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Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



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LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE, ORGANIZATIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS, AND BOUNDARY-SPANNING BEHAVIOR AMONG FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES IN CHINESE HOTEL INDUSTRY



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CUI XIAO

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine the effect of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on Boundary-Spanning Behavior (BSB) among frontline employees in China's hotel industry and to test the mediating role of Organizational Embeddedness (OE) in this relationship. This study applied a quantitative research approach. The questionnaires were used for data collection. Using a stratified random sampling technique, 410 frontline employees from star-rated hotels in China were selected to participate in the study. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software. The findings showed the R² of 0.619, indicating that 61.9% of the variation in BSB is explained by LMX and OE. The findings also revealed that LMX has a significant and positive effect on OE ($\beta=0.751$, $p=0.000$) while both the LMX ($\beta=0.499$, $p=0.000$) and OE ($\beta=0.339$, $p=0.000$) have a significant and positive effect on BSB. Furthermore, the findings indicated that OE partially mediate the relationships between LMX and BSB. In conclusion, the findings provide strong empirical support for the impact of LMX and OE on BSB, highlighting the mediating role of OE. In implication, to enhance BSB among frontline employees, the hotel industry should focus on strengthening LMX and OE, as this will promote proactive service behaviors, ultimately improving customer satisfaction and competitive advantage.





PERTUKARAN PEMIMPIN-AHLI, KETERLIBATAN ORGANISASI, DAN TINGKAH LAKU MERENTAS SEMPADAN DALAM KALANGAN PEKERJA BARISAN HADAPAN INDUSTRI HOTEL DI CHINA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji pengaruh Pertukaran Pemimpin-Ahli (LMX) terhadap Tingkah Laku Merentas Sempadan (BSB) di kalangan pekerja barisan hadapan dalam industri hotel di China dan untuk menguji peranan perantaraan Keterlibatan Organisasi (OE) dalam hubungan ini. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan penyelidikan kuantitatif. Soal selidik digunakan sebagai kaedah pengumpulan data. Menggunakan teknik pensampelan rawak berstrata, 410 orang pekerja barisan hadapan daripada hotel bertaraf bintang di China telah dipilih untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Data dianalisis menggunakan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur (SEM), dengan bantuan perisian Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) dan Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan R² sebanyak 0.619, yang menerangkan bahawa 61.9% variasi dalam BSB dijelaskan oleh LMX dan OE. Dapatan juga mendedahkan bahawa LMX mempunyai pengaruh yang signifikan dan positif terhadap OE ($\beta=0.751$, $p=0.000$), manakala kedua-dua LMX ($\beta=0.499$, $p=0.000$) dan OE ($\beta=0.339$, $p=0.000$) mempengaruhi BSB secara signifikan dan positif. Selain itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa OE mengantara secara separa hubungan di antara LMX dan BSB. Kesimpulannya, dapatan kajian memberikan sokongan empirikal yang kukuh terhadap impak LMX dan OE terhadap BSB, dengan menekankan peranan perantaraan OE. Implikasinya, bagi meningkatkan BSB dalam kalangan pekerja barisan hadapan, industri hotel perlu memberi tumpuan kepada pengukuhan LMX dan OE, kerana ini akan mempromosikan tingkah laku perkhidmatan proaktif, yang akhirnya meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan dan kelebihan daya saing.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index
AT	Affect
BSB	Boundary-spanning Behavior
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMV	Common Method Variance
CN	Contribution
COBSB	Customer-oriented Boundary-spanning Behaviors
Com	Component
C.R.	Critical Ratio
Cum	Cumulative
Df	Degree of Freedom
DV	Dependent Variable
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ER	External Representation
FT	Fit
FSEs	Frontline Service Employees
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index





II	Internal Influence
IV	Independent Variable
JE	Job Embeddedness
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
LY	Loyalty
NFI	Normed Fit Index
OCB	Organizational Citizenship Behavior
OE	Organizational Embeddedness
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PCM	Pooled Constructs Model
PR	Professional respect
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SD	Service delivery
S.E.	Standard Error
SE	Sacrifice
SMC	Squared Multiple Correlation
WOS	Web of Science
Var	Variance
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
χ^2	Chi-square





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction



Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese hotel industry is rapidly recovering. However, it now faces several challenges: increasing customer demands for higher service quality (GuoJun & JiaHui, 2022), declining guest satisfaction (Li, 2023), increased customer attrition and intensified competition (Yang, 2024). The performance of frontline employees is crucial, as they directly impact service quality and customer satisfaction (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). These employees perform boundary-spanning behaviors (BSB) that are vital for enhancing the hotel's external image and addressing customer needs effectively (Chien et al., 2021). Research shows that such behaviors significantly boost both performance and customer satisfaction (Yi & Amenuvor, 2023a; Du & Liu, 2021). However, until recently, there has been a lack of research in the hospitality literature regarding the factors that influence BSB





among frontline employees (J. Wang et al., 2022). Future research on the impact mechanism of BSB shows promise in investigating the incorporation of relationships (Zhang & Li, 2021). Leader-member exchange (LMX) focuses on the strength and quality of the relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Dienesch & Liden, 1986), which has a significant impact on a various employees' outcomes, such as citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Sethi et al., 2023; Niu et al., 2022; Anand et al., 2018). Organizational embeddedness (OE) refers to the work-related factors that contribute to employee job retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). Apart from its direct impact on employee job performance, OE also acts as a mediator in the relationship between other variables and work outcomes (Ampofo, Owusu, et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2021a; Yang et al., 2020).

This study adopts an organizational management perspective to examine the interplay between LMX, OE, and BSB within the Chinese hotel industry. The subsequent sections of Chapter 1 are structured as follows: The subsequent sections of Chapter 1 are structured as follows: Section 1.2 provides the research background, followed by Section 1.3, which outlines the problem statement. Section 1.4 presents the research objectives. Section 1.5 introduces the research questions and hypotheses that guide this investigation. Section 1.6 elaborates on the conceptual framework, including the theoretical underpinnings, research variables, and a visual representation of the proposed model. Section 1.7 defines the key operational terms used throughout the study. Section 1.8 delineates the scope of the research, while Section 1.9 discusses its significance. Section 1.10 outlines the organization of the study. Finally, Section 1.11 provides a summary of the chapter.





