.

Yi replied to me;

It's surely I bargained with him. Dong has already left. I need to do everything. I am definitely worth to get more. We have fewer people; I need to work more. There is no way I get the same. He's got to pay me more. Otherwise, do you expect I will stay?

As already mentioned above, when Teng decided to leave during the refurbishment period, he was entirely ignored by the owner. However, there was a significant difference when Yi expressed the same idea. The owner not only offered him a wage increase, he also decided to give him 'free wage' during the decoration period, which was £200 per week, nearly half of his wage. Yi's claim of departure was indeed a way of negotiation. If he really had decided to leave, he would have left without hesitation. He clearly knew that the owner would not let him go. The threat of departure successfully helped him to achieve at wage bargaining. After Dong had left, Yi negotiated with the owner over pay for the second time. Effort bargaining was used to strengthen his negotiation power. Due to being highly dependent upon him, the owner compromised with Yi on the wage issue. He was forced to raise his wage again. From this case, it can be found that the outcome of a wage negotiation was not simply decided by owners' perceptions. In contrast to kitchen assistants, Chefs' active direct negotiation largely shaped the dynamics. They had the power to resist managerial strategies, and the impact of resistance could bring them benefits on their interests.

Let us examine two cases that occurred in Firm D. The first case: As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Jack, the front area manager, was planning to take over the business during the period of my field work. One day when we were chatting, he said to me:

You know what? Kang (a female chef in Firm D) has begun to directly challenge Kate recently. You know, it's been hot, so the kitchen becomes really hot. As a result, when there was no order, they (chefs) normally sit outside, instead of staying in the kitchen. Yesterday, when Kate went in the kitchen giving the orders to them, Lu (another chef) went in to cook immediately. Kate told Kang that there was another order. Kang said to Kate that Lu himself was enough to cook two. She then kept sitting on the chair, entirely ignoring Kate.

I then asked Jack why this happened. Jack said:

She knows the business will be sold out soon, so she doesn't care. You know what? I'm thinking that after I take over, I might sack Huo (a kitchen assistant). However, Huo has very close relationship with Kang. Once Huo is gone, my concern is that Kang may leave as well.

I asked Jack:

Is that a big deal if Kang leaves?

Jack hesitated for a second, speaking to me:

Yes, it is necessary to have Kang at least for now. She is in charge of stocking. She is now fully managing the kitchen. I need to keep her for a while at least.

The second case: In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Jack was indeed my informant. During the final stage of my field work in Firm D, due to the fall of customer numbers, my shifts reduced correspondingly. Jack then told me a lot about what had happened. One day, he said to me:

Yesterday, Kate irritated kitchen staff again. The thing is that it was not busy in the lunch shift. She then used his phone to check the CCTV which showed the record the day before. When Gui (a kitchen assistant) went out to pick up water from the counter, she moved the phone away from his ear in order to prevent Gui noticing

this. However, it turned into the speaker mode. Gui heard that and later told this to all the kitchen staff.

I then asked Jack;

Does this mean that she did not trust them?

Jack answered:

Yes. You know what? Last time, when they (kitchen staff) stocked, they secretly put some into their bags and took it away after work. Kate indeed saw everything from the CCTV. She told me in anger that how dare they do this when I was even here? Every time when they steamed pork ribs, they would take some away. Kate knew this as well. However, she never exposes these tricks.

From these two examples, it was obvious that the worry about losing key chefs was also the case in Firm D. Jack's worry of losing Kang made him even have fear of sacking a kitchen assistant who had a close relationship with Kang.

Within the context of having scarce available good chefs, chefs' job security was basically stable. Their strong labour market positions strongly influenced owner's attitudes and control strategies towards them. The chefs' dominant labour market position gave them large scope to manoeuvre for their interests. Edwards and Scullion's (1982) research in exploring control and resistance in workplaces suggested that it was necessary to understand why conflict happened in one situation but not in another. Under the particular labour market situation where there had been short supply of available labour, resistance, effort bargaining and informal negotiation were hardly tolerated by owners for kitchen assistants. By contrast, power dynamics between owners and chefs were significantly different. Owners were unwilling to have direct conflict with chefs. Chefs had strong negotiation power and actively engaged with direct negotiation upon wages and their interests. Owners' authority was challenged on varieties of occasions. For the last case in Firm D, the owner even had to tolerate chefs' fiddles due to their high dependence upon chefs under the particular labour market condition. She would rather pretend not to know of their fiddles, instead of revealing their cheatings and sacking them.

5.4 Front area staff's labour market positions and their negotiating power

Section 5.2 and 5.3 discussed the level of owners' dependence upon both kitchen assistants and chefs, and their negotiation power over wage and effort bargain based on their different labour market positions. The remaining sections of this chapter will focus on front area staff, especially students as part-time employees. As already mentioned in the introduction section of this chapter, all the part-time front area workers in these two firms were students. It will first examine the power dynamics between students and owners. After this, it will explore the significance for employing students for ethnic Chinese restaurant owners and the meaning of being a part-time waiter for these students.

Background

In Firm D, Jack had been the front area manager, as a full-time employee. There were altogether seven part-time employees I worked with throughout my field work. All of them were students, though two of them had just graduated. In Firm U, apart from two full-time employees, the eight part-time employees were all students; one of them had just graduated. It was, therefore, clear that students accounted for 100 percent of the front area part-time employees.

In both sites, recruitment was based on posting notes on the window before the businesses went into high demand period. Recommendation from existing student employees was also a popular approach. There were no printed policies to guide selection in both restaurants. In Firm D, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, whether or not a potential employee had the ability of 'being quick' was regarded as the most important factor by the owner. In Firm U, due to the regular absence of the owner, the decision was made entirely by the manager based on his general perception after observing a trainee's work in the trial period. For both Firm D and Firm U, because the trial period only lasted three hours, once having been recruited, on-the-job training was mainly conducted for these students before they fully understood their jobs and requirements. Employee's performance was evaluated by either owners or managers based on a general concept of whether they could finish their work well. 'Being quick' and 'being hard-working' were two basic standards to judge these part-time student employees.

The roster was normally arranged in advance by managers according to whether a part-time student employee was free of class on a particular shift and their preference. Therefore, the basic structure of front area staff in both sites was constituted of a non-student full-time employee as the front area manager and several students, as part-time employees. The next section will examine the power dynamics between these students and owner-managers.

Power dynamics

Soon after I started my field work in Firm U, Yi, the head chef, knew that I had previously worked in Firm D. He then asked me how my experience had been in Firm D. I told him that it was basically OK, but the owner was a little bit harsh. For example, sometimes when a part-time worker started at 6pm, the owner might let him go at 8pm if there were few customers. However, Yi said:

That's absolutely normal. It's the case in Sheffield. There are so many students on the waiting list. If you (any part-time employee) don't want to do the job, no owner cares. Too many want to get a part-time job. By contrast, full-time workers have lots more value. It's not very easy to find a good full-time worker.

According to Yi's description, part-time student employees were easy to replace and their negotiating power was therefore very weak. My actual working experiences indeed supported Yi's point.

In Firm D, Han was my initial part-time partner when the second term started. However, due to on-the-job training and sudden increase of customers, Han just could not fully deal with her job tasks. Both Jack and Kate were not satisfied with her. About a week later, two former part-time workers returned. Jack decided to reduce Han's shifts. In the second week, Han's shifts were down to two from five. Jack told me:

She is now just a second choice. I will arrange her when I am off, or when someone cannot attend.

During her second week in Firm D, Han did not improve much. Jack, as a result, planned to sack her. He said to me:

I will not put her on the roster next week. I will not send her a message.

Han worked only once in the third week due to Kate's day off. However, Jack never called her back for the fourth week.

Shang was one of the two returned part-time employees. Because Shang had worked in Firm D for one semester previously, she knew everything about how to serve customers and what the service procedures were. She quickly became a regular part-time employee. After Han had been dropped from the roster, Shang took over Han's shifts. Because Shang had graduated, she one day told Kate that she could do lunch shifts in the fourth week from Monday to Friday. Kate agreed. However, Shang did not come on the lunch shift on Monday morning in the fourth week. Kate tried to contact her several times, but she had not get through to Shang. Later, Shang called back saying she had not received a message from Jack about the arrangement of her shifts. This made both Kate and Jack very angry. They both believed that she had agreed to work on lunch shifts from Monday to Friday starting from the fourth week. Jack then decided to reduce Shang's shifts.

Fei joined Firm D as a part-time front area employee in the third week after the term had started. He was a second choice on the roster at the beginning. However, after Shang's case, Kate asked Fei whether he could work regularly on lunch shifts. Fei told Kate that he could do it from Monday to Thursday. Because Shang had already lost Kate's favour, Fei became a regular part-time employee as replacement of Shang.

However, with the increases in Fei's shifts, his problem was also exposed. His reaction was slow and he was a little stubborn when serving customers. Furthermore, Kate was a Cantonese speaker, while Fei was a Mandarin speaker. As a result, Fei could hardly understand Kate's instruction. (Further discussion about the language problem is in Chapter 7.) Kate gradually became impatient with him. She finally could not bear him because he frequently committed mistakes. Since Jack later introduced his friend to work in Firm D as a part-time employee, Fei was back to a second choice.

Let us then focus on a case in Firm U. Yu worked in Firm U as a part-time front area worker over four months. He later became my best friend in Firm U. Prior to working in Firm U, he worked in several different Chinese restaurants. I once conducted a detailed discussion with him to explore owners' attitudes towards part-time student employees based on his experiences. He told me:

Before I came here, I worked in Firm L. Because my girlfriend had been working there, I knew the owner. He later invited me to work for him. In my first week, I was given five shifts. Due to the reason that I was new there in the first week, I was not very clear about where everything was placed. One day when I was asked to add table soy source, I asked the owner where the bucket of soy source was. He just asked me to leave the pot for him and he would add it. I then left. When the roster for next week was ready, I found that there was no shift for me. The manager later told me that after I had left that day, the owner went to tell him to remove all my shifts for the next week. Fucked up. He asked me not to be bothered. He said he would do this. It is absolutely not my fault.

From these examples, it can be found that the fates of Han, Shang, Fei and Yu were all basically the same. They all had a bright start. However, due to different reasons, none of them sustained their jobs. Each of them was easily replaced. They did not even have a chance to negotiate. As long as the owner lost the patience for any of them due to any reason, the common strategy was to reduce their shifts and manage to find another one. Once the owner had made the decision, consent and compliance were the only choice for these part-time student employees. The approach for owners to manage the part-time student employees was utterly autocratic, with no scope for employees to negotiate.

If the adjustment of front area employees in Firm D was a continuous process, the situation in Firm U exhibited another extreme. After Firm U's re-decoration, the front area manager, Zha, suggested that the owner could call back some of his previous excellent employees. However, the owner decided to recruit new service people, instead of continuing to employ any of the previous staff. In two days after putting a recruitment note on the window, six students went to ask for a part-time job. Zha finally chose three of them as the regular rotation. Two were arranged as a second choice. The remaining one failed to get a part-time job.

From the analysis above, it can be found that the extent of owners' dependence upon students was similar to that of kitchen assistants. Both of the two groups have subordinate labour market positions, with low level of employer dependence. However, the biggest difference lay on the supply side. The number of students who were willing to take a part-

time job was large. The waiting list was always full. Owners were never worried about recruiting front area part-time workers. Though the negotiation power for kitchen assistants was weak, their job security might be stable under a particular period of time when the product was stable. However, dismissing a part-time student employee could happen at any time with any reason by the owner. Managerial control under this situation was simply imposed. Students, in face of the structural constraint, were absolutely powerless. They had no power to positively respond to the direct control. Employment relations, as a result, were fundamentally shaped by owners' opinion according to the nature of the labour market.

The significance of employing students for owners

First, with a large number of students willing to work for low pay, owner-managers had the chance to carry out the low-pay strategy. During my entire working period in the two firms, according to the official data (National Minimum Wage rates, 2015), the National Minimum Wage (NMW) was £6.50 per hour for those over 21 and £5.13 per hour for those between 18 and 21. However, in both Firm D and Firm U, part-time students' wage was £5 an hour. Indeed, Firm D's initial weekly wage started from £4.50. If the owner believed that a student was already skilled, she would increase it to £5 (The issue of regulation will be examined in Chapter 8. Here we only concerned with the amount). This was agreed when a student applied for the job. This amount was then fixed once agreed by the student.

Chapter 4 already examined the high level of competition in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. Under the condition of excessive competition, approaches in reducing labour costs were pursued by both owners as labour costs basically accounted for a third of a Chinese restaurant's total revenue. By employing cheap student labour, owners could save a lot in labour costs. Students, therefore, were a resource for ethnic Chinese restaurant owners to significantly reduce labour costs.

Furthermore, part-time student workers in ethnic Chinese restaurants afforded owners the chance to conduct flexible control. In Firm D, the basic arrangement for part-time workers was from 12pm to 3pm on the lunch shift and from 6pm to 10pm on the dinner shift. Because there were, on the lunch shift, normally large number of customers, part-time workers generally worked the entire lunch shift. However, working hours on the dinner

shift were largely decided according to the number of customers on a particular day by the owner's perception. Indeed, for most of the time during my field work in Firm D, part-time front area employees were asked to leave at 9pm. They rarely had the chance to work until 10pm. It was also common that the owner would let them go at 8pm, after working only for two hours. I knew some of them were unhappy with this type of flexible management. However, as already discussed in the last section, their subordinate labour market position and potential threat from large numbers of student who were willing to take a part-time job meant that they had to accept 'flexibility' if they would like to continue their work.

My job in Firm D was somewhere between a full-time worker and a part-time worker. I generally did my lunch shift from 11am to 3pm and started my dinner shift at 5pm, working longer hours than a part-time worker and meanwhile not working as a full-time worker because I had a two hour break between 3pm and 5pm. I once discussed this with Jack. He told me:

You are indeed a part-time worker. Your wage is calculated by hours, right? She (the owner) wouldn't want to pay you for those two hours because it was not busy during that period of time. If you work as a full-time worker (weekly wage, not hourly wage), there is no way that she would let you go. It is impossible. You may even work up to 11 hours a day.

For Firm U, due to the reason that the owner was always absent given that he owned two other restaurants in Manchester, front area management was basically controlled by the manager, Zha. However, Zha also had his own business. This meant that though he was allowed to have one day off a week, in order to deal with his own business, he was generally absent at least two days a week. In these days, he would arrange part-time workers to cover his job. One day, a part-time worker went to work on the lunch shift. When I saw the girl, I was a little surprised because Zha once told me that he had been extremely unsatisfied with her. When I met Zha on the dinner shift, I asked him why he had arranged the girl to work. Zha replied to me:

Yes, you are right. I don't like her. The reason why I asked her to come today is that I want to do my business this morning. I need to find a part-time worker to

cover my job. Otherwise, it is impossible for me to call her. She only has this much value. That's why I didn't remove her from the list.

By employing part-time student employees, Chinese restaurant owners could carry out flexible control over working hours. Part-time workers allowed these businesses to quickly adapt to a frequently changed environment based on their unique contexts, in which demands fluctuated frequently. Furthermore, this was another approach that enabled owner-managers to reduce labour costs. By adjusting the number of students based on the demand, owners could use the labour most efficiently to control the cost. It would have been impossible if they employed full-time front area workers. Part-time student employees, therefore, were a resource for ethnic Chinese restaurant owners to conduct flexible control strategies.

Ethnic Chinese restaurants as the opportunity for students

Throughout my entire field work, I had detailed discussion with a total of nine students who once worked as part-time employees in the two sites. My aim was to understand what drove them to become a part-time front area worker and why they chose a Chinese restaurant, rather than working in a non-Chinese owned restaurant or in other sectors.

Of all the nine students, though some of them at the beginning were reluctant to acknowledge that their primary aim was to earn money, by asking them a few further questions, all of them finally expressed that whether they preferred to work longer or shorter, the fundamental reason that drove them to become a part-time waiter was to get some extra money.

As one said to me:

It's not just £5 an hour. They provide me meals once I finish my shifts. If I work two shifts at weekends, I don't need to spend on buying food. This indeed saves a lot. You (speaking to me) buy takeaways every day. You know the price. If you buy meals which are as good as the food we eat after lunch shift, it would at least cost you £10.

Another said:

Indeed, I did not have any plan to work as a part-time employee at the beginning. However, I would like to buy an iPhone 6 for my boyfriend as his birthday gift. I didn't have that much money at that time. I didn't want to ask for the money from my parents, either. They already spent a lot on supporting my study. That is why I started to work here for the first time two years ago.

One told me that she only worked one shift a week. I doubted whether £20 per week was too little. She told me:

I'm happy with £20 a week. That's OK. It's nearly £100 a month. That's quite a lot indeed.

After working as a part-time worker, three out of nine stopped economic support from their families. They fully supported themselves based on their wages. These three students were all in their dissertation stage, so they could fully control their time. They worked at least four days a week; one worked up to five days. Their weekly wage was around £200. The highest could earn as much as £250 a week. One of them told me:

My dissertation is approaching the end. By working here, I don't need to ask for money from my parents. I'm in an ordinary family. I feel guilty to keep asking for money from them. I'm already 24. My weekly wage can cover the rent and my basic needs.

It is clear that their primary aim to get a part time job was to get some extra money. However, as mentioned above, their hourly wage was only £5, which was largely less than the NMW requirement (Again, this Chapter only focuses on the amount. The issue of regulation breach will be discussed in Chapter 8). Why would they choose to work in a Chinese restaurant, instead of working in a British-owned business?

Of all the nine students, two had tried to earn a job in a non-Chinese business before they chose to work in either Firm D or Firm U. One told me:

I once tried to get a job in a cafe. I had an interview with the manager. She later told me that there was a girl from Mexico applying for the job and she can speak fluent English. After listening to this, I knew I lost the chance.

The other told me:

I sent my CV to several pubs willing to earn a waiter job. They asked me to wait to be contacted. However, none of them indeed contacted me at all. Well, that's fair enough. Why would they employ me when there are so many British willing to work for them?

Except from these two, no one had tried to get a job in non-Chinese businesses. They did not even have any thoughts to work in any firms apart from Chinese restaurants. The thought of 'being a part-time worker in a non-Chinese firms' never appeared in their minds. I asked each of them what might be the possible reasons that lead to the fact that 'being an employee in British owned firms' never came out. They explained with different reasons:

I just never thought to be an employee in British firms. Just never have the thought.

Erm, I don't know. It is easy to find a job in Chinese restaurants.

I'm scared of working with whites. Maybe this is the reason.

Probably I think I'm not competent to do the job. Well, I dunno.

By exploring this question further, there was one common answer behind all these explanations: 'I think my English level is not qualified enough to get a job in British firms'. This point was proved to be the critical reason that lead to the failure for the two who had ever tried to get a job in non-Chinese businesses.

Though these students explained why they worked as a part-time employee for different reasons, such as exercising English, unwilling to study or gaining practical experiences, the fundamental reason was to earn money. At least for the nine participants in my research, they all expressed that they would like to reduce the economic pressure more or less for their families. Although some of them knew that they might earn more if working in British businesses, they all recognised that their English level was the main potential reason that prevented them getting a job outside the Chinese business community. As a result, they ended up with Chinese restaurants. Therefore, Chinese restaurants provided them with the opportunity to get a paid job, though the wage was less than the NMW standard and they had no scope for negotiating for their interests. With the significant increase of ethnic

Chinese restaurants over the past several years, more Chinese students had the chance to take a part-time job to support their living. From this aspect, ethnic Chinese restaurants were indeed the resource for students from ordinary families.

5.5 Summary

This chapter examined how the labour market shaped the management practices and employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Management strategies in regulating labour are strongly affected by the level of dependence upon workers (Goss, 1989b). Skilled labour have strong power to challenge management control and negotiate for their interests due to their dominant labour market position with owners' high dependence upon them. By contrast, less skilled labour might be subordinate to management with owners' low dependence upon them. For example, Moule's (1998) research identified that there was a significant difference between despatch workers and dyers over their bargaining position. Despatch workers had little scope to negotiate because they could be easily substituted. Owners' high level of dependence upon dyers, by contrast, meant that there was far more scope for negotiation. Furthermore, the supply of particular workers from the labour markets dramatically influenced labour management practices and shop floor relationships (Scase, 2005). Scarce workers have stronger power in actively engaging in effort bargaining. Discussions in this chapter, therefore, examined how these two key factors in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector shaped shop floor dynamics and negotiation power between owner-managers and workers.

Chapter 4 mentioned that there had been a continuous rise in ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield over the past five years, and owners of these new restaurants were mostly former kitchen workers. With enough savings, together with the market opportunity, they developed their own businesses. Due to their departure, existing Chinese restaurants faced serious problems in recruiting kitchen workers. As a result, there had been short supply of kitchen workers in the sector.

Regardless of the fact that labour shortage had been the problem for most ethnic Chinese restaurants, owners had a low level of reliance upon kitchen assistants. Due to this low level of dependence, kitchen assistants were in a weak labour market position. Their subordinate position largely constrained their negotiation power. Owners had substantial

authority over them. Decisions such as dismissal and replacement were entirely controlled by owners. Negotiation over effort bargaining, wage and other interests were not acceptable to owners. None of the kitchen assistants successfully negotiated for a pay rise during the period of the field work. Owner-managers' control over kitchen assistants was generally 'direct control'. (Friedman, 1990).

By contrast, ethnic Chinese restaurant owners had high levels of dependence upon chefs. Chefs had strong negotiation power over effort bargaining and wage related issues, and their job security was largely stable. Due to their dominant labour market positions, they actively engaged in negotiation over rewards and wages. Management practices were largely shaped according to chefs' desires. There was obvious resistance from chefs in both restaurants to owner-managers' orders. However, owners were unwilling to have direct conflict with chefs for fear of their departure. Owner-managers' control over chefs could be generally labelled as 'responsible autonomy' (Friedman, 1990).

For front area workers, there had been sufficient supply from the labour market. The reason was that part-time front area workers in these two sites were all students. Due to the large supply of students as part-time employees, front area workers were in the weakest position. They could be easily replaced. Managerial control under this situation was simply imposed. Automatic control from owners was significant. Front area workers, in face of the structural constraint, were absolutely powerless. They had no power to positively respond to the direct control.

Ram and Edwards (2010) suggest that the study of employment relations in small firms should follow the core of industrial relations studies – conflict and consent. Discussions in this chapter followed this route. Analysis was structured around how conflict, tension and co-operation between owner-managers and workers was achieved and developed in terms of the influences from the labour market. A central focus was the power dynamics between the two parties and how the political process changed and developed for each group of workers. Edwards and Scullion's (1982) research in exploring control and resistance in workplaces suggested that it was necessary to understand why conflict happened in one situation but not in another. By analysing different labour market

positions and different levels of owners' dependence, this chapter demonstrated how consent and conflict developed on the shop floor for three different groups of workers.

Additionally, this chapter also examined the significance of employing students as front area workers for ethnic Chinese restaurants. Firstly, earnings for part time student workers were much lower than employing full time workers. Secondly, part-time student workers enabled owner-managers to exert flexible control. Because part-time workers were paid hourly, owners could adjust the number of workers hourly according to the number of customers each day. It gave owners the chance to quickly adapt to environmental change to run their businesses effectively. For these two reasons, part time student employees functioned to massively reduce labour costs in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Female workers were regarded as the key source for South-Asian small firms (Ram, 1994; Jones et al., 2006). Due to their limited choices and general lack of ability, these ethnic enterprises were able to employ cheap female labour to compete in labour intensive industries. Within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, part-time students, as a result, became the key resource for these owners.

Chapter 6 Multi-cultural workforces

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Chinese community in Britain is composed of groups with diverse origins and cultural backgrounds. There are three main groups: people from Hong Kong and Guangdong (a province in Southern China) who mainly speak Cantonese, people from China who speak Mandarin and British-born-Chinese (BBC), for whom English is their first language. With different traditions, different language being spoken and different perceptions of people from different parts of the country, there were potentially tensions between different group members. This chapter will examine how the racial context shaped the employment relations in the two restaurants. The chapter will be divided into four sections.

The first section will describe the communication problems among different groups of people and will show how the language barrier created difficulties in communication and workplace control.

The second section will focus on how mutual adjustment, as the product of ongoing negotiations under the informal management structure, developed among these different groups of people. It aims to reveal how the continuous adaption and accommodation between owners and workers played out, given that workers had different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, due to the language barrier and the communication problem, the concept of intersubjectivity will be a special focus. The practical communication problems arising from different languages being used by different group workers meant that direct oral communication could not be always conducted effectively. ‘Guessing’ at times played a central role in understanding people who came from different backgrounds with different languages being spoken. Section two is, therefore, to discuss how intersubjectivity shaped the internal dynamics of mutual adjustment in this particular context.

The third section will examine how employers’ trust towards workers who were from the same cultural background was different from their trust towards workers who were from different cultural backgrounds. There was an obvious difference for the owners in the two restaurants in treating with people from their cultural background and people from a

different cultural background. By analysing these issues, it is to explore how the cultural background shaped people's perceptions and behaviours in the two restaurants.

