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Traversing between transnationalism and integration: Dual embeddedness of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore

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Abstract

Transnationalism was initially proposed as an alternative perspective to the assimilation and integration frameworks, which tend to prioritize the nation-state over transnational mobility. Policy-makers in host societies usually regard transnational migrants' close linkages with the homeland as a sign of social and political detachment, thus reducing their contributions to the host land. Findings from our research on Chinese new immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore suggest the simultaneous embeddedness of immigrants into two or more nation-states and geopolitical spheres. However, integration in Singapore and transnational ties with China are not necessarily a zero-sum game. Our evidence suggests that transnationalism and integration have been construed as a mutually reinforcing strategy in new immigrants' efforts to accumulate economic and social resources in both the host land and the homeland. The formations, characteristics and mechanisms of the dual embeddedness process of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore are detailed in the article.

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years, transnationalism has become a dominating theoretical framework in migration studies. Transnationalism was originally defined as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. . . . An essential element . . . is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies" (Basch et al., 1994: 7). Transnationalism was primarily proposed as an alternative perspective to the assimilation and integration frameworks which tend to prioritize the nation-state over transnational mobility. Most scholars, when applying the model to their studies, put more effort into understanding migrants' transnational links with their origin countries in order to break through the conventional paradigm of the nation-state. Recently, scholars have pinpointed three limitations of current studies on migrant transnationalism. First, the role of politics and the state in shaping transnationalism has been disregarded or downplayed (e.g., Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). Second, the uneven impact of transnationalism on different segments/generations of immigrants and class politics has not been given sufficient attention (e.g., Rusinovic, 2008; Wu and Liu, 2014). Third, the patterns and impact of multiple transnational involvements of migrants in both host and origin countries need to be critically analyzed with a view to understanding the changing dynamics of transnationalism. This paper explores the third of these three aspects, which has been less studied, especially in the Asian context.

In regard to "the multiplicity of involvements," two major themes have emerged. The first theme is whether transnational connections with the origin country co-exist with integration into the host country (Erdal, 2013; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Kivisto, 2001; Morawska, 2003; Schans, 2009; Snel et al., 2006; Tamaki, 2011; Vertovec, 2009; Waldinger, 2008). These studies identified the simultaneous existence of transnational activities alongside migrants' integration, and that these activities are not an absolute zero-sum game, thereby diminishing doubts in Western government circles about the political allegiance of their immigrant residents (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). The second theme further focuses on the relationship or interaction between transnationalism and integration.

Some scholars have suggested, based on empirical data from outside of Asia, the mutually reinforcing nature of the interaction between the two (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Levitt, 2003; Oeppen, 2013; Portes et al., 2002; Snel et al., 2006). For example, Portes et al. (2002) investigated Latin Americans in the USA and found that migrants' economic transnationalism positively facilitates integration. Snel et al. (2006), based on a survey of 300 immigrants in the Netherlands originated from six different countries, discovered that transnational involvement in general does not impede "immigrant integration." But they also pointed out that, for special marginalized group of immigrants, the situation may be the opposite. Some scholars using a more theoretical perspective analyzed the various types of interaction between integration and transnationalism. Tsuda (2012) explored migrants' simultaneous engagement in both sending and receiving countries and discussed four types of interaction between the dual involvements (i.e., zero-sum, co-existence, positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement). Erdal and Oeppen (2013) offered an insight into the relationship between migrants' integration and transnationalism based on empirical work on Afghan and Pakistani migrants in the USA and Europe, and pointed to four different positions: alarmist, less alarmist but pessimistic, positive and pragmatic.

The existing literature and the complexity of research results suggest that the relationship of migrants' transnationalism and integration is not unconditional and is instead determined by many context-specific factors, such as migration policies (Mazzucato, 2008), place and identity (Binaisa, 2013), the context of reception, the mode of migrants' incorporation (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2002), region of origin (Ley, 2013), self-esteem (Kivisto, 2001; Vertovec, 2009), financial stability, educational level and time spent in the destination country (Hammond, 2013; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Levitt, 2003; Snel et al., 2006). Morawska (2004) even identified more than 40 factors contributing to immigrant assimilation and transnational engagements through a seven-group comparison study. All these studies show that the relationship between transnationalism and integration is complicated and that research results are quite diverse among the different survey subjects.

