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Social Capital and Entrepreneurial Mobility in Early-Stage Tourism Development: A Case from Rural China

Abstract

Early-stage tourism destinations often seek external capital to start up, invest, and participate in tourism businesses at various scales. Therefore, entrepreneurial mobility at these destinations is an important phenomenon in need of further exploration both empirically and theoretically. This study uses an early-stage destination in rural China as a case to explore the experiences of entrepreneurial migrants in tourism development and associates their mobility, geographical and organizational, with dimensions of social capital, including institutional support, community openness, and personal social networks. Primary interview data were collected from migrant tourism entrepreneurs, key local community members, and government officials related to tourism projects. This study concludes that entrepreneurial mobility in tourism development is influenced by all three social capital dimensions. This study suggests that entrepreneurs had an idealistic anticipation of the tourism industry before they entered. The integration with locality enhances the potential contribution of entrepreneurial mobility in tourism development.

Keywords: social capital, entrepreneurship, mobility, tourism development, integration, early-stage destination

1 Introduction

Although many developing areas seek tourism as means of economic development, at an early stage, such areas often lack various forms of capital. Individual talents are welcome to contribute human and social capital for tourism development, in which entrepreneurship is an important driving factor (Lordkipanidze, Brezet, & Backman, 2005; Dana, Gurau, & Lasch, 2014; Jaafar, Abdul-Aziz, Maideen, & Mohd, 2011). Many early-stage destinations rely on external and inward entrepreneurs to start up and invest in tourism projects; the experiences of this group of individuals, although under-researched, contribute to the understanding of tourism entrepreneurial mobility and the impact of entrepreneurial mobility on local tourism development. These entrepreneurs acquire social capital in their mobility and start-up businesses, and social capital is considered an asset for tourism entrepreneurship (Zhao, Ritchie, & Echtner, 2011). Therefore, this study attempts to identify the role of social capital in tourism entrepreneurs' experiences in relation to their geographical and organizational mobility and investigate how to sustain such mobility at early-stage tourism destinations.

In many aspects, connections are the main component of tourism. For instance, people are connected to destinations physically by means of transportation and spiritually by their interaction with and experiences at the destination. Tourism businesses are connected for cooperation, collaboration, and even competition in various forms. Connections at the micro and macro levels are the foundations of networks, thus implying the existence of social capital. In studies of tourism, business networks are often discussed under the umbrella of destination development; small-scale tourism businesses have received particular attention (Tinsley & Lynch, 2001; Hall, 2004). Networking and partnership is also substantial in destination marketing (Bhat & Milne, 2008; Hede & Stokes, 2009). Formal and informal business networks

also facilitate interactions that shape tourism products (Petrou, Pantziou, Dimara & Skuras, 2007). The application of social capital in tourism studies is often separated from that of networks and connections.

The theory of social capital has been widely applied in tourism development (Macbeth, Carson, & Northcote, 2004; Zhao, Ritchie, & Echtner, 2010; Johannesson, Skaptadottir, & Benediktsson, 2003; Adger, 2003; Hall, 2004; Jones, 2005; Misener & Mason, 2006; Heimtun, 2007; Nordin & Westlund, 2009; Park, Lee, Choi, & Yoon, 2012; von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006). Tourism researchers generally treat social capital as an existing durable asset rather than an easily alterable construct, particularly from the supply side (Jones, 2005; Jóhannesson et al., 2003). Flexibility is a merit of this concept. Social capital fits many development frameworks and coincides with many concepts in tourism such as stakeholder involvement, organizational networks, and partnership and collaboration (McGehee, Lee, Bannon & Perdue, 2010).

From a communitarian perspective, social capital can be viewed as institutionalized networks and measured as participation in voluntary associations (Putnam, 1995, 2001); using a network approach, social capital is defined based on social relationships among individuals (Lin, 1999; Lin & Erickson, 2008), whereas an institutional approach emphasizes the importance of institutions and the role of the state in generating social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Moreover, social capital can be divided into structural, relational and cognitive dimensions (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Bridging and bonding social capital are also commonly used dimensions. Bridging connects social capital from outside the community, and bonding social capital refers to the social relations generated within a closed structure (Putnam, 2001).

This study is situated in China, where the meaning of social capital may be contextually influenced. The conceptualization of social capital according to Portes and Landolt (2000),

namely sources of social control, family-mediated benefits, and non-family networks, is associated with *guanxi* in Chinese culture. Guanxi, in the form of social networks and resources, is best conceptualized as a process and an ability of *la guanxi* (pulling strings) (Su & Littlefield, 2001). In the case of tourism development in China, guanxi networks are utilized to attract investments and entrepreneurship, which often implies corruption and unethical behavior (Bao & Zuo, 2008). Based on these various conceptualizations and their suitability in the Chinese context, this paper conceptualizes and operationalizes social capital into three dimensions: institutional support, community openness, and personal social networks.

The main purpose of this research is to investigate migrant tourism entrepreneurs' experiences in starting up tourism businesses, under the conceptual framework of the application of social capital in tourism development, the link between tourism development and entrepreneurial migration, and the expanding concept of human mobility.

2 Social Capital and Tourism Development

The level at which social capital is conceptualized varies among tourism studies. Two scales of application are identified: the regional/community scale, which is associated with tourism development processes and outcomes, and the organizational/individual scale, which is associated with tourism entrepreneurship.

