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# Being And Becoming Entrepreneurial: A Narrative Study On The Development Of Entrepreneurial Adults In China And The United States

## Abstract

Today's youth have lives dramatically different from the past and face an unpredictable future and challenging job market, thus being entrepreneurial is increasingly more important to cultivate (Ford, 2015). I aim to understand the state and development of being entrepreneurial and its implications for broadly educating young people, as one approach to better preparing our students for the future (Auerswald, 2012; de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2018). Although the general research interest in entrepreneurship is burgeoning, the developmental perspective has been limited. Additionally, the development of Entrepreneurial individuals across diverse age groups and countries has not been studied extensively and their narratives of being and becoming entrepreneurial have not been heard and studied. Thus, I have used the self-narratives of 24 entrepreneurial individuals in China and the US to explore how they are developing to be entrepreneurial. Specifically, I explored their current state of being entrepreneurial and developmental processes that have contributed to these states. My sample was divided evenly across the Chinese and United States contexts, and also stratified by age groups (from 18 to 39; and 40 and above) and gender (male and female). I sought to understand what factors might have affected the entrepreneurial development in different individuals, according to their own understanding, and explored whether differences exist across countries, gender, and age groups. I placed a particular emphasis on developmental patterns that were revealed in the analytic process. Interviews were analyzed through a coding and interpretive process informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, five key themes emerged related to being of entrepreneurial: (1) Learning as a Way of Being; (2) Action!; (3) Staying in the Arena; (4) Connecting Elements, People, Information and Resources; and (5) Disrupting. Secondly, in terms of factors affecting entrepreneurial development, both internal (self-characteristics) and external (environmental) factors were identified from the narrative accounts, and the developmental process was presented as dynamic and complex. Key developmental sources of influence include: (1) Emerging Self Identities and Experiences from Childhood and Teen Years; (2) Early Entrepreneurial Experiences; (3) Family influence; (4) Work-Related Experience; (5) School Impact; and (6) Virtual and Physical entrepreneurial environments. Finally, differences and commonalities across the countries, age groups, and gender emerged and are discussed. Overall, entrepreneurial development can and should be broadly encouraged given the narratives and lessons shared by the participants. Recommendations and implications for supporting students' "entrepreneurial development" are presented: (1) It is the mindset, not the occupation; (2) Demystifying the entrepreneurial mindset as a way of thinking and being; (3) It takes a village to raise an entrepreneurial child; (4) Developing an entrepreneurial mindset as a way to achieve personal growth and fulfillment. Lastly, the limits and future direction are discussed.

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Douglas A. Frye

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Being and Becoming Entrepreneurial: A Narrative Study on the Development of  
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Mengjiao Guo

A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2020

Supervisor of Dissertation

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Douglas A. Frye, Associate Professor of Education

Graduate Group Chairperson

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J. Matthew Hartley, Professor of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Michael J. Nakkula, Professor of Practice in Education

Howard C. Stevenson, Constance Clayton Chair in Urban Education

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those entrepreneurial individuals who graciously shared their life stories and life learnings with me and the broader audience. Their words, deeds and continuous being are inspirational and contagious. Some of those stories were never told nor heard before and it was a deep honor to share those moments and reflections together. Those stories matter greatly to these entrepreneurs personally and I cannot thank you enough for the opportunity to hear your personal accounts. In addition, the time that you gave to this study and the willingness to share something that you have learned at a big cost and hard way have been a big motivation for me in this work and also in my own life. I sincerely hope this dissertation reflects a glimpse of the wondrous and amazing beauty of those unique and inspirational stories and lives. Throughout the conversations I also received a strong message conveyed differently: we need to allow and create diverse pathways for more individuals to be different and to act entrepreneurially. This manuscript is one of the ways to further this goal.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents who showed me in real life what being entrepreneurial means and how it unfolds, and to my grandma, bobo, an illiterate housewife who fed me with unwavering belief in me and immense love so that I can go further and try the impossible. She sacrificed her own pursuit for her children and us grandchildren so that we can have ambitious dreams. She gave the best love one can

only imagine and because of that I have been privileged to dare to try things. Bobo lived and died in the process of this dissertation. I dedicate this work to the memory of her and the treasure left me with: give your best and make something great happen. I have and will always love you, Bobo.

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While I was writing and defending this dissertation, entrepreneurship became a core theme personally. Compared to creating and building companies, somehow writing this dissertation has actually been the most entrepreneurial thing I have ever done. Being able to research and create values in the field across those two cultures, generating results, and putting them in scholarly writing has been equally if not more challenging than creating an organization based on my past experiences. I would not have been able to accomplish this if there had not been enough support, encouragement, and advice from my mentors, family, friends, and students. I am deeply grateful.

Six years ago, before I returned to Penn for my master's degree, I would never in my wildest dreams have believed that I would stay on for a Ph.D. program and accomplish my own dissertation on a topic that is so close to my heart: the development of entrepreneurship. Yet, the professors, mentors and friends I met at Penn GSE have convinced me that doing research and applied work can both be entrepreneurial and can create value from different perspectives. They also have taught me the broader application of being entrepreneurial beyond just business.

First, I want to express my gratitude to my parents, Zhiqing Guo and Jianzhen Meng. Without you both being entrepreneurial enough to quit your stable jobs and try to make an impact on the world, I would not have had the opportunity to witness what

it means to reach for one's dream. Because of your courage and support, I dared to pursue my education in other countries. With your total trust in me, I was able to take unlikely paths and stay true to my own heart. Life can be challenging, with its ups and downs, struggles and excitements, but it has always been filled with growth and love. I am deeply grateful to be a member of this family and hope to carry on the family legacy to live an abundant life.

Secondly, I would like to use this opportunity to forever honor my grandmother, Zhixian Shi. Though she has passed away, she has never left me. Bo, you were the first and most loving person I have known. You were kind, generous, and entrepreneurial. Although you never got the chance to achieve your dream to become an educator, you raised all your children to be educated and competent members of society. You taught me the courage to love, to stand up for my passions and truth, and to never doubt my capacity to achieve whatever I desire in life. It is my greatest desire to be the person you showed me I could be and to honor you in my work and life. Bo, I miss you deeply, and it is my prayer that you will be happy and proud of me in heaven. I love you, and I can never thank you enough for all the gifts you have given me in the past 29 years.

To my extended family, my cousins Li Liu and Xiaowei Wang and aunts Chunzhen Meng and Gaizhen Meng, although you may not fully understand the research I'm doing, you have been so supportive. When I successfully defended my work, it was like a family celebration. I feel loved and encouraged by all of you.



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Mike, you are living the best example of what it means to have passion in work and in life. You also always put people first. You have been there for me in both my brightest and darkest moments. You believed in me even when I doubted myself. I could be myself completely because you never judged but always understood and listened. Although this dissertation as well as my doctorate journey will be put to an end, you will always be on my path as my mentor, friend, and family member. I look forward to more entrepreneurial projects and the impact we can make together.

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You three committee members are the ones who really taught me the lessons of human development. I have become a better person because of all of you, and my life has been forever changed and shaped by you. Thank you, my committee and my mentors in life and work.

From 2014 to 2020, I spent most of my time in GSE, where I was surrounded by many talented but humble mentors and friends. I was able to learn, experience, and practice the lessons of human development inside and outside of class. Dr. Suzanne Fegley, you were the first person who taught me about human development and shared with me your own life stories to help me grow. You have been my role model and a comfort in so many difficult moments, and I have missed your hugs so badly. I hope I can

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I have never felt alone on this journey because of the many people I met and got a chance to know. I have made great friends who are always there for me: Laronda Thompson, Soo Ju, Vivian Yiu, Zhuozhuo Liu and Kathy Xu. We shared so many meals, laughs, and experiences. You are all extremely bright, loving, and unique. Chaowen Yuan, it is complicated to put all the experiences we shared into words, but I am grateful to have gotten to share a part of the journey with you and wish you all the very best in your work and lives. Thank you for your love and care for me. Chaowen, it is my sincerest prayer that you will be happy and loved always. Kathy, I wouldn't have been able to recover so fast from my health challenges without your care. I will always remember the moments we shared.

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For all of this and beyond, I am deeply grateful to God. You have given me the best gifts ever, and it is my sincerest prayer that I can be a gift to others in all my remaining years.

## **ABSTRACT**

BEING AND BECOMING ENTREPRENEURIAL: A NARRATIVE STUDY ON THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ADULTS IN CHINA  
AND THE UNITED STATES

Mengjiao Guo

Michael J. Nakkula

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Chapter Overview

Being entrepreneurial has been argued to be one of the ways of surviving and even thriving in a context of uncertainty and change (Alvarez and Barney, 2005; Engel, Dimitrova, Khapova & Elfring, 2014; Gruber, 2002;). Nevertheless, it has been almost exclusively connected to business starting behaviors, without being applied to other broader contexts. This research proposes a new definition of the entrepreneurial mindset, arguing that one way to prepare students is through cultivating this mindset, regardless of their professional aspirations.

Under this context, this research is centered on making meaning of the development of an entrepreneurial mindset in the self-narratives of entrepreneurial individuals. By understanding the development of the qualities of being and becoming entrepreneurial, I aim to reveal developmental patterns and pinpoint lessons that a diverse range of individuals from China and America can introduce. This chapter is arranged in the following sections: (1) overview of the context; (2) why being entrepreneurial matters in this context; (3) why and what is an entrepreneurial mindset(EM); (4) the purpose of this study; (5) the significance of this work; (6) research questions and overview of the methodology.

## **Overview of the Context**

With the rapid development of emerging technologies such as self-driving cars, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), we have entered a swiftly changing, globalized, and digitalized world (Christensen & Horn, 2008; Gore, 2013; Levy, 2018 August 10). Indeed, today individuals have lives dramatically different from those of the past, facing an unpredictable future and challenging job market (Ford, 2015; Richards, 2018). According to the World Economic Forum (2020), it is estimated that technology will produce 2.1 million new jobs while simultaneously eliminating 7.1 million jobs by the end of 2020. Large scale changes are influencing the types of jobs that will exist in the future, as well as the skills and knowledge required by those jobs (Arntz, Gregory & Zierahn, 2017; Wajcman, 2017). These changes are also affecting the international order and impacting different cultures across the globe (Zhou & Tyers, 2018). It would have been hard to imagine these developments five or ten years ago. It will be even harder, if not impossible, to visualize and predict the coming five or ten years.

This changing context is a common theme observed by people in our age and it directly impacts the job market as well as the skills needed for future jobs. At the beginning of the new millennium, in a 2000 report titled “Future Work Trends and Challenges for Work in the 21st Century,” the Department of Labor in America stated that “65% of today’s grade school children will end up in a job that has yet to be invented” (Department of Labor in America, 2000). Although many skeptics have raised



questions about how they calculated this number, looking back, almost half of the top 10 most valuable companies were only founded within the last two decades (GANDEL, 2016, February 04). As with these new market leaders, many highly valued jobs did not even have majors in college years ago.

We have already witnessed that many manual labor jobs have been replaced by machines or outsourced to other countries where labor is cheaper and more productive with the multiple work shifts (Pink, 2006). With the prevalence of the internet and artificial intelligence, and the rise of self-driving cars, big data, and other emerging technologies, one does not need a doctorate to see that the speed and magnitude of these changes are unprecedented, not to mention their implications. At first, machines may eliminate many repetitive and programmable jobs that are concentrated in the blue-collar and clerical sectors (Levy, 2018 August 10). Moreover, not only are manual jobs under threat, but also many white-collar jobs are no longer safe. Deeper still, TurboTax has already replaced lower level accountants and there are projects attempting to test the accuracy of machines performing medical diagnoses and document review in legal cases. These tests have found that those machines turn out to be better than humans (Richards, 2018). These developments suggest that no job is “robot-proof”, demonstrating that the information and knowledge people will need may take totally different forms from those we have had for decades, such as rote memorization and fact-based information or computation. This situation raises an important question: when most homework problems can be solved by googling or

Wikipedia, what kind of knowledge, skills and education will remain relevant or “human specialized”? More importantly, in this uncertain future, how should we educate our children?

The future is becoming increasingly uncertain and challenging. Consequently, traditional ways of education may not prepare the youth of today for coming changes. In these changing contexts, the knowledge and skills which are required to be a good citizen and contributor are also changing. There are educators, technologists and researchers trying to respond to the significant question of —what is relevant education in today’s world. Robinson and some other educators argue that some forms of education have become clearly outdated and a more individualized learning model through technology and technology-aided learning is the future (Robinson, 2014; Robinson & Aronica, 2014). Wagner (2010) notes that there is a large gap between the “Old World” of the classroom and the “New World” of work. Not only is what teachers are teaching becoming irrelevant and not as important, but how we test students’ learning can be misleading to prepare them for the future of work. For example, the higher-order skills, 21st century skills, and positive character strengths including being optimistic or gritty are key competencies identified and promoted by the state and educators while they are not tested and measured closely (Wagner, 2010). On the other hand, the traditional knowledge and information-based testing such as SAT or ACT are still the key tests the U.S. has taken as a key factor affecting students’ college

application outcomes. Not to mention Gaokao, the standardized testing in China, which basically tests content knowledge without much coverage of other skills.

Beyond identifying current challenges, some researchers and educators have their own recommendations and suggestions for responding to this uncertain future. For example, Wagner proposes seven skills he considers fundamental for the future. They are critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship, accessing and analyzing information, effective oral and written communication, and curiosity and imagination (2012). Some of these skills have already been recognized and promoted as the 21st century skills. Entrepreneurship as a skill may bring particularly interesting ideas and possibilities into this discussion. Florida (2010 August 12) even suggests that entrepreneurship should be the fourth R, right alongside reading, writing, and arithmetic. These conceptions not only suggest that being able to understand and run a business is an important career development skill, but also that there is tremendous value in letting students learn to “create something of their own” (Florida, 2010 August 12).

In the tech world, leaders and thinkers are also providing frameworks for readiness and adaptability for this changing context. Kaifu Lee (2018), a pioneer in artificial intelligence, provides a matrix for the changing landscape of jobs and skills that will be valuable or replaced in the future. According to his framework, highly repetitive work with low emotional demands reflect the types of jobs that will be replaced.

Moreover, there will be new jobs that will demand creativity and empathy. These qualities will become increasingly important and necessary.

Contrary to the provision of the predications, analysis, and solutions to respond to the uncertain future, some researchers are inviting others to think deeper about the roots of these questions and invite the readers to create their own solutions. Perkins (2014) notes that there are at least six trends which teachers are challenged to ponder in order to help children grow into the citizens, community members and contributors of the future. Instead of providing a “prescription” of what will be worth learning in the future, Perkins argues that it is the thinking process, the prioritization, and a different way of asking about the relevant education and things to be learned that will provide us with a collective reimagination of future education.

### **Why does Being Entrepreneurial in this Context Matter?**

The genesis of this research grew directly from the pressures and promise of this context, the importance of the entrepreneurial mindset, and my personal experience in both entrepreneurship and education in America and China. The need to cultivate more entrepreneurial individuals is extremely important to today’s world.

Throughout human history, there have always been people who have dealt with change uniquely. The pioneers who walked out of the forest and developed fire, the explorers who sailed into the unknown and risked everything for a new discovery, and those who created new ways of production, as well as the priests who entered foreign lands with little knowledge of local languages or cultures, and only faith, are those who

embraced or even created change by themselves (Harari, 2015). Of course, there are other ways of living, which are adaptive in a stable context, but which tend to respond poorly in the face of change. Before the 19th century, compared to many European nations, China possessed a relatively stable society with little change and many natural resources (Harari, 2015). Without strong challenges or threats to its existence, playing it safe and maintaining a “closed-door” policy was seen as the best way to extend the imperial state ad infinitum. However, when confronted with a tangible threat, such as the Opium War, China responded poorly and went through a turbulent century to re-establish order. The traditional way lost its magic when the world changed. Indeed, the need for change and being entrepreneurial can be different in different contexts and it is uncertainty and rapidly changing contexts that require more entrepreneurial thinking and behavior.

Since the Industrial Revolution, entrepreneurship has been argued to be closely linked to national economic advantages, job creation, and innovation (Jones & Wadhvani, 2006). Nations, regions, states, and educational organizations all have been trying to encourage entrepreneurial activities in recent years (Grimaldi et al., 2011). Entrepreneurism does not only mean creating organizations, jobs, and value. It also is a way of thinking and being. It has been argued that entrepreneurship is a necessary and useful skill for everyone, for reasoning, acting, and adapting in today’s world and in the future (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011; Obschonka et al., 2017). To be precise, being entrepreneurial is one of the ways of surviving and thriving in uncertain times. Being

entrepreneurial means more than starting a business. It also means creating new values or new ways of doing things. Entrepreneurial individuals tend to come up with new ways of dealing with uncertainty and emergent challenges. Entrepreneurial individuals also tend to frame problems as opportunities. This way of thinking and acting can be advantageous in the context of today, a time marked by massive uncertainty and novel challenges.

Personally, I have witnessed changing attitudes toward entrepreneurship as the concept has become more valued in many countries, including America and China. As a person who grew up experiencing the change of the Internet and computers from personal luxuries to social necessities, I have lived through this changing context. I am also intrigued by today's world, where screens are the common obsession of billions of people across the globe. In college, when a team of classmates and I competed in a college level entrepreneurial competition, many teachers and peers regarded the team as "weirdos" who do not prioritize schoolwork. Some of my teammates even quit during the competition due to their finals. Ten years later, when I was invited to participate in a university entrepreneurship conference in the same place, the voice to support entrepreneurship had grown greatly in importance. The government at both the national and local level now provides loans, funding, and incubators to support the entrepreneurial activities of college students.

Comparing this trend cross-culturally, I also have spent one third of my life in Western and economically developed countries, observing differences and similarities

across cultures, in terms of technology, workplace and education. The tensions and common challenges from my own experience are very unique. Governments and their citizens all believe they are confronting an uncertain and unknown future. Interestingly, the growing interest in doing things differently has brought a greater focus on innovation and internships in both the US and China.

In 2014, the Premier announced a new push for mass entrepreneurship and innovation by the Chinese government during the 2014 annual meeting of the New Champions in Tianjin (Xinhua News, 2015, September 12). The Chinese government has made it a priority for colleges to support entrepreneurship education nationwide (Atherton & Newman, 2017). America has been a global leader in cultivating entrepreneurial culture and activity. One example is the Global Entrepreneurship Program (GEP), a federal endeavor to provide resources, education, and support for entrepreneurship networks (Stough, 2017). These types of national efforts to promote entrepreneurship have shed light on the importance of cultivating entrepreneurship and creativity in our age.

Clearly, there are many different routes to preparing for the future. This research will focus on one of those ways—help understand and even cultivate entrepreneurial individuals so that we enable young people to not just survive an uncertain future but to thrive and create their own future and lives.

## **Why Being and Becoming Entrepreneurial Matters**

### ***Being Entrepreneurial can Benefit a Wider Audience***

Although research interest in entrepreneurship is growing, most of the work has focused primarily on a narrow view of entrepreneurship as a vessel for business creation, despite its potential to benefit a much wider audience (Mäkimurto-Koivumaa & Belt, 2016). With the term entrepreneurship, there have been numerous relevant terms such as entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial spirit, and entrepreneurial orientation. These concepts have their own unique foci and virtues; however, they only capture one particular element or aspect of entrepreneurship (Naumann, 2017). Other lines of research that focus on traits such as risk-taking and achievement-motivation were limited as we did not understand the contexts and outcomes of entrepreneurship beyond those associated with traditional business-related notions of entrepreneurial individuals (Low and MacMillan, 1988).

Recently, the emergence of cognitive approaches for analyzing how entrepreneurs think is showing much more promise (Busenitz and Barney, 1997; Baron, 2008). The focus on cognition and the mental processing of different uncertain environments is a valuable approach for understanding how to amplify the impact of entrepreneurship for a larger audience (Higdon, 2005).



### *A New Expanded Definition of Being Entrepreneurial and Becoming Entrepreneurial*

This research will continue this latter line of inquiry, focusing on the state and the process of being entrepreneurial, with a broadened definition. In this study, being entrepreneurial or possessing an entrepreneurial mindset is defined as:

A consistent focus on possibilities for creating new opportunities—the belief and the capacity to create new approaches to make things better.

This mindset includes the cognitive and behavioral perspectives needed to interpret uncertainty as an opportunity, as well as an action-orientation for solving perceived challenges. Based on this outlook, entrepreneurial individuals seek opportunities to exercise creativity and leadership throughout their education, work, and personal lives. I use this concept not only because of its growing popularity in the entrepreneurship literature, but also because it captures the core attributes shared among entrepreneurial individuals.

Becoming entrepreneurial captures:

the dynamic and developmental process of growing to become more entrepreneurial over time.

Although there are certain individuals who are born with certain “nature” attributes that are more likely to make them more entrepreneurial than others, I argue that being entrepreneurial is on a spectrum and it takes time and processes to become more entrepreneurial. I selected individuals who are on the more entrepreneurial side of the spectrum as they have already started major organizations and committed more

than one year to running them. By focusing on this end of spectrum, I can capture the core attributes shared among more entrepreneurial individuals. By listening to their narratives of how they grew to be this way, I can get each of their perspectives on the development process of being entrepreneurial over time.

One term that is close to being entrepreneurial is Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM). Some definitions of EM cover entrepreneurial cognition, but it also has been applied more broadly and has large implications in other areas. For example, EM has been argued to be a predictor of entrepreneurial activities or actions and it has not only served as an aim of entrepreneurship education but also as a requirement for entrepreneurial action and a desired trait for entrepreneurs and managers (Matthew, Chris, Kendall, & Steven, 2014).

Given its importance and prevalence in the literature and everyday usage, “being entrepreneurial” has served as an umbrella term to cover all kinds of cognition and behaviors related to entrepreneurial activities and characteristics. The mental aspect fits the goal of this research in the way that I want to know what has been happening within entrepreneurial individuals’ decision-making and thought processes, especially when the environment becomes uncertain. As a result, this approach can help us learn how to train others to think like an entrepreneurial individual, without necessarily starting an organization. Thus, this dissertation will focus on being entrepreneurial as the core construct for understanding the development, thinking, and experiences of

entrepreneurial individuals. I will also review the works on EM to help understand the cognitive processes of being entrepreneurial.

As with many commonly used and seldom agreed-upon concepts, no consensus has been reached about the precise meaning of EM. A recent literature review of EM found that there were no commonly shared conceptions of EM, only particular attributes of EM (Naumann, 2017). In an earlier work, McGrath and MacMillan (2000, p. 15) define EM as “a way of thinking about your business that captures the benefits of uncertainty.” They differentiate EM from other important business mindsets by its quality of “creating future new businesses.” Meyers (2015, p. 73) defines EM as “a specific state of mind which orientates human conduct towards entrepreneurial activities and outcomes. Individuals with entrepreneurial mindsets are often drawn to opportunities, innovation and new value creation.” This definition focuses more on mentalities; however, it is unclear about whether entrepreneurial activities and outcomes can only be applied to business, or if they are more broadly applicable. In Ireland, Hitt and Sirmon (2003) earlier defined entrepreneurial as a growth-oriented perspective in which individuals promote flexibility, creativity, continuous innovation, and renewal. This definition covers a wider range of constructs and dimensions; however, it also does not try to clarify the difference between an entrepreneurial mindset and an innovative mindset. Specifically, Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon, (2003) identified the virtue of EM as its focus on the cognitive abilities that allow individuals to exploit new opportunities when confronted with uncertain and dynamic situations. This

work shows that EM has certain advantages when it comes to analyzing, identifying and integrating fragmented situations that are rather hard to be predict.

As has been demonstrated, there have been a wide range of definitions of EM in the literature, which provide different perspectives on EM and its virtues. Nevertheless, this research aims to use EM to capture the core of thinking and acting entrepreneurially. In other words, What is the core of this thinking? Is being able to make meaning and decisions in the face of uncertainty and to create value through actions the core, along with it being applied broadly to cover behaviors beyond just starting business? Specifically, this research project will adopt an expanded definition to capture the essence of EM without limiting its scope to business.

Instead of being perceived as a trait that people either possess or lack, I want to broaden this term into a more dynamic concept, which varies in degree and can also manifest in different ways in different individuals. Not only does EM develop over time, it also can be perceived as a cognitive skill which can be beneficial for a larger audience of individuals who aim to create their lives and future in many different ways.

### **Purpose of this Research**

Although general interest in entrepreneurship research has grown in recent years, the subjective perspective from the entrepreneurial individuals, and developmental perspectives of being entrepreneurial have been limited. Most of the research is focused on a narrow view of entrepreneurship as a vessel for business creation, despite its potential to benefit a much wider audience. Being entrepreneurial

has hardly been studied from the perspective of entrepreneurial individuals. Rather, research in this area tends to be focused on certain aspects of entrepreneurial traits, such as entrepreneurial skills and motivation, among others. Appearing more objective and measurable, this method fails to capture the meaning of thinking and acting entrepreneurially from the subjects' point of view. It also leaves stories, larger contexts, developmental processes, including meaning-making processes, out of the data.

Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore how entrepreneurial adults in China and the U.S. developed to be this way, according to entrepreneurial individuals' own narratives. Specifically, I aim to explore the state of being and developmental process of being entrepreneurial through entrepreneurial individuals across age groups, genders and cultures. I seek to understand what factors might have affected the development of EM in different individuals, according to their own understanding or self-beliefs, investigating whether any differences exist among countries, genders, and age groups, and also what developmental patterns are revealed in the process.

Through hearing the developmental narratives of entrepreneurial adults—their paths, transitions, experiences, and differences, as well as the nature of this mindset—we may gain a more complete picture of the development of these particular qualities. Yet, most studies of this type have focused on limited narrative elements of being entrepreneurial such as entrepreneurial intention or actions. We can make the mistakes as expressed in the “blind men and elephant stories,” in which each element does not

sum up the whole. Therefore, this research aims to hear and focus on entrepreneurial individuals' own narratives of their development as fully as possible.

Specifically, I will focus on why and how have the participants developed their entrepreneurial mindset? What are the key experiences and factors that contribute to such development? What figured into their decision-making and thought processes? How has their relationships with other people affected their decisions? What support do they have? Lastly, what other experiences have they brought up as important experiences and reflections?

In summary, to hear from entrepreneurial individuals of diverse backgrounds, and to capture a broader understanding of their personal contexts, as well as interesting patterns in their development, is the core purpose of this work.

