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A Study of Restaurant Sector in the Dutch Labor Market**

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**Problems and Strategies of Chinese Immigrants:
A Study of the Restaurant Sector in the Dutch Labour
Market¹**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the economic performance of Chinese immigrants in the Dutch labor market. It reports a case study undertaken in the Chinese restaurant sector. The focus of the paper is on role and nature of Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, in terms of employment generation and labor utilization. In order to elaborate the problems that Chinese immigrants are facing, and their strategies to cope with accordingly, this paper examines the insights of Chinese restaurants both from macro and micro angles. The study shows that the nature of Chinese restaurant business is the basic means of employment generation in a host country. It also shows the distinguishing differences between small- and large-scale restaurant, young- and old-generation of Chinese immigrants, and female- and male worker in the restaurant sector.

1. Introduction

Historically, the Netherlands was an emigration country; however, this pattern changed significantly (Power 1979) following World War II. Large numbers of non-Dutch origin or foreign-born groups settled in the Netherlands as its empire came to an end. On January 1, 1979, there were 431,800 people in the Netherlands of non-Dutch citizenship, or 3.1 percent of the population. Ten years later, the number of foreign residents had risen to 624,000 and the foreign-born share of the Dutch population was 4.2 percent (WRR 1990a).

Chinese pioneers to the Netherlands began to immigrate in the late 18th century and early 19th century either as a result of push factors — escaping the civil war (*Taiping Tianguo Zhanzheng*) between 1851–1864 (Chenpah n.d.)², or of pull-factors — being hired by Dutch shipping companies to break a Dutch seamen's strike in 1911 (Pieke 1992). Later, this initial flow was followed by several ethnic Chinese groups from former Dutch colonies (e.g.: Java, Sumatra, Indonesia and Surinam, etc.), and Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. By 1990, there were 38,761 ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands consisting of 39 nationalities (Zhao 1992).

Initially, the Chinese pioneers to the Netherlands were not engaged in the catering trade, but as seamen or venders. The emergence of the Dutch Chinese catering trade took

² Chenpah is one of the most-senior Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands. In 1992, he wrote a book about the history of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands, but it is not known at this time whether it has

place in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague in the late 1930s (Waldinger 1990). By the 1970s and 1980s ethnic Chinese restaurants reached their zenith. In the 1990s, Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands were challenged by a changing market situation. The fluctuating fortunes of the Chinese restaurant business in the Netherlands revealed two forces at work. First, the opportunity structure for Chinese restaurants altered over time. In turn, faced with this critical dilemma, Chinese adjustment strategies based on Chinese ethnic characteristics partially determined the eventual outcome of the Chinese restaurant trade.

Regard to the ethnic business development, Waldinger, et al. (1985) have proposed an interactive approach that was later refined by Kim, et al. (1989) and Waldinger, et al. (1990). They suggested that successful business participation might be regarded as the interaction between the opportunity structures for immigrants and their characteristics.

Ethnic business owners commonly confront several problems in founding and operating their businesses, namely, (1) acquiring the information needed for the establishment and survival of their firms; (2) obtaining the capital needed to establish or to expand their business; (3) acquiring the training and skills needed to run a small business; (4) recruiting and managing efficient, honest, and cheap labour; (5) managing relations with customers and suppliers; (6) surviving strenuous business competition; and (7) protecting themselves from political attacks (Waldinger et al. 1985; 1990; Kim et al. 1989). By applying the interactive approach framework, this paper examines the immigrants' economic activities in the Dutch labour market with the focus on the Chinese immigrants working in the restaurant sector. From the viewpoint of employment generation and labour utilization, it elaborates both the problems faced by Chinese immigrants and their coping strategies.

The data sources for this study are primary observation and interviews under the following methods. (1) Six Chinese restaurateurs were interviewed — three in The Hague, two in Amsterdam, and one in Utrecht. Some of the interviews were undertaken by informing the subjects, while others were general conversations between a client and

restaurant owner. (2) Participant-observation was employed as I worked in one of the six restaurants as a manual labourer for one week. At the outset, I did not tell the owner my reasons for working there. On the last day of work, however, I was frank about my research proposal. Astonishingly, he understood well my reasons and encouraged me to carry out this research. (3) A mini-questionnaire sampling survey was also conducted. Fifteen questionnaires were sent to the local human resource offices, which were selected on a sampling base. Eleven of them were returned with a great deal of information. (4) Several Chinese Associations were visited and interviewed as well. One of the interviews was reported in “Info Krant.”² (5) I also visited a number of Dutch academic and authoritative institutions, such as WRR (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy), Social and Cultural Planning Office, NIDI, University of Amsterdam, Sinology Institute of Leiden University, etc. Finally, secondary data was also extensively explored to enrich the information base of this paper.

2. Role and the Nature of the Restaurant Sector in Employment

To provide context, a brief review of the evolution of Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands will be given below.

