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Exploring Entrepreneurial Roles and Identity in the United Kingdom and China

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Abstract

This paper examines entrepreneurial identity in both the United Kingdom and China through the lenses of identity theory and social identity theory to develop a deeper and more holistic understanding of the concept of entrepreneurial identity. By examining the entrepreneur as both a role and an identity this paper explores how an entrepreneur views the role of the entrepreneur, the counter-roles to the entrepreneur, the 'self-as-entrepreneur' understand how entrepreneurs construct their identity as entrepreneur. By looking at the role identity in different social constructs, a more nuanced view of entrepreneurial identity can be uncovered for entrepreneurs in both the UK and China. The study argues that entrepreneurs in the UK use counter-roles to bridge the disconnect between their understanding of the entrepreneur-as-role and the self-as-entrepreneur whereas entrepreneurs in China have less conflict reconciling the two, and use the counter-role as a way to paint entrepreneurship as a 'calling', justifying their abandonment of other identities.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial Identity; Entrepreneurial Roles; Counter-roles; UK; China

Introduction

It has been argued that entrepreneurs become so because of a distinct need to stand out in their community, to be an individual in their environment (Oyserman et al., 2002; Teal and Carroll, 1999). It thus follows that this path and these identities may be differently constructed and perceived based on the social constructs in which the entrepreneur lives and works. This study seeks to further understand how entrepreneurs in the UK and China countries with similar levels of early-stage entrepreneurial activity (GEM, 2016), but different cultural and institutional support levels for entrepreneurship, construct the role of the entrepreneur by examining their own discourse. It examines this through the perspective of role identity (identity theory) and as a member of a group (social identity theory) by examining the language they use when discussing their identity as an entrepreneur. It seeks to understand how entrepreneurs view the role of the entrepreneur, hereafter called 'entrepreneur-as-role.' This understanding can underpin the research, being that the role descriptions associated with being an entrepreneur (Lundqvist et al., 2015) may be different in different cultures and thus influence an entrepreneur's behavior in alternate ways.

It will then look at how entrepreneurs understand themselves in this role, having taken on that of the 'founder' (Donnellon et al., 2014) without peers in the workplace on whom they could model themselves, and having just described the role independent of themselves. This will be described as 'self-as-entrepreneur.' The function of counter-roles (Ibarra, 1999; Thoits and Virshup, 1997) in defining the self-as-entrepreneur is examined to better understand how counter-role understanding feeds into entrepreneurial identity. These counter-roles are then supported by understanding of the identities that entrepreneurs felt they needed to give up to embrace an entrepreneurial identity in an attempt to understand the centrality of the entrepreneurial identity. The purpose of examining these themes is to further understand how entrepreneurs in the UK and China perceive their entrepreneurial identity through their discourse and evaluate how this confirms the stratifications used to categorize identity theory.

Theory

Identity Theories

Identity formation can refer to a person's ability to create, negotiate, and maintain an identity in natural, practical, and social capacities. A personal identity, which is a general view of the self (Deaux, 1992), can be said to underlie other manifestations of identity. This self could be argued to be linked to embodiment, as we communicate with the world from our embodied selves and cannot separate the self from its embodiment (Archer, 2000). Accepting that a person is able to view oneself as an object and name/classify oneself accordingly, how this is accomplished is seen differently by social identity theory, which maintains that this process is self-categorization and by identity theory, which calls this self-identification.

Individuals can be argued to view themselves through a lens of meanings imparted by their society (McCall and Simmons, 1978). A social identity comes from identifying with a particular group - identifying with this group, sharing their views and embracing this identity while comparing their 'in' group with other 'out' groups. The uniformity with a particular group is an important aspect of group-based identity and can be based on cognitive (e.g., social stereotyping), attitudinal (e.g., loyalty to the group), and behavioural aspects (Haslam et al., 1996). In group-based identity, only the individual's perceptions are involved in constructing the identity; the individual need not necessarily interact with the group to form the identity (Turner et al., 1987).

Identity theory puts emphasis on the ability to categorize the self as a role-occupier, and to integrate the meanings and expectations thereto within the self (Burke and Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986). Role identity has its basis in differences in perceptions of a particular role as it relates with 'counter-roles.' An individual negotiates meanings from situations and identities, and then identifies their own meaning and interpretation of a role, relating the role to counter-roles around them, and then tailors their actions in a way that represents and preserves these roles (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). This theory puts forth that individuals differentiate themselves from others with whom they interact. An individual's role is seen in relation to other roles, but as distinctive from those roles. In role-based identity theory, the individuals who perform counter-roles are key to the individual's composition of their role identity. Interaction with others is

essential in negotiating a role.

