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# **The Motivation of International Entrepreneurship: The Case of Chinese Transnational Entrepreneurs**

## **Abstract**

The ventures of Transnational Entrepreneurs (TEs) are a new business phenomenon, representing a fluid context in which established arrangements may be expected to change. In terms of one particular relationship, motivation has been found to be a key construct in International Entrepreneurship (IE) research, with two established features of motivation comprising entrepreneurial vision and its implementation. At the same time, nationality has been found to be a consistent influence on entrepreneurial orientation through the impact of culture. Employing qualitative case study methods, this paper investigates these relationships in the new context of the internationalisation of Chinese TEs socially embedded in their host and home countries. Subtle changes in established patterns of IE motivation are detected, and Chinese cultural influence may also be weakening to meet the environment of host countries.

**Keywords:** International entrepreneurial motivation, transnational entrepreneurs, case study

## **1. Introduction**

Motivation has been found (Shane, Locke & Collins, 2003) to play a key role in internationalisation and International Entrepreneurship (IE) (Busenitz and Barney, 1997; Hessels, Gelderen & Thurik, 2008). Following Dimitratos, Voudouris, Plakoyiannaki & Nakos (2012), the motivation of IE in this paper is analysed into entrepreneurial vision and the participation of employees in the implementation of that vision.

The paper investigates these two dimensions of IE motivation in the new context of Transnational Entrepreneurs (TEs) in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) that continue to trade within their home country from a host country base. Drori, Honig & Wright (2009, p.1001) define TEs as "...social actors who enact networks, ideas, information, and practices for the purpose of seeking business opportunities or maintaining businesses within dual social fields, which in turn force them to engage in varied strategies of action to promote their entrepreneurial activities". TEs represent a challenging new phenomenon for the investigation of IE motivation, given their continued strong links with the home country, and definitions of TEs require them to have travelled to their home country at least twice a year for business purposes (Portes, Guarnizo & Haller, 2002). Thus, the home country context of TEs may be expected to be a continuing influence on the two aforementioned IE motivational dimensions. In addition, their dual embeddedness may be conducive to the identification of international opportunities that may be otherwise undetectable by traditional types of IE (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). This suggests that they can possess unique characteristics in terms of their IE motivation.

At the same time, this investigation also casts some light on a longstanding debate concerning whether national culture has a persistent influence on entrepreneurial orientation (e.g. Kreiser, Marino, Dickson & Weaver, 2010). Specifically, Chinese national culture has long been associated with a particular entrepreneurial orientation, with implications for the motivation of IEs.

However, TEs exposed to similar environments in two western host countries may be expected to re-fashion their IE motivation to match host country environments.

Thus, our two research questions are, firstly, *how do TEs sustain IE motivation through (a) their vision of an internationalisation strategy, and (b) the participation of employees in the implementation of that vision?* Secondly, *are observed patterns of IE motivation in TEs' firms still consistent with home country national culture?*

To address these questions, case studies are employed to examine six Chinese TEs' firms, three hosted in the UK and three in Canada, two host countries with similar formal and informal institutions, chosen in order to check for consistency in our findings. These case studies represent one response to pleas for more research into IE in different international contexts (Wright & Stigliani, 2013). Although case studies cannot be expected to test hypotheses or develop new theories directly, new business phenomena such as TEs imply new bundles of resources, representing opportunities for new business attitudes, strategies or relationships, perhaps facilitating proto-theoretic contributions that at least indicate directions or questions for subsequent theorising (Doh, 2015).

It should also be stressed at the outset that our case studies constitute a theoretically interesting TE phenomenon and are not intended to be representative of all TE firms or even of all firms in the IT industry, since "...phenomenon-based research represents an important early phase in scientific inquiry" (Krogh, Rossi-Lamastra & Haefliger, 2012, p.279). This new TE phenomenon confirms the importance of two dimensions of IE motivation and SME internationalization strategies found in earlier research. The TE phenomenon (as represented by our six case studies) also provides evidence, consistent with the persistence of Chinese national cultural influence, in the form of the top-down communication of entrepreneurial vision. However, our six case study firms also displayed some very "un-Chinese" characteristics in

relation to IE motivation in terms of the down-up involvement of employees in the implementation of internationalisation strategies.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, a literature review covers IE motivation, and TEs in general, followed by a specific consideration of Chinese TEs and the possibly continuing influence of China, their home country environment. Following a description of methodology, the case study findings are presented and discussed. The paper concludes with the limitations of the study and implications claimed for theory and business practitioners.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 IE motivation*

Stressing the importance of studying motivation in entrepreneurship research, Herron and Sapienza (1992, p.49) comment that "...because motivation plays an important part in the creation of new organisations, theories of organisation creation that fail to address this notion are incomplete", and entrepreneurial motivation was initially developed in a domestic setting to explain the behaviour of the energisers of the entrepreneurial process (Johnson, 1990; Dunkelberg, Moore, Scott & Stull, 2013). Emphasising the cognitive perspective of entrepreneurs in general, motivation could separate those individuals who positively evaluate opportunities from those who do not (Shane et al., 2003), and entrepreneurial motivation has been variously classified as positive or negative (Deakins & Whittam, 2000), involving push or pull factors (Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007), dissatisfiers and motivators (Greenbank, 2006), intrinsic or extrinsic (Benzing, Chu & Kara, 2009) and necessity-driven or opportunity-driven (Williams and Round, 2009) behaviours.

Extending entrepreneurial motivation into the international context, entrepreneurs are motivated to venture abroad in order to pursue market opportunities, access network resources, pursue knowledge and learning, access finance and reduce risk (Autio, Sapienza & Almeida, 2000;

De Clercq, Sapienza & Crijns, 2005; Ellis, 2010; Kontinen & Ojala, 2011; Voudouris, Dimitratos & Salavou, 2011; Wilson et al., 2007). The cognitive perspective of internationalisation provides important clues about how entrepreneurs perceive and construct their proactiveness and opportunities in their home and host countries (Hmieleski & Baron, 2009) and IE motivation in this study relates to the initiation, direction and energisation of the behaviour of enterprise members towards internationalisation (Geen & Shea, 1997).

#### TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

Table 1 summarises the literature on IE motivation and an emerging theme in this literature has emphasised the “softer” aspects of IE motivation. These studies suggest that IE motivation may be divided usefully into two dimensions. One dimension addresses the “why” question in relation to a strategy of internationalisation: do entrepreneurs actively promote the firm’s international vision, since maintaining a clear international vision can affect international performance (Segaro, Larimo & Jones, 2014)? The second dimension concerns the “how” question in relation to the implementation of an internationalisation strategy, and the participation of employees in decisions concerning internationalisation has been found to be an important influence on performance, given that the innovativeness and social capital of employees at senior and junior levels (Dimitratos et al., 2012) may critically shape the firm’s internationalisation path (Segaro et al., 2014). Indeed, the motivation of employees may be as important as that of the entrepreneurs themselves, especially in small firms, since employee motivation influences the effects of intra-firm knowledge transfer and learning capability when the firm internationalises (Voudouris et al., 2011). Combining these “why” and “how” dimensions, Grant, Gino & Hofmann (2011) emphasise that the possession of a global vision for enterprise employees will be an important requirement for the firm to compete successfully abroad, and proactive employees, with receptive leadership, can together contribute to superior performance.

Three of the eight studies of IE motivation summarised in Table 1 are conceptual, and empirical evidence on these two dimensions of IE motivation is still scarce and comes from a variety of disparate sources. For example, De Clercq, et al. (2005) surveyed 192 managers within a single Mexican mail service firm, and Gabrielsson, Gabrielsson & Dimitratos (2014) conducted a longitudinal case study of four Finnish international new ventures. At the other end of the scale, Dimitratos et al. (2012) surveyed ninety-one SMEs in the UK, and seventy-one in the USA; Audretsch & Aldridge (2012) employed a niche data base of 398 US scientists in cancer research who obtained patents; Autio et al. (2000) studied 59 firms in the Finnish electronics industry; and Elenurm (2013) conducted a Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) study of 2,004 business persons in Estonia.

In these disparate circumstances, it seems appropriate to investigate further the two dimensions of IE motivation in any new business phenomenon that arises, e.g. in TEs' firms.

## *2.2 Transnational Entrepreneurs*

TEs provide an interesting context for the study of IE motivation since motivational differences across cultures can be striking (Dimitratos, Petrou, Plakoyiannaki & Johnson, 2011; Zhou, 2007). With their presence in two geographical locations, TEs are in a unique position to identify and exploit business opportunities that are otherwise not identifiable (Drori et al., 2009), and the importance of TEs in practice has recently come to the fore (Portes et al., 2002; Saxenian, 2006). There are four main ways in which TEs are different to other IE firms. First, Hernandez (2014) argues that the idiosyncratic benefit from TEs' countries of origin is that they have unique channels of knowledge stemming from bicultural international activity. Second, TEs may be more likely to have access to greater home country resources when entering target new host country markets, (Chung & Tung, 2013). Third, such firms possessing social capital by virtue of their ethnic links in the country of origin can facilitate their entry by "leapfrogging traditional barriers

to internationalisation” (Coviello & Martin, 1999, p.63). Fourth, as cultural background and opportunity discovery and exploitation are defining factors in IE (Light & Dana, 2013), internationalisation trajectories are likely to be different between TEs and indigenous entrepreneurs. In these circumstances, it is interesting to investigate the IE motivation of Chinese TEs in two western host countries.

### *2.3 Transnational Entrepreneurs and China*

With the rise of migration between countries, there has been a growing influence of IE activities from ethnic communities (Zhou, 2004), e.g. Indian, Chinese and Turkish entrepreneurs in the UK (Crick & Chaudhry, 2013; Wang & Altinay, 2012). According to Saxenian (2006), Indians founded 15% of all Silicon Valley start-ups, while immigrants from China and Taiwan together founded 12.8%. Levie (2007) claims (pp 146-147) that those immigrant entrepreneurs face “...higher labour market disadvantage, higher opportunity perception advantage, higher resource disadvantage, and greater attitude advantage.” Societal renewal and economic revitalisation through immigrant entrepreneurs can be particularly important in those developed economies such as the UK and Canada that are experiencing an ageing population and growth slowdown (Ndofor & Priem, 2011). Long-range planners have predicted that migrants will continue to play a key role in economic growth in the future (Desiderio & Salt, 2010).

TEs are a new and important subset of immigrant entrepreneurs in general, actively engaging in two socially embedded environments, leveraging their unique resources (Crick & Chaudhry, 2013), and the retention of trading and travel links with their home countries could

TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

help to preserve the influence of their native culture on internationalising strategies and operations. Table 2 provides an overview on the key factors that affect the internationalisation of TE firms. Ethnic ties, social capital and networking appear to be the most important reasons explaining the activities and international growth of TE’s firms. Nevertheless, it appears that, relative to other

internationalised firms, little is known about the characteristics of TEs and the dimensions of their IE motivation. This is understandable since entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities may be considered different to “mainstream” entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is rarely universal by nature (Light & Dana, 2013).

Table 2 also shows that a significant number of TE studies have addressed the nationality of entrepreneurs and the relationship between nationality in general and their entrepreneurial characteristics is well-established in the literature. For example, Engelen (2010) finds that the national cultures of Germany and China have a consistent influence on entrepreneurial orientation, and Engelen, Schmidt, & Buchsteiner (2015) report the specific and consistent influence of individualism and uncertainty avoidance. With data from sixteen countries, Kreiser et al. (2010) establish the impact of national culture on two key dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation: risk taking and proactiveness.