2.1 A Profile of Chinese Restaurant Development in the Netherlands

Chinese pioneers to the Netherlands were not initially engaged in the catering trade. The emergence of the Dutch Chinese catering trade took place in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague in the late 1930s (Waldinger 1990). At that time, Chinese restaurants were mainly for Chinese clients, which is as the interactive approach suggests — that the initial market for immigrant business typically arises within the immigrant’s community itself. The Chinese preferences for Chinese food not only created an initial market for Chinese restaurants, but also played an important role in their continuous development. However, the limitations of the ethnic market itself restricted the potential

² INFO KRANT is a local Chinese-Dutch newspaper, which is published by *Stichting Chinese Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk*, Rotterdam.

growth at that time. For instance, there were only five or six Chinese restaurants in Amsterdam before World War II (Waldinger 1990).

This situation remained relatively unchanged until the 1950s, which was the turning point for the development of Chinese restaurants. This marked their access to customers beyond the Chinese community. With the independence of Indonesia in 1949, large numbers of Dutch citizens returned to their motherland and brought back with them a taste for oriental food. This was the impetus for a rapidly growing market. Unlike in some other industrial countries, such as France, there was no indigenous tradition of cheap, popular restaurants in the Netherlands. Combining existing Chinese cuisine with Indonesian cuisine, the “Chinese-Indonesian” (Chinees-Indisch) dishes became the standard foreign food in the Netherlands (Pieke 1988:5). “Chinese-Indonesian” restaurants in the Netherlands formed a unique phenomenon unlike Chinese restaurants elsewhere (Interview, 1992). Until the late 1960s, the new Chinese-Indonesian restaurants had a virtual monopoly in this rapidly growing market (Waldinger 1990; Pieke 1992; Interview, 1992).

The 1970s to the early 1980s, was the golden age for Chinese restaurants since the total number of Chinese (-Indonesian) restaurants increased significantly. According to statistics provided by the *Bedrijfschap Horeca* (the annual report of the Dutch restaurant business) and other sources, the absolute number increased from 225 in 1960 to 1916 in 1982. In this period, the annual average rate of increase reached 17%, which is the highest in the history of the development of Chinese restaurants (see Table 1). Moreover, Chinese restaurants were no longer concentrated only in western Holland, which includes Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, but scattered almost everywhere in the Netherlands (first the south, and later the north and the east) including smaller towns and even villages (Pieke 1992:8; see Figure 1). Finally, the market share of Chinese restaurants increased markedly from 17% in 1960 to 32% in 1982 (see Table 2).

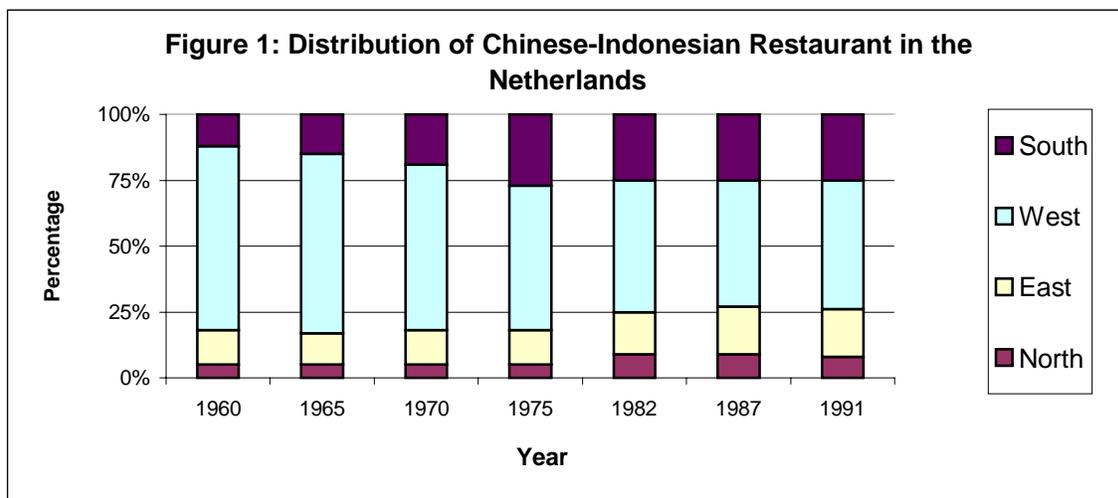


Table 1: Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands: total numbers and change for selected years

Year	Absolute Number	Absolute Change	Annual Average Relative Change (%)
1960	225	-	-
1970	618	+393	+17
1982	1916	+1298	+17
1987	1842	-84	-1
1991	1988	+146	+2

Source: (Cited in Pieke 1992).

1960-1982: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1983.

1987: Pieke 1988.

1991: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992.

Table 2: Market share of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant in the Netherlands

	1960		1970		1982		1991	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Chinese-Indonesian restaurants	225	17	618	22	1916	32	1988	29
Other (Café-) restaurants	170	83	2241	78	4065	68	4841	71
Total	1925	100	2859	100	5981	100	6829	100

Source: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992.

One of the important reasons for this progressive development was the rapid economic growth and rise in the Dutch living standard, which increased Dutch demand for restaurants including Chinese-Indonesian restaurants. Given a lack of historical data, more recent data in Table 3 supports this historical trend.