1.2 Research Background

The hotel industry is a crucial component of the tourism sector in China and plays a significant role in the country's economy (Gu, 2023). During the 1980s, driven by China's reform and opening-up policies, the Chinese hotel industry entered a phase of rapid development (B. Li et al., 2020). Initially dominated by state-owned enterprises, China's hotel industry saw intensified competition and notable improvements in service quality and management standards in the 21st century, driven by the entry of foreign brands and the emergence of domestic players (Zhao, 2022). As delineated in the "The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2021" by the World Economic Forum (WEF), China stands at the forefront of the Asia-Pacific region's tourism economy and has secured a formidable presence within the global tourism sector (Lauren Uppink, 2022). The trajectory of the Chinese tourism industry is marked by an ascendant growth pattern, which has seen resurgence post the COVID-19 pandemic hiatus (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Notably, in February 2023, pivotal performance metrics of China's hotel industry, including revenue per available room, which saw an increase of 15% compared to the same period in 2019, occupancy rate, and average daily room rate, have not only rebounded but exceeded pre-pandemic levels registered in the corresponding timeframe of 2019 (Li, 2023). This recovery has been buoyed by strategic state interventions aimed at invigorating consumer spending and fortifying the caliber of supply chains, thereby infusing vigor into the tourism sector (Lu, 2022). The Chinese hotel industry, a critical component of the tourism economy, is currently undergoing rapid development and transformation (Ratna et al., 2024). It is projected that from 2022 to 2030, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of the Chinese hotel market is expected to reach 8.86% (Research and Markets, 2023). Despite signs





of post-pandemic recovery, the Chinese hotel industry is grappling with several significant challenges. These include rising customer expectations for higher service quality (GuoJun & JiaHui, 2022), a decline in guest satisfaction (Li, 2023), increasing customer attrition and intensifying market competition (Yang, 2024).

In addressing the current challenges faced by the hotel industry, frontline employees are crucial as they play an indispensable role in enhancing customer satisfaction, providing high-quality service, shaping brand image, and fostering customer loyalty (Vikash et al., 2022; Chien et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2016). On one hand, the significance of frontline employees lies in their interactions and behaviors with customers, which directly impact customer satisfaction and the overall operational effectiveness of the hotel, with service quality largely depending on their performance (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). Serving as the primary communication bridge between the hotel and its customers, frontline employees are vital in enhancing service quality. Their service attitude, professional skills, and responsiveness to customer needs are indispensable elements of the customer experience. More specifically, the professional knowledge displayed by employees, their exceptional communication abilities, and their swift and effective response to customer needs significantly enhance customer perceptions of service quality (Jung & Yoon, 2020).

On the other hand, frontline employees are essential in performing customer-oriented BSB within the hotel industry (Chien et al., 2021), which spans both formal and informal roles and significantly enhances service quality and boosts the hotel's reputation (Z. Wang et al., 2023). BSB involves managing relationships across different groups, departments, or environments to facilitate the flow of





information and cooperation (Zhang & Li, 2021). This behavior is particularly critical in the hotel industry as it helps in accessing external resources and enhancing internal and external coordination (Valeri & Baggio, 2021; Ying & Norman, 2017). Besides, the flattening of organizational structures and the dynamism of external environments necessitate increased cross-boundary collaboration among employees, especially in the hotel industry (Marrone, 2010), making individual boundary-spanning activities inevitable due to the complex and changeable working conditions (Zhang & Li, 2021). Frontline employees, serving as the primary interface between the organization and its customers, must not only establish strong relationships with external customers but also closely collaborate with internal teams to ensure the delivery of high-quality service (Han & Hwang, 2021; Peng et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019; Bowen & Schneider, 1985). For instance, when a guest requests additional room amenities, the front desk receptionist effectively communicates with the housekeeping team to swiftly meet the customer's needs. This type of interdepartmental collaboration is a typical example of BSB (Song et al., 2023). For example, the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts leveraged real-time data analysis and fostered cross-departmental collaboration and customer-focused service among its employees to better understand and meet guest needs. These customer-oriented BSB significantly enhanced service quality, resulting in a 7-point increase in Net Promoter Score and a 38% reduction in negative feedback, thereby greatly improving customer satisfaction (Medallia, 2023). It is evident that frontline employees' BSB not only significantly boost customer satisfaction in the short term but also lay a solid foundation for long-term business growth by cultivating a loyal customer base (Bettencourt et al., 2001). Therefore, the hotel industry has witnessed an increasing trend where more and more enterprises acknowledge and encourage employee BSB (Jiaxin Wang et al., 2022).





BSB at the individual employee level are crucial for building relationships both within and outside the organization, yet research on these behaviors remains limited (Korschun, 2015). BSB involves team members' efforts to establish and maintain external relationships critical for achieving work-unit objectives (Choi, 2002). In contemporary organizations, boundary-spanning activities are becoming more and more important (Choi, 2002). It is no longer feasible to secure a competitive advantage in today's fierce market by merely focusing on a team's internal processes (Ancona et al., 2007). As stakeholder theory suggests, the survival and development of an enterprise hinge on its relationships with stakeholders, who can supply a variety of tangible and intangible resources that facilitate the enterprise's growth (Freeman et al., 2010). In the process of establishing internal and external connections for the team, employees engaged in boundary-spanning activities play a key role (Korschun, 2015). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that boundary-spanning behavior is vital for enhancing employee job satisfaction as well as team success (Marrone et al., 2022; Dekker et al., 2019). Individuals and teams are the two levels of enterprise BSB. Given the critical role employees play in establishing internal and external connections, there is a pressing need for more in-depth research into the mechanisms of individual-level BSB (Marrone, 2010). Therefore, this paper focuses on the research topic of BSB at the individual level.

The formation of BSB is closely linked to leadership behavior (Cheng et al., 2023). LMX refers to the quality of the relationship between a leader and their followers (Holt & Lee, 2023). LMX theory critically underscores the quality of interactions between leaders and their subordinates as foundational to organizational effectiveness (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This relationship operates on the principle of





reciprocity, where mutual exchanges influence numerous behavioral and performance outcomes among organizational members (Farooq & Tripathi, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that high-quality LMX contributes significantly to positive subordinate outcomes such as enhanced commitment, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behavior (Cheng et al., 2023; Varma et al., 2022). Extensive research has demonstrated that the interaction between superiors and subordinates is not only central to the smooth operation of an organization but also profoundly influences a wide array of organizational outcomes. These include citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, thereby impacting the overall organizational climate and effectiveness (Sethi et al., 2023; Niu et al., 2022; Anand et al., 2018). The dynamics of these relationships are complex and pivotal, indicating that the role of LMX in organizational psychology extends far beyond simple hierarchical interactions.



