

**CULTURAL AND GENDER EXPERIENCES, ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY AND
BUSINESS ENDEAVOURS OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS**

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ABSTRACT

Existing studies on the relationship between culture, gender and entrepreneurial identity of immigrant entrepreneurs have tended to focus exclusively on women. I set out to understand how Chinese immigrant men and women entrepreneurs construct their entrepreneurial identities based on cultural and gendered experiences. I asked: *How do Chinese immigrant men and women entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial identities based on their cultural and gender experiences? How are these experiences related to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of entrepreneurial success?* Through a qualitative study of 20 in-depth interviews with 10 men and 10 women, I explored similarities and differences within and between the two groups. The findings show that both men and women narrated entrepreneurial identities as coming from nothing, reflecting the notion of “zero mindset” proposed in the literature. My study contributes by connecting coming-from-nothing to entrepreneurial endeavours and perceptions of success. I also show that there is a spectrum of cultural identities ranging from identifying strongly as Chinese to identifying as Chinese Canadian, and that positioning on this spectrum can influence business endeavours. The study also contributes by presenting a direct comparison between men and women immigrant entrepreneurs from the same home and host countries. It does so by showing that: women associated with the idea of “learning entrepreneurship”, whereas men associated with the concept of innately “being entrepreneur”; women tended to prioritize the gender role of mother and wife over the entrepreneurial role and to define success as stability in the business and balance between work and family, more so than men did.

INTRODUCTION

Decreased barriers to migration worldwide and sociopolitical incentives to migrate have built large immigrant communities in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Xiang, 2016). Research on immigrants after arriving in their new host countries shows a higher propensity to pursue self-employment than their native counterparts, suggesting their unique situations may influence the tendency to select entrepreneurship as a career (Mueller & Thomas, 2000). In tandem with global migration patterns, movement of Chinese citizens to various countries around the world has been steadily increasing since the official ‘opening up’ of mainland China in 1978. This, coupled with migrants’ increased likelihood to become entrepreneurs, suggests that Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs may be a key sub-population for entrepreneurship research.

Existing research on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurship has focused on subjects such as firm characteristics, individual integration, business performance, male/female- or race-based discrimination, and transnational enterprise (Chen et al., 2015; Chiang et al., 2013; Saxenian, 2005; Wong & Ng, 1998; Zhou & Liu, 2016). Much less research has been conducted on salient elements of identity that distinguish Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs (Zhang & Chun, 2016). However, identity, and in particular entrepreneurial identity, of these individuals is a key element that drives and is driven by how they choose to act as entrepreneurs (Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Entrepreneurial identity represents how an individual may “see and talk of themselves as entrepreneurs”, which influences entrepreneurial actions and choices (Down & Reveley, 2004, p.234; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Watson, 2009). Recent literature has shown that entrepreneurial

identities are related to specific entrepreneurial business choices and outcomes (Alsos et al., 2016; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to understand how experiences of culture and gender are related to constructions of the entrepreneurial identity, as well as the relationship between this constructed identity and entrepreneurial endeavours. The elements of culture and gender were chosen specifically for two reasons. First, the culture of the immigrant's home country plays a significant role in their actions in their host country (Light, 1972). Second, both immigrant and majority population entrepreneurship research have examined the relationship between identity, culture, and gender, but such studies have not directly compared men and women within the same study (e.g. Essers & Benschop, 2007; Marlow, Greene & Coad, 2018).

The first element, culture, generally sets immigrants apart from native-born individuals residing in a country. Immigrants' prior experiences in their home countries differentiate them from citizens of the host country and influence their actions after they relocate to the host country (Spence, Orser & Riding, 2011). Some research has showed that these differences may not be perceived positively by members of the mainstream population, creating a situation of "Othering", where immigrants are subjected to exclusion or discrimination based on their country of origin (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2019). However, studies have also explored how immigrant entrepreneurs may leverage their cultural know-how to increase access to resources through their ethnic social networks, or even draw in increased amounts of native clients, by distinguishing themselves from other entrepreneurs in their area (Azmat, 2013; Collins & Low, 2010; Tong, 2019; Lidola, 2014).

The second element, gender, has been receiving increased attention, with several studies focusing exclusively on the subject of immigrant women entrepreneurs (Chreim et al., 2018;

Essers & Benschop, 2007; Lidola, 2014; Verduijn & Essers, 2013). These studies have investigated various topics such as sexism and/or discrimination experienced by immigrant women entrepreneurs, and factors motivating immigrant women to pursue entrepreneurship (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Chreim et al., 2018; González-González et al., 2011).

Research has addressed women's gender identity constructions through experiences relating to their culture, family and community (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Essers, Doorewaard & Benschop, 2013). However, most studies on gendered immigrant entrepreneurship tend to focus exclusively on women as the unit of analysis, comparing and contrasting them to the white male entrepreneurial "stereotype". In contrast, this study compares enterprising men and women of the same home and host countries, seeking to better understand similarities and differences between them. Hence, I ask the following research questions: *How do Chinese immigrant men and women entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial identities based on their cultural and gender experiences? How are these experiences related to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of entrepreneurial success?*

To answer these research questions, I conducted a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with Chinese immigrant men and women entrepreneurs in a large city in Eastern Canada. I examine how the entrepreneurial identity is constructed based on cultural and gender experiences as recounted by participants, and link these experiences to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of success. The remainder of this document is structured as follows. The next section offers a brief review of literature pertinent to my research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the methods used. The findings then provide an analysis of the entrepreneurial identity and how it interacts with cultural and gender experiences, and how these are related to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of success. The discussion links the findings to extant literature and

addresses the contributions of the study. The study concludes with the limitation and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I define immigrant entrepreneurship and briefly outline theories relevant to this topic, and then highlight specific research that has been conducted on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. Next, I discuss how the notion of entrepreneurial identity has been conceptualized and studied and address how identity is related to business endeavours and views of success in the general entrepreneurship literature. I will then consider cultural and gender experiences and how these are taken up in constructions of entrepreneurial identity.

Immigrant Entrepreneurship

The definition of an entrepreneur is subject to debate in the literature. Some scholars focus on the act of entrepreneurship, describing enterprise as the discovery and exploitation of activities, while others define it as a profit-seeking endeavor (González-González et al., 2011; Short et al., 2010). Other researchers focus instead on the characteristics of individuals running the enterprise that may contribute to success or failure of their respective businesses (Venkataraman, 1997). In this study, we adopt a more general definition of an entrepreneur proposed by Light (1972) who suggests that an entrepreneur is any individual who owns a business, regardless of the business size.

This project focuses on *immigrant entrepreneurs* – a term used in the literature to include immigrants who start businesses in their country of settlement, which is different from their country of birth (Kloosterman & Rath, 2003). However, the definition of an *immigrant* is also contested in the literature, though this term can be broadly used to describe non-majority individuals residing in a country where they were not born (Collins & Low, 2010).

Research has shown that immigrants are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship than their native counterparts, making them an interesting subject to pursue in the field of entrepreneurship research (Mueller & Thomas, 2000). Various theoretical perspectives have been employed to study immigrant entrepreneurs. Below is a table summarizing several viewpoints as discussed in articles by Nazareno, You & Zhou (2018), and later built upon further by You & Zhou (2018).

Table 1: Theories applied in the study of immigrant entrepreneurs

Cultural Theory (Group Characteristics)	Waldinger, 1986 Light, 1972	Unique characteristics of immigrants due to their homeland culture enable their success in their new host country. The focus is cultural predispositions.
Contextual Theory (Opportunity Structures)	Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990	Institutional and structural circumstances in the entrepreneurs' new host country channel them into and shapes their choices in entrepreneurship.
Mixed Embeddedness	Kloosterman et al., 2010	Ethnic entrepreneurs are embedded within both their ethnic communities and the broader socio-economic, political, and economic conditions of their host country.
Simultaneous Embeddedness	You & Zhou, 2018	Ethnic entrepreneurs are embedded within two cultures – that of their home country as well as that of their host country, and effectively traverse national and social borders with their enterprises.

Over time, theoretical perspectives have departed from the focus on the individual entrepreneur and adopted a broader understanding that both the host and home country environments impact immigrant enterprise (Nazareno, You & Zhou, 2018). Earlier perspectives focused mainly on how entrepreneurs behave and the internal characteristics that drive entrepreneurial behaviour (Light, 1972; Waldinger, 1986). Researchers later realized that not only were the entrepreneurs influenced by their country of origin, but that they were also influenced by the context and

culture of their new host country, leading to the concept of mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al., 2010). Elements that were considered included the political, socio-economic and cultural conditions of both host and home countries (Kloosterman et al., 2010). This gradually expanded to include external elements in a more constructivist perspective – observing how these entrepreneurs respond to and internalize their environment and circumstances to shape their identity as entrepreneur (Nazareno, You & Zhou, 2018). This constructivist approach maintains that one's identity is a product of one's experiences, and that both internal and external factors influence each other in a circular manner (Zhang & Chun, 2017). Therefore, one is not simply “an entrepreneur”, but is rather in a constant state of “becoming an entrepreneur” (Watson, 2009).

Participation in a minority culture does not preclude individuals from internalizing and identifying with the majority culture as part of their identities. *Cultural Spectrum Identity Theory*, a critical theory in the discourse on race, posits that individuals position themselves along “a spectrum of dimensions of cultural identity”, including elements such as language, race, class, or religion (Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015, p.251). Originating from research in religious studies, this theory can be combined with the existing theories of mixed and simultaneous embeddedness in the immigrant entrepreneurship literature to deepen understanding of how multiple cultural identities may be negotiated. In combining these two theories, we arrive at the understanding that the micro-, meso-, and macro-level contexts in both host and home countries are all prioritized differently by individuals, and the relative importance placed on each of these elements determines its influence on the identity constructions (Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015). This can be linked also to the concept of *hybrid identities*, introduced by Essers & colleagues in their study on female immigrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands: the idea that one can identify

with, and utilize, both their host and home country cultures in running their enterprise (2007). I will return to the topic of identity later.

