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Immigration status, mobility and vulnerability  
of Chinese migrant workers in the UK:  
Impact of recession & PBS, and action taken by  
University of Nottingham

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# Overview of presentation



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- ILO-funded survey of Chinese migrants in the East Midlands (2009): aims, methods and sample
- Research findings on impact of recession and new immigration rules (PBS) on documented and undocumented Chinese migrants in UK
- Suggestions for action: Policy measures, Roundtable workshop, NCI network and NAA Module

# Survey methodology



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- Taking research beyond Chinatown
- Engagement with Chinese community
- Migrants in context of external opportunity structure (labour market, employment relations, immigration law) – not a culturalist approach
- Workplace observations and interviews
- Sampling: random and “snowball”
- “Advisers” and community participation
- Drawbacks: highly mobile workforce; some groups, e.g. women, under-represented

# Table 1 Profiles of Observations



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Sector	No.	%	Region	No.	%
Take-away	38	62.3	Hong Kong	26	42.6
Restaurant	13	21.4	Other overseas	6	9.8
Retail	5	8.2	Fujian	14	23.0
Herbal shop	3	4.9	Guangdong	4	6.6
Decoration	1	1.6	Dongbei	7	11.5
Nanny	1	1.6	North China	4	6.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>100.1</i>

# Table 2 Profiles of Interviewees



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Category	Item	No	%
Region of origins	Fujian	14	37.8
	Dongbei	10	27.0
	Other mainland	9	24.3
	HK/Overseas	4	10.8
Migration status	British/PR	15	40.5
	Work permit	5	13.5
	Student	6	16.2
	Irregular	11	29.6
Sector	Catering	26	70.3
	Retailer	4	10.8
	Herbal medicine	3	8.1
	Other	4	10.8
Total		37	100

# Impact of recession on Chinese migrant numbers



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- No simple or direct correlation between recession and migration flows
- Stay or go: migration debt; ease of return and re-migration; “opportunity differential” between home and host countries
- 9.5 yuan to £1 did send some migrants home
- Reports of decreased arrivals
- But demand for migrant workers in Chinese catering remains high – skills not replaceable from non-migrant labour market

# Effects of migration policy



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- Points-based system stresses formal qualifications, salary
- Too few skilled chefs get work permits
- UK Border Authority (UKBA) cracking down on employment of undocumented workers
- But demand for them is increased by restricted supply of documented migrants in catering
- Student workers have filled some demand – if numbers drop, could increase shortfall in catering

# Impact of recession on working conditions



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- Predicted decline in conditions for those in vulnerable employment (including undocumented migrants)
- But no attempt to improve monitoring of exploitation, abuse of immigration status
- Harder to provoke concern about migrant workers in government or public opinion at time of recession
- 2010 change of government – new administration's policy simply to reduce in-migration, regardless of actual labour-market conditions



# Experience of documented workers



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- Not necessarily better equipped to resist unreasonable employer demands
  - Even highly skilled workers (e.g. TCM practitioners) often monolingual in Chinese
  - Bosses exploit dependency to force down wages
  - 28-day window to change jobs – weakens labour-market power
  - Withholding of documents, deceit re progress to Permanent Residency – bonded labour

# Experience of undocumented workers



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- Varied category – contains extremes of vulnerability (trafficking victims), but also workers with relatively high labour-market power
- Nearly all work for a Chinese employer – language, information constraints on employment options
- High mobility – frequent job changes in search of better pay/conditions
- Employment sectors keep a ceiling on earnings, but they can get away from an unacceptable employer
- Lack of access to welfare, basic services

# Migration policy recommendations



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- Adjust PBS to fit specific case of Chinese catering, to avoid perverse outcome of encouraging undocumented migration
- Longer-term: provide training in UK for ethnic catering jobs
- Allow for long-term migrants wanting secure status vis-à-vis employers, but not citizenship
- UKBA crackdown will only create labour shortage if documented migration not facilitated

# New approaches to Chinese community building



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- Spatial distribution of Chinese population - easy for service providers to ignore
- Segmentation of community – areas of origin, dialect/language, old vs. new migrants
- All categories of migrant need better information on rights, status in UK, help to access services
- New resources and momentum for the community: Chinese/non-Chinese professionals and students
- New links (NGOs) between the university and Chinese communities for mutual benefits

# Employment and Empowerment of Chinese Migrant Workers: an ILO-UoN Workshop (22-23 Oct 2009)



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- A bridge between university and Chinese society
- An organisation for migrants' integration
- A platform for voluntary endeavors
- A new model for global citizenship

# What Does NCI Do?



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- E-Community for students, teachers & practitioners
  - Nottingham Advantage Award (NAA) module
  - Cross-Cultural Communication events
  - Internship opportunities via stakeholders
  - Community engagement projects



# Outline of NAA Module



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## **Aims:**

- Global citizenship and cross-cultural understanding
- Communication skills & confidence
- Working experience/employability

## **Structure**

- Stakeholder participation in 8 seminars and 1 field visit
- Chinese and Non-Chinese students together at various levels
- Ten student projects plus 20 internships for community needs











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**Many Thanks !!!**