Additional research underscores the importance of understanding this superior-subordinate relationship within Chinese organizations (Xing et al., 2020). In Chinese society, which is characterized by a focus on relationships and authority, the relationship between superiors and subordinates carries greater sensitivity and significance compared to western societies, significantly influencing the conduct of organizational members (Altinay et al., 2019; Jian & ChongMing, 2001). Moreover, the concept of “Guanxi,” which refers to the building of networks or connections that facilitate business and other dealings, is deeply embedded in Chinese business practices and significantly affects organizational decision-making and performance (Dobrucali, 2020). The influence of Confucian values, which emphasize hierarchical roles, respect for authority, and loyalty, further complicates these relationships. These





values shape expectations and interactions within Chinese companies, often leading to a leadership style that differs markedly from Western approaches (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024). Considering these factors, exploring the dynamics of superior-subordinate relationships within the Chinese cultural context holds both theoretical significance and substantial practical importance. Research in this area is instrumental in deepening understanding of organizational behavior and management practices in China. This knowledge lays the groundwork for developing strategies that enhance employee performance and organizational effectiveness (Xie et al., 2020).

Besides, the Chinese hotel industry has long faced the challenge of high staff turnover (Wen et al., 2020). OE plays a key role in influencing employee departure behaviors and has increasingly attracted attention in recent years (Majumdarr & Dasgupta, 2024; Nejad et al., 2023; Yu, Lee, et al., 2020). OE refers to the fact that people become entangled with organizations due to a plethora of links, investments, and appraisals that form a constellation or web of restraining forces (Peltokorpi et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2001). This is conceptually similar to job embeddedness theory, which suggests that individuals become enmeshed in a web of relationships and other restraining forces that bind them to the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). Thus, positive social exchanges may also contribute to effective behavior in work, in part through the perception that the person is becoming entangled in a web of binding or restraining forces (Allen & Shanock, 2013). In recent years, A growing body of literature on organizational behavior has emphasized the importance of OE due to its ability to explain increased variation in important work outcomes, such as turnover, affective commitment, citizenship behavior, and task performance (Ampofo, Owusu-Ansah, et al., 2022; Yu, Ariza-Montes, et al., 2020). Meanwhile, as





individuals engage in ongoing communication with the organization, they develop positive emotional responses which they associate with the organization, leading to a strong emotional and cognitive connection that results in effective behavior (Allen & Shanock, 2013).

In summary, the Chinese hotel industry, a critical segment of the national economy, has witnessed considerable growth and transformation, catalyzed by both government policies and private enterprise. Despite significant strides in development and a notable recovery post-COVID-19, the sector faces challenges such as high staff turnover, declining customer satisfaction, and intensifying competition. Key to addressing these challenges are the hotel frontline employees, who engage in BSB that are essential for maintaining customer satisfaction and operational effectiveness.

This study primarily focuses on enhancing the BSB of frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry, with the ultimate goal of boosting customer satisfaction and enhancing hotel competitiveness. Concurrently, the dynamics of LMX within Chinese cultural and organizational contexts influence employee outcomes significantly, suggesting a unique interplay of relationships that affect organizational behavior. OE further complicates this scenario by binding employees through a web of social, emotional, and functional ties, impacting their performance and retention. By delving into the intricate relationships between LMX, OE, and BSB within the unique context of Chinese cultural and organizational frameworks, this research aims to explore these intricate relationships to enhance understanding and provide actionable insights for improving employee engagement and customer satisfaction in the Chinese hotel industry, thereby enhancing the competitive edge of the Chinese hotel industry.





1.3 Problem Statement

Despite post-pandemic recovery, the Chinese hotel industry has faced significant challenges, not only in terms of declining customer satisfaction, but also in managing frontline employees who are pivotal to service delivery. According to the “2022 National Tourist Satisfaction Survey Report,” the national tourist satisfaction index dropped to 80.52 in 2022—a 2.37% decrease from the previous year and the first decline since 2016 (China Tourism Academy, 2023). Moreover, although the Global Review Index™ (GRI™) increased by 26.0% from Q1 2022 to Q1 2023 globally, it still remained 10.7% lower than the pre-pandemic level in Q1 2019 (Shiji Group, 2023). The key influencing factors of the GRI™, namely customer experience, employee performance, and service quality, further highlight the central role of employees in enhancing customer satisfaction (Shiji Group, 2023). However, hotel frontline employees have been under mounting pressure due to increasing customer expectations, job burnout, and a demanding service environment. These challenges have contributed to inconsistent service delivery and hindered hotels’ ability to meet rising customer demands (Kumar et al., 2024). However, Chinese hotel frontline employees have been under mounting pressure due to increasing customer expectations, staff shortages, job burnout, and a demanding service environment (Xue et al., 2022).

These challenges have contributed to inconsistent service delivery and hindered hotels’ ability to meet rising customer demands (Grobelna, 2021). As a result, customer attrition has accelerated, with hotel occupancy rates dropping from 69.2% in 2023 to 55% during the 2024 May Day holiday (Lvzhi Technology, 2024).





Simultaneously, intensified market competition, as evidenced by steep price reductions during the 2024 Dragon Boat Festival, further underscores the need for hotels to rely on their workforce to differentiate themselves through service excellence. Consequently, the role of frontline employees in delivering high-quality service has become more critical than ever in the increasingly competitive and complex post-pandemic landscape.

Against this backdrop, frontline employees are increasingly viewed as pivotal to enhancing service quality and strengthening a hotel's competitive position (Vikash et al., 2022; He et al., 2011). Consequently, fostering customer-oriented service behaviors among frontline employees has become a pressing issue that needs to be addressed within the industry. Frontline employees, as the key players in service delivery, greatly depend on the effectiveness of their BSB. Research has shown that LMX, OE, and BSB are key factors influencing frontline employees' behaviors and service quality (J. Wang et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019; Kim & Koo, 2017). However, despite extensive theoretical research on these factors, their complex interactions within the unique cultural and market environment of the Chinese hotel industry have not been adequately explored. A significant challenge for hotel managers is understanding and leveraging these factors to drive employees' BSB (J. Wang et al., 2022). While LMX and OE are recognized as important influences on employee behavior, the specific mechanisms through which LMX and OE interact to enhance BSB in China's distinctive cultural and organizational context remain insufficiently examined. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the interrelationships between LMX, OE, and BSB.





Firstly, the quality of the LMX relationship exerts a direct influence on employees' work attitudes and behaviors (Ho & Le, 2023; Insan & Masmarulan, 2021). However, current research remains insufficiently comprehensive in addressing how LMX influences BSB among frontline employees within the Chinese hotel industry. LMX has significant effects on subordinates' job satisfaction (Bhatti et al., 2015), affective commitment, retention intention, task performance (Wang, 2023), and organizational citizenship behavior (Zhang et al., 2020), and that relationship-based leadership has a stronger influence on subordinates' outcomes than behavior-based leadership in Chinese collectivistic and high power distance culture (Wang et al., 2013).