However, the present empirical studies are predominantly limited to migrants in North America and Europe (Carling and Hoelscher, 2013; Erdal, 2013; Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Levitt, 2003; Morawska, 2004; Portes et al., 2002; Schans, 2009; Snel et al., 2006; Tamaki, 2011; Waldinger, 2008). Three works concern Chinese migrants (Ley, 2013; Morawska, 2004; Ooi, 2008) but all are in the North American context. According to the latest statistics (2013), new Chinese migrants (those who have emigrated since the late 1970s when China started its reform and opening-up policy) are

numbered at 9.3 million, of whom approximately four million are intra-Asian migrants; professional and entrepreneur migrants are an increasingly significant proportion of these intra-Asian regional migrations (Wang, 2014). Nevertheless, few literatures have focused on new Chinese migrants in an intra-Asian context. It seems likely that there are differences between migrants in North American and intra-Asian migrants (e.g., Zhou and Liu, 2012) which need to be further explored to have a better understanding of global migration.

As a case study, this essay focuses on new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore; a major destination of Chinese immigrants in Asia. Transnational migrant entrepreneurs are one of the most dynamic migrant groups and they have received much research attention (Levitt, 2003; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Ley, 2006, 2013; Portes, 1999; Portes et al., 2002). However, surveys of transnational migrant entrepreneurs from different sending and receiving countries show remarkable variations. The transnational activities of migrant entrepreneurs from Latin America to the USA seemed positively associated with their integration in the host society (Portes et al., 2002). On the contrary, the study of transnational business migrants from East Asia in Vancouver identified "transnationalism with recent migrants and poor socio-cultural integration, while relations are weak and inconsistent with economic integration" (Ley, 2013: 921). The two researches concerned the same type of migrants—"transnational entrepreneurs"—but with different conclusions. What then of Chinese transnational entrepreneurs in Singapore?

To examine how the new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore straddle between transnationalism and integration, this essay will focus primarily on their point of view and behaviors. Three aspects will be explored: business management, socio-economic activities and entrepreneurship orientation. We attempt to address the following questions: what factors help forge the dual embeddedness of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in both host and home societies? How does the dual process of integration and transnationalism reflect on entrepreneurs' business management, specifically addressing issues such as business ownership and marketing strategies? How do integration and transnationalism interact with each other? What are the theoretical implications of this case study for the wider subject of transnationalism?

Dual embeddedness is adopted as a conceptual framework in this paper to describe the involvement of immigrant entrepreneurs in both origin and settlement societies. In this theory, all economic activities are embedded in social relations and institutions. Human psychology, cultural values, moral concerns, politics, religion and social structure all play

a significant role in people's economic decision-making (Granovetter, 1985; Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990). However, this theory was mostly applied to research within the framework of the nation-state and has seldom been explored from the perspective of transnationalism. Our study points to the possibility of dual embeddedness in the origin and destination countries with evidence from the socio-economic activities of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore.

Integration is one of two central concepts (the other is transnationalism) we use in this essay. Integration is a two-way process and emphasizes both sides' (migrants and the locals) acceptance of each other: "It focuses on migrants' full participation in the labor market and their formal citizenship, but leaves matters of social membership and cultural preferences open to personal choice" (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013: 869). In this regard, integration is adopted here rather than "localization," "incorporation" or other terms. This is consistent with the use of the term "embeddedness" in this paper to describe the immigrant entrepreneurs who set deep roots in the economic and social structures of the home and host countries and are affected by the values and cultures of both societies.

Despite the extensive research on the wider phenomenon of business transnationalism of the Chinese diaspora (Ley, 2006, 2013; Li, 2000; Liu, 2012; Menkhoff and Gerke, 2002; Ong and Nonini, 1997; Tan, 2007; Wong, 2008; Yeung and Olds, 2000), new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, as individuals, have not been given enough attention. Based upon empirical studies (in-depth interviews, focus groups, participatory observations and data analysis) on new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore, this essay argues that these transnational immigrant entrepreneurs are simultaneously dually embedded into two or more nation-states. Transnational ties and integration have been construed as a mutually reinforcing strategy in new immigrants' efforts to accumulate economic and social resources in both the host land and the homeland.