Additionally, extant research is heavily focused on the immigration of individuals from lesser-developed home countries to more developed host countries (Chreim et al., 2018; Kloosterman & Rath, 2003). Origins of immigrants involved in North American studies include Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Indians, Iranians and others (Aliaga-Isla & Rialp, 2013; Li, 2001). For each of these groups, differences between immigrants and the majority population in the host countries are highlighted by way of religious beliefs, social norms, propensity to enterprise, level of host country integration, and individual characteristics (De Vita et al., 2014; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Froschauer, 2001; Shinnar & Young, 2008).

Given that this study focuses on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, I provide a brief overlook of the literature on this group of entrepreneurs.

Chinese Immigrant Entrepreneurs as a Specific Subgroup

Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs have been studied in various countries around the globe, including Canada. One study on the characteristics of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs presented a “typically transnational entrepreneur, a 45-year old or older man who is married with one child, has completed [higher education], and does not have a full-time job” (Lin & Tao, 2012, p.50). This study revealed that one of the motivators for immigration to Canada was to seek out business opportunities for engaging in entrepreneurship (Lin & Tao, 2012).

Research on Chinese entrepreneurs has also evaluated differences in male and female firm sizes in Canada (Chen, Tan & Tu, 2015). Despite research in both immigrant and mainstream entrepreneurship literature suggesting that firms owned by men are larger than those owned by

women, this study revealed negligible differences when controls were set for firm age and other elements (Chen, Tan & Tu, 2015). Additionally, this study indicated that close ties with family had a negative influence on female-owned businesses but *not* on male-owned enterprises (Chen, Tan & Tu, 2015). The authors hypothesized that family involvement, or over-reliance on family networks, may restrict women from searching for external resources – but also acknowledged the fact that women may be forced to turn to their kin for resources due to social barriers and discrimination (Chen, Tan & Tu, 2015). In another study conducted in Canada on the influence of family capital on the enterprise, Zhang & Reay (2018) found that family involvement in the business had both positive and negative outcomes, which the authors referred to as a *yin-yang duality*. Participants in the study leveraged several methods in an attempt to balance the good and bad effects of family involvement in the business that included exploiting the positives, mitigating the negatives, avoiding family-business interactions, or simply dealing with the conflict as it happened (Zhang & Reay, 2018).

Several studies focus on discrimination, sexism and/or racism experienced by Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in various host countries. One study compares experiences of women in two distinct host countries – Australia and Canada (Chiang, Low & Collins, 2013). The authors chose these two countries due to their relative openness to migration and acceptance of minority settlements. They discovered four major coping strategies applied by women in both countries (although more discrimination was reported in Australia) – creating a niche away from discrimination, integrating into the mainstream population, swallowing the pain, and active resistance (Chiang, Low & Collins, 2013). Another study on discrimination against Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs was located, interestingly, in Taiwan, where there is a prevailing negative opinion towards those who migrate there from mainland China (Zani, 2018). This is a

particularly interesting case of cultural discrimination based on origin and language *despite* having the same racial origin. The study revealed coping strategies reported in other countries, namely Chinese entrepreneurs banding together into co-ethnic communities and dealing amongst each other in order to avoid discrimination (Zani, 2018).

One particularly unique element of Chinese business conduct revolves around the idea of *guanxi*, a type of relationship-building based on commitment and loyalty built within the Chinese culture (Rodriguez-Gutiérrez, Romero & Yu, 2019). A study conducted on utilization of *guanxi* in businesses in Spain revealed that entrepreneurs who had better relationships had a higher risk tolerance, which steadily increased over time after arrival in their host country (Rodriguez-Gutiérrez, Romero & Yu, 2019).

Research has also delved into how Chinese immigrants do business differently than other ethnic groups. For example, research in the United States assumes that many immigrant enterprises are low-end, service-sector oriented, and operate in a very localized manner (You & Zhou, 2019). However, You and Zhou (2019) argue that many Chinese-owned immigrant enterprises are transnational and are influenced strongly by both their home and host country cultures. This references the concept of *mixed and/or simultaneous embeddedness* as discussed earlier, where immigrant entrepreneurs navigate between the social and cultural norms of both their host and home countries in their businesses (Nazareno, You & Zhou, 2018; You & Zhou, 2019). In particular, this study showed that education level, job exclusion, and economic opportunities were key elements influencing business formation for this particular immigrant group (You & Zhou, 2019).

However, despite the research on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, little has been done to investigate how gender, culture and identity of these entrepreneurs interact and how identity

constructions relate to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of success. I propose application of the concept of the entrepreneurial identity to this group of entrepreneurs to better understand their positions as business-owners.

Entrepreneurial Identity and Strategy

Before considering how ethnicity, gender and identity interact in the case of immigrant entrepreneurship, it is useful to consider how identity has been conceptualized and linked to strategy in the general entrepreneurship literature. In general, identity is a self-definition – an answer to the question ‘Who am I?’; identity influences and is influenced by one’s actions and experiences, and the roles that one undertakes (Chreim et al., 2007). From an interpretive perspective - the perspective adopted in this study - identity is seen as constructed through individual narratives and accounts that integrate internal factors and external influences (Watson, 2009). Identity construction can occur through storytelling, constructed both through the experiences of an individual and the re-telling of these experiences through their narratives (Hoyer & Steyaert, 2015). Literature on identity construction in immigrants discusses that this change in social context, and subsequent acculturation to the majority culture, is deeply related to experiences related to their identities (Steinbach, 2014). Identities are understood to be the primary sources of motivation for human behavior (Leitch & Harrison, 2016).

Consistently with these views, entrepreneurial identity is defined as how individuals “see and talk of themselves as entrepreneurs” (Down & Reveley, 2004, p.234). Research proposes that entrepreneurs construct their identities and behaviours in response to the environment surrounding them, creating their own framework with which to interpret entrepreneurial experiences (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Identity serves as a key component connecting the

entrepreneurial self to the external world, including the sociopolitical environment, other entrepreneurs, and the enterprise itself (Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Watson, 2009).

Two major theories inform the notion of entrepreneurial identity – social identity theory and role identity theory (Alsos et al., 2016). Social identity theory stipulates that individuals have a tendency to classify themselves and others into social categories based on various dimensions such as organizational membership, religious affiliation and ethnicity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Social identification comprises the perception of oneness with an in-group, which is seen as distinct from out-groups; it “induces the individual to engage in, and derive satisfaction from, activities congruent with the identity, to view him-or herself as an exemplar of the group” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 35). One’s “social identity is critical to beliefs, feelings, values, and actions... including new firm creation” as Fauchart and Gruber (2011:936) found in their study of entrepreneurs. In the context of the current study, such categories as Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs and Canadian entrepreneurs respectively are potential in-group and out-group classifications perceived by study participants.

Role identity theory, on the other hand, proposes that one’s role in a social system offers relatively structured definitions of identity (Mathias & Williams, 2014), although these roles and identities can be negotiated (Chreim et al., 2007; Stets & Burke, 2003). Roles can be combined and can have varying levels of importance to an individual, influencing one’s identity: the more central the role to a person, the more energy they will allocate towards fulfilling the role, and the more they will behave consistently with the role identity (Essers & Benschop, 2007, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Studies have found that entrepreneurs negotiate between roles that are conflicting in nature, such as doing social good and making profit (Cohen & Musson, 2000; Karhunen, Olimpieva, & Hytti, 2017; Lewis, 2011). The primary difference between social and

role identities is that the former relies on the perception of belonging to a group of uniform members, whereas the latter is based on expectations of a role.

Some studies have addressed how the entrepreneurial identity influences entrepreneurial endeavours, although research on this topic is in its early stages. A study by Alsos et al. (2016) linked various entrepreneurial identity types to a preference for effectual or causal behaviours. This study concluded that three types of entrepreneurial identity (*Communitarian*, *Missionary* and *Darwinian*) were open to causational behaviour, but only the *Communitarian* type exhibited both causational and effectual behaviours. The authors reasoned that this may be due to *Missionary* and *Darwinian* types already having a specific goal in mind for their enterprise, which would explain their preference for causation-type behaviour. In contrast, *Communitarian* entrepreneurs were more flexible with their goals as their main objective is to serve the community and/or bring people together – meaning that they can choose between both effectual or casual behaviour, or even both, in their businesses (Alsos et al., 2016).

The extant research on entrepreneurial identity, endeavours and success has not made major strides in applying these to immigrant entrepreneurs. However, there are a few exceptions. For example, Essers and Benschop (2007) highlighted how some women immigrant entrepreneurs took on a “hybrid identity” consisting of elements from both home and host country cultures in order to maneuver between the demands exerted on them by both co-ethnics and native citizens of their host country. Essers and Benschop’s study clearly illustrated how individual experiences shaped the construction of unique entrepreneurial identities as well as the actions these women entrepreneurs took in their businesses (Essers & Benschop, 2007).

Finally, it is important to understand how immigrant entrepreneurs view entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurial success is a construct that can be used to refer to the enterprise, the entrepreneur,

or both (Fisher, Maritz & Lobo, 2014). Research on entrepreneurial success has focused on objective, econometric indicators such as profit, employee turnover, and client retention (Sarasvathy, Menon & Kuechle, 2013). In recent years, research has turned to models of entrepreneurial success that include both objective, tangible measures as well as subjective, intangible elements – including, for example, level of personal satisfaction with the enterprise, or whether the entrepreneur has accomplished their goals for their enterprise (Chreim et al., 2018; Fisher, Maritz & Lobo, 2014; Staniewski & Awruk, 2018). The literature on immigrant enterprise highlights that there is an array of reasons for pursuing entrepreneurship, which then would indicate that there is an equally vast number of outcomes and ways to be successful.