In the current study it is therefore necessary to consider this literature in the context of Chinese national culture and IE motivation in the new context of TEs’ firms. Confucius lived approximately 2,600 years ago, and his teaching of the importance of society, the group, and the hierarchical relationships within a society (e.g. in conformity with the Chinese business protocol, people are expected to enter the meeting room in a hierarchical order) has endured through time (Ji & Dimitratos, 2013). Confucian principles have prevailed in Chinese society, with an emphasis on harmony, hierarchy, trust, loyalty and obedience. However, Chinese entrepreneurs may have to reconcile these Chinese traditional values with the harsh realities of modern economic life (Yang and Stening, 2013).

McGrath & MacMillan (1992) have long established the relative paucity of entrepreneurs in such collectivistic (as opposed to individualistic) cultures as China, and there has been a long debate between Hofstede and Shane (see, for example, Rinne, Steel & Fairweather, 2012) on the

suggestion that high tolerance of power distance has a negative influence on innovation and thus entrepreneurship.

China's pattern of national culture can also be found generally in most other East Asian countries, but with major differences. For example, Japanese culture also features harmony, loyalty and collectiveness, where the emphasis is also on information-sharing (down as well as up) and teamwork. In China, there is no tradition of the collaboration and participation of employees in decisions. Rather, there is a traditional emphasis on top-down communication, but in a climate of paternalism and trust (Warner, 2012) where employees implicitly identify with the visions of their bosses.

Cross-cultural psychologists have concluded that national differences such as these "...have been proven to be quite stable over time. The forces that cause cultures to shift tend to be global or continent-wide. This means that they affect many countries at the same time, so if their cultures shift, they shift together and their relative positions remain the same" (Hofstede, 2015). Furthermore, national differences such as these "...have been proven to be quite stable over time. The forces that cause cultures to shift tend to be global or continent-wide. This means that they affect many countries at the same time, so if their cultures shift, they shift together and their relative positions remain the same" (Hofstede, 2015).

However, this claim of cultural stability has not gone unchallenged, and Craig & Douglas (2006) concluded that (p.331) "...[the] de-territorialization of culture implies that geographic location is far less critical and at times misleading in defining culture...", that global systems of communication and mass media have led to (p.331) "cultural contamination" and (p.332) the "... co-existence of people from different cultures in close proximity may also lead to hybridization of culture."

Of course, such possible cultural dynamics over time are notoriously difficult to measure, given the difficulties with setting up large panels of respondents for longitudinal study, and replicating prior experiments. For example, Hofstede's first measures of national culture in 1970 were based on IBM employees in different countries (Hofstede, 2015). Although a direct contribution to this debate is not the main purpose of this paper, we would argue that new phenomena (e.g. new ventures set up by TEs in host countries with very contrasting formal and informal institutional environments to home countries) may at least indicate whether observed IE motivations are consistent with cultural change away from the established templates. At the same time, Chinese TEs with dual embeddedness, who still remain rooted to some extent in their home country's informal institutions, may be expected to exhibit little evidence of cultural change. Of course case studies investigating these phenomena can provide no conclusive proof of causation, but established theories may be questioned and/or interesting new research questions may be raised for future enquiry.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Study Design and Context*

Immigration has been viewed as a transnational process in which migrants may maintain ties across the sending and the receiving locations (Ndofor & Priem, 2011). It is therefore interesting to investigate whether such TEs in different host countries display the same behavioural patterns. Canada and the UK are the two host countries in this study that are rich in the TE phenomenon: each has over six million citizens born outside the country (World Bank, 2013), and 21% of Canada's 35 million population were foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2013). Canada's Business Immigration Programme has attracted considerable attention as being perhaps the most successful of over thirty national programmes intended to attract wealthy entrepreneurs with considerable financial and human capital as immigrants and new citizens (Ley, 2013).

Similarly, according to the Office for National Statistics, the UK received a net influx of 630,000 migrants in 2012, including 110,000 of those who immigrated under the entrepreneur/investor scheme. Immigrant entrepreneurs have been claimed to be hyper-productive and net contributors to the UK economy (CfE/DueDil, 2014; Ram, Woldesenbet & Jones, 2011). A recent industry report has revealed that 14 per cent of companies have been set up by immigrant entrepreneurs in the UK, of whom about 25,000 have a Chinese background. Moreover, 17 per cent of new businesses in the UK are founded by immigrants (CfE/DueDil, 2014). There is no secondary data on TEs as a subset of immigrant entrepreneurs in general, so our study focuses on primary data collection on TEs, as follows.

A qualitative, multiple case study methodology was adopted for this study following Yin (2013). Our approach is exploratory and is particularly appropriate as the research question is of the “how” and “why” type (Tsang, 2014; Yin, 2013). Cross-national and internationally comparative case studies facilitate the analysis of dynamic social phenomena, i.e. in our study, the international behaviour of firms and entrepreneurs (Fletcher and Plakoyiannaki, 2011). Case study research allows scholars to gain a deeper cross-cultural understanding of the investigated phenomena (Fletcher and Plakoyiannaki 2011; Tsang, 2014). However, there is still argumentation about the possible theoretical functions of case study methods. For example, Zammuto & Krakower (1991) were early advocates of the use of qualitative enquiries in business and management studies and Montgomery, Dacin & Dacin (2012) argue that cases may be used illustratively. At the same time, a dialogue between Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki & Paavilainen (2011) and Tsang (2013) argued the relative merits of inductive theorising *versus* empirical regularities. In view of these ongoing debates, this paper explores a new and important business phenomenon in order to raise questions about existing theories and to initiate further research.