Being that an individual has many roles or identities, it becomes necessary to understand how an individual prioritizes them within the self. A key element of the identity hierarchy within an individual is centrality versus salience. Centrality refers to the importance that an individual places on a focal identity in relation to other identities (reflection by an individual on their identities). In social identity theory, salience refers to the willingness to take on a certain social identity to have influence within a group (Oakes, 1987) whereas role identity theory looks at the willingness of an individual to activate an identity in a given situation (Stryker, 2002). Thus, an individual could become an entrepreneur for several reasons, yet perceive other role or group identities as more central to their self, whereas others may prioritize that of the entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurial Identity

Creating an entrepreneurial identity has been linked in the literature to identity construction theory in that an individual creates, tests, and integrates a 'test' self into a new role they are creating for themselves. (e.g., Ibarra, 1999). However, Ibarra (1999) examines the construction of an identity through the lens of role identity construction within a workplace, wherein roles are already somewhat understood by the individuals occupying the counter-roles within the firm. This looks at the role identity as a professional role identity, which Schein (1978) put forth as the attitudes, traits, values, and experiences that allow individuals to define themselves in a professional role. Kašperová and Kitching (2014) built on Archer's (2000) embodiment theory towards identity to discern the embodiment element of entrepreneurial identity that they argue is often ignored in entrepreneurial identity research.

When creating a new venture, social norms could play a large part in creating this as-yet undefined role and as such, Donnellon et al. (2014) argue, the entrepreneurial identity, associated with a professional role as a founder. Donnellon et al. (2014) found in a review of the literature that the most common means of constructing an entrepreneurial identity comes from storytelling and the creation of narratives (e.g., Jones et al., 2008), a social constructivist approach (Fletcher, 2003). Farmer et al. (2011) suggested a model linking the role of the entrepreneur with self-perceptions, entrepreneur identity aspiration, and entrepreneurial

behaviours. Entrepreneurial behaviours have been underpinned by attitudes and traits in many studies, which include creativity/innovativeness, comfort with risk and ambiguity, a proactive disposition, aggressive competitiveness, and self-efficacy (Ratten, 2014; Wiklund, 1999; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Covin and Slevin, 1989).

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial identity has been argued to be a salient identity that motivates individuals to take on entrepreneurial roles (Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2007). The perception of these roles can be influenced by social elements, such that an individual can construct the role of 'entrepreneur' before the individual negotiates and identifies with an entrepreneurial identity. In line with this, Newbery et al. (2018) examined the impact of a negative initial entrepreneurial experience on the construction of an entrepreneurial identity. Individuals also need to find a way to fit this identity in with their existing roles and social identities (Williams Middleton, 2013), which can be a challenge in venture creation, wherein no existing group or role may be available to help the entrepreneur in founding a new enterprise. Rae (2006) argues that forming an entrepreneurial identity is both a social and contextual process that includes creating a new firm concurrently.

Bygrave and Hofer (1991) have argued that entrepreneurship should be understood as a social process rather than an isolated activity. Rigg and O'Dwyer (2012) described becoming an entrepreneur in terms of using social interactions to become part of a 'community of practice.' Lundqvist et al. (2015) argue that role descriptions often associated with an entrepreneur, that are experienced in their immediate environment, can help mould the entrepreneur's behaviour by showing them what they 'should' be doing.

Along this line, Pellinen (2014) found that an entrepreneur uses interactions with networks to understand the value of their own resources in their firm, implying a new group identity. Hoang and Gimeno (2010) looked at the process of becoming an entrepreneur through a role-transition lens to argue that individuals face challenges when adding the role of an organization-founder into their overall concept of the self, wherein may lie competing identities. Shepherd and Haynie (2009) argue that entrepreneurs need to manage multiple 'micro-identities' in order to mitigate

the dueling factors of inclusiveness and uniqueness, and that those who are unable to balance these factors face a decrease in their overall sense of well-being. These micro-identities emerge from the multiple roles an individual play, that is, the role they play in work, family, social circles, etc.