As the above indicates, understanding entrepreneurial identity is important. Despite this, immigrant entrepreneurship literature has not given this topic sufficient attention. This study focuses on immigrant entrepreneurial identity constructions that are based on cultural and gender experiences and links these identity constructions to enterprise endeavours and views of success.

Culture, Ethnicity, and Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Both home and host country cultures can influence entrepreneurial experiences, especially if there is a contrast between these two cultures. Extant literature has discussed an “Us versus Them” perspective where immigrants are subjected to exclusion and/or discrimination, referred to as “Othering” (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2017). Immigrant entrepreneurs may experience specific difficulties in their new host countries that include racial and cultural discrimination, and education and language barriers (Billore, 2011; Azmat, 2013; Collins & Low, 2010; Teixeira et al., 2007).

Entrepreneurship is often highlighted as an empowering and enabling career choice for immigrants – but the literature shows that this choice may be brought on by exclusion (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2017; Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Immigrants may choose entrepreneurship not as a method of self-empowerment, but rather as one of few available options for work (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2017). In one study, foreignness is defined as “a dynamic quality which will produce different effects depending on how and by whom it is mobilized, and for what purpose” (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014, p.26). Hence, negative political discourse and ethnocentricity have a strong influence on how immigrants from non-Western cultures are treated in various host countries (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). For example, several political parties in Europe have positioned Muslims in such a light that they are perceived to be “uneducated”, “dumb”, “uncivilized”, and even “criminal” (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). This discrimination further marginalizes immigrants and pushes them to pursue non-mainstream forms of work (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Verduijn & Essers, 2013; Zani, 2018).

Although some research discusses immigrant culture as a potential weakness, other studies focus on foreign ethnicity as a source of strength. For example, a study of Brazilian waxing salons in Berlin, Germany presents a case where cultural differences were used advantageously (Lidola, 2014). Brazilian women entrepreneurs adopted their cultural title of *depiladoras* or waxing specialists and leveraged their unique expertise to “beautify” the local German population (Lidola, 2014).

Still another stream of research has attended to how ethnic group cohesion leads to improved access to resources through the ethnic network (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990). A study on immigrant entrepreneurs showed that they were able to access co-ethnic resources in ethnic religious spaces, and also that higher co-ethnicity increased the degree of involvement between

immigrant entrepreneurs and ethnic churches (Tong, 2019). Lastly, a study of immigrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands looked at the use of “strong ties”, composed of family and ethnic community, in contrast with “weak ties”, which were mainly connections forged through enterprise (Bouk et al., 2013). It was found that trust was a key element in encouraging support from both “strong” and “weak” ties and was especially noticeable in cases where immigrant entrepreneurs operated mostly with non-ethnic colleagues (Bouk et al., 2013).

Hence, culture and ethnicity can be sources of challenges or opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs; they also constitute resources with which entrepreneurs construct their identities.

Gender and Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Historically, entrepreneurship has been epitomized by the prototypical white male entrepreneur, and literature has tended to study entrepreneurial attributes often associated with Western male stereotypes (Ogbor, 2000). These characteristics, such as risk-taking, leadership and innovation, stand in contrast to stereotypical characteristics of women, which include empathy, kindness, caring and sociability (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Ogbor, 2000). Hence in comparison to the “ideal” entrepreneur, women entrepreneurs, and in particular immigrant women entrepreneurs, have been seen as “Others” (Essers & Benschop, 2007). For example, a study of Turkish and Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands indicates that the Dutch majority population “frequently consider Turkish and Moroccan women as prototypical female migrants, captured in their cultures without any rights” (Essers & Benschop, 2007, p.51).

Literature has attended to what sets immigrant women entrepreneurs apart from other groups of entrepreneurs, as well as what drives them (both internally and externally) to pursue entrepreneurship (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Chreim et al., 2018; González-González et

al., 2011). This literature shows that women immigrants often experience various challenges in enterprise, including discrimination based on their gender, skin color, and language proficiency – all of which must be negotiated or addressed when running their businesses (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Chreim et al., 2018; Essers & Benschop, 2007). In one study, Indian women in New Zealand were found to leverage co-ethnic relationships and social capital to set up and expand their businesses after experiencing discrimination and exclusion from the mainstream job market, a tale commonly told by immigrant entrepreneurs of both genders (Pio, 2007). In another study, Muslim Turkish women entrepreneurs who had arrived in the Netherlands at a younger age identified more with the culture of their host country than with that of their home country – but members of the majority population still considered and treated them as “Other” (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014).

Research has also explored how immigrant women navigate the gendered norms of both their host and home countries as entrepreneurs (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2017; Verduijn & Essers, 2013). Essers and Benschop (2007) found that in being exposed to the gender norms of both host country and co-ethnic communities, Turkish and Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands chose one of three approaches. The first was to adhere to and stay within the prescribed gender norms of their ethnic group. The second was to eschew these in favor of a more masculine entrepreneurial identity (characteristic of Western culture). The third was to forge a “hybrid identity” from both their host and home country cultures, navigating between the two and adapting and utilizing each as needed. Some immigrants go so far as to completely denounce their ethnic culture, preferring to adhere to majority cultural norms (Essers & Benschop, 2007). In another study, Indian women entrepreneurs in New Zealand were found to experience conflicts between what was expected of

women in their home country culture and their host country culture (Pio, 2006). In coping with these dualities, women chose either to juggle their two female cultural identities or conform to the majority female identity of their new host country. However, it has also been argued that immigrant women need to navigate carefully in entrepreneurship if they are to avoid exclusion from both groups (González-González et al., 2011).

Recent studies of immigrant women entrepreneurs have taken a positive approach to “Otherness” by discussing contexts in which difference, in both gender and culture, may be considered a strength rather than a weakness (Azmat 2013; Lidola, 2014; Pio, 2006). The emphasis is on how entrepreneurship might “lift” disadvantaged immigrant women out of their victim status, and the terms *emancipation* and *empowerment* are used to illustrate how these women break the chains of gender norms (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Lidola, 2014). However, while some researchers have highlighted immigrant entrepreneurship as a means for women to achieve empowerment, others have claimed that this “idealized optimism” is a problem in the entrepreneurship literature. For example, Verduijn and Essers (2013) point out that framing entrepreneurship as a positive choice for immigrant women not only perpetuates the masculinization of entrepreneurship, but also glorifies some negative elements that force these women into entrepreneurship in the first place (Verduijn & Essers, 2013). The idea that these women must elevate and emancipate themselves from their positions supports the discourse that this “difference” between men and women must be rejected by women in order for them to succeed (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Verduijn & Essers, 2013).

As the above overview shows, gendered empirical studies of entrepreneurship often focus on women, using them as the unit of analysis (Marlow, Greene & Coad, 2018). In these analyses, the male entrepreneur stereotype is considered the norm against which women are viewed and

evaluated as entrepreneurs. This is specifically the case in studies of immigrant entrepreneurs, where a review of this literature has identified limited or no comparisons of immigrant men and women entrepreneurs' gendered experiences and identities (Chreim et al., 2018).

In this section, I briefly reviewed the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial identity and associated actions, and how culture, ethnicity and gender relate to immigrant and other enterprise. This review shows that research on entrepreneurial identity is in its early stages, especially in terms of its application to immigrant entrepreneurs. It also shows that comparison of men and women entrepreneurs has not been a major topic of attention in the immigrant entrepreneurship literature. Hence, the research questions I pursue are: *How do Chinese immigrant men and women entrepreneurs construct entrepreneurial identities based on their cultural and gender experiences? How are these experiences related to entrepreneurial endeavours and views of entrepreneurial success?*

METHODOLOGY

I seek to understand how participants construct entrepreneurial identities through their experiences of culture and gender, and how these experiences relate to their entrepreneurial endeavours and views of success. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study as it emphasizes the importance and influence of the context, setting, and participants' frames of reference in relation to the research questions proposed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Due to the open-ended and exploratory nature of my two research questions, it is especially important to use a qualitative approach that enables me to capture participants' unique perspectives and narratives of their experiences as entrepreneurs, and to be able to pursue emergent themes in the data (Hennink et al., 2011). Rich qualitative data enables the researcher to understand the complexities and nuances in individual cases and to compare across cases (Hennink et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014).

Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of data for this study consists of 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs residing in a large city in Eastern Canada. Of these, 10 are women and 10 are men, allowing me compare experiences of the two genders. As a Chinese immigrant myself, I have connections with the Chinese community. To identify the participants for this study, I contacted two entrepreneurs who have strong relations with other Chinese entrepreneurs. They agreed to participate in my study and enabled me to contact and communicate with other information-rich cases through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a useful and proven method of data collection when lists of members and or individual details are not readily available for use – referred to as a *hidden population* (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). This method also enables researchers to selectively collect data from cases that may potentially

be richer in data and ensure that these cases meet the criteria to be included in the study (McGee et al., 2009). Additionally, personal relations in Chinese culture, called “guanxi”, can play a significant role in determining individual participation and willingness to divulge information (Zhang & Chun, 2017). Snowball sampling with a referral from a known contact of the co-ethnic Chinese community increased the likelihood that not only would the referral be willing to participate, but also the chance the data gathered would be rich. A list of the interviewees, their characteristics and their businesses is provided in Table 1.