As a team member, boundary spanning can be an especially challenging task and may require leadership support to make it successful (Qiu et al., 2022). In LMX theory, it is widely acknowledged that cultivating a strong relationship with one's leader enhances the performance of followers in tasks and their willingness to contribute to the organization (Martin et al., 2016). This is because positive relationships with leaders can provide followers with valuable resources such as emotional and material support, thereby enhancing their work-related outcomes (Montano et al., 2017). The hospitality management literature has shown a keen interest in understanding the factors that contribute to BSB and how to encourage such behaviors among frontline employees (J. Wang et al., 2022; Jung & Yoon, 2020). However, there has been limited research on the factors influencing customer-oriented BSB among frontline employees in hospitality literature until recently (Kim & Qu, 2019; Bettencourt & Brown, 2003) and, remarkably, how leaders can encourage and inspire their team members to exhibit such behaviors





remain unclear (Marrone et al., 2022). This statement emphasizes the crucial role of LMX in shaping employee outcomes in Chinese cultural settings and identifies a gap in the existing literature concerning the specific effects of leader-member exchange on BSB within this sector. By highlighting this deficiency, the research underscores the need for a deeper investigation into how these relational dynamics function in the unique context of China's hospitality environment.

Secondly, OE refers to the resources that entangle an employee in a specific organization (Harris et al., 2011). Research examining the relationship between LMX and OE in China has only emerged in the last decade (Zhuo & Shichang, 2021). However, these studies have yet to address the hotel industry. Recent studies have demonstrated that employees who experience high-quality exchanges with their supervisors tend to exhibit high levels of OE (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Harris et al., 2011). The positive impact of OE on the workplace has made it a significant area of interest for management researchers nowadays (Froese et al., 2021). Despite this, research on the relationship between LMX and OE in China remains in its early stages and primarily focuses on non-service industries (Zhuo & Shichang, 2021; Qian et al., 2018; Peng & Xiao-bing, 2015; Pengcheng et al., 2013). Overall, the existing literature identifies OE as a crucial factor affecting employee turnover in the Chinese hotel industry, highlighting a growing academic interest in exploring the connections between LMX and OE within this specific cultural context. Therefore, this study underscores the necessity for further investigation to fully comprehend the relationship between LMX and OE in the Chinese hotel sector.





Finally, BSB is one of the critical behaviors exhibited by frontline employees during interactions with customers, playing a key role in enhancing customer satisfaction and hotel performance (Chien et al., 2021; Jung & Yoon, 2020). Employee behavior can be defined from various perspectives, among which pro-social organizational behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, and BSB are significant research directions in the domain of service enterprise management (Hui et al., 2012). Unlike organizational citizenship behaviors and pro-social behaviors, which have broad applicability across various positions and contexts, BSB are specifically concerned with the unique aspects of crossing organizational boundaries in the functioning of an organization (J. Wang et al., 2022; Hui et al., 2012). The literature on service management and boundary-spanning highlights three key dimensions of customer-linking behaviors exhibited by frontline employees (Bettencourt et al., 2005). These dimensions of BSB primarily involve enhancing the organization's external image, internally sharing information regarding evolving customer needs and potential service delivery improvements, and delivering high-quality service to customers (Chien et al., 2021). Empirical studies have confirmed that employee BSB contributes to improving performance (Du & Liu, 2021) and customer satisfaction (Yi & Amenuvor, 2023a).

Most of the current research on BSB focuses on team BSB (Marrone et al., 2007) and the discussion of the impact of BSB (Dekker et al., 2019), but empirical research on the antecedents of employee BSB is still quite lacking (Marrone et al., 2022). The hotel industry faces a significant research and management challenge: “despite hotels’ extensive efforts to motivate employees from every angle, they still struggle to effectively enhance employee engagement” (SSHIRC, 2021; Sekiguchi et al., 2008).





Particularly, there is currently limited understanding of the factors driving employees' BSB (J. Wang et al., 2022). These few antecedent studies mainly focus on individual factors, such as length of service, motivation, core self-evaluation, etc (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). Surprisingly, the understanding of how team leaders can support and motivate their members to engage in these behaviors is still lacking (Marrone et al., 2022). The leader's leadership behavior has an impact on the behavior of subordinates that cannot be ignored (Chen et al., 2002), especially in China's cultural background of "Guanxi" (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). While research has demonstrated that LMX influences prosocial behaviors via mechanisms such as perceived organizational support and interactional justice (Qiu et al., 2022; Rokhim & Devina, 2019), the specific impact of LMX on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry remains unexplored.



Besides, previous research has confirmed that mutually beneficial boundary-spanning collaboration between organizations and individuals relies heavily on employee engagement (Ying & Norman, 2017) and Person-Organization fit (Farmanesh et al., 2021). Although Person-Organization fit is an important component of OE (Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022), there is a lack of research on the impact of the overall dimension of OE on BSB. So, whether OE drives the employee's BSB needs to be explored.

Based on the analysis of BSB mentioned above, the research findings indicate that a great deal of empirical work has emerged in this area over the past two decades. While some theoretical attention has been given to advancing team boundary-spanning research (Burbach et al., 2023; Marrone et al., 2022; Joshi et al.,





2009), significant gaps still exist in the understanding of the boundary-spanning phenomenon. On one hand, the literature on hotels has been limited in its studies on how to cultivate boundary-spanning personnel until recently (J. Wang et al., 2022; Kim & Qu, 2019; Yang & Lau, 2019). On the other hand, while some research has been conducted on the factors affecting members' BSB, it has focused on factors such as personal characteristics, with little attention being paid to environmental or situational factors (Marrone et al., 2022; Marrone, 2010). In the study of the impact mechanism of BSB, exploring the introduction of relationships represents a promising avenue for future research (Zhang & Li, 2021). In the Chinese hotel industry specifically, research exploring how LMX and OE influence the promotion of BSB among frontline employees is notably scarce. Exploring these relationships represents a promising avenue for future research, particularly in understanding the impact mechanism of BSB (Zhang & Li, 2021).



As the body of literature within the hotel sector increasingly highlights the importance of LMX (Chang et al., 2020; Hasib et al., 2020; Altinay et al., 2019; Aslan, 2019), OE (Arici et al., 2023; Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022), and BSB (Farmanesh et al., 2021), there persists a notable gap in comprehensive research examining how these factors interrelate, particularly within the context of the Chinese hotel industry. This study aims to bridge these gaps by exploring the interactions between LMX, OE, and BSB among frontline employees, emphasizing the influence of leadership and organizational practices. This research seeks to provide targeted management strategies to enhance service quality and customer satisfaction in China's hospitality sector.





1.4 Research Objectives

RO1: Examine the effect of LMX on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

RO2: Examine the effect of LMX on OE among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

RO3: Examine the effect of OE on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

RO4: Test the mediation effect of OE in the relationship between LMX and BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.



1.5 Research Questions and Hypothesis

Based on the Research Objectives, this study presents four corresponding research questions and four hypotheses.