Table 3: Consumer restaurant preferences (%)

	1984	1986	1988	1990
Those ate outside last half year	55	62	63	68
Those ever visited Ch-In. restaurant	62	63	56	65
Frequency of visiting Ch-In. restaurant:				
More often than once per 2-3 weeks	8	5	5	8
Once a month	20	14	12	15
Once every 2-6 months	45	49	53	43
Less often/nearly never	25	31	28	32
No answer	2	1	2	2

Source: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992.

However, difficulties arose for Chinese restaurants in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The number of Chinese restaurant at that time reached a saturation point, and they were challenged by new market situations. It was estimated that a minimum population of 5,000 to 10,000 on average was needed to support one Chinese-Indonesian restaurant on average. In the three big cities in the west, the ratio was substantially lower at about 3,000 to one restaurant because of the extra demand generated by local and foreign tourists (Pieke 1992:24). The statistics show the intensity index of a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands (see Table 4). On the other hand, there were several other ethnic groups' restaurants competing in the market. Consequently, the growth of Chinese restaurants was stagnant, and their market share started to decline slightly (see Table 3).

Table 4: Number of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant per 100,000 residents in 1982 and 1991

Regions	1982	1991
Total Netherlands	14.0	13.2
Subtotal of 3 cities	23.2	21.2
Amsterdam	25.7	23.7
The Hague	21.8	25.1
Rotterdam	21.1	15.0
Subtotal of West-Holland	15.0	14.6
Utrecht	13.5	12.1
Noord-Holland	16.9	16.3
Zuid-Holland	14.7	14.1
Subtotal of East-Holland	11.2	11.9
Overijssel	11.5	11.6
Flevoland	-	10.9
Gelderland	12.9	12.2
Subtotal of North-Holland	10.7	10.0
Groningen	11.1	11.0
Friseland	9.8	9.7
Drenthe	9.7	9.3
Subtotal of South-Holland	14.1	13.3
Zeeland	14.1	14.0
Noord-Brabant	13.9	13.1
Limburg	13.9	13.5

Source: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992:15.

2.2 Some Characteristics of Chinese Restaurants

The evolution of Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands reveals various characteristics. Firstly, Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands are connected to cities. Historically, the western part of Holland, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague were the cradle of Chinese restaurants (Pieke 1992; Waldinger 1990). Gradually, the restaurants spread all over the Netherlands with a minor presence everywhere, following, as it were, the regional Chinese population distribution. The intensity index of Chinese restaurants

in the agglomerations of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague is remarkably higher than that of the Netherlands as a whole. The city-related location of Chinese restaurants affects their business situation and the authenticity of their Chinese cuisine. In the downtown core or on other shopping streets —especially in the local “Chinatown”³ — business seems better and the cuisine is more typically Chinese. In other neighbourhoods, business is less robust and the cuisine is more or less modified (Interview, 1992). It is significant that there are more clients in shopping centers than in residential areas. Moreover, there are more Chinese clients among the consumers in shopping centers because Chinese generally live nearby. In residential areas, the majority of clients are Dutch. Therefore, the cuisine of a Chinese restaurant in downtown core has to maintain the genuineness of Chinese food in downtown whereas modification is necessary to meet the Dutch taste in other locations.

A second characteristic of Chinese restaurants is its family-related orientation. Unlike many modern businesses, the family-type Chinese restaurant is deemed to be a means of family employment, and hence the aim of the business is not to maximize the profit, but to provide the basic necessities of daily life and to maintain and/or improve income and wealth gradually. My interviews suggest that this family-type restaurant affects decisions around labour utilization, management, and working conditions. (I will return to these issues in the next section). Furthermore, this type of restaurant facilitates the choice of chain migration (Pieke 1992).

Thirdly, Chinese entrepreneurs are self-reliant. Owing to cultural history, Chinese immigrants can exploit this advantage by opening a restaurant (Interview, 1992). The nature of a restaurant determines that the business is labour intensive, which compensates for a scarcity of capital. One of the few advantages of owning a Chinese restaurant is cheap and loyal labour including family members and wage labour that is normally

³ “Chinatown” in the Netherlands is unlike that in the USA, Canada, UK, or France regardless of the scale and typicality. Before World War II, “Chinatown” was formed gradually, to certain extent, in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. After the War, due to the needs of business, “Chinatown” was down-scaled or distributed among several streets and thus lost its concentration. Nowadays, one can only find “China streets”, rather than a “Chinatown” in several large cities in the Netherlands, where many Chinese restaurants, shops, and so on, are located. For more details, see Chenpah, 1992; Kwong, 1989; Schaap, 1992, etc.

Chinese as well. On the other hand, due to the fact that the Chinese in the Netherlands are not a target group for compensatory minority actions, they receive neither the benefits accorded to the native group in the labor market, nor the compensatory benefits offered other non-native groups. What they therefore must do is rely on their own resources to solve their employment problems. The result of my sampling survey shows that in some regions, Chinese unemployed persons are not registered separately by Dutch employment offices. In some regions, there was no registration of the category of “Chinese” until January 1, 1992. In other regions, unemployed Chinese are registered but the number is too small to be analyzed. For instance, there were 8 Chinese among 2415 unemployed non-native groups in Groningen, and 15 Chinese among 4607 unemployed non-Dutch persons in Haarlem (sampling survey, 1992). My interview with a Chinese Association also suggests that Chinese become self-employed only after many failed attempts at finding employment with a mainstream Dutch company or similar-type business (Interview, 1992).