The remaining portions of this essay will proceed with a brief overview of new Chinese immigrant society and entrepreneurs in Singapore and the methodologies adopted in our fieldwork. It will then examine the contextual factors and characteristics of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' simultaneous embeddedness process of transnationalism and integration. The mechanism of dual embeddedness will be examined from the perspectives of transnational conversion of economic and social resources. Finally, the paper concludes by outlining the main conclusions and theoretical implications of the findings for migrant studies.

Methodology and data

Data for this paper were derived from our fieldwork in Singapore carried out between March and July 2012 and from October to December 2013. Additional fieldwork was conducted between early 2014 and January 2015. Primary data were collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews with 25 new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore and participant observation of their companies and activities. Background information on the entrepreneurs—gender, age, education, citizenship, leadership positions in social organizations, motives for migration and reasons for starting a business—and basic profile information of their companies—ownership, industrial sector, number of top management staff and their nationalities, number of employees and local employees—were gathered. Table 1 presents the profiles of 10 key informants who provided information about themselves and their businesses.[1]

In selecting interviewees, we focused on immigrant entrepreneurs in small to medium sized enterprises. Currently, 99 percent of all enterprises in Singapore are small-medium enterprises (SMEs) and they contribute nearly half of the national GDP (SG Press Centre, 2011). One of the biggest challenges in our fieldwork was how to gain access to interviewees. Tensions between new Chinese immigrants and local Singaporeans (Gomes, 2014; Liu, 2014; Yeoh and Lin, 2013), and the concerns of Chinese entrepreneurs over potential sensitivities and privacy posed challenges in the recruitment of interviewees. During our fieldwork, many potential informants declined to be interviewed. To overcome these difficulties and to obtain reliable information, 10 interviewees came from our own local circle of friends and an additional 15 informants were introduced by other colleagues.

The small number of interviewees could be a potential issue in supporting our arguments. On the other hand, the data we have collected provide an overview of the diverse profile of the key informants and their businesses. The interviews were supplemented by information about the new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs from: journals, newspapers and magazines; reviews of published and unpublished data; visits to the entrepreneurs' companies; and participation in their activities, such as the Outstanding New Immigrant Award organized by the Huayuan Hui in early 2014 and Tianfu Association's 15th Establishment Anniversary in January 2015.

[1]Details about the other 15 key informants are not available: some refused to provide background information about themselves and/or their enterprises, other interviewees were no longer available for further interviews, and some interviewees were from the same company.

Table 1. Profile of Chinese immigrants and their businesses.

Entrepreneur	Sector	Business ownership	No. of owners/ No. of local owners	No. of employees/ No. of local employees	Age range	Gender	Education	Citizenship	No. of organizations in Singapore and China	No. of leadership positions
A	Hi-tech manufacturing (water filtration)	Family	3/0	170/133	45–55	Male	University (Ph.D.)	Singapore	2 in Singapore; 2 in China	2
B	Human resources	Family	3/0	21/13	55–65	Male	University	Singapore	7 in Singapore; 6 in China	12
C	Manufacturing (heating units)	Partnership with Singaporeans	2/1	100/40	35–45	Female	University (Masters)	China	3 in Singapore; 0 in China	0
D	Manufacturing (printing and advertising)	Partnership with Singaporeans	3/2	40/20	45–55	Male	University	Singapore	2 in Singapore; 1 in China	2
E	Finance and investment	Family	2/0	3/1	35–45	Male	University (Masters)	Singapore	5 in Singapore; 2 in China	1
F	Hi-tech constructing	Partnership with Singaporeans	3/1	27/20	45–55	Male	University (Ph.D.)	Singapore	2 in Singapore; 2 in China	1
G	Clinics	Partnership with Singaporeans	2/1	3/2	45–55	Male	University (Masters)	Singapore	3 in Singapore; 1 in China	1
H	Real estate/ restaurant	Partnership with Singaporeans	3/1	100/30	35–45	Female	University (MBA)	Singapore	3 in Singapore; 2 in China	3
I	Consulting	Family	2/0	2/1	35–45	Male	University	Singapore	2 in Singapore; 2 in China	1
J	Healthy products	Partnership with Singaporeans	2/1	10/8	35–45	Female	University	Singapore	2 in Singapore; 1 in China	1

New Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore

Most new Chinese immigrants arrived in Singapore after 1990 when Singapore and China established their diplomatic relations. There are no official statistics available on the number of new Chinese migrants to Singapore. It is estimated that their number has been growing fast from 300,000 in 2004 to 700,000–800,000 in 2011 (Yim, 2011: 284). The large flow of Chinese immigrants into Singapore is closely related to the coincidence of Singapore's liberalization of its immigration rules[2] and China's relaxation of emigration controls in the mid-1980s. The remarkable growth of Chinese immigration has raised concerns among local Singaporeans (Liu, 2014; Yeoh and Lin, 2013).

Immigrant entrepreneurs are an important part of recent Chinese immigrants in Singapore. They mainly consist of two types: affluent Chinese coming to Singapore as immigrant investors to start their own companies, and those who initially either worked or studied in Singapore and later established their own companies. There are no reliable statistics on the number and profile of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore. We can obtain a general conception of this group by reviewing the membership of "Singapore Tianfu Hui," a new kind of Chinese voluntary organization established in 1999. Initially, the members were mainly from Sichuan province. Over the years, it developed into a China-wide organization (i.e., although many members are from Sichuan, some 40 percent of its current members are from other provinces of China). From an initial membership of 600, the number rose to more than 2,000 by 2015. Ninety-five percent of them have university education background and 90 percent have become Singapore citizens and permanent residents (2015 Membership Record; interview with an officer of the association, 11 January 2015). The committee board consists of 60 members, of which 45 own their own companies (75 percent of the committee members). The data suggest that highly educated entrepreneurs play an active and dynamic role in the new Chinese immigrant society of Singapore. Similar data describe the members of new migrant associations, such as Huayuan Hui (Huayuan Association) and Tianjin Chamber of Commerce (authors' interviews).

New immigrant entrepreneurs face two simultaneous social processes: transnationalization and localization, which are quite different from the

[2]Since the 1980s, due to Singapore's low fertility rate, the government began to ease policies to attract more immigrants. For example, the percentage of foreign employees in a Singapore company was allowed to rise from 45 percent to 50 percent. Also, for foreigners who invest at least SGD1.5 million in certain fields allowed by the Singapore government, they and their family members can apply for Singapore permanent resident status.

experiences of the old migrants. In the latter case, they usually experienced the process of localization first and they were often initially cut off from their homeland due to historical reasons, followed by the reestablishment of transnational activities after a period of exclusive localization (Gomez and Hsiao, 2004; Kuah, 2000; Wang, 2001).

Context of dual embeddedness: States and individuals

In this part, the context and dynamics of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness will be examined at the level of the nation-state and the individuals. In the following discussion, we discuss the evolution of the migration policy of Singapore and China, and the general characteristics of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs.

Dynamics in Singapore and China

The political context in both origin and destination countries affects migrants' development and behaviors (Lacroix, 2013; Ley, 2006). In Singapore, there are two strands pushing the entrepreneurs to integrate into local society. One is Singapore's relatively flexible immigration policies for foreign investors and the other is the government's active measures to integrate immigrants.

Being a country of immigrants, Singapore has been receiving immigrants for the past two hundred years. In recent decades, to overcome the challenges posed by Singapore's persistent low fertility rate (which stood at 1.2 in 2013), the government has implemented two-pronged measures aimed at increasing the country's fertility rate and attracting immigrants from other countries. In 1997, the government implemented a "foreign talent" policy to attract global talents from around the world.[3] In 1998, the government, through the Economic Development Board and the Ministry of Manpower, established "Contact Singapore" as the biggest national head-hunter. The two institutions work together to attract global experts and professionals to work, invest and live in Singapore. Contact Singapore set up offices in Europe, North America, China and in other countries. These efforts led to a dramatic increase in the Singapore's population from 3.5 million in 1990 to more than 5.4 million presently.