Table 2: Participants organized by gender and then length of business ownership

Participant #	Gender	Age	Arrival in Canada	Entrepreneurship Start Date / Duration	Business Type
1	M	50-60	1985	1990 / 30y	High-tech and IT consultancy
2	M	40-50	1985	1994 / 26y	Computer retail, Medical Spa, Landlord
3	M	50-60	1980	1995 / 25y	Restaurant, Landlord
4	M	50-60	1994	2000 / 20y	High-tech
5	M	40-50	2000	2000 / 20y	Community Forum, Payment technology
6	M	60-70	1975	2001 / 19y	Toy store, bubble tea shop
7	M	50-60	1999	2002 / 18y	High-tech, Restaurant, (serial entrepreneur)
8	M	50-60	2000	2005 / 15y	Real estate brokerage
9	M	30-40	2014	2009 / 11y	High-tech
10	M	30-40	2008	2019 / 1y	Bubble tea shop
11	F	50-60	1995	1996 / 24y	Management Consulting, Legal Services (Lawyer)
12	F	50-60	1998	1998 / 22y	Acupuncture and traditional medicine
13	F	40-50	1994	1998 / 22y	Translation Services
14	F	50-60	1993	1999 / 21y	Accounting
15	F	40-50	2003	2000 / 20y	Real Estate Brokerage, Oriental Yellow Pages
16	F	40-50	2000	2001 / 19y	Confectionery
17	F	40-50	1998	2002 / 18y	Restaurant, Pet Store
18	F	50-50	1995	2012 / 8y	High-tech
19	F	20-30	2010	2015 / 5y	Renovation
20	F	40-50	1997	2019 / 1y	Massage and Beauty

Data collection was conducted over a 6-month period. Interviews followed a semi-structured, open-ended format which allowed for flexibility in exploration of emergent themes in participants' narratives (Patton, 2015). Interview topics included reasons for coming to Canada and starting a business, experiences surrounding the enterprise related to gender and culture, goals with regards to the business, and views of entrepreneurial success. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A. Interviews averaged 90 minutes in length. They were digitally recorded and transcribed. Several interviews were conducted partially in Mandarin Chinese, as I offered participants this opportunity when it appeared that they could communicate better in this language. I translated all the portions in Mandarin to English.

Doing the transcription of the interviews myself allowed me to gain stronger familiarity with the data. During this and later stages of data collection and analysis, I engaged in extensive memoing noting emergent themes in the interviews (Miles et al. 2014). The interview transcripts were analyzed using both deductive and inductive coding procedures. I used the NVivo software to code and retrieve quotations. I created a provisional start list of codes informed by the literature and the interview questions, which constituted the deductive codes (Miles et al. 2014). Through the process of analyzing the data, additional (inductive) codes were generated to account for emergent themes in the data. For example, the initial code list included such themes as *Cultural experiences* and *Entrepreneurial success*, both deductively derived for the literature and the interview protocol. As I progressed with the analysis, I identified that these themes had various dimensions and constituted pattern codes (Miles et al., 2014) that grouped several subcodes or subthemes, most of which I identified inductively from the data. For example, *Cultural experiences* was broken down into *Coming from nothing*, *Being Chinese* and *Being Chinese Canadian*, based on the findings from the interview data. As this example indicates, the analysis

progressed through telescoping, a process of zooming in to and zooming out of the data (Hennink et al., 2011). “Zooming in” allowed me to look at the data in detail to clarify the various dimensions in a pattern while “zooming out” involved stepping back from data in order to better understand broader concepts across the entire study (Hennink et al., 2011).

The analysis was iterative, as new themes identified in later interviews prompted returning to earlier interviews to check for their occurrence. I used tabular arrangements to conduct comparisons across interviewees and groups of interviewees (Miles et al., 2014). This proved to be particularly useful in identifying similarities and differences between men and women participants.

Figure 1 presented in the beginning of the Findings section shows the central themes that were analyzed to achieve the study objectives of understanding the construction of entrepreneurial identity through cultural and gender experiences and understanding how these experiences influenced business endeavours and views of success.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Steps were taken to establish the trustworthiness of the study as described by Miles et al. (2014). Data and results were triangulated by having both myself and another researcher (my supervisor) review the transcripts and coding to provide independent viewpoints on the analysis. Furthermore, rich description of the cases and extensive quotes from the data gathered are provided in the analysis to enable readers to form their own judgments about the results, and about the transferability of results to other, similar contexts.

FINDINGS

I organized the findings into two major sections: a) cultural experiences and entrepreneurship and b) gender experiences and entrepreneurship. Each section is further broken down into subsections. It should be noted that cultural and gender experiences are not separate from each other. For example, how a man or woman experiences the gender role and its impact on entrepreneurship is not dissociated from the experience of being Chinese. Yet, for analytical and presentation purposes, I discuss these two dimensions in sequence, pointing out how one might affect the other as I present the findings.

The following model in Figure 1 captures the important themes addressed in this section. On the left are the two types of experiences - cultural and gender experiences - that help shape the entrepreneurial identity, business endeavours, and perceptions of success. In this study, business endeavours refers to how the entrepreneur shapes the enterprise in order to achieve their ideas of success. The analysis that follows will show that the various themes are interrelated.

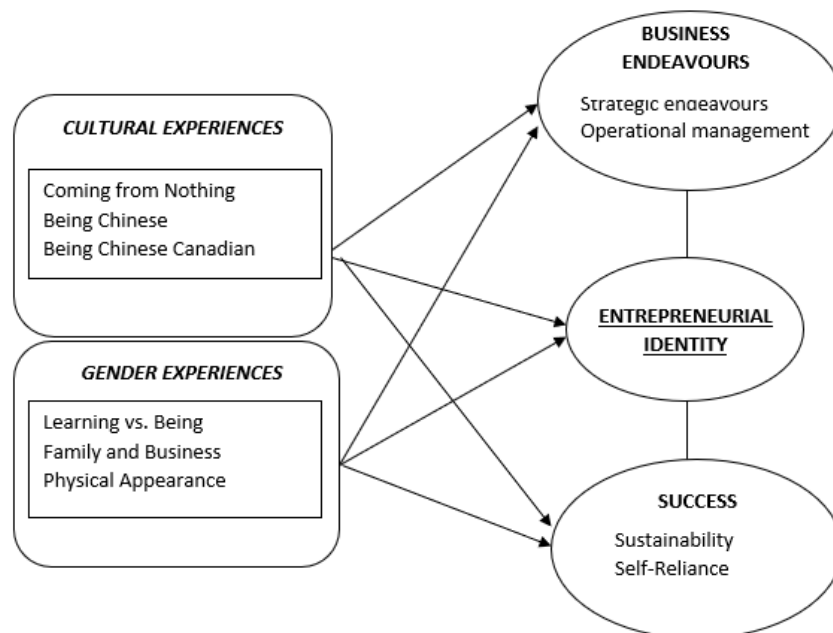


Figure 1: Model illustrating central themes

Cultural Experiences and Entrepreneurship

This section provides an analysis of how participants perceived their ethnicity to contribute to their entrepreneurial identities. The first element that contributed to participants' entrepreneurial identities was their lack of resources when they first arrived in Canada, with several participants indicating that they "came with nothing". This influenced their stance on several elements of entrepreneurship including financial management, setting business goals and strategies, and measuring entrepreneurial success. Additionally, some participants constructed strong Chinese entrepreneurial identities while others took on a hybrid Chinese Canadian entrepreneurial identity. In positioning themselves vis-à-vis these two cultures, they spoke about the strengths and weaknesses of these cultures and how appropriation of various cultural attributes influenced their strategies and operations.

Overall the participants' discussions of their cultural experiences strongly related to social identity theory: the notion that one constructs their identities based on their membership or belonging to a particular social group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In this case, the group in question was the "Chinese" social group. This allowed participants to define who they were vis-à-vis other Chinese and non-Chinese members of their social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Coming from Nothing

In their identity narratives, the entrepreneurs emphasized the significance of "coming from nothing": arriving in Canada with little to no resources, after gathering what little belongings they had and restarting their lives in a foreign country. They saw this experience as making them resilient entrepreneurs, capable of persevering in their business endeavors. Coming from nothing

also had an impact on the entrepreneurs' views of business margins and how they evaluated their own success.

Coming from nothing had two connotations: lack of financial resources and lack of human capital that manifested as weak English language skills, lack of understanding of the Canadian culture, and not knowing how business is done in Canada. P1 stated, "You have a big heart, you have a big dream, but you have nothing. Even if you want to do (business), you have no money!" P7 offered more contextual information on life in China in the 1990s before immigrating to Canada: "When we were young, matches, soap, white sugar, all these things, we had to use tickets for these. We couldn't eat a full meal, we wore bad clothes, and we would be overjoyed to ride a bus!" These difficult life experiences, according to P1, explained why Chinese people are very resilient and willing to endure hardship: "The environment is different. The Chinese peoples' ability to work hard and endure is a very good habit based on our traditions, but you can't help but admit that this hard work and tenacity is forced out of us." The feeling that he had no choice but to work hard was echoed by several other participants who referred to unfavourable conditions due to a combination of lack of financial and human resources (e.g. lack of recognition of education degrees).

Others indicated that "coming from nothing" had a strong influence on how they managed their business finances. P4 said: "I believe in creating value and meanwhile staying frugal. Money means a lot to me! I never had the understanding that you can take money easily. It's more like we need to create a ton of value for people and then take a small portion of that as a reward." Participants contrasted their views of finances with those of Canadians around them. For example, P14 said that "I'm still very *Chinese* Chinese. I'm more careful in cost control. Westerners, I think there's a few of them are a bit...finance aspect, they spend a lot of money.

They maybe also earn a lot, but they also spend a lot!” Interestingly, she emphasized that this is a very “Chinese Chinese” thing to do, which evoked a contrast with others who may be identified as “Chinese Canadian” and may be less frugal in their operations. P17 mentioned that her employees called her “cheap” because she was frugal in her business operations, but that she valued cost savings more than keeping up appearances.