1.5.1 Research Questions

RQ1: Does LMX have a significant and positive effect on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry?

RQ2: Does LMX have a significant and positive effect on OE among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry?





RQ3: Does OE have a significant and positive effect on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry?

RQ4: Does OE mediate the relationship between LMX and BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry?

1.5.2 Research Hypothesis

H1: LMX has a significant and positive effect on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

H2: LMX has a significant and positive effect on OE among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

H3: OE has a significant and positive effect on BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

H4: OE mediates the relationship between LMX and BSB among frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework serves as a visual representation of the postulated relationships between independent and dependent variables in research (Mukhtar et al., 2023), particularly in quantitative studies. Key elements within a conceptual framework encompass concepts, framing, constructs, framework, and variables (Mugizi, 2019). To effectively address the complexities identified in the problem





statement and align with the stated research objectives and questions, this study utilizes a robust conceptual framework grounded in established theoretical perspectives. Specifically, our exploration is supported by the LMX theory and the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory. These theories constitute the theoretical foundation for examining the relationships among LMX, OE, and BSB in the context of the Chinese hotel industry.

1.6.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

The LMX theory explores how the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates affects organizational behavior and performance (Van Breukelen et al., 2006). This theory posits that high-quality exchange relationships between leaders and some members can enhance communication, strengthen trust and respect, thereby improving job satisfaction and performance among employees (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). LMX theory emphasizes the unique relationships between leaders and each of their direct subordinates, typically dividing these relationships into in-group (high LMX) and out-group (low LMX) members, with in-group members generally having access to more resources and support (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975).

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, proposed by Hobfoll, focuses on how individuals strive to retain, protect, and build resources and minimize resource loss in the face of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In this theory, “resources” can be tangible (such as money), intangible (such as time), personal (such as self-esteem and self-efficacy), or social (such as social support). The theory posits that the loss of





resources leads to further resource loss, whereas resource gain helps in acquiring more resources, creating a positive cycle (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Within the framework of COR theory, the “spiral effect” describes how individuals experience gains and losses of resources, significantly influencing their stress levels and well-being (Matthews et al., 2022). Resource Loss Spirals occur when the depletion of resources leads to further losses, increasing stress and negatively impacting well-being, as noted by Hobfoll (2001) and supported by recent findings (Somaraju et al., 2022). Conversely, Resource Gain Spirals begin with increases in resources that catalyze additional gains, enhancing resilience against stress and improving overall well-being. For instance, increased social support at work not only enhances trust but also encourages greater investment in relationships, creating a reinforcing cycle of resource gains (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). This dynamic interplay of resource spirals plays a critical role in shaping individuals’ responses to their environments and their psychological health.

1.6.2 Research Variables

In this study, the conceptual framework is constructed around key variables that interact within the context of the Chinese hotel industry’s frontline employees. Specifically, the framework identifies LMX as the independent variable, BSB as the dependent variable, and OE as the mediating variable.





The LMX represents the distinct and personal connections that supervisors establish with their subordinates at varying levels of quality (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Proposed for LMX are four sub-dimensions: affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. First of all, affect describes the shared fondness in a dyadic connection, which is mostly motivated by interpersonal attraction rather than by professional or professional values (Potipiroon & Ford, 2021). Secondly, loyalty can be interpreted as an indication of how far both the leader and the member are openly endorsing each other's behavior and personal characteristics (Xia et al., 2022). According to the third definition, contribution is defined as the perception of the quantity, direction, quality, and effectiveness of the work-related efforts directed toward the common goals of the pair, irrespective of whether those goals are explicitly or implicitly (Kapil & Rastogi, 2018). Lastly, the professional respect encompasses the mutual respect and recognition that leaders and subordinates hold for one another's professional competencies. This involves assessing the individual's expertise, competencies, and performance in their professional role. In a strong LMX relationship, there is a mutual respect for each other's professionalism and a recognition of the contributions and achievements made at work (Wang & Wong, 2011). LMX is considered a job resource because supervisors play a role in providing resources from HRM practices to their subordinates (Gim et al., 2022; Breevaart et al., 2015). As resources are obtained, they can be used to acquire more resources through investment (Hobfoll, 2001). Therefore, the development of high-quality LMX relationships can also provide members with additional resources.

Employees with strong OE possess a wealth of resources in their work, which can be categorized into three main aspects: the organizational connections that reflect





relational resources, the sense of belonging to the organization that signifies resource fit, and the perceived sacrifice that comes from the relinquishment of resources (L. Zhang et al., 2019a). Links and fit are resources that have instrumental value, meaning they allow individuals to gain additional resources such as supervisor support or job-relevant skills, while sacrifice represents an intrinsic resource that serves as an end goal and has little value in acquiring other resources, such as salary, bonuses, and allowances (Kiazad et al., 2014). All in all, embeddedness refers to the resources (e.g., links, fit, sacrifices) that embed an employee within a specific job within a specific organization (Ampofo, Owusu, et al., 2022). Theoretical and empirical research has described OE as a status of an abundance of resources (Harris et al., 2011; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). Besides, COR theoretically explains the components and empirical findings of OE (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008), employees who are embedded in their organization are more likely to acquire additional work resources and less likely to lose resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Specifically, the study examines the concept of customer-oriented BSB, which are categorized into three categories: service delivery, internal impact, and external representation (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). External representation involves promoting a positive company image, while internal influence involves sharing creative ideas with colleagues and superiors, and service delivery entails providing services aligned with job descriptions (Chien et al., 2021). The concept of BSB describes the actions individuals take in an organization in order to communicate, coordinate, and communicate between internal and external boundaries (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Based on the COR theory, BSB can be viewed as a consequence of an individual's resource condition. Specifically, employees who are embedded within





their organization are more likely to engage in BSB due to the acquisition of additional resources.

1.6.3 Visualization and Explanation of the Model

COR theory posits that individuals and groups are motivated to acquire, retain, and protect resources that are crucial to them (Hobfoll et al., 2018). This theory emphasizes a dynamic spiral where the acquisition of resources leads to further resource accumulation, enhancing individuals' capacity to obtain additional resources over time (Matthews et al., 2022). Based on COR theory, this study argues that social relationships, such as those formed through leader-member exchange, constitute valuable resources. These relationships can significantly contribute to the resource gain spiral by fostering the acquisition of additional resources, which are vital for both personal and organizational development.

OE is conceptualized as reflecting an individual's overall resource status, encompassing various dimensions such as job fit, skill match, and social relationship networks (Allen et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2001). The deep connections formed through high levels of OE enable employees to accumulate resources that stabilize their position within the organization. This stability reduces their turnover intentions and enhances their capacity to engage in BSB. Such behaviors include representing the organization in external contacts or facilitating interdepartmental cooperation, which are essential for organizational adaptability and success.