Increasing immigrant population has been accompanied by growing social tension between immigrants and local Singaporeans. The Singapore government responded by accelerating plans to integrate new

[3]Global talents here are generally taken to mean highly educated and/or business entrepreneurs.

immigrants into the local society. The "National Integration Council" was established in 2009 to "bond citizens with permanent residents and new citizens," with the latter groups expected "to share commonalities, values and experiences with fellow Singaporeans" (National Integration Council, 2010). Community Centers and other social organizations are encouraged to hold various activities to facilitate and strengthen contact and communication between immigrants and the locals. For instance, in the Singapore clan association, *Jinjiang Huiguan*, new immigrants take one-fourth of the seats on the committee board (Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, 2010: 3). Additionally, the government tries to bridge ethnic and cultural differences between immigrants and Singaporeans by strengthening the immigrants' national (i.e., Singaporean) identity. For example, to encourage new immigrants to stay and settle in Singapore permanently, the government increased school, health care and public housing benefits of citizens and permanent residents, partly to encourage permanent residents to take up citizenship. New immigrants are also urged to integrate and develop a shared identity by learning English, interacting with locals, joining in community activities and adopting the four key values that define the Singapore identity: dedication to national service, upholding law and order, embracing multiculturalism and meritocracy (Liu, 2014: 1234).

China's changing policies since the 1990s have played an important role as well. In the 1990s, China encouraged the Chinese to study overseas and then return to China. But over the last twenty years, with the increase in global mobility, the policy has changed from an emphasis on "returning to China to make a contribution" to "contributing to China from overseas," which deemphasizes the importance of the physical location of the immigrants. At the same time, the Chinese government encourages the Chinese diaspora to integrate into local society, socially, culturally and politically (if they are citizens of resident countries).

If the above discussion explains the process of Chinese immigrants' integration in the host society, what about the factors that contribute to their transnational activities with China? Apart from new immigrants' cultural and sentimental attachment to their homeland and Singapore's immigration policy, there are three key factors that allow new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' simultaneous embeddedness in China.

The first relates to close political and geographical links. Singapore and China built their formal diplomatic relations since 1990. Geographical proximity has been facilitated by transportation links—it is only a six-hour flight from Singapore to Beijing and there are more than 590 flights a week between Singapore and different cities in China. The ease of communication and transportation has made it convenient for entrepreneurs

to commute between the two countries. With the rise of China as the second largest economy in the world, it is understandable that new immigrant entrepreneurs will seek to take advantage of their Chinese background and maintain links with their home country for business resources and opportunities.

The second factor is the deepening of the economic relationship between Singapore and China. By November 2013, 140 Chinese companies were listed on the Singapore stock exchange, with a market capitalization of around SGD32 billion (*Lianhe Zaobao*, 2013). In 2013, China became Singapore's number one trading partner, with bilateral trade worth SGD115.2 billion (USD1.4 billion), up 11 percent compared to the previous year. The bilateral trade between China and Singapore accounts for 11.8 percent of Singapore's total trade; in 1990, bilateral trade stood at USD2.8 billion (*China Daily*, 20 February 2014). China's dynamic economy motivates entrepreneurs to maintain a strong relationship with the homeland.

Last but not least, the Chinese government has made some conscious efforts in maintaining ties with the Chinese diaspora. Firstly, the various government leaders give public talks to welcome overseas Chinese to do business in China. Secondly, government delegates are sent to visit overseas Chinese and their associations regularly to solicit investment and other business ties. Finally, some programs have been designed to provide convenient long-term stays in China. For example, long-term visas (one to five years) are provided to some overseas Chinese talents.

Individual factors

The characteristics of immigrant Chinese entrepreneurs are a starting point to understand their capacity to integrate in Singapore and to establish linkages with China resulting in their embeddedness in both societies.