The final section will discuss inter-group conflicts. Conflicts among different groups were not a single vertical affair. It also dramatically influenced the employee-employee relations. It is, therefore, to discuss how conflicts and tensions caused by the cultural difference were experienced vertically between owners and workers and horizontally between workers and workers.

6.1 Communication problems

Based on this research, Table 3 and 4 show the basic features for each group of people in the two restaurants to understand and speak different dialects.

Table 3 The ability of language understanding

	Mandarin	Cantonese	English
Mandarin speakers	No problem	Poor	Moderate
Cantonese speakers	Generally no problem	No problem	Moderate
British-born-Chinese	Generally no problem	Depends on parents' background	No problem

Table 4 The ability of language speaking

	Mandarin	Cantonese	English
Mandarin speakers	Fluent	Incapable	Moderate
Cantonese speakers	Generally fluent	Fluent	Moderate
British-born-Chinese	Generally fluent	Depends on parents' background	Fluent

According to these two tables, understanding and speaking Mandarin and English are basically not a problem for all the three groups of people. By contrast, Cantonese would create difficulties in communication. For typical Mandarin speakers, they could hardly understand Cantonese, and a typical Mandarin speaker basically could not speak Cantonese at all. For British-born-Chinese (BBC), their parents' background decides whether they have the ability to understand and speak Cantonese. If one of their parents has a Cantonese background, they generally have no difficulty in both understanding and speaking Cantonese. If neither of their parents has a Cantonese background, it is unlikely that a BBC will be able to understand and speak Cantonese. In this situation, they could speak Mandarin fluently, with poor ability in Cantonese. This is the basic situation for each group of people to understand and speak different dialects. Let us then focus on the specific context in the two restaurants.

Firm U's owner was a Mandarin speaker originally from Tianjin, a northern city of China. He moved to the UK about ten years ago. Due to his social experiences after he had arrived in the UK, he later learned how to speak Cantonese. As a result, he had no problem in using both Mandarin and Cantonese. When he appeared at the restaurant, he spoke Cantonese communicating with Cantonese speaking workers and used Mandarin talking to Mandarin speakers.

In Firm U, all the chefs were from Guangdong province, with the Cantonese background. However, all of them could speak Mandarin fluently as well. When they talked to each other, they spoke Cantonese; when they talked to Mandarin speakers, they could switch to using Mandarin immediately. Furthermore, Firm U had never employed a worker with BBC background. Overall, as far as communication was concerned, it was basically not a problem in Firm U.

Communication in Firm D was, however, a major problem in workplace control. Both Kate and Nick, Firm D's couple owners, were from Hong Kong and spoke Cantonese, while the couple could hardly speak Mandarin, though understanding Mandarin was not a problem for them.

Jack, the manager in Firm D, was a Mandarin speaker from a China's northern city. He told me that he could not understand Cantonese at all at the beginning. However, because he had worked there for years, regular contacts with Kate finally gave him the ability to fully understand Cantonese, though he could speak only a little. As a result, communication between him and Kate was fine.

I am myself a Mandarin speaker. Like most Mandarin speakers in this study, I did not have the ability to understand and speak Cantonese. When I started my field work in Firm D, the owner always spoke Cantonese to me at the beginning. Once I told her that I could not understand, the owner began to speak English. So, the communication between me and Kate was always like this: starting from Cantonese, soon switching to English. This type of communication had lasted quite a long time until I began to gradually have the ability to understand basic Cantonese. Even under this condition, English was still the necessary tool to connect us.

Though English could be used as a tool to facilitate the communication as mentioned above, it did not fundamentally solve the problem. During my fieldwork, two BBC persons worked in Firm D as part-time front area workers. Zoe was one of them. Her parents were both Mandarin speakers. Therefore, apart from being able to speak fluent English, she was basically like a Mandarin speaker, with no ability to understand and speak Cantonese. The communication between Kate and Zoe at the beginning was largely the same as that between Kate and me: Kate started by using Cantonese. Once she realised that Zoe could

not understand, she then switched into English. However, the problem was that Kate's English was not at a high level, while Zoe was a native English-speaker. When Zoe replied in English, Kate sometimes could not understand Zoe's words. The communication between them was then extremely difficult. Jack always worked as an interpreter as a result. When Kate spoke Cantonese to Zoe, Jack then translated Cantonese into Mandarin to Zoe.

These observations demonstrate that communication was a serious problem between Kate and non-Cantonese speakers. In order to understand each other, 'guessing' played a crucial role throughout this process. The next section, therefore, will examine how ineffective communication arising from a language barrier created problems in workplace control, and how mutual adjustment and intersubjectivity played out under this particular context.

6.2 Mutual adjustment and intersubjectivity

6.2.1 From guessing to adaptation

In the preceding section, it was mentioned that during the final stage of fieldwork in Firm D, I could gradually understand basic Cantonese because I worked as the full-time waiter with frequent contacts with Kate. However, for most part-time Mandarin speaking workers, it was impossible for them to work long enough to gradually get the ability to understand Cantonese. The gap between a Mandarin worker and Kate, as the Cantonese speaker, was hard to bridge.

A week before I finished my field work in Firm D, I once talked to Fei, who was set to take over my full-time job after my departure. I asked him whether his Cantonese had improved. He said:

Of course not. I can guess 50% of her words. For the remaining 50%, I just literally cannot understand at all.

A similar idea was expressed by another Mandarin-speaking worker, Cui. One day I discussed with her whether she was frightened of Kate because Kate's attitude towards her was not always friendly. She said:

No, I'm not bothered at all because I do not understand any of her words. When she speaks to me, I just smile even if I don't understand whatsoever. I just read her facial expression and I keep smiling. That's it.

According to the description, under a context where Cantonese could not be easily understood by different groups of people, it was normal for workers to draw on the perception of the owner's value or interests, rather than on any direct spoken communication with her. During this process, the unspoken influences and guessing largely influenced their behaviour in adaptation. Both Fei and Cui, even for me at the beginning, tried to understand Kate's words by guessing what she was saying based on the particular situation. The understanding of intersubjectivity was, as a result, extremely important to capture how people from different backgrounds speaking different languages accommodated to each other.

It was not long after I had started my fieldwork in Firm D. One day when the lunch shift was approaching the end, everybody was waiting to have their lunch. I stood near the counter, reading news from my mobile phone. Kate suddenly called my name and began to speak to me. As mentioned earlier, I did not understand her words during the early stage of my field work. I noticed that she was holding a bottle of detergent and a wad of tissues in her hands. However, this just simply could not give me a clue to what she would like me to do. After a few words, she seemed to realise that I did not understand. Her face turned suddenly to an expression of obvious impatience. She then walked directly to the big round table and began to wipe the glass on that table. I then went over and took the tissues and detergent from her, starting to clean the table. She did not say one word during this process, but it could be read from her face that she felt very unpleasant. After handing the stuff to me, she did not even have a look at me and walked back.

The same thing happened for the second time about one week later. It was also at the end of a lunch shift. Kate, as she did the first time, held the detergent and tissues, speaking to me. Though I still could not understand her words, I clearly knew her meaning. I got the cleaning stuff from her and went to clean the glass. She said nothing this time, which meant that it was exactly what she would like me to do.

Firm D provided hot pot as well, though it was not its main business. Due to the speciality of the hot pot, once it was ordered by customers, the whole set for normal meals needed to be changed into another set particularly designed for hot pot, and one extra small bowl and a large plate was also required to be provided. As mentioned in Chapter 5, training in Firm

D was basically on-the-job training. The owner would teach a worker step-by-step the hot pot serving procedure when the worker encountered the hot pot service for the first time. After that, workers were asked to serve customers by themselves. However, the practical problem was that it was not a simple task to remember each step after only being taught once for new waiters.

When Han served hot pot customers by herself for the first time, after she had finished preparing the set used for the hot pot, she went back to the counter. I then realised that she had forgotten to do two things: changing chopsticks (changing normal length chopsticks into long chopsticks) and providing large plates. Kate indeed had been standing at the counter watching her actions. After Han had been back to the counter, Kate began to speak to her in Cantonese. Han, as a Mandarin speaker, could not understand Kate's words. Though I did not understand as well, I could see that Kate occasionally pointed at the hot pot. It felt obvious that Kate was saying something about Han's serving mistakes. However, due to the language barrier, Han just stared at Kate with a blank expression on her face. Kate soon realised that Han had failed to understand. She herself then went to serve the hot pot customers by replacing normal chopsticks with long chopsticks and providing extra plates. Having seen this, Han said sorry to Kate and promised Kate that she would now remember everything.

The second time Han served hot pot customers, she did complete all the set preparation tasks correctly. However, she forgot to give the customers the hot pot menu. This irritated Kate again. She shouted at Han at the counter and kept telling her loudly that she had forgotten something.

Having experienced this once, Han must have thought she had done something wrong, so she went back to the table to re-examine the set arrangements. Because the problem was not caused by set preparation this time, having finished the checking, Han told Kate that she thought everything was OK. Kate looked extremely unhappy. She suddenly switched into English, saying 'menu, menu'. Meanwhile, she collected the hot pot menus for herself and sent them to the customers. Han suddenly realised her mistake, and she kept apologising to Kate.

When it was towards the end of my field work in Firm D, I began to be able to understand a few Cantonese words, though it was unlikely that most Mandarin-speaking part-time workers would have this ability. One day when Fei was transferring bottled drinks from their original packaging into the fridge, due to his carelessness, he spilled the drinks out of the box onto the floor. Kate was standing inside the counter when this happened. She then went to have a check. After seeing this, she asked Fei to be careful. And meanwhile, she seemed to find that Fei had put some drinks into wrong places in the fridge. She then started to tell Fei where the drinks should be put. Fei kept nodding and saying ‘okay’ when listening to Kate’s instructions. Just after Kate had gone back to the counter, Fei spilled everything out of the box again. Kate this time turned furious. She shouted at Fei and kept asking him why he messed up everything. Nervousness and anxiety could be clearly read from Fei’s face. He just kept saying sorry and meanwhile cleaned the mess.

When the shift approached the end, I went to get Fei and asked him why he was extremely nervous just now. Fei said with a deep sigh:

I admitted that I made a mistake at the beginning. However, did you see how she spoke to me after that? She just kept blaming me, standing there shouting at me. That made me so scared. If she had not done that, I would have been all right.

I told him:

No, she just said that you should put everything in the right places. Though she asked you to be careful, she didn’t take your mistake so seriously the first time.

Fei hesitated for a second, and said:

I did not know. I did not understand her words. You know, she has been harsh. Therefore, I just thought she was blaming me. This gave me huge pressure and made me so nervous. That’s why I messed it up again. It’s so annoying.

Under the situation where explicit language communication was a barrier between the owner and employees, there was only very limited explicit oral communication over the management of employment relations and working practices. Ambiguities arising from employees’ failure to understand Cantonese limited the extent to which Kate could directly

guide the serving process. Workers' responses to the commands of the owner were largely based on guesses about her wishes. Within the accommodation process, employees had to make assumptions about the owner's perceptions and intentions. The results of this process would then be interpreted by employees based on their guesswork about how to adapt and accommodate their behaviour accordingly. The adaptation that took place from the employees to Kate was, therefore, informed by the ongoing subjective guessing rather than by explicit oral communication. In the absence of explicit communication, a variety of actions was reliant heavily on subjective interpretation and recognition.

However, adaptations based on guessing in practice could not always match owners' perceptions. The owner's interests and objectives were often assumed by employees based on their previous working experiences, with these assumptions forming an important part of the ongoing, everyday behaviour. Nevertheless, though guessing and intersubjectivity played a central part for employees to understanding the owner, incorrect guesses were unavoidable, as Fei's case showed. Once mis-interpretation happened, this would give rise to negative effects upon both workers' and employers' experiences. The resulting misunderstanding would create difficulties for employees to experience their work and for the owner to conduct labour management. In this situation, employees may not achieve implicit understandings and expectations from the owner. Conflicts and tensions would then appear between the two parties.

6.2.2 Cultural clash

In Firm D, there were three obvious mismatches in workplace control between Zoe and Kate due to the cultural clash. In a situation where direct verbal communication could not always be effectively conducted, cultural clashes between groups of people would be more obvious. Continuous adjustment and accommodation between them is then required.

One day, after Zoe had just finished delivering a dish, Kate suddenly shouted at Zoe:

You delivered to the wrong table.

Delivering food to the wrong table indeed also happened several times to other employees. For them, as a typical Chinese, after knowing that the dish was given to the wrong table, they would go and get the dish back, and check the order to find the correct table. However,

due to Zoe's British background, she went back to the counter from that table and said to Kate:

But I already got it wrong. It's been delivered.

After hearing Zoe's words, Kate rushed out of the counter and went to get the dish back. After delivering the dish to the correct table, Kate went back to the counter, speaking to Zoe angrily in Cantonese. As mentioned above, I later improved my ability to understand Cantonese. I heard that Kate basically told Zoe that because the mistake was identified just after it had been delivered, she needed to immediately tell the customer and bring back the dish. However, Zoe surely could not understand Kate's words. But it felt like she knew what Kate was saying by judging the situation according to Kate's body language. She then replied with smile:

All right. I understand. I know what I should do next time.

The second time happened on an evening shift. It was me, Zoe and Kate working on that shift. Due to the large number of customers that evening, Kate also went out of the counter to serve customers, though she normally only took orders and supervised the serving process inside the counter area. As a result, she had no time to wash used glasses, and soon fresh glasses had run out. After realising that there were no available fresh glasses, Zoe then went to the counter and began to wash some dirty stacked glasses in the sink. When Kate came back into the counter after finishing delivering a dish, she suddenly shouted at Zoe in Cantonese:

Get out! Let me just wash these. Get out to deliver!

When this happened, I was in the opposite end of the restaurant cleaning a table, but I could hear Kate's loud voice. Zoe then went out of the counter area and walked towards me. She stopped in front of me, saying:

I just don't know what she was thinking. We've got no clean glasses to use. I went to wash those used ones. However, she just behaved like that. (She sighed)

I was indeed not surprised by Kate's reaction. First, as already analysed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, during the high demand period, the pressures were high from both the product

market and the labour market. Under the high pressure, autocratic control was applied to manage labour. This was basically experienced by every front area worker. However, the second reason that caused Kate's bad temper was probably particular to Zoe due to the different cultures. Though there was no written rule stating that the counter area was not accessed by part-time workers, everybody after working in Firm D for a while could realise that only Jack and Kate had full access to this area, while others were not welcome inside it. Indeed, not having available clean glasses to use did happen several times during high demand periods. However, no part-time workers, including me, would go inside and wash them directly. They would report this to Kate and wait for Kate to wash them. However, Zoe just simply could not catch this tacit understanding based on her cultural background. She just did what she thought was correct, while failing to understand the owner's perception. As the empirical data showed, she was still confused by Kate's behaviour even after she had been ejected out of the counter.

In Firm D, there was only one six-person table, with many four-person and two-person tables. There was a rule that only when the number of customers exceeded four, could they sit at the six-person table. Kate indeed took this rule extremely seriously. I once guided four customers to sit on the six-person table. After seeing this, she immediately came over from the counter and asked them to sit at a four-person table. One day when it was Zoe's turn to guide customers, three customers went in and sat on that six-person table directly. Having realised that there were three sitting on the six-person table, Kate asked Zoe how many they were altogether. Zoe answered three. Kate's face suddenly turned, and asked Zoe:

Then, why did you let them sit on the six-person table? Why?

Zoe answered:

I didn't. They sat on the table by themselves.

Kate seemed to become angrier after hearing this. She said to Zoe:

You need to guide them, Ok? This is your task. Now, go to get them sat on a four-person table.

For two other Chinese waiters, apart from me, when we first encountered this situation, it was natural for us to invite the customer to transfer to a four-person table in a polite way. However, Zoe stood still and said:

But, they have sat down.

After hearing Zoe's words, it could be seen that Kate was furious by her facial expression. She stopped talking to Zoe and directly went to ask the customers to change a table by herself. Standing in front of the counter, Zoe was entirely at a loss.

Section 7.2.1 discussed how guessing and intersubjectivity could create problems in adjustment in Firm D under the condition where explicit communication was generally absent. From these three examples, it can be found that with extra cultural clash added in the process, accommodation was hardly achieved between Kate and Zoe.

Indeed, Zoe's failure to adapt to Kate's perceptions finally made Kate extremely unhappy. During the final stage of my field work, the owner began to plan the labour arrangement during the summer vacation because most students would go back to China. By that time, Zoe had not been on the roster for a long time as a part time worker. Jack then suggested Kate to get Zoe back. However, Kate rejected Jack's suggestion. She thought Zoe's reaction was too slow and she was less capable. However, when Zoe worked with me and Jack, she could perform very well. Her pace and reaction were not slow at all. The primary reason that caused the difference was that when Zoe worked with us, we all spoke Mandarin. Though there was also a cultural gap between Zoe and other non-BBC background workers, explicit communication largely minimised the negative impacts of the culture difference. By contrast, when working with Kate, guessing caused by the language barrier plus the cultural difference gave Zoe nowhere to capture how Kate perceived her work. The relationship between them was then negatively shaped during the day-to-day working practices.

6.3 The difference of owners' trust towards members in different groups

As indicated in the last section, communication in Firm U was not a major problem between members of different groups. By contrast, there was a dramatic difference in 'trust' between different group members. Though having the ability to speak fluent Cantonese,

the owner was indeed originally from Tianjin, a northern city in China, where people speak Mandarin. Teng, the kitchen assistant who was also in charge of karaoke, was from Tianjin as well. Chapter 6 mentioned that Teng once told me the story about how former karaoke staff cheated due to lack of supervision. After listening to the story, I had a discussion with him about the extent of the owner's trust in him. Teng told me:

We are from the same place. He basically trusts me. I can feel that.

I asked him:

How about them (Cantonese speaking staff)?

Teng smiled with scorn, and said:

What do you think of this? It's for sure that the owner does not trust them. You know what? About one month ago, I was so tired during that period of time. I told him I needed to be off the karaoke for a period to take rests. Yi then introduced one of his friends to him as my replacement. On the day when the guy did the trial, the owner texted me asking me to keep an eye on the numbers of customers and drinks they ordered. He told me that they were from Guangdong, so he just could not fully trust him. After the trial, he came to have a conversation with me, expressing that he would not want to have the karaoke managed by that guy. He hoped that I could continue to manage the karaoke for him. I finally agreed.

Anyway, we are both from Tianjin. I know he trusts me, and I would not cheat on that. They are all southerners, speaking Cantonese. He (the owner) just simply does not trust them.

Indeed, the distrust from the owner of Cantonese-speaking staff was once captured directly by me. When Firm U re-opened after refurbishment, the front area manager was Zha. Apart from me, there were three kitchen staff: Yi and Dong were the chefs, and the other one was a pot washer from Portugal. Zha, Yi and Dong were all Cantonese speakers, and they all originally came from Taishan, Guangdong province in southern China.

Dong normally had his day off on Tuesday. It was on the Monday in the second week. Dong had not appeared until around 12:20pm. I then asked Yi what happened to Dong. Yi

told me that his two-month baby had caught a high temperature so he would not come. On Tuesday, Dong took his day off as usual. On Wednesday evening after work, I received a text message from Yi asking me whether I could work on Thursday (I regularly took my days off on Thursdays). Yi told me that because Dong's baby was still in a condition of high temperature, he just could not come to work. As a result, apart from his regular one day off, Dong took two more days off that week.

On Saturday, the owner came to collect two weeks' revenues (he did not come the week before). He arrived at around 9:50pm. He then invited everybody to have hot pot together with him. However, Yi and Dong politely declined because they would like to leave at 10pm when the shift finished. Because the kitchen work was already done, I started to eat with the owner. About ten minutes later, Zha came to give a piece of paper to the owner, telling him that it was the summary of working hours for each worker this week. The owner had a look at the paper, and told Zha that it was okay. Zha then left. After Zha had left, the owner had another look at the paper. He, this time, read the summary for a short while, and then turned his head to me, asking me:

How many days did Dong miss this week?

'Three days'. I answered him. After hearing that, he expressed that he knew this.

I did not know how many days Zha wrote on the slip. But one thing was clear, that due to the regular absence of the owner, the restaurant was entirely managed by Cantonese speaking workers, including the front area manager and the head chef. Chapter 6 mentioned that close supervision in Firm U was largely absent, so there was much scope for cheating. The owner would be the one who knew this most. Indeed, Yi once reported to the owner on Thursday saying that Dong would not come and I would replace him on Thursday. However, this is the context where the owner did not trust Cantonese speakers. As a result, the distrust from the owner with Cantonese speaking workers lead him to ask me, a Mandarin speaker, for double-check.

Let us now examine the 'trust' issue in Firm D. Firm D's co-owner, Kate, was a Cantonese speaker, originally from Hong Kong. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were altogether two British-born-Chinese working in Firm D. Zoe was one of them, who was a

Mandarin speaker. I discussed the problem in communication between her and Kate in the previous section of this chapter. Jessica was the other one. Unlike Zoe, Jessica was a Cantonese speaker. Having worked with Jessica for a while, I began to realise that Jessica was the only part-time worker who had access to the till. It is necessary to mention that she was also basically the only Cantonese speaking worker in the front area. (Strictly speaking, she was not the only one. Firm D also once recruited a Cantonese speaking boy working in the front area. However, after working about three shifts, he was never called back). In other words, no more part-time workers were allowed to use the till, and they were all Mandarin speaking workers.

After realising this, I one day asked Jessica whether she had also noticed the difference. Jessica answered yes, and said to me:

She (the owner) does not trust them (Mandarin speaking front area workers) at all. One day, it was me and Cui working on an evening shift. Because there was one table of English customers, I went to serve them, leaving Cui to manage ordering and the till. When Kate arrived, she directly walked into the counter, and asked Cui to stop taking orders and go out of the counter area. When I was back in the counter, Kate said to me:

You need to take charge of ordering. How can you leave her to do this? If you would like her to use the till, you need to stand beside her and supervise her.

The idea of Kate's distrust of Mandarin-speaking staff was also corroborated by Jack, the front area manager. Jack indeed did not quite like Jessica. He thought Jessica was always lazy. Furthermore, both Zoe and Cui had conflicts with Jessica, while Zoe and Cui were both Jack's friends. He introduced them to work in Firm D. One day before the lunch shift started, Jack had a check of condiments on each table. He found that the chilli and soy sauce bottles on many tables were empty. He then said to me:

Look, they are all empty. Jessica had yesterday's dinner shift. This basically meant that she did nothing. I don't know why Kate fancies her that much.

I added:

And it feels that only Jessica can get Kate's trust. It seems that they (Mandarin speaking workers) are not allowed to use the till.

Jack said:

No, she doesn't trust them at all. They are not allowed to touch the till.

In mainstream research about employment relations in ethnic minority small firms, co-ethnic employees were generally deemed to be more 'trustworthy' than other employees; and this eased labour control (Ram et al., 2000; Ram and Jones, 2008; Jones et al., 2010). Ethnic ties were regarded as a strong factor to support minority small firms. However, there was little research in exploring the dynamics between sub-groups when encountering the 'trust' issue. The above data suggests that in these two case study firms, owners showed an obvious preference in trusting staff from their own background. Firm U's owner was a Mandarin speaker. Even though he later could master Cantonese, there was little trust from him towards the Cantonese-speaking chef. Firm D's owner was a Cantonese speaker. As a result, only the Cantonese-speaking girl could get trusted. In contrast, Mandarin-speaking workers were simply believed to be untrustworthy.

Therefore, the assumptions and prejudices of the two owners largely shaped their attitudes towards labour from a different background. Labour management was, as a result, practised by the owners differently in relation to workers from different groups.

6.4 Inter-group conflicts

Chapter 4 analysed how the frequently changed product market influenced business performances and managerial choices in the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. For Firm U, with the constraint of its poor locational space, the consequences were more severe than Firm D. The result was that it suffered serious turbulence throughout my field work. Massive labour turnover was the result. The external environment largely led to its poor performance. Meanwhile, the internal intergroup conflicts and tensions also dramatically contributed to the turbulence.

As frequently mentioned in previous chapters, two weeks into my research in Firm U, there had been six employees in the kitchen: three Cantonese speaking chefs: Wen, Pian and Yi, and three Mandarin speaking kitchen assistants: Teng, Teng's wife and me. Though all of

these three Cantonese speaking chefs could speak fluent Mandarin, they only spoke Cantonese among themselves. When they communicated with Mandarin speakers, they switched into Mandarin. However, communication between Cantonese speaking workers and Mandarin speaking workers was limited. Most of the conversation was limited to work-related communication. Furthermore, due to the reason that they held the key positions in the kitchen, their attitudes towards Teng, Teng's wife and me were not always friendly. 'Ordering' would be the more proper word to describe conversation for most of the time.

When there was spare time, it was normal that Wen, Pian and Yi stood around each other chatting in Cantonese; while Teng, Teng's wife and I stood together talking in Mandarin. It was indeed during this period that Teng became my informant.

I once discussed this situation with Teng. He said:

It was impossible for us to match with them. They never want to have a close relationship with us. They are from the South; while we are from the North.