2.3 Role and Nature of Chinese Restaurants

Based upon the above discussion, the roles of Chinese restaurants in terms of employment generation can be summarized as follows. First, the Chinese restaurant provided uneven employment to Chinese immigrants over time. This uneven impact coincided with the change of the market opportunity structure. Before the 1950s, employment in Chinese restaurants was limited. After the 1950s, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, it played a more dominant role. It has been estimated that at least 50 to 60 percent of the Dutch Chinese labour force is employed in the catering trade. Another 15 or 20 percent is registered as unemployed and looking for a job as a cook, waiter, or restaurant manager (Pieke 1988; 1992). Fieldwork of Boissevain and Grotenbreg (1989) in Amsterdam suggests that about 55 percent of Chinese⁴ business activities is in the category of restaurant or snack bar. According to this fieldwork, the distribution of Chinese business is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Surinam-Chinese business activities in Amsterdam

Business Type	Chinese	(No, %)	Others ^a	(No, %)	Total	(No, %)
Tropical greengrocers	6	20.7	28	15.1	34	15.9
Record/video	1	3.4	13	7.0	14	6.5
Barber	-	-	11	5.9	11	5.1
Goldsmith	3	10.3	3	1.6	6	2.8
Butcher	-	-	4	2.2	4	1.9
Garage	-	-	2	1.1	2	0.9
Tailor	-	-	4	2.2	4	1.9
Coffee shop	-	-	27	14.6	27	12.6
Café	2	6.9	17	9.2	19	8.9
Restaurant/snack bar	16	55.2	31	16.8	47	22.0
Travel agency	-	-	11	5.9	11	5.1
Miscellaneous ^b	1	3.4	34	18.4	35	16.4
Total	29	100.0	185	100.0	214	100.0

Source: Fieldwork by Jeremy Boissevain and Hanneke Grotenbreg, cited in Waldinger 1990:95.

Notes: ^a: Includes non-Chinese ethnic Surinamese such as Creole, Hindustani, etc.

^b: Includes diverse shops and market stalls.

Secondly, Chinese restaurants provide an alternative means of survival and a basic means of improving income and wealth. Some authors suggest that the Chinese-Indonesian catering trade has given the Dutch Chinese unprecedented opportunities (i.e. Pieke 1992:21). It is more precise to say that, given limited market opportunities, Chinese immigrants concentrated on catering. It must be noted that the original employment of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands was not in the restaurant sector, but as seamen and peanut-candy vendors (Waldinger 1990; Chenpah n.d.). From a historical point of view, whatever jobs Chinese immigrants took were for survival. In this sense, most Chinese restaurants provide survival-level jobs and continue this tradition. This similarity of employment outcome suggests again that immigrants were forced by

⁴ “Chinese” in this fieldwork refers to the ethnic Chinese who came from Surinam. Since there is a lack of information on those from the P. R. China, and Hong Kong, the distribution of business of the Surinam-Chinese is used here as a duplicate.

new social surroundings to pursue survival-level employment. The eventual change in the dominance of survival jobs for Chinese immigrants indicated a change in Dutch social surroundings and the ability of the Chinese to mobilize their resources.

Finally, although the restaurant sector is the dominant sector in which Chinese immigrants are still active, it is no longer the only sector. A small number of Chinese are engaged in other sectors in accordance with the middleman minority approach (Bonacich 1973, 1980; Min 1990). In the Netherlands, these sectors include groceries, video stores, bookstores, and import and export companies (Pieke 1992:22; Interview, 1992). Chinese immigrants who are engaged in these sectors are estimated to be small in number, however reliable data is not available.

In spite of the macro perspective depicted above, the roles and nature of Chinese restaurants should also be analyzed at the micro level. In the next two sections, I will focus on the micro issues of labour utilization and employment conditions.

3. Labour Utilization

One of the most important ethnic strategies is recruiting and managing efficient, honest, and inexpensive labour. Although this is true in general for all Chinese restaurants, there exist significant differences in these issues between small- and large-scale restaurants.

3.1 Difference between Small- and Large-Scale Restaurants

Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands can be divided into two categories by using annual turnover as a criterion. Large-scale restaurants are those whose annual turnover is at Df. 610,000 and above, while small-scale restaurants refer to those whose annual turnover ranges from Df. 195,000 to Df. 610,000 (*Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992:18). I would also suggest another typology for Chinese restaurants, which is family-type vis-à-vis business-type. Nevertheless, due to lack of adequate statistics to distinguish them, I must follow *Horeca's* categories as a proxy.

Horeca also suggests differences of labour utilization between small- and large-scale labour. The larger the scale, the more that paid labour is used. The small-scale

restaurant intends to exploit family members and/or is self-exploiting. The owners and family members of small restaurants occupy an important share of the labour force, which is 65 percent of the total labour force. Wage labour accounts for only 35 percent of the total labour force in small restaurants, compared to 72 percent for wage labour in large restaurants (see Table 6). On the other hand, both types of restaurants employ a number of part-time labourers, and small-scale restaurants employ more part-time workers than larger restaurants. This gives the Chinese restaurant — small scale in particular — a competitive advantage in reducing wage costs, due to the numerical and functional flexibility of labour utilization.⁵

Table 6: Percentage of the labour force in Chinese-Indonesian restaurants in 1990, (%)

Types of Labour Input	Small-scale	Large-scale
Full-time	53	60
Part-time	47	40
Total	100	100
Owner	40	16
Family member	25	12
Wage Labour	35	72
Total	100	100

Source: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992.