### **Significance of this work**

From the literature review I have completed, I anticipate that this work can contribute to the field in the following ways: First, it is expected that being entrepreneurial will be found to be a particularly useful skill to have in challenging and uncertain environments. We want to learn from people who are entrepreneurial to uncover the core developmental processes behind being entrepreneurial so that we can help cultivate more people with this mindset. Second, given that much of the research has introduced EM as entirely business focused, this work will include entrepreneurial individuals who may not necessarily start businesses, yet who have demonstrated cognitive and behavioral patterns that could be deemed entrepreneurial. In this way we

can explore EM in a broader set of circumstances. Thirdly, many works have focused on only one or several isolated parts of being entrepreneurial, through metrics and personality tests. In these conceptions EM is understood as fragmented, context-free and sometimes a fixed concept. However, this research will seek to capture a much broader picture, from the accounts and developmental pathways of those with entrepreneurial mindsets themselves. Through this study, I hope to provide a snapshot of being entrepreneurial from different backgrounds in which entrepreneurs are making their own meaning of their thoughts and actions over time. This approach may help the field understand being entrepreneurial and EM from another perspective. Additionally, there are also different levels and degrees of being entrepreneurial. Consequently, I want to use this work to explore the dynamics and patterns that emerge from this data to better understand these levels and degrees more thoroughly.

My intention is to contribute to the fields of education, human development, and entrepreneurship with one approach to being prepared for the future through a deep understanding and analysis of the development of entrepreneurial mindsets of people from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, the purpose of this research is to understand the developmental processes contributing to the entrepreneurial mindset (EM), and its implications for broadly educating young people, and as an approach for better preparing students for the future (Auerswald, 2012; de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2018). Therefore, this study will be an important step in establishing conceptions of

different types of entrepreneurial mindsets, as well as theories on the development of EM.

#### Research Questions and Overview of the Research Design

The main research questions which I aim to explore in this study are:

1. What does “being entrepreneurial” mean as perceived and described by entrepreneurial individuals?
2. How have participants in China and the United States become entrepreneurial, according to the accounts of the entrepreneurial individuals themselves?
3. According to participants’ accounts, what factors or experiences have contributed to their development of being entrepreneurial?
4. What are the differences and commonalities across countries and groups in terms of the growth of EM in their descriptions of their own experiences?

The research focus is not on the development of entrepreneurs, but rather the beliefs and self-narratives of being and becoming entrepreneurial by those participants, who demonstrated their entrepreneurial behaviors. Those entrepreneurial individuals are not necessarily the ones who create companies and business as entrepreneurs. Matheson says it well: “An entrepreneur is someone who takes risks to create something new, usually in business. But the entrepreneurial mindset is available to anyone prepared to rely only on their own abilities for their economic security and



expect no opportunity without first creating value for others” (2013, p. 1). Not everyone will or should be an entrepreneur, but the ability to be entrepreneurial can be a desirable skill or mindset. Scholars affirm this notion that “the successful future strategists will exploit an entrepreneurial mindset... the ability to rapidly sense, act, and mobilize, even under uncertain conditions” (Ireland et al., 2003, pp. 963–989). Therefore, in my research I aim to use the concept of EM as a way to broadly understand being and becoming entrepreneurial.

Due to this newly expanded definition, and the research goal of uncovering the broader developmental contexts of entrepreneurial individuals, a qualitative research approach is proposed for this study. The theoretical perspective most associated with this work is grounded theory, which is using the inductive approach to build constructs and theory from the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Using grounded theory, this research seeks to understand the state and development of being entrepreneurial through meaning-seeking in entrepreneurial individuals. In particular, I will collect the self-narratives of the target population, as well as other related data such as site visits and peer interviews, which will be used to help interpret and contextualize the narrative data.

I have employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002, 2015) to include participants from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, in order to explore the relationship between the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and other factors such as family background, culture, gender and age, this dissertation utilizes interviews of 24

entrepreneurial individuals across different age groups (ranging from ages 20s to 60s), different sexes, and across China and the U.S. All of these entrepreneurial individuals have started organizations and also run those organizations for one year or more. The organizations range from multiple million-dollar businesses to local nonprofits. This way, I can capture a wide range of backgrounds as I attempt to understand the core of thinking and acting entrepreneurially.

Specifically, the interviews covered core mental, developmental, and emotional processes behind the participants' entrepreneurial activities, along with other aspects of the self-narratives on their own development of EM. After collecting the interview data, I transcribed the interviews and analyzed them in their entirety. A codebook contributing to core themes was created from the interview transcript data. The contrast between age groups, countries and also genders was analyzed with the hope of building a framework for EM development.

Importantly, the data collected in this research depended mostly on interview transcripts, the words expressed by the interviewees, their tones, and vocal and facial expressions. Notes from the interviews were employed in the process of understanding the data. In summary, there were three steps in the research process: data collection, coding, and analysis, including interpretation of the findings.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the idea that there are changing contexts and changing requirements for human talents and skills. Particularly, we are living in dynamic,

changing, and uncertain contexts, with the growth of “smart” technology threatening repetitive jobs. Thus, the skills, competencies, and mindsets to respond to this environment require more attention and action. A core mindset of huge potential is the entrepreneurial mindset. Despite entrepreneurship’s common and narrow connection with business thought, skills, and actions, this research calls for a broader conceptualization of being entrepreneurial as a way to respond to changing, uncertain, and often risk-involved contexts.

To capture the nature and development of an entrepreneurial mindset under this broadened definition, this research qualitatively explores self-narratives of entrepreneurial individuals (people who have started an organization or major project of their own wills and at their own risks for over one year) from China and the U.S. This research can help capture the EM—the mindset that reflects entrepreneurial individuals’ core features and paths without limiting it to business-specific activities. This method allows us to understand the nature, development, and hopefully potential recommendations to educate more entrepreneurial individuals to better thrive in new contexts.

This chapter ends with a brief introduction to the research questions and methods to provide a clear picture of the research as a whole. Detailed information on methodology will be presented in chapter three.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Chapter Overview

There have been debates over using existing theoretical perspectives and previous literature in grounded theory research, as researchers attempt to focus on the data without the influence and constraints of existing works (Corbin & Straus, 2008). Nevertheless, the understanding of existing works still can provide inspiration and direction for this study, not only in terms of positioning this current work within the field, but also in gaining new ideas from theoretical traditions, relevant research, and methodological directions.

Given the new expanded construction of being entrepreneurial, it is important to clarify the definition and conceptualization of EM based on previous research. Although this study includes a proposal for a new definition and a construct, past research on different domains of EM, a closely related term, can shed light on the research direction, identify gaps, and provide some frameworks for analyzing data—instead of directly building on previous studies. Specifically, I will review relevant works on EM in the following order: (i) the theoretical and methodological tradition of this study; (ii) conceptualization of EM; (iii) an expanded new definition of EM; (iv) cognitive and psychological perspectives on EM; (v) the biological and neurological perspective on EM; (vi) EM and diversity; and, (vii) the state of the field and gaps in the inquiry of the development of EM.

By reviewing previous studies, researchers can identify important areas that need future study. EM, as argued in this research study, does not emerge at a single point in time and out of context; it therefore obliges researchers to search for meaning through voices of entrepreneurs to capture a fuller picture of the processes and contexts that allow one to more deeply grasp this phenomenon.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Tradition**

Symbolic interactionism is a key theoretical framework that offers inspiration for this current study. The symbolic interactionism approach originated in the philosophical writings of James and Dewey, which was also strongly shaped in the field of social psychology (Mead, 1936). According to Mead, symbolic interaction is the constant interaction between individuals and the environment that shapes individuals' views, identities, and actions. The individuals, therefore, intentionally choose which situational stimulus they will respond to. Researchers need to understand meanings in specific context, as individuals experience them. Mead also proposed a three-component theory of social act: society, self, and meaning.

Society has a collection of members with a shared meaning system through which members interact with one another using words or symbols. The shared words and symbols are essential to form any collective understanding and actions (Pearson, 1989). In a system centered analysis of entrepreneurial individuals, there are different systems involved that have different meaning structures. The primary systems are

families, the working system, and sometimes the school system, which shape and influence individuals.

The notion of *self* is crucial for this study as it contains the same person as both subject and object. Mead's theory holds that individuals develop from social infants to learn norms, symbols, and values through interactions with others in different systems. In this process, they also develop an internal system to interpret and interact with the environment and form a dynamic conception of self. Particularly, Mead divides this self as "I" and "me;" and the "I" is the interface of others and self and "me" is the reflective self.

The component of mind is the process of interacting with oneself (Littlejohn, 1983). Talking or communicating with oneself can occur at different stages of interaction. Individuals may think before making crucial decisions, throughout the process, and when the results of such decisions emerge. It provides an interesting framework to think of how entrepreneurial individuals think in their current works, throughout their development. The question emerges: is entrepreneurial "minding" a unique mental habit, a skill, a system of different minding based on contexts, or a specific process that they use to interact with the system? Those are the analytical categories that Mead's work inspired.

Sevak and Baker (2014) have applied the symbolic interactionist approach to develop a framework in entrepreneurial opportunity development. Particularly they suggested that subjective and objective factors are intertwined in the process of

opportunity development. Most studies conducted on EM development have focused on the objective factors, whereas researchers (Akanbi, 2013) only measure “objective factors” such as entrepreneurial intention and motivations. In such studies, scholars overlook context and the subjective interpretation of the individual’s experience, oversights that the current study will correct.

Besides the social interactionist theory, Bronfenbrenner’s psycho-ecological theory and constructivism are also relevant and useful frameworks in locating and analyzing the development of EM in cross-cultural contexts, as well as thinking about the development and education of EM (1993, 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner (1993, 1998), there is a bi-directional interaction between individuals and their environments. Specifically, there are different circles of influence that can be captured as different system levels such as family and schools as direct micro-systems, and more macro-level contexts like politics and global economies. With the entrepreneurial individual as the center of analysis and creation of the narratives for this study, the systems of the environment can serve as organizational structures for the key influencers and experiences in their narratives and self-theories.

The stories of individuals becoming entrepreneurs describe how individuals with certain drives and agencies interact within a specific historical and cultural context. In this study, I invite people to share their accounts of those different factors that interact in shaping their development. With this approach in mind, Bronfenbrenner’s bio-

ecological model provides nested circles of interactions to analyze environmental factors, individuals, and the effects of timing.

Another key theoretical perspective stems from the life course framework. As the main proponent of this theory, Elder (1998) posited that individuals' lives are embedded in developmental time, which represents a source of inspiration to analyze the sequence and influencing factors on those individuals' stories. Elder analyzed the Great Depression and the Second World War, to identify patterns of coping for adolescents and adults. It is within those extreme contexts, where families face increasing uncertainties, that Elder examined coping patterns, different trajectories, and intergenerational transmission for individuals. Role transitions, and the impact of various events on an individual's subsequent adaptation and interpretations, develop an individual over time within the historical and cultural contexts.

The concepts of trajectories, transitions, agency, timing, and historical time and places are all important lenses through which researchers can understand the stories of participants; I used these lenses to help develop the sampling strategies for this study. According to life course theory, the impact of historical events on individuals depends on the stages of the individuals when the event occurs. Specifically, people will have more salient memory and impact if they are in adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, the experience of profound historical change can leave a differentiated impact on different cohorts' trajectories. For this study, I sampled individuals in their 20s to 40s (the young group), and also senior participants in their 40s to 60s (the senior group).



Individuals in these age ranges grew up in post-World War Two China and America, experiencing dramatically different political and economic environments.

The senior group (age 40 and above) from China tend to be the first generation of entrepreneurs who created their wealth during the Open-Door Policy, a policy that allows Chinese people to conduct private business and also participate in international trade which was banned since 1949. The young group (age 18 to 39) grew up during the rapid development of the internet and social media, applying innovative technology in their own organizations. Does the senior group, affected by economic shortages in their youth, show certain group behavior patterns such as trying to take control of their finances closely? Does the Chinese young group demonstrate certain attributes resulting from growing up during the One-Child Policy in a different way than their American counterparts? Life course theories can be a framework to provide answers to these questions and inform data for comparison.

Piaget has argued that knowledge is the product of individual construction and, similarly, entrepreneurial individuals are also constantly constructing their own environments through knowledge they create over time (Bouchhiki, 1993). The constructivist way of seeing learning and living as part of one's own construction also sheds light on some thinking in the research (Krueger, 2009). Not only can knowledge and learning be one's own construction, at least in part, but self-narratives and meaning making are also constructed by the participants, though always in interaction with their environments and the people in them. Analyzing what they symbolically construct as

their own understanding of their experience is a process of constructing the meaning of EM from participants' perspectives.

This study also integrates some methodological traditions such as phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is the study of structures of experience from the subjective first-person perspective (Smith, 2013 December 16). In this research, I am interested in the entrepreneurial individuals' narratives of their experience of perceiving, becoming, and being entrepreneurial. The phenomena under analysis are the self-narratives of the participants' subjective understanding of those experiences. These experiences may not represent the "objective facts" of a particular phenomenon, but they provide what the participants constructed and expressed from their perspective, which is the focus of this study.

Hermeneutics refers to "one's interpretation of one's connectedness to the world over time" (Nakkula & Selman, 1991, p. 186). That is, individuals' interpretations of self and others are connected with the worlds that they live in, and the passage of time can transform individuals' "new connections to the worlds, new interpretations of those connections, which in turn continuously redefine our being-in-the-world" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 19). Applying the hermeneutic tradition to this study, participants' interviews represent "sacred texts" that I will try to connect with and become immersed in. The processes of deep reading and data analysis invite the researcher to live the participants' experiences and worlds. This deep immersion, interaction, and "being" in the words of research participants can potentially impact

researchers' practices, their meaning-making systems, and even their own lives. The researcher is not only interpreting the "data," but according to Schleiermacher (1998), going through the hermeneutic circle. The goal of researchers is to situate themselves in the subjects' words and meaning, take their perspectives, and use their words to derive meaning of the data. Therefore, applying the hermeneutics tradition to understand the subjective meaning participants derive from their experiences is an important part of this study.

### **Conceptualization of Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM)**

Researchers have used different approaches to define and understand the meaning of an EM. One approach was to look at its etymology: the original root of its meaning. The term "entrepreneur" comes from the French, *entrependre*, meaning to undertake a major project. This term was popularized around 1800 by Jean Baptiste Say, who emphasized "the entrepreneur shifts resources out of an area of lower and into an area of high productivity and greater yield" (Drucker 1985, pp. 23). In this context, the entrepreneur represents an important factor in the economy, and it denotes an individual with value-creation with strong connections to action-taking.

In the history of this term, the economist Schumpeter (1936, pp. 74-75) discusses the concept of entrepreneurship at length:

The function of entrepreneurs is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production . . . by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening up a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on.

Schumpeter (1936) emphasized the newness of entrepreneurial activity, providing a view of entrepreneurship in the macro-system. According to this construction, not only are innovation or creation from scratch perceived as new, but also a new combinations of different components of the systems are possible. Nevertheless, Schumpeter is still analyzing and discussing entrepreneurship in the context of production and its application in the industrial setting.

Stevenson (1983) defined entrepreneurship as “the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled” (p. 3). This definition implies that entrepreneurial activities include more irrationality or atypicality when it comes to decision-making in the business setting. Compared to planned organizational actions that tend to occur based on a planning, organization, implementation, and feedback circles, with a strong emphasis on analytical and logical processes of understanding the feasibility of the opportunity measured by resource availability, entrepreneurs assume greater risk and pursue the opportunities regardless the current resources. Stevenson connects entrepreneurship with risk and as opposed to a strict focus on opportunity.

An influential figure in management literature who has expanded the conception of entrepreneurship is Drucker (2002), who disputed the common usage of entrepreneurship to refer to small businesses. Drucker observed that this term, “refers not to an enterprise’s size or age but to a certain kind of activity. At the heart of that activity is innovation: the effort to create purposeful, focused change in an enterprise’s economic or social potential.” Drucker (2002) called for a broader application of

entrepreneurship as a change agent in society, one which has a social impact beyond just economic gains. Specifically, he argued that “the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity.” Even with this expanded definition and its implications, researchers have largely studied entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in the confines of economic activity.

In addition, it is important to note that entrepreneurship can take a variety of forms based on certain characteristics of the organizations, the motivation for starting the organizations, and the organizations’ roles in society (Guterman, 2018). Majid and Koe (2012) have argued that there are several categories of entrepreneurship including regular or commercial entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship, and green entrepreneurship. They differentiate these by key organization purpose. For example, sustainable entrepreneurship’s focus is to balance economic, environment, and social contributions instead of just focusing on one aspect. Tilley and Young (2009) further clarify these categories by comparing their motivations and main goals. Specifically, there is an increasing interest in social entrepreneurship focused on social justice, equity, or environmental issues. Broadly speaking, the primary goal of traditional entrepreneurship is profit, while non-profit organizations and social entrepreneurship aim to balance both profit-making and social good. What makes these different types of organizations entrepreneurial commonly occurs during their formative stages (Andersson, 2016).

Researchers have conceptualized mindset as the mental filter through which individuals process information (Thum, 2012). It is a certain inclination or orientation of individuals as they interact with outside information. Mindset research has remained largely limited to cognitive studies. For example, Gupta and Govindrarajam (2002, pp. 116-117) organized the key findings on mindset in the following ways:

human beings are limited in the ability to absorb and process information and we are constantly challenged by the complexity; (ii) the information around us is ambiguous and dynamic; (iii) and, as a result, individuals develop a process of filtration through which they select the ways that to absorb and interpret information

Thus, cognitive filters are mindsets, which are the results of individual interactive processes accumulated and developed over time. When these mindsets are challenged, individuals adjust or change their mindsets to respond to external stimuli. Therefore, Gupta and Govindrarajam concluded that the more self-aware individuals are of those mindsets, the more likely they can manage or adjust them.

Dweck (2006) popularized the concept of mindset in her study of growth mindset. Dweck argued that there are two different kinds of mindsets that separate the high achiever from the rest, namely *growth mindset* and *fixed mindset*. Growth-minded individuals tend to perceive their talents as mutable, which learning and hard work can improve. Individuals with a more fixed mindset perceive their talents as set or fixed (i.e., unable to be improved). With different mindsets, people will perceive and act on environmental challenges and changes differently. This work highlights the different impacts drawn from different mindsets. As EM is also using mindset as a way to capture

certain cognitive aspect of being entrepreneurial, the relationship between EM and growth-mindset is also important to take into consideration.

Table 2.1 *Definitions of Entrepreneur(ship)* (Bosman & Fernhaber, 2018, P9)

Definition of Entrepreneur(ship)	Emphasis	Reference
The entrepreneur shifts economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield	Creates value	Say (1821)
The function of entrepreneurs is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production ... by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening up a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on	Change agent/creative destruction	Schumpeter (1942)
The pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled	Drive	Stevenson (1983)
The entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity	Opportunity	Drucker (1985)
The discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities	Processes	Shane and Venkataraman (2000)

McGrath and MacMillan (2000, p. 15) defined entrepreneurial mindset as “the ability to rapidly sense, act and mobilize, even under uncertain conditions.” Also, they suggested that individuals have fully developed the EM when they acted as “habitual

entrepreneurs,” whose specialty lay on starting business within or outside an existing organization. This concept of habitual entrepreneurs describes individuals with a tendency and habit to think and act as entrepreneurs. The concept of an EM informs the present study, but unlike McGrath and MacMillan, I use individuals’ behavior at the onset of a major project within or outside an organization as the cues to identify EM. I chose participants who have started and continue to pursue this opportunity for a year or more, as these individuals are more likely to have formed a pattern of entrepreneurship.

Given the variety of definitions of EM, without a general consensus, Naumann (2017) conducted a synthetic literature review on the concept of EM. Naumann confirmed that there was no commonly shared understanding of EM, but a mix of diverse depictions of certain aspects or attributes of EM. Additionally, most research conducted on EM stemmed from the Anglo-American perspective and the quantitative method, with only one qualitative work that Naumann identified (Naumann, 2017).

EM has served as an identifier of entrepreneurial individuals who acquire these skills through their interaction with the environment, rather than an innate character quality. This understanding of EM can help researchers deal with the uncertain, complex, dynamic contexts in which EM occurs. Yet, the scholarly understanding of EM remains highly fragmented and ardently debated. Different conceptions of EM led to different research methods and results. The conceptualization of EM has cognitive



aspects, and some researchers have linked those with personal traits without a common overall conceptualization.

After the screening previous research on EM in several stages, I selected 33 studies which discussed or explained EM's concepts and attributes. I found 17 theoretical studies and 16 empirical studies, of which 10 were explanatory and six were exploratory. All the explanatory research studies but one included interaction with participants. The longitudinal studies were only used to engage with the same individuals with a week of interval. Half of the exploratory research studies were conducted in the United States and American scholars conducted 85% of the studies. In addition, only one scholar included interviews with entrepreneurs from the start-up (Shane, 2000) and others included experiments with students recruited through convenience sampling. Table 2 presents how the studies selected for this review conceptualized EM, categorized to show cognitive, personal attributes perspectives, or combined views.

Table 2.2

*Definitions of Entrepreneurial Mindset (EM) in the Literature (Naumann, 2017, p160.).*

Author	Definition
McGrath and Macmillan (2000, p.15)	“Ability to sense, act, and mobilize under certain conditions.”
Ireland, Hitt, and Simon (2001, p. 968)	“Way of thinking about business that focuses on and captures benefits of uncertainty.” “Growth-oriented perspective through which individuals promote flexibility, creativity, continuous innovation, and renewal.”
Haynie and Shepherd (2007, p. 9)	“Ability to adapt thinking process to a changing context and task demands.”
Dhliwayo and Van Vuuren (2007, p. 124)	“Way of thinking and acting about business.”
Shepherd, Patzelt, and Haynie (2010, p. 62)	“Ability and willingness of individuals to rapidly sense, act, and mobilize in response to a judgmental decision under uncertainty about a possible opportunity for gain.”
Baron (2014, p. 55)	“Think, reason, make decisions, plan, and set goals in relatively unique way.”
Davis, Hall, and Mayer (2016, p. 2)	“Constellation of motives, skills, and thought processes that distinguish entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs.”
McMullen and Kier (2016, p. 664)	“Ability to identify and exploit opportunities without regard to the resources currently under their control,” only working when entrepreneurs experience promotion focus.

Besides the definitions discussed in this paper, there are also other definitions that shed light on other aspects of EM. For example, researchers commonly link the ability to take risks, be experimental, be innovative, and be active with EM. Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) described entrepreneurship as a “dynamic process of vision, change and creation . . . [which requires] an application of energy and passion towards the

implementation of new ideas and creative solutions” (p. 30). In their definition, Kuratko and Hodgetts intentionally broaden the concept of entrepreneurship to cover not only enterprise creation but also individual behavior in both business and non-business activities. Following the same notion, the European Union described EM as “a key competence for all, helping young people to be creative and confident in whatever they undertake” (Gibb, 2011). Here, confidence and creativity are also combined with EM, implying that EM is a key competence advocated for a broader audience. Matheson (2013, p. 1) noted,

An entrepreneur is someone who takes risks to create something new, usually in business. But the entrepreneurial mindset is available to anyone prepared to rely only on their own abilities for their economic security and expect no opportunity without first creating value for others.

Researchers have also tried to identify the links between EM and the Big Five personality traits. In a meta-analysis of 23 studies, Zhao and Seibert (2006) found that, compared with managers, entrepreneurs scored higher on traits reflecting conscientiousness and openness to experience and lower on traits reflecting neuroticism and agreeableness, with no difference on extraversion.

There has been an increasing interest in understanding and defining EM, but the constructions of EM remain debated. Due to the lack of a common definition of EM, and its largely business-based understanding, I want to combine the core aspects identified in previous literature with an expanded definition, proposing a new definition. By exploring this new definition of EM in the context of an exploratory, cross-cultural

context with participants of diverse background, this study will represent an important contribution to the field of EM research.

### **An Expanded New Definition of Entrepreneurial Mindset**

It is important to highlight some features linked with this expanded definition. First, EM is a mental filter, like other mindsets, with not only cognitive aspects but also affective or intuitive aspects (pattern recognition). Second, EM is both a product as well as a predictor of the interaction between individuals and their environments. It has developed and evolved and over time. Third, EM is on a continuum, meaning individuals with EMs may exhibit any number of aspects associated with EM—it is not an all-or-nothing dichotomy. Fourth, I used behavioral and self-identification approaches to identify the actions that entrepreneurial individuals exercise or manifest.

Based on the many definitions offered in previous studies, EM describes many desirable traits like being comfortable with uncertainty, the ability to adjust and even thrive in uncertain contexts, the ability to take calculated risks, and the willingness to take these risks. According to the person-environment-fit model, cultivating EM will enable individuals to have the competence to respond to the dynamic and uncertain future of the contemporary world. Nations and organizations have made major efforts to cultivate individuals with this trait and some even argue that EM is the new literacy needed for this century. Moreover, EM has associations with other important outcomes.

This study will focus on highly entrepreneurial individuals who take the leap to start an organization as their job or side project. These participants have devoted themselves to their projects for over one year. This method is like studying “extreme cases” to understand their stories of developing an EM.

### **Cognitive and Psychological Perspective On EM**

Psychology has also contributed greatly to the understanding of EM. For example, the psychological study of entrepreneurship is a very important and growing field adding insights into how individuals construct and develop EM. Some more recent studies have adopted and applied classical psychological theories, such as personality psychology and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991) to understand entrepreneurial activities and behaviors. In their meta-analysis of 23 studies, Zhao and Seibert (2006) found that entrepreneurs, compared with managers, scored higher on traits reflecting conscientiousness and openness to experience and lower on traits reflecting neuroticism and agreeableness—with no difference in extroversion.

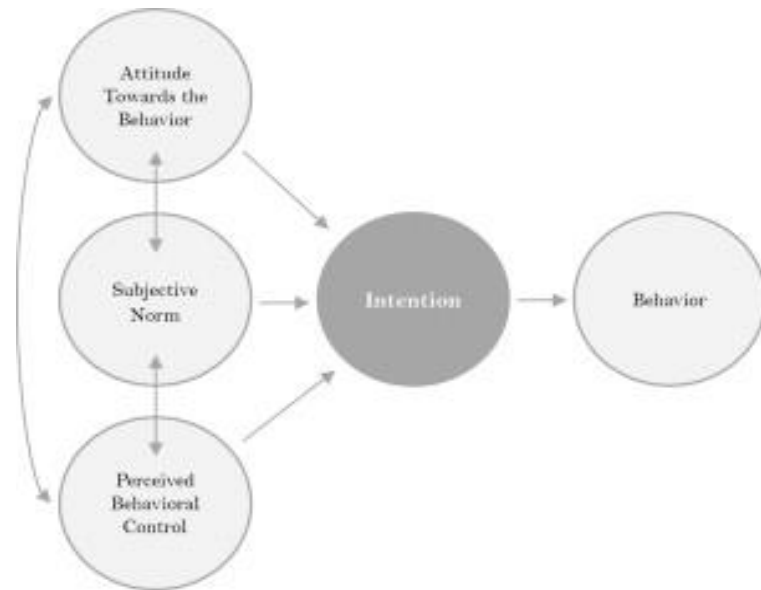


Figure 2.1.

Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) applied the theory of the planned behavior model (Ajzen, 1988) to explore the different factors related to entrepreneurial behaviors (see Figure 2.1).

Another line of work concentrated on entrepreneurial thinking. The concept of mindset originated in cognitive science, and it was connected to the concept of thought and cognitive processes. Some scholars have argued that EM, or entrepreneurial thinking, is a discipline that, like any discipline, can be learned (Michaels, 2012). More than anything else, entrepreneurial thinking emphasizes recognizing opportunity and learning to capitalize on it in a manner unique to the situation. In most industries, nations, and markets, entrepreneurs challenge existing assumptions to generate value in innovative and creative ways. This behavior can take the form of championing new products, lending expertise to social innovations,

or institutionalizing entrepreneurial activities within an organization.

At the core of entrepreneurial thinking is the application of “effectual reasoning” as opposed to “causal reasoning.” Entrepreneurial thinkers are often brilliant improvisers who do not start with concrete goals, but rather, assess how to apply their personal strengths and abilities to achieve the goals presented to them (Sarasvathy, 2001). Therefore, the entrepreneur’s effectual reasoning relies on having dynamic goals that may shift over time. In contrast, causal reasoning relies on setting a specific goal and then diligently working to achieve it (Sobel & Kirkham, 2006). Effectual reasoning in entrepreneurial thinking manifests itself in discovery-driven planning. The inherent uncertainty in effectual reasoning lends itself to risk, and discovery-driven planning is a practical tool that entrepreneurs can use to recognize the differences between developing a new venture and expanding a more conservative line of business (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000).

Generally, entrepreneurship scholars engage in cognitive research to understand how individuals identify entrepreneurial opportunities and act upon them (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Haynie et al. (2010) proposed a situated metacognitive model of EM (see Figure 2.2). They suggest that entrepreneurial individuals think about their own thinking in dynamic contexts. These metacognition processes can be important to understand and even help teach others to think like entrepreneurs.

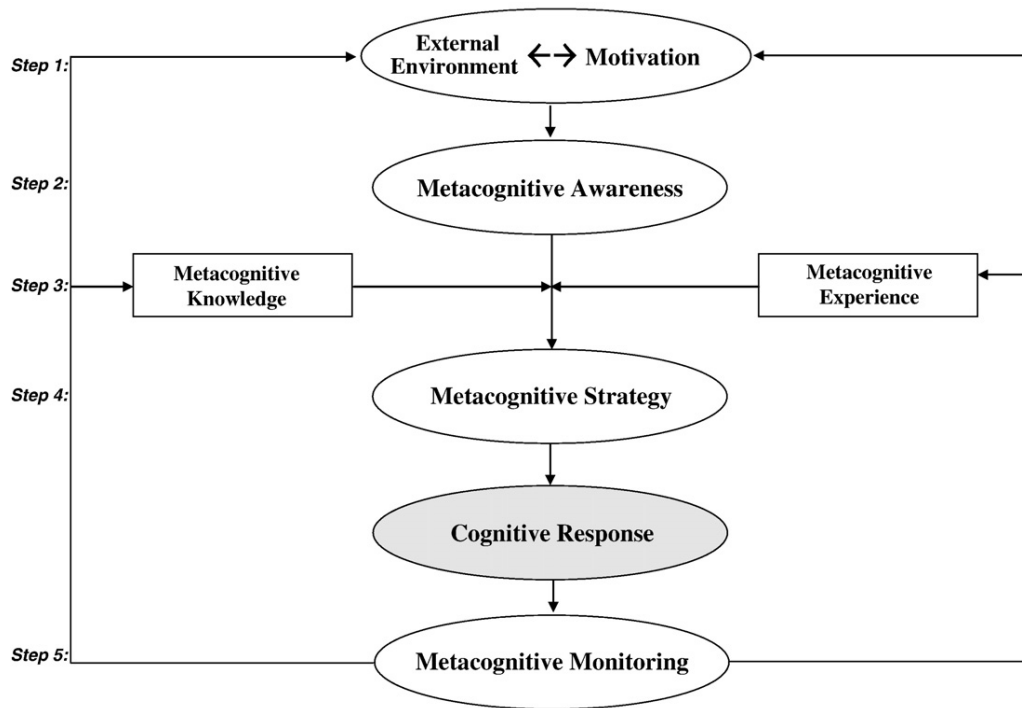


Figure 2.2

Metacognitive Model of the Entrepreneurial Mindset

### Biological and Neurological Perspective on EM

With the growing population of entrepreneurs, scholarly interests in this topic have also increased across different disciplines outside of business. Studies in the fields of psychology, biology, culture study, and neuroscience have examined the topic of entrepreneurship. One strand of biological research on entrepreneurship has included genetics studies of twins (Johnson, 2009) and adoptees (Lindquist, Sol, & Van Praag, 2012). The researchers identified a genetic component to entrepreneurial drive and the tendency to start a business (Nicolaou, Shane, Cherkas, & Spector, 2009; Shane, Nicolaou, Cherkas, & Spector, 2010; Zhang et al., 2009).



In another study, the researchers suggested that heritability coefficients of entrepreneurship can reach up to 40% to 50% (Nicolaou et al., 2008 ). There also have been studies identifying some genes that are associated with entrepreneurship, but no genes have reached genome-wide levels of significance so far (Quaye, Nicolaou, Shane, & Mangino, 2012). Moreover, Zald (2007) argued that entrepreneurs differentiate themselves in the numbers and density of dopamine receptors in their cerebral cortex. Subjects who consistently took more risks also had significantly higher numbers of dopamine receptors, as shown in a number of experiments (Krueger, 2010). Yet, without proper contrast groups and further studies, researchers still know little about the genetic and environmental contributions to the risk-taking behaviors and differences in dopamine receptors.

Another important field of research, neuroscience, is still in its early stages of exploring entrepreneurship, despite the relationship between entrepreneurship and more well-studied areas in neuroscience (e.g., decision-making, risk-taking, affect, pattern-recognition, and innovation) (Baron, 2008). Few studies have directly explored the genetic components of EM and the brain. In an event-related potentials (ERPs) study, Ortiz-Terán (2013) explored the decision making of founder entrepreneurs compared with non-founders/non-entrepreneurs through the Stroop task. The researchers found not only group differences in temperament and character measures, but also differences in reaction times and ERP latencies and amplitudes. Specifically, the

entrepreneurs group showed significantly different results in the novelty-seeking parameter with exploratory excitability and impulsiveness as its sub-scale.

The interpretation of these differences was unclear. The authors observed that those factors are “associated with riskier behavior, interest in new ideas and activities, but also intolerance of monotony and boredom” (p. 43). Interestingly, Lawrence et al. (2008) labeled this kind of entrepreneurial impulsivity as *functional impulsivity*, which is associated with activity, enthusiasm, and adventurousness. Their results both behaviorally (shorter reaction times) and neurophysiologically (N200) suggested that founder entrepreneurs make faster decisions than do the contrast group. Their interviews with founders confirmed that the founders are more drawn to seize the opportunity and act quickly under uncertainty (Peter & Ortiz, 2014). In their conclusion, the authors stated that founders embrace ambiguous problems more quickly.

There are also theories and studies (Shane, 2003) suggesting that entrepreneurs’ decision making differs from managers in their capacity to analyze and make decisions in an emotional state of hot cognition. Other researchers have suggested that entrepreneurs have a qualitatively different decision-making process than others (Shane, 2003). Others have found that the decision-making process is also different between the economic and social categories among entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs (Krueger, 2009). Therefore, new studies need to compare the entrepreneurs, non-entrepreneurs, and social entrepreneurs in their risk-related, decision-making processes.

## **EM and Diversity**

Entrepreneurial individuals do not exist in a vacuum, but they are deeply being, immersing in, and interacting with their contexts to both construct their mindsets as well as the environments. Although most works in the field are done within economically developed countries, there has been work done to explore the cultural, contextual, and diverse social factors, such as gender differences, as they interface with EM.

Haase, Lautenschlager, and Rena (2011) conducted a cross-cultural comparison between the EM of university students in Namibia and Germany. They wanted to test whether there are differences between the entrepreneurial intentions among those populations and what may contribute to such differences. They designed a cross-sectional study on the prospective career paths of 2,353 university students from Namibia and from Eastern and Western Germany in which they gave a 23-question survey on prospective career paths. The results suggested that Namibian students have a higher entrepreneurial intention compared to their German counterparts.

In another study on the entrepreneurial intention of adolescent students in Nigeria, Salami (2019) provided very interesting depictions of the contexts that influenced them. The research focused on the relationship between family environment, social network, parental socio-economic status, self-efficacy, proactive personality, and entrepreneurial intention—with the mediator being the role of self-efficacy. Based on the 250 secondary school students randomly selected from six

schools in different regions, the research used a structural equation model to analyze their data. The results suggested that both contextual and personal factors have a significant relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, self-efficacy mediated the relationship. Although entrepreneurial intention is not the same construct as EM, this study provides evidence on the role of contextual factors as well as the individual differences to affect entrepreneurial attributes.

Besides countries and some micro-level contextual factors, the studies on both females and racial/ethnic minorities in their intention and experiences also shed light on the systemic contextual barriers individuals face when it comes to entrepreneurial activities. Despite the statistics on the increasing growth of entrepreneurial activities, minorities and women remain underrepresented groups in these activities in many countries. These statistics suggest that both females and minorities still experience substantial obstacles like limited resources, fewer mentors, and limited credit history—not to mention the less visible challenges that they faced constantly from social stratification (Ashourizadeh, Chavoushi & Schøtt, 2014).

Notably, minority groups often have a very strong desire to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities to transform their current disadvantages (Heilman & Chen, 2003; Weiler & Bernasek, 2001). Yet, they have rarely fulfilled those potentials and drives (Kent, 1990). One study compared African American business students' entrepreneurial attitudes orientation (EAO) scales with the original validation sample of EAO and the students who have exposure to entrepreneurship have even achieved

higher EAO. One exception is self-efficacy, where African American business students do not have higher results. The authors proposed entrepreneurial education and resources for tapping into African American individuals' motivation for entrepreneurial activity to have more fruitful and equitable results (Nabi et al., 2008).

Sriram, Mersha, and Herron (2007) proposed an urban entrepreneurship model that views skills, motivation, and resources as important factors for entrepreneurship in the African American community. They argued that individual behavior is the key factor affecting entrepreneurial achievement, with the available resources as a moderator in this relationship. Junior Achievement found that 86% of African American teens expressed interest in starting a business (Gibson, et al., 2014), a promising statistic that certain innovative programs can promote the entrepreneurial drive for African American youth, and thus create more value for society as a whole.

Similar to race, gender represents another social institution long plagued by different results in starting and running businesses. Despite the increase of female entrepreneurs, men have almost double the rate of entrepreneurial activity (Shinnar et al., 2012). In another study on the relationship between gender identity across four countries, researchers found that individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO) is higher among men (Goktan & Gupta, 2015). Interestingly, they found both masculinity and femininity have a positive relationship with IEO, suggesting that there is both positive messages in gender identity relating to entrepreneurial orientation.

The study of minority groups and entrepreneurship shows promise in exploring the potential of under-represented groups to create change and value that were not achieved before. To provide entrepreneurial knowledge, training and resources are some of the most common recommendations for making that possible. Vallejo and Canizales (2016) discussed how race, class, and gender shaped entrepreneurial incorporation. Their study did not directly address the experiences and statistics of minority group and entrepreneurial intention or activities, but it uncovered the contextual systems that they live in.

In the current research study, I have also explored if there is a group pattern in the meaning-making and sharing process of being and becoming entrepreneurial. Given the scope of this work, I could only select countries, age groups, and gender as the key groups to include from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds as a representative sample.

### **The State of the Art and Gaps in the Inquiry of The Development of EM**

Although the definition and construction of EM remains unsettled, most researchers agree on the importance of EM. As a result, research into the implications and development of EM has become a hot topic in the fields of research and practice. The development of EM remains only a partially understood concept without much scientific explanation or well-established theories. Ranging from autobiographies, magazine profiles, anecdotes from entrepreneurial individuals, to widespread heroic stories of the famous Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, the hype over entrepreneurship is a

constant topic of discussion. Yet, there are still many remaining questions, such as whether individuals can learn to develop an EM. If it can be learned, researchers need to understand how some people develop EM while others do not. These significant questions remain in the discussion as work in related fields is trying to provide insight.

The first wave of studies examining the development of EM began in the field of education. Common barrier for minority groups to access entrepreneurial activities are education, mentors, and cultural, social, and financial capital support. Many studies have shown that entrepreneurial education can have an effect on students. For example, some researchers have compared the results of students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship before and after a lesson targeting entrepreneurship, finding that students develop more positive outlooks towards entrepreneurship after such a lesson (Özdemir, 2015). This kind of instruction may be helpful to inspire EM progress, but without a control group, there might be other confounding variables that explain these changes. Additionally, attitude measures may be temporary, as the experience can trigger fleeting positive feelings towards a topic. Some studies (Duval-Couetil, 2013; Campos et al., 2017) have tested whether there are lasting changes in EM through intervention or training programs.

There have been studies exploring different factors to improve the quality and impact of entrepreneurial education. In some studies, researchers have focused on the role of teaching approaches, like "design thinking," and their efficacy in having positive impacts on students' motivation and satisfaction with their own performance (Daniel,

2016). Other researchers (Teerijoki & Murdock, 2014) have focused on the role of teachers and the content of curriculum to determine how they make entrepreneurial education more successful. Most studies (Maxwell, et al., 2018; de Villiers Scheepers, et al., 2018; Bilén, et al., 2005) on entrepreneurial education use convenience samples, including students from universities who enter entrepreneurial programs. The self-selection bias can be an issue when it comes to the validity of their results. An entrepreneurial outlook is a complex product and the result of the interaction between individuals and their environments. This process occurs gradually and is influenced by the individuals' family background, exposure to opportunities, racial and gender identity, individual attributes, and meaning construction systems may all play an important role in the process. Thus, to apply a developmental approach in this area is urgently needed to help understand the whole picture of the development of EM.

Minola and colleagues (2016) discussed the importance of adolescence in the development of an EM. The biopsychosocial model of entrepreneurial development has also proposed adolescence to be an important time for EM development. This theory and model require further examination, although they have brought scholars' attention to the development of entrepreneurship throughout life and the systematic factors necessary to understand EM development. In this study, I have adopted a developmental model as a guide to analyze participants' experiences within different time frames and systems.



Recent studies have focused on different age groups to identify patterns in the development of EM. Mbebeb (2009) investigated the relationship between socialization in family occupations and EM priming. As the primary socialization institution, the family provides both context and the materials for early childhood education. Mbebeb have argued that EMs priming is a crucial component of it. The strategies to build and sustain life skills developed during early childhood is another important factor, as development, including EM, is cumulative and progressive.

Figueiredo-Nery and Figueiredo (2008) studied entrepreneurship education within primary schools in some of the world's most economically under-developed countries in South America. They provided empirical evidence on the impacts of pedagogic practices on the initial formation of EM. Their results suggested that the inadequate physical conditions, teachers' unawareness, and deficient qualifications have had detrimental effects on students' development of EMs. They further argued that developing countries need long-term and comprehensive entrepreneurship education that is regionally and culturally inclusive, beginning as early as primary school.

In terms of adolescents, researchers have produced both theoretical and empirical results on EM. Salami (2017) confirmed the importance of contextual and individual factors that affect youths' entrepreneurial intentions (Akanbi, 2013; Carr & Sequeira, 2007). In other cultural contexts, researchers have suggested that the role of self-efficacy, personality traits, and family factors remain important in entrepreneurial intentions. Research on entrepreneurial intentions is built on the planned intention-

behavior theory. The rationale is that intention is the precursor of behaviors. This theory may explain certain factors influencing entrepreneurial action.

Further research is necessary to understand the process of how traits, contextual factors, and self-efficacy interact in the process of developing entrepreneurs.

Researchers (Kautonen et al., 2015) have shown that many people express the desire to be entrepreneurial, but few follow through with actions. Wach and Wojciechowski (2016) observed that EM influences entrepreneurial intentions, while a system or theory of how those different factors interact and affect individuals remains lacking in the field.

Barnes and de Villiers-Scheepers (2018) studied journalism students learning in a multidisciplinary experiential entrepreneurship model (MEEM), designed to improve their ability to deal with uncertainty. The researchers adopted entrepreneurial journalism as a way to prepare journalism students with certain environmental challenges. The researchers found that entrepreneurial individuals are familiar and competent, but they also target to teach this group EM. Barnes and de Villiers-Scheepers expanded on the concept of EM in other fields and found positive changes (2018). The researchers assessed the MEEM trial using a sequential mixed-methods approach, consisting of survey data collected at the start and completion of the course and interview data collected two months later. The findings suggested that the theoretical principles underpinning MEEM not only enabled students to create a new media venture, but the skills acquired also provided a method for entrepreneurial problem-solving and innovating, which is valuable to students working inside or outside

traditional news media. This study contributed theoretically by outlining five principles of entrepreneurial problem-solving and providing a teachable method that can be deployed through effectual entrepreneurship pedagogy.

Through these relevant works, there is still a need to explore the development of EM beyond the field of business. Researchers need to control or account for contextual factors such as gender, age, race, and culture in future research. The current study is trying to fill in some of the gaps of previous research by both expanding the definition of EM, looking into the areas that have shown interesting patterns with diverse samples, and also understanding the whole picture of what motivates an entrepreneurial individual to take action on their ambitions.

## **Chapter Summary**

Previous researchers (Wach & Wojciechowski, 2016) have attempted to understand the factors that affect the development of EM and related concepts, like entrepreneurial intention. Family background, income, culture, and gender may impact these concepts. Yet, most studies focus on EM within specific groups, such as a single nationality, or evaluate certain entrepreneurial education models (Popescu, 2014). This restriction leaves the nature and development of EM across diverse age groups and countries relatively overlooked.

In this study, I argue that EM does not develop overnight but over time. By integrating and building on established studies regarding the progress of various fields, this study is positioned to understand the periodic expansion and development of EM.

Because age, culture, and gender all shape EM or certain components of EM, such as confidence in innovation (Ashourizadeh, Chavoushi, & Schøtt, 2014), this study will focus on Chinese and American entrepreneurial individuals in different gender and age groups. This research seeks to understand the growth of the subjects' EMs and the implications for broadly educating young people on EM (Auerswald, 2012; de Villiers-Scheepers et al., 2018). In doing so, I can examine EM from a developmental perspective and understand this development relative to the subjects' unique qualities to provide new insights in the field.

As many studies (Yousaf, et al., 2015) have shown, starting and enacting entrepreneurial ideas can be a highly subjective experience and decisions perceived unique to the individual. Individuals can process and understand similar environments or risks in very different ways. Thus, instead of measuring EM or trying to study certain aspects of EM, this study will capture a large picture of how entrepreneurial individuals perceive and think about starting, running, and pivoting their organizations. In addition to the need to explore an expanded construct of EM, the deep meanings made by the entrepreneurial individuals across different contexts will provide interesting lessons. Thus, this study will utilize this approach to focus on the highly entrepreneurial individuals based on their own words and stories.

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODS AND STUDY DESIGN

### Chapter Overview

The purpose of the present study is to describe and analyze the developmental experience of entrepreneurial individuals in China and the United States as presented in their own accounts. To analyze and make meaning of these lived experiences, I used qualitative research methods, specifically grounded theory and conventional content analysis, along with relevant theories, such as symbolic interaction, hermeneutics, and narrative analysis. In this chapter, I explain the methodology, participant sampling strategies, interview protocols and processes, and data collection and analysis methods used in this study, as well as the steps I took to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the current work.

### Methodology

#### Research Questions

The main research questions of this study are:

1. What does “being entrepreneurial” mean as perceived and described by entrepreneurial individuals?
2. How have participants in China and the United States become entrepreneurial, according to the accounts of the entrepreneurial individuals themselves?
3. According to participants’ accounts, what factors or experiences have contributed to their development of being entrepreneurial?

4. What are the differences and commonalities across countries and groups in terms of the growth of EM in their descriptions of their own experiences?

Because this is an exploratory work with an expanded definition of EM, this research uses grounded theory methodology and inductive conventional content analysis to answer these questions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The grounded theory approach, can capture the hidden meaning and compare the essence of different experiences as well as how participants make sense of such experiences throughout the data collection and analysis process. The conventional content analysis approach provides a guide to drawing meaning from the data and identifying themes.

I use interviews as the data collection method to gather the self-narratives of the target population. Specifically, the interviews cover the core mental and emotional processes behind the entrepreneurial activities of interviewees, as well as their self-narratives about their development of EM. Other related information, such as site visits and peer interviews, were used in some cases to help interpret the data; however, they were not used systematically as part of the formal data analysis process.

Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1963) to study how hospital staff handles dying patients, grounded theory has distinctive features and guidelines. It particularly emphasizes inductive processes, which are open-ended explorations of the data intended to inform new theoretical understandings. This method is often applied when

there is limited existing research in a given field or for exploratory purposes to introduce or apply new constructs from the data that has been analyzed.

Limited developmental studies on entrepreneurship have been conducted. Within the existing research (Ashourizadeh, Chavoushi, & Schøtt, 2014), most scholars have focused on several aspects of being entrepreneurial, often without considering developmental and contextual accounts. Also, as noted in the chapters above, this study will provide a broadened definition of EM, which goes beyond business and is more dynamic. In this sense, there are very few works that this study can build upon to help capture how entrepreneurial individuals make sense of their experiences. Consequently, this research will rely heavily on the accounts of the participants themselves. This approach will allow me to create a new set of knowledge that will contribute to the field. The inductive approach of grounded theory will help guide and facilitate this research process.

Grounded theory is a systematic approach to qualitative data collection and analysis. It provides a guide for sampling, coding, and analysis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I employed a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002, 2015) to include participants from a diverse set of backgrounds in terms of field, organization size and developmental stage (i.e., start-up vs. mature organization), national origin, age, and gender. The decision to group participants to represent those populations was

informed by my previous studies in entrepreneurial education as well as life course theory and ecological theory.

Elder's work on individual lives embedded in developmental time was a source of inspiration for analyzing the sequence and influencing factors on those individuals' stories, such as the Great Depression (1998). The concepts of trajectories, transitions, agency, timing, and historical time and place are all important lenses for understanding participants' stories. These concepts helped develop the sampling strategies for this research. To explore the relationship between the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and other factors such as family background, culture, gender, and age, I interviewed 24 entrepreneurial individuals across different age groups and genders from China and the United States, which I describe in detail in the sampling section below.

Another framework that influenced the current work is symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969). According to this theory, meaning and value are defined, created, and interpreted by people through their experience and interactions with their environment. Blumer (1969) viewed human behavior as the result of constant meaning-making and value interpretation by individuals. Blumer's work is relevant to this study because the cognitive processes and actions of entrepreneurial individuals towards their environment may rely heavily on how they read and mentally process their surroundings. The famous distorted reality phenomenon made known by Steve Jobs has anecdotally demonstrated that entrepreneurial people can perceive and even create a



reality of their own and communicate this reality to others to create something new. Therefore, a deep analysis of people's words and the meaning-making of their own development—even though they may not be objectively accurate—can allow us to see reality through their perspectives and understand their own constructions of the meaning and experience of being and becoming entrepreneurial over time.

Another theory relevant to this study is narrative identity theory (McAdams, 2011), which is rooted in psychology. When people create their own narratives from the reflective past, perceived present, and planned future, they form an integrated self and identity. This narrative helps them internalize their own life experience and construct a coherent story of self with purpose and meaning. This theory allows for the inclusion of context, development, key characters, and other factors from a subject's own perspective. How they convey such narratives, form their stories, and share content and their own identity provides rich information. Narrative methods have already been applied in psychotherapy and other fields to use one's own narrative formation and reformation to provide clarification, treatment, and control over one's identity and self. But researchers have not explored how possessing a more positive self-narrative affects one's actions, identity, and life purpose. For the aims of this study, this theory informed my use of self-narratives to understand the identity formation and exploration of entrepreneurial individuals. Certain techniques related to this theory were also used to analyze the meaning construction of their experiences.

I have also consulted the narrative analysis method as a way to understand the stories. Drawing from Ricoeur's (1981) theory of interpretation, I analyzed the transcribed stories to capture the core experiences that the participants lived through the “hermeneutic circle,” which connects the parts and whole interactively to contribute to deeper understanding. Other theories, such as Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecological model, were also useful for analyzing different factors affecting participants’ EM. They provide an organizing framework for locating certain interactions and factors between individuals and environments.

### **Participant Sampling and Description**

I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002, 2015) to include entrepreneurial individuals who represent different backgrounds in terms of culture, race, gender, age, and type of organization, among other categories. More precisely, I employed maximum variation purposeful sampling, or heterogeneous purposeful sampling (Fridah, 2002), to strategically select people who are entrepreneurial, but from a range of organizations, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. With this sampling design, I was able to select a variety of diverse dimensions of factors for the sample that are relevant to the research questions. I was then able to identify important patterns in the data and compare them within and across different groups. This sampling method fits well with the goal of capturing the core meaning of being and becoming entrepreneurial while also pinpointing the unique patterns that emerge from different narratives within their own contexts.

My selection criteria for “being entrepreneurial” is as follows: participants (a) have started and run an organization or project with no connection to their existing job for over one year; (b) perceive themselves or are observed by peers as entrepreneurial; and (c) are willing to discuss and share their experiences in an interview.

Employing the maximum variation purposeful sampling strategy, I sampled and interviewed 24 entrepreneurial individuals recommended by their peers and other individuals across different industries. I screened participants according to the selection criteria. To cover a diverse set of backgrounds, I purposefully grouped participants according to country (China or America), sex (female or male), and age (placing participants’ 40 years old and under in one group and those above 40 in another). Half of the interviewees are from China and half are from the United States. Interviewees are divided by gender and age group. Specifically, I have a group of young entrepreneurial individuals who are under or equal to the age of 40 (n=12), and another group of mature entrepreneurial people who are older than 40 (n=12). Additionally, half of the participants are female(n=12) and half are male (n=12).

Given the sample size, it is not be possible to add more group categories such as race, education level, or industry while maintaining an equal number of interviewees in each subcategory. Nevertheless, I have intentionally selected the 24 participants of the study to cover a wide range of industries, including health, technology, and education; a range of organization sizes (from fewer than 10 people to over 5000); different types of organizations (both for-profit and nonprofit); as well as different regions in both

countries, such as New York, San Francisco, Shanghai, and Chengdu. This design allows the current study to sample a wide range of participants with diverse backgrounds.