2.1 The Regional/Community Scale

The application of "capital" in tourism studies requires substantial clarification of the definition, ideology, and scale of the terminology (Macbeth et al., 2004). The accumulation of and investment in rural capital has been proven to be important for rural community development as well as tourism development (George et al., 2009). Flora, Rickerl, and Francis

(2004) identified four forms of capital that are crucial to community development: human, social, financial/built, and natural; the authors' categorization is also frequently adopted by tourism researchers (George et al., 2009; McGehee et al., 2012). Among the four types of capital, social capital is most frequently mentioned in tourism studies, possibly due to the constant debate and theorization of this concept. Other forms of capital, however, are often indirectly referred to.

On a regional scale, social capital is often discussed in conjunction with other forms of capital. Macbeth et al. (2004) proposed the concept of SPCC (social, political, and cultural capital), which bundles social capital with political capital and cultural capital as a whole entity encompassing community values to evaluate "tourism readiness" and contribute to development and innovation beyond the scope of tourism. McGehee et al. (2010) identified positive relationships between perceived social capital and most of the other forms of perceived capitals in tourism and developed regional tourism system inventory for the case study area. At a regional level, social capital is mainly understood from the communitarian approach; governments, voluntary associations, and other institutions play a significant role in generating and maintaining social capital.

More tourism studies appear to adopt the concept of social capital on a community scale. Social capital is utilized to understand social and environmental changes introduced into the local community by ecotourism operations, for example, in the case of a community-managed eco-camp in the Gambia, Africa (Jones, 2005). Rural tourism communities in Korea have been examined using relational factors of social capital, e.g., trust, norms, cooperation, and networks, and social capital has been shown to be positively associated with crops farmers grow and tourism activities they offer (Park, et al., 2012). Social capital was discovered to initiate coping

strategies in tourism through networking, innovation and identity forming in a case study on rural communities in Iceland (Jóhannesson et al., 2003). Empirical studies have suggested various but generally positive effects of community social capital in terms of tourism development. In a rural context, social capital is also reflected in community participation and engagement (Pretty & Ward, 2001; Sharp, 2009), stakeholder involvement (Pretty, 2003), development policies (Shucksmith, 2000), and the overall theme of integration (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008).

Studies have reported contradictory results regarding whether length of stay in a rural community influences the level of social capital. Park et al. (2012) showed that long stays in a community result in low social capital, whereas McGehee et al. (2010) found the opposite, i.e., that longer residence results in higher social capital. In the case of a ski destination, new actors largely replaced old actors in tourism development; thus, the composition of community social capital changed continually throughout the destination's life cycle (Nordin & Westlund, 2009).

Overall, social capital exerts positive effects on tourism development, but inequity, power distribution, and interpersonal conflicts, which are negative indicators, may be generated over the course of tourism development (Ashley, 2009). Communities require proper management of bridging and bonding social capital to maintain community transparency and high social capital (Jones, 2005). In the context of tourism, although relatively under-researched, social capital has been increasingly examined. A close tie between social capital and human capital has emerged in the flow of people, networks, new organizations and partnerships. Therefore, it is essential to consider the relationship between social capital and human mobility in tourism development.

2.2 The Organizational/Individual Scale

Social capital is also often applied in identifying the role of organizations and individual social resources possessed through formal and informal networks. Tourism organizations and businesses can synthesize those resources and enhance collaboration among stakeholders (von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006). Krishna (2004) identified six activities that essentially utilize social capital in the context of rural India: membership in labor-sharing groups, dealing with crop disease and natural disasters, trust, solidarity, and reciprocity. Participation in various organizations, individual agents and organizational leadership are important sources and provoke the utilization of social capital when needed (Bodin & Crona, 2008). Social capital possessed in the forms of groups with common goals, for example, natural resources management, facilitates decision-making among stakeholders, managing conflict, and synergizing government and local institutions (Adger, 2003; Bodin & Crona, 2008). The role of voluntary organizations and associations also varies with context, whereas in developed countries the number and nature of voluntary organizations and associations are considerably different from those in developing countries (Putnam, 2001).

Zhao, Ritchie and Echtner (2011) examined three dimensions of social capital—cognitive, relational and structural—in individual tourism and among non-tourism entrepreneurs; they found that structural and relational social capital contributes to tourism entrepreneurship, whereas cognitive social capital is marginal. Another study carried out among recreational farm owners in Taiwan analyzed the relationship between social capital and future cooperative intention and concluded that social capital is a crucial factor in facilitating future cooperation (Shu et al., 2010). Ngoasonga and Kimbu (2016) examined the role of microfinance institutions in development-led tourism entrepreneurship and stressed the importance of collective action and

social capital generated through informal microfinance mechanisms in supporting tourism entrepreneurship. A recent study conducted among tourism social enterprises in a developing economy suggests that social capital contributes to the creation of social value; thus, tourism enterprises must build relationships with and empower local communities to ensure effective network development for social value generation (Altinay, Sigala, & Waligo, 2016). Thus, social capital is linked to the success and sustainability of tourism entrepreneurship.

The classic work of Granovetter (1973, 1983) regarding the notion of strong ties and weak ties stresses the significance of weak ties in individual ego-centric networks. Granovetter suggested that weak ties are more likely to cover a wider range in a large circle and therefore have the potential to provide information from different sources. The findings of Granovetter have been discussed and experimentally investigated by numerous researchers. One study conducted by Jack (2005) on entrepreneurs' network ties has proved the results otherwise. In the case of entrepreneurship, strong ties are proven to be most important, and it is the function of network ties that generates value rather than the frequency of contact. However, strong ties can be more problematic than weak ties after an entrepreneur has launched his or her business (Jack, 2005). Latent and inactive contacts can be activated, and community disclosure can occur, resulting from a high level of social capital, which will likely limit the access of outsiders or new comers for business or development initiatives (Portes & Landolt, 2000).