Hytti (2005) suggested that social contexts should more frequently be studied with entrepreneurship research after studying the shift in professional identity to become an entrepreneur. Ireland and Webb (2007) called for the study of entrepreneurship through the lens of identity theory. Stets and Burke (2000) argue that a social identity and a role identity should be linked to give a more complete view of a personal identity, that is (p. 231), "Identity theory focuses on social structural arrangements and the link between persons; social identity theory focuses on characteristics of situations in which the identity may be activated; both theories acknowledge the importance of the individual's goals and purposes. Thus an understanding of the conditions for the probability of and the actual activation of an identity can be found."

The above-cited research looks at entrepreneurial identity, while the majority of the research comes from countries that may be argued to have a different approach to entrepreneurship than does China, a newcomer to the market-based economy. Thus the construction of an entrepreneurial identity in China may look different than the countries examined in the above literature. Even among western nations, approaches differ, as evidenced by studies looking at how entrepreneurship and innovation is enabled by a state and its respective institutions (e.g., the OECD's National Innovation System framework).

Entrepreneurial identity papers focused specifically on China are few, but it may be that the research cited above does not quite capture the development of an entrepreneurial identity in China. Yao et al. (2016) suggested that while the 'entrepreneur prototypes' (characteristics and behaviours) in China, Taiwan, and the United States have similarities across cultures, there are also enough cultural differences to display a relationship to a country's individual values and their exposure to entrepreneurship.

Support for privatization and state-owned enterprise reform occurred in the 1990s. Unlike many western and industrialized countries, China's focus on manufacturing has remained a strong contributor to its economy, with different foci, as pointed out by Orr and Roth (2012) to be more

focused on rapid commercialization and less focused on analysing and understanding its customer base than other market-driven economies that encourage entrepreneurship and innovation.

The theory and literature review thus underlie the following research questions that will be examined: How do entrepreneurs interpret the role of the 'entrepreneur' (entrepreneur as role)? How do entrepreneurs identify themselves vis-à-vis this role (self-as-entrepreneur)? What is the function of the counter-role in defining how the entrepreneur identifies (counter-roles)? What did the entrepreneurs give up in their identity to give salience to the entrepreneurial identity (managing other identities)?

Methodology

This investigative research adopted a qualitative inductive approach to gain a detailed account of the entrepreneurs' views. With the understanding that roles and identities can be influenced by social contexts (Hytti, 2005), this paper does not attempt to form an underlying theory of entrepreneurial identity. Rather, the emphasis is on the range of interrelated and subjective understandings of an entrepreneur about their role and their identity, within their own constructs and validity (Ussher, 1999). This research treats realities as subjective constructions (Berger and Luckmann, 1991) based on meanings available to an individual (Gergen, 2015). This approach has been used in entrepreneurial identity research (see Kašperová and Kitching, 2014). The researchers did not develop a priori hypotheses or coding, but attempted to understand phenomena based on analysis of the interviews (Dana and Dana, 2005).

In total, 20 interviews were conducted for this research, ten in the United Kingdom, which is argued to follow the 'Anglo-American' model in how its entrepreneurs are able to bring an innovation to market (dispersed ownership, market-centered) (OECD, 1997) and ten in China, whose model is not defined as such, but where the market and individual ownership is a newer focus for the state (Xu and Wang, 1999; Claessens and Djankov, 1999). The entrepreneurs who were interviewed were all founders of a business that they still run. Participants were selected based on professional connections through the researchers' universities. All interviewees agreed

to participate and were assured their anonymity would be maintained. An outline of the entrepreneurs' businesses can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents Entrepreneurial Ventures

Code	Country	Field	Entrepreneurial Venture	Years as an Entrepreneur
UK 1	United Kingdom	Software	Custom made business management software	12
UK 2	United Kingdom	Technology	Database services and management	15
UK 3	United Kingdom	Service	Online real estate services	5
UK 4	United Kingdom	Service	Property development	13
UK 5	United Kingdom	Design	Accessory design and sales	2
UK 6	United Kingdom	Design	High tech home appliance design and development	14
UK 7	United Kingdom	Business Support	Leadership and mentoring consultancy	3
UK 8	United Kingdom	Business Support	Business and technology consultancy and support	4
UK 9	United Kingdom	Service	Corporate auto rental service	2
UK 10	United Kingdom	Technology	Agro-tech farming development	2
CN 1	China	Business Support	Business to business industry news reporting and business incubation	1
CN 2	China	Design	Auto component design and development	4
CN 3	China	Software	IOS and Android app developer	2
CN 4	China	Service	Language training and tutoring	2
CN 5	China	Technology	Data and technology analysis	10
CN 6	China	Service	Group gaming experiences	4
CN 7	China	Design	Filtration system design and development	15
CN 8	China	Service	STEM graduate recruitment	2
CN 9	China	Software	IOS and Android app developer	8
CN 10	China	Technology	Digital advertising	8