During this initial stage, it could be clearly found that the Mandarin group and the Cantonese group were obviously separated from each other. However, there were basically no direct conflicts between group members at this stage. This was largely due to the reason that there was a clear hierarchy between Mandarin-speaking workers and Cantonese-speaking workers during this period. The dominant position of Cantonese-speaking employees as chefs over Mandarin-speaking employees as kitchen assistants gave them power to dictate the relationship. The subordinate position of Teng, Teng's wife and I forced us to accept autocratic management from Cantonese-speaking chefs.

After a short time, both Wen and Pian had left. Yi was the only remaining Cantonese-speaking chef, together with Teng, Teng's wife and Juan (Juan was that lazy chef, working in Firm U for only two weeks before he flew back to China). Though Yi had been promoted as the head chef, having lost his partners, Yi experienced challenges from Mandarin-speaking workers. Direct conflicts occurred, as the result.

Juan one day arrived at around 12:10pm, which was 10 minutes later than the opening time. After arriving, he began to cook for himself as he usually did. Having finished the lunch,

he turned on his tablet and started to watch. Yi was standing near him, chopping beef. It seemed that Yi had some words with him. Juan suddenly spoke to Yi loudly:

If you would like me to do something, just tell me directly. Ok?

Yi answered:

Don't you know what you should do? Is it always necessary for me to remind you?

Juan replied:

It wouldn't be difficult to tell me what I should do, would it?

Yi said:

We've been working as chefs for years. Don't you understand that the basic implicit understanding for being a chef is self-discipline?

Yuan still sat there, saying:

But I'm not a self-disciplined person.

Yi then mumbled some words which I could not hear. He then grabbed a cigarette and left the kitchen.

Their quarrel attracted Teng's attention as well. He came over to me and told me that Juan and Yi several days ago had another quarrel. The conflict on that occasion had been more intense. It was because they had different ideas on stir-frying a particular dish. When Juan was cooking, Yi would like Juan to use a particular method, the way probably used by Southern chefs. However, Juan insisted that the dish should not be cooked in that way and finally ignored Yi's instruction. They then had an argument on this. As Teng recalled, Yi finally threw the kitchen knife onto the cutting board and left.

Indeed, conflicts were not just between Juan and Yi; Teng and Yi also had direct conflicts. One day when Teng was cooking skewers, Yi went over to ask him whether he added extra salt into the seasoning. Teng said:

There is no need to add extra salt. It is already salty enough.

After hearing this, Yi's face turned suddenly, and he said to Teng:

I told you we have changed the way of marinating meat. The amount of salt is reduced when marinating the meat. You need to add extra salt into the seasoning.

However, Teng just reacted in a strong manner:

I told you this is enough. Putting salt into the seasoning would make it too salty.

It seemed that Yi realised Teng would not follow his instruction. He continued to do his work with an obviously unhappy face.

Resistance from Teng was indeed not only expressed in his behaviour, his perception also protected himself from Cantonese-speaking staff. One day when we finished the dinner, only Teng, his wife and I were still at the table. Teng told me that the owner would come tomorrow. I asked him how he knew this. Teng said:

He texted me this afternoon. He said he would come tomorrow to sort out some problems. He always texts me to get the latest information about the restaurant, asking me questions like how the kitchen is going, how the front area is going and how the karaoke is going.

I then asked him:

Do Zha and Yi know that he (the owner) will come tomorrow?

Teng said:

How can I know this? But you just don't tell them the owner regularly texts me to update the kitchen conditions. He (the owner) may also text them as well. But don't let them know that he regularly sends me messages.

As mentioned above, Teng, at the beginning, already realised that there was a natural gap between the two groups of workers. However, there was no resistance from him because Cantonese-speaking chefs had the dominant position. By contrast, later due to the departure of Wen and Pian, Yi was separated from the other Mandarin-speaking workers. Though already promoted as the head chef, Yi, as a Cantonese-speaker, lost the dominant power to control the remaining Mandarin-speaking workers. The latent tension between these two

groups of people began to develop openly. This was why both Yi and Juan, and Yi and Teng had conflicts during this stage.

As latent tension already developed into direct conflicts between Yi, as a Cantonese-speaking worker and Teng, as a Mandarin-speaking worker. It would be important to identify how they perceived the other party to further understand why conflicts and resistance happened.

Chapter 5 once mentioned that during the refurbishment period, on the day when Teng failed to negotiate with the owner for his and his wife's stay, we had a dinner that evening. Teng told me a recent progress in Firm U and analysed what led to his dismissal based on his opinion. He said:

It was not until today that I understood why he (the owner) did not retain me. Yi already found a few employees for him, at least two. One of them was to replace her (Teng pointed at his wife) to wash pots. That's why he (the owner) did not invite me to have the meal. I didn't know this indeed at the beginning. However, Yi leaked this by accident. I then asked him some other questions. He told me that the owner invited them to have a dinner a couple of days ago. You know what? Two days ago, when I went to clean the karaoke in the afternoon, I saw the owner was talking with three guys in the restaurant, including Yi. The other two must have been the ones Yi found for kitchen work.

Damn it! Yi must have already collaborated with the owner. The owner was a shit as well. It is sure that Yi asked the owner to dismiss us so that he could introduce people from Taishan (the city in Guangdong province, where most Cantonese speaking chefs originally came from, as analysed in Chapter 4). It must be like this. Once he has got his own people, it would give them the chances to do everything without being known by others.

From Teng's description, it can be inferred that most of his conclusions concerning Yi were based on guess-work. This, however, clearly revealed his distrust and resentment about Yi. He simply attributed his dismissal to Yi's trick. Teng's dissatisfaction at Yi even extended to the wider population – Cantonese-speaking workers. He believed that once they got rid

of him, they could fully take advantage of their unique ethnic tie. Teng's negative attitudes towards Yi and Cantonese-speaking workers developed during these three stages, from only realising the gap, to open resistance, to hostility at the last. This indeed reflected that the antagonism from Teng to Cantonese-speaking workers gradually developed in everyday work.

Yi's perception was captured after Firm U re-opened. As analysed above, Cantonese-speaking workers had little communication with Mandarin-speaking workers in Firm U. This was also the case between me and Yi. As a result, I had a relatively distant relationship with Yi.

However, our relationship improved during the refurbishment period. At the final stage of the refurbishment, there were only Yi, Dong (Dong was the chef Yi brought in during the decoration period) and me working in the kitchen to clean the mess. There were basically two reasons that contributed to an improvement in our relationship. First, as a researcher, I understood that I needed to follow all rules and managerial instructions. What I should do was just to follow any rules and managerial instructions. In this context, it was Yi's instructions. Secondly, unlike cooking, cleaning was purely physical work, without any technical requirements. As a result, during the clearing period, I just worked diligently to complete every task Yi allocated to me. Gradually, I could identify that Yi was happy to talk with me. Our talks were later not only limited to work-related issues. He began to talk about his personal life, such as his early experiences of working as a kitchen assistant in Newcastle and how he knew his wife and how they finally married. Having noticed the change of Yi's attitudes towards me, I realised that it would be possible in time for me to explore Yi's perceptions of Teng's departure and to confirm whether Teng's guesswork was correct.

Finally, I conducted a detailed discussion with Yi in the first week after Firm U had re-opened. The conversation started from my question to him: what made you have the idea to leave and what drove you to make the decision to stay?

Yi answered:

It was simply because of Teng and his wife. They always had their own ideas, and they were extremely lazy. They were also always unsatisfied with their wages. You know what? When I started my work in England, I earned £200 a week. It was not until the fifth year that my wage rose to £230 a week. How about them? He earned £300 a week; his wife earned £300 a week, as well. He also took the karaoke job. That was a lot.

Moreover, he was always angry with me. Doesn't he know his position? He was just a worker. It felt as if he was the owner. He had been in bad temper towards me for a month. I just tolerated him for a month. One day, the plumber came to fix the sink. I forgot to mop the floor that evening. On the next day, when he saw me in the morning, he said to me 'Shit! Who cleaned the floor yesterday? Water was everywhere'. He then threw the plug to me. Damn it! He was furious with me just due to such a tiny thing. Who did he think he was? And his wife. Those containers hadn't been cleaned for nearly half a year before I asked you to clean them during the cleaning stage. Last time I asked her to clean those containers. You know what? I had already taken them out and put them into the sink. She just put them back, and she was angry with me. She was the one recruited to wash plates. She then just refused to do that. I'm telling you. In the second week after I worked here, Pian wanted to let them go. If he hadn't been in charge of the karaoke, they would have already gone. I already tolerated them so much. I just could not bear them anymore.

Furthermore, they were just illegal workers. I have a UK passport. I can work anywhere. Can they? You know what? If I had called the Immigration Office, they would have been forcefully ejected back to China. I have been so kind to them. They thought they were treated unfairly by me.

When I arrived, Wen wanted to let them leave. Look at what he did later on. Wearing a jacket, walking around the kitchen at 4pm and asking whether the meal was ready. Fuck off. It was working time. If he was in another restaurant, he would have been immediately fired.

I then said:

But you never mentioned this before. It felt like you were so kind to them.

Yi replied:

I was. Working here is the easiest job across the world. Don't you think I wouldn't want to stay here? I just think we are all Chinese. It was tough for them to work abroad. I then decided to leave and let them stay. They believed I stabbed them in the back.

When discussing chefs' negotiation power in Chapter 5, I mentioned that Yi finally decided to stay after refurbishment because the owner promised him to give him £200 per week during the decoration period and raised his weekly wage from £450 to £480. Though Yi claimed that the reason why he chose to leave was because he would like to let Teng and his wife work in Firm U, it was surely not the deciding factor. However, Yi's description clearly expressed his dissatisfaction towards Teng and his wife. Their unwillingness to follow his orders, their laziness and their bad attitudes all caused Yi's unhappiness. It can be clearly felt that Yi did not want to work with them anymore.

Indeed, Yi's resistance to Teng was also recognised by the owner. Chapter 4, when discussing the negotiation power for kitchen assistants, mentioned that I once conducted a discussion with the owner aiming to explore his perceptions about Teng's negotiation for a wage rise. The owner discussed his opinion from a labour market point of view. In the discussion, I also asked him how he understood the conflict between Yi and Teng. The question from me was straightforward:

Do you know about the conflict between Yi and Teng?

He answered:

Surely I know. It is a long-lasting problem. Both of them had talked with me about the other's problem. However, as an owner, I've got to make the decision. Let me just ask you. One is the head chef, and the other is a kitchen assistant. Who would you pick if you were me once they have irreconcilable conflicts?

Indeed, he (Yi) was not only resistant to Teng. His resistance was widespread to any non-Taishanese. They (Taishanese) are all like this.

If the discussion with Yi demonstrated his unhappiness and resistance to Teng, the further fundamental antagonism in his mind towards Teng gradually appeared throughout his working experiences.

One day when I was cooking skewers, Yi asked me whether I added extra salt. I answered yes. Yi said:

When Teng was here, I asked him to put some more salt onto the skewers. He just didn't follow my words. He had his way to do everything. Shit! On one occasion, we had very few lamb skewers left. You were there, right? He then asked me to buy some lamb. Damn it! Couldn't he speak in a normal manner? Was he the owner?

I was in the kitchen when the 'lamb case' happened. Indeed, Teng did not speak to Yi in an aggressive way. He just asked Yi whether he could go to buy some lamb from a nearby store. However, Yi's antagonism towards Teng made him distort Teng's words. The suggestion from Teng was regarded an unfriendly order.

After Teng's dismissal, Zha, the front area manager, started to manage karaoke. One day when it was approaching 10pm, I found that Yi was still on the upper floor serving karaoke customers. I went to ask him why he was still working. He said:

Zha will not come today. He told me that he had done three consecutive night shifts. He said he was too tired. He would like me to do today's shift. I agreed. I have known his parents for a long time. We are all Taishan brothers (Taishan is the place where they original came from). I've got to help him. You know what? Teng previously sometimes also asked me whether I could help him to do a few shifts. I never agreed. Why would I help him?

Indeed, Yi's antagonism and resistance was not only limited to Teng. I later found that this was applied to the Mandarin group, as Teng developed his resentment to the Cantonese group.

Lin, the chef who once worked in Firm U, later founded his own restaurant opposite Firm U. Two weeks after its opening, the business was still struggling with few customers. One day when we finished the lunch, Yi went out to smoke. I followed him out. Yi asked me:

Many said Lin had excellent cooking ability. Have you have eaten his cooked meals?

I answered:

I did, but I just can't remember the taste.

Yi continued:

I have known him for quite a long time, but I have never eaten his cooked meals. Next time, I will go to have a try. However, one thing I'm wondering about is that, if he really has good quality, why couldn't he flourish in any of the restaurants he ever worked? He once worked here, it struggled. After leaving here, he worked in firm V, it struggled. Now, he has his own restaurant. It is also struggling.

Furthermore, apart from him, many from Tianjin (a municipality in northern China) were said to have good techniques. Do you know Ning? He once said straightforwardly to me that he thought I was less capable. He previously worked in firm M for a long time as the head chef. Later on, everybody knew firm M was the worst tasting Chinese restaurant. So, where did his confidence come from?

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Yi clearly identified the disadvantage of Location B versus Location A. In his words, Location B was dying. Restaurants located on Location B, in Yi's opinion, were doomed to failure because they were far from the city centre and the university area. However, when the focus was Lin rather than the economy, Yi's resistance towards non-Cantonese speakers made him conclude that the failure of Lin's restaurant was due to his limited ability. Under this context, he entirely ignored the impacts from the external environment. Yi's bias directed him to judge non-Cantonese speaking workers in this way, which indeed reflected the fundamental ideological antagonism between these two groups.

Up until this point, the analysis in this section has mainly focused on conflicts between Mandarin-speaking workers and Cantonese-speaking workers. There were also conflicts within each sub-group. For the group of Cantonese speakers, I did not notice obvious conflicts between members throughout my field work. The reason would be that most of Cantonese-speaking workers were from Guangdong province so that they share the

common language and culture. By contrast, Mandarin-speaking workers were heterogeneous from different provinces. There were clear resistance and conflicts between them.

In Firm U, though both Teng and Juan were Mandarin-speaking workers, Teng was from Tianjin municipality; while Juan was from Jiangsu province. Juan and Teng had direct conflicts several times during the period of my fieldwork.

It was a busy Saturday evening. Both Teng and I had not stopped even for one second since the start of the evening shift. When Juan finished a stir-fry order, he came to chat with me about his plan to go back to China. Teng suddenly said to him:

If I was in China now, I would kill you with no doubt (Teng expressed his dissatisfaction at Juan's laziness).

Juan replied:

Come, you can kill me now. There is no need saying that if you were in China. Just come, use the chopper. I will give you a surprise.

They then looked at each other with scorn.

Later that evening, after Teng and I had finished all the skewer orders, we sat down chatting to each other. Teng said to me:

We've never experienced so many orders on one single shift, haven't we? I'm exhausted. Well, this is because people in the kitchen are not united, unwilling to work for each other (I understood Teng was expressing his dissatisfaction at Juan).

Having heard Teng's words, Juan reacted immediately:

It seems as if you did everything. It feels like once you leave, the restaurant would then collapse immediately.

Both of them then laughed at each other.

Before Juan went back to China, I got a chance to conduct a detailed discussion with him. The detailed conversation aimed to explore two issues: one was about how regulations

influenced both owner-managers' and employees' choices (this will be discussed in the next chapter), and the other was about how he experienced his work during the period of working in Firm U. Juan said:

There are too many trivial things here, too many, though there are only a few people. Everybody would like to discuss gossip behind others backs. But I don't care at all. Moreover, if I feel good, I may do something beyond my responsibility. If not, I only do my job. If food is deteriorating or smelly, that's none of my business.

I have been here (UK) for so long. I've never met a person from Tianjin with good quality. They are all shits, saying one thing and doing another. Several days ago, the owner came to have a chat with me, saying that 'Juan, you need to clean the kitchen with them'. I don't want to explain to him. I know they have reported me to the owner. I don't care. As long as I receive my wage after a week's work, that's fine for me.

It's so annoying working here. Everybody thinks they have done more work than others. It feels like the restaurant is absolutely reliant upon them. To be honest, Teng and his wife made me feel extremely unpleasant. You were there that day, right? When I finished my lunch and gave the bowl to his wife, she said to me: 'you don't pay so you wash for yourself'. How could she speak like this? So, can I say 'you don't pay so you are not allowed to eat the meal cooked by me'? That's so annoying. Furthermore, are they really unconscious of their illegal identities? They are illegal workers. As illegal workers, how can they behave like this? Absolutely absurd.

Though both Teng and Juan spoke Mandarin, and came from China's northern cities, this did not mean that they could easily work together in the UK context. Direct conflicts were frequent between them. According to the detailed discussion with Juan, he clearly expressed his dissatisfaction of Teng and Teng's wife. Just like Teng's antagonism to Cantonese speakers and Yi's antagonism to Mandarin speakers, Juan also extended his antagonism towards Teng to the wider population – people from Tianjin. All these deep-rooted perceptions to resist people from other parties finally shaped their day-to-day behaviour and perceptions on the shop floor, which revealed the internal dynamics between multi-cultural workforces in these two restaurants.

6.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the dynamics between multi-cultural workforces in the two restaurants. In the specific context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, it basically consisted of three groups: Mandarin speaking workers, Cantonese speaking workers and British-born Chinese. Existing research in exploring employment relations in ethnic minority small firms rarely includes discussion about the heterogeneous character within ethnic groups. By contrast, Chan et al., (2007) suggested that the co-ethnic Chinese should not be simply treated as a homogeneous group, though with no detailed explanation of the dynamics between different group numbers. Analysis in this chapter does not treat the co-ethnic Chinese as a homogeneous group. The aim was to reveal how this ethnic mix influenced the employment relations and the labour management process.

Due to different languages being used, there have been strong communication problems between different groups of workers. As mutual adjustment in small firms reflects informal negotiations and tacit understanding (Ram, 1999), one of the main aims of this chapter was to examine how mutual adjustment played out in a context where direct communication was largely constrained. Wapshott and Mallett (2013) demonstrated the importance of intersubjectivity in shaping patterns of adaptation and accommodation between owners and workers in ambiguity-intensive small professional service firms, where people frequently drew on the perception of others' value or interests instead of on any direct communication with them. In this particular context, due to the language barrier and the communication problem, the concept of intersubjectivity reflected the unspoken side of communication and tacit understandings. The practical communication problems arising from different languages being used by different group workers meant that direct oral communication could not be always conducted effectively. 'Guessing' at times played a central role in facilitating the mutual adjustment process.

However, because employees' assessments of employers' perceptions were frequently based on their intersubjective assumptions in different situations, it was inevitable that misinterpretations occurred. When workers failed to correctly understand owner-managers' intentions, owner-managers were unsatisfied with them. The dismissal of two front area workers in Firm D was a direct result of their inability to understand the instructions they received. The problematic explicit negotiation by intersubjective guessing arising from the

language barrier, therefore, has important consequences for work organisation and employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. It reflects the mutually adjusting nature of employment relations and working practices in small firms (Marlow et al., 2005). It undermined the process of mutual adjustment and caused workplace conflicts due to workers' misunderstanding.

Another significant issue was that owners' behaviour towards employees differed according to workers' ethnic identity. Firm D's owner had a Cantonese background. As a result, apart from full time front area workers, only one part-time worker with a Cantonese background was allowed to use the till. All of the remaining Mandarin background workers were not allowed to use the till, due to her distrust. Firm U's owner had a Mandarin background. As a result, he did not trust anybody who had a Cantonese background to be in charge of the karaoke business. In the multi-cultural working environment, the assumptions and prejudices of the two owners largely shaped their attitudes towards labour from different backgrounds. Labour management was, as a result, practiced by the owners differently according to the ethnic group in question.

This chapter examined the conflict between members from different cultural groups and regions, focusing on the conflict between Cantonese employees from the Southern area and Mandarin employees from the Northern area of China. There had been substantial hatred and hostility between Cantonese-speaking workers and Mandarin-speaking workers. These two groups of workers were reluctant to work together, generally with limited communication during working. They had little tolerance and patience with each another. Without toleration and the willingness to communicate, there was frequent oral conflict and workplace resistance between these two groups of workers. People from one cultural group interpreted the other group's behaviours and perceptions with obviously biased judgement. Examples illustrated that antagonism was rooted in each group towards another.

While to outsiders Chinese people may appear somewhat homogenous, historical tensions and traditional divisions persist, alongside of course regional senses of kinship. Though people seemed to share an ethnicity, and certainly a nationality, with different traditions and different perceptions of people from different parts of the country, an inherent antagonism and conflict between these three parties negatively influenced the shared

ethnicity. Previous research has found family and kinship ties to be of central importance in developing ethnic businesses and shaping management practices (Ram et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2006). However, in this Chinese restaurant sector, co-ethnicity and kinship ties were two distinct concepts. It is the regional ties that largely shaped the shop floor behaviours within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Therefore, understanding of the mechanism of the conflicts between groups from different regions is crucial to explain cooperation and conflicts in exploring employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK context.

Chapter 7 Informality and Ethnicity

Section 2.2.3 analysed how informality interacting with ethnicity shapes shop floor experiences and patterns of employment relations in South-Asian small firms. The two central focuses are organising informality and regulatory informality. Due to the widespread use of family workers, management practices exhibited more characteristics of informality than general small firms, such as recruitment and selection and work arrangement (Ram et al., 2000; Ram et al., 2007). As for the regulatory informality, given that ethnic firms largely competed within low value-added sectors, the introduction of NMW and WTR put extra pressures on these firms and forced some of them to engage in illegal practices, such as employing undocumented workers (Jones et al., 2006). It is then necessary to draw out the concept of informality and ethnicity to examine how informality and ethnicity interact with each other in shaping management practices and workplace relations. This chapter, therefore, explores how informality interacting with ethnicity affects employment relations under the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

The first aim of the chapter is to explore the presence of organising informality, to examine how informality and negotiated order were played out within the two case study firms. This chapter will begin by examining how informality operated through the labour management practices. Under the typically informal environment associated with small firms, with lack of clear rules and policies, there was a process of continuous informal bargaining on the shop-floor (Ram, 1994). The negotiated order was subject to constant informal negotiation between owner-managers and workers, which revealed the nature of the internal political process in the restaurants (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2009). After this, the chapter will discuss how informal negotiation influences rules and policies, organisation structures and management styles in the two case study firms, which echoed the call by Edwards and Ram (2010) that informality needed to be understood and interpreted under a particular context in order to demonstrate the complex and heterogeneous nature of employment relations in small firms.

Furthermore, in-depth ethnographic research such as Roy (1952) and Moule (1998) has shown that working in an informal context with less supervision could create space for

employees to re-interpret or modify the management process. Therefore, this chapter will summarise types of fiddles practised in the two restaurants. By focusing on these fiddles and cheatings under the particular occupational circumstances, this chapter will explain why workers engaged in these activities and discuss the scope for them to manipulate policies and management practices. Moreover, by examining owners' reactions to the workplace fiddles, it will discuss why owners tolerated certain types of fiddles and what the significance to employment relations was. By examining how fiddles played out under the informal negotiated environment, the analysis aims to further understanding of the dynamic processes of negotiated order around consent and resistance between employers and employees.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the 'family ideology' in South-Asian small firms played a crucial role in shaping workplace relationships (Ram, 1994; Ram et al., 2001; Ram and Edwards, 2010). The widely applied 'family ideology' enabled owners to treat workers from the same ethnic group as family members. Owners were happy to share their attitudes and values with workers. Meanwhile, co-ethnic employees under the management with the 'family culture' would like to conduct self-sacrifice, self-denial and hard work in order to ensure the success of the business. The 'family culture' facilitated high degrees of informality and contributed crucially to the success for these ethnic minority small businesses.

In light of this, under the theme of organising informality, this chapter is to explore perceptions and ideology for both employers and employees in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in dealing with the other party and the businesses. By analysing the particular workplace culture of the ethnic Chinese group, it aims to examine how the particular culture interacting with informal practices affected the employment relations in the two firms.

The second aim of this chapter is to explore the regulatory informality. It will examine to what extent regulations influenced owner-managers' choices and the labour management process in the two firms. Four aspects will be examined.

The analysis will first focus on the effect of the National Minimum Wage (NMW). Previous research (Ram et al., 2001; Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2006) has

demonstrated that firms had different patterns of adjustment following the introduction of the NMW. The impact of the NMW was mediated by the informality of employment relations in small firms, together with product and labour market influences. In line with this discussion, this section will explore to what extent the NMW affected both owners and workers' behaviour and choices in the two case study firms.

The second section will focus on the Working Time Regulations (WTR). The law has clear constraints on overseas students upon working hours. The section will examine to what extent employers and employees followed this law and how they breached the law to satisfy their needs.

The third section will discuss regulation relating to health and safety. According to the Health Act 2006 (Health Act, 2006), relating to health and safety in work places in England it is illegal to smoke in all enclosed spaces. Existing research has little discussion about how regulatory breach was conducted from this aspect. This section aims to fill the gap by examining how owners and workers worked together to breach the law.

The fourth section will discuss the alleged employment of illegal workers in the two firms. It focuses on the possible employment of illegal workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. It aims to explore why employers might choose to recruit illegal workers and how the law put constraints upon both owners' and illegal workers' choices.