The advantage of this sampling design is that it allows a focus on the core common theme of being entrepreneurial or entrepreneurship from very diverse groups of individuals. It also allows the research to be informed by different contexts, groups, and other participant identities. The limit is that, given the scope of this study and its nature as an exploratory study, I could not include a comparison group—people who are not currently entrepreneurial—for the following reasons: 1) I aim to define entrepreneurship using the grounded theory approach at this stage; and 2) without capturing “being and becoming entrepreneurial” in the first place, it would hard if not impossible, to conceptualize “a comparison group.” Besides, the main focus of this study is to capture the deep meaning of being and becoming entrepreneurial from the participants’ narratives, which leaves the possibility that those core features of being entrepreneurial and the pathways of becoming entrepreneurial may be unique to those individuals. The question of whether being and becoming entrepreneurial looks different among actual self-defined entrepreneurs versus the general population will need to be explored in future works. That question is not the focus of this study.

Table 3.1

*Grouping categories of participants*

12 Chinese				12 American			
6 Female		6 Male		6 Female		6 Male	
3 Young	3 Mature	3 Young	3 Mature	3 Young	3 Mature	3 Young	3 Mature

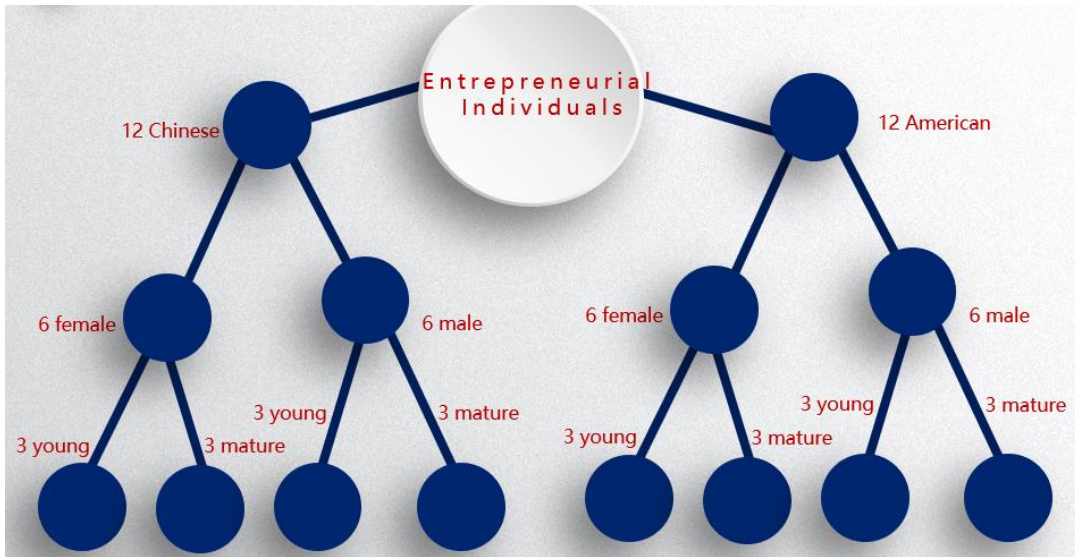


Figure 3.1 Grouping categories of participants.

Table 3.2

*Backgrounds of Participants*

Code	Nationality	Gender	Age Group	Industry	Years in Organization
1	China	F	Y	Education and e-commerce	7
2	China	F	S	Renovation	20
3	China	F	Y	Government consulting	1
4	China	F	S	Arts	20
5	China	F	Y	Tourism	5
6	China	F	S	Training	4
7	China	M	Y	Media	5
8	China	M	Y	Sports	3
9	China	M	Y	Fitness	5
10	China	M	S	Clothes	20
11	China	M	S	Education	5
12	China	M	S	Medicine	15

Code	Nationality	Gender	Age Group	Industry	Years in Organization
13	US	F	S	Education	10
14	US	F	Y	Information	1
15	US	F	S	Health	4
16	US	F	Y	Clothing	3
17	US	F	S	Social	4
18	US	F	Y	Nonprofit	1
19	US	M	S	Bar	5
20	US	M	S	Engineering	20
21	US	M	S	Business education	5
22	US	M	Y	Information technology	2
23	US	M	Y	Branding	2
24	US	M	Y	Medical devices	1

*Note.* F = female; M = male; Y = young; S = mature.

Besides different sizes of organizations, the participants also represent the categories of non-profit, social, and commercial entrepreneurship, though not all entrepreneurship types are represented in each subgroup. This is partly due to an uneven reality in cultural, gender, and age groups but is also due to which participants responded within the time limit for sampling.

Table 3.3

*Categories of entrepreneurship represented by the participants*

Types of entrepreneurship	Total number	Number by cultural group	Number by age group	Number by gender group
S	5	Chinese: 3	Y: 2	F: 3
		American: 2	S: 3	M: 2
N	2	Chinese: 0	Y: 0	F: 2
		American: 2	S: 2	M: 0
C	17	Chinese: 9	Y: 10	F: 7
		American: 8	S: 7	M: 10

*Note: S = social entrepreneurship; N = non-profit entrepreneurship, C = commercial entrepreneurship; F = female; M = male; Y = young; S = mature.*

**Procedures**

Participants were recommended through peers and word-of-mouth references, both in person and through the professional networking site, LinkedIn. I then reached out to learn about their experiences and background. I screened for candidates who have either founded programs within existing organizations or started their own organization and have run these programs for over a year. After I identified fitting participants, I have approached them by email, text, and phone to share a brief

introduction to the research and ask whether they would be willing to be interviewed. After obtaining their consent, I conducted a self-structured interview to discuss their personal experience in entrepreneurship and their understanding of EM, as well as their own stories of development and experiences of the entrepreneurial mindset.

Because two countries are included in the study, I conducted interviews in either Chinese or English, depending on participants' preferences. For those participants who agreed to participate, I followed up and obtained their verbal consent to be interviewed and to have their conversations audio recorded. For those participants who either turned down the interviews or were not willing to be recorded, I asked for their reasons for not wanting to be interviewed or included as data and whether they would be comfortable to have their reasons included as background information for this research. I have used these conversations as background information for my notes only if they gave permission and have not included them in the data collection and analysis.

I scheduled in-depth and semi-structured in-person interviews at convenient sites for participants, such as their offices or a café; at times I conducted the interview over the phone. Based on pilot interviews, I expected the interviews to vary in length from 45 minutes to one hour and 10 minutes, and this was approximately the case for the study interviews as well. The interviews were relatively open-ended, semi-structured, and carried out in a conversational style. I used a semi-structured interview protocol and the topics to be addressed included participants' understanding and



experiences of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset, as well as their own development of an entrepreneurial mindset over time.

I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews for analysis in the language in which the interviews were conducted. I also wrote notes and reflections about the interviews to help understand their context.

After collecting the interview data, I transcribed the interviews in their entirety. Following this step, I have created a codebook to capture open or basic codes and core themes from the interview transcript data. I then analyzed similarities and differences between age groups, countries, and genders with the hope of building a framework for the development of EM. Importantly, the data collected in this research depended mostly on interview transcripts. This included not just the words expressed by the interviewees, but also tone of voice, as well as vocal and facial expressions which I captured in my notes. I used these notes from the interviews in the process of analyzing the data. The research process included three steps: data collection, coding, and analysis, including grounded theory interpretations of the data.

## **Interview Approaches**

***Being both an “insider” and a researcher.*** Being an entrepreneur myself, I would briefly mention my own background to interviewees to convey a shared experience. I intentionally shared this information to make them feel comfortable and connected. Throughout these conversations, there were times when this background helped me relate to and better understand their experiences and certain business

terminology. This shared background and knowledge was at times helpful in supporting and encouraging interviewees to share their experiences. Some interviewees told me that they had a great experience being interviewed and that they felt that they were heard and understood. Thus, my role as an insider helped me establish a rapport with the participants and allowed for the creation of a context for sharing rich information and meaning (Creswell, 2014).

At the same time, my role as a researcher allowed me to see myself as an instrument to engage and empower interviewees to speak. My awareness of my researcher identity allowed me to focus on and immerse myself in the perspectives, experiences, and stories of interviewees for data collection and analysis. Nevertheless, I was careful to allow my dual identity to enrich, but not override, the data collection and analytic processes (Corbin & Straus, 2008).

***Being fluent in both cultural contexts.*** The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees. As a Chinese national and a long-term international student in English-speaking countries, and with five years of experience in America, I was able to have these conversations in two languages. I also possess certain time- or context-related experiences that are especially useful when interviewing Chinese interviewees, such as knowledge of certain policies that regulate how people from rural areas work in cities. Additionally, there were some cultural norms or cues that could be hard to capture; however, being culturally sensitive allowed for better understanding of such cues and navigating through such conversations. Being fluent in

both cultures and languages provided a unique value to many individuals with similar backgrounds, making them feel comfortable and connected.

***Semi-structured interviews.*** This research used semi-structured interviews. I developed an interview protocol that covers the main questions regarding entrepreneurial experiences and personal development. The questions were inspired by the literature and developed through discussions with experts on this topic. I also completed interview training and practice before this work. With my advisor's help, we also completed internal practice interviews to make sure that the questions and interviewing techniques were appropriate. These questions served as guidance for the key areas to explore.

The goal was to have interviewees share their personal and entrepreneurial stories. Some interviewees who already have self-narratives regarding such experiences took the lead in sharing, and I only needed to follow up with some questions to obtain additional information that had not been covered. This approach provided flexibility in investigating topics that I did not plan to address, but which interviewees brought up. It also provided some talking points and structure for guiding the conversation, allowing the collection of the key points of their narratives, including their beginnings, the main turning points, and their key influencers.

## **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the interview transcripts using the following steps. First, I read each transcript in its entirety and then conducted a thematic analysis to construct the

codebook. I discussed initial codes and themes with one of my academic mentors. I then used these codes for analyzing the rest of the transcripts. Finally, I identified core themes, core findings across different groups, and developmental patterns and presented them in the results section of the dissertation.

***Line-by-line coding.*** After collecting six interviews and having them transcribed, I start to code those transcripts line-by-line to create open codes. These codes were mostly based on the interviewees' own words, phrases, paragraphs, or terms that capture aspects of meaning in the texts. After four transcripts had been coded this way, larger categories of meaning emerged and different patterns began to appear.

***Codebook development.*** Because this work employed inductive coding, I used Excel to create an open codebook with the core codes and code clusters that emerged from the data. I discussed these codes and the codebook with my advisor. I then applied these codes in new transcripts and determined whether they were applicable. Sometimes, there were new codes that were derived from the data; however, most of the meaning was captured by existing codes.

***Constant comparison and categorization.*** After the coding process was completed, I examined earlier transcripts again to see whether there were any new codes that could be applied. At this stage, I began to categorize the codes into code clusters across the transcripts. Some repetitive codes were combined or cut at this point. This process is an iterative one with constant comparison between codes and code clusters across the transcripts.

***Memoing.*** I wrote memos from the transcript coding process to capture core messages and storylines that I might otherwise have missed or forgotten. After the coding and theme development stage, I started to compare transcripts based on the groups and determine whether there were any interesting patterns. In this way, interesting themes were compared and analyzed across groups. Memoing was used in this process to document the key insights from the data and thematic analyses that emerged along the way.

***Theme and pattern development.*** Through reading the data deeply, I was able to capture important patterns and themes that emerged and grew more robust over time. These themes and patterns will be discussed in great detail in the results section and are the key results for responding to the research questions. Morse and Field (1995) explained the concept of themes as common threads and meaning rooted in data. Participants may not directly articulate the themes; however, once identified, the themes should appear significant and apparent in the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Subjectivity has long been criticized in qualitative work. Without delving into a lengthy discussion of whether “objectivity” exists, I have made an intentional effort to be both transparent and reflective in my role as a researcher and an entrepreneur, and how I have been influenced by and am influencing the research.

We don’t separate who we are as persons from the research and analysis that we do. Therefore, we must be self-reflective about how we influence the research process and, in turn how it influences us (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13).

Throughout the research process, I have made it explicit that participants' identities would be anonymous and that they could feel free stop participating at any time in the process.

One of the interviewees was undergoing a challenging phase, both personally and professionally, at the time of the interview. He agreed to talk but did not want his story to be included for data analysis. Consequently, I conducted the interview and took notes on some important lessons he shared for background information, but respected his decision and did not include his conversation in the data. Growing up with entrepreneurial individuals and being in the community for years, I used my own experience to relate to and empathize with the participants to better analyze their stories. Nevertheless, I was very careful to convey their stories in the way they tried to express them.

### **Trustworthiness and Creditability in Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research applies a different philosophical and epistemological stance than quantitative research and has its own methodological approaches and criteria for critiquing work and its rigor (Cope, 2014 January). I intentionally adopted ways to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this research.

Credibility “refers to the truth of the data or the participant views and the interpretation and representation of them by the researcher” (White-Jefferson, Broussard & Fox-McCloy, 2020, p. 212). To support and enhance credibility, researchers should demonstrate engagement and have participants recognize the experiences

described by the researcher. In this research, I typically had two follow-up conversations with participants to share general conclusions and to seek their feedback. Their responses helped to validate the results if they immediately recognized and resonated with the description and findings.

To improve dependability, which is the ability to generate similar findings from different researchers working with similar conditions (Tobin & Begley, 2004), I invited peers with qualitative coding experience and training to read over excerpts of the transcripts with my codebook and to see if their codes were in agreement with mine. Although ideally the best way to achieve dependability is to have other researchers replicate similar processes in similar conditions and check whether findings are consistent or not, this can hardly be achieved in practice. Nevertheless, peer reviews and feedback from knowledgeable researchers can help improve dependability in coding and analysis. The debates and discussion on a regular basis also helped in this regard and enriched the coding and analysis process.

Other ways to improve the trustworthiness and credibility of this study include repeated reviews of transcripts, iterative processes and discussions to reach data saturation, and conversations with participants and experts through professional conferences (my advisor and I participated in the EM presentation at AERA and presented the preliminary findings of this work). The use of information-rich direct quotations from the data and memoing, as well as discussions with experienced mentors, also helped support the rigor of this work. Additionally, triangulation was

employed through multiple data collection methods, such as interview data and notes from interviews, reflective journals, and memos, as well as the literature.

### **Self-Disclosure: My Own Experience of Being Entrepreneurial**

As part of the process of becoming aware of my own biases and intentions as a researcher, I was also interviewed by my advisor, Dr. Michael Nakkula, who is an experienced interviewer and who has a deep understanding of this type of work. This examination was not to understand the data better, but rather a way to look at myself as a research instrument. I also had a practice of self-reflection to understand my own intentions and background coming into this research.

I grew up in an entrepreneurial family. Both of my parents quit their stable jobs in a state-owned factory and hospital to start their own small business in 1993. Their presence and absence have given me a positive conception of entrepreneurship from a young age. Their external success, along with their struggles, stresses, and even conflicts within our family are the context of my upbringing. Diagnosed with OCD and bipolar disorder respectively, my parents were blessed and cursed by their entrepreneurial lifestyles. To this day, my father still runs his organization while my mother has quit her job to become a writer and artist. These lived and observed experiences of being with entrepreneurs had indirectly planted within me the notion of an entrepreneurial lifestyle early on. One example is that I developed a conflicted view of being entrepreneurial. On one hand, I wanted to avoid their reckless and overwhelming lifestyle, and pursue a more balanced and enjoyable life. “You told us that you wanted



to live a simple life and not worry about so many things and have so much stress and experience so many struggles,” my mother reflected. On the other hand, my ambition and actions have demonstrated the opposite. I like to break rules to make an impact, have started businesses, and have devoted my professional life to being an entrepreneur. “You even work harder than us and that made me really worried about your health.” My dad has always been concerned about my workaholic tendencies and his hope for me has always been to be happy instead of driven or successful.

When I think of my early days, I remember loving to sell my ideas and convincing others to do the things that I wanted to do. In kindergarten, I was bored with structured times for napping, wanting to run away and play instead. One time I persuaded two other children to form a “Prison Break” plan and escaped when the teachers were visiting other rooms. We were successful in running away, but I was caught later on by my teachers when I was already with my family. This incident was risky and it reflected my desire for autonomy, leading others, and taking action.

Ironically, I always regarded myself as an introvert as I love to read and need time to be alone to revive my energy. I can be talkative and sociable and have developed a passion and ability to share some ideas in public, despite the fact that my early public speaking performances were not good. I failed to consistently participate in class, but in middle school I improved my ability to capture the attention and emotions of others. This change was because I gained the opportunity to have more leadership roles in school and was required to do public speaking regularly.

Seeing that my ideas and creativity added value or brought joy to others gave me a great sense of fulfillment. By college, my peers and teachers started to see me as a “natural public speaker” and I was able to lead my team in public and private through my public speaking ability. From creating a school play, to running the school magazine, to forming my own team to compete in University level entrepreneurship competitions and winning money, I love generating ideas and making them a reality.

Because of the mental health challenges of my parents, I have been driven to make a difference in people’s lives. This mission-like drive, combined with a passion for creating new ideas and products with a team and learning new things, landed me with three jobs right after college. I became a full-time consultant to explore different industries in business, a part-time business English teacher and a part-time marketing consultant for a start-up. I chose these three types of jobs because I explored and was drawn to the same three disciplines in college: business, education and technology. My stay at these positions was not long-lived as my start-up side project became my main endeavor when we invested in it. This investment was a life-changing experience for a twenty-something to suddenly become a co-founder of a company that would last for eight years, creating an idea that attracted investment.

At that time I faced an interesting dilemma: should I take my idea and create my own company or continue being part of the company that three other engineers and I founded, negotiating or even fighting with them when our ideas differed? I chose the latter one because I did not think that the idea I developed while working for them was

“right.” It felt like I abandoned my team, but I am never certain, even today, whether this move was the right one or not. Soon after being promoted, I realized that my value was mostly in creating ideas and motivating people to make them into a reality. Back then these people that I motivated were mainly the investors. Once we passed that stage, the engineers seemed to be more important and I was lost. Creating the marketing strategy or doing other similar things did not feel like much of a contribution to make an impact. In addition, the different visions of the projects became more apparent. I came up with idea by interacting with parents and realizing their struggles of not being able to connect with their children under 3 years old. Consequently, for me, the customers’ problems were the key component of my design process. Providing a better solution was the only thing that mattered to me.

My co-founders wanted to leverage the company’s patents and expertise in audio recognition technology, which had no direct connection with this new project. They seemed to impose technology onto the solution even when it was not suitable. After a life-or-death fight to protect the original idea, I felt lost in deciding my next step. I did not feel I was making a direct contribution to changing lives and I did not feel I was powerful enough to make my ideas a reality in this situation. Consequently, I quit the company and started my education in human development at Penn. While I was doing my master’s and PhD work there, I was also able to work on my education start-up on the side. It may not have been the best option since I was not able to focus on a singular endeavor and give my best to either research or business. However, I cannot make one

of them disappear. It is clear to me that I will always be entrepreneurial, regardless of my situation.

Five years of being both a researcher and an entrepreneur allowed me to observe the world from two different perspectives. As I worked on this research, my own identity as an entrepreneur made some of the entrepreneurs more comfortable and conversations flowed more easily. This background also allowed me to build a rapport with my participants through understanding their experiences and challenges. Their passion and stories were contagious. I began to miss the roller coaster ride of working on realizing great ideas. At the same time, being a researcher gave me a space for listening, observing, and reflecting on the stories and development of entrepreneurial individuals. This switching of roles and perspectives provided an interesting experience for this research. It made a difference in the construction of the environment, the interaction of the interview, the mutual reflection on the experiences, as well as the interpretation of these experiences. I also need to be critical when examining my hidden preferences for entrepreneurial individuals. Being entrepreneurial is one of many options and skills that we may hold, and I need to be careful not to be carried away by its charm.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter started with the key research purposes and questions, which drove the selection of the research method. Given the exploratory nature of this work, limited existing research covers the core construct of EM I have proposed in this work. Also, the

focus on “listening to” the perspectives of entrepreneurial individuals who had lived the experiences, grounded theory, and other related methods, such as narrative analysis, were chosen as the key methodological approach to collect and analyze the data. I then described the detailed procedures to show the research design as well as the backgrounds and grouping strategies for the participants. I also explained the interview process to help readers understand the data collection procedures.

Because the researcher and the researcher’s interpretation of the data matter greatly for this research, being self-reflective and sensitive to the researcher’s own bias and background is also crucial, and I discussed several different ways that I would respond to those biases. I also explained other ethical considerations that will provide transparency for the entire research process. Finally, I presented the common doubts and criticisms regarding my chosen method as well as the key ways that I will improve the credibility and trustworthiness of this work.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS: BEING ENTREPRENEURIAL

### Chapter Overview

This chapter contains a presentation and discussion of the core themes and examples I identified from the interview data in terms of the participants' narratives of being entrepreneurial, using the inductive method. I describe and explain each theme using the represented data and examples from it. Specifically, the chapter discusses the core themes on being entrepreneurial from the participants' perspective which include: 1) learning as a way of being; 2) action; 3) staying in the arena; 4) connecting elements, people, information and resources; and 5) disrupting. The chapter also includes relevant literature, which aids in my discussion and analysis of the findings.

### Learning as a Way of Being

#### *Constantly Learning and Taking in New Information*

One of our respondents, Mr. Zhu stated that: "No matter how many degrees you have received, once you are actually starting work, you are still a baby in real-life." Indeed, constantly learning and taking in new information is a core element of being entrepreneurial. Some people learn from books and thought experiments, while others learn from life experience and observing others' experiences. Yet, all participants in this study acknowledged the need to constantly update their knowledge and skill-base to keep up with their work as well as their requirement for themselves.

One participant noted that: "When I was little, I was always reading history books. I would imagine if I were the historical figure, what actions and decisions would I

make.” In this way, participants addressed reading not only as a way to learn knowledge, but also as tool to exercise their thinking. They would exercise their problem-solving ability and perspective-taking through books.

Some participants noted that they were even mentored and influenced by characters in books or authors: “Like how did these people make the history and what did they do? They did things that were fantastic. How could I do something that’s fantastic so that I can get them a history.” In this way, books served a catalyst through which participants could model themselves after influential people in history, which impacted their own lives. One unusual example of learning from books is from a young American entrepreneur who has been a huge *Harry Potter* fan. He found ways to be creative, based on his love of *Harry Potter*:

I was obsessed with Harry Potter...I know all the spells. Yeah. I know them all. And like I used to, I used to like make, you know, I like, I like entertainment and stuff too. So I used to like make videos and things like that... I didn't really make a lot of money, of course when I was younger, but you know, I, I always made things and I always try things and that was, that was exciting to me.

Books also inspired this study’s participants to try new things, think beyond their own lives, and to create. A young Chinese entrepreneur, who holds a very westernized view and thinks critically about his education and life, noted being influenced by rock music, magazines, and blogs from Western culture. This example illustrates that media plays a huge role in shaping individuals’ values and ways of learning, for young generations especially.

### *Mixed or Critical Views of Learning in Schools*

Very interestingly, although this study's participants reported that they regard learning as a foundation of living and being entrepreneurial, they hold mixed or critical views of learning in schools. One participant noted that:

So ... school sort of has this binary outcome system, right? Where it's like, well, this is right, or this is wrong. But I mean real life doesn't work that way. Right? That's not how real-life works. So in a lot of ways, school prepares people adequately to be wonderful employees because um, you know, uh, an employer is going to say this is the right way to do it and this is the wrong way to do it. Don't do this, do this. But it doesn't serve entrepreneurs very well in terms of development because um, like I said, by nature I feel like true entrepreneurs and risk takers are always rule breakers. So that's why school doesn't necessarily benefit entrepreneurs that well beyond a certain extent of being able to teach them to write stuff like that.

Overall, this study's participants expressed the view that real-world learning is more relevant, more complex, and more self-determined than the learning that takes place in schools. Although not all participants hold this critical view of school, they suggested that they view learning as the life-long, self-driven, context-related ways of being in general, and being entrepreneurial in particular.

Some participants noted that they would prefer to learn from other experts, mentors, or experiences than through books or in school. More specifically, they noted that they are able to derive strategies for and ways of learning from others:

When you really want to learn a new field, you can learn someone's decades' experiences through just listening and asking questions. Don't try to compete with those practitioners with your book knowledge. Just be humble, know your purpose and learn. People not only will tell you what they learned but they would even tell you the things they wish or imagine they had done but they probably haven't. We all want to talk values and look good. But if you are



actually learning and doing what they are telling you, you can grow extremely fast very soon.

Participants noted that the process of learning from others is particularly relevant when working in a new field or new area. Many entrepreneurs noted that they tend to do everything they can to shorten the learning curve and become an expert in, or at least develop basic background competence regarding, areas relating to their business.

### ***Challenges of Learning: Ego Problems***

However, participants also mentioned a challenge related not to learning itself, but to being able to overcome the ego problem. The participants noted that this is especially true when they need to reach out to others and find mentors. In this situation, they may need to speak many people who do not necessarily know better than they do themselves. As very competent individuals, the participants noted that they needed to stay open and be able to take in the information and knowledge that is most relevant and helpful, while also controlling their competitive nature, which might lead them to argue with others when learning.

Moreover, participants noted that, when they try to create value, products, or solutions for their target customers, it is important for them to learn from and listen to their customers, which can be difficult. When they are told that their solutions are insufficient, they may become defensive and argue that their products are exemplary, believing that only intelligent people are able to understand them. This defensive situation can be a significant and prevalent challenge and roadblock for entrepreneurs.

Thus, the ability to be open, but also independent, in terms of learning and thinking is an ongoing process for entrepreneurial individuals, which all participants in this study addressed.

## **Action!**

While entrepreneurs may have various motivations and preferences—and work in different contexts—no one can be entrepreneurial without taking action. The quality of being entrepreneurial, as opposed to being innovative or smart, requires action. Rather than words, only actions can help individuals reach their goals. While most individuals know the importance of taking action, entrepreneurial individuals take the concept of action-taking to the next level.

### ***Really Put in Efforts Instead of Planning or Pretending To Do It***

First, action does set people apart, differentiating “real” entrepreneurs from people who would like to be entrepreneurial but fail to do so. While the following quote may appear extreme, the participant expressed it with great passion and sincerity. It may be debatable what should be considered “action” or “doing,” according to this participant, planning and thinking without implementing actual actions to actualize those plans constitutes laziness:

I think he or she just has to really put in the effort, um, and just do it. I think a lot of people just say they'll plan stuff, you know, I want to do this, but they just don't do it because doing it takes work. And I think it's because they're lazy. Honestly. Like when I see people just don't do it, I'm just like, you're just lazy. I'm just need to do it. Like you just need to write that email. You just need to, you know, file that tax report. You just need to do it. But a lot of people just put it off

and ended up like, oh, wanting to do this. I want to do this. Like a, but you just literally need to start.

While there are reasons, other than laziness, for failing to take action, this response indicates that an essential part of being entrepreneurial is being able to actually do the work.