Because the interviews were being conducted by researchers in the UK and in China, the researchers asked the questions in a semi-structured manner, in the same order. The questions were developed to allow the participants to discuss issues that would provide answers to the overall research questions. The researchers did ask the interviewees to clarify their answers at some points and provide more detail. The interviews were conducted in English in the UK and in Chinese in China.

The questions were originally composed in English and were agreed by all the researchers. They were then professionally translated, after which, one of the bilingual researchers checked the questions to make sure they conveyed the same meaning. Interviewees were asked to discuss what they believed an entrepreneur to be in order to understand how participants viewed the 'entrepreneur-as-role'. They were then asked how they believed being an entrepreneur made them different from others to understand how they viewed themselves vis-à-vis the term 'entrepreneur,' to understand the 'self-as-entrepreneur'. Lastly, they were asked about what parts of their identity they felt needed to be sacrificed to take on the role of entrepreneur.

Interviews lasted around three quarters of an hour and were recorded. The recordings were later transcribed and translated into English by a professional translation service. These translations were confirmed by a bilingual researcher who was present at the Chinese interviews to ensure accuracy. The data was coded and analyzed using a thematic discourse analysis to identify themes and patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This analysis attempted to construct an understanding of entrepreneurial identity grounded in the experiences of entrepreneurs, while allowing for the "multiplicity of interrelated, subjective, and often oppositional understandings" (Taylor and Ussher, 2001, p. 295) that entrepreneurs, especially entrepreneurs from different countries, may have about their identities seeking to understand how they construct their reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

This analysis paid attention to the discursive features of the language used during the interviews to better understand how the participants constructed their views on the above-mentioned themes. Language, word choice, and tone drove the analysis, with coding focusing on understanding the usage of words to the interviewees. Thus, the results, which are presented by country, will highlight aspects of entrepreneurial identity not necessarily associated to the existing

literature, but which extend the existing narratives of entrepreneurial identity. The meaning, in line with thematic discourse analysis, comes from the language used, rather than the language used reflecting existing meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2013)

An analysis of discourse revealed common interpretive repertoires in which participants made sense of their entrepreneurial identity (see table 2 summary). The following sections evaluate the responses in greater detail.

Table 2: Discourse used to describe themes

	Entrepreneur-as-role	Self-as-entrepreneur	Counter-role	Managing other identities
UK	Someone else; Someone who has ideas; iconic brave; takes risks; creates something new; driven to succeed; can make something out of nothing	I just I don't consider myself to be an entrepreneur; see an opportunity; creative all the time; creates a job for everyone; taking on responsibility; taking risks	Not as much invested; can come away from work; comfortable; enjoy their job security	If I can't get a healthy balance, I must be doing something wrong; my friends never ask how I'm doing; sacrificing time with family; working 15-16 hours a day; dependent on how much you let it consume you
China	We should provide good service to society; start something innovative; I agree with my professor, who said...; you take responsibility and think how to make things better	It should be a state of life, not a profession; ought to shoulder all the risks; thinking always about how to survive and make the firm better; greater dreams	We are all partners; we don't want to make employers different from employees; you can't say that you are the leader and he is the employee; you must create something	I do not believe that people could start a successful business while keeping up with their personal life; I have no time to take care of my child; every day is unpredictable; the life of a founder is lonely

Data Analysis and Results

United Kingdom

Entrepreneur-as-role

The discourse of the UK study participants showed an understanding of the role of the entrepreneur in two main ways- as a caricature, or a 'larger than life' archetype, and also as a risk-taking innovator. When asked to describe what they believe is an entrepreneur, most respondents used the third person to construct an archetype, focusing on traits. There was a focus on the infallibility of the entrepreneur; the entrepreneur is someone who always lands on his feet. Iconic entrepreneurs were named as examples, like Richard Branson. However, this was equally applied to nefarious characters, prestige seekers, and a television character in a soap opera that was known for always looking for the next way to make easy money off others.