3 Tourism and Entrepreneurial Migration: Under the Mobilities Paradigm

Mobilities have been increasingly discussed in tourism studies (Cresswell, 2011; Hall, 2005; Hannam, 2009; Williams & Hall, 2002). However, whereas entrepreneurial migration is a well-established topic, entrepreneurial mobility is a neglected one (Wright, 2011), particularly in the developing world. The conceptualization of entrepreneurial mobility is also ongoing, with

existing studies on entrepreneurial migration related to the geographical mobility of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial migration in tourism can be undertaken for production and consumption purposes, referring to the business-oriented and lifestyle or amenity-oriented nature of entrepreneurs (Williams & Hall, 2002). The importance of tourism in facilitating entrepreneurial migration is reflected in the search for spaces, lifestyle, and creating opportunities (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). In a tourism-dependent economy, entrepreneurs who are business-seekers and amenity-seekers are attracted (Snepenger & Johnson, 1995). On the macro scale, tourism development significantly influences immigration and residential development (Kuentzel & Ramaswamy, 2005).

Generally, entrepreneurial migrants bring human capital, innovation, creativity, and external networks to local tourism development and economy (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2013; Lordkipanidze, Brezet, Backman, 2005). Entrepreneurial migrants take risks and opportunities and maximize their resources; the value of embeddedness also contributes to higher integration with local communities (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). Social and economic spheres of entrepreneurship are interconnected. A study conducted in rural England showed that migrant entrepreneurs have distanced themselves from confined rurality and have relied less on rural settings for resources (Kalantaridis & Bika, 2007). Social embeddedness is important in reaching a wider market and resources when the size of the rural locality is limited. Migrant entrepreneurship thus becomes a driving force for the integration of rural areas and regional, national, and even international economies.

Studies on migrant entrepreneurs have raised the issue of conflict with local communities. The engagement of entrepreneurs in community activities and the permanence of migration prove to mitigate this issue (Paniagua, 2002). Migrant entrepreneurs in developed countries place a

stronger emphasis on lifestyle in decision-making and on high educational attainment and are general older. Interestingly, the least profit-oriented entrepreneurs can contribute to rural economies (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). In developing countries, migrants seek employment and entrepreneurial opportunities that can offer high income and social status. Two important factors that determine migrants' decision regarding entrepreneurship are capital availability and specific knowledge (Gössling & Schulz, 2005). An increasingly popular phenomenon in tourism and hospitality entrepreneurship is social entrepreneurship, which also occurs among migrant entrepreneurs (Schaper, 2012; von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). Social entrepreneurs balance the profit-seeking goal of businesses with a social quest or goal to promote social values and social change by integrating such a goal into business models (Cho, 2006; Mair, Robinson, & Hockerts, 2006).

Thus, tourism entrepreneurial migration has different meanings to and effects on both individual migrants and the destination. When endogenous tourism development is encouraged and practiced, tourism entrepreneurship of migrants is a valuable resource for sustainable and integrated development (Paniagua, 2002). The phenomenon of entrepreneurial migration in tourism in developing countries is not sufficiently researched, although the current literature on tourism-related migration in developing countries suggests the domination of labor migration (Gössling & Schulz, 2005; Ladkin, 2011; Yang & Lu, 2007). The connection between social capital and tourism entrepreneurship is implicit in many studies, and the relationship between locality and host areas affects migrants' entrepreneurial mobility and success.

4 Methodology

An inland county with a population of 600,000 in central China, L, is selected as a case area. In 2010, county L developed a master plan for tourism development, indicating the government's

initiative to develop tourism. Based on the infrastructure of tourism, number of tourist sites, and annual tourism receipts, county L is determined to be in the early stages of tourism development. Official statistics show that annual tourism income represents 15% of the county's GDP. The county resembles other areas in China in terms of political structure, natural resources, and deteriorating rural conditions.

In-depth interviews, site visits and observations, and secondary documents such as the local tourism master plan, plans for major tourism projects, and relevant government-issued reports were collected. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 tourism entrepreneurs, including 11 entrepreneurial migrants (EMs), 9 local entrepreneurs, and 10 local government officials who were in charge of or participated in tourism projects. Local entrepreneurs and government officials were interviewed to understand their perspectives on EM experiences and allow for triangulation in this study. In total, 20 tourism projects and businesses at the destination were selected based on their start-up status (Table 1). Most of the entrepreneurial migrants were involved in large-scale tourism projects, and local entrepreneurs had smaller enterprises mainly offering tourism activities and accommodation. The type and scope of tourism projects were also considered. The informants shared personal and organizational experiences. An increasing number of projects were being developed because the development trend leaned toward tourism from the local government; the types of projects listed in this research represent the overall tourism development strategy, which is positioned to preserve and utilize ecological resources to develop tourism and to develop ecotourism and rural tourism for surrounding urban markets.

Table 1 List of types of tourism businesses/projects

Type of Tourism businesses/projects	Scope	Number of sites
Tourism sightseeing sites	Scenic area (national forestry park, ancient villages, etc.) developing into sightseeing sites or tourist districts	4
Agritourism sites	Agritourism as the main product (organic farms and ecological parks)	4
Tourist activity operators	Cable car operators, river rafting operators, and etc.	3
Resorts	Themed resorts (hot-spring spa, summer escape, health and wellness, etc.)	4
Self-employed or family businesses	Happy Farmer Home (bed and breakfast) and other self-operated hospitality businesses	5

Phenomenological and narrative approaches were used to collect and analyze data. Given the weakness and vulnerability of a single-case study (Yin, 2003), this research used the contextualization strategy of inductive reasoning and formulated empirical inferences within the boundaries of the case (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Deductive and inductive analyses were conducted. In analyzing interview scripts and observation notes, three principal steps were followed, namely, identifying the category, attaching codes and meaning, and drawing inferences. By repeatedly reading the texts, codes were developed for the content of the narratives, discourse, and phenomena. Inferences were drawn to note critical information and first impressions exposed by the text, which facilitated data analysis. The second process individually analyzed each code, by reference, and identified explicit connections to other codes. In the second stage, notes were also taken to demonstrate potential and implicit relationships.