7.1 Organising informality

7.1.1 Informality in the two firms

Recruitment and selection

In both Firm D and Firm U, the manner in which employees were recruited to the two businesses could be largely characterised by the use of informal personal networks. The grapevine was regarded as the most simple and cost effective method for recruiting both chefs and front area workers. In Firm D, Jack, the front area manager, altogether introduced four of his friends, including me. Firm D, throughout my research, only recruited one chef, who was recommended by another chef. In Firm U, all of the part-time front area workers before the refurbishment were friends of Ming, the front area manager. They knew each other when they previously worked in another restaurant. For Firm U's kitchen staff, after

the couple workers had left, the head chef Wen introduced both Yi and Pian, his two former colleagues. After the refurbishment, Yi, as the head chef, brought in Zha, the front area manager and Dong, the other chef. Furthermore, due to the short supply for kitchen staff in Sheffield, the owner in Firm U also recruited kitchen staff from the internet. However, of all the kitchen workers recruited, there were only two recruited in this way.

The selection process was also very informal, with no interviews or other techniques used. In both sites, for the chefs and front area staff who were introduced by existing staff, they would get employed straight away. Indeed, both owners encouraged employees to call their friends and acquaintances to work for them. Most of the chefs who were introduced by existing staff had previously spent years working in ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. They surely had basic abilities. Owners believed that this could hugely reduce uncertainties for picking up workers, especially for kitchen staff, such as Juan, the lazy chef recruited via the internet.

Training

There was no training at all for new chefs in both restaurants. The chefs who were recruited were 'ready-made' as they had been working in the Chinese restaurant sector for years. Once they were recruited, they started their work directly. For kitchen assistants and front area workers, 'training' basically started from the three-hour trial period before recruited. They were taught some basic tasks, and the working environment was introduced. Once recruited, they started their work with on-the-job training. There was no clear time to differentiate 'training' and 'working'. With a worker becoming more skilled, they had less 'training' and more 'working'. This first reflected the predominantly informal nature of training among small firms. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4, labour costs comprise a large proportion of total costs for these businesses. Due to the intense price competition, cost saving dominated many aspects of management strategies. It was, therefore, difficult for owner-managers to invest in training. With the application of on-the-job training, owners could save a large amount of labour costs, and on-the-job training was also sufficient for front area workers and kitchen assistants to acquire the fundamental skills.

Supervision

Supervision in the two firms was largely decided by the owners in a systematic manner. In Firm D, though the owner worked together with employees as co-workers, there was clear hierarchy and division between them. The managerial function was generally operated based on Kate's perceptions. The method of close employee supervision was generally applied. Without clear rules and policies in guiding the management process, performance appraisal and supervision were managed through informal mechanisms and tacit understandings. In Firm U, when the owner was absent from the site, there was the desire for the front area manager and the head chef to create a harmonious environment with less intense supervision. Once the owner appeared, it suddenly became intense. He would point out everything that he thought was improperly done, and forced employees to accept his requirements. Supervision basically exhibited a typical autocratic feature of control.

Pay arrangements

Pay levels in these two firms were initially set by owners. Pay increases were basically a product of individual bargaining. As already discussed in Chapter 5, the negotiation power for pay rise for kitchen assistants and front area staff was weak. Due to owners' general low level of dependence upon these two groups of workers and their labour market subordinate positions, their negotiation power was largely constrained. Consent and compliance for pay settings were basically their only choice. No kitchen assistant or front area workers during my field work successfully negotiated a pay rise. By contrast, chefs' dominant labour market position gave them large scope to manoeuvre for their interests. Owners generally were afraid of direct conflict with chefs due to the short supply of good chefs from the labour market. Chefs had the power to resist managerial strategies, and the impact of resistance could bring them benefits to their interests. For example, Yi successfully bargained for a pay rise during Firm U's refurbishment period. As a result, pay rises for chefs were largely shaped by their informal bargaining.

Staff exit

Under the informality-dominated context and the frequently changed product market, staff turnover rate was significant in these two firms. Because front area workers were all students with a part-time job, voluntary departure from them could happen at any time for many kinds of reasons such as doing revision for exams. For full time workers, the only

tacit rule in both sites concerning voluntary staff exit was that workers should apply to leave one week ahead. It was purely an oral application by workers. If the owner would like to keep the worker, it then went into the negotiation stage over pay or any other related issues. Involuntary exit was also frequent. For kitchen assistants and part-time front area workers, as discussed in Chapter 5, if an owner would like to sack employees with any reason, they generally had no choice but to be compliant. Dismissal for these two groups of workers was completely based on owners' decision. By contrast, there had been no dismissal for a single chef in both restaurants throughout my research.

7.1.2 Dynamics of informality and negotiated order

Informal negotiation for rule and custom changes

After working in Firm D for a week, I found that Jack sometimes would put a few coins into a small bucket at the counter, rather than put them in the till. I asked him what the bucket was used for. He told me that it was the tips bucket. When customer left a tip, the tips were finally shared by full-time front area workers and the owner. After explaining the basic custom, Jack told me some more stories:

There was no 'tips sharing' policy at the beginning. All the money belonged to Kate. Erm, do you remember that girl, who was short, wearing a pair of glasses? She worked here a year ago as a full-time waiter. Can you remember her? (I said yes and I described the girl a little bit). Spot on. It was her. Her name is Sonia. She is Malaysian. She could speak Mandarin, Cantonese and English fluently, and she was clever. She could manage to do everything well. After working here for a while, she one day asked for a pay rise. However, Kate wouldn't want to increase her wage. I cannot remember what exactly happened then, you know. It seemed that they had an argument about this. Finally they reached the agreement that Sonia's wage would keep the same, while tips would be shared among full-time workers, including me. It was no longer Kate's personal revenue. The bucket has been here since then.

Later, Sonia left because her boyfriend had completed his course and they went back to Malaysia. Nei joined us. Tips were, then, shared by Nei, me and Kate.

Before Yi took over the head chef position in Firm U, there was a tacit rule that thorough kitchen cleaning needed to be done every week, though general cleaning would be done every day. The thorough cleaning normally lasted at least an hour, compared to general cleaning with around fifteen minutes. This process was guided by the head chef, and it was indeed completed every week. After the refurbishment, Yi already took over the position. I later realised that, until the fourth week, there had been no thorough kitchen cleaning. I asked Yi whether the rule had changed and whether the owner knew the change. Yi answered:

I know that it was once a week previously. But, you know, everything is flexible. It's changeable. Before it re-opened, we did it once, right? (Last week in the decoration period). It was all right. We don't need to do this every week. It was too complicated and the task was too heavy. Last Sunday, he sent me a text asking me to send a few photos to him after the thorough cleaning. I phoned him back. I told him that we were no longer providing stir-fry dishes and we did every day cleaning carefully. So the kitchen was not dirty at all. There was no need to clean once a week as before. He accepted this. He later said that as long as the kitchen was clean, that would be OK. See, Lewis, don't be that stubborn. Things can change. I'm telling you, I have had enough of cleaning everything in the kitchen.

Indeed, there had been no thorough kitchen cleaning after Yi became the head chef in Firm U. It seemed that the owner had not paid much attention on this issue, as well. Otherwise, there would not have been no action on thorough cleaning until I finished my field work. Informal negotiation and rule changes, as a result, did not just happen regarding pay, but also things like work practices and duties.

Informal negotiation for work arrangements

When I started my field work in Firm D in late November, 2014, Jack had two days off a week on Thursday and Saturday. Normally, a full-time worker could only have one day off a week. The reason why Jack had an extra day off was that he had a college course on Thursdays in Birmingham. After he had completed the course, Jack regularly took one day off on Saturdays, as a normal full-time worker did. However, it seemed that Jack had been used to having a day off on weekdays. He soon told me that he felt exhausted by working

six days a week. He told me that he would like to ask Kate for one day off on weekdays. On the Sunday when the roster for the next week was released, I found that there were no Jack's shifts on Thursday. I asked him the other day how he negotiated with Kate so that he could secure a day off on weekdays. Jack told me:

Um, she did not agree at the beginning. I just insisted that I was too tired by working six days. It made me exhausted. She hesitated for a moment and said to me: 'Ok. Ok. If you are too tired and would like to take two days off, that's Ok. However, you need to work until 8pm on the other days (Jack's shifts normally ended at 7pm).' I accepted her bargain. You know what, I know I can get allowed to take one more day off. Haha.

In the final week of my field work in Firm D, I told Jack I would finish my work by the end of the week. Jack thought for a short while, and said to me:

It may be sensible for me to reduce my shifts as well. I do not even have time to exercise. Probably being part-time from now on. I will speak to her (Kate).

I did not know what Jack said to Kate and how he argued with her, but the fact was that Jack had another day off on Monday the next week. After the two negotiations, Jack ended with three days off a week rather than one day off.

However, this was not the end. In May 2015, when I had completed the intensive field work in Firm D, I one day went to find Jack to get updates of the restaurant. Jack spoke to me:

I am so tired now. I have been working for two consecutive weeks, without having one day off. It's now during the exam period. They (part-time workers) are all preparing for their exams. Kate did not want to recruit any new staff only for this short period. If I did not work, there would be no one working here. She talked to me several times and wanted me to work for her. I finally agreed. But I am telling you, I am absolutely exhausted now, and this will probably continue for one more week.

It can be found that the negotiation and bargain over work arrangements between Jack and Kate was continuous and contingent upon diverse situations. The dynamics were shaped by a range of factors. Internally, the close relationship between those two provided Jack with the opportunity to argue for his interest; externally, the temporary drop of available part-time workers revealed the uncertainty in the labour market, which functioned together with the informal management mechanism to turn Kate's managerial control from dominant autocracy into negotiated pattern. Work arrangements, as a result, within this context were largely based on an ad hoc, negotiated approach, dependent on the frequently changed employer-employee positions.

In Firm U, informal negotiation over work arrangements basically exhibited the same type. Ming, the initial front area manager took one day off a week at the beginning. As noted earlier, she had to work on everything, not just serving customers, due to the regular absence of the owner. In the third week, I found that she began to take two days off. I asked her how she negotiated with the owner to get the permission. She said:

He came last Sunday. You know this, right? I had a talk with him. I have been struggling so much recently. I'm a girl, not a superwoman. I need to take rest. I just couldn't work like this for six days a week. It takes me nearly one hour to get home. Every day when I arrive at home, it is around 12am. They (part-time workers) are capable. I told him I just couldn't continue working six days a week. I required another day off. He finally agreed, though I could feel that he was a little reluctant to accept.

Informal negotiation for personalised policies

In Chapter 5, I mentioned that Jia, the kitchen assistant, was recruited after Firm U re-opened, though she was later sacked due to the reason 'early adjustment' (the product market transited from the high-demand period to the low-demand period). In the afternoon of her first day working in Firm U, she suddenly left after saying something to Yi. I then asked Yi what had happened. Yi said:

The owner told me that she would leave from 3pm to 4pm every day because she needed to cook for her child. I've never heard of anything like this before. However, if she had the agreement with the owner, that's none of my business.

This was surely a unique policy created for Jia. It lasted until her dismissal. The external environment gave Jia the chance to apply for this specific policy. The product market was in the high-demand period when she joined Firm U and the short supply from the labour market decided that she was the only kitchen assistant the owner could find during that period. The impact of these external factors was then mediated through informal negotiation to form the policy. Dynamics between Jia and the owner were shaped by both the external influences and internal informal mechanism rooted in the firm.

7.1.3 Scope for cheating and fiddles

The first two sections of this chapter demonstrated that informal managerial practices dominated in the two small firms. Management practices and policies were re-interpreted and modified through the process of informal negotiation. This section will examine how much scope was created for workers to operate cheating and fiddles under the informal management structure.

Cheating by informal personal connection

In Firm D, apart from being a kitchen assistant, another task for Huo was to deliver take-away. One day when Huo had his day off, Kate asked me to deliver take-away together with Nick, the male owner. When we came back after having delivered a few orders, I was told by Kate that there were some new orders waiting to be delivered, and the chefs were cooking. Kate asked me to wait for a short while until they were ready. Jack then went towards me and said:

Lewis, my friend ordered one of these. It was the order from the Power One (the property name). When you give the food to him, you don't take his money. Nick never gets off the car when delivering. I asked my friend to wait inside the building. You just go in and give the food to him. That's fine. Nick never checks the money. When you come back, just give the money to me. Both Kate and Nick cannot know this. That would be no problem at all.

After hearing this, I hesitated for seconds and then answered yes. About ten minutes later, when the chef had finished cooking, I began to pack the food. At the same time, Jack was having a discussion with Kate about the end of his shift. Because there was one order from the building he lived in, he would like to deliver and go home directly. Kate agreed. It was Jack who delivered finally. Though I did not ask Jack whether he finally operated as planned with his friend, it would be clear that he trusted me on hundred percent so that he could tell me the fiddle and ask me to conduct the fiddle.

Cui was another part-time front area worker recruited by Jack as Jack's friend. Due to Cui's personal requirements, Jack arranged Cui many shifts a week. One day, when we three worked on the evening shift, Cui suddenly told Jack she was really hungry. Jack expressed that he was hungry as well. After a short discussion, they picked up one dish they would like to eat. Jack then wrote the dish on an order sheet marking that it was from one table of customers who added this dish and gave it to kitchen staff. When the dish was ready, they began to eat at the counter. I was then invited to share the meal. With this little trick, they did not pay for the dish. Once the order sheet came back from the kitchen, Jack threw it away.

At the beginning of this chapter when discussing the informal labour management practices in the two firms, I mentioned that the informal personal network was widely used as the recruitment technique by owners due to its efficient and cost effective feature. However, it worked as a double-edged sword here. Cui and I were both recruited by Jack as his friends. We were trusted by each other. However, this type of trust arising from the informal personal connection gave employees the opportunity to cheat the system and created scope for fiddles.

Personal cheating

In Firm U, as noted earlier, apart from being a kitchen assistant, Teng also had the task of managing karaoke after work. This meant that as long as there were karaoke customers, Teng had to continue his karaoke work after 10pm. Firm U had only one key. Teng, as a result, always held the key because he needed to lock the door after he had finished his karaoke job. At the beginning, when there were no karaoke customers, Teng left together with other employees at 10pm. Gradually, everybody was used to Teng's staying in the

restaurant after work due to his karaoke task, though there would be no karaoke work on a particular day. One day when there were no karaoke customers, everybody left at 10pm as usual. I waited for Teng to lock the door and leave together. However, having seen that everybody had left, Teng locked the door from inside and went back to the kitchen, telling me that he would cook some food and take it home. I was a little bit shocked because nobody had ever discussed and had any concern about what Teng would do after work. The tacit understanding was that Teng would manage the karaoke after work so it was no problem for him to continue staying in the restaurant. This finally gave him the chance to cheat the system due to lack of supervision under the informal management structure. Because Teng had a close relationship with me as my informant, I later found that it became a regular action for him to cook after work, whether or not there were karaoke customers.

As mentioned earlier, Firm D had a custom of sharing tips between full-time waiters and the owner. There was a tip bucket at the counter used for putting tips. One day when Jack and I worked on the evening shift, Jack suddenly said to me angrily:

Shit! I will no longer put tips into the bucket. Long time ago, I knew that she (Kate) rarely put tips into the bucket. As long as it was the money from customers, she would put all of them into the till. The till was her personal property. Though this has been annoying, I have put tips into the bucket. I just do not want to lower my level. However, she received £5 tips this afternoon. I stood beside her. She just put the note into the till straight away in front of me. Fuck off! I will never leave any tips into the bucket. The customer just left £5 tips. It now belongs to me!

The appearance of personal cheating was largely attributed to the absence of effective supervision in these two firms, especially for Firm U. Due to lack of effective supervision, employees had space to manipulate rules and modify control. For Teng's case, it was more a matter of taking advantage of the informal management structure. By contrast, the fiddle practised by Jack was obvious workplace resistance to management. It was expressed as dissatisfaction of managerial control. Employment relations, as a result, were shaped in the way of fiddles according to the dynamics of day to day life on the shop floor under different contexts.

Cheating by intergroup relations

Ming, the manager in Firm U at the beginning, started her work only a few days ahead of me. She was recruited by the owner to replace a former front manager, Jemma, who was sacked due to deliberately working with karaoke staff to give false information about the revenue. I learned the story from Teng, my informant in Firm U.

Firm U's karaoke had types of set menus. For each type, they were composed of different drinks depending on how much the set menu was, and for each set menu, three-hour free singing was included. If customers would like to continue singing, they needed to pay for additional hours, which was £30 an hour. Because there was no computer-based order system, orders were recorded manually. Orders, as required by the owner, basically included what type of set menu was ordered and how many additional hours added. Because the CCTV to cover the karaoke counter had been broken, there was, as a result, no supervision to the upper floor karaoke area. The owner could only check the revenue based on the order notes written by workers. This, then, left the scope for workers to submit false information.

Before Teng was in charge of karaoke, it had been managed by two part-time employees only working for karaoke. After they had been sacked, the two former part-time workers regularly played in Firm U's karaoke as customers. They then gradually got familiar with Teng and they later told Teng the truth about why they were dismissed, which nobody had ever known before. Teng one day told me:

Now, I completely understand how they collaborated with the front area manager on purpose to cheat. They told me everything yesterday.

As you know, there was no external supervision for karaoke, no CCTV coverage. Everybody knew that it was easy to take advantage of this hole. When I noted down the order yesterday, they (the two sacked former karaoke staff) came over and had a look. They then suggested to me to write the false note and even taught me how this could be properly done without danger of being identified. They said:

'The thing is that it is impossible to cheat on the set menus because he (the owner) knew the amount of the drink stocks. However, he would never know how many extra hours a room of customers added. Suppose that they add three hours. If you

note down two hours, you would get £30; if you note down one hour, you would get £60 and if you note down none, all the £90 would belong to you. This is exactly what we did. If you note down the real hours they add, as you are doing now, you can never take the advantage. He (the owner) later seemed to realise this and asked Jemma to supervise. However, he did not know that Jemma and we were in the same camp. She covered for us and we shared the money with her. You know what? Our weekly was set as £400. By doing this, we could at least get £700 a week by using these tricks. Sadly, we were too careless at the end. A pot washer heard our talk one day. She then reported to the owner'.

The intergroup cheating in Firm D was even more obvious and regular. It was a Friday evening. Both Kate and Nick (the couple owners) had left to celebrate their friend's birthday. A man with a child came in and walked straight into the kitchen. Jack told me that they were Kang's husband and daughter. They then ordered some food and began to have the meal. Because the owners were absent, Kang later went out to eat with them. After they had finished, Kang's husband went to the counter preparing to pay. Both I and Jack were at the counter. Kang then followed him and said to Jack with a smile that it has been paid. Jack then smiled to her a little bit. Kang's husband and daughter then left without actually paying for the meal.

A similar experience happened to Huo (one of Firm D's kitchen assistants) the next time. It was another day when the owners were absent. They both left to attend a Chinese party in the afternoon. In the evening, Huo's two friends came to have meal. After they had finished, Huo went out speaking to Jack:

Jack is kind. Everything is fine. It's Ok.

It seemed that Jack clearly understood what he meant. He smiled back to Huo. Huo's friends then left without paying for the meal.

After Huo had gone into the kitchen, I asked Jack whether this type of 'free meal' always happened. Jack answered:

Yes, whenever they (the owners) were not on-site, they would invite their friends to come for meals. It was really annoying indeed.

I asked Jack:

But you wouldn't tell them (the owners), would you? Otherwise, it is impossible for them to do this.

Jack replied:

Yes, they (kitchen staff) know I wouldn't tell them (Kate and Nick, the couple owners). This is not my business. Though I don't like the way they did it, I wouldn't report this to them. Furthermore, I'm taking over the business. I need them to work for me. I just don't want to irritate them, at least for now.

Here the focus of interest is the structure of informal intergroup connections that impacted directly upon work behaviour in the two firms. It indicated that the informally organised intergroup relationship was able to modify and resist a series of managerial control to create scope for fiddles and cheating on the shop floor. By exploring the network of intergroup relations, it further advanced the understanding of informal workplace behaviour and the institutional dynamics between workers and owners.

Based on these three types of cheating, it can be found that under the informal management structure, rules are largely shaped by negotiated order between workers and owner-managers. Without clear rules and supervision to guide the management, the informal relationship between employees had large scope to cheat the system.

7.1.4 The workplace culture

Owner's perceptions and ideology

Chapter 3 already summarised two reasons that enabled me to successfully secure my initial access in Firm D: 1. developing a long-term good relationship with Firm D's manager, Jack; 2. using the 'bargaining cards' technique used by Holliday (see Ram and Holliday, 1993). There was, indeed, another reason that contributed to the success of gaining the access quickly: the unexpected departure of its full-time waitress, Nei. The discussion now turns to the third factor and focuses on how this case related to the owner's ideology behind the approach to managing labour and shaping the employment relations.

After I had been employed, Jack told me that it was because Nei suddenly decided to take two weeks off because her husband was planning to fly back to China. It normally required two weeks ahead for a full-time employee to apply for a long-term break based on the tacit understanding between both owners and workers, as Zha, the manager in Firm U, once mentioned. Kate, the Firm D's owner, was then extremely unhappy. She finally was forced to accept Nei's decision. It ended up with Kate posting recruitment notes on its window. I then had the opportunity to be employed.

Having worked for a while, I once discussed with Jack about Nei's previous status in Firm D. Jack told me:

She already worked here around two years as a full-time front area employee. She was a really diligent girl and her working pace was faster than most people. However, Kate did not fancy her at all. Kate rarely gave a smile to her and was really harsh to her. As far as I can remember, I have never heard of any words from Kate to praise her. Once Nei committed any mistake, Kate would shout at her immediately with very bad temper. Because Nei was introverted, she did not communicate with Kate quite often and she was frightened of Kate. As a result, their relationship was bad.

Kate once advised me not to talk too much with Nei. She believed that Nei had too many ideas in her mind. Kate saw Nei as potential threat to the business because she never expressed her ideas.

I was then interested in why Kate kept Nei working in Firm D for two years if she was tired of working with her to such an extent. Jack explained to me:

She can work well. She has the ability. Getting a good full-time worker is not an easy thing. She (Nei) had value to her (Kate). That's the only reason. It's simple.

I was not convinced by Jack's explanation at the beginning. I thought 'being valuable' would not have been the only reason. However, what happened next corroborated Jack's opinion.

Two weeks through my work in Firm D, I became an excellent waiter. Jack later told me that, due to my extraordinary performance, Kate had decided not to get Nei back because she had had enough of her and the 'sudden departure' really annoyed her.

On the Friday in the fourth week, after finishing the lunch shift, Jack chatted with me:

Nei came yesterday (I regularly took my day off on Thursdays, so I was absent on Thursday). She brought food for us. When she gave some of it to Kate, Kate rejected her offer straight away. During her stay, Kate said nothing to her, even without a greeting. I could obviously feel that Nei felt awkward, and she left soon.

As already mentioned in Chapter 5, Firm D had adjusted its part-time workers several times. Both Kate and Jack expressed dissatisfaction for existing employees. One day when Jack discussed the situation with Kate at the counter, I was alongside with them. Jack spoke to Kate:

We should probably get Nei back. She knows everything. She can work well. She once told me that she would like to come back.

After listening to Jack's suggestion, Kate's face turned immediately. She thought for a short while and replied:

Erm, OK, that's OK. Phone her today. Current workers are not that capable. If she would like to work, I will put her on the roster. However, she can only work as a part-time worker. I do not want her work for too long. Once we have proper persons, let her go.

In the end, Nei did not come back. Jack later told me that she had found a job in another restaurant.

Ming, Firm U's initial front area manager, had a similar experience to that of Nei. As mentioned in the last section, Ming started her job in Firm U a week ahead of me to replace that former front area manager due to her collaboration with karaoke workers to cheat. It seemed that Ming and the owner had a very close relationship. Whenever the owner came to collect money or appeared for any reason, he would have long talks with Ming. I could always hear laughs and see smiles from their faces during their conversation. Ming also

told me that the owner invited her to have meals a few times after work. Indeed, I had never heard of similar invitation from the owner to other staff, including the head chef. Furthermore, Ming was told by the owner that if she had any difficulties in her personal life, she could go to get help from him with no hesitation. It felt like a close working proximity could be easily identified.

Like Nei, Ming was diligent and hard-working. Furthermore, Ming had the ability to manage front area part-time workers given that the front area manager and the head chef in Firm U largely took the management role. As a result, apart from basic serving tasks, Ming was also in charge of ordering everything for restaurant and karaoke use. Later on, she frequently complained that there was too much work and she was always exhausted. This could be identified by the change of her spirit and temper. However, even in such a bad health condition, she had been committed to the business, managing to save costs for the owner from everywhere. However, Ming said the owner kept putting pressure on her. Meanwhile, she told me she was invited back by her former owner because a full-time worker had just left and she was promised to be paid higher. Therefore, she said she was considering leaving Firm U and working in that restaurant. Finally, Ming decided to leave Firm U.