I find the fastest and inexpensive are Chinese people who do renovations. My employees think – why do you keep hiring this person? My way of thinking is: How do I ensure we run smoothly? ... They only think – how come you’re getting THIS guy again? They think I should find a more professional-looking person. (P17)

Entrepreneurs who had started with nothing had a specific perspective on entrepreneurial success. P1 stated:

These recent few years, Chinese people from mainland China are loaded with money, they come to invest. Compared to my generation, at that time, we really didn’t have money. We really enterprised. And for us even 5 cents was very important. I still think we’re very successful. We haven’t unfairly taken peoples’ money, no bad comments, no bad customers, our reputation, brand name, financially, all doing so well. And for this I am very happy. (P1)

From this we can see that his view of entrepreneurial success was to make a good name for himself, while earning money and leaving that “really-didn’t-have-money” period of his life behind. He differentiated himself from others who start their businesses with more resources by saying “There are lots of Chinese people doing business, they are billionaires! But actually working like (me) here, it’s hard to be a billionaire!” Hence participants established their own yardstick by which they measured their level of entrepreneurial success.

P17 related that after coming to Canada, her previous education and work experience were not accepted when applying for jobs. She later decided to run her own business and explained during the interview her thought process at the time regarding her business strategy: “I didn’t really have a particular strategy – I’m in this business, I HAVE to do it well. No backing out now – my

only path is forward.” This sense of no particular strategy but forward is repeated by other participants such as P20 who stated: “Overall, I think I have a strong inner self, I’m that type of person and I’m not scared. So I thought – Well, I won’t starve to death!”

Views of oneself as coming from nothing and as a resilient entrepreneur were associated with perspectives on profit-making and success, and with pride in one’s entrepreneurial achievements. With respect to profit goals, the previous quotation says it well. By setting *not starving to death* as a bottom line, the participant positioned herself in such a way that *any* performance would be good performance. This enabled her to explore the world of entrepreneurship at her own pace and enjoy the benefits that it offered her. When asked about her goals in running her business, she simply stated that it was “keeping myself happy. But even if I have more than just feeling happy, I don’t need much more than that!”

Being proud of their entrepreneurial achievements, however measured, was also an element of entrepreneurial identity accounts:

I’m proud of myself! To be Chinese and work hard. I can help so many people here... I’m satisfied with myself – so far what I have achieved. Being Chinese entrepreneur, being an immigrant, being a woman, in this society, I work hard, come a long way today, I’m fortunate, I’m very proud. (P14)

She elaborated that she was proud of her progress as an entrepreneur, especially given the combination of her Chinese, female, and immigrant identities in the context of Canadian society.

In sum, coming from nothing had a strong influence on how participants viewed their financial resources and operations, how they set their goals, and how they measured their success as entrepreneurs. Participants tended to compare themselves with their former selves or other Chinese immigrants and declared a strong sense of pride in their success as Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. The findings on the experiences of entrepreneurs and their construction of

identities as coming from nothing, closely aligns with literature on social identity theory, where identities are shaped based on an individual's membership in a social "in-group" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). "Coming from nothing" implied that the participants were part of a group of people who had little to no resources, in contrast with immigrants or even mainstream population members who have money, social connections, or other resources that could be leveraged in entrepreneurship.

Being Chinese

Being Chinese was an important theme in participants' identity narratives, whereby ethnicity itself was seen by most participants as a source of strength in their business endeavors, although a few participants also referred to how being Chinese could be a source of weakness. Those who viewed the ethnic identity as "a specialty" and essential part of entrepreneurial identity tended to emphasize the value of being Chinese to the enterprise. This is well captured by a participant:

I believe that culture is one thing, in your blood, nobody can compete with that. Culture is a HUGE specialty. I have to really utilize that. If you use it well, you could have success (in your business). Culture to me is speak the language, understand the way to do business, connections. So for me – I can really utilize those three. (P5)

He emphasized that an in-depth knowledge of Chinese business culture, language and connections set him apart from Canadians and other ethnicities interested in doing business involving China. Another entrepreneur, reflected on how being Chinese facilitated his transnational strategy:

Because our product is designed in Canada and it's made in China, so being Chinese is much easier for us to negotiate or to talk to our manufacturers. So if you want to add new features, first in the world, manufacturers can give you a lot of insights, because they've been in this business for years. So there's less risk, or less possibilities for us to make mistakes. (P9)

The entrepreneurs who engaged in transnational strategies reflected on what it meant to be a Chinese entrepreneur in Canada in the context of rapid technological development in China:

In the year that we left China, we thought to leave the country to learn new and exciting things and bring these learnings back. but now, a few decades later, China might be even stronger than Canada in these aspects! We've flipped and... we've brought Chinese things here – we've turned 180 degrees! Before I wanted to take the good things from here to China, but now ... at the same time I can also bring good things from China to here! (P7)

The idea of bringing resources from China to Canada and the rest of the world was common in the narratives of the four entrepreneurs who had adopted transnational strategies. These participants indicated that there were certain areas where Canada was behind China in terms of development, and that was where they had chosen to focus their business strategy. One entrepreneur spoke about how he decided to bring a novel Chinese phone payment technology to Canada:

Chinese technology companies have evolved or innovated a lot – especially on the payment front. Almost everybody uses phones to pay – we don't carry cash anymore. Before 2015 – my friends would have 10,000RMB in their pockets in cash, but starting in 2016, people only carry phones... I went to [Chinese company] saying, I want to introduce this to outside of China. Think about the Chinese travelers, students, immigrants they can easily pay their expenses by phone! (P5)

He described the process of bringing new and foreign technology to Canada and how he received quiet support from regulators in Canada, who realized that his strategy would benefit Canada's economy. Instead of setting strict regulations on how he was developing his business, regulators monitored how he was doing and watched him with interest.

They don't regulate us and that's them helping us. It gives us freedom, and they talked to me and said, you're doing really good! They realized that my business would introduce a new revenue stream from outside of Canada.... Hundreds of millions of dollars from China to Canada. That's real money for the Canadian economy! (P5)

He discussed strict regulations set in China with respect to removing money from the country, and how through this technology, he made it possible for Chinese nationals to spend more freely in Canada, hence contributing to the Canadian economy. The entrepreneurs who engaged in transnational strategies set themselves as conduits for bridging across countries and economies, and as contributors to employment and to consumers:

We mostly sold to the American market and earned American dollars. But work opportunities were created here in Canada and in China! When we made products, manufacturing and producing opportunities and jobs were made in China. So, a lot of good was done. And of course, when the kids get the toys at the end they're also very happy! (P7)

Another participant described that some Chinese organizations may have difficulties selling their wares in North American countries, and that Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs like himself have an important role in connecting these two players:

You depend on these Chinese manufacturers. They made a huge investment in land, factory, people, and oftentimes the technology as well. And also the manufacturing know-how and skills. So it's very much a mutual dependency, right? Our company is very much a brand. Consumers trust a brand... A factory doesn't have that. They don't understand the dynamics in the Western world. We took their product, added our own innovation, adapted it to the North American lifestyle, and...that made their product popular. (P4)

Hence, the entrepreneurs who engaged in transnational strategies all claimed their ethnicity as an advantage in entrepreneurship. In addition, they presented themselves as conduits for the transfer of advanced technologies to the Western world, as connectors of world economies, and as contributors to economic development in the countries where they transacted.

Some of the participants who proudly identified as Chinese entrepreneurs, admitted to their lack of understanding of the Canadian culture and to the fact that it was a significant barrier in conducting business. This weakness was overcome by hiring a Canadian to occupy a prominent position within their companies:

Canadian culture is very important too...I do realize that I have weakness in the culture thing because I cannot keep talking about hockey for hours! I don't know ANY stars from our Senators team...I DO know we have Senators...that's it! (laugh) I don't watch hockey! I don't really understand the Western culture. So, what I did is to hire a partner. Our president is Western, and he helped us on Western culture! (P5)

Not all narratives of ethnicity (being Chinese) and its influence on the business were positive. Several participants recounted experiences of their products or businesses being perceived by customers or competitors as less or lower quality than Canadian businesses or Canadian-made goods. One woman mentioned that when she first started her business, clients were quick to question the origin of her firm's renovation supplies. As a result, she became very conscious of how "Chinese" her company appeared.

I thought: How could I do things so that I could portray a very good appearance, so that customers see we're not a company of only Chinese people? We had products that were made here and those which were made in China, but we wouldn't say it was manufactured in China. But we also wouldn't say it was made here! We would just say the company was American. When we first opened up, customers all asked "Where were your things built?" But you see these Canadian companies? The majority of their products are also from China. But they just put a Canadian label on it, so customers will never know. (P19)

However, she discussed that after her company stabilized, she had no fear revealing that her supplies originated from China, saying openly that "There's nothing bad about being manufactured in China! Actually, it's made very well!" Another participant, P9, not only experienced questioning about the origins of his product but was directly insulted by customers who held negative opinions about China, saying that his product was either poorly made or a copy of other products.

People like to ask "Hey, where is this product made?" I say "It's made in China." And then they say "Oh, so made in China crap?" or "Made in China – copycat!" I'm like, "Hey, I'm made in China too. Do you have opinions about that?" I deal with all these stereotypes all the time. When I'm dealing with any customers other than Chinese customers, they still have the same stereotype of us. (P9)

Participants were not only judged because of the origin of their products, but also in relation to controversial news topics in the media. One man discussed how recent news about the Chinese company Huawei and its connection to cybersecurity had negatively impacted his business.

Huawei's things and that kind of stuff, sometimes it will make others look at you, with that kind of judgment. Judging your way of doing things or your "correctness". Of course, I'm not saying that we are sensitive, but we can feel it. So when you're doing work, there's people that don't believe in your abilities, but when we do our job we are still responsible and fair. (P1)

Competitors and clients treated his business as if he was somehow connected to the negative media, and that Huawei's behaviour was predictive of him and his company's actions. This type of discrimination was subtle, he said, as they would not directly confront him, but they would say things and act as if he had done something wrong, when in reality he had not. He discussed that the only way to combat this was to remain focused, honest, and continue to do good work – and that a negative reaction would only feed into the stereotype already held by others.