Finally, the initial inferences were compared with code notes. The findings were consolidated according to category and theme.

5 Results

5.1 Characteristics of Tourism Entrepreneurship in Early-Stage Destinations

In transitioning rural China, tourism development is predominantly nature-based and leisure-oriented with small-scale operations run by farmers. Increasingly, large-scale resorts, theme parks, and agritourism sites have been developed. In the study area, the entrepreneurial migrants (EMs) were motivated to make intricate mobility and tourism development decisions, driven by financial benefits, social participation, and environment awareness. The mobility and tourism decisions were intertwined, influenced by personal development goals, vision, lifecycle, emotional attachment, and family obligations and other external forces. Features of social and innovative changes were noted, indicating the characteristics of social entrepreneurship. However, no purposive social entrepreneurship was noted because all of the entrepreneurs recognized and valued economic goals. Examined from the socio-behavioral perspective adopted in entrepreneurship studies (Ateljevic & Li, 2009), the personality features of entrepreneurs, such as determination, diligence, persistence, and controlling, were noteworthy in the present study, which echoed findings reported in previous studies (Hallak, Assaker, & Lee, 2015; Jaafar et al., 2011).

Entrepreneurial mobility according to the conceptualization of Wright (2011) refers to the organizational and geographical mobilities of entrepreneurship. With respect to organizational mobility, the entrepreneurs involved in the present study ranged from large-scale corporations with multiple businesses; with respect to geographical mobility, spatial movement and exploration of new territories were indicated in new and returnee EMs. Applied empirically in

the present study, corporate entrepreneurship fell in the high organizational mobility and high geographical mobility quadrant, new EMs and returnees' start-up tourism projects fell in the low-high quadrant, and local tourism entrepreneurship fell in the low-low quadrant (Table 2).

Table 2 Entrepreneurial mobility quadrants (Source: Wright, 2011)

	Geographical mobility	
Organizational mobility	Low-low Quadrant 1 Creation of new firm in local context	Low-high Quadrant 3 Individual mobility
	High-low Quadrant 2 Move out of established organization	High-high Quadrant 4 Move established firm

Entrepreneurs involved in this study perceived themselves as pioneers in tourism development. The identification of economic opportunities was within grasp of the potential of tourism development, mainly based on the current thriving tourism demand and institutional and policy support for tourism in China. These features had implications for the promotion of social change through tourism entrepreneurship in rural China. Entrepreneurs with vision and empathy toward local communities can drive local development, particularly where urbanization has caused a drastic decline in traditional agriculture. Therefore, as significant indicators of social capital, creating an enabling environment and enhancing the capabilities of such entrepreneurs are important (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). However, the experiences of tourism entrepreneurs in the present study indicated the complexities in obtaining social capital and the challenges of mobilizing tourism business in an early-stage destination.

5.2 Phenomenological and Relational Deconstruction of Entrepreneurial Tourism

Experiences

A relational approach was adopted in the phenomenological analysis of entrepreneurial experiences; such experiences were deconstructed by the connection to various social actors in the tourism development process. At the start-up stage of the tourism entrepreneurial experiences, the relationships with local communities and local governments, and the experience of personal/social development, were shown to be important attributes.

Dealing with Local Communities

The relationship between entrepreneurs and local communities was transformational. EMs initially experienced unwelcoming voices in the local community. The primary conflict was rooted in land circulation; although rural farmland is collectively owned by the community, many farmers privatize their land and resist leasing land to external entrepreneurs. To serve large-scale tourism projects better, the village/town government took the responsibility to conduct land circulation and leveling. Therefore, no direct negotiation occurred between EMs and local community members. For small-scale projects, the negotiation was conducted principally by the entrepreneurs, with the assistance of the village/town officials.

The negotiation was a major task, circulating the privately managed farmland sometimes involved relocating the local residents. The farmland circulation process was in the early stages in China and was originally a strict policy; the policy has been eased in recent years to support rural development. Price and compensation were the other major points of negotiation and were often the most difficult. Many land contracts used the price of crops as a reference for compensation. Most of the villagers were content with a reasonable price, but a few of them compared their income with the potential gains after the land was leased for tourism

development. In such cases, the entrepreneurs would eventually earn significantly more money from the land. The concept of relative deprivation may be applicable in this situation (Crosby, 1976). The attitude of local villagers toward tourism development was relative to what they gained when they had the land or what other people gained with the land.

“After the open door policy was established, the contract responsibility system was implemented (farmers had the right to privately manage the collectively owned land by contract), especially after the cancellation of agricultural tax, they would rather abandon the land, because they received subsidies, even though nothing was planted in the land. And they had a strong sense of ownership on the land. They think the land is owned privately, [...]., and the farmers were short-sighted. It was okay that they left the land abandoned. If we wanted to lease them, they thought we were making loads of money on it. They wanted to keep the land and observe what we were doing, and see if they could do the same thing.” (EM-3)

During the negotiation, previous relationships with the community may not have necessarily relieved the tension. Several returnee entrepreneurs, in fact, experienced more difficulties with their home villagers because new entrepreneurs experienced more assistance in dealing with the local community members during the land negotiation, whereas returnees were initially more confident and underestimated the challenges. Because the decision on the land lease and project development was made between the entrepreneurs and key village leaders, the difficulties encountered in the land negotiation may have been the result of neglecting the farmers’ voices. Patience was shown to be important during the process because explanations were required from every single household regarding the costs and benefits of the project. However, the conservative nature and innocence of the local farmers, from the perspective of a few entrepreneurs, made them “easy to manage” as long as they were properly compensated.