Conforming to the above facts, the small-scale restaurant bears much lower labour costs than its large-scale counterpart. On average, the total labour force costs in a small restaurant are only about half that of a larger restaurant, 7-11 percent versus 16-23 percent respectively (see Table 7).

⁵ For a discussion of numerical and functional flexibility of labour, see, for instance Smith 1989; Armstrong 1989.

Table 7: Business performance of Chinese-Indonesian restaurant in the Netherlands (1990)

Categories	Small-scale (% of the turnover)	Large-scale (% of the turnover)	Average (% of the turnover)
Total annual turnover	100	100	100
Meal/dish sales	91	86	87
Drinks	8	13	12
Others	1	1	1
Total labour costs	7-11	16-23	15-19
Wage & social insurance	6-10	15-22	14-18
Other labour costs	1	1	1
Meal/drinks sales per M ²	Df. 3,155	Df. 4,400	Df. 4,100
Paid labour force	Df. 26,000	Df. 29,000	Df. 27,500
Turnover per LF	Df. 83,000	Df. 109,000	Df. 101,000

Source: *Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1991.

These fact patterns for wages by scale may inadvertently lead to an inference that small-scale restaurants have a comparative advantage in labour costs. Nevertheless, on a productivity basis, this is not true. The annual turnover per labour force is Df. 109,000 in large-scale restaurants and Df. 83,000 in small-scale ones respectively (also see Table 7), which is a 31 percent difference. What are the reasons for this apparent anomaly?

Two possible explanations exist. First, as mentioned earlier, small restaurants are family focussed and are a means of employment with the ultimate goal being to provide for the basics of daily life and maintain and/or gradually improve the living standard. The large-scale restaurant is more or less a modern capitalist business with the aim undoubtedly being to maximize profits. A second reason for the above outcome is that different management can result in a diversity of business performances. There is a limited application of scientific management techniques in small-scale restaurants. The managers and/or owners are directly involved in the operation as cooks/chefs, waiters or operators. There is little time for market analysis or planning. This can sometimes result in big operating losses for small restaurant (Interviews, 1992). Unlike a small-scale

restaurant, large-scale restaurants emphasize office work and market-analysis planning leading to greater productivity.

Regardless of scale, Chinese restaurants both exploit the use of inexpensive, loyal and hard working labour. From the management point of view, taking advantage of cheap labour is essential to reduce the cost of the business and to remain competitive by providing inexpensive food. From the worker's perspective, they accept a low wage given their low opportunity cost. Their work is further marginalized when their labour is substituted by "free labour" — i.e., family members. Therefore, the supply of abundant cheap labour is one of the preconditions for survival of Chinese restaurants. Unfortunately, Chinese restaurants are now facing shortages of cheap labour (*Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992; *Info Krant* 1992, various issues).

Several reasons are given for this shortage. First, a difference between the two blocks of Chinese dialects is one obstacle. Cantonese restaurants (including Hong Kong restaurants) prefer to hire workers who speak or understand Cantonese. Other non-Cantonese restaurants, such as Zhejiang restaurants, employ non-Cantonese speaking workers. This results in a situation where some restaurants experience a shortage of labour, while some workers cannot be employed simply because of language or cultural differences. A second cause of the labour shortage is an outgrowth of location or the differences in the economies of big cities and small towns, inasmuch as Chinese restaurants are scattered throughout the Netherlands, but the Chinese population is generally connected with big cities. Restaurants in small towns find it relatively more difficult to engage proper and sufficient labour than those located in big cities. A third reason is less transparent. As 1997 approached with the transfer of Hong Kong to Communist China, Chinese who owned restaurants in the Netherlands claimed a shortage of restaurant labour as a strategy to raise the quotas for Chinese immigrants. Finally, experienced restaurant workers look for better working conditions after 10 years of so and if unsuccessful are willing to remain unemployed until they get a satisfactory job (*Info Krant*, Vol. 154).

I asked the owner of a large Chinese restaurant for his comments on these opinions during my interview. He argued that the language difference reason is natural.

If the owner and workers cannot understand and communicate with each other, how can the owner hire this kind of worker? With regard to the relatives or friends desiring to come to the Netherlands, he commented, “It is not blameworthy at all. We just do something to try to help our relatives or friends. I am sure that anybody would do the same.” (Interview, 1992)

In sum, if there indeed exists a shortage of cheap labour, I would argue firstly that the shortage is a structural one, either in the sense of separate blocks of Cantonese and non-Cantonese workers, or in terms of diversity between cities and towns.

Secondly, both arguments above reflect the different standpoints of labour and management. The former argument claims that is from a worker’s point of view, and the latter is doubtless a management point of view. It might be misleading if any conclusion relied only on one side of the argument.