I had no further contact with Ming until I happened to meet her while she was working in another restaurant. When I saw her working there, I was shocked because I did not know that she had left Firm U. After exchanging greetings, I asked her why she had chosen to leave Firm U. She explained:

I was too tired. I needed to do everything. I really couldn't bear that anymore. I had a chance working here with more pay. You know what? After I had told him that I would like to leave, he said he would offer me some equity if I continued working. I worked for another week. He didn't mention the equity thing at all. I am not a fool. If he hadn't raised my wage for such a long time, how could he possibly give me an amount of the restaurant shares?

I then asked her

Has he contacted you since you left?

Ming replied:

No. Never.

I said:

But it seems that you had a very close relationship. You once told me that he cared about your life a lot.

Ming said with scorn:

Do you really think it is real? The only reason why he took care of me so much was that I had value for him. Who else could work for him in such a way as I did with only £340 a week as a full-time waiter? Everything he promised to me was just illusion. He just used the technique to ensure that I would work for him. I finally understood this. But it was too late. There was no care and sincerity. That was purely 'value'. Once I left, my 'value' ended. The relationship ended. That's why he has never contacted me since I left.

Based on these two examples, it can be found that whether an employee was worthwhile significantly influenced owners' management strategies and their attitudes towards front area workers. The next part will examine how chefs were treated as far as their values were concerned.

As already mentioned in Chapter 5, when my field work was in the final stage in Firm U, Yi became the only chef. Due to Yi's strong labour market position and the lack of potential available chefs, the owner was highly dependent upon him. Similar to Ming's early status, whenever the owner came up, he would get Yi to have pleasant talks. Because this always happened in the kitchen, it made a strong impression on me.

I remembered when Yi was just introduced by Wen (about a week after I started my field work in Firm U, when Wen was the head chef), together with Shui, another chef introduced by Wen. The owner one day came to the kitchen to find Wen to deliver tasks. Wen, Yi and Shui stood close to each other. The owner did not even have a look at Yi and Shui, as if they were not there, showing absolutely no respect for those two. This significantly

contrasted to the owner's attitude towards Yi after he had become the head chef. I asked Yi whether he could remember that particular time. He answered yes and continued:

He didn't take us seriously at that time. He thought he had higher social status than us. He believed we were subordinate to him. After both Wen and Shui had left, he began to speak to me, began to flatter me and changed his attitude towards me completely because he knew nobody would work for him. A really practical person.

Lewis, I am telling you, every owner in Britain is like this. I have been used to this. You know what? Before Wen started to work here, he had worked in Firm E for three years. When Firm E opened its branch Firm G on Location A, Wen was the head chef there. He was also the general manager, managing basically everything, including designing the menu, stocking, cooking, etc. Wen played the crucial role throughout the initial stage. Believe it or not, he basically could not take a break for a second for an entire day. During the first three months after its opening, its average weekly revenue was £40,000! Firm G wouldn't have been so successful without him.

However, not long after Firm G had developed its dominant position in the market, there was a conflict between its owners. Wen was later sacked, as a result. This has fucking nothing to do with what you have done for them! They (Chinese restaurant owners) will keep you if you have value for them. Once you are not a useful person to them, you would go. It's as simple as this!

In Chapter 5, I mentioned that I once conducted an intensive discussion with Yu about his previous working experiences in ethnic Chinese restaurants. He told me a story which happened when he worked in Firm L.

Firm L was the Sheffield branch of a Birmingham-based restaurant. It was opened in early-2014. After its opening, it suffered a period of severe turbulence, the result of which was that it experienced strong labour turnover. Due to lack of available chefs in Sheffield, the owner managed to find a chef from Birmingham. He promised the chef that he had the right to decide whether or not to leave once a proper chef was found. However, the owner recruited a new chef just the next day after the chef had arrived to help him. On that evening,

the chef from Birmingham was sacked by the owner and forced to leave. After hearing this, he was suddenly at a loss. He told the owner that he had brought everything from Birmingham with him, packed in two big cases, and asked him how he could leave that evening. However, his plea for staying for another day in the accommodation did not work. Yu finally invited the chef to live with him in his apartment on that night. The chef travelled back to Birmingham the next day.

From these empirical examples, it can be concluded that whether or not an employee was regarded to be valuable was basically the only criteria for an owner to decide how he treated them and whether he would like to keep them. This perception was not only rooted in the mind of owners from both Firm D and Firm U, it was also the same for other restaurant owners based on the chat. Friendship and ethnic ties were vulnerable once it conflicted with this evaluation standard. Any resistance and negotiation from employees would never work and probably had negative consequences for themselves if they did not have strong arguing power as far as the extent of their value was concerned.

Employees' perceptions and ideology

The first time I experienced the strong employees' attitude towards work happened in the second week after I started my field work in Firm U. It was during the Easter vacation, a low-demand period. The business at that time was in a poor condition. It was a Thursday evening when Wen went to smoke after dinner, I followed him out. He then spoke to me:

It is the fourth straight day that we generated less than £100 a day. Let's hope things will get better at the weekend (he sighed deeply). It was not unusual that revenues on Friday, Saturday and Sunday altogether could achieve £3000.

I then said to him:

You are so concerned with the business. It's the owner's honour to have you as the head chef.

Wen replied:

I'm not fucking caring about the restaurant. It has nothing to do with me. I'm just caring about my wage. If the business continues to be like this at the weekend, I'm

worrying that my wage cannot be paid on time. It may be postponed to next week. That's why I'm so concerned.

Wen's words clearly expressed his attitudes towards work and the business. His worry about the poor business situation was due to his concern for his wages, instead of the restaurant itself. However, I did not take his idea so seriously at that time. It was not until my return to Firm U to continue my research that I realised this was a widespread consideration about wages among workers. My understanding of employees' worry about the wage issue developed later.

One day, I saw Juan mumbling to himself (Juan was that lazy chef, who worked only for two weeks in Firm U before going back to China). I then asked him what he was saying. He answered to me:

No customers at all.

I replied with a smile:

That would be perfect, wouldn't it? You don't need to work and you get paid. It's everybody's dream.

However, Juan denied my opinion immediately:

It's not what you think. If the business is poor, our wages are then not secured. So, no customers are absolutely not a good sign.

I continued to ask:

As far as I know, the worst condition would be that you get your wage a week or two weeks later, which means that you will finally get your wage in not a long time.

Juan said:

But it is annoying. Really annoying. I have a wife; I have children. I need to support them. That's not good to get the wage late.

In the week after Firm U re-opened, there were few customers. On that Thursday, there was only one table of customers till 7pm. I had been chatting with Yu at the counter from

5pm, while Yi kept playing the App games in the kitchen. Yi later came out and complained to me:

Hi, Lewis, I have completed everything. I've got nothing to do.

I replied to him:

That's wonderful. The owner has never postponed paying you since I came here. Late payment is not the convention in Firm U.

Yi sighed and spoke to me:

I'm just worrying that this might happen.

I then asked him whether he felt stressed when the business was like this. Yi said:

Anyway, I'm in charge of the kitchen. So, you know, a little bit. However, I just did everything exactly as he (the owner) asked me to do. I followed his way to marinate everything. If customers dislike the taste, it's him to blame. Stress? When I receive my wage, I will be relieved. .

Based on these empirical cases, it can be found that 'receiving the weekly wage without delay' was rooted in employees' perceptions. Wen clearly expressed that he had no concern about the business, only his pay. Though Juan and Yi did not directly express this idea, whenever they had worries about the business, they basically worried about their wages. It just simply could not be identified that they had any emotional connection to the business. Indeed, I later realised that it was not just this 'weekly wage' concept that influenced their perceptions towards work and their attitudes towards the owner. The ideology of 'only wage matters' dramatically shaped the working culture and behaviour for employees.

In the final week during the decoration period, all staff were asked to do cleaning in preparation for opening. Working hours were set from 12pm to 5pm during that period, instead of 12pm to 10pm, which was the normal working hours. I once asked Zha which time he preferred, 5pm or 10pm. Zha told me:

It's of course 10pm. We are coming to earn money. Now, we can only earn half.

On Friday, the owner came to check the progress and meanwhile guide the cleaning and food preparation. Yi was allowed to leave at around 7:30pm, though I had to continue as a researcher. About three minutes after he had left, Yi came back. I asked him why he came back. He said with anger:

Damn! I met him (the owner) at the entrance. He asked me to marinate those chicken wings.

I asked him:

Will he pay you for working extra hours?

Yi answered:

Surely not. If he paid, I could work until 10pm or even 11pm. Shit. It is already 7:40pm. I've been working almost three extra hours. He still called me back to do these things. Fuck off.

On a Thursday evening around 11pm, I received a text message from the owner asking me whether I could return to the restaurant in order to work on karaoke because his friends wanted to play from 12am. I told him that I was already on the bed so that I could not do this. The next day when I met Yi, he asked me whether I received the message from the owner last night. I said yes, and I then asked him whether he went to work. He said:

I was on my day off yesterday. I'm working for money. I have no interests about close relationship and friendship. If he would like me to work when I was on my day off, pay me double. Otherwise, there was no way for me to do this for him. I'm telling you, it is nothing but taking advantage of each other.

During the cleaning week before Firm U re-opened, I once asked Yi what types of food the owner was planning to provide. Yi told me that the owner would like to introduce buffet. I then remembered that Yi once expressed several times the idea that operating buffet would be the only choice to survive. I, therefore, asked him whether it was because he gave the suggestion to the owner and the owner finally took his advice. However, Yi said:

No, definitely not. I said nothing to him. This has nothing to do with us (chefs). For us, we only do what we are required. He makes the decision for everything. We just complete our tasks.

Later, the hot pot buffet price was set as £16.99 per person by the owner, as already mentioned in Chapter 3. Three weeks through the adjustment, there were only a few regular customers left. The business began to suffer. Both Zha and Yi clearly realised the change over the past several weeks. We one day discussed this problem at the counter, and I asked them whether they would tell the situation to the owner. Zha answered first:

No, we won't. Everything is determined by him. If he wants to do things in a particular way, we just follow his decision.

Yi continued:

Yes. If there is no task, we take rests; if there are lots of heavy tasks, we just keep working to complete them. It (fewer customers after changing the price) is none of our businesses.

These examples indicated that workers in Firm U regarded wages as their fundamental pursuit. They might occasionally have concerns to the business. However, their real worry was their wages. Was this the case in Firm D?

Jack once told me that one day when Kate checked the kitchen's CCTV at home, she found there was no one in the kitchen. She then called and asked Jack what was happening there. Jack then told this to kitchen staff. After hearing this, Kang burst into tears immediately, saying to Jack that they had been working there for years and just could not get trusted. Kang felt extremely heartbroken and angry. I then asked Jack whether this would lead to Kang's departure. Jack said no. The reason was that Kang was paid a little bit higher than the average wage compared to other Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. Therefore, Jack was confident that such things would not cause troubles as far as resignation. He said if she would like to leave, there had been hundreds of reasons that could let her make the decision.

Indeed, workers' behaviour under this particular working culture could be also captured by owners. On the day when I officially finished my field work in Firm D, I received a text

message from the owner that evening asking me whether I could work on the next day because both of the two part-time workers could not attend. I knew that for an ethnographer, it was necessary to maintain a good relationship with potential participants. I then agreed, though I had formally declared that my job ended that day. When I met Kate the next day, Kate said to me:

Lewis, thank you, thank you very much. I will remember your kindness. You are unlike most of my previous employees, who would never like to come back once leaving here. That's really kind of you.

Based on these workplace evidences, it suggested that 'wage' was basically the only determining factor for employees to decide whether they would like to work. No matter how struggling the business was, it had nothing to do with them. Once the wage was agreed and secured, they rarely bothered with issues such as management styles, rules and policies, ways of control, etc. Though these factors had huge impacts to shape employment relations in small firms based on existing literature, they were less influential for employees in Firm D and Firm U. Contribution, loyalty and ethnicity connection, which were seen as dramatic features in South Asian small firms, could rarely be found in this context.

7.2 Regulatory informality

7.2.1 The NMW breach

According to the National Minimum Wage (2015), during the period of my fieldwork from November 2014 to July 2015, the NMW for workers aged 21 years and over was £6.50 per hour; for those aged 18-20, it was £5.13 and for workers under 18, it was £3.79 per hour. Let us then examine how workers in these two firms were paid. Table 5 shows the hourly wage in the two firms which each type of employee earned during my research.

Table 5 Hourly wage each type of worker earned in the two firms

	Firm D	Firm U
Part-time front area workers	£5	£5

Full-time front area workers	£5.50	£5.70 and £6.70
Kitchen assistants	£5.50	£5
Chefs	between £7.50 and £8.30	between £7.50 and £8.30

The amount in the table for each worker's hourly wage was based on my discussion with them, although I was not able to verify these reports with reference to pay slips. According to the table, the pay level in the two firms for part time front area employees was the same: £5 per hour. Because no employees under 18 ever worked in the two firms, this amount was definitely below the NMW level. Full time front area workers were paid differently. The wage of Jack, the Firm D's manager, was calculated based on an hourly rate. His hourly wage was £5.50. Ming, the initial manager in Firm U, was paid £340 a week. She worked ten hours a day, six days a week. This meant that her hourly wage was £5.70 per hour. Zha, the second manager in Firm U, was paid £400 a week. He also worked ten hours a day, six days a week, which meant that his hourly wage was £6.70 per hour.

For kitchen staff, the only kitchen assistant in Firm D was paid £330 per week, which was equivalent to £5.50 per hour, with working ten hours a day, six days a week. Kitchen assistants in Firm U were all paid £300 per week, with the same amount of working time. Their hourly wage therefore amounted to £5 per hour. Chefs in both sites were paid between £450 and £500 per week, which meant that their hourly wage was between £7.50 and £8.30.

According to these numerical data, only chefs' wages were over the NMW level. Considering that no workers in these two firms were under 21 years of age, for the remaining groups, their wages were therefore basically all lower than the statutory minimum rate, apart from Zha. After realising the widespread underpayment of the NMW, I once asked Yi why the breach of the law was so apparent in ethnic Chinese restaurants. Yi answered:

This (the NMW) has nothing to do with us (Chinese restaurants). It's something to regulate British restaurants. I have been here so many years, working in several different places. No restaurant followed that rule.

I continued to ask:

So, what decides workers' pay levels?

Yi said:

The market. The market decides this. Look, all the part time workers are now paid £5 per hour. It's the same everywhere. Some may pay £5.50, if they like. Cantonese cuisine chefs were generally paid between £450 and £500 per week; while Sichuan cuisine chefs were basically paid between £500 and £550 per week, or even higher. This is the current situation in Sheffield. The market determines the wages.

According to Yi's description, the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector did not regard the NMW as a law to regulate them. The widespread underpayment of workers also served to support Yi's words. Indeed, the 'NMW' was a very obscure concept among both employers and employees in these two firms. During my research, I had discussion with three chefs and two front area managers in these two firms. Nobody knew the exact value of the NMW hourly rate. The answers were along the following lines:

Is it five something?

It is six, right?

Is it six eighty? I cannot remember.

I also discussed with a total of six part-time workers about whether they knew the current NMW level. Four out of the six had not even heard of the NMW. One expressed that she knew the concept of the NMW, but she did not know the level. One guessed that it was around six pounds per hour.

Even for the Firm D's owner, the NMW level was also something outside her knowledge, as she said:

I know. I know the NMW. But I don't know the current level. You know, we don't measure the wage by that. There is a common recognition for wages on particular jobs. We would achieve agreement before they decide to take a job. I tell them how much I'd like to pay them. If they agree, they take the job.

Though there was a tacit understanding of the wage calculation in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, the pay level by any means for most workers was lower than the NMW standard. A potential issue behind the widespread violation of the law was that, once workers were dismissed unfairly or felt unsatisfied with the business for any reason, they might report the NMW breach, which might result in the business being investigated. Therefore, considering the potential danger of breaching the law, the practical labour management practices might constrain owner-managers' choices in sacking employees and their manners in treating employees, and employees' bargaining power to negotiate for their interests would also be enhanced. However, as Chapter 4 already mentioned, apart from chefs, other groups of workers had little negotiating power, especially when it came to the stage of dismissal. So, how should the contradiction be explained?

It is necessary to explore how the owner-managers perceived the violation, why they were confident that it would not cause any potential trouble to their businesses, and why threatening to report the alleged violation by employees would not enhance their negotiation power.

With the question in mind, I once asked Kate, the Firm D's owner, whether she had any worries that employees might report the breach of the NMW. Kate said to me:

No. No. There is no need to worry about this. We would agree on the wage level before they start their work. For example, for those students (part time front area workers), if they would like to work with £5 per hour, they take the job. It's the agreement made by both parties. Once they decide to work here, it means that they accept the offer. So, no, they won't do this. No one has ever done this, kitchen staff and students. This never happens. It's not just me who pays their wages at this level. Every Chinese restaurant in Sheffield does the same. So, I'm not bothered.

According to the conversation, the owner took the underpayment as granted. She had no fear about the possibility of being reported by employees. The confidence arose from her belief that it was an agreed exchange, and because there had been no previous incidents of employees reporting her to the authorities. With no worry about breaching the NMW law, as indicated in Chapter 4, owners dominated the management of kitchen assistants and front area workers. So, why did owners have the confidence that the violation would not be reported, and why had reporting never happened?

In order to explain why employees did not choose to report the NMW breach, and why they accepted a wage much lower than the NMW, I chatted with many workers in the two restaurants. After these discussions, I realised that the ‘Chinese community’ was the biggest constraint upon employees’ choices. As Yi explained:

We can't. It's impossible for us to do this. This is a small community. Everyone (people in the Chinese restaurant sector) knows everyone. We work in different restaurants. Changing work places is rather normal. If somebody does this, nobody would employ him. That's for sure.

I continue to ask Yi:

How about Wen (Wen previously worked in Firm U, and later found his own restaurant)? He has his own business now.

Yi said:

Who knows how long his business could last? He is now working with two partners. I'm telling you. It's highly likely that they split up one day. Once this happens, he still needs to find a job. If he does this (reporting), who will employ him? No way.

Furthermore, I think I once told you. It's a mutual agreement. I (an owner) can offer you that amount of money. If you (an employee) are happy with that, you choose to work; otherwise, you decline the offer. That's it.

Yi's words pointed how the ‘small community’ limited workers’ choices as far as reporting the NMW breach was concerned. If anybody did this, they would lose the chance to be employed forever in this sector. However, why would workers, especially for kitchen

assistants who received wages far lower than the NMW level, choose to work in Chinese restaurants receiving wages far less than the NMW, instead of finding a job in mainstream markets, such as British owned businesses, where they could at least earn a wage with the minimum standard of the NMW? The answer lay in the fact that most kitchen staff had poor English skills. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the recent booming of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield gave a large number of students the opportunity to work as part-time workers to support their lives with a decent wage, considering that their English level made them not fully capable of working in non-Chinese businesses. The situation for kitchen workers was even worse. Among all the kitchen staff in the two firms, apart from one from Malaysia, all the remaining Chinese-origin workers had quite low English ability, though they held a British passport. It was literally impossible for them to fluently communicate in English. As a result, their only destination was Chinese restaurants. Without other possible choices, the community constraint was more significant for workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

Another factor that contributed to employees' unwillingness to report the violation was that all the payment in these two restaurants was 'cash in hand'. This meant that it was hard to have 'proof' of the widespread breach of the NMW regulations. Both Jack and Zha believed that it was impossible for an employee to report the violation successfully as long as the owner declined that he had ever employed the person, as Jack explained to me:

Basically, no one would do this. I've never seen anybody doing this, though conflicts or even fighting once happened between Kate and former part-time workers. The owner can just simply refuse to admit that she has ever employed you.

I continued to ask:

Then, what should they (workers) do if they would like to prove their words?

Jack answered:

Find some witnesses to support you.

I said:

Will anybody do this?

Jack replied:

No. If you do this, who else would employ you?

The cash in hand payment therefore largely reduced the possibility to successfully report the breach of NMW regulations. Together with the community constraint, it seemed that it was unlikely to get any supporters. Therefore, the ‘small community’ further constrained employees’ choices in negotiating with owners for their own interests.

The violation of the NMW regulations in the two firms was not only exhibited by paying workers under the minimum level. Cheating the system by co-operation between owners and workers was another feature, which established some pay-related routines in the two firms.

The first time that I knew about Firm U’s violation of the NMW regulation was after Firm U re-opened after refurbishment. As already mentioned in Chapter 7, the relationship between Yi and me improved a lot during the cleaning stage before Firm U re-opened. With our relationship becoming closer, Yi began to share more information with me. He explained:

We only reported (to the tax authorities) working time from 24 hours to 30 hours a week. This meant that I worked as a part time worker (though kitchen workers were all full-time workers, working six days a week, ten hours a day). We then collected subsidies from the government. It was about forty or fifty something a week.

Because all the wages in the two firms were paid cash in hand, there was no way for the government to trace the real working hours.

Chapter 7 mentioned that before Juan (the lazy chef working in Firm U for only two weeks) left for China, I had a detailed discussion with him. One theme was about his working experiences in Firm U, which has been discussed in Chapter 7, and the other was about cheating the system. Given that I already had the concept of how Yi took advantage of loopholes in the regulation to get money from the government, I then asked Juan whether he did this in the same way. Juan said:

No, I don't. He took subsidies from the government. I don't. I only work here for two weeks. That's not a large amount. Anyway, I did the same when I was in London. I'm telling you. Every Chinese restaurant does the same thing. No Chinese restaurant exactly follows the rule. That (the rule) is something to regulate British restaurants.

If Yi only explained how he cheated the system with the co-operation of the owner, Juan's description demonstrated that it was not a single case just for Yi. It seemed to be widespread in ethnic Chinese restaurants in the UK. The cheating occurred not only in Sheffield, also in London (because Juan previously worked in London). It seemed that this trick was applied to every worker holding a British passport. Dong later also confirmed this.

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, Dong was Yi's friend, joining Firm U during the refurbishment. During that period, there were only Yi, Dong and me working in the kitchen, plus a pot washer from Portugal. Having developed a good relationship with Dong, I one day discussed the problem of deliberately breaching the regulation with him. Dong told me:

Yeah, we (not sure whether 'we' represented Chinese restaurants or kitchen workers, but they basically meant the same in this context) all do the same. I've got two children. My wife needs to take care of them. So, I can get a little bit more. It (the subsidy) is more than £100 a week. My weekly wage is £450. The extra money for a month is basically equivalent to my one week income. That's not bad. We make use of the loophole and get the money that belongs to us.

I was not quite sure why Dong said 'get the money that belongs to us'. By acting in an illegal way, they took the money that indeed belonged to the government. So, why did he make a claim like this? I once had a discussion with Zha, the front area manager in Firm U. Zha was also originally Chinese, and later got a British passport. He also told me that this trick was applied to all the workers who hold a British passport. For tax purposes, they pretended to be part-time workers, only working 24 hours a week. Therefore, a reasonable explanation would be that, due to the widespread application of the breach, staff in ethnic Chinese restaurants already viewed this action as a legitimate way to use the loophole in

the regulation to get extra money. Because everybody did this, they therefore treated it as a 'legitimate' action, despite it being illegal.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to note that the achievement of the cheating was with the owners' help. They collaborated with workers to provide false information so that workers could appear to be working on a part-time rather than full-time basis. In previous chapters, I have discussed different types of conflict and resistance between employers and employees. However, when facing the NMW violation, they co-operated together to cheat the system with a strongly shared tacit understanding of how to behave.

7.2.2 Working time breach

As mentioned in Chapter 5, all of the part-time front area workers were university students. According to the Working Time Regulations (The Working Time Regulations, 2003), the Tier 4 visa for Chinese allows each student to work in the UK for a maximum of 20 hours per week in term time. However, the fact was that no workers and owners in the two firms took this rule seriously. The arrangement of work for both parties never took the law as a reference.

After Firm U's re-decoration, there were only three regular part-time front area workers. All of them were Master's students. According to the roster, one of them worked five days a week, ten hours a day, including both the lunch shifts and the dinner shifts, and another worked four days a week, with the same amount of working hours per day. When they received the wage on the second week, I had discussions with them and was told that they did work based on the schedule on the roster. This meant that they worked fifty and forty hours a week, respectively, which was far more than the limit stipulated by the regulation. The roster was completely determined by a discussion between Zha and these part-time workers. They told Zha when and how long they would like to work. Zha then arranged their working time based on their requirement and the practical business situation. There was no regulation concerned with WTR involved in the discussion.

In Firm D, the ignorance of the regulations relating to working hours was also obvious. When it was in the penultimate week of the first term, because two out of the three part-time workers had already completed their first-term classes, they decided not to come to work in the final week. Cui, as a result, became the only one who could work in the final

week. Average shifts for a part-time worker per week were three to four shifts in Firm D. Due to the other two workers' temporary departure, Cui had ten shifts in the final week according to the roster. For each shift, it lasted at least three hours. Her weekly working hours during that week were no doubt over 30 hours.

Among all the part-time workers in the two restaurants, Jing was the only one who had ever worked in a British restaurant. I one day had a chat with her about her experience during working in that British restaurant, especially issues around the working hours. She told me:

I worked there about over one month as a part-time waitress. The maximum hours I ever worked for a week were 18. They just did not allow me to work any longer. While, for us (Chinese restaurants), nobody cares about this rule. Many even don't know this rule.