The experience of dealing with the local community involved a sense of pride and fulfillment because of the change and transformation migrant entrepreneurs brought to the communities. In several villages where tourism was more mature, the villagers began to participate in vending local specialties and even developing HFH accommodations. Most changes were related to the improvement in infrastructure and living environment because of the early-stage status of many of the projects:

“The community saw benefits now. The change is obvious. I took down filthy pig houses and toilets, reconstructed them properly together in the back of the village. The environment is improved, [...] now they fully support me, [...] the first three years we persuaded and persuaded. We got 200 mu per year. This year alone, for one year, we got 450mu land.” (EM-5)

“I put up 20 road lamps in the village. During the Chinese New Year when everybody was back home, they were thrilled to see the changes. At least this is what I can do for the stay-behind elderlies and children.” (EM-2)

Acknowledging these changes demonstrated a sense of fulfillment and self-efficacy. The ability to change and provide a positive influence was valued by migrant entrepreneurs, particularly those such as EM-1, who was previously viewed by local villagers as an outsider but now a respected community member. The transformation in the communities had positive effects on the attitude of villagers toward the tourism project as well as the mode of cooperation between tourism entrepreneurs and local communities. The attitude of EMs regarding change and transformation in the local communities was positive. This phenomenon reflected that key tensions in the early-stage tourism development remained between the developers and the communities; tourists had not rendered any significantly negative effect.

Dealing with Local Governments

The local governments involved in this study featured different levels of government, namely, county, working department, town, and village levels. The EMs had extensive contact with all four levels of governments in their mobile and start-up experiences. The experiences were most negative with the working department officials. The county-level officials were supportive in inviting the entrepreneurs to establish the tourism projects. Tourism entrepreneurs often had common goals with the town/village governments, most of which support tourism development. The working departments, which were supposed to provide administrative services and assistance in implementing government-funded developments in these projects, were reluctant in providing assistance. One informant described the implementation as “onion-peeling” because project funding was layered and shared with the working departments that assisted in the application. In general, EMs experienced disappointment and frustration when recalling the complexities and overwhelming efforts involved in the process.

The major themes and emotions expressed by EMs were *guanxi* and administrative formalities and the contesting public and private interests in tourism development. In handling *guanxi* and administrative formalities, the role of administrative power and political leadership frequently arose. One noteworthy story was related by EM-6, a returnee entrepreneur, who had contacted several government officials in the local agricultural department, who fully supported his idea of developing an agritourism site. Chen, a county vice mayor who at the time was in charge of agriculture, was highly encouraging and had made promises to EM-6 in terms of applying government funds.

The funds were mainly used for land leveling, which was the premise for establishing the project. Farmland abandonment was mentioned by several entrepreneurs because they

considered not producing anything from the land a crime. However, the process of land leveling and circulation was unexpectedly long; projects that involved government funding were extremely difficult to implement, as EM-6 indicated:

“Now I always joke about it. I said Mayor Chen was a big fraud. He fooled me to come back and did not care about me now. He said he cares and if I really invest he would help me, but I know now, he wanted help but how much power does he have. Now there are so much not done here. Why did not he say anything? There were work meetings here for the working departments; he never showed up, because the county council did not inform him, [...], he is in charge of agriculture but the council did not ask him to attend the meeting, because he is not a party member. He is a non-party mayor, so it relates to politics, and it gets too complicated.”(EM-6)

To scrutinize *guanxi* in the experience with local government, *Shouren* (*acquaintances*) *guanxi* was a determining factor in the initiation of tourism entrepreneurial mobility. The successful application of these project funds was the result of the nature of the agritourism project, the assistance of key local contacts, and the support from the county council. However, the implementation of the projects was ineffective. A few agritourism projects did not apply for such projects because of the lack of direct *shouren* *guanxi* and the reluctance of the entrepreneurs to seek and maintain such *guanxi*. Moreover, the lack of transparency would instigate the abuse of social capital based on the success of the application in the current administrative system. One government official explained that staff members in several of the working departments had low wages and benefits, which was the reason for their reluctance to provide all of the funds to assist the tourism projects. However, a new policy on upgrading the wages and benefits of civil workers was issued in China, with the hope of potentially improving the situation.

EM-6 and many other EMs had experienced hospitality from the local government officials in the decision-making process, but disappointment and frustration arose in the actual start-up phase of their projects. Most of the challenges and complexities derived from implementing policies and obtaining permissions from various working departments. Political involvement was palpable in doing business in China. The national policy on farmland circulation was clear; however, persuading the officials to work on turning the “raw land” into “cooked land” such that the investors could come in and start a project more smoothly was difficult. For large corporate projects, the town-level government was obligated to complete the land circulation. These projects frequently had a local correspondent to handle administrative formalities, often a retired government official who was familiar with the local political situation.