It was decided to focus our study on certain regions and one industry, in order to pursue deep (rather than broad) enquiries, using a theoretical sampling frame (Patton, 2002). We

concentrated, therefore, on information technology (IT) firms in Central Scotland and in W. Canada. IB research has been criticised for assuming away too much of context (Poulis, Poulis & Plakoyiannaki, 2013), there have been recent calls for contextualisation (Michailova, 2011). Welch et al. (2011) argue that theorising is enhanced by combining contextual richness and explanatory rigour. We focused on IT firms in two regions with a strong presence of the IT industry within each country, which is a significant subset of high-tech and fast-growing industries in general. The IT business context has offered a fertile ground for SME internationalisation research (Hewerdine, Rummyantseva & Welch, 2014). In addition, IT is one of the industries that has strong TE presence and recent research has employed the IT context to study TEs (Brzozowski, Cucculelli & Surdej, 2014). For example, CfE/DueDil (2014) reported that there were nearly 28,500 migrant-founded IT companies in the UK. Thus, the IT industry is also rich in the TE phenomenon and IT has already been the most popular high-tech industry featured in existing IB research (Hewerdine et al., 2014).

### *3.2 Case selection*

Again, it should be emphasised that the intention of this study was to investigate the impact of the new phenomenon of TEs in relation to theory, rather than attempting a representative sample of firms for generalised conclusions. The criteria for selection were that the investigated firms should be enterprises employing between 10-250 people, be established in the UK or Canada in the IT sector, and be owned and controlled by a Chinese TE who has engaged in some outward international business activity. In each country, three TE firms of Chinese origin were found. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we combine within-case and cross-case analysis. Fine-grained analysis within each case enabled us to get much closer to theoretical constructs and causal forces (Sigglekow, 2007). Replication logic was adopted and cross case analysis involved identifying emerging themes from our study of the two IEM constructs, and

pattern matching (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Theoretical saturation was reached. Six case firms were deemed sufficient to provide robust evidence and generate theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). In order to present anonymity we name the Canadian firms CA1, CA2, CA3 and the UK firms UK1, UK2 and UK3.

### *3.3 Data collection and analysis*

Data were collected from three main sources to enhance the validity of the study and achieve triangulation (Yin, 2013). First, semi-structured interviews at each firm were initially conducted with the (co-)founder of the firm and then with a managing director or a senior manager (see Appendices 1 and 2). Second, archival data (e.g. company websites, financial data, media reports, internal documents), and other related documents, such as industry reports, government publications, and press articles, were accessed. Finally, company visits were made and some participant observations were conducted. Although such observations are rarely useful in the IT industry involving employees mainly working at keyboards, we did attend weekly and monthly employer/employee meetings.

In line with recent studies (e.g. De Clercq, Castaner & Belausteguigoitia, 2011; Dimitratos et al., 2012; Zampetakis, Beldekos, & Moustakis, 2009), the open-ended interview questions advocated by Wright (2015) drew on the IE motivation measures proposed by Hornsby, Kuratko & Zahra (2002), i.e. does the entrepreneur have a clear vision or strategy to commit to internationalisation (IE motivation, Dimension 1), and are employees in the firm encouraged to play a role in helping management to improve foreign activities and how this is achieved (Dimension 2)?

The use of multiple respondents made it possible to develop converging lines of inquiry. A frequent challenge for qualitative researchers is how to manage abundant data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). All data were imported and processed using *NVivo 10*. The evidentiary database or audit trail exists independently of the six individual case reports and contains enough

information to enable other researchers to infer their own independent conclusions about each case (Yin, 2013).

The company profiles of the six case firms are reported in Appendix 1, showing numbers of employees, total sales, international sales growth and a subjective assessment of perceived performance compared to objectives, with perceived performance measured on a four-point scale. Job titles and background on how the entrepreneur and the senior manager started or joined the company are discussed in Appendix 2. A thematic analysis was subsequently conducted on the transcripts of interviews to understand how the firm's IE motivation drives its internationalisation.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

Our findings are summarised in Table 3 and discussed below. We begin with responses to questions concerning the first dimension of IE motivation.

TABLE 3 NEAR HERE

*Dimension 1: Whether the entrepreneur has an international vision, and how it is communicated.*

A vision may be seen as a creative image of a possible future outcome, and it has been argued that it should be a "...catchy verbal declaration of intent" (Rüegg-Stürm and Gomez, 1994, p.375). Five out of six TEs in our study demonstrated a proactive, strong and clear international vision. They expressed that an international vision is the "backbone" to their firm's internationalisation process. IE motivation was seen as a firm-level resource for internationalisation. Firm UK3 who had a strong vision stated:

*"I've always wanted to have an international company since I founded it. So far, we have closely followed our initial plan and I am satisfied with the progress. We will concentrate on Asia in the next few years." (E, UK3)*

Although UK3's performance was not considered satisfactory by the Founder, this may indicate that the entrepreneur is highly ambitious, setting the goal high.

Similarly, Firm CA3 had an international vision from inception and viewed internationalisation as essential to achieve its vision to be market leader:

*“We were already international at ‘Day 1’ of the company, a Canadian company having an office in New York. There is no way that we retreat. We will have more branches and collaborations globally.” (L, CA3) and “Since our goal is to become the market leader, we must internationalise. If we don’t, competitors will copy our products and put us behind.” (K, CA3)*

CA2 had a very strong vision, and overcame initial problems and successfully internationalised:

*“We definitely keep going abroad for sure. We are in talks with a few potential overseas partners at the moment.” (I, CA2) and “Initially the company had some trouble in internationalising; but it has proven to be the best move we’ve ever had. Now we are definitely continuing on internationalisation.” (J, CA2)*

UK1 (the firm with the weakest performance) had a weak vision and reactive approach to internationalisation, this was evident in statements by both respondents:

*“If there is something good enough that comes up, yes I will go along with it and grow the company. If not, I will take it easy and just sit back.” (A, UK1) and “We do not have a particular plan for the international market. But if opportunities come to us, we will definitely evaluate the possibility of going ahead.” (B, UK1)*

None of the firms achieved their desired perceived performance (see Appendix 1). UK1, UK2, and CA1 were cautious about their international venturing. UK1 identified its current main product at the late maturity of the innovation life-cycle. At the transitional stage where it considered phasing out the product or re-innovating completely, it withheld its next strategic move until it was able to reconfigure its resource capacity.