Through both the positive and the negative approaches, the language used created the theme that they are able to do what others cannot. The role takes on an almost larger-than-life persona who goes down a different path and displays rugged independence. They were described as living by their wits, by a different set of rules of conduct. Warren (2004) has pointed out research by Hobbs (1991) noting that the term 'entrepreneur' was regarded more negatively before the 1980's and was often associated with an obsessive and odd personality, rather having the more current association with promoting the growth of a country's economy.

The discourse often gravitated towards risk and an entrepreneur's relationship with it, again focusing on a trait in their descriptions. Risk was an overarching identifier during the interviews. The entrepreneur-as-role was not merely someone who was able to rationalize and calculate risk, it is someone who is motivated and excited by it. The entrepreneur is able to use risk in a way others are unable to create new things, better lives, and improve processes. The risk is mitigated by the ability to succeed. The entrepreneur is described by UK 8 as "Brave and wants to step out from routine, who sees risk as an exciting challenge" and by UK 4 as having "a clear vision... a goal that inspires them." This supports research arguing that social contexts play into role creation (Hytti, 2005) and that known entrepreneurial attitudes and traits may influence how the entrepreneur-as-role is created by the interview subjects.

Self-as-entrepreneur

However, the interviewees understand and describe themselves as an entrepreneur differently from the entrepreneur-as-role. This produces a disconnect between the construct of the entrepreneur-as-role and the role identity of self-as-entrepreneur. The participants often seemed uncomfortable initially with identifying as an entrepreneur, with the interview participants often denying they are “really an ‘entrepreneur’” in the beginning of their discourse on the subject. UK5 said of thinking of himself as an entrepreneur, “I just don’t like it at all.”

However, later in the talk, the interviewees were able to describe in great detail what made them distinct in the self-as-entrepreneur after making their discomfort with the term clear. The self-as-entrepreneur embodied different foci from the entrepreneur-as-role. While risk was identified as a hallmark of the entrepreneur-as-role, the risk was contextualized when describing the self-as-entrepreneur. The daunting nature of the personal responsibility was paramount in the discourse. Whereas the entrepreneur-as-role is cunning and able to take on risk and come out on top, the self-as-entrepreneur is weighed down by the day-to-day responsibilities that accompany it. The language became more concrete, speaking of mortgages, accounting and money management, and how to juggle responsibilities to many stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, customers, and shareholders. The language also became more focused on the consequences of failure for the entrepreneur-as-self, which indicated that the interviewees may have felt as though their self-as-entrepreneur persona was embodied without any kind of guidance to see them through it. UK 3 said, “If I fail, then it is my house that gets repossessed or my family that gets affected.” UK 6 spoke of feeling great responsibility for “120 staff, customers, less-so suppliers, but you need to have a good working environment. It’s a big load on you... I hope it never goes wrong.” Thus the salience for the self-seemed to come from the role of ‘care-taker’ of the organization.

The discourse also focused on another trait mentioned in entrepreneurial attitude and trait research, that of innovativeness. The interviewees described the self-as-entrepreneur as willing to question things with an eye towards improving them. There was a subtle difference in this description from the previous description of the archetype entrepreneur, who was described in terms of creating new things and processes. The self-as-entrepreneur described the attribute

more like a contemplative questioner who looks at improvements rather than heroic invention. The language described it as a trait that could not be ‘turned off.’ UK 2 described “improving the wheel rather than reinventing it” and UK 10 said they look at everything and say, “why are they doing it that way? They are wasting so much time!”

Counter-roles

The ‘they are’ used in the description of the entrepreneur-as-role became an ‘I am’ in the description of the counter-roles. Rather than the self-as-entrepreneur, the discourse indicated that the counter-role was how the interview subjects reconciled their identification with the entrepreneur-as-role. The non-entrepreneur has a job role that is easily understood and fits into a ‘normal’ role like student or employee. The non-entrepreneur is portrayed as able to switch between these roles easily, shedding the employee role at the end of the day and picking it back up again the next. The only real decision for the non-entrepreneur is whether or not to go to work, and the only consequence of the wrong decision is that they would not be paid. The motivation for the non-entrepreneur is the regular paycheck.