The political environment and the political system therefore vitally influence the implementation of tourism projects. Culturally, the business world is contracted, bonded, and straightforward, particularly in large cities that engage in predominantly economic activities. The experience in less developed areas involved more political activities than economic activities. Based on previous studies, the existence and utilization of *guanxi* in political or administrative procedures was a compromise for the lack of efficient administrative system (Wang & Ap, 2013). The lack of *shouren* *guanxi* meant more effort and investment in infrastructure development from government funding, indicating the direct economic outcomes of social and political actions. *Shouren* *guanxi* was obtained through acquaintances and friends. Seeking and maintaining such *guanxi* was possible, although doing so involved exerting extensive effort and social courtesies, as well as induced mental stress. Small-scale tourism businesses and local entrepreneurs, such as HFH owners, did not face significant challenges in terms of dealing with

the local governments because of the lack of government funds in such businesses and limited conflicts in land circulation.

Relationship with the Self

The changes in the self were an important part of the EM experience. Dealing with the local community and the local government was primarily a synthesis of the entrepreneurial and mobility experiences. The relationship with the self was related to personal changes and transformations in the experience, including the themes of cultural adaptation, emotion management, and self-efficacy.

Cultural Adaptation

Dealing with the locality revealed the cultural differences in geographical localities; norms, values, and perceptions had local features. The process of adaptation was complex and alternated between adjusting to the local norms and attempting to change such norms. Adjusting to the local norms was revealed in the growing understanding of the local conditions and the deeply rooted socio-economic explanations. For example, EM-2 explained how the traditionally rooted perceptions of rural residents were extremely difficult to challenge, and he had to change his attitude and became more patient through the process.

The approach of EM-1, an older and more experienced entrepreneur from northern China, to adaptation involved promoting new norms. For example, he suggested the use of Mandarin Chinese instead of the local dialect in official meetings, encouraged local villagers to be on-time to community meetings, and educated local villagers on maintaining environmental hygiene in the tourist site. However, many of his efforts did not significantly change the norms and habits of the local communities. From an individual perspective, the cultural adaptation experience was a coping mechanism for an individual moving from a more developed area to a less developed one.

Emotion Management

When facing challenges in the start-up stage, EMs experienced emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and even depression. In addition, they experienced tremendous stress, particularly when the initiation of their projects was opposed by family members. The stress was caused by the investment in their projects and the risk and uncertainties associated with starting a new business in a new locale. The emotion management approaches varied personally but were an important part of the entrepreneurial and mobile experiences of EMs.

EM-8 started a river rafting business. The season for river rafting was relatively short, and the market was strongly influenced by the weather and length of summer. To cope with the stress caused by the numerous difficulties related to his business, EM-8 wrote poems to express his feelings and release negative emotion. EM-4, a returnee EM, had grown gray hair after two years of establishing his business because he exerted tremendous physical and mental effort. His friends said he looked significantly older now than his real age. He replied:

“I am 45. In 20 years, I will be 65. Then this project should be completed and I will retire here, ... yes, it is a long way to go, but I am prepared.” His coping mechanism was to maintain a positive attitude at all times and play mahjong with his business partners in the evenings. He expected and was prepared for the challenges of developing a tourism project. Although many entrepreneurs experienced challenging times and negative emotions, they generally presented a positive attitude when describing their negative experiences and emotions. One of them expressed, in a self-comforting manner, “Wherever you invest, whatever you do, it won’t be smooth all the way.”

Self-Efficacy

Another theme in the experiences of EMs in terms of the relationship with the self was self-efficacy, which is a common characteristic in entrepreneurship (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). Self-efficacy is defined as the demonstration of the capability to reach an outcome. Self-efficacy was demonstrated by the entrepreneurs through confidence, personal devotion, and a sense of fulfillment. They were confident principally because of their previous success; most of the new entrepreneurs and several of the returnees had previously experienced entrepreneurial success in other businesses. In addition, their confidence developed from social networks established through tourism projects in other areas in China, mostly more developed areas. In connecting with these projects, they had opportunities to collaborate and adapt their skill sets and management approaches.

Long-term devotion was demonstrated by many EMs through their awareness of the long-term development cycle of tourism projects. Such devotion was perceived as a necessary quality in developing tourism projects. EM-1, for example, endured numerous physical and emotional difficulties over the last 10 years of developing a tourism project in the destination where he now calls home. He overcame various obstacles. His persistence and devotion were proven traits that resulted in his success. Self-efficacy was perceived as a means to an end and an input–output spectrum; the effort and energy devoted to pursuing a goal yielded satisfactory results. The difficulties and challenges were appreciated, as indicated by EM-2 in describing his *pains* and *gains*:

“I put a lot of energy, my heart and blood, and feelings (into this project). When I harvest (from this project), I will gain feelings... (These challenges) in the same time pushed us to go forward. I want to push us into a ground with no possibilities. Sometimes when doing things, it is necessary to push yourself. It is easy to move backwards, but if you are used to moving

backwards, it is difficult to move forward again, [...], there is nothing in the world that is smooth all the way, so I always felt that, maybe I won't be successful, but my character is that I would not easily say no. We have one life and there are not many opportunities to give up on."

Start-up EMs, particularly those among the returnee agritourism entrepreneurs, had such determination to complete their projects. The integration of community development and entrepreneurial success was perceived as a noble act, enabling the entrepreneurs to attain higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, this method was proven to be a practical means of gaining social support. Therefore, when tied to community benefits, greater responsibility was necessary in the development of tourism projects, as well as more determination and devotion.

The sense of fulfillment was expressed among EMs, but it was higher among agritourism entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who directly dealt with less developed rural communities. A few of these entrepreneurs showed traces of social entrepreneurship; hence, they prioritized collective community benefits. Entrepreneurship became a self-fulfilling and self-enhancing act, which provided individuals with a stronger sense of accomplishment.