Finally, regardless of the particular argument used, any shortage of cheap labour has an impact on immigration. So long as cheap labour is one of the most essential preconditions for the continued existence of Chinese restaurants, the development of restaurants is determined, at least partially, by a sufficient supply of cheap labour. When the supply of cheap labour cannot meet the demand of restaurants, one of the strategies of restaurant owners is to seek a new source of cheap labour. It is inevitable that they will induce new immigrants to come to the Netherlands.

To sum up, the preconditions for the development of Chinese restaurants are related to the Chinese position in the Dutch labour market. Chinese restaurant workers possess neither the inherent advantages of native group in the labour market, nor do they receive the benefits of other minority groups. As long as it is the case, they have to rely on their own resources to solve the problem of employment and advancement. Therefore, given the Chinese position in the Dutch labour market, their business strategies and the level of future Chinese immigration are intertwined.

3.2 Employment of Next Generation

Can the children of Chinese immigrants provide a secondary labour supply in the future? It is suggested that the rapidly growing second generation (i.e., those Chinese children who have finished their formal education in the Netherlands) is very reluctant to enter the catering trade, which employed their parents and other first-generation relatives (Pieke 1992:22)

However, I would argue that a Dutch education, even the post-secondary education that the young generation receives, has an ambiguous impact on their employment prospects. On the one hand, Dutch education provides prerequisites, such as language ability, working skills and a network with former classmates and friends, to seek non-catering employment in the labour market. On the other hand, given labour market segmentation, barriers to employment in the mainstream economy may still exist. Furthermore, a recent trend of youths seeking self-employment raises the possibility of inheriting and running their parents' restaurant business.

Interviews reveal that social communication differs between the old and new generations of Chinese immigrants. The medium of the old generation is that of the Chinese community. The aim and method of their social contacts is to enhance their restaurant business. The new generation, however, has broad contacts with Dutch society. Their classmates are Dutch, and their media are various social occasions such as parties, dances, sports, and travelling, etc. To some extent, the new generation of Chinese immigrants is integrating and/or has integrated into Dutch society. This provides greater employment prospects than merely in the catering trade (Interview, 1992).

From the perspective of the older Chinese generation, upward mobility via Dutch education is important and they will sacrifice their own interests such as time and money in order to achieve that goal. A father of a three-year-old girl told me during an interview:

The crucial thing is we are willing to work hard because we don't want to see our kids experience the same things as we are now (Interview, 1992).

Another middle aged Chinese restaurant owner also told me:

I don't let my kids help in the restaurant, for it will affect their regular studies in the school. They have to learn a lot of things at school and are rather busy. Some of the parents let their children work in the restaurants for one reason or another. I don't advocate doing so at all. I believe this will exert a negative impact on the future of the kids. I have to ensure my kids have enough time to study and have a good rest, just as other Dutch kids. I cannot only do something for immediate interests by ignoring the future and long-term interests (Interview, 1992).

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of the new generation, their professional choice is a rational one. Their education is seen as an important channel for mobility. Generally, Chinese students perform well in the school. Table 8 reveals that Chinese students are performing better than all other groups, except for the indigenous Dutch, and north and west Europeans. Other research on the education of Chinese children suggests that more than other minorities, Chinese children are able to do well in schools, despite negative factors like the presence of large numbers of minority or working-class children at their schools (Pieke 1988:20).

Table 8: Average C.I.T.O. test scores of selected ethnic groups (1987)

Ethnic Groups	Dutch	Arithmetic	Analytical	Total	N.
Native Dutch	71	70	74	535	55156
Turks	49	51	53	523	815
Moroccans	50	49	54	523	734
Southern Europeans	61	61	65	530	210
Eastern Europeans	64	64	67	531	45
N. and W. Europeans	67	69	73	534	159
Chinese	59	73	63	534	150
Antillians	55	52	59	525	117
Creole Surinamese	55	47	57	524	404
Hindustani Surinamese	55	53	58	526	338

Source: C.I.T.O. *Eindtoetsbulletin*, September 1987, cited in Pieke 1991:168.

Nevertheless, social mobility is not the only factor that a Chinese child considers nowadays. More elements such as real income, opportunity costs, satisfaction and ease of work, and so forth should also be taken into account. An owner of a large Chinese restaurant said to me:

I have a friend who also has a restaurant. His son was studying Medicine at university. Upon graduation after 6 years study, he had to go into practice. Suddenly he realized that the income of working in the restaurant was much higher than that of being a doctor. Later, he quit and went back to being a manager in his father's restaurant. He told me once, 'I was stupid that I had wasted 6 years. If I had worked in the restaurant 6 years earlier, how much could I have earned?' (Interview, 1992)

A middle-age lady who works in a Chinese Association in Rotterdam amplified this with some other interesting comments.