The entrepreneurs portrayed this in contrast to their own need to take on many jobs without clear description and their inability to shed their role of entrepreneur, often bringing it home with them, working around the clock, even if just thinking of new processes and ideas. The non-entrepreneur is unburdened by this endless creativity and looks to others to solve problems. “They want the security of the nine-to-five, whereas entrepreneurs are almost exclusively relying on themselves” said UK 4. UK 6 portrayed them as “bright but don’t fit in easily.”

In this counter-role, the entrepreneur is able to reveal some of the creativity and independence they see in themselves without embracing the full archetype in the entrepreneur-as-role description. The interviews show that the counter-role, where salience was perceived in being cared for—regular paychecks, schedules set by others—was the complement to the self-as-entrepreneur identification with being responsible and a caretaker of the institution.

The language showed discomfort when the interviewees tried to identify as entrepreneurs themselves, but seems mitigated by the use of a counter-role to define and understand the self-as-entrepreneur. The interviewees can show that they are motivated by more than money by

describing the non-entrepreneur as motivated by the regular paycheck. They can describe themselves as creative by contrasting it against the ability of the non-entrepreneur to just come to work and do things as told. They can acknowledge their unbridled creativity by describing the counter-role's ability to 'turn off' at the end of the work day. They can give themselves credit for the risk they take on by describing the counter-role as content to just work without looking to solve problems or improve things.

Managing other identities

With the focus on the great responsibility as an entrepreneur, the interviewees' discourse focused on two approaches to understanding what parts of themselves/their identities they had to sacrifice to take on this role. Some respondents put forth that the 'vision' made the sacrifices worthwhile while not outlining (or perhaps no longer remembering) what these sacrificed parts of themselves were. UK 10 said that "The company becomes a person, and I think you should sacrifice yourself to prop up the person... the vision lasts... it can't be about you."

Others used strong language to protest that they were giving up anything of themselves to be an entrepreneur. They spoke of balance, and of schedules that keep them involved with the family during certain hours of the day. Many maintained that they strived to be away a normal amount of time, but that they also brought work home with them in that their thoughts were with creating new processes and finding new ideas around the clock.

China

Entrepreneur-as-role

For these interviewees, the discourse showed two main associations with the entrepreneur-as-role: responsibility and dissatisfaction with the current state of things. When constructing what they saw as the role, the respondents often cited definitions provided by others in roles of authority. The interview discourse included the source of information: professors, academic materials, and Chinese proverbs. The entrepreneur-as-role was thus a more academic construction, and less based on societal norms when compared to the UK interviewees. The language used was aspirational, that is, instead of what the entrepreneur is, the discourse

focused on about what the entrepreneur should be. The respondents often incorporated themselves into the definition, often saying, “we should” as well as “they should.”

The entrepreneur-as-role needed to be original and creative, harkening to traits to help create their definition. CN 2 said that an entrepreneur starts something innovative, “instead of simply copying what’s already existed” and CN 6 responded that an entrepreneur will “make something new that people haven’t done before.” This originality was further developed by the interviewees as they described the entrepreneur-as-role as someone who is restless with the status quo and felt compelled to break out of it. The restlessness was paired with the creativity in the entrepreneur-as-role.

The interviewees also expressed an expectation that the entrepreneur would take responsibility for their actions and innovations. The language moved towards benefitting society somehow, and to take care of the employees. The idea of starting a business to make money was presented with negative discourse. CN 3 described the responsibility of the entrepreneur as to, “first provide a good service to society and also be responsible for employee’s better life quality.”

Self-as-entrepreneur

When describing the self-as-entrepreneur, there was discomfort in describing the self as different or distinct from non-entrepreneurs. The discourse showed comfort with the label of entrepreneur, but discomfort with being seen as distinct from their staff. Initially, some respondents made clear that entrepreneurs are not different than employees. But in each of these instances, the respondent followed this by a ‘but’ or a ‘however’ and then a description of the differences. CN 6 said, “Actually, in my company, we don’t want to make partners different from employees... we think alike, we act alike.” The same respondent also said, when talking about the entrepreneur-as-role, that “It’s different when you are the entrepreneur because you have to work very hard, invest a lot of effort, and take the responsibility of the outcome.”

The other major theme of the self-as-entrepreneur discourse, similar to the description of the entrepreneur-as-role, was the need to shoulder responsibility. This was talked about in terms of ensuring their company was fulfilling its responsibilities to employees. The all-encompassing nature of entrepreneurship was also discussed in personal terms, following the tone of

entrepreneurship as a calling. Respondents said that for them, it had to overtake personal matters like hobbies and family, as theirs was a great responsibility to many. In this area, salience seemed to come from being a caretaker not only of the business, but also of the family and the outside world.