In our business process there's a few competitors, intentionally, who say: "What is that? Is that secure? Is that...?" You know exactly that he is raising misleading ideas and trying to take the conversation in that direction. And in these situations, if you don't calm down, if you immediately get angry, then it will be even worse for you! During this time, we must be very open and explaining. (P1)

Overall most participants viewed being Chinese as offering an advantage in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Being Chinese conferred on the individual a good understanding of Chinese markets, thus enabling transnational business. It also enabled some entrepreneurs to engage in transfer of more advanced technology to Canada. A few participants who reflected on the challenges of being Chinese to the enterprise had various ways of countering negative views of their products and businesses: redirecting customer questions to avoid discussing the origin of

their products, confronting derogatory comments, and continuing to do business responsibly and fairly.

Being Chinese-Canadian

While some participants constructed very strong Chinese entrepreneurial identities, choosing to incorporate understanding of Canadian culture through hiring practices (of host country nationals), other participants narrated their identity as Chinese Canadian, constructing a hybrid identity that incorporated what they perceived to be strong elements from both cultures:

Each culture has good things and bad things, right? I'm lucky... I'm Chinese Canadian now. I already had lots of really strong Chinese culture in my mind, so then came to Canada and I never 100% stick with Chinese culture. I learned Canadian culture. I keep the good part of the Chinese culture; I learn lots of good culture from Canadian. So, I merged these two together. (P1)

This participant kept himself open to adopting what he perceived to be useful elements of the Canadian culture into his identity and his business. He strongly identified as Chinese Canadian, and believed that a hybrid identity woven of the fabric of two cultures had helped him in his business:

Chinese we have a good culture. We are patient, we don't give up, we can take lots of hardship, we can work very hard. Also, we can analyze things in detail. Canadians, on the other hand – they pay more attention to the market, the value of something. This has really helped me in the sense that, I have been able to mesh these two ways of doing things together. (P1)

This way of perceiving oneself as a mix of both Chinese and Canadian helped one participant do business with other co-ethnics who did not understand host country culture as himself. When asked about how he interacted with his mostly Chinese clients, he discussed culture at length.

You have to combine the local culture, with your Chinese culture. Culture-wise you let (Chinese clients) understand you, you can understand them, you can understand local requirements, bylaws, or everything, and you have to teach your clients this is Canada. We're doing things differently than in China. (P8)

Not only was he able to better understand how to navigate the Canadian business sphere, he also understood what the expectations of his Chinese co-ethnics were. He was then able to educate and guide them as to what is appropriate or legal in Canada.

In sum, some participants constructed strong Chinese entrepreneurial identities, differentiating themselves from other entrepreneurs whom they believed not be as capable of transacting with China. Chinese ethnicity was seen as a particular strength in entrepreneurial endeavours that involved transnational strategies. Several participants presented themselves as agents in the transfer of advanced technology to Canada, the expansion of connections across countries, and the development of economies where they operated. Participants who presented themselves as first and foremost Chinese entrepreneurs and declared limited understanding of the Canadian culture also pointed to the need to bring in people ensconced in the Canadian culture to help mitigate this lacuna. Other participants who presented themselves as Chinese Canadian entrepreneurs, hence constructing a hybrid identity, pointed to taking on strong elements of entrepreneurship from both cultures. Overall, entrepreneurial identities were constructed based on experiences of belonging to particular social groups that were based on ethnicity and culture. The entrepreneurial identity as “Chinese” was juxtaposed in narratives with identifying as “Canadian”, with these two being the end points of an identity spectrum. Participants discussed how they navigated between these two poles when constructing their own identities as immigrant entrepreneurs

Gender Experiences and Entrepreneurship

This section discusses how participants used their gendered experiences in entrepreneurship to construct their entrepreneurial identities. The first element that contributed to entrepreneurial identity narratives was how men and women approached entrepreneurship; specifically women in my study tended to discuss that they “learned” to be entrepreneurs, whereas men referred to entrepreneurship as a way of “being”, seeming to imply that being an entrepreneur was an innate characteristic. Men and women also held very different opinions of how their family roles influenced their business endeavours. Women discussed that they were limited in entrepreneurship due to their multiple responsibilities as mothers and wives, apart from their responsibilities as business-owners, but men generally did not express the same degree of pressure from multiple roles. Lastly, women spoke in particular about how their looks influenced their business endeavours and how others perceived them, a topic that was not central in men’s accounts. Overall, women spent more time discussing how their gender influenced them as entrepreneurs, especially with regards to normative gender roles that they had to navigate. This connects the idea of role identity theory to gendered entrepreneurial identities – the concept that a person in a particular role is expected to fulfil a certain set of behaviours or do what is expected of them by society.

Learning or Being as Central in Entrepreneurship

Several women participants presented their entrepreneurial identity as learners and emphasized the importance of learning for their business operations and success. One participant sums up how it affects her enterprise below:

In my native Chinese culture, there is a huge respect for education. It’s lifelong learning, always being curious about something and always learning. That respect

for knowledge, and for ongoing learning – it’s something I felt like that was inherent – built into my DNA. I think that helped me with ongoing learning, on how to run my business. Learning how to be effective at my job. (P13)

She described learning as part of her DNA or a key part of her personal identity, and something that helped her run her business. Two other women entrepreneurs connected education to the Chinese culture as well:

Education is a basic, you have to be fully equipped with knowledge before going forward. That’s my philosophy, that’s my Confucian philosophy. That’s a Chinese philosophy. I have to fully educate myself as much as possible. And I also think that if my clients have been educated, it’s easy for me to communicate with them. That’s why I think education is very important. (P14)

Chinese we work so hard, I work very hard, but I also have to work smart. I have to learn things very fast. People even told me in the first year – you’re a CEO, you don’t even know how to write email. It is true!... All those things, nobody teach you. How to write an email as a CEO? So you have to learn – you have to observe, you have to put your heart in it. (P18)

P14 discussed the importance of education not only for herself in her business, but also as something to share with her clients while running her business – not only did it make her job easier, but it also prepared her to move forward and do well in her enterprise. In the second quote, P18 discussed the importance of learning as she enterprised, and indicated that learning on her own was especially important because nobody else was there to teach her what she needed to know. P19 also discussed learning and knowledge as an asset: “When I first started my business, my father always kept reminding me of the point that everything that you have learned is YOUR know-how, and you really have to protect that know-how.” Her father reminded her that her knowledge was hers and hers alone and she must protect that “know-how” from others who would seek to one-up her business. Yet another woman put learning and knowledge at the forefront in her business motto: “Attitude, aptitude, action”:

You need a willingness to learn and readiness to be grateful. My tagline is “Attitude, aptitude, action”. You have to have an attitude of service, of being grateful and of always learning. Aptitude comes from always learning – I always

need to upgrade my skills, and I need to have the knowledge and know-how to always remain on the road to become more competent. (P11)

She discussed that her focus on learning originated from her attitude, which then led to benefits for herself and her business – increased competency, more know-how, and better skills to leverage in her business.

In contrast, a several other participants in this study tended to view entrepreneurship as an innate quality found within people. I refer to this as “being” an entrepreneur, in contrast to women who referred to how they “learned” to enterprise. For example, P10 stated: “Every Chinese person has that sort of entrepreneurial way of thinking – they all think they can make something of themselves! They’re not afraid of failure. They’re endlessly pushing forward.” This participant believed that thinking like an entrepreneur was a Chinese trait.

Although some participants spoke about valuing learning in their enterprise, mostly women participants presented it as a core part of their Chinese and entrepreneurial identities. Those who tended to position entrepreneurship as an innate characteristic of themselves or a group of individuals, rather than something that could be gradually learned, were mostly men.

Integrating the Family and the Business

Men and women had contrasting tales when asked about the relationship between business and their families. Many participants discussed family as a core element that had influenced their decision to pursue entrepreneurship – but once their journey as an entrepreneur started, the relationship between the family and the business was very different for men and women in my study. This section discusses how the family role is experienced and embedded in entrepreneurial identity constructions, and how it helps shape endeavours differently for men and women.

The importance of family in Chinese culture is captured by a quote from P16: “In Chinese

culture it's said: family then state then all under heaven (**jia guo tian xia**). We will be more hardworking and diligent than others." P16 also stated that "in Chinese teachings, boys from childhood are always taught to be the primary provider for the household." The reference to the Chinese proverb "家國天下" emphasizes the importance of family in Chinese culture. The participant uses the proverb to explain that Chinese are more willing to work hard because of the responsibility they feel towards their family. This is especially true in the case of men, as the patriarchal Chinese culture paints them as the primary breadwinners for the household. Women, however, are still expected to care for the family – but not only are they *not* expected to be the primary breadwinners, sometimes they are believed not to be *capable* of doing so. One participant pointed to condescension towards women in the culture:

Men think that women hesitate when they make decisions. Also, they will question your vision. The men think that their vision is advanced, but women's vision is not like that. In Chinese way, they think that "women have long hair but short vision". Men think they're creative, they can have new ideas. But they don't know how to maintain them, but women say they have an idea, it's just like they have a baby and they will take care of it – they have a motherhood feeling for the business. (P14)

This way of bringing a nurturing, motherly identity to the enterprise was reflected in other women's accounts. Not only is the business like a baby, but employees are like family members:

I'm more family-oriented. I hope that my employees are also my family members. My kitchen manager, I was her "mom away from home". So...I say it's like a family... Slowly (my employees) can begin to understand the feelings that I have towards them, this caring. This is my (culture), I think, being a Chinese person. (P17)

However, her outlook changed when she gave birth to her first child; she then decided that her business would have to come second to the needs of her family.