Nineteen out of the 25 informants had acquired Singapore citizenship, a key factor promoting dual embeddedness. The study of immigrant entrepreneurs in the USA also showed that transnational entrepreneurs were more likely to be naturalized Americans (Portes et al., 2002). However, naturalization also has practical and pragmatic considerations (Erdal, 2013; Hagelund et al., 2010). The acquisition of Singapore citizenship should not be considered a definitive demonstration of the entrepreneurs' integration into Singapore society; it also offers ease of travel since a Singapore passport allows visa-free entry to more than 150 countries, including China. Two-thirds of the informants mentioned this as a reason for acquiring Singapore citizenship. On the other hand, taking up Singapore citizenship is indicative of their positive affiliation with the new

land. While attempting to integrate into Singapore, their cultural background and family connections in China keep them connected with their homeland. Entrepreneur B told us:

> I have been a Singapore citizen for sixteen years. I have regarded myself as Singaporean in spite of my Chinese educational and cultural background. I love Singapore. But I still have lots of family members and friends in China, which means I keep an intimate relationship with China. (Interview 2, Singapore)

Their advanced educational background provides an indispensable means that allows their double engagement. Educational level is usually positively associated with transnational entrepreneurship (Hammond, 2013; Vertovec, 2009). Twenty-two out of 25 interviewees hold a university degree. An advanced (university and above) educational background equips the immigrant entrepreneurs with knowledge (e.g., technical skills and bilingual ability) and capability (e.g., openness, flexibility, a global vision) to adapt to the host society. On the other hand, as members of an immigrant elite group, the Chinese government tries to establish links with them for China's socio-economic and cultural development. All of the interviewees expressed their strong homeland linkages and confidence endowed by their education in China and Singapore that make them active participants in the two countries. The interview below reflects how Chinese migrants view their human and cultural capital.

> I received my university education in China. After I came to Singapore, I felt that if I want to develop my career, my current educational degree was not enough. So I furthered my study in one of the Singapore universities and got my MBA in two years. At that time I felt more confident than before. I thought that I was not inferior to any Singaporean . . . I received most of my education in China. I still keep in close touch with my old classmates. I appreciate my motherland so it is natural for me to make contributions to China when I have the ability. (Interview 8, Singapore)

Local knowledge enhances their capacity to be embedded in both countries. Gaining local knowledge is related to the time they have spent in the destination country; the longer they have stayed, the more local knowledge they have acquired. This promotes engagement in economic and social interactions, locally or transnationally (Hammond, 2013; Kivisto, 2001).

Local knowledge includes interactions with Singaporeans and developing social skills to understand local culture. The interview typically reflects

the importance of local knowledge for their embeddedness in Singapore society.

> Once I arrived in Singapore, I continued in the same industrial sector as in China and opened a small printing and advertisement company. One reason was that I am familiar with this business and I could get support from my business networks and experience in China. The other reason was just to get some local experience and practice first. After all, the information about Singapore you get from TV and newspapers in China was quite limited. Without deeper knowledge about the local society, how do you know where to start? The only way is to contact and work with the locals directly. During the early stages of my company's development, I spent most of my time with my employees. We worked together and ate together. From this experience I learned some local customs and got to know how to get along with them. (Interview 4, Singapore)

Chinese entrepreneurship constitutes a key dynamic of transnational embeddedness. Entrepreneurship, in itself, is not a characteristic directly associated with dual social embeddedness. However, in the pursuit of business profit, the entrepreneurial spirit becomes one of the critical drivers pushing immigrant entrepreneurs to embed themselves in both the origin and destination countries. The cultural aspect of Chinese entrepreneurship surfaces in perceived ethnic cultural characteristics, such as hard work, familism, discipline, diligence and *guanxi*[4] (Liu, 2012; Yeung and Olds, 2000). The entrepreneurs take advantage of their dual social background and networks from Singapore and China to seek resources from the two countries. In the process, their cultural capital plays a significant role in enabling them to be active in both societies. One of our interviewees puts it clearly:

> For a better life and a bigger space to develop my career, I gave up my good (in other people's eyes) job in a company under the central [Chinese] government and came to Singapore. . . . I established my own company not a long time ago. I think I have confidence to make it. Why? There are two reasons. I have worked in Singapore for many years and I am familiar with the local resources and rules. I came from China and understand Chinese culture. So I also know how to find and develop the market there. (Interview 5, Singapore)

[4]*Guanxi* is a general Chinese term used to describe interpersonal relationships or connections that may result in social and economic exchanges that are beneficial for the parties involved.