*“Our best-selling software has given us a great boost financially, but it is going to be phased out by the market and we are losing our advantage there. I am not sure if we should develop the next generation or start anew...we still need some time to figure it out.”*

*(A, UK1)*

Similarly, UK2 was intending to continue with its plan, but was also concerned with the economic situation of the prospective markets:

*“The company has plans to internationalise further in the next 3-5 years and we are finalising the details at the moment.” (C, UK2,) and “For the next step, we want to go to the neighbouring Ireland as well as the States where the consumer base is huge. But, whether to carry out this plan really depends on the direction of the global economy.” (D, UK2)*

Firm CA1 was performing well with 27% sales growth, although there was an element of caution in their growth. Respondents stated:

*“We have set a clear vision to go for a few more national markets because of the success in the existing markets. Like when we succeeded in Australia, then we decided to go for New Zealand.” (G, CA1) and “I sometimes worry if we can cope with the speed of expansion. But looking at the financial figures, I know keeping going abroad is the right option.” (H, C1)*

The firms tended not to share their vision with their employees. Even though they had a strong vision, four of the firms did not view it as being necessary or desirable for the achievement of its objectives. A vision was considered to be a management function, and it was feared that sharing might confuse staff if it changed, confused employees, and detracted from day-to-day activities.

The following comments illustrate this:

*“Talking about the vision is kept within the managers. Not a routine business to me. Employees do not need to know, and I doubt if they actually care.” (B, UK1)*

*“I would feel reserved to tell my employees about my vision for two reasons. One, visions can change, but I don’t want them to see me as a changing person. Two, telling them my vision can kill their creative thinking. I don’t want to influence their mind before they talk to me.” (E, UK3)*

*“Nope, I don’t find it useful to share my vision...based on experience, if the plan is not explicit enough, the staff can easily become confused and take the wrong message out of it. So I would say that having a vision is important for me per se, but not for my employees.” (I, CA2)*

*“Vision, to me, is the planning of the company’s future. That’s not something my employees should worry about. I want them to focus on the planning of the present, no further distraction.” (K, CA3) and “No, not necessarily, we don’t think sharing the vision is a value-added activity towards staff training. It might be useful to, but it can be a long process to take effect.” (L, CA3)*

Firm CA1 did share its vision in an implicit way, assuming employees would know the vision, or just for new staff:

*“The sharing is autonomous to me. My team should be able to “guess” what the company vision is, based on what we do. So, we do not have to spend extra time on it.” (G, CA1) and “Vision sharing can be important for training new employees, but for existing staff, we don’t explicitly do that.” (H, CA1)*

Only firm UK3, did feel it was important to share its vision. This was done in a formal way at employee review meetings:

*“It’s important [to share the vision], but I only bring it up once in a while, like in half-year review meetings. What are more important are the concrete plans that help to achieve that vision, and that should be a daily business.” (E, UK3) and “Yes, we do remind the employees when conducting our half-year or quarterly review. So they know where exactly the direction is.” (F, UK3)*

Any such strategic vision must be translated into operating decisions, and the literature (reviewed above) suggests that this depends crucially on the involvement of employees in its implementation, or IE motivation, Dimension 2.

*Dimension 2: Whether employees are encouraged to give ideas and suggestions on the firm’s international activities.*

Overall, the TEs in our sample were found to be supportive to the contribution to international planning from employees, however there were differences in terms of the formality of the planning, and the extent to which communication was explicit or implicit. In firms CA1, CA2, and UK3, proactive and regular management-employee communication was evident. Input from employees was considered an integral part of the internal consultation process during strategic planning. For example, employees at CA2 were encouraged to write down their ideas for the international market on the “glass wall” in the firm’s meeting room so that management can review those ideas and include any feasible ones into the next meeting’s agenda. Though this process may be implicit:

*“We are making our employees part of the planning process. So it may seem ‘invisible’ but they contribute all the time.” (J, CA2).*

To support this the firm maintained an open culture:

*“We have an open-door policy for employees. Whenever we conduct a job review with employees, we always end it by asking them if they have anything to say about the company. And some good ideas are collected that way.” (I, CA2)*

The management in firm CA1 agreed that the firm should have "...content-rich goals for internationalisation, as the power of goal-setting is incredible" (G, C1) and that it was important to train staff on what the management aimed to accomplish in the next few years, encouraging them to "...persevere when facing temporary adversity". The respondents expressed strong commitment to regular employee input to feed into planning, as the following statements show:

*“We have bi-weekly strategy meetings at which we discuss the next step of the company with employees.” (G, CA1)*

Firm CA1 engaged in highly formal planning processes, this reflected the prior education of the founders.

*“Both founders are MBAs, so the company follows a textbook style in engaging employees into vision-making.” (H, CA1)*

Three firms UK1, UK2, UK3 and CA3 undertook less formally planned approaches in communicating their IEM. UK2 had no formal dissemination to employees and communication was through an open door culture. The entrepreneur (C, UK2) stated:

*“I assume my employees always know what I plan to do from our informal talks from time to time. But absolutely, they are always welcome to knock on my door and talk to me.”*

The small size of the firm was a reason for its informality. This was stated by the manager:

*“There is no dedicated dissemination process in the company. We are okay with the way we are. The company is small and the staff should know the manager’s decisions very well and quickly.” (D, UK2)*

UK3 had a similar open door approach with a focus on gathering employee input, but with no formally planned approaches:

*“There are no specific means to educate employees because I do not feel it is necessary... I think it is important to listen to employees because they may see things you don’t see. Sometimes they really inspire me.” (E, UK3).*

Regular meetings were about operational issues:

*“Although we do have regular meetings, we always talk about day-to-day operations rather than planning or vision.”*

UK1 did not feel it was necessary to directly and proactively inform their employees about the next step of international expansions due to their size. They acknowledged that there was a tacit communication in the firm and presumed that employees were able to understand their thinking through the company’s daily operations:

*“My employees know perfectly well about what I think, as we are too small not to directly spend time on revenue generation. I do not have to tell them repeatedly about my vision.”*

*(A, UK1)* and *“The plan ahead is really dependent on my boss. But we are happy with the way it is.” (B, UK1)*

We note however that UK1 was the least satisfied firm with its performance and had the lowest level of sales and international sales growth (See Appendix 1).