From the COR theory perspective, employees with a high degree of OE possess a greater resource base, which empowers them to perform effective boundary-spanning actions. These actions, in turn, lead to further enhancement of their resource pool, exemplifying the dynamic gain spiral predicted by COR theory. This continuous cycle of resource acquisition and utilization not only solidifies their organizational role but also expands their influence and capabilities within and beyond the organization.

Furthermore, this study introduces a novel interpretation of BSB, viewing it as an outcome of an individual's resource status, thus extending the application of COR theory to understand dynamic employee behaviors within organizations. This perspective underscores how resource-rich environments foster greater adaptability and proactive behavior among employees, contributing to organizational resilience and success.

Building on the dynamic resource-building perspective provided by the COR theory, LMX theory further enriches the understanding of interpersonal dynamics within organizations. LMX theory suggests that the attitudes and behaviors of followers are significantly influenced by the quality of their exchanges with leaders (Han et al., 2019). LMX theory posits that the quality of exchanges between leaders and their members significantly influences follower attitudes and behaviors, impacting outcomes such as work engagement, citizenship behavior, and performance (Insan & Masmarulan, 2021; Martin et al., 2018; Anand et al., 2018). This influence extends beyond immediate behavioral outcomes, with high-quality LMX relationships fostering an environment where employees are more likely to develop deeper OE (Akgunduz et al., 2023).

Besides, followers who engage in positive and constructive interactions with their leaders, as demonstrated in high-quality LMX relationships, are more likely to exhibit attitudes and behaviors that surpass usual expectations (Zhang et al., 2020). Such high-quality LMX relationships cultivate an environment of mutual trust, respect, and support, which is crucial for encouraging employees to assume additional roles and responsibilities. In this enriched setting, employees feel more empowered and motivated to engage in boundary-spanning activities. These dynamics underscore the role of strong LMX in facilitating organizational adaptability and employee engagement in broader organizational roles. All in all, a high-quality LMX promotes trust, respect, and a sense of obligation—factors crucial not only for effective BSB but also for strengthening employees' embeddedness within their organization, facilitating a symbiotic enhancement of both individual and organizational performance.

Drawing on the principles of COR theory and LMX theory, this study develops and explores a model where OE acts as a mediating variable between LMX and BSB. Additionally, the model proposes that LMX may also have a direct impact on BSB. This dual pathway approach, depicted in the theoretical model shown in Figure 1.1, aims to comprehensively understand the dynamics of leadership and its influence on organizational behavior. The conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1.1 illustrates a mediation model where OE serves as a mediating variable (MV) between LMX as the independent variable (IV) and BSB as the dependent variable (DV).

This arrangement of Figure 1.1 is structured to explore the causal sequence in which the independent variable influences the mediator (LMX→OE), and



subsequently, the mediator affects the dependent variable (OE→BSB). Such a configuration aligns with established mediation analysis principles, which are crucial for examining the mechanisms through which interventions designed to enhance LMX might indirectly influence BSB through improvements in OE. The model not only asserts that LMX directly impacts OE, as indicated by H2, but also that OE significantly affects BSB (H3), thereby positing OE's role as a critical intermediary that facilitates the translation of positive leader-member relations into effective BSB (H4). This mediation pathway, highlighted through the validated and proposed paths in the model, is central to understanding how targeted organizational interventions can be structured to enhance employee performance and interactions both within and beyond the organization.



Building on the foundational understanding of the conceptual framework as outlined, it's pertinent to delve deeper into the specific pathways that the model examines. The model depicted in Figure 1.1 not only clarifies the direct and indirect influences within the organizational dynamics but also sets the stage for a detailed exploration of both validated and new paths that are hypothesized in this study.

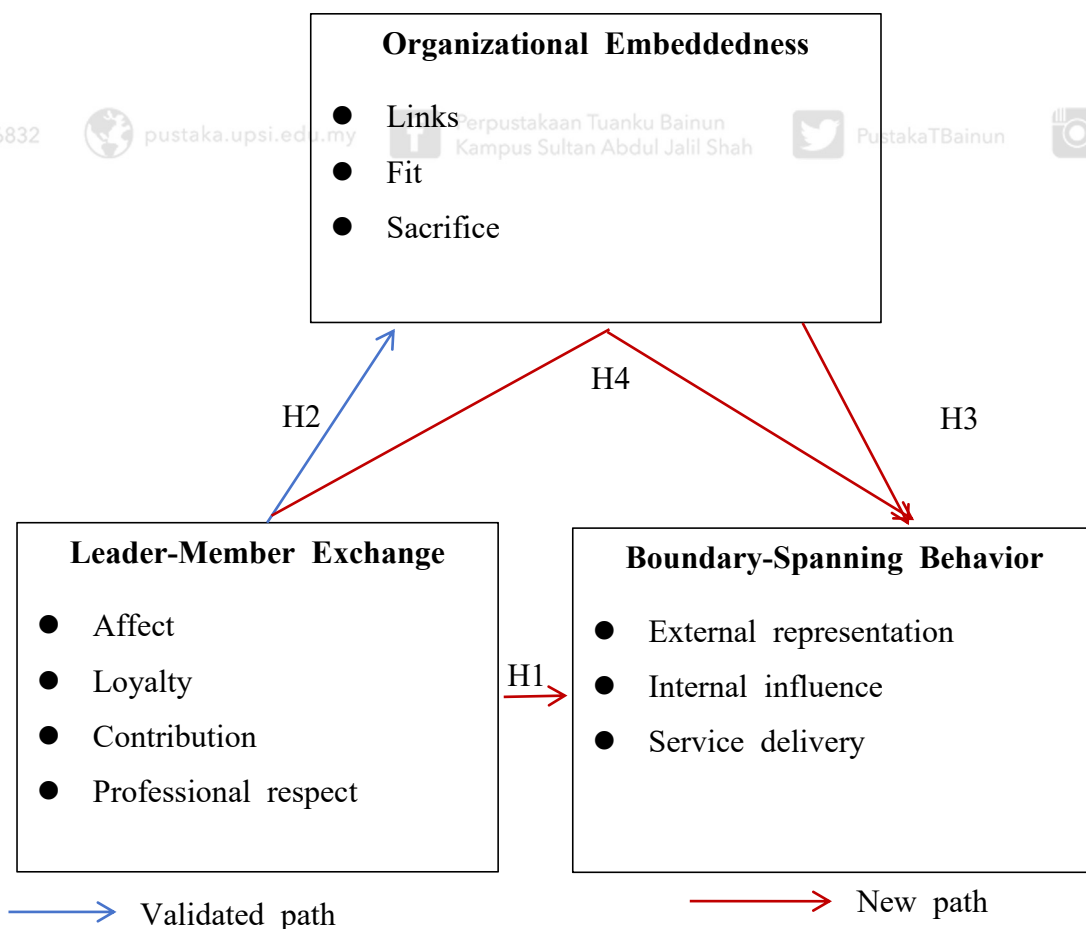
Starting with a validated path, H2 posits that high-quality LMX enhances OE. According to previous research, employees with high levels of OE are associated with high-quality exchanges with supervisors (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Dirican, 2023; Harris et al., 2011). However, the study of how LMX and OE are related in China has barely begun in the last decade (Zhuo & Shichang, 2021; Qian et al., 2018; Peng & Xiao-bing, 2015; Pengcheng et al., 2013). The results of the studies lack attention to the service industry, especially the hotel industry.