It is, therefore, obvious that, similar to the NMW, the regulation about working time had absolutely no effect on both owners and workers' choices. Indeed, when I discussed with Kate, the Firm D's owner, whether she had any worry that students might report to the council about paying the wage below the minimum level, she even said:

Nobody would do this. Moreover, they are students. They are not allowed to work that long. How can they report to the council?

Kate's words clearly demonstrated that she knew that there was a limit for a part time worker. Though it was unlike the case of the NMW, where both owners and workers worked together to deliberately breach the law to prove the false working hours, the same action from them was that they just simply ignored the rule.

7.2.3 Health regulation breach

On the first day of my field work in Firm U, after the staff meal, kitchen workers went back to the kitchen. I then followed them in. They all went to the corner near the back door and began to smoke in the kitchen. That shocked me instantly. If it was in China, it would be absolutely fine to smoke inside a building. However, in the UK, it is obvious that the law prohibits smoking inside any building. They then chatted to each other while smoking. After that, they moved back to start working. About two hours later, the head chef stopped

working. He walked towards that corner, and called another chef. They then started to smoke as they did previously. One week through my research, I even found there was a 'smoking time'. The 'smoking time' took place regularly twice a day: after lunch time and dinner time. Whenever chefs finished lunch and dinner, they would gather together to smoke. It was a routine for them. For the remaining time, they might smoke together or smoke separately based on personal needs. Smoking was then a rather normal activity for chefs inside the kitchen as if there was no a law which constrained that. Indeed, I found that smoking was basically the only time for them to take a rest. Once they finished smoking, they went back to work. There was no exception-smoking took place inside the kitchen, at the corner near the back door.

As mentioned earlier, Firm U also operated karaoke on the upper floor. I later found that smoking on the upper floor was more significant. Karaoke customers could freely smoke inside karaoke rooms and in the lobby. Nobody had ever prevented them from smoking. Firm U even provided ashtrays for them. It was as if they were in China, where the law allowed people to smoke during singing.

In the second week, after I had developed a relationship with them, I one day asked Wen, the head chef, why they were allowed to smoke in the kitchen. Wen said:

It's Ok. See, there is a gap between the two pieces of doors. The air can pass through from outside. He (the owner) already removed the smoke detectors for both floors. The circuit inside the sensor has been cut off. That's for us to smoke.

It's a Chinese restaurant. The law is only set to regulate British restaurants. That's fine.

Wen's words once again separated 'Chinese restaurants' from 'British restaurants', as Zha, Juan and Yi once said. They all believed that Chinese restaurants were immune to British regulation, laws and rules. They had their own ways of dealing with varieties of issues, regardless of types of regulation, laws and rules. Furthermore, according to Wen's description, which I had to take at face-value, it was the owner who cut off the circuit to pave the way for chefs and karaoke customers to smoke. This was similar to the breach of NMW. In that case, it was also a co-operation between owners and workers. Chinese

restaurant owners provided the fake working hours so that workers could get subsidies from the government. A later case supplied support for Wen's words.

As frequently mentioned in previous chapters, Firm U's owner appeared every one or two weeks because he had two other restaurants in Manchester, and Firm U was not exactly a profitable business. One day, during the 'lunch time smoking time', the owner suddenly arrived. Because everybody including me was smoking in the corner, nobody knew the owner had come into the kitchen (there was a turn from the kitchen entry to the corner linked to the back door). When the owner appeared before everyone, the chefs said hello to the owner. The owner then said to everybody:

Go to bring in the oil and lamb from my car.

Having said this, the owner walked away. After hearing the owner's words, everybody put out their cigarettes and then went out. This was an extremely smooth process. There was no comment from the owner on smoking at all. It was obvious that the owner treated smoking inside the kitchen as a legitimate behaviour.

During Firm U's re-decoration period, it was only me and Yi who regularly worked in the kitchen, plus a pot washer from Portugal. One day when we were cleaning, a man went into the kitchen, and he started to chat with Yi in Cantonese. It was obvious that they knew each other. After about ten minutes, the man lit a cigarette, and he passed one to Yi. They then began to smoke. This time, it was just in the centre of the kitchen, rather than at that back corner! The man stayed that afternoon for about an hour. They altogether had at least three cigarettes each. One was beside the hob, and the other two were beside the operation table. For the following whole week, the man appeared nearly every day. Yi told me that he was his friend. He was planning to open his own restaurant on Location A. Because he had finished everything, but had to wait for the certificate, he was free during that period of time. While, the most important thing was that they were just used to smoking in the centre of the kitchen. Regulations and laws about this had no constraints upon their behaviour at all.

Indeed, after my intensive field work in Firm U, I regularly went back to Firm U to get updates. One day when I walked into Firm U's kitchen, Yi was there. I then called Yi to smoke. Yi followed me to the back corner. Before I lit the cigarette, Yi said to me:

Be careful. Several days ago, officers from the health department went to check Firm A's hygiene condition (both Firm U and Firm A were located on Location B). Before they left, they found a butt in the kitchen. It was then forced to shut immediately.

After hearing this, I then expressed that I would not smoke. Yi continued:

That's fine. Just be careful.

He then lit a cigarette; so did I. After we had finished smoking, Yi carefully cleaned the floor and threw the butt into the bin. Previously, there was an ashtray on the floor, and the ash was basically everywhere on the floor. However, I noticed that the ashtray was missing, and Yi's cleaning of the floor also surprised me.

From this case, it can be found that smoking inside the kitchen not only occurred in Firm U. Chefs in Firm A definitely also smoked in the kitchen. Otherwise, there would not have been a butt identified by officers from the floor. The regulation for sure had its effects once the violation had been caught. After Firm A's case, Yi's attitude during smoking changed significantly compared to what he did previously. However, the violation of smoking within an enclosed working area just simply continued in Firm U.

7.2.4 The employment of alleged illegal workers

When discussing the conflict between Mandarin speaking workers and Cantonese speaking workers in Chapter 7, it was mentioned several times that those Cantonese speaking chefs holding a UK passport would like to cause Teng and his wife's employment to be terminated by informing the city council that they were illegal workers. According to Teng's words, his wife and his visa was originally signed to a Chinese restaurant in Cambridge. They later left the restaurant because they thought their wages were too low without the permission of the immigration office. After he had left that restaurant in Cambridge, he worked as a construction worker in a Chinese firm. Due to hardly bearing the heavy work, he gave up that job and put his CV on the internet aiming for a kitchen

assistant. Later, he was contacted by the Firm U's owner and then recruited, as mentioned in Chapter 4. Due to his departure from Cambridge without permission from the Immigration Office, he believed that his visa must have been cancelled.

Unlike previously discussed regulation upon wages and working hours, regulation related to illegal employment did have much constraint for both employees' and employers' choices. During Firm U's refurbishment period I one day had a meal with Teng to get updates of Firm U. Teng told me:

I'm now considering giving up the current job and moving to Nottingham. The immigration office has been recently investigating illegal workers in Chinese restaurants (in Sheffield). Once I was caught, I would be either returned to Cambridge or forcefully repatriated back to China. Several days ago, I had a talk with my friend. They told me the policy had changed, which meant that it was highly likely that I would be sent back immediately once they caught me. There is no immigration office in Nottingham. So, I'm considering moving to Nottingham. Last week, I heard that the head chef in Firm T had left for a break in case of being caught. To be honest, I'm now so worried. That's why I transferred basically all my earnings to China last week. Once I was caught, if I hadn't transferred that money, I would have lost everything. Anyway, the current situation is really intense. My friend in Nottingham is now searching a job for me. Once he finds me a decent job, I will leave for Nottingham.

Though Teng finally did not give up his job in Firm U based on this reason, it was clear that he had obvious fear of how the law might punish him once he was caught. Indeed, later cases further revealed that the regulation relating to illegal workers largely constrained workers' behaviour and choices.

A week after Firm U re-opened, when Teng had been sacked during the refurbishment, Yi one day asked me whether I had any updates about where Teng was working. I told him that two days ago, Teng's WeChat (Chinese version of WhatsApp) showed that he was in Winchester. Yi then said in a teasing tone:

So, this means he has changed his workplace again. I heard that he was in Liverpool at the beginning, then Leeds. You said that he had told you he was in Newcastle. Now, it shows he is in Winchester. You know what? The biggest problem for him is that he is an illegal worker. Not many owners would take the risk to use him considering his illegal status.

The policy changed several years ago. Previously, once you were caught, you just said you forgot to take your ID card. Or, for example, I have the UK passport. You use my information. That was fine. In 2011, it changed fundamentally. The government began to use fingerprints. There is no chance for any illegal worker to survive once they are caught. His visa was signed to London, right? (Indeed, it was Cambridge). You know what? Since 2011, the wage for newly-arrived labour has been paid by bank card so that they have to pay the tax. I once asked him whether he had a bank card. He said no. I asked him whether he had ever paid tax. He answered no, as well. It's no doubt his visa has been cancelled. He has been on the blacklist of the immigration office. It's just about time. See when he will be caught.

I'm telling you. In the first week when I came here, Shui (one of the initial three Cantonese speaking chefs in Firm U) wanted to inform the immigrant office to let him go (due to the conflict between Cantonese-speaking chefs and Mandarin-speaking chefs, discussed in Chapter 6). To be honest, I had this in my mind several times. Finally, I gave it up. Anyway, we are all Chinese (though Yi already holds a UK passport). However, if we had done this, he would have been ejected with no doubt.

Yi's words suddenly made me recall that when Teng was planning to move to Nottingham when the immigration office was investigating illegal workers, he told me that one of his friends in Birmingham was reported. His friend was immediately repatriated after the officer had confirmed her illegal status in that restaurant. It was just as Yi described, once those illegal workers were reported, the result would be definitely a one-way ticket to China. I then further realised why Teng was so nervous during that period of time.

A potential breach of the law resulting from the employment of individuals who were alleged to be illegal workers might also cause trouble for owners. Chapter 5 has mentioned

that Yi had been resentment towards the owner due to the owner's decisions was conflicted with Yi's preferences about how to organise the buffet.

It was a day when we chatted to each other, Yi said to me:

If he continues to make me feel unhappy, I will have the restaurant closed, plus his two restaurants in Manchester. Last time, Chong (a driver) told me that he had altogether eight illegal workers in his two restaurants in Manchester. One illegal worker would cause him to pay £20K. Then, let him prepare the money.

I once told you that if I would like him (the owner) to sack Teng, he must go. You understand? If we are unhappy, we then report this to the council. £20K for one. It would be altogether £40K for him and his wife. Can he (the owner) not sack him (Teng)? Anyway, there is no need to do this if things do not go that far.

Therefore, according to Yi's words, employing illegal workers would be potentially extremely dangerous for ethnic Chinese restaurant owners. With the risk of being fined, owners might make cautious decisions about whether to employ illegal workers. This was supported by my later updates with Teng's working experiences after his departure from Firm U. I occasionally had contacts with Teng after his departure. Teng one day sent me a message telling me that he might take one day off to come to Sheffield. I then asked him where he was working; he texted:

I'm now in a small town.

It's far from the city centre, so nobody would come here to investigate.

It's safe here.

No restaurants within the city would take the risk to employ me, and meanwhile I don't want to leave myself in danger of being caught as well.

If the potential price for employing illegal labour was massive, why were some Chinese restaurants owners reported to still employ illegal workers? Bearing this question in mind, I one day had a discussion with Zha, the Firm U's front area manager. He said:

Erm, there are fewer illegal workers than before. Previously, it was the convention to use illegal workers because illegal workers were cheaper. However, the margin has reduced a lot nowadays. Moreover, supervision on illegal workers was not very intense previously. If you are caught by officers, you can just say you had a few days off from your workplace and work here as a part-time worker. Or, you can just sit in the front area as if you are a customer. They do not investigate customers. However, since the change of the policy (the introduction of fingerprints identification), this no longer works. I do not know why he (the owner) still uses illegal workers. See, there is no big difference on wages. Anyway, fewer and fewer Chinese restaurants would choose to use illegal workers.

The actual wage level was indeed no difference from Teng to other kitchen assistants. They all earned £300 a week. Chapter 5 thoroughly discussed why Teng was recruited based on the analysis from labour market impacts. Due to the sudden departure of the couple (one head chef, one kitchen assistant) and the shortage of labour supply in Sheffield, the owner got Teng from the internet. Furthermore, Teng was originally from the same province as the owner. As analysed in Chapter 7, there was a huge difference for the owners in the two firms in treating with employees according to their different cultural and language backgrounds. Based on these reasons, Teng, as a possibly illegal worker, quickly secured his job in Firm U. When combined with previous analysis, it was not difficult to realise that Firm U's owner did not take regulation as a serious matter. The employment of Teng further indicated that when facing difficulties arising from the external environment, regulation was something that could be ignored.

On the whole, the pressure from the law upon employing alleged illegal workers had bigger constraint over both employers and employees' choices in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. The violation was not generally applied to the whole sector. For example, there had been no alleged illegal workers in Firm D during my research. Both workers and owners would suffer hugely after being caught. For the other breaches discussed above, they were unlikely to be identified. By contrast, illegal workers were easily identified with solid proof. Therefore, small firm owners and workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector took this violation cautiously. However, even in a situation like this, it appears that there were still

owners who were willing to run the risk of employing potential illegal workers. Regulation from their view was indeed something that simply did not apply to Chinese restaurants.

7.3 Summary

Informality has frequently been regarded as a defining characteristic of small firm employment relations, with limited use of written policies and practices, and an ad hoc way of management (Ram 1994; Marlow et al., 2010). Within ethnic minority small firms, however, ethnicity interacts with informality in shaping management practices and shop floor behaviours. Due to the widespread employment of family members, ethnic minority small firms exhibit higher degrees of informality in organising tasks (Ram et al., 2000). This chapter has examined how informality interacted with ethnicity in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector by focusing on the organising informality and regulatory informality.

It first focused on the nature of informality. As one of the defining characteristics in small firms, informality was also present in the two case study firms. It was reflected throughout the labour management practices. Under the informal condition, with tacit understandings on rules and policies, there was a process of continuous informal bargaining on the shop-floor. This chapter mainly focused on three aspects to explore the dynamics: informal negotiation for rule and custom changes, informal negotiation for work arrangements and informal negotiation for personalised policies. Order was then subject to constant informal negotiation between owner-managers and workers, which revealed the nature of the internal political process in small firms (Ram and Edwards, 2010).

The informal mechanism in small firms created space for workers to re-interpret and modify control through the process of negotiation (Moule, 1998), which was the case for this research. This chapter summarised types of fiddles practised in the two restaurants. By focusing on these fiddles and cheating under the particular occupational circumstances, the chapter explained why workers engaged in these activities and discussed the scope for them to manipulate policies and management practices. By examining how fiddles played out under the informal negotiated environment within different contexts in Firm D and Firm U, the chapter explained the dynamic process of negotiated order around consent and resistance between these two parties.

The chapter also analysed the particular workplace cultures for both owners and workers in the two restaurants, revealing how the particular culture affected the employment relations under the context of high degrees of informality. For owners, 'whether or not an employee had value' fundamentally decided the approach in treating and managing labour. For employees, 'whether or not receiving wage on time' strongly shaped their attitudes toward work and the employer-employee relationship. Existing research has frequently demonstrated how 'family ideology' consolidated relationships between owner-managers and workers and facilitated the development of businesses in South-Asian small firms (Edwards and Ram, 2006). However, in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, the concept of 'family ideology' seemed not to exist.

The specific workplace culture, as the reflection of ethnicity, dramatically advanced informal practices and affected the bargaining process. Several examples in this chapter illustrated how staff dismissal was randomly conducted by both restaurant owners once they regarded a particular employees as having no value anymore. It was contingent upon diverse situations, such as the change of demand circles and the irregular labour supply. The last chapter analysed how regional ties could consolidate people from the same cultural and language backgrounds. The relationship between owner-managers and workers from the same region and with a common language was typically strong. They generally trusted each other and had little conflict between them. However, when the 'regional bond' encountered the 'value' evaluation standard, the relationship become rather weak. Friendship and regional ties were vulnerable once it conflicted with this evaluation standard. This particular 'whether or not an employee had value' culture from owner-managers, therefore, further interacted with informal practices in the two restaurants, especially the ad hoc decisions on staff dismissal.

For employees, 'wages' was the determining factor at work. They had little concern with issues such as friendship to owner-managers, ways of control and working environments as long as 'getting (more) money' could be achieved. Most kitchen workers would rather work in a situation with high product market pressures than in a cosy environment with few customers but earning the same. The reason was that working under the environment with high customer demands could ensure that their weekly wage was unlikely to be

delayed. Contribution and loyalty from workers were seen as dramatic features in South Asian small firms (Ram et al., 2000), even though these features could rarely be found in this context. With the predominant ideology in mind, employees engaged in continuous bargaining over reward and pay issues, and over ad hoc tasks in exchange for overtime bonus, though their negotiation powers were largely constrained by the labour market. Co-operation was expected to follow from the efforts of each individual to maximise earnings.

As for the regulatory informality, this chapter discussed how owners and workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector responded to a variety of UK laws. This research examined four aspects of employment practices in relation to laws and regulations. They were: the national minimum wage, working time for student workers, health and safety, and alleged employment of illegal workers. According to interviews and participants' descriptions, law breaches existed in all the four aspects.

Though informal practices involving law breach did exist in South-Asian small firms, it was generally because they were forced to engage in illegal practices, and it was not very common among them (Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). By contrast, most owners and workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector regarded the breach of laws as 'legitimate'. They explicitly expressed that the law was only set up to regulate British restaurants, instead of Chinese restaurants. Their practical labour management practices were rarely developed to take regulations into consideration. During this process, co-operation between employers and employees played a central part in providing a solid foundation for violation. The strong co-operation between these two parties at these times was extremely rare in relation to other activities.

Although these restaurants were in the UK setting, the UK law did not place significant constraints upon them in practice. These ethnic Chinese restaurants operated as if they were in China under UK regulation. From this sense, it was as if they were 'Chinese ambassadors' in the UK. They largely functioned in a Chinese way within the UK context.

Chapter 8 Discussion

This PhD thesis explores employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK economy. The research aim is:

To thoroughly understand how employment relations are experienced in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context and the main factors that shape this process.

As identified in Chapter 2, the ethnic Chinese group has a variety of differences compared to South-Asian small firms, such as the structure of the product market and the labour market, and the internal constitution of labour forces. All of these have been demonstrated to be likely to influence employment relations differently. Furthermore, there has been the suggestion that research into ethnic minority small firms should focus on wider groups, not just South-Asians and Blacks (Vertovec, 2007; Sepulveda et al., 2011). However, there has been no extensive research to explore employment relations in ethnic Chinese small firms in the UK context. This is the rationale for the conduct of this research.

In order to explain workplace behaviours and dynamics between employers and employees, this thesis set out four empirical chapters, from four broad aspects, to examine the nature of the workplace relations in two ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield. The four general aspects are: the product market, the labour market, multi-cultural workforces and the informality-ethnicity interaction.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will review the research questions that serve to achieve the research aim. The second section will discuss the empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions of this research.

8.1 Reviewing research questions and objectives

Research question one: To what extent does the product market influence owner-managers' management strategies in operating their businesses and choices in managing employees?

Management practices and employment relations in small firms have been demonstrated to be sensitive to external environments (Harney and Dundon, 2006; Ram and Edwards, 2010). The ethnic Chinese restaurant sector was extremely competitive and unstable.

Edwards and Ram (2006) indicated that labour management in small firms under uncertain economic environment requires owners to make continuous adjustments to frequently changing market conditions. Within unpredictable external environments, management needs to change its strategies in work organisation to match product market conditions. Within the competitive and unstable product market environment in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, this kind of frequent adaptation to the product market was indeed the case for the two restaurants.

Firstly, the ethnic Chinese restaurants in Sheffield operated in an extremely competitive market. For the past five years, there had been continuous increase in both the supply side and the demand side. For the demand side, there had been a significant rise of Chinese students since 2008. For the supply side, with increasing number of students, a large number of chefs went over to self-employment to start their own businesses. 'Saturation' has been regarded as a major problem within the South-Asian restaurant sector (Ram et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2006). In the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield, saturation was also a major problem. With the continuing rise of new Chinese restaurants largely developed by chefs, the consequence was that the supply side far outnumbered the demand side. Intense competition largely constrained owners' choices to in running their businesses.

The competitive market largely influenced owner-managers' pricing strategies. Within the context of intense competition, the profit margin became extremely low, and customers were sensitive to prices. Due to the low profit margin, owner-managers' might choose to increase their prices after improving the restaurant conditions through refurbishment, which had been done by both Firm D and Firm U. However, with so many restaurants providing similar food, increasing prices in this way immediately negatively influenced customer numbers. As was the case for most South-Asian restaurant owners who were forced to engage in pricing competition under a saturated market (Jones et al., 2006), ethnic Chinese owners also had to choose the same strategy under the competitive market situation.

Secondly, reducing costs was regarded by both owners as the priority in running their businesses. Saving labour costs dominated many aspects of management strategies under the conditions of intense competition, in which expanding profits by raising prices could

hardly be achieved. As Levie and Lichtenstein (2010) suggested, HRM practices in small firms reflect their responses to react to external pressures and balance competing forces. For example, training in the two firms was completely on-the-job. Once a potential candidate was regarded as 'all right' during the trial period (no pay), he would start the work directly and accept extensive training during working. There was no clear time to differentiate 'training' and 'working'. As a worker became more skilled, they had less 'training' and more 'working'. Because labour costs accounted for a large percentage of business total revenues, it was, therefore, unwise for owner-managers to invest in training. With the application of on-the-job training, owners could save a lot in labour costs. Furthermore, the competitive market required owner-managers to use different approaches to retaining regular customers. Quality of service was very important. One of the main reasons that Firm D failed to compete with its direct rival was that Firm D's service quality was much lower than its competitor.

Secondly, customer demand fluctuated frequently in the Chinese restaurant sector over a year. This was due to the change of student numbers. Student numbers followed the change of semester time. When it was during term time, there were large numbers of students. Customer demands, as a result, were in a high level. When it was during vacation time, there were few students and customer demand was, therefore, in a low level. Undertrain environment and demand fluctuation have been demonstrated to influence management practices in small firms to a large extent (McMahon, 1996; Edwards and Ram, 2006). This nature of demand fluctuation influenced owner-managers' management practices to a large extent. Pressures from the turbulent market created massive management problems.

Recruitment and dismissal completely followed the demand change. In responding to the uncertain environment, the 'rational' choice from owner-managers to keep down the labour costs was to control the number of workers. A common strategy owner-managers in these two restaurants followed was to recruit staff before their restaurant transited into busy periods, and dismiss staff before it moved into low demand periods. Secondly, working under a situation like this, labour management was largely dominated by autocratic control in the two firms, as described by Friedman (1990). Both of the owners frequently intervened in workers' performance. Rules and policies were constantly adjusted to

accommodate market pressures. Owner-managers had to impose harsh control upon workers to intensify their work efforts. Pressures from the product market were passed down from owner-managers to employees.

Indeed, if recruitment and dismissal practices could ideally adapt to the change of customer demands, it would be expected that running a business at least from this aspect might fully handle the uncertainty. However, the actual problem was that adaptation could not always fit into the demand model. In order to control the labour costs, the practical labour management practices conducted by owner-managers in face of demand fluctuation always led to two types of problems: early adjustment (employee dismissal during transition from high demand period to low demand period) and late adjustment (employee recruitment during transition from low demand period to high demand period). The consequence was that there had been always fewer workers than it actually needed, which created massive problems in management.

Finally, the thesis analysed how location influenced management strategies in operating their businesses (Rechters and van Kempen, 2000). One useful strategy for South-Asian small restaurant owners to avoid saturation was to re-locate their businesses to remote areas or less competitive areas (Ram et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2006). However, this strategy can be never applied to ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in Sheffield. With the contrast between Location A and Location B, it illustrated how owners were forced to adapt to locational limits. For Location B which could hardly access large numbers of students, owners were necessary to re-structure their businesses to focus on non-Chinese within nearby neighbourhoods. In facing of the spatial constraints, ethnic Chinese restaurant owners generally could not have any positive strategic choices, but to be adaptive.

Research question two: To what extent does the labour market influence shop floor behaviours and dynamics between owner-managers and workers?

When analysing the influence from the product market, the thesis has revealed that there had been continuous rise of ethnic Chinese restaurants over the past five years. These new Chinese restaurant owners were mainly chefs and kitchen assistants. With enough savings and continuously rising Chinese students (the rise of customer demands), the established their own businesses. The result was that there had been short supply for kitchen workers

in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, which formed the basis of the labour market situation. It is suggested that the level of owners' dependence upon workers and the supply of labour have significant influence upon shop floor dynamics between owner-managers and workers (Goss, 1989b; Scase, 2005). With the short supply of kitchen labour in the sector, the discussion treats chefs and kitchen assistants as two separate groups and examine the shop floor relations based on owners' different levels of dependence upon them. The discussion was organised based on the suggestion by Ram and Edwards (2010) that the study of employment relations in small firms should follow the core of industrial relations studies – conflict and consent. It examines the power dynamics and the political process between owner-managers and the two group workers under the particular labour market.