Counter-roles

Discourse about the non-entrepreneur focused on individuals in the counter-role being motivated by money and being content to fulfil their job as described, similar to the UK interviewees. After alleviating their discomfort with the counter-role stratification during the previous question, the non-entrepreneur was contrasted with entrepreneurs, who have bigger ambitions and more devotion to their role. Whereas non-entrepreneurs work to improve their own personal skills, the discourse showed entrepreneurs are viewed to work to give back and improve society. The terms devotion and creativity were used to describe how an entrepreneur was able to embrace more responsibility than non-entrepreneurs. The interview participants spoke of needing to make many more decisions than non-entrepreneurs and of being beholden to more stakeholders. The non-entrepreneur was seen as a follower, obeying the boss and fulfilling a role. This employee role could be shed at the end of the work day or easily transferred to another company, whereas the entrepreneur was presented as a lifestyle. The way it was described was almost as though it were a calling rather than a job or role.

Managing other identities

The concept entrepreneurship as a lifestyle was followed by respondents identifying readily with the concept of giving up parts of their identity to embody the role of the entrepreneur. CN 1 stated "This is a sacrifice you have to make... your personal hobbies and interests... you are in this state, heart and soul, it's not like before you started a business." Respondents acknowledged how important families and friends were, while also saying they did not have enough time for it these relationships.

A few respondents made clear that they still felt they kept their other identities, even if they did not have enough time for them. One spoke of being part of a science fiction club, even if rarely

attending the meetings. Another spoke of fitting in lunch with his spouse, while also admitting he never really had enough time for her. There was a tone of inevitability in word choice, as though following the entrepreneurship path had to mean painful tradeoffs and round-the-clock working. CN 2 stated that he worked “whenever I am awake.” All respondents spoke of their long work days; stating that they were often the first to arrive and the last to leave. Respondents also expressed that they were working, at least mentally, when they were away from the office, but the emphasis was on the long number of hours actually on the job.

Shrouding the concept of the entrepreneur as something quite academic, almost lofty, while also referring to it as an unselfish calling to focus on improving society and take care of others could be how these respondents reconciled their feelings of obligation to their families with their drive to take on the entrepreneur role. Associating the care-taker role both in their business and to their social/familial networks may create some dissonance in their entrepreneurial identity.

Discussion

The data indicated that, for the first research question examining the entrepreneur-as-role, entrepreneurs in the UK and China base their understanding of the role on different groundings, with UK respondents looking more at examples of real-life and caricature entrepreneurs than do the Chinese respondents. The role in China is better understood by the Chinese entrepreneurs through definitions gleaned from academia and philosophy. While McCall and Simmons (1978) examined the meaning of identity through the societal lens, this finding adds depth to show how the societal lens (Murnieks and Mosakowski, 2007) and role descriptions (Lundqvist et al., 2015) changes for the same entrepreneurial definition in the UK and China. This different lens may impact how the entrepreneurs in each country view themselves differently, furthering understanding put forth by Farmer et al. (2011) of how the role may link to self-perception.

For the second research question examining the self-as-entrepreneur, the data showed that respondents in both the UK and China held similar definitions of the self-as-entrepreneur in areas such as the great, if not daunting, level of responsibility to handle and manage everything, which may indicate that a caretaker role is somewhat salient to the participants’ entrepreneurial identity. This role was framed by common narratives (Jones et al., 2008), such as holding many

mortgages, financial responsibilities, and taking care of employees while managing stakeholder relationships. The tone when describing the self-as-entrepreneur matched Mitchell's (1996) portrayal of entrepreneurship as something very different from being an employee, which respondents expressed in this research as either a calling or something that could not be dismissed, and as an extraordinary undertaking that only some people can handle. The interviews indicated this calling required great sacrifice and responsibility.

The data answered the third research question by showing both groups understood the counter-roles similarly. Both groups stated that non-entrepreneurs can 'turn off' at the end of the day, that they have clearly-constructed duties in their jobs and clear job descriptions, implying that they are nurtured to their own caretaker identity. They do not need to shoulder great responsibility and are unencumbered by the brimming creativity and endless workload of an entrepreneur. This belief that an employee cannot (or will not) affect institutional change in the way an entrepreneur does is supported by Albertini and Muzzi's (2016) finding that individuals are more likely to institute change through a start-up rather than trying to change existing operations at a company.