Nowadays, kids in schools no longer study as hard as previously. The first reason is there are two groups of kids in the school. One is those who were born and grew up in the Netherlands, and the other is those who came to the Netherlands recently because their parents or relatives are here. For the former group, it is not so difficult to manage school studies. But for the latter group, it is not easy to adjust and catch up since the education they received at home previously is totally different from what they are doing now. Although they try hard, their scores cannot compete with those of the others. Gradually, they give up. Secondly, due to the availability of employment and better payment at restaurants in the future, it doesn't seem necessary to study hard. (Interview, 1992)

To sum up, the desire for socioeconomic mobility and the impact of Dutch education has an ambiguous impact on the employment prospects for the second generation of Chinese immigrants. Therefore, the children of Chinese immigrants may or may not enter the catering trade as their (grand) parents did.

3.3 Role of Female Labour

Interviews in lieu of data are needed to illustrate the role of female labour in the Chinese restaurant sector. Chinese female participation differs from the conventional role of female labour in the Netherlands' economy. First, Chinese females may or may not take

care of their restaurant's business (Interview, 1992). If they participate, the prevailing gender division at a Chinese family-type restaurant is male (usually the owner) cooking in the kitchen and female (usually the wife of the owner) working as a waitress and cashier.

Secondly, this kind of gender division in restaurants also reflects the view that a female possesses less-important skills than a males does. According to the specific skill hierarchy in Chinese restaurants,⁶ the male is usually at a higher level in the hierarchy than the female. Almost all the chefs are male, while females are predominately dishwashers, waitress and so on.

Thirdly, female mobility is slower than male mobility within this skill hierarchy. As mentioned above, working in a restaurant begins with physical labour — such as dishwasher — as the starting point for upward mobility in the catering trade. Given that most cooks are males, this implies complete male mobility from the bottom to the top, but not for females. Female mobility halts at a certain level and the top level is rarely achieved.

Fourthly, this gender division of labour reflects another significant issue — power relations by gender. Given that males control the skilled jobs in the Chinese catering industry they receive the greatest incomes and control skill and capital accumulation to the detriment of females.

4. Employment Conditions

Although the Chinese restaurant provides a livelihood for immigrants, poor employment conditions are normally overlooked or tolerated by the outside society (Waldinger 1990). For most Chinese immigrants, the lack of alternatives forces them to accept poor working conditions. Thus, unlike other sectors, Chinese restaurant working conditions are characterized by long hours, low wages with no job security, and no union protection.

⁶ A restaurant business is a typical labour-intensive sector. The skill hierarchy within a restaurant can be classified, from bottom to top, as dishwasher, helper in kitchen, waiter, cashier, chef, and manager (owner).

4.1 Working Hours

A restaurant, regardless of the labour law concerned, often remains open until the last available client leaves. These long working hours are an outgrowth of the need to cover the high fixed costs of housing, depreciation, interest, etc.

In addition, for workers, long working hours are one way to compensate for the low hourly wage. A full-time restaurant worker labours 10-12 hours a day, 6 days a week, which is much longer than the general 40 hours per week norm for other sectors. A part-time worker's time depends on the contract between her/him and the restaurant. A young woman, who is a sister-in-law of the owner, told me: "I cannot leave because there are still a couple of clients sitting and drinking although it is after midnight. Tomorrow I have to wake up at 9 o'clock in the morning to prepare" (Interview, 1992). At times, owners work even longer hours than their employees do. Long hours reduce the average fixed costs for capital. One of my interviewees, who is about 40 years old with a lot of gray hair, told me:

I only sleep five hours a day. The rest of the time I work in my restaurant or on other matters concerned. Only on Sunday, can I have a little leisure time (Interview, 1992).

Another restaurateur of a large restaurant told me that he had to be sitting there as long as the restaurant was open to supervise workers. "Nobody knows what will happen if I leave the place. This is really a difficult job," said he.

4.2 Wage and Income

With the exception of a few owners of large restaurants, the majority of Chinese immigrants who work in restaurants earn a low hourly wage. The wage of a worker is about Df. 10 per hour, which is much lower than the minimum wage in the Netherlands (Interview, 1992). On offsetting feature is the possibility that taxes are either not or are only partially paid (Pieke 1988:19). This has two impacts on the Chinese restaurant business. In the first place, the cost, particularly the labour cost, can be reduced to such a low level that it is competitive enough to allow the business to still earn profits. Next, to compensate for the low wage, meals and accommodation are provided, especially for

newcomers, which makes the income in restaurants comparable with the pay in other sectors (Interview, 1992).

A more intriguing explanation for the continued existence of low wages is the argument that some Chinese immigrants do not make a wage comparison between restaurants and other sectors, but between pre- and post-migration. Needless to say, the wage they make now is much higher than what they made before. This gives them the satisfaction of being employed in restaurants and reduces the risk of being unemployed until they accumulate a certain amount of money to establish their own business.

4.3 Job Security

Chinese immigrants working in restaurants have no job security (Pieke 1988:18-9). The following facts illustrate this:

(1) A high rate of failure in the restaurant business. Although the average life span of Chinese restaurants has expanded from 5.2 years in 1982 to 7.3 years in 1991 (*Bedrijfschap Horeca* 1992:2), the general life span is not long. Twenty-seven percent of Chinese restaurants last less than three years. It is quite common to see many Chinese restaurants announcing their closure by putting a notice on the front door.