### ***Do it Even When You are Fearful***

Participants also noted that taking action can involve: making the effort to reach out, despite an introverted personality; outworking competitors with extraordinary efforts; creating products; solving problems; making decisions when there is no easy or right options or enough information; and selling goods and services, even when their deliverability is in question:

Well I built a deck at our house. I took on the project. I remember I came back, um, and I was like, I have to send them an invoice for like \$3,000 and I don't think I can actually do this myself. Like I've never actually built a deck by myself. I go with my dad, I've never been (doing this by myself). How am I going to do this? And I remember just being like really afraid, like what's going to happen? I can't actually do this, you know, 'cause I just signed up for something without me knowing that I can do it right. And then ended up working out great and I got a referral.

Many times, being entrepreneurial seems to correlate with qualities of being bold, having no fear, and taking risks. In this way, the quote provided here is not a rare example, but a common one. Many entrepreneurs noted that they were fearful, but took on projects anyway, or took the actions required to make their plans a reality. While a great deal of work occurred in the intervening time, entrepreneurs reported being able to say yes and achieve their business goals through action.

### ***Action-takers instead of Risk-lovers***

Another common layman belief of entrepreneurs is that they love to take risks. However, the results of this study indicate that not all participants are “risk-takers,” but are all “action-takers” who are able to tolerate or process the risks associated with their actions. The participants noted that they do not perceive certain actions to be risky, whereas other individuals would.

For example, with regard to reaching out to mentors or people in high positions, which can seem risky and scary for many people, the participants in this study described the process as a risk-free action.

You know, like if you ask for something, the worst thing that someone's going to say is no. If you don't ask for it, the best thing they're going to say is no. If you don't ask for it, you know, and why do you expect to get anything?

According to this participant, asking for something you want can be understood as a win-win situation, because by taking this action, you can only add value; at worst, it will not cost you anything. Based on this rationale, this participant emailed many significant people in his field, and many of them became his mentors or even clients. His thinking and actions demonstrate participants’ entrepreneurial perspective on risky behavior.

Similarly, a senior female participant explained why she did not view her action of quitting her full-time job as faculty member and doctor as risky:

You know, what do I have to lose? I have my tenure at Penn to lose, you know, I've, uh, I had a three-year-old at the time. I've got the job stability to lose, but you know, I can always go back.

This participant felt that there was no risk because she could always be a doctor and “go back” if things didn’t work out well. However, she was passionate about the opportunity to pursue her goal and work with a partner who was a successful entrepreneur. In the end, she felt that the opportunity may be the riskier part to lose, if she decided not to leave her job.

These results indicate that deep thinking among entrepreneurial individuals tends to go beyond what is commonly perceived as risky, and instead to incorporate information on different opportunities and costs. While entrepreneurs may not necessarily enjoy taking risks, they are often motivated by something important or feel that they have nothing much to lose. In addition to decisions and analysis, entrepreneurs’ actual actions to quit, call, or take another action set them apart as being truly entrepreneurial. Indeed, one participant noted that:

I don’t think they can learn to be entrepreneurial from schools. Maybe they can learn knowledge or concepts regarding how to start and run a business. But you have to do it to be actually be entrepreneurial. That’s the only way.

In this way, more than other definitions of entrepreneurship, the participants’ responses suggest that being entrepreneurial is way of being, and especially a way of doing. In other words, no one can be truly entrepreneurial until they actually take action.

### ***Staying in the Arena***

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and

again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does know great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

Theodore Roosevelt (Roosevelt, 1910).

Humans all share one commonality in life: suffering. While no one likes to experience feelings of failure, high anxiety, and pain, entrepreneurial individuals tend to recognize those “failures” as training and short-term challenges, instead of something they should try to avoid. They often have a higher tolerance for challenges and uncertainties than others, and some of them do not consider obstacles as “signals” to quit. Among the participants of this study, even those who decided to close their businesses started new ones and continued to improve.

Based on these examples, it is necessary to reconsider the definition of failure. For the purposes of this thesis, inspired by those participants, I suggest that “failure” means permanently leaving a field. All participants in this study noted that they have experienced challenges and difficulty but have not left their field.

***“I Expect Life to be Filled with Problems.”***

One participant noted that: “It was extremely hard when you don’t know whether you can pay your people and still be in business next month but we never thought about quitting.” The entrepreneurs who participated in this study reported that struggles and “roller-coaster-like” experiences were a part of their daily lives. They have faced economic risks, emotional and psychological risks, and the social crisis of being shamed if they fail. When facing those challenges, several participants addressed unique

ways way of interpreting challenges and struggles. They reported that they did not consider those experiences as reason to quit or change their decision. Ms. Liang stated that:

Others expect that life should be smooth and problem free. But for me, I expect life to be filled with problems. If I live a day without any problem, I would actually free scared and worry whether something serious is wrong.

This response indicates a core, unique way the respondents in this study deal with challenges. To Ms. Liang, accepting struggles and seeing them as ways to become stronger is not only a slogan, but also a way of being. Ms. Liang reported feeling at peace with struggles and having overcome tremendous difficulty as well achieving significant goals at young age. Rather than expressing self-pity, Ms. Liang chose to focus on both current changes she could make, and what she could learn from and improve the next time. In this way, it is possible to suggest that failures and challenges are mental and behavior gyms for entrepreneurial individuals. The study's participants noted that these experiences enable them to build their entrepreneurial "muscles" and perceive them as part of life instead of options or rare events.

### ***Higher Purpose and Motivation to Keep Fighting***

While other participants noted that they perceive challenges to be painful, they were still able to find certain higher purposes or motivation to keep going. For some, love still outweighs the pain: "At the end of the day, this is still what gives me joy and keep me up everyday." For example, one participant noted that: "I cried the other day after our machine was ruined by the water but after letting the emotion out, I still have

to face it and solve the problem.” Repeatedly, then, participants were able to adjust their mood in order to face and try to overcome those struggles and they tended to find their higher purposes, drives and love in midst of the challenges and pains.

Similarly, some participants expressed sentiments like: “Most days, I am expecting to be challenged.” Some participants even reported that they prefer to experience challenges. They tend to feel bored if they are not challenged and noted that they were often characterized as troublemakers during school. They noted that challenges are what excites them.

Although their perceptions differ, all participants noted that failures were not permanent, but served instead as motivation for working harder. This finding is in alignment with motivation theory, in which seeking pleasure and avoiding pains are understood as two sources of drive, pleasure and pain. One participant, a senior female entrepreneur, noted that she was risking a lot when she started her own venture: “I’m too old to fail and I have to make it work.” This participant noted that her drive came from her feeling that each opportunity could be her last. She does not view her age as being a desirable asset as an entrepreneur, so she works extremely hard to be successful. Although she cannot choose the challenges that may get in the way of her success, she does benefit from her “risk it all and I can’t fail this time” mindset.

For participants who had experienced multiple experiences of their businesses shutting down, either as a result of policy, others’ actions, or their own decisions, they did not perceive those experiences as failures. After these experiences, all participants



reported that they started a new venture later, incorporating previous lessons. One participant noted that the experience of a business shutting down: “taught me a great deal regarding the importance of knowing the policies.” Similarly, one participant noted that:

It was a hard decision but I didn’t complain or felt sorry for myself as it would be useless. Rather I still believe that if I were able to finance my factory, it would work. So I gave it away to a friend who was able to and after a few years he did make it work which proves that my business decision was right but I didn’t have many options. Yet my skills to recognize the opportunities follow me and I was able to start something new in another city. Also, it still creates some values for the society so I was very content.

In this way, the participants expressed a fighting spirit; even when they are beaten, if they do not leave or give in, they still have a chance to fight back and continue their stories. Participants noted that they use learning and working hard as ways to fight and respond to challenges and failures, in the traditional sense. All participants have their own stories of outworking their competitors. In this sense, being entrepreneurial means remaining in the arena and never really quitting.

## **Connecting Elements, People, Information and Resources**

### ***Connecting Different Elements to Create***

One participant noted that: “You have to connect the existing elements to create something new.” Unlike many common perceptions of entrepreneurs as individuals who create new things from scratch, participants in this study noted that, instead, they often connect existing elements to come up with new solution or meet a different need. For example, one participant noted:

There were a lot of similar products in the market and we think that instead of competing with price, we can focus on providing customized products for those growing small businesses. So others are selling bottles, souvenirs, we were the first few to create logos and other services on those products for business.

In this situation, the entrepreneur was able to break down different elements of products, problems, and solutions to create a new way of connecting those basic elements and respond to an existing need. In this way, participants' responses indicate that the concept of being innovative should not only include the creation of entirely new things, but also new ways of connecting different elements.

### ***Being Part of Network or Systems***

As well as connecting elements in a new way, being entrepreneurial also means connecting other resources, such as people and information. Many entrepreneurial individuals enjoy working with and influencing others. In this study, some participants reported that they intentionally built networks, whereas others noted that they had always been personable and able to talk to anyone. While senior entrepreneurial individuals tend more likely to be the key decision-makers, they must also be able to connect and work with others by connecting different elements, and managing people, information, and resources.

This finding is in alignment with the happenstance theory (ref), which not only acknowledges the power of chance events, but also suggests that people actively choose to be situated in places where chances, luck, and opportunities may present themselves. For example, one participant noted that she was first influenced by her boss and started to model her actions after his. Over time, she learned that she needed to be surrounded

by influential people and attend networking events. This participant's experience suggests that being in the right place at the right time can be a result of both choice and chance:

I learned that especially as a founder, as a cofounder and entrepreneurs, Um, I don't know if it's specific for, I think it's more specific to fashion and retail related industry, but network is key. So really the people who I met in the summer and people who I linked with their email and who we invited to our pop-up events... we had a lot of events where the people who really made us who we are today. I've covered, I studied like I started management, so we're not into the fashion industry, but we know how we stepped in was we just cold email like editors at vogue ... we just went into their offices with um, whatever we had. And we just linked up with them, you know, hung out with them, grab drinks with them. And um, I think people really underestimate how networks can really, um, you know, network of a network of a network is going to land you something.

This reflection indicates that, for entrepreneurs, taking action to attend events and engage in networking is essential. This concept is closely related to that of taking action; participants all expressed the need to connect people, resources, and information. Some entrepreneurs reported that they grew faster and better when they realized the importance of those connections. While some individuals naturally have better people skills, all entrepreneurs must take action to identify and seek opportunities.

For young entrepreneurs, connecting with others has been a key part of their entrepreneurial effort from the beginning of their careers. Young entrepreneurs in particular articulated their drive to connect with people who may complement their skills or resources. The ability to influence others, both internally and externally, is key for young entrepreneurs who seek to turn an individual passion or project into a

broader, shared organization. Senior entrepreneurs reported that they tended to work with others, without thinking of having a co-founder. However, their basic idea of being kind to others, while experimenting with different teams, structures, and ways to lead, can also enable senior entrepreneurs to mobilize their resources. For example, one participant noted:

I told my store manager to borrow money to invest in the stores so she can also be a shareholder and owner of the store. It was a lot of money for her and her family since they came from small village, but she trusted me and did it. By the end of the year, she was able to get a triple return of her investment and now she is a very successful businesswoman.

Not only can the entrepreneurs themselves benefit from these practices of networking, resource sharing, and information sharing, but participants also noted their desire to create value for and share resource with others. In this way, entrepreneurs tend to contribute significantly to a network and keep improving their value. While being entrepreneurial may seem to be an individual effort, it is never undertaken in isolation. Instead, entrepreneurial individuals are experts in connecting and moving information and resources, as well as functioning as network hubs. In this way, being entrepreneurial also means being able to connect.

## **Disrupting**

### ***Disrupt to Create Something New or Better***

One participant, Ms. D, noted that “You have to disrupt in order to start something new.” As well as applying to the concept of departure from popular perceptions, disruption is a way for entrepreneurs to find and solve problems differently.

In the extant literature, the concept of “disrupting” was popularized by Dr. Christensen, who proposed that disruptive technology is what enables the small guy to beat the large one: the classical David and Goliath story. In the same way, many entrepreneurs’ primary goal is disrupting an existing solution by providing a much better technology or different solution. This study’s participants noted that they perceive disrupting as a way to innovate; they tend to notice the problems and issues with current solutions and then work to provide a different solution.

For example, Ms. D was working as a leader in a business school when she realized that certain individuals were not happy with the existing business curriculum: “For entrepreneurs, you don’t need to have three courses in finance and accounting to be able to understand your numbers.” Informed by the students’ perspective, Ms. D created an entrepreneurship school based on people instead of process:

We created here 35 brand new courses, so brand new. So now imagine this, which we are able to teach, in our own ways. So if we were, if we were in any established college being visual arts or business or whatever, you're bond by the legacy of, you know, I I never would have gotten 35 courses, never never! you know. And so sometimes you have to, I hate to use this word because it is overused but, but you have to disrupt in order to start something that's different. Because I, I knew that, if you're going to start school of entrepreneurship outside of business school, the whole approach has to be different... that you don't need to know calculus to understand the term sheet, that you know, the curriculum should be experiential , we promise students, “when you come here, you will start something, and you're gonna fail and that's fine cause college, the university should be a safe place to fail, we're gonna help you get back up

Because of her ability and willingness to disrupt traditional ways of doing things, Ms. D was able to create brand new courses and degrees, thereby serving many students who were not ostensibly a good fit for business school. Thus, being disruptive

can mean being innovative when it comes to solving different problems and meeting a previously unmet need.

Similarly, another entrepreneur stated that:

I don't do well, um, being told what direction to take and what to do. I kinda like to forge my own path and um, you know, sometimes that's, you know, a hindrance to grow up because you don't always know what you're doing because when you're young, you don't have all the experience that's necessary to be immediately successful and know exactly what you're pursuing. But at the same time, it sets you up for success because, you know, a lot of times, um, big success comes from doing something differently or, um, forging your own path and growing that way and being bold and sort of being the adventurous spirit as opposed to following rules and instructions because rules and structure just lead to normalcy in a lot of ways.

Participants of different cultures, ages, and sexes all expressed their belief that being able to disagree with authority and societal norms was an important and salient aspect of their entrepreneurial development. Instead of following others' instructions, participants noted the need to "disrupt" the rules and change their ways of doing things. While different entrepreneurs vary, in terms of the different degrees to which they are willing to be different and disruptive, their ability to forge their own path and break the rules when necessary was important to all participants.

### ***Being Okay to be Different or Even Crazy***

Among the Chinese senior group, participants noted that this process of breaking norms can mean quitting stable jobs and taking on the "dirty work" of selling products. At that time, sales was regarded as less socially favorable than other endeavors, due to the society's previous condemnation of capitalist economics. Throughout Chinese history, doing business has generally ranked low in the hierarchy of socially valuable

careers. In post-World War II China, farmers, workers, and government officials were more highly regarded than businesspeople. While economic reform has changed the situation and enabled people to own private property, the social assumption that “making money is greedy” still remains prevalent. One participant noted that:

I can't stand the ways of how things get done in the office. Most people's full-time work was just to read newspaper and drink tea and call that a day. I want to change things and improve our results and work but I became kind of like the enemy for the whole department. Also, whatever things I do, I have my own ways of doing it and I can to improve but that was also strongly criticized by my supervisor and they thought that I was disrespectful and arrogant. So I decided to quit and start my own company. Most people thought that I was crazy as my former work is for the government and we had a very high social status but I couldn't stand it. I didn't know how but I had to figure out ways to make a living so I tried to sell many different things, which was again very shameful according to others because you have to ask for others' money and that was not what we were told as a noble job. The noble jobs are to serve not to make money from others.

Mr. Li has experienced the pressure of being considered “crazy” and suffered due to the fact his way of doing things was different when others were following his orders. He noted that he is entrepreneurial in his decisions and actions, making sure to do things his way and be consistent with his values. Mr. Li reported that he would rather choose to quit than conform to methods with which he disagrees, regardless how others may view him.

Although the perception of entrepreneurship has changed significantly in China, the concept of quitting a “good job” to try something new is still difficult for many people to understand. Participants' responses indicate that their entrepreneurial success required them to break a traditional career path and disrupt the traditional

concept of what is a “good” job option. Mr. Y, a young Chinese entrepreneur, faced questioning when he quit his job and deviated from the accepted path: “I left my job in CCTV and many people thought that I was crazy because that was many people’s dream. But to me, that’s not my dream and I don’t want to waste any more time there.” While times have changed, the belief that holding a stable, high-paid, and respected job title is better than creating a new organization remains prevalent, especially among senior people. The close relationship among Chinese families, co-workers, and communities can also make it difficult for young entrepreneurs to accomplish their goals without receiving censure from family and friends.

Conversely, American participants reported experiencing a more diverse environment, in which entrepreneurship is supported. However, these participants noted that they experienced a significant amount of internal questioning, and that choosing the entrepreneurial path also required them to reject safe and traditional ways of doing things:

I became very confused as I knew that I wanted to continue working on my venture and it was my passion but I was not sure that I was ready for it. Most of my friends work for consulting and investment banking and it seems that working in those areas are naturally next step for high achievers.

Again, as every culture views certain forms of employment as socially favorable, entrepreneurship requires the ability to deviate from popular paths when needed.



## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter on the core theme of “being entrepreneurial,” I presented the key patterns of entrepreneurship in participants’ own words. The detailed concepts and examples relate to five themes: learning as a way of being; action; staying in the arena; connecting elements, people, information and resources; and disrupting. These themes, based on interview data, provide a way of expanding the concept of being entrepreneurial beyond business. More specifically, entrepreneurship can also be measured behaviorally. Participants’ responses provide insight into the lives of entrepreneurial individuals.

## CHAPTER 5: BECOMING ENTREPRENEURIAL

### Chapter Overview

Although there are different factors and pathways to becoming entrepreneurial, it is important to emphasize that being entrepreneurial is something that is learned and developed over time rather than an inherent trait. Becoming entrepreneurial cannot happen overnight. This chapter focuses on the factors and process of becoming entrepreneurial. As this research tries to understand how respondents became entrepreneurial, we begin to see evolving patterns. This chapter starts with the highly debated question on whether being entrepreneurial is up to chance or personal effort. Then, inspired by Bronfenbrenner's (1993, 1998) ecological model, the chapter will analyze different impacts on the entrepreneurial individuals from different systems with the individuals at the center. To be precise, we learn about their childhood and also use time as a factor to capture the changes and patterns. Then, I focus on the micro-system in which they are influenced by families, friends and school experiences. Relating to this, their families' indirect experiences and values (meso-system) will also be discussed. Lastly, I will discuss the micro-system and chrono-system in order to evaluate certain historical and political factors that have strongly affected many participants. Using this model, we can gain a clear picture of their ways of becoming entrepreneurial developmentally (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1998).

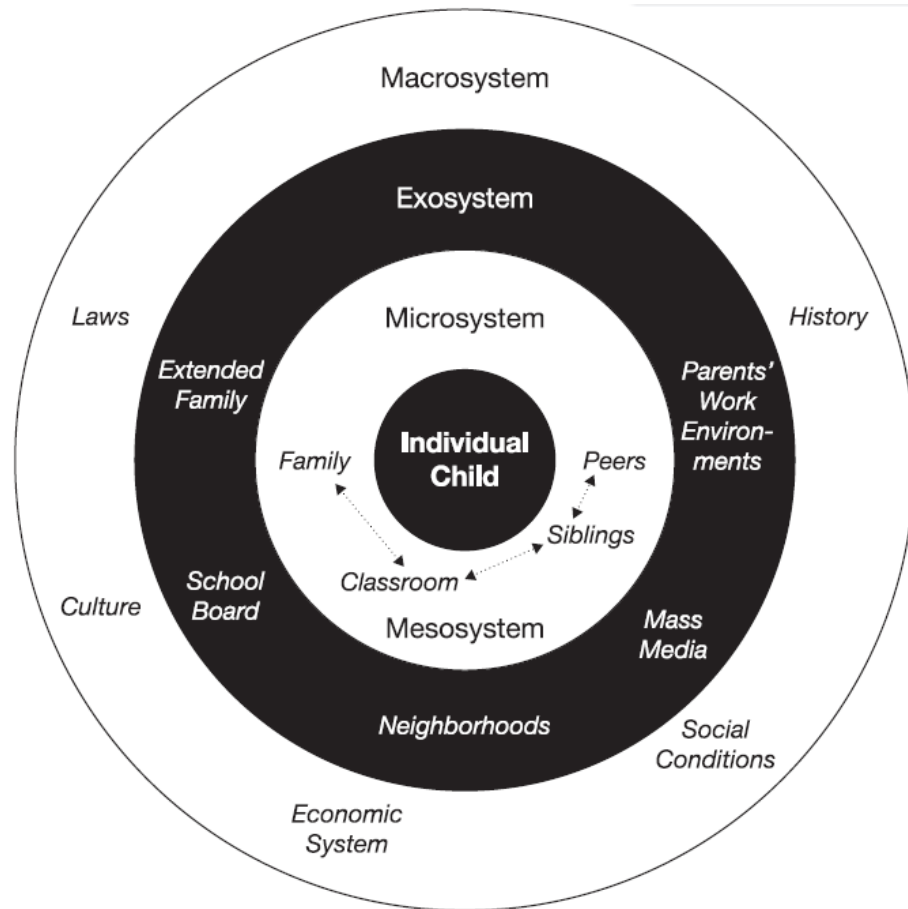


Figure 5.1:  
Bronfenbrenner 's Ecological Model (1993, 1998)

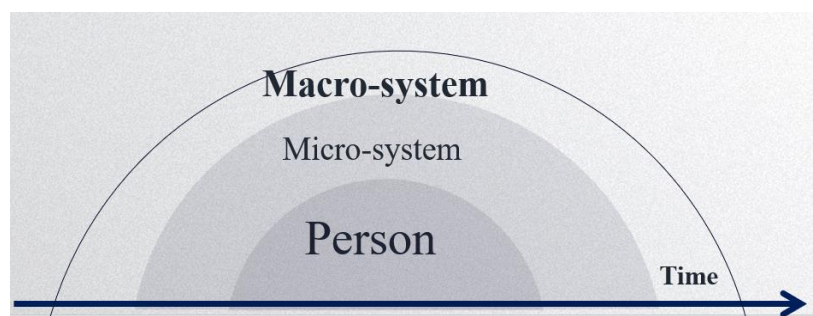


Figure 5.2:  
Modified Ecological Model for Analysis of Different Systems of this Research

## **“Chance” or Personal Efforts, That is the Question**

Indicating the role of chance in entrepreneurial efforts, one participant in this study stated that: “I never thought about that I was able to start my own business but when I? think back, it also makes sense.” Unlike the popular media’s portrayal of entrepreneurial individuals as those who have always wanted to be their own boss, most participants in this study noted that previous work experience led to their decision to start their own organization. Some participants reported being driven by negative factors they encountered from previous work experience, while some noted that they were influenced by positive factors of their first few jobs.

Mr. G was a high performer with a master’s degree in the 1980s, when his generous personality and ability to fix machines for his colleagues gained him unexpected responsibility: people would ask him for help beyond his job description. Through those experiences, Mr. G learned the value of his computer skills in a factory setting, and decided to charge people for his service. As this small side project snowballed, he decided to quit his job and leverage his customer-base to open his own computer repair shops. As opportunities arose, Mr. G responded with the bold action of starting a company, even though he had not planned to do so.

Similarly, Ms. C was invited by her previous boss and client to set up her company. Without any plan to start her own company, Ms. C was only doing her job and trying to create value for her clients. Her efforts and attitudes stood out from those of her colleagues, which made a deep impression on a client with a great deal of resources.

At end of the day, she was invited to set up a company with her client. When her previous boss heard about her decision to set up a new company, he immediately also invested in her. Clearly, Ms. C excelled and was able to stand out. Her decision to embrace the opportunity to set up the company demonstrates her courage and ambitiousness.

Mr. Zhu was from similar background, but a different region of China. Mr. Zhu's story is another example of "chance factors" as opposed to those of personal virtue and effort in entrepreneurial endeavor. In the context of the national change from a planned economy to a more market-oriented one, and the regional policy change making Shenzhen an open area for economy, Mr. Zhu was from a relatively "backward" region, according to his own assessment. Because of his work ethic, leadership skills, and personality, Mr. Zhu was chosen to become the factory leader's personal assistant. Instead of just doing this job, he noticed the need to start to provide products for schools and factory members internally and negotiated a way to open up stores within the factories. This effort shows Mr. Zhu's ability to initiate projects beyond his job description. This practice was very successful, and he then started to negotiate his personal shares of the projects, becoming aware of business opportunities and actualization. Although the stores were shut down by the factories, Mr. Zhu had become aware the opportunities in business and the large change happening in the country from a planned economy to a market economy. He was willing to take a risk to achieve his goals and moved to a place with a more flexible policy to encourage entrepreneurship.

While Mr. Zhu's acumen, sense of opportunity, ability to understand the industry, and willingness got him started initially, his long-term values of serving others, creating value, and being down-to-earth enabled him to progress, despite challenges. More specifically, even though Mr. Zhu experienced two shutting down events and changed both industry and location, he has remained optimistic. He expressed the belief that he came from nothing, and that the value of his efforts belongs to society. Mr. Zhu also noted that, in his growing period, he was able to be content to do well and focus on creating value instead of making profit.

In a similar context, Ms. Q's experience also reflects the combination of both personal efforts and chance, as well as value-based work. Ms. Q is also a high performer as a salesperson in a factory; her chance to begin her entrepreneurial work was a crisis during which her boss wanted to close the factory. Motivated by her promise to deliver products on time for her clients, she took over the factory and became the owner. She stated that: "I can't break my promise so if my boss can't keep it, I will." This sense of responsibility enabled Ms. Q to make the crisis into an opportunity, and she has grown the factory ever since. Unlike Mr. Zhu, Ms. Q wasn't negotiating or pursuing opportunities and autonomy first. She would have been happy to work as a top performer if not for the possibility of the factory's closure; however, her commitment to her customers motivated her to become the boss and take a leadership role.