Similarly, CA3 regarded the systematic management of IEM as unnecessary, and did not set up a specific mechanism that allows regular and effective communication between management and employees with regards to international planning. The entrepreneur K, CA3 stated:

*“I think my people should know my plan fairly well, through the company’s media reports and website. It might be a waste of time to repeat what’s already out there.”*

L, CA3 supported this view, and conclude that this was fine as the firm was achieving its desired performance:

*“We do not have a specific programme that allows communication between management and employees. It may be an area we have ignored now that you mentioned it; but we are okay for now.”*

To summarise these findings, we conclude that the new context of Chinese TEs’ firms provides rich case study evidence that is consistent with the extant literature on IE motivation, based on a disparate range of research contexts. In relation to Dimension 1, we find that TEs did exhibit visions of internationalisation and communicate them in different ways, using tacit and/or explicit knowledge sharing processes (Fletcher & Prashanthnam, 2011). Chinese TEs were receptive to feedback (see below), but they communicated their vision and plans implicitly, not explicitly, to their employees. This was because they wanted employees to focus on achieving shorter term, operating objectives or presumed that their employees would be able to understand the direction of the firm by experiencing the daily operations.

Furthermore, in relation to Dimension 2, our findings suggest that Chinese TEs do indeed actively engage the “voice” of their employees in the international activities of their firms. This finding contrasts with the received views on Chinese entrepreneurial orientation, which is influenced by Chinese national culture. This inconsistency was observed despite the continued links of Chinese TEs with the home country, and is suggestive of cultural dynamism, as the influence of traditional cultures fade within new, fluid business phenomena. Subtle variations from expected patterns of IE motivation were detected, and traditional Chinese cultural influence may be weakening to meet the need for legitimacy in the environmental context of host countries.

## **5. Conclusions**

At the outset, two research questions were proposed. Firstly, *how do TEs sustain IE motivation through (a) their vision of an internationalisation strategy, and (b) the participation of*

*employees in the implementation of that vision? Secondly, are observed patterns of IE motivation in TEs' firms still consistent with home country national culture?* We also explained that we intended to use a small sample of firms demonstrating the new phenomenon of TEs as a new, fluid environment in which IE motivation may be expected to change, along with cultural influence.

In this context, it may not be surprising to find in relation to the second research question that, yes, our six case study firms displayed some very “un-Chinese” characteristics in relation to IE motivation through (Dimension 2) the participation of employees in decisions that implement the entrepreneur’s vision of internationalisation. Traditionally, Chinese employees have shown harmonious attitudes towards the decisions of their bosses that were handed down to them, but in a top-down fashion, not involving participation in those decisions. Nevertheless, in these novel TE ventures, entrepreneurs seem to have trimmed their strategies to achieve legitimacy in relation to the host country’s environment of formal and informal institutions. Such an outcome challenges theorising that emphasises the general stability of a national culture’s influence (Hofstede, 2015; Kreiser et al., 2010), especially the specific influence of China’s national culture (Engelen, 2010).

On the other hand, however, our case study evidence was found to be consistent with the Chinese tradition of (Dimension 1) the top-down communication of entrepreneurial strategic vision in relation to internationalisation, using a tacit and/or explicit knowledge sharing processes. Furthermore, all our TE case study evidence was consistent with the existing IE literature in relation to our first research question, which emphasises the crucial importance of IE motivation comprising Dimensions (1) and (2). Of course, such conclusions cannot be interpreted as constituting “confirmation” of earlier theorising and empirical results, since our case study sampling was not intended to lead to representative cases or generalisable results, but at least they are consistent with earlier IE research (e.g. Hessels et al., 2008; Dimitratos et al., 2012).

The findings of this study may also have some important managerial and policy making implications. There are two ways of viewing TEs as a laboratory for investigating theory and practice. On the one hand, TEs may be seen as a new, fluid organisational experiment, where strategic change is most likely. On the other hand, TEs maintain trading links with the home country and may thus be expected to be conservative in strategic terms.

In other words, TEs may be “unique animals” who could be viewed as pace-setters among IE firms. Their willingness to involve host country employees in internationalising operations could be considered to be innovative by other international entrepreneurs who do not enjoy their multi-cultural experience. On the other hand, the top-down nature of internationalisation missions in international ventures owned and controlled by Chinese TEs could be considered a relic of Chinese national culture and not relevant for other nationalities of firms. Nevertheless, Chinese TEs’ firms have exhibited flexibility in their foreign ventures that question the importance of home country nationality.

Finally, the study may have implications for policymakers. The flexibility of TEs’ firms in Scotland and W Canada in response to host country circumstances, in addition to the advantages that TEs’ firms offer in terms of continuing links with their home countries, raises the question of how much public policy should favour such firms.

The findings of this study have some important managerial and policy making implications. First, entrepreneurial firms (especially those founded by immigrants) could benefit from studying TEs and their responsiveness to the host country context in relation to employee participation in internationalisation. Policy makers often look to assist businesses with high growth potential (Arshed, Carter & Mason, 2014), and Shane (2009) recommends that they may wish to take a niche approach by supporting a small subset of new businesses. However, Shane (2009, p.148) argues that “...there is a lot of evidence that these policies lead people to start

marginal businesses that are likely to fail, have little economic impact, and generate little employment.”