For kitchen assistants, though labour shortage was the problem for most ethnic Chinese restaurants, there had been a low level of dependence of owners upon kitchen assistants. Due to the low level of dependence, kitchen assistants were in a weak labour market position, which then shaped the balance of power in these Chinese restaurants. Owners had absolutely authority over these workers. It was the employer's perception which was imposed upon the employment relations; decision-making was entirely controlled by owners. As a result, kitchen assistants' subordinate position largely constrained their negotiation power. Structural limits from the labour market meant that employee resistance was difficult. Negotiation over effort bargaining, wage and other interests were not acceptable by owners. None of the kitchen assistants successfully negotiated for a pay rise during the period of the field work. The fact that dismissal and replacement could be easily conducted gave them no choices but to be compliant. Consent was basically the only choice for them under the particular labour market condition. Owner-managers' control over kitchen assistant was generally Direct Control (Friedman, 1990).

By contrast, ethnic Chinese restaurant owners had high levels of dependence upon chefs. Together with the supply shortage from the labour market, chefs had strong negotiation power over effort bargaining and wage related issues, and their job security was largely stable. They actively engaged with direct negotiation upon their interests. Within the context of having limited available good chefs, their strong labour market positions

strongly influenced owner's attitudes and control strategies towards them. Chefs' dominant labour market position gave them large scope to manoeuvre for their interests. Under the particular labour market situation where there had been short supply of available labour, resistance, effort bargaining and informal negotiation were hardly tolerated by owners for kitchen assistants. By contrast, power dynamics between owners and chefs were significantly different. Owners were unwilling to have direct conflict with chefs. Owners' authority was challenged on varieties of occasions. Owner-managers' control over chefs was generally Responsible Autonomy (Friedman, 1990).

Another group is the front area workers. In contrast to kitchen workers, there had been sufficient supply for front area workers. The reason is that part-time front area workers in these two sites were all students. The number of students who were willing to take a part-time job was large. The waiting list was always full. Owners were never worried about recruiting front area part-time workers. Furthermore, front area workers did not require any special abilities and skills, which meant that owners had little dependence upon front area workers. As a result, with large supply of students and owners' low level of dependence, front area workers were in the weakest position. When compared to kitchen assistants, though the negotiation power for kitchen assistants was weak, their job security might be stable under a particular period of time when the product market was stable. However, dismissing a part-time student employee could happen at any time with any reason by the owner. Managerial control under this situation was simply imposed. Students, in face of the structural constraint, were absolutely powerless. They had no power to positively respond to the direct control. Employment relations, as a result, were fundamentally shaped by owners' opinion according to the nature of the labour market.

Edwards and Scullion's (1982) research in exploring control and resistance in workplaces suggested that it was necessary to understand why conflict happened in one situation but not in another. By analysing different labour market positions and different levels of owners' dependence, it demonstrated how consent and conflict developed on the shop floor for the three different groups of workers.

Research question three: How do potential conflict and resistance within multi-cultural workforces impact employment relations on the shop-floor?

In the specific context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, it basically consisted of three groups: Mandarin speaking workers, Cantonese speaking workers and British-born-Chinese. Existing research in exploring employment relations in ethnic minority small firms rarely had discussion about the heterogeneous character within ethnic groups. Chan et al., (2007) demonstrated that there was potential conflict and resistance between ethnic Chinese groups' members with different origins, which suggested that co-ethnicity under the ethnic Chinese context should not be simply treated as a homogeneous group. However, existing literature had no detailed explanation of the dynamics between different group numbers. In addressing the gap, it is to examine how the multi-cultural workforces influenced the employment relations and the labour management process.

The first problem arising from multi-cultural workforces was the communication difficulty. Because different languages were being spoken, direct verbal communication was sometimes difficult between different groups of members. The problem was mainly exhibited in the communication between Cantonese speakers and the other two groups. In Firm D, because of the language barrier, guessing became a regular practice of employees to understand the owner. Acceptance and adjustment to the owner's orders from employees were, as a result, always conducted by guessing what the owner would like them to do according to the particular situation. Mutual adjustment in small firms was believed to be largely shaped by informal negotiations and tacit understandings (Ram, 1999). Under this particular environment, tacit understandings played a critical role in accommodating owner-managers and workers from different backgrounds. Wapshott and Mallett (2013) noted that the negotiation of employment relations, especially in ambiguity-intensive small professional service firms, frequently drew on the perception of others' value or interests instead of on any direct communication with them. The concept of intersubjectivity denoted the underlying processes of mutual adjustment. Indeed, due to the language barrier, intersubjectivity significantly influenced employees' behaviours in responding to the owner's words. However, the adaptation based on guessing in practice could not always catch up with the owner's real meanings. Once mistakes occurred due to misunderstanding, what followed next would be conflicts and tensions between the owner and employees.

Another issue that was dramatic within the context of multi-cultural workforces was that owners' trust towards people from different groups was significantly different. Firm D's owner had a Cantonese background. As a result, apart from full time front area workers, only one part-time worker with a Cantonese background was allowed to use the till. All the remaining Mandarin background workers were not allowed to use the till, due to her distrust. Firm U's owner had a Mandarin background. As a result, he did not trust anybody who had a Cantonese background to be in charge of the karaoke business. Under the multi-cultural working environment, the assumptions and prejudices of the two owners largely shaped their attitudes towards labour from different backgrounds. Labour management was, as a result, practiced by the owners differently in treating workers from different groups. Atkinson (2008) suggested that psychological contract might provide a more nuanced exploration of the employment relations by considering both employer and employees perspectives in advancing the understanding of employment relations in small firms. In this context, with the strong cultural and language influence, there had been low-trust between different group members with little obligation.

The key focus was to examine the how the potential conflict and resistance between members from different cultural groups affected their shop floor behaviours. Though people seemed to share an ethnicity, with different traditions and different perceptions of people from different parts of the country, an inherent antagonism and conflict between these three parties negatively influenced the shared ethnicity. Family and kinship ties were believed to be the key character in developing ethnic businesses and shaping management practices (Ram et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2006). However, in this Chinese restaurant sector, co-ethnicity and kinship ties were two distinct concepts. It is the regional ties that largely shaped the shop floor behaviours within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. The regional ties basically referred to the conflict between northern people speaking Mandarin and southern people (specifically people from Guangdong province and Hong Kong) speaking Cantonese. Antagonism was rooted in each group towards another. The result was that resistance and conflicts between members in the two parties were frequent. Furthermore, antagonisms also existed between Mandarin-speaking workers from different regions (provinces). Their behaviours and attitudes on the shop floor towards people from other backgrounds were largely influenced by resistance and opposition. While to outsiders

Chinese people may appear somewhat homogenous, historical tensions and traditional divisions persist, alongside of course regional senses of kinship. Therefore, understanding of the mechanism of the struggle between groups from different regions is crucial to explain co-operation and conflicts in exploring employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK context.

Research question four: How does informality interacting with ethnicity shape management practices and workplace behaviours?

It has been demonstrated that informality significantly interacts with ethnicity in shaping shop floor behaviours and patterns of employment relations in South-Asian small firms. They functioned together mainly in two ways – organising informality (Ram et al., 2000; Ram et al., 2002) and regulatory informality (Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Jones et al., 2006). With the acknowledgement of the importance of drawing these two concepts together in studying employment relations in ethnic minority small firms, this questions aims to explore how informality interacting with ethnicity affects employment relations under the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Two aspects were mainly discussed: organising informality and regulatory informality.

As for the organising informality, informal practices dominated management practices in both Firm D and Firm U. There were basically no written rules to guide management processes such as recruitment and selection, training, supervision, pay arrangements and staff exit. Management practices were conducted by customs, tacit understandings and direct oral communication. In exploring the dynamics of organising informality, the analysis mainly examined three aspects of activities on the shop floor: informal negotiation for rule and custom changes, informal negotiation for work arrangements and informal negotiation for personalised policies. Examples illustrated how work was structured in an ad hoc way and there was a process of continuous informal bargaining on the shop-floor. Order was subject to constant informal negotiation between owner-managers and workers, which reflected the nature of working organisations in most small firms (Marlow, 2005).

Moule (1998) has demonstrated that the informal mechanism in small firms could create space for workers to re-interpret and modify control through the process of negotiation. With extensive hours of field work in the two firms, the researcher had the opportunity to

realise different kinds of fiddles. The cheating was summarised in three types: personal cheating, cheating by informal personal connection and cheating by intergroup relations. 'Cheating by informal personal connection' was caused due to recruitment conducted by personal networks. Trust arising from the informal personal connection between managers and workers gave them the opportunity to cheat the system and created scope for fiddles. The other two types of cheating occurred because of the informal management structure. Without clear rules and supervision to guide the management, the informal relationship between employees and employers left workers with plenty of scope to manipulate and cheat the informal management system. The occurrence of the fiddles and cheating further demonstrated that management in the two firms was organised with high degrees of informality.

Indeed, owner-managers, in many instances, clearly knew the fiddles workers practised, and they tolerated their cheating by turning a blind eye. Under these conditions, their choices to ignore workers' fiddles were largely mediated by external conditions. For example, from the product market point of view, when it was during the high demand periods, owners feared losing staff. Furthermore, key employees' strong labour market position also influenced owner-managers' decision to tolerate such fiddles. Both Harney and Dundon (2006) and Edwards et al., (2006) suggested that employment relations in small firms required analysis to identify a complex interaction of both internal and external factors. It can be found that in these two firms, informality and negotiated order functioned together with the product market and the labour market to shape every day shop floor experiences between owner-managers and workers.

It also analysed the particular workplace culture and ideology for both owners and workers in the two restaurants, revealing how the particular culture affected the employment relations under the context of high degrees of informality. Existing research has frequently demonstrated how 'family ideology' consolidated relationships between owner-managers and workers and facilitated the development of businesses in South-Asian small firms (Ram et al., 2000; Edwards and Ram, 2006). However, in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, the concept of 'family ideology' seemed not to exist. For owners, 'whether or not an employee had value' fundamentally decided the approach in treating and managing

labour. Any resistance and negotiation from employees would never work and probably had significant negative consequences for themselves if they did not have strong negotiating power as far as the extent of their value was concerned. For employees, 'earning and wage' shaped their attitudes toward work and the employer-employee relationship. No matter how struggling the business was, it had nothing to do with them. Once the wage was agreed and secured, they rarely bothered with issues such as management styles, rules and policies, ways of control. The specific workplace culture within the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector further interacted with informality in shaping management practices.

The specific workplace culture, as the reflection of ethnicity, facilitated informal practices and effort bargaining process in the two restaurants. For owner-managers, once they regarded particular employees without value anymore, they would sack them immediately. Informal practice, especially staff dismissal, was strongly affected by this evaluation standard. Research question 3 illustrated how regional ties could build strong relationship for people from same cultural and language background. However, the regional bond might completely lose its function when it conflicts with the owners' value oriented judgement criteria. For employees, with 'getting (more) money' as the almost only principle at work, it enhanced their frequency of informal effort bargaining for monetary exchange, especially on ad hoc tasks. Though employees' bargaining power was largely constrained according to their labour market position, as discussed in Chapter 5, their particular working culture interacted with the labour market in shaping their informal negotiation with owner-managers, which further demonstrated that there has been complex internal play between internal and external forces in shaping shop floor behaviours and employment relations in small firms (Atkinson et al., 2008).

As for the regulatory informality, existing research has demonstrated that laws and regulations, mainly the NMW and WTR, could have a variety of impacts upon small firm practices (Arrowsmith et al., 2003; Carter et al., 2009; Atkinson et al., 2016), especially for South-Asian small firms (Ram et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2006; Ram et al., 2007). Regulation interacted, externally with product markets and labour markets and internally with informality and particular management structures, to shape labour management

practices and employment relations in small firms. The analysis discussed how owners and workers in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector responded to a variety of UK laws.

This research discussed four aspects of employment practices in relation to laws and regulations. A large percentage of workers were reported to be paid below the NMW level. By discussing with part-time student employees about their working hours, it revealed that their weekly working hours were far beyond the limits set by the WTR. Smoking inside one firm was freely practised, and it was suggested by workers that this existed in other Chinese restaurants. Illegal workers were also reported to be employed in one of the two firms. Based on the analysis, the concept of the ‘Chinese ambassadors’ was developed to describe these ethnic Chinese restaurants. Though these restaurants were operated in the UK context, they largely behaved in their own ways. UK laws had limited constraints on them.

These breaches meanwhile consolidated the relationships between owner-managers and workers to some extent because conducting the regulation violation required strong co-operation between these two parties, which itself was rare on the shop floor in these two restaurants. In contrast to employer-employee conflicts caused by a variety of factors such as the product market competition, labour market pressures and regional hostility, collaboration between them was dramatic in practicing these informal actions with tacit understandings.

8.2 Contributions

In order to achieve the research aim, four research objectives were identified. Up to this point, all the four research questions have been answered. Research findings revealed how employment relations were experienced between owner-managers and workers in the two restaurants and what types of factors shaped the dynamics between the two parties.

This section will first synthesise the findings and discuss its empirical contributions. The next section will draw out a few key concepts based on this research and adapt the framework when comparing to existing research aiming to achieve a theoretical contribution. Finally, the methodological contribution will be discussed.

8.2.1 Empirical contributions

The nature of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector

Chapter 3 justified why it was appropriate for this research to choose two restaurants, basically one up-market restaurant and one down-market restaurant.

Researchers have demonstrated that there is diversity and complexity existing in the social relations between owner-managers and workers in small firms. As Edwards and Ram (2010) suggested, it was necessary to capture variation under different situations and the subsequent significance to employment relations. With an application of this view, it was possible to grasp the complexity and heterogeneity to explain how a variety of factors played out to shape dynamics between employers and employees. For example, as Ram et al. (2001) mentioned, although informality was seen as the basic feature in small firms compared to large companies, it was necessary to understand its meaning to employment relations in different contexts. Once circumstances change, the nature and extent of informality would adapt to these changes. Therefore, understanding employment relations in small firms requires capturing the complexity and heterogeneity within this process in a dynamic manner. Chapter 2 already identified a variety of contextual factors which may shape the employment relations differently, and examined how the change of contexts both externally and internally would lead to subsequent impacts upon employment relations. Furthermore, a comparative study can give researchers the chance to draw on the similarities and differences among a variety of contexts to increase the power of analysis (Yin, 2009).

For this particular research, the 'difference' made sense in that, externally, the product market position and labour supply should be different between an up-market restaurant and a down-market restaurant so as to reveal how different layers of external forces influenced labour management practices. When considering specific features inside the businesses such as multi-cultural workforces and cheap part-time student employees, the resulting choices from different external environments might influence owner-managers' practices in regulating these particular types of labour, which might identify different internal dynamics. Therefore, based on this analysis, this research chose one up-market restaurant and one down-market restaurant as research sites.

According to the analysis above, it was expected that labour management practices would, to some extent, exhibit different features due to the contextual differences between an up-

market restaurant and a down-market restaurant. However, as shown from the empirical data, management in the two restaurants was largely conducted in the same way and the relationships between employers and employees in the two restaurants were also basically the same. So, how should we explain this?

Firstly, both of the firms operated within a similar product market environment. The nature of the product market was highly competitive and uncertain. Under the same environment of intense competition and frequent demand fluctuation, owner-managers' choices were influenced largely in the same way. For example, with their competitors providing similar food at similar prices, profit margins for both Firm D and Firm U were extremely low. The competitive environment decided that their pricing strategy had to match the same level as their competitors and their primary concern was to reduce labour costs as much as possible. Their recruitment, dismissal and training practices were exactly the same to adapt to the demand change.

Secondly, the labour market environment in which the two case study firms operated was also basically the same. The whole sector experienced labour shortage for kitchen workers. Front area workers were all part-time students. Workers' negotiating power in both of the restaurants were largely dependent on their labour market positions, with influence from the product market to some extent according to the level of demand. Specifically, chefs had strong negotiating power due to the owners' high dependence upon them. Kitchen assistants in both places were easily replaced with little negotiation power. Front area part-time student workers were completely powerless to negotiate for their interests.

Based on the empirical analysis, it can be found that the two restaurants operated within a similar external environment, they had exactly the same type of employee profile, and management practices in the two restaurants were also largely the same. It, therefore, seemed that the distinction between one which was a little lower and the other which was a little higher was overridden. It was indeed less to do with the subtle distinction within this particular context. The deciding features were whether the restaurant was in busy periods or non-busy periods, and whether a worker was a chef or a student worker. These were the fundamental factors to shape employment relations in the two firms. It was not necessarily about whether it was a higher-end restaurant or a lower-end restaurant. Actually,

people were treated the same in these two businesses, not in a particular restaurant. The distinction between up-market and down-market was almost a misleading clue at the beginning. In practice, that level of subtlety did not exist. Management strategies were largely decided by the unstable and intensively competitive product market. Employees' effort bargaining and negotiated power was dependent upon their labour market positions. The two restaurants had dramatic similarities in how they run. The dynamics in the two restaurants were also largely the same. They were managed also in quite similar ways. The two businesses are fairly similar, regardless of the difference in their market positions. It was indeed the nature of the markets which dominated the managerial practices and employment relations in the two firms.

Curran and Stanworth (1979) once argued that social relations in small firms were not only explained by the 'small' size. The 'size-determinant' explanation was inadequate and over-simplified because it ignored other constraints and influences on social relations in small firms. One of the key findings was the sectorial influences. In their particular research, it was between the printing industry and the electronics industry. Patterns of control and social relations were dramatically different in the two industries. Industrial differences were explained as the main reason. For my research, in this particular ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, it can be found that the markets exerted significant pressures over management and employment relations. It indicates how the nature of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector influences the managerial practices and shop-floor experiences. It is the industry that fundamentally shapes the employment relations and workplace behaviours, not their particular market positions.

Ethnic twist

In the two firms, apart from a pot washer in firm U from Portugal, all the staff were ethnically Chinese. Firm D's owner once tried a non-Chinese to take a dish washer job. However, he was sacked within three days. From this example, ethnicity had the highest priority. Being an ethnic Chinese almost appeared to be the prerequisite to working in a Chinese restaurant. Another issue that definitely strongly linked to the shared ethnicity in shaping working practices between owner-managers and workers in the two firms was the regulation breach. The widespread violation of laws was attributed to their identity of being

ethnic Chinese. Laws and regulations were believed to only constrain British businesses, instead of Chinese businesses. Shared ethnicity bonded owners and workers together to breach the law collaboratively. However, apart from these two aspects, shared ethnicity within the ethnic Chinese context seemed to influence workplace relationships negatively.

The workplace in both these two firms comprised three groups of workers: Mandarin-speaking workers, Cantonese-speaking workers and British-born-Chinese. Chan et al., (2007) indicated that co-ethnicity under this context should not be simply treated as a homogeneous group, though with no detailed explanation of the dynamics between different group numbers. This research goes further than identifying the problem. Empirical data has illustrated that an inherent antagonism between these three parties strongly shaped their behaviours. Conflicts and resistance were frequent on the shop-floor between different group members. Though people seemed to share a Chinese ethnicity, with different traditions, different language being spoken and different perceptions of people from different parts of the country, their workplace relationships were negatively impacted by shared ethnicity. Existing literature focusing on South-Asian small firms has demonstrated that ethnic minority firms were generally involved with kinship ties. Though workers within the same community might not be exactly family members, they shared the family culture and subsequent kinship tie. It was confirmed the importance of kinship ties in supporting the initiation and development of ethnic minority enterprises (Ram, et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). Although subsequent studies acknowledged that ethnic minority businesses were also largely shaped by the wider social-political-economic environment (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Jones et al., 2014), they never denied the importance of how ethno-cultural features and shared ethnicity positively helped to bond owners and workers in ethnic minority small firms. For example, Jones et al. (2002) mentioned that recognising the impact from the wider context was not intended to eliminate the role of social capital. Kinship ties were highly effective informal resources for ethnic minority entrepreneurs. By contrast, within the ethnic Chinese group, while to outsiders China may appear a somewhat homogenous entity, historical tensions and traditional divisions persisted, alongside a particular regional sense of kinship. The regional tie was basically reflected as the conflict between northern people speaking Mandarin and southern people (specifically people from

Guangdong province and Hong Kong) speaking Cantonese. Furthermore, antagonism also existed between Mandarin speaking workers from different regions (provinces).

It was, therefore, clear that in the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, a dramatic feature that was different from existing research into ethnic minority business studies was that co-ethnicity and kinship ties were obviously two separate concepts. Co-ethnicity in this context did not give rise to kinship ties. Under the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, the social relations as far as the co-ethnicity was concerned was not just about the country of origin or the ethnic Chinese heritage. The point of co-ethnicity or shared ethnicity within this context was too broad. Regional identity was the over-riding factor influencing how workers perceived other workers, reflected in whether a person was from the north or the south, what language was being spoken and what cultural characteristics were being shared. Co-ethnicity and so called kinship ties had little impacts upon behaviours in the workplace. Regional ties were much more significant once workers were inside the firms. Existing research in analysing ethnicity indeed largely underplayed the role of regional identities. In the Chinese workforce, 'region' had profound implications to affect shop-floor relations between employers and employees, and employers and employees.

It was then necessary to draw out the concept of 'ethnic twist'. The ethnic twist, in this context, basically referred to the conflict and antagonism between Cantonese-speaking employees from the Southern area and Mandarin-speaking employees from the Northern area. It was the region and language that had major impacts: internally upon employment relations, vertically between employers and employees, and horizontally between employers and employees. The regional gap, the language difference and the cultural diversity altogether developed barriers between employees from different groups. Co-ethnicity in this instance seemed to be a double-edged sword. It helped ethnic Chinese to get into the workplace. However, once they were inside these businesses, shared ethnicity worked more as a constraining factor to connect people. It was the ethnic twist that began to come into play. The ethnic twist negatively influenced social relations between different group members during the day-to-day work.

Socio-economic factors trump ethno-cultural factors

Empirical analysis has shown that the ethno-cultural factor, that is the co-ethnicity of being ethnic Chinese, has some relevance in the two restaurants. It provided the basis for workers to get into those restaurants. To begin with, co-ethnicity in the first place was no doubt important. However, once workers got inside these firms, co-ethnicity seemed to be not very important in practice. There were loads of other factors trumping it. Externally, there were the product market and the labour market; internally, there were the ethnic twist and the particular workplace culture.

Jones et al., (2012) mentioned that recognising the impact of the wider context was not intended to eliminate the role of ethno-cultural capital. Kinship ties were a highly effective informal resource for ethnic minority entrepreneurs (Ram et al., 2007). Employment relations in the South-Asian restaurant sector have been characterised as exhibiting a strong community connection and strong unity between co-ethnic workers shared with trust, contribution and dedication (Ram et al., 2000). However, in the Chinese context, the consideration of the ethno-cultural factor was seemingly less influential in terms of how people were managed. These positive features were largely absent in the two restaurants. Empirical data, according to interviews and participants' accounts, has suggested that there had been commonly disregarding of UK laws as being ethnic Chinese, ethno-cultural factors, therefore, had little impact within this context.

Co-ethnicity worked almost like a marker, or a qualifier. It was not something that played a major role influencing employment relations. There were a number of other factors, such as the product market, the labour market and the character of ethnic twist, which had major impacts. In most conditions, being ethnic Chinese was less important, or less prominent than other pressures. Though ethnicity mattered, it did not explain shop-floor behaviour and employment relations a great deal. Co-ethnicity was trumped by the markets and regional ties in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. Everybody was ethnic Chinese, but it clearly had evolved to affect working experiences. In the day-to-day operation of the firm, the importance of shared ethnicity gave way to other factors. The ethno-cultural factor in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, therefore, had different implications. Within this context, it requires a broader understanding of ethnicity and a broader understanding of

how different elements of the product and labour market and a variety of internal factors interacted to trump the ethno-cultural influence.

Students: specific resource for ethnic Chinese restaurant owners

Women's labour has been regarded as the key factor in the success of ethnic businesses (Ram, 1994; Ram et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2006). Firstly, the supply of female labour was generally cheap because of their under-valued skills and dependent relationship to men. Secondly, due to their subordinate position, the survival of ethnic enterprises was also sustained upon the exploitation of minority women to expand their values. In the two case study firms, it was the fact that 100% of part-time workers in the front area were students. The objective of this question was to capture whether students in ethnic Chinese restaurants play a role that is similar to that of female workers in South-Asian small firms, and to explore the value of student workers to owner-managers and the implications for management practices.

Firstly, compared to chefs and kitchen assistants, the labour market position of part-time student workers was the weakest. For kitchen assistants, though they were also in an inferior labour market position, most of them could at least secure their jobs as long as the business was in a relatively stable state, such as during the stage between two transition periods from the product market. However, the work status of student workers was completely vulnerable. They could be dropped from the roster at any time, for any reason, decided by either owners' or managers' perception. The reason was that Chinese students provided a pool of potential candidates who would like to get a part-time job, plus the fact that front area servicing work did not require specific ability. Owners could find replacements easily from their waiting lists. In a situation like this, owners had absolutely no dependence upon any worker. Managerial control within this situation was simply imposed. Students in face of the structural constraint were absolutely powerless. Employment relations between part-time student workers, as a result, were fundamentally shaped by owners' perceptions.