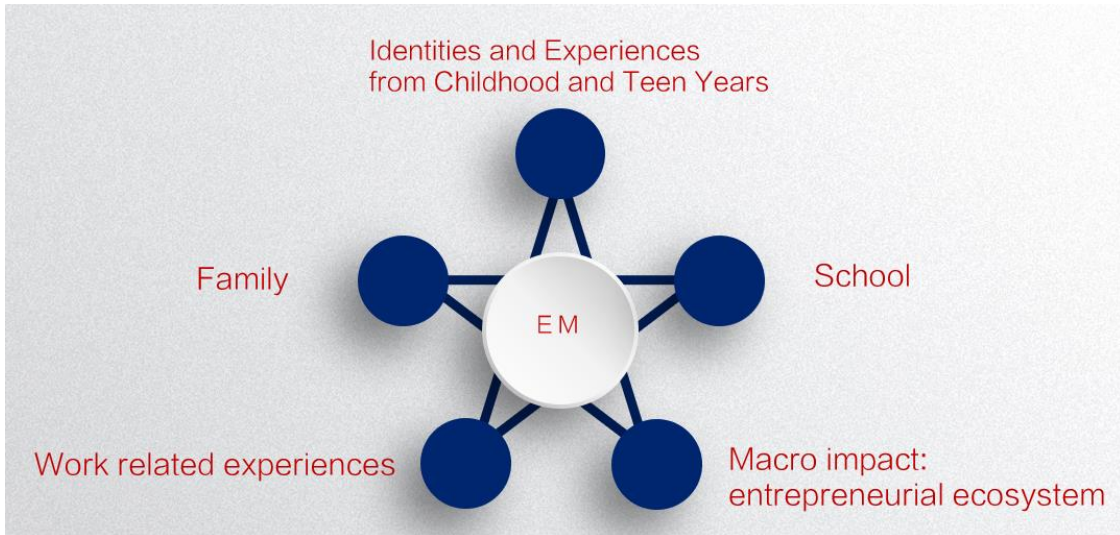
It is also necessary to take culture into consideration. American counterparts from the senior group also reported their beliefs that their paths were the result of

many factors, both internally and externally. They clearly recognized the individuals' efforts, yet they also admitted, and even stressed, the belief that the eco-system and "luck" play a significant role in becoming entrepreneurial.

The only exception to the general trend of being influenced by previous work experience was two American business partners who immediately jumped into entrepreneurship before they had ever worked for anyone else. Interestingly, they were not totally "immune to work for others." Mr. J had worked for his neighbors since he was a child, and also worked at a repair shop. His business partner always knew that he would be his own boss, yet he had experience of making money from school projects even before this decision. Both business partners were in agreement regarding their decision to start their company, and seized the opportunity based on their own experience. They expressed a desire to think of themselves as determining their own life path and being driven by motives of self-fulfillment and financial profit. They represent the beliefs of many young, ambitious, and driven American entrepreneurs. They recognize the importance of others and environment, but they regard their individual motivation as the key driver of their entrepreneurial actions.



*Figure 5.3:  
Overview of the Factors Affecting Entrepreneurial Development*



*Figure 5.4:  
Overview of the Systems Affecting Entrepreneurial Development*

**Emerging Self Identities and Experiences from Childhood and Teen Years**

When discussing their childhood, participants offered quiet, yet interesting stories, with certain shared patterns. In terms of their own perceptions, especially



related to their identities, there are three main patterns that emerge from their self-narratives.

### *Top and Popular Student Leaders*

We see both top students and average students in our sample. Interestingly, some participants have been regarded as the popular, well-liked kids since they were young. In the Chinese context, top students tend to be popular because of their academic excellence; they also tend to be the leaders among students or teachers. For the senior Chinese group, all were the top students in their class and four out of six are also the first-born child in the family. Young Chinese entrepreneurs had more similar childhood self-identities with their American counterparts than their Chinese seniors. Two thought of themselves as top students. One had worked very hard to get an education and other opportunities to transform herself and her family. She was from a very humble background; her dad had been disabled and her mother a housewife without a stable income. The other young man seemed to know how to “game the system” and become the top student, yet still be able to enjoy himself. “I managed to have a girlfriend in high school and they don’t bother me because I’m the top student and I skipped classes and exams which I thought were useless but I was managing to do well and was a popular student leader at schools growing up.”

The American group also had some participants who were top students and performers since their early childhood. They were working hard and also engaged in

many extracurricular duties besides academic work. They were also the example of top students in the American context.

Their experiences of being at the top of their academic peer group made them experience more winning moments; clearly, they were very comfortable with public attention, and often had strong interpersonal and communication skills. One student described how:

When my teacher was sick, I was the “little teacher” to teach in class and there were no other teachers at that time and my classmates always respect me a lot as they see me as the youngest, the smallest and also very generous person. I share my notes and knowledge with them all the time. This character has stayed with me.

All of the top students in the Chinese context were regarded as popular and served as student leaders in their schools. They were given more responsibilities to influence others, and also more opportunities to exercise other skills.

### ***Popular Kids, Independent Thinkers and Troublemakers***

Although top students tend to be popular, this story may vary in the U.S. Other participants who disliked school, were also popular or “different,” in their narratives. American participants tended to be the trouble makers or the cool kids who either represented their peers to stand up to authority figures, or else they simply did not care much about school but were immersed in their own world, doing things such as building projects or fixing things at home and in the neighborhood. One student described his experience as follows:

Yeah, I mean, ...I was a very mediocre school student, 3.0 GPA all the way through, didn't really put in a lot of effort in the school. (I) didn't care about it.

When I was about, you know, five years old, have these deep thoughts with myself who actually am I? What makes me Jack is very strange. I was very like self-analyzing of myself. Um, and my parent, my mom freaked out when I told her that's how I was like, who am I? Like I've been thinking about this and I don't understand what makes me me. I'm very fascinated with history, so I always was like, well I don't want to be someone that's in this history book. Like how did these people get in here and what did they do? They did things that were fantastic. How do I do something that's fantastic so that I can get them into a history? That was something that really was like, but then at the same time to that I also wasn't driven in school, do well in school. ...Because in school I never actually learned how to learn. Constantly doing uh, you know, building projects at my house, a number of projects...

In the Chinese group, apart from the top students, there were also those who were very critical about school. One example was a man who became extremely cynical about the Chinese system. He was strongly influenced by Western culture and demonstrated more similarity with the American participants than Chinese ones.

Age groups also showed different patterns. Senior groups tended to be more obedient in general, and were more likely perceived as top students. The younger generation showed more independent thinking and critical engagement.

### *I'm Always...*

Interestingly, many students made identity-related statements regarding their development, which seemed to go back to a very young age. Such statements usually started with something like "I'm always...."

I've always been very independent, right? Like, I don't like to follow rules and I don't like to listen to people. I kind of being my own entity, especially in work. Um, and I've always been that way. I've always been more of a rule breaker than a rule follower even at school. So, um, I was never big on institutions and like following directions and doing this and that, whatever... Um, just because of who I am as a person, I feel like inherently, like I've always been more of an

independent and a rule breaker and somebody who doesn't like to sort of go with the flow.

This person was very confident and set in his style of being independent and setting directions for himself. He discussed how he could be very competitive and want to show others that they were wrong in schools and try to prove the teachers were wrong.

Um... Yeah, I guess I would say, I'm always interested in entrepreneurship since I was a child. So, I was been always interested in that. And as with many entrepreneurs my father... Both of my parents are very entrepreneurial people, so we are always doing projects of various kinds.

Doing projects and building things is another common way for those participants to learn from their earlier experiences that they can be good at problem solving, and even perhaps build an organization one day.

Others also identified their personality or personal characteristics relating to entrepreneurial skills. "I'm always very creative. My mom called me the creative Carrie." "I'm always a people person. I can talk to anyone. Because I grew up in a village and my parents are busy so basically, I would have meals at different people's houses daily and that made me very comfortable to talk to anyone." Their creativity, outgoing personality, and people skills are key aspects of their own identity from their childhood.

So, I think my biggest passion I would say in life in general is talking to people. So, I love, love knowing it's for me knowing people. I just love people in general. I think this is the main purpose, why I'm here on this earth is to know, I think that the main reason for me is to know how other people and have this connection and see myself in you... So, so for me getting the experience to know a lot of people and finding and then my passion for helping to, finding problems that

they have and my passion for helping. And I think that because I don't think it's just the creation part. I think I'm also very, very, very passionate about planning. So that's planner in the family. I only planned all the trips. I always plan every year. I always planned out thing. So, whenever we're going out, since I was a kid, I was the person planning the how thing we're going to go for my family, for my cousins, for my friends.

Those examples show how entrepreneurial individuals were building identities from earlier experiences that could lead further along the entrepreneurial path. Their own identities and social status, such as being popular or a leader, also demonstrate important entrepreneurial skills that can lead to more opportunities to further exercise or strengthen their self-perception: such as “I’m always the leader” or “I’m creative.”

Two other participants were rather good enough students and their “entrepreneurial enlightenment” seems to be related to experiences and factors beyond the childhood and adolescence periods.

## **Early Entrepreneurial Experiences**

### ***Selling at An Early Age***

Selling things at an early age to neighbors is a common experience shared by many informants. They were encouraged to profit from their labor or intellect. These could be very small experiences, such as selling lemonade or ice cream in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, they served as an early exercise to understand how trade works. Real-life lessons came both as joyful or bitter, depending on the results. But in retrospect, they all enjoyed reminiscing about those experiences in an almost romantic fashion. Said one respondent:

We sold all the apples on the Christmas Eve and we made like twenty dollars.

We used that money to celebrate and it was a very happy moment for all of us.

We are still talking about it even today after so many years.

It was not all that romantic in the moment for everyone, however. Some participants were selling items to help contribute to their families, and were taking risks, as well.

By selling ice cream, I have to figure out when and where will be the best place and also need to avoid running into other kids who are also selling ice cream. Sometimes I can sell out them very fast, but I also had the days when I have a lot left. We didn't have the fridge at that time, so I have to eat them or see them melting, which is a very heartbreaking experience. After that, I would think more on how to avoid wasting the ice cream.

### ***Building Problem-Solving and Character Skills in Early days***

Respondents also tended to share another commonality: a propensity for building things or solving problems. Although more male than female participants seemed to enjoy this, I found examples amongst both genders. Certain projects were very hands-on. The respondents had to build physical projects or even sell them. Others were a more intellectual challenge. "I like to solve math problems," said one. Another reported, "I like to find ways to improve teams." Respondents seemed to enjoy not only solving their own problems but others as well.

One surprising area of social experience came from playing sports. As another participant put it:

I think that I learn a lot from playing basketball to apply to my business. For example, we hate to play with the kind of person who is not a team player. He or she can be a very good one but if they don't play along with others, no one

wants to play with them. That taught me a lot about building and leading teams. Also, playing sports.

Another arena in which participants gained experience came from the military training. One participant attributed many of his values and personal characteristics to this:

We don't make a lot of money, but we are willing to give everything to others. One person will visit his family, we will give all the money we have to him and feel connected. This value always stays with me... In my worst days, I felt that yes, I lost everything, but I didn't have anything to start with and things didn't matter much to me.

He also mentioned the reason he started his current organization and quit his previous one was that he liked the "working spirit" in Shenzhen, where everyone seems hopeful—walking fast to work hard and pursuing goals that reminded him of his old days in the military. Besides, military training was very hard, which cultivated a strong work ethic. He felt that he could easily outwork his competitors.

Although specific experiences or examples may differ, these three were common: past experience in salesmanship, an ability to solve problems, and a drive to train their personal character were all key shared characteristics. Based on experiences gained from those repeated patterns, they formed their key values, identities, characters and skills.

## **Micro-System of Influence: Family**

### ***A Supportive or Hands-off Family Environment***

The Chinese senior group tended to have many brothers and sisters. Their parents were mostly busy making a living and leaving a lot of space for themselves in

their early childhood. Yet they tend to be influenced by their parents' simple value systems and strong work ethic. Hands-off yet warm and hard-working family experiences were commonly described. They expressed that their parents did not know much about other possibilities and could not serve as guides for them. Nevertheless, they would teach them to be kind, hard-working, and responsible to others.

My parents were farmers and they didn't know nor had time to educate or parent us. So, we are basically on our own. But I know that they loved us a lot. They would give everything up for us and to raise us. They just...didn't know. Most people back then didn't know how to be parents besides giving us food. But they also model for us to be honest and kind people to serve others and not be selfish.

The Chinese junior group tended to divide into actively supportive or hands-off family environments. Their parents often let them decide what they wanted and exercise their decision-making power as they grew up. Some respondents were from less-educated families. These individuals demonstrated similar patterns to the senior group, representing their parents as loving and modeling the right values for their children.

### ***Entrepreneurial Parents as Role Models***

There are also entrepreneurial parents who had deeply influenced and even intentionally cultivated their children. One individual reflected both on his mother's influence and on the powerful model she set:

My mother is very entrepreneurial and always energetic though she doesn't have much education. I think I can get this energy from her. After she was laid off by her factory, she started to work for hotels as a cleaner and she noticed that there was opportunity to sell high quality yet cheap curtain. So, she started to wholesale curtains to hotels. She used to ask me to collect the payment and I



would walk for hours to get there and sometimes got rejected by the manager. She wanted me to experience that and grow stronger.

In the American group, parents and family played similar roles as in the Chinese groups. Some modelled themselves after their entrepreneurial parents, while others were supported by their parents in their entrepreneurial pursuits. Their parents' living examples, characteristics, and values were also deeply ingrained in them.

I think an influence that I had a lot is (from) my mother. She's the type of person, she would not let things go. She would speak up about something if she doesn't think it's right. And sometimes I think she's a little bit extreme sometimes, you know. I just want to go out and have fun and she's telling this person you shouldn't be doing. But at the same time, uh, she's very hard working and she's very strong. Then it became an inspiration for me. So, so I think this is a, this is all, this is all what, what keeps me or what makes me go inside this field and yeah, for me, yeah.

Clearly, their parents have provided role models and also safe spaces for them to dream big and believe their ambitions can be achieved.

Other American participants also mentioned their parents' influence in their entrepreneurial development. As one respondent said, "my dad was an entrepreneur, so I got a lot of that from him." Another reported, "...and as with many entrepreneurs my father... Both of my parents are very entrepreneurial people, so we are always doing projects of various kinds." One interesting example was that one participant took a paid project but was not sure that he could complete the project as he had no prior experience with it. His father helped him and later encouraged his projects and the companies he started.

### *Family Value and Character Training*

The participants' parents may not have directly trained them to be entrepreneurial, but they did provide them certain important skills early on. Consider this respondent's experience:

And my brother and I were all always trained to ask for things ourselves when we were young. So, like we'd be in parents, so like my, my dad be driving, my mom would be on the next seat and me and my brother would be in the backseat. And you know, when we go to like even restaurants, like we had to order everything. Um, we had to ask for all the directions because they don't speak English. Yeah, we were very trained since I think young age to, you know, just to work hard and um, yeah, work hard. I think they don't really expect material or like specific goals. But they want us to work hard and if possible, do it the most efficient and like the best way surrounded by, you know, the best people.

Working hard, asking for help, being kind and finishing the things you started are common values the parents or family tended to pass on to participants from both cultures. Here is another example:

I think my mom actually, she used to be really like, she used to be from a really affluent family. So even in her like teenage years in Korea, like there were not a lot of cars and stuff, but she had like two chauffeurs and everything. But like at age 27, she got everything taken away from her and she was, her family was \$1 million in debt. Like all her, all her family's like land and like furniture and like everything was taken away by the government because they were bankrupt. And my mom had to learn how to overcome that. And like she was a pharmacist, so she like, she worked a lot. Like she was like a businesswoman who was a pharmacist. So, she earned a lot of the money back and within like two years she was able to fill it all up and earn more money. So, I think from that and she keeps on reminding me of that moment and how, you know, everything can just be gone, and you know, one or two bad decisions... So always... Um, you have to have like a skillset and um, uh, you have to always be able to, um, earn money even when you have nothing. That's like the mindset that my brother and I always have all. And that's why we're always just working hard to create a special, specialized skillsets.... Well you always prepare for that. So, I think I was really lucky in that I never really experienced any dark moments

of my life other than like, you know, stress from recruiting and stuff... But yeah, my mom has. I almost feel like I experienced it myself because she told you so.

These indirect experiences were shared and carried forward by respondents who valued them as life lessons, and also a motivation to be able to rely on yourself to start over and overcome the worst situations.

Besides parents, two entrepreneurs were first invited by their brother or sister to help out their business. They were then able to grow in their own entrepreneurial development, as well. Conflict between family and work can occur when the line is blurred, but they also received a great deal of trust and mentorship from their family members. Given the fact that most businesses globally were family-owned, this way of becoming entrepreneurial is not rare.

### **The Impact of School**

Participants expressed mixed views towards the impact of school on their entrepreneurial development. Some were quietly critical about schools, especially when schools are still focused on training students to be followers and meeting the standards set by others. According to one respondent:

I feel like a lot of entrepreneurs aren't looking for the yes and no answer. They were looking for a new solution to a problem that they see in the market, right... In school, but, um, whether it's, you know, a writing class or a science class, you're always at the mercy of the instructor, right? So, if somebody says, well, I don't really like your point. This isn't written the way I would have written it. It's technically considered wrong. That doesn't mean that it is wrong. Right? So, school sort of has this binary outcome system, right? Where it's like, well, this is right, or this is wrong. But I mean real life doesn't work that way... So, in a lot of ways, school prepares people adequately to be wonderful employees, because um, you know, uh, an employer is going to say this is the right way to do it and

this is the wrong way to do it. Don't do this, do, do this. But it doesn't serve entrepreneurs very well in terms of development because um, like I said, by nature I feel like true entrepreneurs and risk takers are always rule breakers.

Besides the critique that schools fail to create creators and rule-breakers, there are other concerns about a low return of investment, especially when it comes to higher education for low income folks. One respondent felt particularly strongly about this:

That's what I was going to say exactly. What you're saying is I have \$70,000 in student loan debt. If I could have had \$70,000 to run the venture. Yeah. I think I'd be further along than when I got out of education. I do think it's, there's value to the degree. I don't think it's \$70,000 worth of value, but there is value to the degree. I think a degree is only valuable because of what it is. I just think it's a signaling effect. That's all. I think that when you have a college degree, any good, they give college degrees out like candy today. I mean you don't have to do much. There are people that, it's like I get, I know I've been through rounds of interviews with Google. I'm having hiring managers who reach out to me all the time. It's not because I'm graduating from Temple with a management information system. It's because I'm running this business and they see what we're doing and they're like, well, I want you on my team now. I feel like, I feel like the college degree, like I said, it's just a signaling thing, right? It's like, well, I made it through school.... So, employers looking at credentialing, they're always credentialing people. ...They know that the education system isn't adequately preparing people for the workforce.”

These respondents were very opinionated, but they also touched on an important question: the value of a college degree, whether the return is worth it and whether school is preparing students for the workforce. Both participants were holding college degrees but believed that the value of the degree was not worth the investment and that school was not a key factor, or even adding much value to their work.

Others pointed to missing pieces in the school curriculum. “We don't traditionally educate folks who aren't in the business schools about this being an option. I see a lot more of it now, said one. Another respondent said,

My mom always used to call me creative Carrie. She's a teacher. So, what's funny is I think if I think about it from an analytical lens, I think I probably always showcase that sort of creativity and innovative approach. But the systems I operated in, the system, the educational symptoms we all attended (?) didn't naturally pick up, observe that and nurture it.

On the other hand, some respondents reported having been influenced by teachers or otherwise benefiting from being at certain schools. Graduating from one of the best business schools in the world, one participant attributed a lot of her networking consciousness, skills, and other business knowledge to her school:

Yeah, so I think it was kind of ingrained with us with our business background. So, um, like, you know, I don't know if you know, but like you probably know, but I didn't work in culture. Like you just have, you just go to info sessions and you just have to email people. Right. And same with Harvard and they're, you know, business related fields. And so my brother and I were kind of trained to not fear people and, you know, kind of just give it a try and if they don't respond or if they don't find it with us and then whatever, there's other people.

### **Work Related Experiences**

Not Surprisingly, work-related experiences were a common point of discussion, and all of the respondents reported that they were very relevant to their entrepreneurial activities. In many ways, work experience, whether it be full-time or part-time, has created resources, helped build skills, connected respondents with important people— some of whom were their co-founders or partners—and realize their roles and opportunities in the field. Even in the extreme examples, working experience helped entrepreneurial individuals confirm that they were not the “corporate type,” or that they did not want to work for others anymore. The experience

still provided them with very important information that pushed them onto the entrepreneurial path.

### ***Working as a Way to Know Their Place in the World***

Many entrepreneurial individuals were top performers in earlier work settings. They tried to create values and applied their skills in those places. Some were recognized and promoted.

When I was in the school of nursing there, they created a job from the Dean's Office for me to be a person for the school of nursing, you know, to apply certain skills, um, networking, conflict resolution, engagement. And then she sought to bring me right into the PhD program at Ohio State right out of my bachelor's. But I tell you that here because it's relevant to how I became an entrepreneur. What I, what I want to communicate is that I've always looked for opportunities to innovate in places.

Two other entrepreneurs who founded programs and or schools were given or themselves created positions within organizations. Although all took personal risks to lead new initiatives, each may have taken a different level of risk, as one respondent put it:

It's an academic position so it is in some ways entrepreneurial because you are responsible for doing your own thing, your own projects. But in some ways not, because there's almost no risk in university so least you have the tenure and it has very little risk and it is not like you take very much risk as a faculty entrepreneur. So, my own personal entrepreneurship experiences have all been outside of, you know part-time outside of the university.

Still, they were still entrepreneurial, and deserve responsibility for creating new programs. Some individuals also created and funded their own projects outside their existing work. Their jobs allowed them to apply their talents and entrepreneurial abilities by providing financial security that many traditional entrepreneurs do not have.

Others were not able to find a balance between employment and their own passion such that both could co-exist. They tended to find themselves misfits at their workplace, unwilling to continue working there. For many, this process took a while, as this respondent suggests:

I started to build my gym after work. So basically, I called some friends and asked them to invest and to make money together. Exercising is my passion so I can work there right after my full-time work until 2am to clean up. I worked full-time as a manager and also built my gym after work for a few months. Until others got envious at me in my full-time job and I felt also it was meaningless to continue working at my job though I was the youngest regional manager that time. I wanted to really grow my gym. So, I quit my job and worked at my gym then.

Clearly, some respondents were experimenting and considering different factors when they took the decision to quit. A few rare decisive participants made a quicker decision, but they still gave weight to the decision and were not impulsive.

I was young and bold, and I really hated the ways they were doing things there. I always wanted to do things better and I had my own independent thinking, but my supervisor thought that I was arrogant and gave me a hard time there. Then I felt that I could do better other places and I looked for other opportunities to quit.

As this participant's experience indicates, many felt that they were not really valued or their skills were wasted in previous work, which helped them to make other decisions. Even those extreme individuals who "always knew that they would be entrepreneurs and would stay that way for the rest of their lives" also typically had some sort of internship or part-time work experience early on. These individuals used the experience as a way to learn, and to explore their position in the world. Those experiences also raise important questions as to whether organizations can cultivate

and keep these kinds of entrepreneurial individuals by tapping their strengths and embracing internal innovations. We do see that can be a possibility for some.

***Working as a Way to Grow Skills, Networks and Opportunities.***

Work experience is a very important way to learn and grow skills, resources, as well as to find and realize new opportunities. Some respondents never thought about starting their own organization, but instead about being approached and “found out” by others, through work.

My client actually approached me and offered me the opportunity to start the business with him. So basically, he can find investment and resources, I can run the things which he realized by seeing me serve other clients. To me, he was like my mentor and very successful person and I wouldn't take much risk by working with him. So, I took the opportunity. My former boss actually invested in me when I told him about this decision to start a high-end traveling agency.

Their skills and values were identified and put to use through working relationships. Skills they picked up in previous work environments were also applied in new organizations. For many young people, this offers a path to entrepreneurship. They absorb as much knowledge and skills as possible, and even connect with key people and resources by working in relevant fields. When they are “lucky”—doing a job right, taking advantage of “happenstance,” and being open to opportunities, they can be surprised by where those things can take them.

Yet this approach is not only limited to young graduates who are exploring. Senior figures who are already content experts can also be recognized and approached by others through work to start a business together.



My friend and colleague who is our CEO, Madeline, herself has the dual degree in nursing and Wharton. I had consulted for her for many years, which I did a lot of, you know, lectured to nurses, physicians advise her business on continuing education initiative. She sold her business of continuing education business back in 2008. It's a very successful business. I consulted for it that whole time from like 2001 to, she managed it through 2012. She started talking to me in 2010 to say, "Hey, I'm ready to think about my next adventure. And you are now a national, an international expert in the field of cancer survivorship... We should brainstorm ideas for next business." And I'll never forget that conversation..., we then embarked on, that was just a casual for me like two-year journey of thinking through ideas. And ultimately then the work I was doing at Penn in the cancer center, integrating, um, what we call patient recorded outcomes. Having patients report electronically on a tablet, on a phone, what their symptoms, they're just stresses and integrating that into the care visit, um, and into an individualized plan of care was something I was starting to explore in my work setting. And I got like a \$75,000 pilot grant to explore that. And so my co-founder partner and I basically ultimately arrived on taking that vision out into the corporate, the business world.

This is an amazing story, when this participant has long been entrepreneurial in an existing organization, led a lot of initiatives, is influential in her field, is well-aware of the problems and challenges faced by the patients, and has struggled to close the gap between research and practice. It takes decades of relationship-building, accumulating experiences to somehow arrive at this conversation and partnership with this business friend, who could lead her into entrepreneurship work. It is through her previous work—the content expertise, reputation, influences, and resources—as well as the unsolved struggles and problems which led to her decision to quit her full-time job at a renowned institution and take an entrepreneurial path to have more impact on patients' lives.

Those who were realizing business opportunities, such as repairing computers for others or selling items to their co-workers, demonstrate more “proactive” ways to

use work as a means of creating opportunity. They realized that they could apply their skills to certain needs and were also able to put into practices to actualize those needs, creating values and profits. One respondent exemplified this when they said:

It wasn't my job to fix others' computers but because I fixed some technical issues for others and the word spread out. Many co-workers are asking for my help and I thought it could be an opportunity, so I open my own repair shops. I got my first customers from my previous work.

Working is very closely related to their “starting” actions, and there were a lot of valuable things that can be cultivated and accumulated at work. Entrepreneurs tend to learn and respond to opportunities or create ones through work, while also learning more about their own strengths and weakness, finding their partners and co-founders through work, and even developing motivation to create better organizations out of bad work experiences.

### **Macro Impact: The Physical and Virtual Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

There are also factors from the macro systems that influence entrepreneurial development. The most salient example comes from the Chinese senior entrepreneurial group, who benefitted from the economic reform and transition period to a market economy. It was a seller's market, where sellers had more negotiating power as products were scarce and demand not met. A lot of respondents from this group observed that “it was so easy to make money back then.” Apart from market opportunity in this early period, one participant correctly highlighted certain intellectual property protections and policy support for entrepreneurs.

I think if you look at the regions that have been very successful in fostering entrepreneurship in many years there are hundred factors, but the big one seems to me is that at governmental level there has to be strong property rights and has to be easy to form an entity so I think some parts of world the entrepreneurs say I'm not gonna start a business here because I know that any moment the government can just take my money.

China has been slowly catching up with property protection. Some regions were taking steps to encourage entrepreneurship as far back as the 1980s. Besides government policy, there are other factors relating to the ecosystem of entrepreneurship.