When I was 36 years old, my daughter was born. That was one rather big change at that time. Afterwards I slowly stepped down. Before that, I would work day and night. No more ideas like that. I just wanted family-oriented, "normal" days.

Very regular, so during the day I could go and then in the afternoon I would come home. Because this (business) is not my priority. My priority is my family. So, this, in being a woman, this is my way of thinking. (P17)

It is interesting to note here that *before* her child was born this participant had a family mentality towards her enterprise. After her daughter was born, that took priority over her “business family” and she slowly adjusted her work to prioritize the family role. Another woman discussed her change of trajectory when her child was born:

To be honest, before I had a kid, my career was my priority, and never thought about kids. After my son was born, I realized I’m a mother! ...I have to take care of my kids! When I started my business, I put my family and my kids first, but I have to do a lot of overtime work. (P14)

This appeared to put entrepreneurship and family at odds with each other, where investing time into a successful business detracts from family and vice versa. Several female participants discussed this more in depth, highlighting their struggle in juggling family and enterprise responsibilities. One participant discussed that she chose not to start her business until after her child left for university because she had no family supports, unlike what is customary in Chinese households:

There are lots of Chinese women who do their businesses, that lots of family members help. Like the grandparents help make meals for the kids, and things like that. But I have no helpers. So that is the difficulty of being a woman. Lots of women need to work their businesses AND also need to take care of the household. (P20)

On the other hand, several men discussed family roles in their interviews, but only two, younger participants mentioned that they practice gender equality in raising children. They stated that the younger generation divides family work equally between both parents unlike previous generations. Sharing family responsibilities at home is illustrated in the quote below:

Sometimes I work from home, because my daughter is just 5 months old... I do the cooking at home, and it’s just two of us, raising the newborn! We don’t have

the luxury (of having family take care of our child) ... I will just do whatever I can to help my wife, because she has to feed the baby! (P9)

Other men who participated in the study typically did not bring up what they did at home, though they discussed the importance of “family support” when doing business. However, this seemed to have the opposite connotation of “supporting the family” that women addressed. The support that some men discussed involved their wives accommodating or understanding their and their business needs. Two quotes below show two different ways that the rest of the family can support the enterprise: one financially and another emotionally.

You need support from your family. When I started, I told my wife that I need 5 years for this venture. She left her job to join the government, so that we would have some financial stability in the family. (P4)

You need support from your family. Most importantly you need mental support from them. You work so hard, you go home every morning at 2 o'clock, then your wife your kids might ask “Daddy where did you go? Why don't you come back?” My family never challenges me for this, that's how great their support is, almost like encouragement! They don't need to say anything to me, and I take this very positively! “Wow! My family is behind me, like really behind me!” (P1)

The stories that these men told of their family support contrasts starkly with the stories told by women participants. However, it can be seen in both genders of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs that family has a significant role in entrepreneurship decisions and strategies – for better or for worse (for the business). One male participant brought up the fact that one is not successful without family:

I say my success is not only me, myself, my company. It's as a father, for my kids, as a husband, for my wife, as a son to my mother! I feel so success you know why? My business side doing okay, my family doing okay, and most important, I have two lovely kids! This is my success. This is a VERY big success! (P1)

While success in the business is important, it was only one measure: in order for him to truly succeed he had to do so in all roles he occupied – as a father, husband and son – in addition to being a business owner. Only once he had achieved all of these goals, can he call himself

successful. This is echoed by a woman participant, who lamented that although she may have achieved what others consider “success” in her enterprise, she had no time left for other aspects of her life. As a result, she believed that she was not successful.

From a material angle...other people will think, my business is very successful. But then, I think success isn't just determined by these things. This I think is essential – is a very core element. Am I confident? Am I happy? Am I healthy? Am I balanced? I think if we put all these things together...I am not successful. Being a wife, I do not have enough time to be with my husband. And then being a mom, I didn't spend enough time, not enough patience...the only thing I'm successful in is my business. (P15)

However, not all women felt similarly to the above participant, with several discussing that they valued the freedom of choice that entrepreneurship provided, so long as their family priorities came first.

I value being a hands-on parent, being able to raise my own children, that would mean that I cannot be travelling all the time, I cannot be commuting. I needed to take what I value, and whether the business would let me live a life of things that I value. I feel like I have more control over things in general, for me I value the freedom of choice. (P13)

For women, it appeared that the needs of the family could clash with the needs of their business, especially when it came to navigation of tasks demanded of them by their perceived roles in society. Several women discussed how difficult it was to juggle the roles of mother, wife and entrepreneur, and those who believed they had achieved success overall tended to prioritize the family role. Although several men pointed to the importance of family, some were able to “off-load” their family and parental duties to their partners, which enabled them to take more time to put towards their enterprise. Interestingly, some of these men still considered themselves successful both as entrepreneurs, husbands, and fathers.

Women's Physical Appearance and Gender in Externally Facing Entrepreneurial Situations

Not all aspects of “being Chinese” were related to culture and behaviour – some women participants explained that their *appearance* had a significant impact on their business. For some of these women, especially those in the service industry, their youthful appearance, beauty, or the fact that they looked like they were a representative of the culture that their service belonged to, assisted them in conducting business. One woman involved in the beauty industry noted that her appearance helped her as an entrepreneur.

I am in the beauty business. As a Chinese, we got the genes to look younger, and we have softer skin, less body hair (laugh), those kinds of things. Everybody comes here, sees me, and they think, oh even though today I have no makeup on - I still look good! Looking like this and appearing like this helps me a bit. (P20)

For another woman, looking Chinese increased her credibility as a practitioner of acupuncture and as a doctor of Chinese traditional medicine.

Many people, when they go search for an acupuncturist, they look for someone that looks like Asian...Chinese. Western people, when they learn Chinese medicine, are not as good as Chinese people. Some Westerners want to come to my practice to learn. At the college they only learn for 1 or 2 years. What they learn is superficial. We would learn how to actually diagnose disease. They learn to treat the symptoms only. It's not the same. Their results also aren't as good. (12)

She compared her practice with that of Western people and positioned hers as superior, but as importantly, she indicated that clients sought out practitioners who “look Chinese”- an area where she had a superior advantage.

However, women also provided several accounts of gender-based discrimination. Interestingly, when asked, men did not discuss the influence of their gender on their business, instead deflecting the conversation to womens' gender-based problems in business. This can be interpreted as men not experiencing gender-based difficulties in their businesses, in contrast with

women, who discussed situations where they experienced gender-based discrimination while running their enterprises. One participant noted, with frustration, that her gender, in addition to her youthful appearance, had a significant negative impact on her interactions with others, including co-ethnics.

If I put my hair in a ponytail, I look small or young. Then other people when they see me, they think “Oh, you’re just a little child”. When I first started running my business, other people thought I was a “young girl”, so they screwed around with my company like I’m nothing! Chinese people are like this too. If you attend an event and other people look at you, they’ll think, “Oh, you’re just a young girl eh!” (P15)

She recounted incidents where other co-ethnics would band together to try and take her company out of business, or try to hire her employees out from underneath her in an attempt to eliminate her from their competition – simply because they believed that she was an easy target due to her gender and youthful appearance.

When I started the newspaper company, all the other Chinese newspapers, they said, oh hey, a little girl has entered our midst, we have to get rid of her. So, they started to give ads for free! And then, as soon as I started, when I needed advertisements, the clients - they called me to cancel contracts. So, my employees started to leave. It wasn’t even that [my] newspaper couldn’t keep going, my employees couldn’t keep going! (P15)

In the above, the combination of gender and youth are presented as a challenge for conducting business even among co-ethnics. Another woman stated that there are both pros and cons to being a girl, small and gentle, notably when interacting with men:

Often in renovations, it’s all men, so when people meet me, I appear small, and people get that impression, so they – you know how the way men speak is very straightforward, and pointed, very cutting words. But things like this don’t happen to me! But also if they see a sweet soft girl, often they will try to fool me or take advantage of my “gentleness”. But I’m actually a very strong-willed person – so you can’t mess with me! Don’t look at me and think that because I’m a girl, that’s how it is! If it doesn’t work out, you can leave. (P19)

She noted here and elsewhere that the abrasive and “cutting” tones usually used by men in the

renovation industry were not typically used on her, and that she got into fewer arguments with colleagues and business partners than she believed would be the case if she were a man.

However, there were also instances where men believed that they could “pull the wool over her eyes”. In those circumstances, she dropped her “soft and gentle” approach and adopted a more “strong-willed” stance, with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

Overall, many participants referred to their gender identities as role identities, implying that there were certain behaviours and actions that they were expected to perform as members of society.

This contrasts with the earlier section on cultural identities, which were positioned more as social identities, built relationally based on membership in an ethnic group. With respect to gender, participants with children felt significant pressure to perform in their roles as parents – and especially women, who seemed to indicate that they mostly “automatically” accepted the responsibilities associated with domestic and family care. In addition to this, only women participants discussed the influence of their physical appearance, whether good or bad, on their business. This shows the influence of yet another set of role expectations placed upon women in this study.

This section has analyzed the findings from the study, summarized in the model presented at the beginning of the section. In the next section, I turn my attention to discussion of these findings in view of the extant literature.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My study explored how Chinese men and women immigrant entrepreneurs' culture and gender experiences helped shape their entrepreneurial identity, entrepreneurial endeavours and views of success.

Culture and Entrepreneurship

A common cultural theme seen amongst several participants in this study was the idea of “coming from nothing”, where participants arrived in Canada with very limited resources. This supports the discussion of the “zero mindset” displayed by participants in Zhang & Chun's (2017) study on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Western Canada. Participants in both studies discussed that they had to effectively start from the bottom of the ladder, and that their previous education, work experience, and knowledge had been devalued. In my study, this pushed participants to adopt a mentality where success was defined rather loosely, with examples of success including “keeping myself happy”, “we haven't unfairly taken peoples' money”, and “at least I won't starve”. The study by Zhang and Chun (2017), although touching on ideas of entrepreneurial achievements, mostly discussed the “zero mindset” in terms of self-efficacy and psychological impacts, rather than connecting it to the broader entrepreneurial identity and ideas of success. I found that participants connected the idea of having nothing to lower expectations in terms of what would be considered “successful”. However, they still placed pressure on themselves to do their best despite the limitations they faced.