In short, the entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness in Singapore and China are mainly affected by the two nation states and the entrepreneurs' abilities. The evolution of the immigrant policies of the Singapore and Chinese governments, the improved diplomatic relationship between the two states and the burgeoning economy of China have all formed a dynamic environment allowing the new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs to traverse between Singapore and China. At the same time, the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' background and characteristics provide them with human and cultural capital to help keep their feet in the two countries.

Characteristics of dual embeddedness

In this section, we explore the immigrant entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness in the process of integration and transnationalism. The discussion focuses on three dimensions of their entrepreneurial activities: business management, socio-economic ties and business culture orientation.

Business management

Three key factors of business management emerged from the interviews as closely related to the integration and transnationalism of the entrepreneurs:

The first factor is joint ownership with locals, which allows immigrant entrepreneurs to gain access to local business resources. Joint ownership offers two important benefits to immigrant entrepreneurs by firming up a company's competitive edge through access to local market resources and established business networks, and by facilitating immigrant entrepreneurs' transition from "outsiders" to "insiders." In Table 1, six of the 10 company owners have a partnership with local Singaporeans in joint capital investment.

The second factor is employing local workers. The localization of human resources helps reduce the cost of hiring expatriates from China. Local employees facilitate entry into the local markets given their personal networks and business contacts, and it promotes the image of the company in the local society through job offers and word of mouth. As shown in Table 1, seven out of 10 companies have at least one Singaporean managerial member of staff; in four out of five labor intensive companies more than 50 percent of their total employees are local Singaporeans.

The third characteristic is multi-sited business strategies. On the one hand, immigrant entrepreneurs employ localization in terms of ownership and hiring employees; on the other hand, they also avail of transnational

links in their businesses. Most of our interviewees indicated that their China background and personal networks are their biggest advantages after moving to Singapore and starting their own business. These are then transformed into a China-centered marketing strategy and multi-site cooperative operations.

Most of our interviewees have set their sights on the China market. As such, transnational economic and social ties with China are key to the formation of a China-centered marketing strategy. Entrepreneur B's experience highlighted this point:

> My company is a human resources company, mainly it brings foreign students to study in Singapore and to introduce foreigners to job opportunities in Singapore. China is our main market. I started my business in Sichuan province. Before I came to Singapore, I had worked in the Sichuan provincial government for quite a long time. I was familiar with many officials, including the provincial governor, vice-provincial governor and their secretaries, some of whom I even have very close relationships with. To date, I have brought upwards of 20,000 people from Sichuan to Singapore, and 6,000 families have settled down in Singapore. (Interview 2, Singapore)

A multi-sited cooperative operation is another part of transnational business strategy. It consists of different models that combines the use of resources from two or more countries, e.g., "*China market + western techniques + Singapore management*" or "*Singapore capital + Singapore techniques + China materials*." It shows new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' international vision, experience and higher education. These characteristics distinguish them from the earlier generation of Chinese immigrants who were mostly from the rural areas of China and generally had a poor educational background, the new immigrant entrepreneurs have at least a university degree and have a more international vision. The following interview illustrates this point:

> When you start a business overseas, the best way to operate your business is to utilize the resources you own in China combined with your understanding and knowledge of the local business situation. With this unique position, your company will grow fast. As far as my company is concerned, we are headquartered in Singapore. Singapore is our technical research center as well as our international trading center. China is our manufacturing base. The techniques and equipment we use are mainly from the US. (Interview 15, Singapore)

Socio-economic links

A wider perspective of socio-economic links is helpful to understand immigrant entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness in the origin and host societies. Our study finds that two channels—institutionalized and personal—play an important role in establishing the immigrant entrepreneurs' socio-economic links locally with Singapore and transnationally with China.