I think universities are probably the most important because that's where, you know, you get young people to come to universities and then often what they do when they leave there determines often there is a base for them to stay in that region, so if you look at Boston or Silicon Valley or Beijing is those universities that whole area around Bei Da, Qing Hua. I think you have to argue it because the institutions, and young people there stayed. And then the third factor would be the critical mass of a people in a labor market. So, if you look at Silicon Valley, it is the most attractive place for entrepreneurs to go, because there are other entrepreneurs there and so those now works prove very important both for helping each other but also to create a liquidity in the labor market. And I suppose another thing would be also look at Silicon Valley and Seattle right now, certain other regions there are, some mother companies that have children and in China you look at Hangzhou Ali, there is Ali and there are children of Ali there, and in Silicon Valley, there is HP and in Seattle there is Microsoft and Amazon...

Together with governmental effort and policy to support and respect intellectual and private properties, universities, the labor market, and hubs for big corporations and start-up companies, all contribute to a well-connected and lively eco-system. Not only does this system provide resources, talent, and information flows, but also creates a certain culture, as well as values shared by residents regardless their passports.

Beyond the physical community and ecosystem, both Chinese and American members of the younger generation tend to be internet savvy, having grown up with a rapid development of information technology and access to a wide range of information sources. This generation tends to think globally and connect beyond their immediate community. They can reach out to form a tribe even beyond physical borders. “I like reading Western magazines and read famous people’s blogs and tweets so in many ways, I feel that I am more Western than Chinese,” said one respondent. This global culture connects people more than ever. All of the participants discussed opportunities in the global market. One participant noted that they “...like reading stories from Jack Ma (a Chinese entrepreneur who built up Alibaba).” Many senior entrepreneurs have travelled to other countries and have business experience in other cultures. Therefore, it is correct to say that all of the participants have been influenced by the globalized, digitized, and connected world.

### **Chapter Summary**

Becoming entrepreneurial is a process that is affected by a number of different factors, with the individual and their unique traits and character at the center. The process of becoming entrepreneurial varied person by person, yet they all seemed to develop a certain type of entrepreneurial mindset. There are certain ways to analyze, decide and act toward external environments, especially when it involves uncertainty, risk and opportunity. This chapter adopted Bronfenbrenner’s eco-psychological system model as an organizational framework to discuss those factors from the level of

individual experiences and identities, to the micro-system including school, family and work-related factors, and finally the macro system. Although arguably the meso system is not so salient in their storytelling, certainly respondents also received indirect influence from their parents or friends' experience, so those parts were covered in the micro-systems as well.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on discussing the lessons learned by comparing different groups: different cultural groups, different age groups, and genders. These lessons illustrate different ways of being entrepreneurial in light of an individual's context, identity and attributions, as well as any group patterns. This chapter then discusses participants' reflections on what they see as crucial aspects of being entrepreneurial, as well as their thoughts on how to develop entrepreneurial individuals. Those lessons need not reflect their personal experiences, but certainly reflect the thoughts and advice they would want to share with a broader audience.

### Patterns Learned from Cross-Cultural Groups

#### *Attributional Difference and a Universal Hope to Make the World a Better Place*

This research has found that cultural differences produce collectivist or individualistic orientations when it comes to decision making and attribution. Chinese entrepreneurial individuals tend to attribute to others the reasons to start or quit or keep going. "I can't let my clients down," "my boss invited me to start the company," or, "I have to make it work and make a contribution to society," are all common reasons Chinese participants across different age groups and genders offered as reasons for starting or continuing with their organization. Although they may find personal fulfillment in their work, their expressed key drivers are always connecting to others and making impacts on communities.

For American participants, they tend to value their own interests and fulfillment when they make decisions. As a Korean-born second generation American female entrepreneur, Ms. C, offered a story that provides some nuance. As the only Asian American example amongst the respondents, her story is significant. Certainly, family was a very important reason for her, but she also recognized her own passion and interests, rather than being mainly influenced by her family. Her brother approached her with an attractive opportunity to start a business. She had always regarded her brother as a mentor and role model, so her decision was both personal and relational. When she later decided to pursue her own passion, her brother and the rest of the family were very supportive, even helping to connect her with important people in her areas of interest.

Although superficially her entrepreneurial path seems deeply influenced by her family, she remains focused on her own goals. Her decision was formed not merely as a contribution to family, but to achieve her own development. Nevertheless, her story still carries echoes of the pattern that Chinese entrepreneurs hold more collectivist values and consider others as a main reason to start and continue their business, while American counterparts appear to prioritize their own happiness, values and enjoyment before other factors.

Interestingly, the order or priority of these motivations may be different. Participants from both cultures have recognized the importance of social impact and giving back. For example, two self-assertive entrepreneurs who attribute their

entrepreneurial pursuit to their own decision-making and search for personal meaning, are also creating value for others and see contributing to a better world as their long-term purpose.

These young entrepreneurs had already achieved a great deal. They were upfront about their ambition to be well-known, influential and successful financially.

My mind's a little more complicated because I also want influence as in..., like personal influence in terms of like being somebody who was very well known, like. I don't want to say fame necessarily, but influence yet. Um, but I also want like..., without worrying about it [finances]... So, like my big number that I always talk about is between 500 million and a billion, in terms of net worth.

When it comes to their values and long-term mission, they have thought about ways to give back. One said:

And then there's a lot of things, especially in Philadelphia, it's like our population is like 1.5 million and like a third of those are in poverty conditions. And I think that a lot of that can be solved through, um, giving a lot of these underprivileged communities access to technology ..., [Be]cause I went to school in the suburbs and I was really, you know, they gave us a good basic foundation. Um, I didn't take advantage of everything but because I'd say there were not very successful, and I just think that giving back to the community is really important to me and just makes me feel like finishing the whole circle. It's about in 20 or 30 years. But yeah, if we get there, but yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, I'll probably give away over a billion and then when I dialed skip it all the way. That's not going to off the poverty causes disease research is ultimately the biggest goal for me. It's to leave the world a better place.

Being able to make a contribution beyond just making money is a frequent topic amongst all participants. Some view this as a later stage goal or ultimate purpose, while others focus on it from day one. Fundamentally, being an entrepreneur is both personal, relational and social.



## **Patterns Across Age Groups**

### *Historical Events and Generational Differences*

The younger generation of entrepreneurs place greater importance on teams and working with others. Having co-founders or working with partners and encouraging teams rather than through a hierarchy tends to be more important among younger groups across both cultures and genders. Having open and flatter institutional structures are more common amongst younger groups. These respondents also described thinking more about intentional team design and saw entrepreneurship as in some measure about choosing people who complement their own working styles and strengths.

[For] people who are following your direction, what if they find your ideas are always changing and stuff. They will not be able to really get it. That's why I need that structure because my ideas are always changing, which is why I need, I need people, which is why I need people that can say this is what we need to do in two weeks. This is what we need to do now. Because I recognize that I'm not a very strong decision maker. I'm great at making serious decisions. Like when there comes a serious decision that I have to make, I'm not great at that little decisions. I suck, I suck, I suck, suck, suck, suck. I can make a big decision relatively easily and be okay with it. I can't like... So, I need somebody who is able to provide that structure, you know, where it says we're going to do this right. And just kind of being structured, calm and collected.

The younger generation is more likely to perceive entrepreneurial effort as a team effort. They need people with different skills who share equal status and values. They also are more familiar with different ways to structure their organization.

The young Chinese entrepreneurial group was also very comfortable forming teams and working with co-founders. They built open and democratized structures

similar to their American counterparts. In terms of power, however, it remained relatively centered on the founders and co-founders. Their employees are considered teammates but also subordinates.

Senior respondents, on the other hand, tended to be the bosses or owners of their organizations. Although their leadership styles differed, it was very clear that they were the main decision-maker who decided the direction and development of the company.

We didn't really know any concept of shareholders or better ways to motivate people. So, all the attempts to work with others, we had the half-half equity which turned out to be a disaster as no one can decide. It's one thing when you both agree on things, but it is totally another when you hold different opinions. There are so many conflicts. When you work with others, you always have different ideas and it is very confusing for the employees to decide whose orders to follow. So, I stop having partners ever since.

It is common for Chinese senior entrepreneurs to be the "brain" of the company, while employees serve as bodies to implement decisions. While this group did value competent employees and some even offered them with higher pay and equity, their leadership style still harkened back to an ancient Chinese emperor. There was little doubt that they were the king or queen of their organizations. They valued loyalty and the implementation of their plans, rather than building forums in which to discuss, debate, and share ownership. American senior entrepreneurs were more open in allowing partnership and discussion, and even sharing equity within their organizations. Yet, compared with the younger American group, they were clearer about their roles,

and tended to work with other experienced people in a clear division of labor, rather than savoring uncertainty.

### ***Economic Reform: A Transformative Policy***

China's economic reform and open-door policy provided a unique opportunity window that is an important historical factor to look at both chronologically and as a "happenstance story." Before economic reform, China was a traditional socialist country. No one had private property and most people were poor. A flexible policy to encourage entrepreneurship was first implemented in the city of Shenzhen.

All the senior entrepreneurial Chinese participants were affected by this policy. They moved to other cities or even countries and started looking for opportunities in those regions. All of them were born from humble backgrounds, which is common in China. Most (four of six) were from rural areas, and two from cities. Yet, they all remembered that they had to work early to support their families. They all were educated with the idea of serving others and the country. Half were educated beyond high school and half of them hold college or even higher degrees. They all experienced the opportunity window when:

Doing business and making money [was] so easy..., There was a shortage of products, so whatever we get, we can sell and sell them at a high price. Most people were making like 10 or 20 dollars a month, but I can make 100 or 200 by selling a TV. And even that, we can't provide enough products for them.

Yet, it was not just luck and being born at the right time that made them entrepreneurial; rather they were able to stay independent from popular mindsets shared by others.

It was the best of time to start the business, yet it was so hard for so many people to try it. People's mindset is still the old one which is to work for the factory and make the stable salary which also gains the respect from others. The majority of people were blinded by the popular views of jobs and the values of working for government or state-run factories are the most honorable jobs. But I don't think that it's the right one for me.

They were the minority in their generation who quit their stable jobs and started their own. Some of them did not like bureaucratic ways of doing things at the large organization where they used to work, while others were presented with opportunities or recognized other ways to provide value.

Although competition became fiercer, they accumulated experiences and self-efficacy which helped them to keep growing.

All of these respondents worked first for other people. They are good examples of the "happenstance story," as they were all "star" performers in their work, either being promoted to managerial roles or noticed by their boss to lead other projects. The male group tended to be more assertive—they all decided to quit and started their own companies or projects. One respondent explained,

I talked to the factory leader about opening stores for their members to provide products and I made a lot more money than the average salaries. Then I decided that I want to expand to cover more factories but the leaders at that time did not want to take the risks, so I was offering to provide payment for them regularly and take the risks on my own.

Another respondent noticed "many people at work [were] asking me for repairing their computers and it wasn't my job. So, I thought that I should open a store to provide this service and immediately those co-workers became my customers."

The female group tended to be influenced more by their environment. They tend to wait a bit longer before finally deciding to make their move. “My friends invited me to start the company and it is still my area and I trust them, so I said yes,” said one respondent. The only senior Chinese female entrepreneur who started her own company waited for many years as vice president for other companies until finally deciding to have her own. “I made the wish that I wanted to be my own boss while I was working for my last company. But it was because that I didn’t think that I was treated fairly. I had thought about for a while until I decided that I was ready.”

These participants demonstrated a very mature level of entrepreneurship through their organizations’ development as well as their own personal development. They all served as mentors for young entrepreneurs who now have become leaders in their fields. They are great examples who demonstrated that being able to recognize and seize the opportunities presented in their time also involved taking great personal risks to think independently.

## **Gender Patterns**

### ***Experiences of Sex Discrimination amongst Entrepreneurs***

According to the literature (Kanze et al., 2018), female entrepreneurs tend to be perceived as less confident, are less valued, and are less likely to receive investment than their male peers. Yet, those differences were not mentioned much by most participants, with the exception of the American female group.

The American female subgroup seems to have had more awareness of their identity as female entrepreneurs and other aspects of their identity, using terms such as “woman,” “person of color,” “young.” Yet, they did not mention certain experiences that may be relevant or even caused by these identities. One young female entrepreneur even suggested that being young has the advantage of having less responsibility, meaning one can take more risks as an entrepreneur.

One young Chinese entrepreneur, Ms. L, described an incident that points to what female entrepreneurs still face in the way of gender discrimination:

Because I have a very trusting relationship with this client. Other competitors cannot really compete with and get the deal away from us. However, some people didn't understand why. Some people were very suspicious about our relationship. One person asked me directly that “what is your relationship with Mr. XX.” It was clear that they assumed that there was something fishy and dirty happened between me and my client, which is why my clients would insist doing business with me. I was disgusted but I kept smiling and ignored it. People can assume horrible things on you because you are from humble background, you are young and pretty and they would make the assumptions that you became rich because of dirty exchanges. I can't decide what others may think but I can decide to ignore them and focus on what I want to do. I have my own integrity and I know that I won't compromise. For example, I never drink for business. I don't drink. I only create great products and values and if that's not enough for others, I won't do business with them then.

This example was mentioned as if it were a trivial event. Sitting there looking at this participant, however, I could feel that it still hurt, causing the participant concerns and burden. The remainder of the Chinese female group, whether younger or older, did not explicitly mention how being a woman may have affected their pursuits or experiences. Perhaps it was that they were still not as aware of the significant differences influenced by gender, or perhaps they just accepted it as fact to work with instead of fighting

against it or focusing on it. It is also possible that female participants did not want to mention the most negative and personal experiences because they did not want them reflected in my data.

### ***The Role of Family in Decision-Making***

The female group overall was more likely to mention their family as part of their support, or an important factor to be considered when they made important decisions. “After I gave birth to my son, I took a long break from work. I want to spend time to be with him and also think of my next step,” said one. Another reflected, “I’m a single mother and it is very important for me to also have a balance of life. I need to be able to spend time with my family and to enjoy vocations with them. So, I can’t take tons of risks. But now my boy grew up. I am ready to be freer to pursue what I want.”

While male participants did not spend as much time reflecting on how their personal life has influenced their entrepreneurial pursuits or decisions, they did talk about how being a father changed their perception of life. For example, one participant said,

I have two sons and I want to live a good example for them. I require both of them to exercise and develop physical strengths. So, when I have free time, I tend to exercise with them and encourage them to try different things.

Both gender groups have been shaped by their social experiences, but it is the female group which tends to take those gendered roles into their entrepreneurial decision-making, more so than their male counterparts. Other differences were not

salient as all of them considered making contributions as a key factor and they all valued relationships as part of their work.

## **Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

In talking and sharing, many people would love to share what they have learned maybe [over the] decades. They love to share. Not only they would want to share what they have learned, they even would want to share what they wish they ha[d] learned, since everyone wants to look good before others.

This is what one participant expressed about his experience learning from other experts. I think it is a proper way to highlight the value of lessons that come directly from these entrepreneurial participants.

Being entrepreneurial is a process, both in terms of the way in which they are living and also the way in which they reflect and share with others. When it came to what they perceived as important in retrospect, interviewees also had insightful lessons to share.

### ***Open to Learning While Allowing Yourself to be Human***

When Steve Jobs passed away, his speeches became a bible for many entrepreneurs. One of his most cited quotes was “stay hungry, stay foolish.” Our participants underscored the importance of continuing to learn and remaining open and humble, sentiments which are also echoed in this famous quote. These sayings were what helped them along the way and are still the habits they keep. Learning not only includes gaining knowledge and skills, but also learning one’s limits and overcoming ego.



Learning is key in those participants' own experiences. They emphasized this when explaining what matters in becoming entrepreneurial. Being open means constant thinking, analysis, and change. When absorbing information, one wants to be open and hear as many perspectives as possible given time constraints. Most of time, that information does not offer a direct map for one to follow. Rather, these perspectives are like different buffet items, and the entrepreneur has to think independently about what should be valued and what should be ignored, in order to make an informed decision.

It is especially important that one needs not only to learn from all sources, but also to listen to one's own ideas and experience, even when it may be against the majority. The challenge in managing these seemingly contradictory ideas is that it requires a way of thinking and accepting that things are as unpredictable and messy (as is life itself), while also being able to make sense and act quickly on that information.

This requires cognitive capability to analyze different kinds of information and dynamic situations in order to make the best possible decision. It also requires self-awareness and psychological strength to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, to manage subjective biases, face these stresses, and be motivated to stay strong and confident in the meantime. Said one respondent,

Because it's not a smooth road. It's a pretty bumpy road, and there were some points where I was unsure if it was going to succeed. The biggest fear I had was the bruised ego ...So, I mean you worry about jobs that, you know, the people that work for you, but you just don't want to let them down, so it really does become pretty internal.

When analytical power is not enough, being able to “feel” or recognize certain patterns or go with your guts can also be important. Learning in this sense is cognitive, social, emotional and also psychological. It is all encompassing and also selective.

Being able to learn and feel as a human may require one to recognize the role of luck and happenstance. One also has to recognize that the entrepreneurial journey takes time.

I think the one thing I believe that others don't like to acknowledge is true is the role of luck and uncertainty which I think that sometimes some of people we hold as more successful entrepreneurs and they are in the right place, the right time, they think that they set their direction. Yet the difference between been very successful and not been successful sometimes is just pure randomness of us, and so we over interpreted and say, oh that person is genius entrepreneur. Sometimes I think there, sometimes individual is mostly responsible but sometimes they are in the right place, right time and I think that's not something that I wish more people believe and internalize. I said because I think it make them little humble about their success and maybe less discouraged when things do not work.

This respondent articulates the complex interplay between individual drive and genius as well as other environment uncertain factors. Being able to recognize that a whole system is at work and there is no single formula will guide entrepreneurs' development. It is “timing, resources and people” and even luck that increase the likelihood of being a successful entrepreneur. This insight can also help overcome “ego” issues and relieve the burden of having to be perfect or always right as an entrepreneur.

### ***Starting and Following Your Vision Through is the Really Hard-Core Thing***

Not all entrepreneurs are super stars Jack Ma or Steve Jobs, who are excellent speakers and thoughtful leaders as well as great entrepreneurs. Still, all entrepreneurs

are the ones who actually rolled their sleeves up and got things done. The value of acting was a central theme in the interviews. Just do it or just try to start something brings so much all at once.

If you think about it, starting something really brings everything to the forefront. You have to think about the resources you need in terms of people, finances and whatever. You have to (figure out)... How do you get people together, how do you raise the money? How do you...? Everything comes, and it's just you and that's a lot of things to learn... So you have to be able to learn to gather your team, right, to teach people about networking ... So, in starting something, you will learn so much.

Theories about successful entrepreneurship might focus on important skills or characteristics, but instead of mastering them as one might follow a recipe book, what really matters is not so much what you know but what you do with what you know. Just the act of starting will help one to “get into the perfect storm” where knowledge, skills and analysis all become urgent and applicable. Rather than composing a marketing plan for a hypothetical company in a business class, one will lose real money if they cannot draw enough users and convert them by the end of the week. This sense of learning and doing can bring so much at once. At the same time, individuals need to be able to handle uncertainty, storms, and even failures.

When this study's respondents started their projects, everything seemed uncertain. Having a vision and perseverance were also needed to help navigate the challenges. Like one participant said,

You really have to have your mind set. When we talk about the vision, ... they call it pivoting today... You may be changing course a little bit, but you have to keep your eye on your ultimate vision. You can't be stupid about it. I mean, if it is very clear that it's not going well, you do have to know when it's time to

maybe re-vector or try something new. [That] takes a lot of perseverance... If I look at certain things in my life, you know when things were tough, but if you really buckle down and get things done, you develop a fair amount of self-confidence, and that helps.

The participant quoted above seems to point out that an entrepreneurial mindset itself requires setting one's mind on a certain entrepreneurial direction or vision and working toward it.

### ***Connecting with Others Counts***

Although respondents emphasize the importance of having a mission and being passionate in what one does, they also highlight the value of what one creates for others, with others. Deep down, what motivates and excites people may be different, but being able to connect with others' needs, other skills and resources, and creating values for others, are all shared across different industries.

One respondent told me that "you have to know some psychology or how to feel and understand people's needs, desires and values, to really offer something valuable for them." In this way, entrepreneurship is different from creative expression, which can be for others or just for the sake of art, or artists themselves. One has to work with others and serve a group of people beyond one's self. Being empathic and socially competent is important. One's business mission is often connected with these ideas, for example being able to create social impact, or leave something valuable for society. No man (or woman) is an island. Being able to tap into resources, networks and others' talents is another key requirement/ingredient for being a human and for being entrepreneurs.

When it comes to providing insight as to how to cultivate entrepreneurial individuals, entrepreneurs themselves point out factors from both micro and macro

systems, as well as from the larger process. Entrepreneurs also differ even as to whether entrepreneurship can be taught. Most people say that certain things can be taught while others are dependent on an individual's innate talent. "You can teach it, but you can't guarantee who has learned it." While many people believe that only some people are naturally entrepreneurial, others believe that the drive, ambitiousness, and passion are merely hard things to teach or learn. They can agree on some foundational elements: having a solid education or knowledge in business, certain problem-solving skills and people skills. But fundamentally, entrepreneurs all think that you have to do it to learn it.

### ***Supporting Entrepreneurial Individuals: The Role of Environment and Culture***

Firstly, entrepreneurs need to understand that being entrepreneurial can lead to a career path and is an option for life. Schools still tend to sort students into desirable pathways, focusing on encouraging them to pursue higher education, or encouraging students towards high-paid jobs. Recognizing students' diverse talents or exposing them to entrepreneurial activities as an option is still not part of the popular path.

I think people only know, most people only know what they know and um, and educational systems. And so, if they see someone with promise, they'll push them in the direction that they know? met. ...I think that [...] in universities, colleges, schools that their teachers probably should be trained to recognize characteristics of folks who have [a] more innovative or entrepreneurial mindset and nurture those individuals.

Having mentors, teachers and visiting speakers share their experience at schools can be a way to expose this option to students.

I think what I would say is, um, the first thing is exposure. Yeah. I mean bring in people who've done a lot of different things and have them tell their story. Yeah. That would be the first thing that comes to mind.

Not all students are destined to become entrepreneurs, but the skills embedded in being entrepreneurial should be introduced and also created through classroom cultures, projects and even the school environment. Have people from diverse cultures work together in an open space are great ways to encourage innovations, people skills and also set the stage for the entrepreneurial show. As one respondent said,

I'm also impressed, giving another example, they need to build a co-working space they went to an alumni community and they can crowdsource for funding in a matter of days, literally, it's a very entrepreneurial approach to taking what's really a public institution and get in private individuals to help support it. And I thought that they did a very nice job in integrating across different schools and universities. So, engineers, businesspeople, from architecture, all different schools were involved.

### *A Different Way to Frame Risks and Encourage Action*

All entrepreneurial individuals also dislike "failures," risks, and challenges. The reason why they still do what they do is that they have perhaps have a different perspective on "failure." One example of an attempt to cultivate this different mindset can be found in a dean who established an entrepreneurial education school at a university. She shared their blueprint and experience of cultivating people with an entrepreneurial mindset. She neatly expressed this ability to perceive and frame failures differently in the following passage:

P: Academically, you know you ... need to be free to be able to create things, um, but how you teach somebody, how you change attitudes, it's not just sitting in a classroom, taking notes right, talking about theory. You know they have to do it, there has to be a combination of both..., so that's why we try and make that program as experiential as possible. You will start something. If and when I talk to groups..., I said, you know, if you think about it, starting something, brings

everything to the forefront, you have to think about the resources you need in terms of people, finances and whatever. You have to... How do you get people together, how do you raise the money, how do you...? Everything comes, and it's just you and that's ... So that you have to be your team, right. To teach people about networking is the important ..., so, in starting something, you will learn so much.

R: So basically you have to throw yourself into the storm of entrepreneurial activities?

P: Exactly and you have to, you have to be in and you have to you know... Yes, you know. You started a company, you know what it's like, you know exactly what it's like. So that's, we are trying get them [to] understand starting something... We promise students, "when you come here, you will start something, and you're gonna fail, and that's fine cause college, the university should be a safe place to fail. We're gonna help you get back up." We're not interested in... students, you know, coming out of here and go into IPO like really no, I don't think so.

We're interested in the mindset, and here's why and here's why, because the external environment doesn't want people that are just follow the rules or, you know, I study finance that's all I know, I studied biology that's all I know, I studied chemistry that's all that I know. ...

The outside world is demanding what you're calling an entrepreneurial mindset. Higher education, I think has a responsibility to graduate students who understand that mindset and who have that mindset. So, then I get...this question, all the time... You can't teach someone to be an entrepreneur, you can't, they are born with it they just want to take risk...no, I don't believe that at all, I don't believe that at all, I think, all the so born entrepreneurs and in society beats us off it. they just know you can't do that, you can't... That's gonna fail, that sucks, stupid idea, is over, okay, all right. So, ah, everybody has different personalities, everybody has, you know, different attitudes [about] what you can teach people. You can teach people resilience, you can teach people that failure is not the opposite of success, it's the component of success... That it's okay to fail, that to tell students not in your classes but it's okay to fail because you learn from failure. And so, if they're hearing this in their classes, if we're showing them, you know that it's okay to fail... We have a class called "ready set fail." You have to be able to work in teams... You have to develop a curriculum that lets people experience being entrepreneurial. I want to graduate people that, so we've changed their outlook on life to make them more innovative in their life, their career, their profession, that's, that's what we strive for.

It was an amazing example to see how this school had a “people-focused,” rather than knowledge or skill-focused way to train students to accept or even celebrate failures. They should be provided lessons and experience in cultivating people’s attitudes toward failure, “giving” them storms, having real projects to learn and pick up the learning pieces along the way.

Along a similar line, another participant described how people can learn character by using life as an extended classroom. When challenges come, people need to be “okay with it.” Put in another way, to have an internal, stable working model is the key to managing their well-being as well as their business, which both require a different perspective and perception of failures. We need to let people solve problems and experience the ride so they can handle more.

## **Chapter Summery**

This chapter discussed patterns found while comparing different groups amongst the study participants. Chinese entrepreneurial individuals tended to point to external factors as key drivers contributing both the motivation to start and continue their organizations, while American participants tended to lay more weight on their own internal drivers. Yet, all want to create value and impact for society. Younger respondents tend to have a more democratic and partnership-oriented approach within their organization, while the senior Chinese group tended to have more control and hierarchy-based orientation. Older Americans tended to focus more on teamwork and partnership than their Chinese counterparts, but they also had clear roles and



boundaries by comparison with the younger group. With respect to gender, the study demonstrated the existence of discrimination and particular challenges faced by women. There were also differences in terms of their decision-making process, particularly with respect to the role family played in their professional work. Yet there were always individual exceptions.