The sense of fulfillment comprised two facets: an intrinsic one from personal devotion and self-realization in creating something out of nothing and an extrinsic sense of fulfillment from effecting change and contributing to local communities. Hence, in the phenomenological experiences of EMs, dealing with communities and governments was both a social and a relational experience in the course of establishing a new project. Dealing with the self was a process of realizing personal potential and using this potential to reach a goal. Although negative experiences were reported, most EMs consider the path of hardship a prerequisite for success, and their perspective on the potential of tourism and their positivity contributed to their persistence in developing tourism.

5.3 Conceptualizing Tourism Entrepreneurial Mobility through Social Capital

Social capital appeared to have more profound and complex relationships with entrepreneurial mobility if perceived as a determining factor in entrepreneurial and mobility experiences. All three aspects of social capital, i.e., institutional support, community openness, and personal networks, exerted various effects on the initiation of entrepreneurial mobility in tourism, but they did not appear to significantly control the decisions and outcomes of mobility. This study revealed the importance of the willingness to contribute to local community, which could also be included as social capital. However, this study only considered social capital as an external factor. Unlike personal characteristics or beliefs, it is perhaps more fitting to group emotional connection with the concept of cultural or human capital.

Institutional and policy support for entrepreneurial mobility likely results in economic gain. In this regard, social capital is closely linked to economic capital, which is the main motivation for tourism-supply-induced mobility. Community openness created a positive image of county L's hospitality in welcoming tourism investment, mostly through the government's attitude towards investors from developed areas. Social networks were also shown to be connected to institutional and community support in the context of rural China. In certain cases, the presence of networks determines the accessibility to institutional resources and grants. The role of social networks in doing business in China is widely acknowledged and examined (Su & Littlefield, 2001); tourism entrepreneurship is not an exception. The ability to establish bridging and bonding networks contributed to the mobility of the entrepreneurs and the future success of their tourism projects.

By studying the experiences of inward tourism entrepreneurs, because the stage of their businesses was in line with the development status of the destination, bonding networks and relationships within the locality were discovered to have higher importance. One group of actors

in this study, namely, the village leaders, was revealed as vital in building bonding relationships with the local community. A trend observed among the village committee and outside investors was the co-development and co-managing of medium- to large-scale tourism businesses. Therefore, the relationship with village officials was crucial in developing tourism in rural China, which indicated a conceptual connection between tourism entrepreneurial mobility and social capital.

Uncovering tourism entrepreneurs' experiences with social capital and social networks further enhances the conceptualization of entrepreneurial mobility. In this case study, corporations with higher organizational mobility were valued more by local governments, which increased access to local networks and resources. By contrast, medium-scale entrepreneurs who had low organizational mobility and high geographical mobility tended to experience more challenges in acquiring local social capital. The origin of EMs, i.e., whether they were from more developed areas, also mattered. Entrepreneurs with higher geographical mobility often possessed more bridging connections from outside of the locality. Similarly, local and returnee entrepreneurs demonstrated more bonding connections. Such findings resonate with the growing importance of return migrants in rural development in the context of China (Démurger & Hui, 2011; Zhao, 2002). EMs with high geographical mobility often required the establishment of new social networks for resources. For those with low organizational mobility, reliance on social organizations and community support constitutes a means for social capital. The higher the organizational mobility of the entrepreneurs, the stronger they became in terms of general networking abilities.

Networking abilities were drawn from guanxi networks and the ability to engage in la guanxi. Although the specific network features were not quantitatively calculated, the findings indicated

the effort and challenges experienced in handling relationships. Therefore, the importance of networking abilities is linked conceptually to entrepreneurial mobility (Fig. 1). Bonding and bridging networking abilities were presented on a continuum. In the case of high organizational mobility and high geographical mobility, bridging networks have more value to the entrepreneurial start-up; however, bonding networks demonstrated higher importance when organizational mobility and geographical mobility were both low.

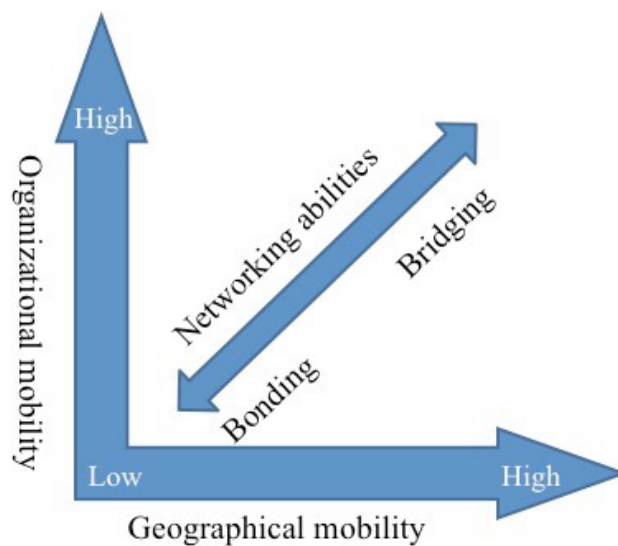


Figure 1 Entrepreneurial mobility and the importance of networking abilities
(Source: Author)

The aim of this study is to examine start-up tourism businesses; thus, the conceptualization may be contextually bonded and limited to the establishment and early-stage development of entrepreneurship. However, the applicability of the relationship between entrepreneurial mobility and social networks can be further divided into other types of entrepreneurship with further examination conducted in other contexts and industries.