Moving to unexplored territories, H1 introduces a novel path by examining how LMX directly influences BSB among hotel employees. Although studies have demonstrated that LMX has a significant positive impact on both intra-role and extra-role performance (Chun et al., 2016), the specific effects on boundary-spanning activities have not been sufficiently analyzed in this industry. This hypothesis seeks to delineate how leadership quality could potentially facilitate engagement in activities that exceed regular duties, enhancing organizational adaptability and customer service.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework



Note, H4- Mediating hypothesis



Similarly, H3 explores another uncharted area by assessing the impact of OE on BSB. Researches highlight OE's influence on work outcomes (Stoermer et al., 2021; Coetzer et al., 2018) and suggests that it has a stronger effect in collectivistic societies, such as China (Jiang et al., 2012). Yet, the specific link to BSB remains under-examined. This hypothesis is grounded on emerging evidence suggesting that elements like co-worker support (Satheesh et al., 2023) and job fit might promote such behaviors (Gabler et al., 2023; Farmanesh et al., 2021).

Finally, H4 explores whether the link between LMX and BSB is mediated by OE. This hypothesis mainly explores the mechanism of OE on LMX and positive work behavior. Although existing research has confirmed that both transformational leadership (Yang et al., 2020) and green human resource management (Tabrizi et al., 2023) can influence employees' positive behaviors through the mediator of OE, OE is less important in connecting LMX. Specific applications of BSB in the hotel and hospitality industries are few.

Overall, this study's conceptual framework provides an in-depth exploration of the relationships among LMX, OE, and BSB within the Chinese hotel industry. By analyzing both existing validated pathways and newly proposed ones, the framework enhances the theoretical understanding of how LMX directly impacts employees' BSB and how this impact is mediated by OE. This research offers significant practical insights for improving leadership strategies and employee motivation within the hotel sector.



1.7 Operational Definition

This section provides the operational definitions of key terms used in the study.

1.7.1 Frontline Employees in Hotels

Frontline employees in the hotel industry refer to the staff members who directly interact with guests and provide services on the hotel's premises (J. Wang et al., 2022). These roles typically include front desk staff, bellhops, doormen, valet attendants, concierges, as well as restaurant servers, housekeeping staff, fitness center employees, and more (Ampofo, 2020; Karatepe et al., 2005). Their responsibilities encompass addressing guest inquiries, managing daily operations, and ensuring a seamless guest experience. As boundary-spanners (Chien et al., 2021), they are actively engaged in managing customer requests and resolving complaints. The professionalism and customer-focused approach of these employees play a pivotal role in maintaining high service quality and operational efficiency (Yadav & Dhar, 2024; González-González et al., 2021).

1.7.2 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Leader–Member exchange (LMX) theory focused on the social and emotional exchange processes embedded in the leader-member relationship in the workplace (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). The LMX refers to the dyadic



relationship between supervisors and subordinates (Sethi et al., 2023). A fundamental principle of LMX is acknowledging that a leader will exhibit different qualities in the relationships with each follower (Dansereau Jr et al., 1975). The four sub-dimensions of LMX are: affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect (Xia et al., 2022; Potipiroon & Ford, 2021; Kapil & Rastogi, 2018). Affect refers to the mutual affection and personal liking between the leader and the member. Loyalty is the mutual faithfulness and support between the leader and the member, even in challenging situations. Contribution refers to the amount of work effort and task performance that both the leader and the member put into their roles. Professional respect is the degree of respect for each other's professional capabilities and competence.



In this study context, LMX refers to the fact that leaders in hotels choose to establish different quality exchange relationships with different frontline employees when building relationships with them due to limited time and energy.

1.7.3 Organizational Embeddedness (OE)

Job embeddedness denotes a collection of factors that deter employees from quitting their jobs, which originate from both their work organization and residential community (Mitchell et al., 2001). This study only analyzes OE (work-related factors that keep individuals in their jobs) rather than community embeddedness (non-work factors that keep individuals in their jobs). OE comprises three primary components: fit, links, and sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001). Fit refers to the degree to which an





employee perceives their values and abilities as aligned with the organizational culture and job requirements. Links pertain to an employee's social connections and engagement in work activities with colleagues. Sacrifice entails the potential losses or sacrifices an employee may experience when transitioning to another job (Ng et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, following Mitchell et al. (2001), OE can be defined as the totality of forces that keep frontline employees in their current hotels. These forces include organizational fit, links, and sacrifice (Ng & Feldman, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001).

1.7.4 Boundary-Spanning Behavior (BSB)



Boundary-spanning behaviors (BSB) are defined as the efforts made by employees to establish and maintain relationships with key entities external to one's working unit to achieve work unit tasks and objectives (Marrone et al., 2007; Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). The current study places emphasis on the concept of customer-oriented BSB, as frontline employees play a crucial role as boundary spanners. These behaviors can be categorized into three main categories: service delivery, internal impact, and external representation (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003). External representation involves being vocal advocates for the organization's image, products, and services to external stakeholders; Internal influence entails taking individual initiative to communicate with the firm and colleagues, aiming to enhance service delivery by the organization, colleagues, and oneself; Service delivery refers to serving customers in





a conscientious, responsive, attentive, and courteous manner (Bettencourt et al., 2005).

In the context of this study, BSB refers to the customer-oriented actions taken by frontline hotel employees that go beyond organizational boundaries to interact with customers. These actions typically involve collaboration and communication with external organizations, customers, and internal colleagues to more effectively meet customer needs and enhance service quality.

1.8 Scope of the Research

The study focuses on examining the interrelationships between LMX, OE, and BSB within the context of the Chinese hotel industry. It investigates both the direct and mediating effects of LMX and OE on BSB among frontline hotel employees, with particular attention to how these dynamics contribute to service enhancement and operational efficiency—critical factors for maintaining competitive advantage in the hospitality sector.

Geographically, the research is confined to China, enabling an in-depth exploration of the cultural and operational features unique to its hotel industry. This localized scope allows for a nuanced application of global theories—such as the COR theory—within the specific context of China's dynamic and multifaceted service environment.