A key difference emerged concerning the function, if not the definition, of the counter-role. For the UK entrepreneurs, the counter-role connected the disparate definitions of entrepreneur-as-role and self-as-entrepreneur. The counter-role helped the UK entrepreneur embrace some of the more lofty definitions of the role while also putting them into context of how they produce a cognitive schema of themselves as entrepreneurs, that is, far more down to earth and burdened by responsibility. This discomfort with acknowledging the role of an entrepreneur may be linked to Anderson and Warren's (2011) description of the entrepreneur being shaped as a role by the UK media in public imagination as a certain set of characteristics that are larger-than-life or heroic (Drakopoulou-Dodd and de Koning, 2002; Drakopoulou-Dodd, 2002). This popular understanding of the entrepreneur-as-role could misalign with the identity constructed by the UK entrepreneurs, showing how the understanding of counter-roles (as put forth by Burke and Tully, 1977 and Thoits, 1986), impacts UK entrepreneurial identity.

For the Chinese entrepreneurs, the counter-role did not need to act as a conduit between the understanding of the role of the entrepreneur and the self as an entrepreneur, as there was not

the same disconnect in the understanding. The role of entrepreneur seemed to be less romanticized, and more of an academic definition that one either met or did not. This connection meant more similarities could be drawn between the role and the identity than were in the UK data. The counter-role in the Chinese sample seemed to provide evidence of the role of entrepreneur as a 'calling' with which the entrepreneur could not but identify.

This may have mitigated the sense of guilt over perceived neglect of family obligations, with a key aspect of salience in the China group being unfulfilled if they felt they were doing so. It may also have buffered the discomfort with separating themselves from their employees. Although China is classified as a high power-distance society, it is also classified as a collectivist one (see Pavlou and Chai, 2002). The self-assignment of the role of entrepreneur (rather than climbing the ranks through seniority), paired with a collectivist culture could partially account for this discomfort. This difference that emerged from the salience in the UK and Chinese groups could be a topic for further research.

Another way in which the Chinese entrepreneurs used the 'calling' to mitigate the tension between family identities and entrepreneurial identity is in their dedication to their work, which responds to the fourth research question. The increased salience of the entrepreneurial identity seemed to conflict with the salience they wanted to give to other roles. They described the entrepreneurial role overtaking most other roles, and the need to work in the office more than anyone else. The UK entrepreneurs did not seem to feel the same guilt, but did acknowledge some tradeoffs, perhaps again feeling discomfort with not being the archetypical 'hero' entrepreneur. They were less willing to acknowledge the sacrifice of other identities and less likely to speak of working late hours, preferring instead to say they mentally brought their work home with them in order to fulfil other roles.

Conclusions and Limitations

In all, the entrepreneurs interviewed for this study had similar constructs to their individual identities as entrepreneurs, but had different understandings and constructs of the definition of the role of the entrepreneur and their own expected roles in other forums (e.g. family, friends and hobbies).

Understanding these differences can form a better understanding of how an individual's entrepreneurial identity can work within a society's constructs of the 'expected' role of the entrepreneur and the other expected roles that an individual should embody in a society. Differences in understanding of the 'entrepreneur-as-role' may have implications when facilitating exchanges or business between these cultures. The term 'entrepreneur' may mean an individual who starts and runs a business to groups in different countries, but how this term is perceived will differ between different groups, necessitating consideration when communicating between groups.

While existing literature has investigated the path towards and formation of entrepreneurial identity, this research shows that the term 'entrepreneur,' is conceptualized differently between different cultures. This view of an entrepreneur could influence the development of an entrepreneurial identity. The impact of this view of entrepreneurs by a cultural group on the development of entrepreneurial may be an area of further investigation for future research. Further research could unpack the sources of the disconnects shown in this research to help better understand the entrepreneur as an identity in multiple social settings.

As with all research, this research has limitations. In understanding the construction of an entrepreneurial identity, this study looked only at entrepreneurs who had already successfully created a venture, which could be argued to create a 'survival bias' (Gartner et al., 2010). In addition, the entrepreneurs represented many industries; however, there could be nuances between the industries that this paper has not found. In all qualitative research, the role of the researcher cannot be dismissed in the analysis of the data.

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