5.4 Challenges to Tourism Entrepreneurship

The experiences of EMs were a combination of personal and professional experiences. Individual experiences reflect organizational experiences. The following section draws findings from an organizational level in terms of entrepreneurship challenges in early-stage tourism development. Practical challenges to tourism entrepreneurship were drawn from the entrepreneurial experiences described by the individual EMs. Several themes were inferred from the analysis.

Implementing Ideas Before Projects

Most of the challenges the early-stage tourism projects faced resulted from the mismatching perspectives on tourism development. Local community awareness of tourism opportunities would provide more community support in land leasing, tourism employment, and the development of small-scale rural accommodations. It was observed that EMs had innovative ideas and more experiences with tourism, but such ideas may not have been communicated well to local communities and governments. Implementing ideas and promoting tourism were important before implementing the tourism projects. The change in community attitudes toward tourism indicated the effects of tourism development in general, but social and ideological changes took a long time and tremendous effort to implement.

The ideological conflicts between EMs and the local government officials were caused by the different goals in developing tourism and contemplating private and public interests. Several entrepreneurs shared that the major goal of private companies was to market nearby urban markets and maintain steady growth in tourist arrivals. For early-stage destinations, infrastructure, tourist facilities and activities were to be completed and service quality to be improved, whereas the local government, particularly the county-level government, adopted a

more ambitious approach in marketing to a wide range of markets and spent more generously in destination media promotion than in infrastructure development and quality control. Although the private sectors aimed to obtain short-term benefits, the risk of investment was high in an early-stage destination. In extreme cases, the entrepreneurs perceived the government officials as eager to see the numbers increase but were negligent of tourist experiences and repeat visitations. By contrast, the government officials perceived the entrepreneurs as greedy and purely profit-driven.

Cost of Investment

Time and energy costs were associated with the effort exerted during negotiation, handling administrative procedures, and maintaining guanxi networks, which may also be related to the perceptual differences between external entrepreneurs and local communities. The challenges of a start-up entrepreneurship were ultimately financial, although the time and energy costs of dealing with all types of relationship and administrative procedures induced emotional stress and frustration. The primary outcome was the lagged progress of project implementation and unprepared reaction to the market, which eventually slowed the return on investment. Therefore, the discrepancies in the perception of tourism development and the guanxi culture also partially slowed the entrepreneurial process.

Regarding the trend observed for the reforms in agriculture and rural land policies in China, the gradual transformation from public and collective land management to privatized land circulation required policy support at the local level. The reform provided tremendous potential for agritourism development, but the local financial services were inadequate. Large-scale projects had more financial resources and local assistance, whereas small- to medium-scale entrepreneurs appeared to face more financial challenges at the start-up stage.

Management Challenges

Entrepreneurs new to the tourism industry faced more management challenges. They also revealed the absence of guidelines for various types of tourism projects. For example, river rafting businesses lacked operational guidelines and standards, and agritourism projects lacked proper guidance on the management of agricultural and tourism products, which led to challenges in product development. There was a lack of human and intellectual capital, and in an early-stage destination, only a limited number of people had tourism-related expertise. Other challenges included training and staffing and the lack of marketing and distribution channels.

Scale matters when facing management challenges. Large-scale projects had business connections in terms of destination marketing. A lack of communication and collaboration among medium tourism actors in the area was revealed, particularly in the rising agritourism projects. Collective action toward agritourism project implementation was lacking because all of the agritourism projects in the study area started at approximately the same time, which coincided with the government policy on promoting agritourism and land reform. The need to collaborate and promote the locality as an agritourism destination will be imperative when the agritourism projects have been fully established. Small-scale tourism businesses were often more embedded in local communities; the management challenges were mainly caused by the seasonality of tourism and the quality of services at this stage.

6 Conclusion

This study demonstrated the experiences of entrepreneurial migrants starting tourism businesses in an early-stage destination in rural China and aimed to identify the role of social capital in entrepreneurial mobility. Dealing with the local governments and local community reflected an ideological discrepancy between EMs and the locality. Achieving the economic goal

of EMs in an efficient and capitalistic manner was more difficult because of the influence of the generally laid-back local culture. The handling of guanxi networks appeared to be a major part of the experiences of EMs; effort was exerted to seek and maintain guanxi networks in an attempt to gain resources and support at the start-up stage. Both bridging and bonding networks were demonstrated in networking abilities, although different levels of these networks were observed among the entrepreneurs with different organizational and geographical mobilities. Moreover, the relationship with local communities needed to be cultivated to establish a collective goal to develop tourism projects. This study contributed to the conceptualization of entrepreneurial mobility in a tourism context and provided new insights into the application of social capital.

Moreover, the perception of the tourism industry and tourism activities significantly determined the initiation and outcomes of tourism entrepreneurship, in addition to the personality factors of entrepreneurs and the social capital influence. The overall ideology that the tourism industry is promising, prosperous, green, and sustainable emerged from the data obtained in this study, which can be further explored with respect to its formation and whether it is due to the early-stage status of the destination. Although the future plans and prospects of tourism entrepreneurship in the destination were full of hope and confidence, the experienced and anticipated challenges were reiterated by the entrepreneurs as well.

Although the single case study had many constraints and limitations because the findings were framed by the locality and the special Chinese social features, the study paves the way toward interesting future research topics. First, the use of quantitative methods can be adopted. Methods such as social network analysis would be appropriate to apply to measure the characteristics of different types of networks associated with tourism entrepreneurial experiences. Second, a study in an urban or more developed context is suggested because the status of the destination

influences the motivation of tourism entrepreneurs and the available resources. Additionally, several key actor groups can be further examined from a social relationship perspective, such as returnee entrepreneurs and village leaders.

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