Thus, in order to successfully facilitate TEs and benefit from their entrepreneurial activities, policy-makers may wish to restrict themselves to ensure that sufficient measures and resources are committed to building a healthy regulatory, cognitive, and normative environment that encourages the IE motivation of TEs. In the case of Scotland and Canada, despite the ongoing public debate about the merits of immigration into the UK (*The Guardian*, 2014), the benefits of retaining a stable or high percentage of immigrant entrepreneurs seemingly far outweigh the drawbacks to the national economy (Ndofor & Priem, 2011). TE firms in the case studies reported that Canada has a more welcoming attitude towards immigrant entrepreneurs, and UK policy makers might learn from their Canadian counterparts whereby the immigrants are encouraged to maintain their links with their home countries (Ambrosini, 2014).

The present study faces some limitations that are likely to guide further research. First, as an exploratory study, we qualitatively evaluated the under-explored IE motivation theme. It can be worth opening up the entrepreneurial construct with a large-scale, quantitative study and include other entrepreneurship dimensions such as market orientation, learning orientation, strategic orientation, etc. Second, the sample firms were limited to those owned and operated by Chinese TEs, which may limit the generalisability of the study. A better understanding of IE motivation could be achieved by a sample of TEs from different countries and industries beyond IT, and/or a comparison with indigenous entrepreneurs. Third, the study may be more interesting if the motivation-performance relationship is investigated. In particular, the drift in IE motivation between employees and entrepreneurs and senior managers has not been identified before and it would be valuable to see whether this affects the performance of TE firms adversely. Fourth, scales for measuring IE motivation may be developed, i.e. a comprehensive scale for measuring

IE motivation may be devised from the areas of strategic management, organisational psychology and international business.

## Appendix 1: Descriptive Summary of Cases

Firm <i>Subjects</i> ( <i>NY</i> )	Founding year/International isation year	Products/Services	Reason for first international event	International servicing mode: Countries	Number of employees	Annual sales (million £)□	International sales growth over 2010-2013	Perceived performance satisfaction
<u>UK1</u> <i>A</i> (39) <i>B</i> (8)	1996/2000	Software design, IT consulting	Received offers from overseas customers via online search	Exporting: China, Hong Kong; Sales office: Hong Kong; Joint venture: Middle East	24	0.89	3%	*
<u>UK2</u> <i>C</i> (7) <i>D</i> (3)	2007/2010	IT consulting, Database creation	Proactively seeking overseas customers	Sales office & subsidiary: China	34	1.02	15%	***
<u>UK3</u> <i>E</i> (13) <i>F</i> (13)	2003/2006	Application R&D	Referred by previous clients	Licensing & subsidiary: China, Hong Kong	32	2.75	12%	**
<u>CA1</u> <i>G</i> (20) <i>H</i> (25)	2005/2007	Utility-related hardware and software development	Received offers from overseas customers via exhibition	Exporting: China, Hong Kong, US; Licensing: Australia, US	30	2.33	27%	***
<u>CA2</u> <i>I</i> (15) <i>J</i> (18)	2001/2010	E-health solution provider	Proactively seeking overseas customers	Franchising: US (15 locations), China (1).	50	9.27	30%	***
<u>CA3</u> <i>K</i> (5) <i>L</i> (5)	2010/2010	Wireless sensor network, digital signal processing, health data analysis platform	Partially received foreign investment at inception	Licensing: US, China, Hong Kong; Representative office: US (New York)	25	3.50	35%	***

*Notes:* (1) Unless otherwise specified, the first subject in each firm is the founder/CEO, the second a senior manager.

(2) Based on the interviews, the lead market of the IT industry was considered to be the US.

(3) NY: The number in the brackets behind each subject represents the years of living in the host country since immigration.

(4)  $\text{£}$  : The historical rate on 1 July, 2013, when the data were obtained, was used for the currency exchange (1 British pound = 1.562 Canadian dollars).

(5) \*\*\*\*Exceptionally Satisfactory; \*\*\* Satisfactory; \*\* Weakly Satisfactory; \* Unsatisfactory.

## Appendix 2: Job titles and background of study respondents

Company	Respondent	Job title	Background on why the entrepreneurs and managers founded or joined the company
UK1	A	Managing Director (Founder)	When A realised there was no automation software for timber processing, he started the company to design such software for the timber industry and beyond. B joined the company as the result of the company's expansion to Asia.
	B	Vice President( Production)	
UK2	C	CEO (Founder)	C was always looking to start his own business when still an international student in the UK. Once graduated, he immediately started his IT company that offers optimised enterprise solutions to education agencies that recruits foreign students. D was hired to manage the overseas sales representatives of the company.
	D	HR Manager	
UK3	E	CEO (Founder)	E discovered that there was an information asymmetry issue in the furniture wholesale industry, so he designed an app that connects the wholesalers with the manufacturers in Asia. F had been a personal friend of E before joining the company.
	F	Vice President( R&D)	
CA1	G	CEO	G and H were classmates in their MBA class. G invited H to join the company she started with the promise to give him the shares if the company succeeds in the future.
	H	General Manager	
CA2	I	CEO (Successor to Founder)	The company created an online platform that solves the information asymmetry in the e-health industry: some seniors cannot either afford or find full-time care, while some nurses are not able to work full-time. The founder is already semi-retired and hired I as the CEO. J is a veteran worker who has worked with the founder since the company established.
	J	Chief Financial Officer	
CA3	K	CEO (Founder)	K won a major innovation design award that offered him the start-up fund and a free office for one-year. L was his immediate hire, who graduated from the same university.
	L	R&D Director	

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TABLE 1: KEY STUDIES ON INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MOTIVATION

<b>Author(s) (Year)</b>	<b>Investigated firms</b>	<b>Dimensions of IEM and their effects</b>
Autio et al. (2000)	Finnish internationalised firms	Early internationalisation confers a learning advantage as managers of the firm instil a more open, entrepreneurial culture throughout the firm.
De Clercq et al. (2005)	Belgian internationalised SMEs	Firms with an entrepreneurial mindset are more likely to develop a long-term, substantial presence in the international arena. Knowledge acquired from international activities is likely to be disseminated by managers of the firm to employees of the firm.
Dimitratos et al. (2012)	UK & US medium sized internationalised firms	Two imperatives for the entrepreneurial firm to compete successfully abroad are: first, activation of behaviour of middle- and higher- level employees towards entrepreneurial ventures abroad; second, top management team being receptive to employee ideas.
Elenurm (2013)	Estonian firms	Identifying an entrepreneur’s own vision of a business opportunity and implementing that vision facilitate the development of internationalisation of the firm.
Gabrielsson et al. (2014)	Finnish international new ventures	Managerial vision towards internationalisation/globalisation affects the international/global route of the firm, respectively. IE motivation positively affects the advancement of the firm at the early growth stages of the firm, while negatively at the late growth stage.
Oviatt & McDougall (2005)	Conceptual study	The perceptions of entrepreneurs towards opportunity and experience are key to the early internationalisation of their firms.