The study population comprises frontline employees employed across a range of hotel classifications, from budget to luxury establishments. A stratified random sampling method was employed based on hotel star ratings, ensuring a representative cross-section of the industry. This approach minimized sampling bias and provided a robust foundation for data analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM).

By clearly defining its empirical and contextual boundaries, this study provides practically relevant insights tailored to the Chinese hospitality industry. These insights are expected to assist hotel managers and practitioners in refining leadership strategies, strengthening employee–organization connections, and fostering behavior that contributes to enhanced service outcomes and organizational performance.



1.9 Significance of the Study

To maintain a competitive advantage and deliver exceptional customer experiences, hotels must focus on the behaviors of their frontline employees. As such, exploring the relationships between leaders and employees, the degree to which employees are embedded within the organization, and their BSB is crucial for enhancing service quality. This study aims to delve into the interrelationships among these key factors, with the objective of providing targeted management recommendations and improvement measures for the hotel industry.

On the theoretical level, this study not only enriches the application of COR theory and LMX theory in the Chinese context but also importantly offers a novel





interpretative framework for understanding the impacts of LMX and OE on BSB. This framework deeply analyzes the intricate relationship between LMX, OE, and BSB from three key aspects.

Initially, the role of LMX as a critical predictor for BSB is affirmed, supported by empirical data. The influence of leadership in boundary-spanning activities is highlighted, revealing a direct link between LMX and BSB, offering new perspectives for understanding the triggers of employee BSB and filling previous research gaps.

Secondly, this study reveals a strong connection between LMX and OE, confirming that LMX is a significant predictor of OE. Notably, the research focuses on frontline employees in the Chinese hotel industry, demonstrating that the impact of LMX on OE is more pronounced in this context than in other industries and countries. This heightened influence underscores the applicability of these mechanisms within a specific cultural and industrial framework, highlighting the uniqueness and practical significance of this study.

Lastly, the mediating role of OE in the relationship between LMX and BSB is explored in depth. While prior studies have examined the mediating effects of OE between LMX and other organizational outcomes, its specific role between LMX and BSB has not been adequately investigated. Through rigorous empirical analysis, the hypothesis that LMX indirectly influences BSB through OE is validated, revealing a more complex network of relationships among these factors.





Furthermore, by focusing on the Chinese hotel industry, this research extends LMX theory into a non-Western, high power-distance, and collectivist cultural context. It illustrates how key Chinese cultural characteristics, such as the emphasis on “guanxi” (interpersonal connections) and “face” (social status), shape the relationships between LMX, OE, and BSB. These findings suggest that these cultural elements amplify the effects of LMX on both OE and BSB, providing new cultural insights that enrich the global understanding of LMX theory and its application across diverse contexts.

In summary, this framework enables a deeper understanding of how LMX and OE influences BSB and how this effect is manifested and enhanced within China’s specific cultural and social contexts. This new interpretative perspective not only expands the existing theoretical framework but also provides fresh directions for future research and analytical tools.

From the practical perspective, this study provides valuable perspectives for hotel managers, demonstrating that enhancing LMX and OE can significantly elevate employees’ BSB. The findings emphasize the necessity for decision-makers and human resource specialists to support a variety of leadership support policies and management intervention strategies aimed at fostering a stronger sense of OE among staff. This enhanced sense of embeddedness can better motivate frontline hotel employees to engage in BSB, thereby improving service quality and customer satisfaction.





Furthermore, the practical significance of this research lies in offering a strategic approach to the hotel industry. This approach involves improving leadership behaviors and strengthening employees' sense of belonging to the organization, which are crucial for enhancing their proactivity and service capabilities. Such improvements are particularly vital for the hotel industry that strives for exceptional customer service and competitive edge.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in the research process. Chapter One introduces the study by presenting the research background, problem statement, objectives, research questions and hypotheses. It also outlines the conceptual framework, operational definitions, and the scope and limitations of the research. This chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of the study.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive literature review. It starts with an overview of the hotel industry and its workforce, with a focus on the Chinese context. The chapter then elaborates on the theoretical foundations, including the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and LMX theory. It further reviews the constructs of OE and BSB, covering their definitions, dimensions, antecedents, consequences, and research gaps. Finally, it develops the hypotheses that guide the study.





Chapter Three details the research methodology employed. It outlines the research paradigm, design, population, sampling procedures, instruments used for data collection, and the pilot study for validity and reliability testing. It also describes the data collection process and statistical techniques, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), used to test the research model.

Chapter Four presents the research findings. It includes data screening, descriptive analysis, validation of measurement models, and structural model assessment. The chapter discusses the results of hypothesis testing and interprets the relationships among LMX, OE, and BSB based on the empirical data.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis by first discussing the major findings, followed by an exploration of their theoretical and practical implications. It then outlines the study's limitations and offers suggestions for future research, before ending with a final conclusion.

1.11 Summary

This chapter has established a comprehensive foundation for the study by outlining the current state of the Chinese hotel industry, the theoretical underpinnings of the research, and the specific dynamics at play between LMX, OE, and BSB among frontline hotel employees.



At the outset of this chapter, the introduction and research background provide a foundation by highlighting the significant challenges confronting the hotel industry in its swift recovery following the pandemic. These challenges, particularly the urgent need to enhance customer satisfaction and boost competitiveness, underscore the critical importance and immediacy of optimizing and enhancing customer-oriented BSB among frontline hotel staff. Moreover, existing research emphasizes the significant impact of LMX and OE on employee behavior.

Following this, the problem statement offers a comprehensive review of the literature, identifying existing research gaps that this study aims to address. It particularly notes the scarcity of research on how BSB among frontline hotel employees is influenced by LMX and OE, highlighting this as a key area of focus.

Moreover, the research questions and hypotheses section formulate specific inquiries and predictions that guide the empirical investigation, aiming to validate the significant positive effects and mediation relationships posited by the study. Simultaneously, the conceptual framework visually maps out these relationships, providing a structured model for analysis. This structure aims to explore the direct effects of LMX on OE and BSB, as well as the mediating effect of OE on the relationship between LMX and BSB, within the unique context of China's hotel industry.

Additionally, operational definitions ensure clarity and consistency by defining key terms and constructs used throughout the study, thus setting precise parameters for measurement and discussion. Likewise, the scope and limitations acknowledge the constraints and delimitations of the research, setting realistic expectations for its



applicability and impact. Importantly, the significance of the study is highlighted by its potential to contribute valuable insights to both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, specifically in strategies for managing frontline hotel staff to enhance overall performance and customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, this chapter offers a clear and concise summary of the study's background, problem statement, objectives, theoretical foundations, and significance, setting the stage for the detailed empirical analysis in subsequent chapters.