Students functioned as a particular resource to owners in two respects. Firstly, by employing student workers, owners could save significant amounts of labour costs. In both of the two case study firms, front area student workers were all paid £5 per hour, compared

to the National Minimum Wage of £6.50 per hour during the period of my research. Secondly, part-time student workers enabled owner-managers to exert flexible control. Because part-time workers were paid by the hour, owners could adjust the number of workers hourly according to the number of customers each day. Furthermore, as already mentioned, customer demands frequently fluctuated during the year according to the dates of semesters. By employing part-time student workers, owners could adapt to the demand fluctuation swiftly. This type of easy replacement and dismissal could otherwise have been difficult to conduct if they had employed full-time workers. This type of flexible control, in turn, also helped to reduce labour costs significantly.

Indeed, ethnic Chinese restaurants were also an opportunity for students. Nearly all of the student workers in the two restaurants stated that the fundamental reason for them to find a part-time job was to get extra money to reduce economic pressures for their families. And meanwhile, they were also clear that their English level was not adequate to earn a job in most non-Chinese businesses. Chinese restaurants, as a result, could provide the chance for them to get a part-time job. Ram (1994) mentioned that, in suffering from racism, South-Asian female workers had restricted options to get a job. South-Asian small firms, however, gave them the opportunity to get employed, though they experienced strong exploitation and harsh control. In this sense, ethnic Chinese restaurants were also the main employment resource for ethnic Chinese students.

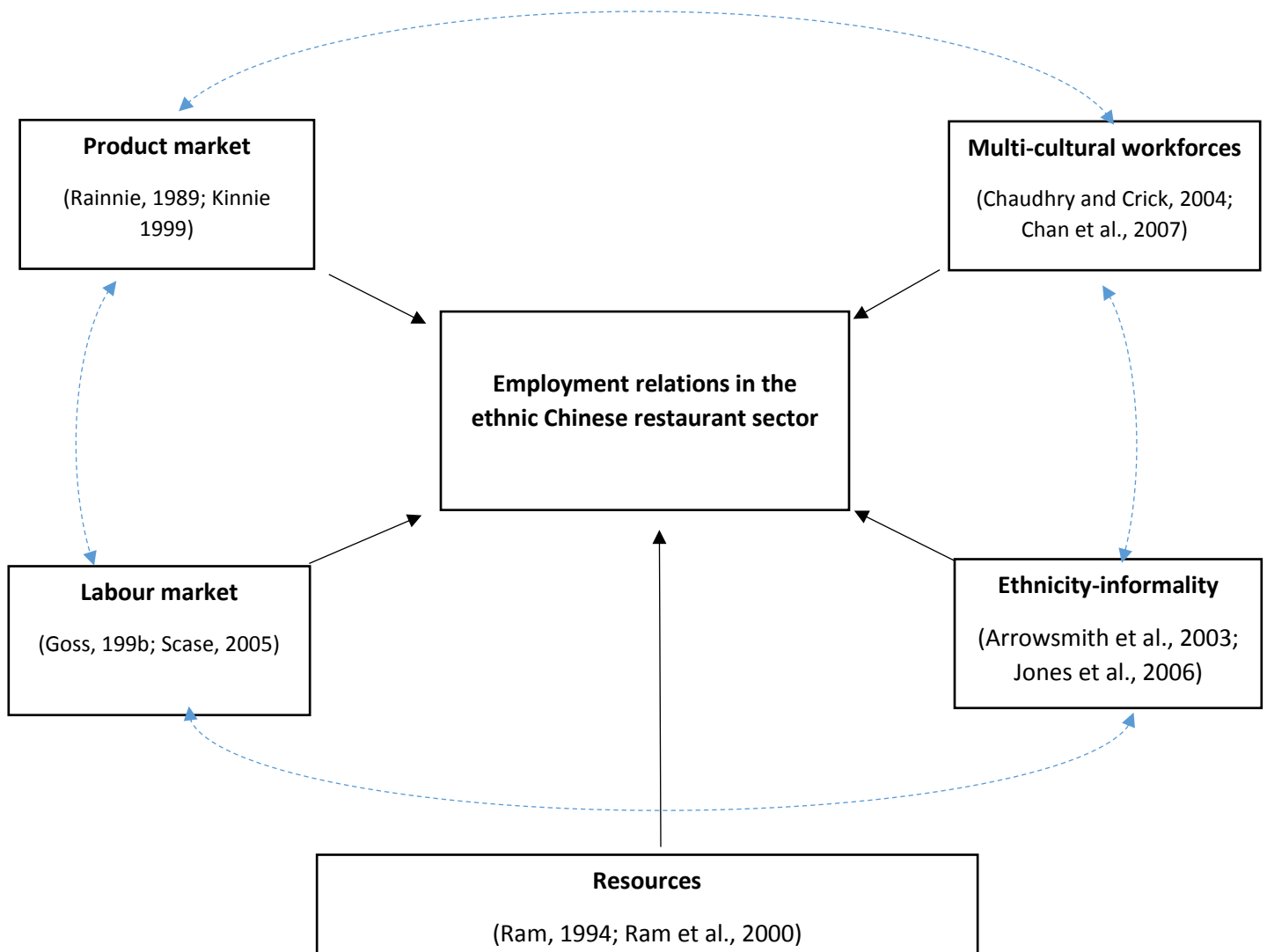
8.2.2 Theoretical contributions

Section 2.3.4 has developed a framework that is used to guide this research. This section will review the analytical framework and develop it, based on the empirical analysis, into a new framework that might be applied to further research into employment relations in ethnic minority small firms.

Chapter 2 (Literature Chapter) has demonstrated the importance of the product market, the labour and the interaction between ethnicity and informality in shaping management practices and employment relations in ethnic minority small firms. Within the context of the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, empirical analysis has illustrated how these three themes influence the dynamics of employment relations and shop floor behaviours. Having finished the discussion, it can be concluded that these three themes can be applied to the

ethnic Chinese restaurant sector and they have specific influences in the context. A framework that is used to guide the study of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms, therefore, should retain these three key elements and examine how they affect patterns of employment relations with a context-sensitive view (Ram and Edwards, 2010). Additionally, the ‘resource’ theme should also remain in the framework. It is necessary to discover what might be particular resources in other ethnic minority firms, and the significance of female and family workers to South-Asian restaurants and students to ethnic Chinese restaurants.

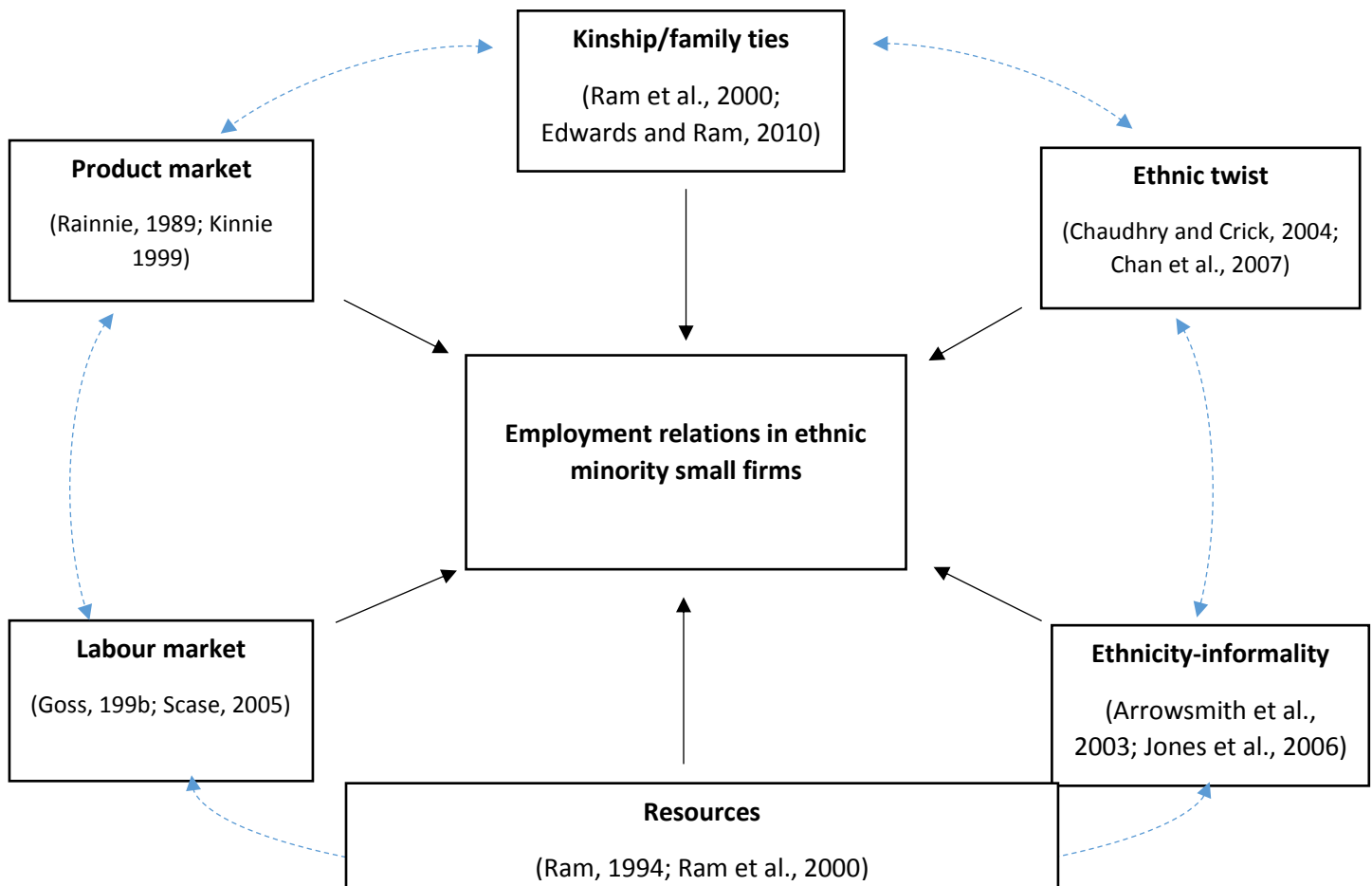
Analytical framework for this research:



There remains one theme to be analysed: the multi-cultural workforces. The key concept that emerges from discussing the multi-cultural workforces is ‘ethnic twist’. It reflects the fundamental resistance and antagonism between workers from different groups, with different language being spoken and different cultural backgrounds. What lies behind the ‘ethnic twist’ is the concept of ‘regional ties’, which replaces ‘family ties’ or ‘kinship ties’ in shaping workers’ behaviours and attitudes in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. By exploring the heterogeneity of people in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector and drawing out the concept of ‘ethnic twist’, it can throw light on future research to discover how resistance and conflict within ethnic groups shape patterns of workplace behaviours.

Based on the discussion above, a new theoretical framework designed for future research in studying employment relations in the ethnic minority small business is developed and shown below:

Figure 9 Analytical framework suggested for future research



Compared to the framework used to structure the undertaking of this research, this new framework retains the ‘product market’, ‘labour market’, ‘informality-ethnicity’ and ‘resource’ themes. The new framework also incorporates the theme of ‘family/kinship ties’. Though this theme does not appear in the framework used for this research and is hard to apply to the analysis of employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, with its profound meanings in South-Asian small firms, it is sensible to cover this theme in a new framework that can be used in future research. Finally, the specific ‘multi-cultural’ theme has been replaced with the ‘ethnic twist’, which denotes the key concept from the study of multi-cultural forces, a concept deriving from this research and having significant impacts upon shop floor behaviours and employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector.

This revised framework has been developed as a guide for researchers who study small firms with people from different ethnic groups. With the addition of the concept of ‘ethnic twist’, it expands current understanding of patterns of employment relations in ethnic minority small firms. The revised framework, therefore, identifies a new category that might have major effects in ethnic minority small firms. Subsequent research might draw on and adapt this model in studying ethnic minority businesses. This means that future research needs to be sensitive to the context. The key themes in the framework provide the analytical basis for exploring employment relations in small firms employing different ethnic groups. What is more important is to capture the dimensions of these themes in various contexts. This requires researchers to examine how particular factors influence the shop floor behaviours and what factors might have more significant effects in one context while being less functional in another context. For example, in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector, it is the ethnic twist instead of kinship ties that strongly shapes the management practices and shop floor dynamics. Given the specific contribution of this research, it might be particularly interesting to examine how ethnic twist functions in different ways in other ethnic groups.

8.2.3 Methodological contributions

As a study of workplace relations, this research is located within a rich ethnographic tradition, enlightened by work such as Roy (1952; 1954), Lupton (1963), Burawoy (1979), Edwards and Scullion (1982), Scott (1994) and Ram (1994). Their work provided insights

of workplaces by researchers directly engaging in the production process on the shop floor for an extended period of time. Through direct observation and participation in workplaces, they were able to generate in-depth understanding of people's behaviour on the shop floor and so as to explain people's behaviour. Methodologically, by employing the ethnographic approach, I conducted participant observation in two case study firms over a period of seven months, during which time I was a member of staff. This enabled me to collect in-depth data on a day-to-day basis on the shop floor. By working closely with participants in the field for such a long period of time, I had the chance to fully understand the context and understand how shop floor behaviours and particular contexts were influenced each other.

It is necessary to mention that the dynamics of conflicts and resistance between group members identified in this study could arguably be only captured by being located in the fields and working closely with those participants on a day-to-day basis. Without understanding the nature of the struggle between different cultural groups comprehensively, it would have been failing to draw out the concept of 'ethnic twist', a key theoretical contribution of this research. Furthermore, the research captured different types of fiddles and cheating. The insights of the practice of the fiddles I got based on the ethnographic empirical tradition can be never achieved by approaches such as surveys and loose interviews. Without realising the fiddles might lead to a failure in understanding how the informal management structure left large scopes for workers to maneuverer to conduct cheating and how the informal relationships between workers developed under the informal management system. These examples illustrate the importance of ethnographic approach in exploring workplace relations and the value of this research.

Indeed, there has been little significant ethnographic research in exploring employment relations in ethnic minority small firms since Ram (Ram, 1994). The thesis has demonstrated the continued importance of the ethnographic approach in studying workplace relations. Prior to this PhD study, there had not been any intensive research to explore employment relations in ethnic Chinese small firms in the UK context, apart from a few survey-based and loose interview-based studies (Chaudhry and Crick, 2004; Chan et al., 2007; Rochelle and Steven, 2013). With the application of the ethnographic approach,

it finally gave me the opportunity to capture insight of the contexts and nuances to understand the dynamics between management and workers and to explain their behaviours in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector. This PhD thesis might be the first to thoroughly examine how employment relations are experienced in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK context and the factors that shape the process.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Vertovec (2007) suggested that the increasing number of ethnic minority groups represented in the UK has called into question understandings of ethnic minority populations that have been based predominantly on analyses of African-Caribbean and South-Asian communities. Understanding needs to be informed by analyses of the increasing ethnic diversity to be found in the UK. Prior to this PhD research, there has never been any extensive research focusing on employment relations within the ethnic Chinese group. In addressing the research gap, this research aims to understand how employment relations are experienced in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector and the main factors that shape the process.

Methodologically, the research is located within an ethnographic empirical tradition. The application of the ethnographic approach enabled the researcher to collect in-depth data and have the opportunity to fully understand the contexts, which laid the foundation for empirical and theoretical contributions.

With the robust data collected in the field, this thesis has examined how shop floor behaviours and workplace relations were influenced by a variety of factors, both internal and external to the case study firms. According to the findings in the four empirical chapters, this thesis successfully not only answered those research questions and objectives, but also developed a whole new picture of what working life was like within ethnic Chinese restaurants in the UK context, a hitherto under-explored area.

Based on the empirical analysis, the research, conceptually, develops a new framework that may be helpful for future research in studying employment relations in ethnic minority small firms. One theme that has never appeared in previous research is the 'ethnic twist'. The concept derives from analysing the multi-cultural workforces and revealing the heterogeneity of workers and the importance of culture and language as influences on relations between different groups of workers. The concept denotes the resistance and conflict between ethnic group members from different origins and backgrounds.

This research, therefore, convincingly adds new knowledge to the field of employment relations in ethnic minority businesses. Firstly, it addresses an important gap in

employment relations research, specifically the absence of research on the ethnic Chinese community in the UK. Secondly, the thesis has demonstrated that employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector were different from employment relations in the South-Asian restaurant sector in a number of respects. The South-Asian ethnic group has long been treated as though it were representative of all the ethnic minority groups. The thesis, however, has shown that the conclusions based on South-Asian small firms do not apply to the ethnic Chinese group. Finally, the insights provided by this thesis could not have been generated through alternative research approaches, such as surveys and interviews. The final conclusion of this thesis is that future research should continue to engage with the potential of ethnographic research to generate new knowledge of shop floor behaviours and workplace relations in small firms.

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Appendices

A1. Information Sheet for employers

1. Research title

Examining the employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK context.

2. Research objective

This research will thoroughly examine the employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms based on its particular business condition in the UK context. The research aim is to analyse the influences from the product market, labour supply, internal structures, resources and cultural background in determining the employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms.

3. Who is supervising the research?

This is a PhD research supervised by the Management School in the University of Sheffield. The field work is part of the research. The aim of the field work is to collect related information, which is used as the data to be analysed in order to achieve the research objective.

Specifically, this research is supervised by my two supervisors: Dr. Robert Wapshott (r.wapshott@sheffield.ac.uk) and Prof. Jason Heyes (j.heyes@sheffield.ac.uk).

4. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University Management School's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

5. Why has my organisation been chosen?

As stated above, my research is focused on examining the employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the UK context. In my time studying and working

in Sheffield, I have come to know various ethnically-Chinese owned small firms in the city. I am approaching the owners of these businesses to ask whether they can participate in my research on this topic. As your business falls into this category, I am approaching you to discuss whether your business would be a part of this research.

6. Do I need to take part?

The method of this research is called “ethnography” (participant observation). This means that the data collection process is mainly based on my observations in the workplace. Under this research method, it is a continuous process throughout the day-to-day running of your business.

The basic rule is that it is voluntary for you to participate. This is the nature of voluntary participation. Based on this rule, this information sheet is designed for you to understand issues related to the research. If you agree to participate, I have got a consent form as well, which is prepared for you to sign once you confirm the research process.

Therefore, once you agree to be a participant of the research, you would take part in the research process naturally.

The research may also include semi-structured interviews to understand your perception of particular issues, such as questions about how you organise your business, why you take a particular course of action under a particular environment and so on.

Before I take semi-structured interview, I will inform you of the general interview topics. And meanwhile, interviews could be recorded. It is up to you to decide both whether you would like to be interviewed and whether you would like the interview to be recorded. Participation is voluntary.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This research will analyse the employment relations from factors such as the product market, labour supply, internal structures, resources and cultural background based on participant observation in your workplace. So, practically, once the analysis process is finished, this would help you better understand how factors influence employment relations

of your business, which could help and guide you to improve work efficiency and employment relations with employees.

8. What will happen to the results of the research project?

All the materials will be used as research purpose, for my PhD and academic contributions such as academic publications. The research has no commercial aim or any other purpose than the ones stated here.

Furthermore, the data collected may be used for other research and subsequent research. This will be referred to on the consent form.

If you as the owner would like to read my report, I am happy to provide the result for you. In order to respect the anonymity of participants (a basic ethical requirement), this report will highlight the key points in my analysis rather than identifying individuals or individual practices that could identify any employees. The nature of this report, if requested, is defined by my professional ethical obligations and standards.

9. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information I collect during the course of the search will be kept strictly confidential. First, the names of all the participants will be kept anonymous throughout the writing and publishing stage, including the names of your organisation. All the materials will be anonymised and I will remove any identifying information before sharing in academic papers and even before discussing with my supervisors. Second, I will store the interview recordings and the copies of transcripts in my computer. In order to avoid leaks, I will set passwords on these documents.

10. What if something goes wrong?

First, during the research process, I will entirely follow any routines and rules set in your organisation. I clearly understand this is the fundamental principle to conduct this research.

For me, I will manage to avoid any conflict and collision with my colleagues. If there is any situation, where I think it would be really difficult to handle, the first thing I will take is to step back and avoid conflict. Then, I will report to you and we may together deal with the issue. I will not disrupt your business.

For you and your employees, if you think I cause any serious troubles, please no hesitate tell me. I will follow your instructions. However, if you believe that this may not be handled between us, you can contact my supervisor Dr. Robert Wapshott: r.wapshott@sheffield.ac.uk. If, having approached my supervisor, you believe the matter remains unresolved, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary department: registrar@sheffiled.ac.uk.

Finally, you will be given one copy of the information sheet and asked to sign the consent form document signalling your voluntary agreement to participate.

A2. Information Sheet for employees

1. Research title

Examining the employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector in the UK context.

2. Research objective

This research will thoroughly examine the employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms based on its particular business condition in the UK context. The research aim is to analyse the influences from the product market, labour supply, internal structures, resources and cultural background in determining the employment relations in ethnically-Chinese owned small firms.

3. Do I need to take part?

The method of this research is called “ethnography” (participant observation). This means that the data collection process is mainly based on my observations in the workplace. Under this research method, it is a continuous process throughout the day-to-day running of the business.

The basic rule is that it is voluntary for you to participate. . This is the nature of voluntary participation. Based on this rule, this information sheet is designed for you to understand issues related to the research. If you do not want to be involved in my thesis, I will not record your activities in my field notes in the research. So you will not appear on my field notes and my thesis. It is your right to make this decision.

Though the restaurant owner already agreed to participate, this does not mean that you are required to do so. I will be the only person at the workplace with access to my notes so the boss can't tell who is and who is not participating. It is also anticipated that I will see you outside of work (e.g. around the local area or at Chinese community social activities), which may provide a further opportunity for you to talk to me in confidence about your participation.

During the working process, if you would like to withdraw the observation, you can tell directly without any formal approval. I will then withdraw the recording of your activities, only recording instances and interactions among colleagues who have agreed to participate.

If you agree to participate, I have got a consent form as well, which is prepared for you to sign once you confirm your voluntary participation in the research process. Therefore, once you agree to be a participant of the research, you would take part in the research process naturally.

The research may also include semi-structured interviews to understand your perception of particular issues, such as questions about your job, how you came to work here and so on.

Before I take semi-structured interviews, I will inform you of the interview topics. And meanwhile, interviews could be recorded. It is up to you to decide both whether you would like to be interviewed and whether you would like the interview to be recorded. Participation is voluntary.

4. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

One of the main interests in this research is to analyse the dynamics between employees and employers in the work place. This is to understand what factors will influence the employment relations and how this process happens between you and the business owner / your manager.

Therefore, once the analysis process is finished, the findings may identify those factors which mostly influence the employment relations and consequently give you suggestions on how to improve relations with the business owner / your manager.

5. What will happen to the results of the research project?

All the materials will be used as research purpose, for my PhD and academic contributions such as academic publications. The research has no commercial aim or any other purpose than the ones stated here.

Furthermore, the data collected may be used for other research and subsequent research. This will be referred to on the consent form.

6. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information I collect during the course of the search will be kept strictly confidential. First, the names of all the participants will be kept anonymous throughout the writing and publishing stage, including the names of the organisation. In addition, I will store the interview recordings and the copies of transcripts in my computer. In order to avoid leaks, I will set passwords on these documents.

One of the issues you may be concerned about is whether I will provide one copy of research findings to the owner and due to the small scale of the business, the owner could identify any of you according to particular actions and features.

Indeed, if the owner would like to read my report, I will provide one copy of the result to the owner. In order to maintain your anonymity and protecting all of you as employees, the report will only contain information which exhibits a few general analyses and results without any clues that may be used to identify any employees according to a particular features and actions.

7. What if something goes wrong?

First, during the research process, I will entirely follow any routines and rules set in your organisation. I clearly understand this is the fundamental principle to conduct this research.

If you think I cause any serious troubles, please do not hesitate to tell me.

However, if you believe that this may not be handled between us, you can contact my supervisor Dr. Robert Wapshott: r.wapshott@sheffield.ac.uk. If, having contacted my supervisor, the matter still cannot be handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the University's Registrar and Secretary department: registrar@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally, you will be given one copy of the information sheet and asked to sign the consent form document signalling your voluntary agreement to participate.

A3. Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Examining the employment relations in the ethnic Chinese restaurant sector within the UK context	
Name of Researcher: Xisi Li	
Participant Identification Number for this project:	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated <i>[insert date]</i> explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. <i>Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential (<u>only if true</u>). I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the above research project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____

Name of Participant <i>(or legal representative)</i> _____ _____	Date _____	Signature _____
Name of person taking consent <i>(if different from lead researcher)</i> <i>To be signed and dated in presence of the participant</i> _____ _____	Date _____	Signature _____
Lead Researcher _____ _____	Date _____	Signature _____
<p><i>Copies:</i></p> <p><i>Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.</i></p>		