Respondents recommended that aspiring entrepreneurs remain open to learning, to regard oneself as a human with weaknesses for whom life's struggles play a crucial role. Respondents also recommended starting and following through on the important things, as well as connecting with others to serve, lead and create values for others. Lastly, when it came to cultivating entrepreneurial individuals, participants highlighted the importance of having the right culture and space for diversity and cooperation, while changing the way that people perceived failures also mattered.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion, Implications and Limits**

### **Chapter Overview**

In the recent wave of attention on entrepreneurship, most narratives on the subject are centered upon “superhero entrepreneurs,” with their stories of entrepreneurism seemly entangled with the ups and downs of business. The current research has attempted to expand the idea of being entrepreneurial into a broader notion, one that conceptualizes it as a way of life, not defined by any one field, including business. Forgoing the select few who made it to the top, this research tries to focus on typical entrepreneurial individuals from both China and the U.S., who represent different age groups, sexes and industries. Through their own narratives of being and becoming entrepreneurial, I covered important patterns, uncovering the meaning and processes behind their attitudes and behaviors. Through a comparison of different groups, I also identified differences and commonalities in being entrepreneurial in different contexts. Learning directly from these details, the crucial characteristics of being entrepreneurial and how to cultivate others in becoming entrepreneurial were also discussed.

An immersion into the self-narratives of these entrepreneurial individuals is a journey into the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people as well as a mirror to reflect different contexts, times, and different groups in China and the U.S. In this study I have stayed as close to their actual discussions as possible, trying to capture the true meaning

of their words. After a deep reading of the data and the sharing of their voices and stories, this concluding chapter will present the key implications of the data. Naturally, these implications are not intended to provide a definitive guidebook for others to follow, but rather, additional and diverse voices in the conceptualization of being and becoming entrepreneurial. I also want to highlight some key implications that can shed light on practices in and research on the development of entrepreneurial individuals. Lastly, this chapter will include a discussion of the limitations of this study and possible directions for future research. The chapter will end with a call to embrace a broadened conception of being entrepreneurial in different contexts and an encouragement to develop the concept of an entrepreneurial mindset in educational contexts.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

### ***It is the mindset, not the occupation nor the business***

Not everyone will or should be an entrepreneur, just as there is no profession that should be taken up by everyone. Society thrives on a foundation of diverse individuals who can develop and contribute a number of unique talents and passions. At the same time, we live in an increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world, where the mindset and behaviors of being entrepreneurial should be considered a core competence.

As we learned from the participants of this study, being entrepreneurial includes a particularly optimistic perception and sense-making of failures, challenges and risks; constant learning, analysis and thinking to find optimal decisions and actions towards

environments, industries, other stakeholders and themselves; and an integration of different elements to find better solutions and to disrupt the conventional ways of solving issues. At the core of these elements, we can see the entrepreneurial mindset emerge. This mindset is what we can share and learn from these participants. It transcends the bounds of different fields and contexts.

This study focuses on entrepreneurial individuals who have already started and stayed with their organization for over a year. This restriction is not to suggest that being entrepreneurial is a binary concept: that one is either entrepreneurial or not entrepreneurial. Similarly, as with the entrepreneurial mindsets that these participants have developed and shared, this study also does not suggest that one either has or does not have this mindset. As we observed in the data, many people were not originally entrepreneurial. Rather, they were approached by certain people and driven by other factors when they made the step towards being entrepreneurial. One had worked in a large university as faculty for decades until she was ready to quit and work in a start-up full-time. Consequently, being entrepreneurial is a spectrum. We can all become more entrepreneurial over time or in certain contexts.

Based on these different features of being entrepreneurial, we have already found variability across different participants. Some were more proactive in approaching opportunities. Some were more impact-driven. Some were more focused on innovation. This variability suggests that there are opportunities to explore the different types of entrepreneurial mindsets in future research. Although this concept is

often defined as a singular idea, this concept should include many different types of mindsets, based on the different degrees of certain features and different combinations of certain traits. This study has only focused on its essential characteristics, without differentiating them; however, this choice does not imply that the entrepreneurial mindset only has one kind.

This study also asked participants to identify opposing or different mindsets that they found contrasted with the entrepreneurial mindset. The most common responses were: 1) the employee mindset, which defined those who work as much as one is supposed to work based on the job description and who do not want to work more and beyond their current position or payment; 2) the follower mindset, in which one can do well if instructed and trained but who do not want to change ways of doing things or show leadership and initiative; and 3) the “lazy” or “easy” mindset, which designates one who tended to seek shortcuts and easy ways to finish their work and who do not want to expend effort. Obviously, there are other mindsets in which people differ in key characteristics such as those who are extremely risk-averse, or who have a certain “can’t” attitude and perception of challenges. Seen in this way, the entrepreneurial mindset represents a certain way to perceive and make decisions and it is one of many mindsets that people can employ in their personal environment, especially when it comes to work.

*Demystifying the entrepreneurial mindset:*

*EM As a way of thinking that can benefit people living in a VOCA ( Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) context*

Although a myriad of books have been published on the subject, the entrepreneurial individuals that are typically spotlighted and remembered are rare business tycoons. This narrow focus can foster a fear of the concept and repel people from embracing this mindset as a personal skill for surviving and thriving in a VOCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) context.

Some of the myths have already been discussed in this study. For example, individuals can differ in terms of their entrepreneurial tendencies with some being entrepreneurial geniuses. Similar to IQ, not all of us are born with a highly entrepreneurial nature. Nevertheless, we can all improve and reach a degree where it can benefit us based on our environment, decisions, and nature tendencies.

Another common myth is that the entrepreneurial mindset or being entrepreneurial can be learned. Almost every participant believed that an entrepreneurial mindset could be learned; however, they also believed a person needed a desire to learn just as with any other skill in life and work. The participants have contributed ideas for improving one's level of and skill in entrepreneurship. They all came to the notion that one had to do it to learn it. Similar to any other skill, it not only required head knowledge, but also actual practice to learn and improve.

Another stereotype we wanted to dispel was the misrepresented image of successful “superhero” entrepreneurs. In society we are presented with many rosy stories of the lives of many self-made entrepreneurs. Often they are portrayed as extremely disciplined, determined, knowledgeable, hard-working, risk-taking, without fear, and with a special ability to solve any problem, similar to a superman or superwoman. This characterization is not reality. Quite the opposite, we found that all our participants talked a great deal about their struggles, fears and dark moments. The important insight is that they have certain ways to “maintain” or to not give up in those moments. Even when they must “shut down their business,” they do not see these developments as failures and are willing to try again in other ways. These are techniques for knowing and accepting the process, and understanding that life can be unpredictable and messy. There is no magic recipe to tell one “if you do this, this, and that, then you will be successful.” Even successful entrepreneurs may have been unsure about their new ventures. Handling failure and disappointment, and confronting conundrums are part of daily life. Consequently, accepting and viewing challenges as an opportunity for improvement is what keeps them in the arena. These individuals tend to set their minds on determining appropriate expectations, handling uncertain challenges, understanding one’s limits, allowing for “failures,” and trying their best to learn. All of these steps constitute an entrepreneurial mindset and a stable internal working system, which matters a great deal in managing their own well-being as well as that of their organizations.

The last important key point is that being entrepreneurial or becoming more entrepreneurial takes time. Not only should we be kinder to ourselves in accepting our own limitations, we also need to be more patient in our journeys. As one of the participants put it:

It takes a lot of time, actual time. I have this small group of entrepreneurs I've been working with for over a few years, and they work with me now on an independent study project. They will be with me three times a week so can we work on that adventure, and it's really only now that I can go back to the failures or obstacles they encountered two years ago and say, 'Hey, do you remember, you know..., they didn't return your calls or emails two years ago. That seemed like a failure, but it was actually an opportunity for you to learn how to persuade others. We need to work with them to figure out how to improve and how to prevent it for the next time.

We do not become entrepreneurial overnight. After all, there is rare superhero-transforming magic in life. Most of time it is small moments and experiences and subtle habits and practices that lead to extraordinary changes over time.

### ***It Takes a Village to Raise an Entrepreneurial Child***

As we discussed in the becoming entrepreneurial section, it takes a system of dynamic factors that interact with the characteristics of an individual to cultivate EM. We have learned from participants that having supportive and entrepreneurial families, the transmission of certain values such as a strong work-ethic, and positively impacting the lives of others are very significant. Schools also can play a role in exposing individuals to resources and career paths that are related to entrepreneurial pursuits.

More importantly, one can have different structures and testing systems that encourage an entrepreneurial mindset as an important learning outcome. There was some criticism regarding the current school systems as it may not fit for self-directed



and disruptive entrepreneurial students. Working experiences are important to inform and prepare people to become more entrepreneurial; however, this experience can also differ based on the natural personality and drive of the individual. Earlier entrepreneurial experiences speak volumes in the reflections of the participants. Actions are also another way to embark on different journeys to discover one's path or skills, including being entrepreneurial. Becoming entrepreneurial also reflects the happenstance theory (Krumboltz, 2011). It is both the individual and certain environmental factors, or even luck, which fosters small steps towards becoming more entrepreneurial.

Related to the development of entrepreneurial individuals, the creation and development of their organization is also a product of human effort and environmental factors. "Luck", context, culture, specific industries, timing, and numerous other influences, as well as the individual entrepreneur and his or her team, all play a role in the fate of their organizations. Recognition of the power of "luck" is a surprising finding from the data. Luck is commonly perceived as an "excuse" or even the opposite of being entrepreneurial. Nevertheless, luck and other environmental factors do play a huge role in the success and development of organizations. The network theory (Barabási, 2016) seems to provide an explanation for understanding the fact that success does seem to favor people who are at the center of networks. There is also a culminating effect for being the "first." They present different strategies to improve one's luck to be successful. This finding again confirms the idea that entrepreneurs and their success is

not totally “self-made.” Human agency clearly has a large role to play. However, one power humans have is the ability to recognize opportunity, improving “luck,” moving to the center of resources, and identifying opportunities in their environment to really ride the waves.

A remark made at the end of one of the interviews noted that an understanding and recognition of the role of luck can help unburden entrepreneurs, since sometimes success really is not under their control. This is a very refreshing view and recommendation that entrepreneurs need to be as “objective” as possible toward themselves in both their ups and downs. They need to realize their weaknesses and overcome their ego to create value for others, through working with other co-workers and teams, inside and outside their organizations. They also should not be so hard on themselves so that they can stay calm and better manage stress. Challenges for many entrepreneurs sometimes come not from the outside, but the inside. Some entrepreneurs have killed themselves or died prematurely.

We hope that this current research presents a more realistic picture of being entrepreneurial and share the recommendations and insights that we gathered from entrepreneurial individuals. With a hope that we can manage the downsides of being entrepreneurial through an understanding of the factors that influence this mindset as well as the realistic and complex situation of their lifestyle. This approach will allow us to cultivate more entrepreneurial individuals and also improve their well-being by

removing some pernicious myths about them and through managing the risks that this mindset may bring.

### *Developing EM as a way to Achieve Personal Growth and Fulfillment*

I have argued that developing an entrepreneurial mindset is important for responding to a VUCA world. In this context, being agile and able to learn, analyze, and act in response to one's environment while also managing self-growth is crucial. Human development as a field has long had an interest in preparing individuals to meet the requirements of their contexts. Along the same lines, changing contexts call for a different set of skills and mindsets, among which we suggest that EM should be at the core. It is literacy in this changing and uncertain context and as a mindset that can benefit everyone for their personal development, regardless of their profession.

Beyond the idea of responding to the requirements of the environment, I will go further to suggest that developing an entrepreneurial mindset can even help to provide another method for achieving personal growth and fulfillment. When we view EM as a way of perceiving and processing life, it offers a space for lifelong learning and growth.

First of all, it suggests important lessons on how to process challenges, risks and failures. Not only entrepreneurs encounter such struggles. We all face dark times and downturns in life. Being able to process these periods as ways to learn and improve is a core value that can add to the lives of everyone. This view epitomizes the Buddhist notion that life is suffering and we are cultivating an inner higher self in the process. This

belief and mindset is not limited to any one religion, but it is essential, especially in our context where stress and life challenges are common.

Secondly, this mindset encourages a discovery and exploration of different sides of oneself. One can work in an organization while also practicing an art and doing other side projects to explore and express one's other talents. Being entrepreneurial is not really about taking huge risks, such as quitting one's job or taking on loans to start a business. Rather, it is a way of taking certain calculated risks, while trying different things to meet one's own unfulfilled potential or to cultivate one's talents to create value for others. Many of our participants started by exploring subjects or ideas as side projects, later figuring out a way to make a profit on their existing hobbies. Most of them did not just quit their jobs, but rather first experimented and collected data. Once they were certain of great potential or were somehow pulled towards a particular direction, they decided to go further.

Nevertheless, most people need to take small steps and experiment. Some people may never quit their daytime professions; however, they can manage to keep working on their own "secret pleasure" on the side. Consequently, developing this mindset can free people from the pressure of having to take on massive risks or being extremely confident from day one. It allows people to do whatever they feel is comfortable and manageable while also challenging people to take action to pursue and complete an endeavor. It also encourages them to get out of their comfort zone and to be more entrepreneurial than their previous selves.

Lastly, I found a common drive and set of values shared by all the participants. In these shared values, making an impact and creating value for others and society was an important outcome and goal of being entrepreneurial. Theories on self-determination suggest that we need autonomy, mastery and meaning to be fully motivated and thriving (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset can create possibilities for achieving these three core elements over time. It allows one to do something they enjoy, and which they often are good at. Even further, being entrepreneurial always has a component of creating value for people beyond just yourself. Thus, it can infuse meaning and a great sense of purpose in individuals as well as encourage contributions to the community at large.

In conclusion, developing an entrepreneurial mindset can break through certain mental and cognitive limits. These limits include needing to work to make a living or taking on great risks to do something one truly loves. EM embraces the conflicts, paradoxes and challenges of life. People who become entrepreneurial can take on the right number of challenges, but also take action to achieve their potential over time. We can all become more entrepreneurial and use this mindset to live happier and more authentically, and to create meaning and impact for ourselves and others.

### **Research Limits**

This study is potentially limited by several factors. This is a qualitative work and I have adopted a purposeful sample to cover a diverse group. Consequently, its results cannot be used to generalize to broader population of entrepreneurial individuals in

both countries. However, these results are insights that can be read within their own contexts to understand the narratives of the study's participants. The insights can also serve as a source of inspiration for both research and practice.

Similarly, the difference and commonalities between and among different groups also should not be generalized. These are the patterns emerging from this work and additional studies are needed to test whether these results can be confirmed by a broader quantitative study.

Additionally, it is reasonable to argue that the participants in this study were the ones open to sharing, by the virtue of their willingness to accept the interviews. We approached them through professional social media networks and peer recommendations and required their approval before proceeding with our interviews. Consequently, the study has some self-selection bias. There was one individual who agreed and participated in an interview, but who was not willing to clear this interview for this research because he felt that "he is not successful and does not have many valuable things to add." Based on his experience, he has dared and achieved much, but was also going through a dark period during the time of the interview. This conversation also confirmed the thought that not all entrepreneurial individuals at different stages are willing to share their experiences. This sample may represent the group who are on the bright side of their organization's journey. They may be the optimists and open ones relative to the whole entrepreneurial population.

Furthermore, this study is largely based on interviews and the self-narratives of the participants. This method allows us to learn directly from the participants' own perspectives and the meaning-making of their own experiences. It does not suggest that their narratives are an objective reflection of reality. Rather, we are learning and exploring the meaning of and lessons from their narratives. It may be that they have a distorted view on reality, which is a core element that allows them to stay calm and function well in uncertain contexts. However, there is no evidence or attempt from this research to explore the relation between their narratives and the perspectives of others, nor any way to guarantee that the stories that they shared were entirely truthful. This approach may be a limit as well as a value of this research, depending on the perspective. Based on the research questions proposed in this research, I believe that self-narratives are an important and sufficient resource for this work.

Finally, China and America are extremely diverse internally and we cannot and should not believe that these participants can speak for all of the experiences in their countries and cultures. Specifically, there are regional differences, sub-cultures and also racial differences. We have included an African American female, a Latino and Asian Americans in our sample. This is not to say that it will represent their entire cultures, however it does give us a taste of the most salient differences between other factors such as collectivist and individualistic cultures, age groups and sexes.

## **Future Direction**

As discussed in the section on the limits of the current research, there are some directions proposed for future research to continue the exploration of the entrepreneurial mindset.

Although the development of other skills and competencies have been acknowledged as important goals for educational institutions, families and countries, the nature of and the factors that influence the development of the entrepreneurial mindset remain largely unexplored, especially when this mindset is understood in a broader sense. Beyond schools that offer entrepreneurship education, most educational institutions have not felt a need to include this mindset as a core component in their curriculum and culture. This research has provided a new conceptualization of EM as a dynamic mindset that can be beneficial for anyone who faces an uncertain and complex context. It is not limited to business schools, nor does it require starting a real organization. This research offers the space and methods for understanding the development of EM as another core educational outcome. It provides a data-based framework and foundation for understanding the core competencies that we can draw from entrepreneurial individuals while also applying them to a broader context. This topic will provide many future opportunities to further the knowledge of EM and the development of EM.

Based on the core themes emerging from the data, future work can develop measurements based on core factors to capture and quantify the entrepreneurial



mindset. Additionally, as I have discussed, the entrepreneurial mindset includes different types of mindsets. It will be beneficial if future research can identify the different varieties of EM as well as quantify them to inform the cultivation of EM. Beyond the essential qualities of EM, we can also try to develop longitudinal studies to follow certain groups of people over time to understand developmental patterns and the interplay of different factors with individual characteristics in the development of the entrepreneurial and other mindsets. It will be very interesting to explore what kind of experiences, Behaviors, or factors can influence or even predict the development of EM. Additionally, whether there are certain stages or different manifestations of EM in different stages of life and whether we can develop ways to measure different stages or levels of being entrepreneurial is another direction to explore.

Another area for future study is to compare the differences between different sub-groups of entrepreneurial individuals to understand and capture their unique strengths and limitations. Such work might yield strategies to support certain disadvantaged entrepreneurial groups such as women. Other sub-cultures and groups also need more attention, such as those with different incomes or racial backgrounds.

Lastly, this study is centered upon the self-narratives of entrepreneurial individuals. There are other methods for study and research on this topic, such as other forms of narrative and observational study, which can add additional voices and perspectives to this work.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the key implications of this research. I argued that the entrepreneurial way of thinking and doing, the particular mindset, rather than a certain profession or field, is what should be understood and applied in a broader context. In our day and age, this mindset is increasingly useful and important in helping people of different fields and contexts survive and thrive. By presenting a realistic picture of being entrepreneurial and the process of developing this way of life, I aim to embrace a more “tolerant” approach for encouraging people to be more entrepreneurial in a way that fits them. The factors that influence EM are part of a complex system and the success of an organization is not totally up to the individual. Recognizing this system perspective can create a healthy and sustainable model of being entrepreneurial over time. Lastly, this research argues that EM can help everyone achieve their potential and create meaning and value for the larger community. It can be a learning goal and an important one to encourage in education, parenting, and the working space to support the flourishing of human talents and potentials.

Last but not the least, this chapter ended with a discussion of identifying certain limits of this research and providing several recommendations and directions for future work. I would love to end the paper with a saying from a participant “it is the people and it always should be the people” which should be our outcome and intent when adding value. I hope this research can encourage more individuals to be the creators of themselves, to add more value by being entrepreneurial, and figuring out new ways of

doing things better. This will add another perspective for the promotion of being entrepreneurial as a way of developing oneself and a better world.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A –IRB NOTICE OF EXEMPTION



DATE: 01-Apr-2020  
TO: Michael J Nakkula  
CC:

**Institutional Review Board**  
3800 Spruce St., First Floor Suite 151  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Phone: 215-573-2540  
(Federalwide Assurance #00004028)

RE:  
IRB PROTOCOL#: 832936  
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Development of Entrepreneurial Mindsets (EM) in China and America: An  
Exploratory Work on the Developmental Perspective of the EM

SPONSOR: NO SPONSOR NUMBER  
REVIEW BOARD: IRB #8

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#### IRB SUBMISSION: NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

Dear Dr. Nakkula,

The above referenced protocol was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board on 31-Mar-2020. It has been determined that the proposal meets eligibility criteria for IRB review exemption authorized by 45 CFR 46.104, category #2.

## **APPENDIX B Interview Protocol in English and Chinese**

### **Regarding their Entrepreneurial experiences and understandings:**

Can you please briefly share your entrepreneurial experience?

When and under what circumstances, did you have the idea of starting your organization/project?

What is your understanding or construction of entrepreneurship? What kind of skills and qualities are required to be one?

What may an entrepreneur look like to you?

What do you think of entrepreneurial mindset/thinking?

Are there any different types of entrepreneurs? If so, what are they and what kind of entrepreneur do you think you are?

What kind of considerations do you have when choosing a team? Any stories, struggles and changed have you experienced regarding the team?

How did the capital and team work in your experience?

Do you tend to work with people who are different or similar to yourself?

How did you attract the founding team?

Are there any other people who have had a great influence on you and your entrepreneurial experience?

Who will you turn to/what would you tend to do when you have challenges?

What other experiences did you have which may have affected your entrepreneurial pursuits?

Did you have any big struggles in the process? How did you or what helped you to overcome it?

Have you ever thought about quitting? Why or why not?

What stage is your organization now? What will be next?

### About entrepreneurs

What were you like as a child or an adolescent? Did you notice anything set you apart from the rest of your peers? Or was there something different between you and your peers? Did you notice whether you tend to perceive and analyze things differently?

Were there other kids who were also engaged with entrepreneurial activities?

Did you notice any changes in you happened when you grow up? How have you changed? How have you remained the same over the years? What may contribute to it?

When encounter a difficult challenge, what did you tend to do?

When you grow up, who are the people who have a great impact on you? How did they affect you? Are there other factors that affect you in certain ways? How did they affect you? In what ways?

When were you becoming interested in being an entrepreneur.

How did plan or envision your life when you were younger? Did you do anything to put this into action?

What kind of early entrepreneurial activities have you done? Can you talk more about it? How did this activity help you in terms of who you are and what you would do after it?

“Did this activity has any effects on you// after you did it? ”

What kind of skills or characters that you have which helped you as an entrepreneur? What qualities and characteristics are important to entrepreneurs in your mind now? Are those teachable?

As an entrepreneur, how did you get to this stage? what kind of personal growth or changes have you experienced?

Do you think entrepreneurship can be taught? Can you learn it from the school?

If you were to teach your own children or others to start a business, what would you do? Are there any ways you think will help a person to form such a way of thinking and acting like entrepreneurs?

What what is your big goal or vision for business and yourself? What would you do to get there?

Finally, what other ideas do you want to share and add?

## 创业经历和理解：

创业或者创业者思维，在你看来是什么？

可以先分享一下您的创业经历么？

什么时候和什么境遇下，萌发的创业的想法？

您心目中的创业是什么呀的经历？要求什么样的能力和素质？

创业者是什么样子的？

您认为的创业思维是什么？

您觉得自己是什么样的创业者？

您在挑选团队的时候，有什么样的考量？遇到什么纠结和难题么？

在资金和团队方面是怎么开始运作的？

您倾向于和与自己不同还是类似的人一起共事？怎么吸引到最初的团队的？

在您的创业过程中,有哪些对您影响很大的人么？

有哪些经历对您的创业和思维有所影响？

在创业过程中有哪些特别难的经历？您是什么挺过来的？

## 关于创业者

您童年时期或者青少年时期是什么样子？和其他同龄人有不同的地方或者比较特别的地方么？

您平时的思维方式、看待问题的方式有什么和其他人不同的地方么？

您读书时期和后边创业之后又是什么样的？发生了变化了么？有哪些东西一直保留下来了？



在成长过程中，有哪些对您影响重大的人？他们是怎样影响您的？还有其他外部环境影响到您么？怎么影响的？

您自己是如何规划或者实践自己的成长的？

在您印象当中，自己很早之前做过哪些和创业相关的活动？可以具体聊一下么？

您觉得自己的创业优势在哪里？什么品质和特点对创业者非常重要

作为一个创业者，您是如何走到今天这一阶段，您个人的成长又经历了什么？

您觉得创业可以教么？可以从学校学会么？

如果让您来教授自己的孩子或者其他人创业，您会怎么指导？什么样的方式会真正帮助形成这样的思维和行为方式？

如果您的创业项目一直顺利发展，你对企业和个人最大的目标或者愿景是什么？

最后还有什么其他想法想分享和补充么？

## APPENDIX C-Verbal Consent Form



**University of Pennsylvania**

Dr. Michael Nakkula; Mengjiao (Kari) Guo

Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Development

Graduate School of Education

[mengjiao@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:mengjiao@sas.upenn.edu)

### **Verbal Consent Form for Participation in Research**

**Thank you so much for your interest to participate in this research.** This study aims to understand the experience of being and becoming entrepreneurial by individuals who are from China and the States. There are no known risks in this study. Also, you can choose whether or not you would like to participate voluntarily and you can chose to stop participating at any time.

There is no charge nor compensation for this study. If you are interested, the general research findings can be shared without any identifiable information.

If you agree to participate voluntarily, you will have a conversation with me, Mengjiao Guo, for approximately one hour. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed, but your identity will remain confidential. No names or organizational identities will be included in the reporting. I will replace all actual names and organizational entities with pseudonyms and ID numbers. All data will be stored in a hard drive to which only I will have access. The data will not be stored or distributed for future research studies. The recordings, data and transcriptions will be destroyed and erased after five years. Is there any question you would like to ask or is there anything that is unclear for you?

If you are clear with the information, can I please get your verbal consent for participating in this work?



宾夕法尼亚大学

Michael Nakkula 博士； Mengjiao Guo

人类发展的跨学科研究

教育研究生院

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### 参与研究口头同意书

非常感谢您对本研究的兴趣。本研究旨在了解来自中国和美国的个人在创业和成为企业家方面的经验。在这项研究中没有已知的风险。此外，您可以选择是否自愿参与，也可以选择随时停止参与。

这项研究不收费也不赔偿。如果你感兴趣，一般的研究结果可以分享，没有任何可识别的信息。如果你同意自愿参加，你将与我，郭梦娇，进行大约一小时的谈话。您的回复将被记录和转录，但您的身份将保持保密。报告中将不包括姓名或组织身份。我将用假名和身份证号码替换所有实际姓名和组织实体。所有数据都将存储在只有我才能访问的硬盘中。

这些数据将不会被存储或分发用于未来的研究研究。录音、数据和文字记录将在五年后销毁和删除。

你有什么问题想问，或者有什么不清楚的地方吗？

如果你对这些信息很清楚，我能得到你的口头同意参加这项工作吗？

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