(2) Substitution of wage labour by “free labour,” i.e., family members. Between 1982 and 1987, the total number of restaurants dropped only slightly, from 1915 to 1842, while the average number of employees (excluding family members working in the restaurant) dropped by almost half, from 4.6 to 2.7 (Pieke 1988:18). Even more disquieting is the fact that an uneven number of unemployed Chinese are elderly cooks who have few chances of finding alternative employment, either within or without the Chinese restaurant business. Chinese restaurants seem to fire older people first, those who are less flexible and less able to work hard (Pieke 1988:19).

(3) Flexibility of employment. As mentioned earlier, a number of part-time workers are used in the restaurants. During busy times, such as in summer and on weekends, a Chinese restaurant will likely hire more part-time workers to cope with the increased trade.

4.4 Trade Union and Other Organizations

The lack of job security in Chinese restaurants is partially owing to a lack of union protection. In addition, Dutch labour laws are almost universally ignored (Pieke 1988:19). Even more important than this lack of the presence of unions in family-type enterprises, even in large restaurants, is that Chinese solidarity plays a dominant role in setting work expectations. The common cultural norms that create a mindset for appropriate behaviour replace outside views of work discipline. Workers tend to compromise with proprietors in most conflicts. One restaurant owner told me:

There is no trade union in my restaurant, although there are more than forty workers. When problems arise, I go to the person concerned simply asking him/her whether it is good for us Chinese or not (Interview, 1992).

Another worker in a Chinese restaurant also told me, “If I am not satisfied with the work in this restaurant, I just keep quiet until I find a new job in another restaurant.” These attitudes suggest that the Chinese are more intent on solving their management-labour conflicts individually rather than via unions.

While there are no union or other labour organizations, there are, however, some semi-political organizations that exist within the Chinese community. These organizations perform three functions, (1) Trying to increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the Dutch government and bureaucrats. (2) Trying to mobilize ethnic resources and solidarity to compete with other ethnic groups or natives in order to keep their enclave business viable. (3) Trying to balance the interests, benefits and conflicts within the Chinese community, including to provide information, consultations and skill training, and so forth, for both entrepreneurs and workers.

Conventional Chinese associations in the Netherlands, such as the Sectie Chinees-Indische Bedrijven Horeca Nederland, the biggest organization of proprietors of Chinese restaurants in the Netherlands, are concerned with the health of the catering trade. Recently, however, there are some indications that Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands are seeking a new development strategy. In July 1991, a group of Chinese proprietors gathered at the “Sea Palace” restaurant in Amsterdam to discuss development strategies for Chinese businesses in the Netherlands. It concluded that the,

“Catering trade is the most important means of livelihood for Chinese in the Netherland . . . Nevertheless, time is changing and the Chinese have to adapt themselves accordingly. Based upon the catering trade, the Chinese have to develop other businesses, establish a multi-sector business group, and furthermore, step onto the political stage in the Netherlands.” (Overzeese Chinezen 1991). Based on this principal, a united Chinese business group —Overseas Chinese Economic Investment Share Holding Group in the Netherlands — has been formed and begun functioning.

5. Summary and Conclusion

By applying the interactive approach, this paper, has analyzed some problems that Chinese immigrants face when founding or operating their restaurants. My analysis starts from a macro perspective, and then moves down to the micro perspective.

Looking at the macro level, I analyze the roles and nature of Chinese restaurants in employment. Historically, the emergence of the Dutch Chinese catering trade took place in the late 1930s. The 1950s marked a turning point for the development of Chinese restaurants as they gained access to customers beyond the Chinese community. The 1970s and early 1980s were the golden era for Chinese restaurants as by the late 1980s and early 1990s they experienced a decline in business. Over the entire period, the Chinese catering trade was city-related, family-based, and self-reliant. Based upon these facts, I argued that Chinese restaurants had an uneven impact on the employment of Chinese immigrants over time. After the 1950s, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, the restaurant business played a dominant employment role providing an alternative means of survival and eventually improving workers’ income and wealth positions. Although the restaurant sector is still dominant, it is no longer the only sector in which Chinese immigrants are involved. A small number are engaged in other sectors as well, in which most ethnic groups are active in accordance with the middleman minority approach.

At the micro level, labour utilization and employment conditions were discussed from the perspective of small- and large-scale restaurants. I concluded that the larger the

scale, the greater the proportion of paid labour. Small-scale restaurants either exploit family members and/or are self-exploiting. Both types of restaurants employ part-time labour with small-scale firms utilizing more part-time workers than their counterparts. Finally, on average, the business performance of large-scale restaurants is better than that of small-scale restaurants.

I also argued that the new generation of Chinese immigrants might experience different employment prospects than their parents and/or grandparents. The Dutch education that the young generation receive has an ambiguous impact on their employment. Educated Chinese youth are unlikely to accept jobs in the secondary labour market or at the bottom of the job hierarchy. Counteracting this is the possible trend to seek self-employment via inheriting their parents' restaurant business.

Finally, interviews strongly revealed that Chinese restaurants are male dominated. Females are subordinated in terms of the division of labour with little access to future skilled positions or power. The employment conditions in Chinese restaurants are characterized by long working hours, low hourly wages, little job security and no union protection. However, a new joint Chinese development strategy is gradually being formulated to overcome the many problems now facing the traditional Chinese restaurant sector.

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