Taneja et al.(2015)	Conceptual study	Employee engagement is a long-term commitment supporting long-term organisational sustainability in international markets. Critical aspects of employee engagement are training and development, rewards, recognitions and engagement, manager-employee communication and interaction, and leadership and development.
Zahra et al. (2005)	Conceptual study	The cognitive models of managers of the firm and their predisposition towards internationalisation are instrumental for its international entrepreneurial ventures.

TABLE 2: KEY STUDIES ON TRANSNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURS

<b>Author(s) (Year)</b>	<b>Investigated TEs: Country of origin / international activities</b>	<b>Themes/ Dimensions behind TE international activities</b>
Audretsch & Aldridge (2012)	Around the world / USA	TE social capital promotes firm entrepreneurship and is conducive to firm entrepreneurship
Brzozowski et al. (2014)	Around the world / Italy	The home country's institutional and socio-economic characteristics and country-specific entrepreneurial factors are key in shaping the TE ties-performance association.
Crick & Chaudhry (2013)	Indian, Chinese and Turkish / UK	TE firms are socially embedded in two environments and actively leverage resources for capitalising on their resource base.
de Silva (2015)	Around the world / Sri Lanka	Challenging institutional voids in the political, legal and regulatory systems discourage TE investment in transition (host) economies. Networks are used to respond to these voids.
Hernandez (2014)	Around the world / USA	Home country bonds of TEs are unique channels of knowledge, which provide their firms with idiosyncratic benefits in international places.
Kariv et al. (2009)	Around the world / Canada	Ethnicity plays a central role in the engagement of different types of transnational networking. Different types of transnational networking affect firm turnover and survival.
Krishna & Subrahmanya	Around the world / India	TEs who possess entrepreneurial experience and who had obtained early funding have a high probability of

(2015)		achieving survival in the host country.
Lin & Tao (2012)	China / Canada	Seeking business opportunities is an important reason for TE migration to the host country in the first place. Subsequently, business expansion, by drawing resources from dual locations, becomes the primary driver towards a transnational mode of economic adaptation.
Ndofor & Priem (2011)	Around the world / USA	TE capital endowments and social identities influence their choice of an enclave versus dominant market venture strategy in the host country.
Patel & Conklin (2009)	Latin America / USA	Network size and scope enhance the extent of TE activities.
Sequeira et al. (2009)	Latin America / USA	TEs' positive perceptions of host country opportunities and their greater embeddedness in home country activities predict the specific type of ventures that the TE undertakes.
Terjesen & Elam (2009)	Canada, France, India / Around the world	Early life, education and career (global) experiences, capital resources, and social and professional networks induce TE international activities.
Urbano et al. (2011)	Around the world / Spain	Transnational networks and entrepreneurial perceptions of opportunities of the host society facilitate the development of TE activities.
Zolin & Schlosser (2013)	Around the world / Australia	TEs tend to facilitate INVs, apparently because they have university degrees, international connections and technical capabilities.
Wang & Liu (2015)	Around the world / USA	Immigrant-owned TEs fare better than non-immigrant-owned firms without TE activities in terms of employees, annual total sales, and total payrolls.

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TABLE 3: TE's IE MOTIVATION

<b>TE's Firm</b>	<b>D1: Entrepreneurs Possessing and Sharing of Internationalisation Vision</b>	<b>D2: Employee IE Motivation Communication Processes</b>
UK1	<i>Reactive, Weak Vision &amp; Not Shared</i> Assume vision grows with time; Wait for opportunities to come first. Considered no need to tell employees about vision	<i>Unplanned &amp; Tacit</i> Communication from entrepreneur to employees, assumes employees know
UK2	<i>Proactive, Strong Vision &amp; Not Shared</i> But cautious international expansion– Take a step-by-step approach but try not to be overoptimistic, considered not appropriate to share vision with employees	<i>Unplanned &amp; Tacit</i> Open door, open communication culture, no formal dissemination processes
UK3	<i>Proactive, Strong Vision &amp; Shared</i> Follow the initial internationalisation plan and increase export intensity, Vision shared at 3-6 month review meetings with employees so they know the direction	<i>Unplanned &amp; Tacit</i> Open door, open communication culture, but feedback to employees deemed unnecessary; employee feedback not regularly sought
CA1	<i>Proactive, Strong Vision &amp; Implicit Sharing</i> Reap profits from fast expansions. Vision not explicitly shared except with new staff, assumed employees know	<i>Planned &amp; Explicit</i> Strategic planning, founders have MBA, planned Bi-weekly meetings
CA2	<i>Proactive, Strong Vision &amp; Not Shared</i> Already planned to increase international market scope, considered not important for employees to know	<i>Planned, &amp; Tacit and Explicit</i> Employees write on glass wall, integral part of goal setting, and strategic planning, open door and feedback in staff reviews
CA3	<i>Proactive, Strong Vision &amp; Not Shared</i> Considers internationalisation a must to be the market leader, not for employees to be concerned with, focus on the present	<i>Unplanned &amp; Tacit</i> No specific mechanisms for communication, assume staff know the plan from WEB site.