Participants discussed positive aspects of being Chinese and how that influenced their entrepreneurial endeavours. One participant described his Chinese culture as a specialty, something he has in his blood. This strength translated into leveraging knowledge of the business

and technology landscape in China. Some participants in the study spoke with pride about bringing into Canada more advanced technologies from China. Although existing literature has frequently discussed how immigrants might seek to bring back resources and technology to their home countries, some participants in my study engaged in a pattern of *reverse technology transfer* from China to Canada. This is consistent with findings of other studies that show an increasing trend to transfer technological innovations from China to other countries (Feng, 2009; Gross, 2012). However, more to the point in this study, the pride in being a Chinese entrepreneur in Canada aligns with social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which states that actively identifying with a social group is associated with pride in belonging to the group and with favorable categorization of the in-group (Chinese entrepreneurs) in comparison with out-groups (Canadians). In this case, Canadians were portrayed as not sufficiently technology-savvy.

However, some pushes for the adoption of novel Chinese technologies have been met with mixed responses, in particular a distrust of the reliability and safety of Chinese products (Kirchherr & Matthews, 2018). My participants referred to these experiences as well, attending to the negative side of being Chinese. This entailed struggling against or trying to overcome peoples' prejudices and beliefs held against China and Chinese nationals, specifically suspicions of the quality, security, and integrity of Chinese products and businesspeople. Thus, participants discussed both advantages and disadvantages associated with their ethnicity, portraying it as a potentially double-edged sword in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Several participants also constructed a *hybrid* identity using aspects of both their Canadian host country and Chinese home country cultures, similar to what we see in a study by Essers and Benschop (2007). However, I found that some participants placed unequal importance on the Chinese and Canadian portions of this hybrid identity, which presented itself as a spectrum, with

varying degrees of “Chinese-ness”. This interplay between Chinese and Canadian elements of identity can be linked to *Cultural Identity Spectrum Theory*, which has been discussed in the literature on religious studies. This theory discusses how the assumed dichotomy of “Us” and “Them” in extant identity research fails to acknowledge the hierarchal positioning of cultural identities amongst individuals and groups, and the unique interplay between the constituent components of these identities (Lengel & Holdsworth, 2015). For example, in my study, individuals who positioned themselves closer to the Chinese end of the spectrum had to bridge a wider gap between themselves and fellow Canadians and did so by adopting a tactic of hiring Canadian nationals. In contrast, taking on both Chinese and Canadian attributes enabled several entrepreneurs to conduct business in a way that positively utilized elements of both host and home country cultures.

Gender and Entrepreneurship

In this study, I also consider the differences between men and women Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. Previous research on gendered immigrant entrepreneurship has tended to focus only on women (for example, the studies by Essers and colleagues, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2014), an aspect of research that has been noted to be a weakness in this literature (Chreim et al., 2018).

A difference between men’s and women’s narratives was the frequency with which participants referred to themselves as “learning entrepreneurship” versus “being an entrepreneur”. Women placed a strong emphasis on the importance of continually learning to become (better) entrepreneurs. Men – although acknowledging the importance of learning and education – mostly identified as businessmen or entrepreneurs in their narratives. One male participant believed that Chinese nationals were more entrepreneurial or had a type of “entrepreneurial thinking” that they were born with.

Men and women also had differing opinions on the relationship between their businesses and their families. Although both agreed that having family support was very important, their idea of what constituted “family support” contrasted greatly. Men believed that family support meant that their spouse and children believed that they were doing good by the business and would not question them about their extensive investment of themselves in the business. Women entrepreneurs on the other hand wanted to or believed that they needed to take care of the family and household, and a few expressed frustration at having to juggle family and entrepreneurial duties. The literature on role identity theory, which argues the behavioural expectations associated with a role can shape identity is informative here (Stets & Burke, 2000). Overall, the Chinese women in my study behaved in conformity with normative gender roles, and their narratives showed that they had largely internalized the female gender role expectations. As a result, these participants leaned largely towards stability as their idea of success. This aligns with existing literature on gendered entrepreneurship, which indicates that women entrepreneurs put more emphasis on stability and are less likely to pursue growth than their male counterparts (Menzies et al., 2006; Acs et al., 2004). Similarly, the influence of physical appearance as discussed by the women in my study could also be connected to expectations of society on women’s looks.

A study on women entrepreneurs in Uganda revealed that normative standards of entrepreneurship, as well as broad sociocultural standards, may reduce the value of the entrepreneurial identity (Masika, 2017). The author found that this patriarchal context was associated with an over-valuation of the gender identity of women entrepreneurs, so that they saw their gender identities as more significant than who they were as entrepreneurs (Masika, 2017). Consistent with the discussion in this article, I found that women participants in my study

tended to place much greater emphasis on their gender identities, whereas men generally did not discuss whether their gender contributed to their entrepreneurial endeavours, preferring to discuss women's issues instead. "Over-valuation" of gender identity is subjective here, as several men participants did not believe that their gender influenced *their* business positively or negatively, but firmly believed that gender had a negative influence on women's business.

Conclusion and Limitations

In this study, I tried to understand how Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' cultural and gender experiences influence their entrepreneurial identity constructions, their business endeavours and their views of success.

In terms of cultural identity, I expanded upon the notion of coming from nothing or "zero mindset" proposed by Zhang and Chun (2017) by connecting it to entrepreneurial endeavours and perceptions of success. I build on *Cultural Identity Spectrum Theory*, linking it to the idea of *hybrid identities*. I show that there is a spectrum of cultural identities and how positioning in different places of this spectrum (e.g. identifying strongly as Chinese or identifying as Chinese Canadian) can influence business endeavours. To my knowledge, *Cultural Identity Spectrum Theory* has not been applied in the context of immigrant entrepreneurship, yet it can enrich understanding of the interplay of home and host culture influences on entrepreneurial identity and endeavours.

I contributed to the literature on gender in immigrant entrepreneurship in two ways. Firstly, I present a direct comparison between men and women from the same country of origin, living and conducting business in the same city in their new host country. I found that women associated with the idea of "learning entrepreneurship", whereas men associated with the concept of

innately “being an entrepreneur”. In addition, women showed a tendency to prioritize the gender role of mother and wife over the entrepreneurial role and to define success as stability in the business and balance between work and family, more so than men did.

This study has limitations. First, the sample was limited in the number of younger entrepreneurs. Extant literature has recognized that immigrant entrepreneurs, of different ages and/or generations exhibit different behaviour patterns when enterprising (Beckers & Blumberg, 2013; Chababi et al., 2017; Rusinovic, 2008). Research conducted on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs of the second generation or a younger age could be compared to the participants in this study, to see if there are differences between patterns seen in the first and second generation Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. Specifically, it would be interesting to compare the differences between genders over generations, to see if the findings in this study are reflected in younger Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. Second, the study included immigrants in one city in Canada, and it would be interesting to compare these participants to immigrants in other cities or countries. For example, if there is a comparison to other Chinese immigrants in nations with more patriarchal or matriarchal societies, this would facilitate a deeper understanding of how different contexts are internalized by individuals from a similar host country.

Finally, the findings from this study cannot be generalized at large, as is typical of qualitative studies (Miles et al. 2014). However, the contributions of this study on cultural and gender experiences add to an increasing body of knowledge on immigrant entrepreneurs. This topic is only likely to increase in importance in a global context where immigration has become more prevalent around the globe.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Personal Background/Migration/Why Entrepreneurship

When did you come to Canada and why did you choose Ottawa to live in?

What did you do for a living before starting entrepreneurship?

What inspired you to start a business?

Tell me briefly about your business (When did you start? What do you do? Who/what is your market? Do you have employees?)

Do you own the business by yourself or do you share ownership with others e.g. family or business partners?

When starting your business, did you find accessing resources easy? (e.g. finances/banks/lending, government and policy support, how to do things, employees) or did you face obstacles? Can you please elaborate.

Being a Chinese Entrepreneur

In your case, how is being Chinese helpful in entrepreneurship? Can you give me an example or two?

In your case, how is being Chinese a hindrance in entrepreneurship? Can you give me an example or two? (e.g. language)

Please tell me how you, as a Chinese entrepreneur, interact with the Canadian market.

Please tell me how you, as an entrepreneur, interact with the Chinese community in Ottawa or elsewhere.

How has your business strategy changed over time?

We have some questions on gender – trying to understand how female and male Chinese entrepreneurs differ from each other

Is being a male(female) an advantage or a potential problem in your line of business?

Has being a male (female) influenced your business or how you do things? If so, how?

Can you give an example of a time when you chose to do something specifically because of your gender?

What is your role in your family? How does it affect your role here in your business?

As an entrepreneur, you are viewed a certain way by the Chinese community. Would this have been different if you were a woman in this line of business?

We have some questions on your identity as an entrepreneur and on your views of success

How would you compare yourself to similar businesses run by immigrants? What about Canadians?

What does being a Chinese entrepreneur mean to you? Has the way you see yourself as a (Chinese - female) entrepreneur changed with time? Please tell me how and why.

Has your approach to entrepreneurship changed with time? If so, how?

Do you believe your business is doing well or succeeding? Success means different things to different people- what does "success" mean to you? Would you consider that you are achieving your goals?

What are your business plans for the future?

What have I not asked you, but should have asked, to better understand immigrant entrepreneurship from the perspective of a Chinese male (female)?