Institutionalized channels include formal organizations in China and Singapore. Immigrant entrepreneurs become members or take up leadership positions in multiple social organizations in China and Singapore. As Table 1 shows, nine out of 10 interviewees simultaneously participate in organizations in both countries and take leadership positions in at least one organization in either country. Here, we take one of our interviewees, Entrepreneur B, as a detailed example to elaborate how new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are dually embedded into two societies through institutionalized socio-economic linkages.

Currently Entrepreneur B is a member of six organizations in China and seven organizations in Singapore. Some are linked to organizations that have ties with the government in China and Singapore as well as grassroots and community organizations. These extensive connections indicate his integration and transnational practices. Entrepreneur B is one of the main leaders of Tianfu Association. Under his leadership, the association has held or participated in nearly 1,000 social activities in China and Singapore. Through these involvements, Entrepreneur B also obtained more opportunities to establish close and strong links with government officials in both countries. The Tianfu Association is often contacted by Chinese official agencies to receive visiting officials from China. According to Entrepreneur B, to date, the association has received over 100 Chinese government officials and 39 mayoral delegations, six officials from the Chinese central government, 12 officials from provincial governments and more than 70 from local governments. Likewise, in Singapore, government officials are frequently invited to attend the activities of Tianfu Association. Two ministers were present at the 15th Establishment Anniversary of Tianfu Association held in January 2015. Entrepreneur B acknowledges that through his participation in these organizations, he was able to broaden his social networks.

> Many people get to know me through the organizations I have joined rather than through my company. When people know that I am an Association leader and was granted awards by the Singapore government and featured in the local media, I am easily trusted by my customers and local Singaporeans. Through my participation in organizations, I got to know

> many Singaporean elites in politics and business and was also known to them. I am the first new Chinese immigrant to be invited to join an organization with links to the Singapore government as a committee member. I also invited some Singaporean elites to be consultants or honorary chairmen of our Association. Currently, there are 20 consultants and honorary chairmen in Tianfu Association, 11 of them are Singaporeans, including a former Singapore parliament member and a former university president. (Interview 2, Singapore)

Personal networks are also an important part of the socio-economic links of interviewees in both societies. All interviewees reported maintaining ties with their classmates, friends and colleagues in China. These personal networks are an essential bridge when they seek business opportunities in China. To sustain transnational networks and friendships, Entrepreneur B told us that every time he goes back to China, he visits them and often invites them for dinner. Similarly, in Singapore, personal ties with local-born Singaporeans are a measure of personal and social links with the local society. All the entrepreneurs mentioned having a good number of local friends. Entrepreneur E told us that 60 percent of his friends are locals.

The institutionalized and personalized links are two significant strands that keep the immigrant entrepreneurs' feet in the two societies and sustain the process of dual embeddedness in both the homeland and the host land.

Business culture

Business culture orientation is another indicator of the immigrant entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness in Singapore and China. They display two "faces" in their business culture: the "Singaporean face" and the "Chinese face." Chan and Ng (2001) have studied the double face phenomenon[5] of Singaporean Chinese doing business in China, but there are some significant differences between them and Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore. For one, the latter are either naturalized citizens or permanent residents of Singapore and as such, they have an explicit intention to settle in the destination country.

[5]Chan and Ng (2001) classified Singaporean Chinese businessmen into two groups. The first group is culturally more Chinese and belongs mainly to the first generation. The second group is more westernized in outlook. When Singaporean Chinese do business in China, the second group is not appreciably different from other national groups, such as Europeans or Americans. The first group (the older and Chinese-educated generation) seem to be more adept at exploiting their ethnic identity and enjoying "cultural sameness" with their counterparts in mainland China. However, when they enter the China market, these characteristics do not guarantee business success.

The Singapore face. The "Singapore face" emphasizes differences in the ways of thinking, customs and business practices between Singaporeans and Chinese, and highlights Singapore's western heritage in terms of business practice and political governance. Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, once described this "East–West" divide as follows:

> We found that although we are Chinese and speak Mandarin, we are different in our work methods and mental make-up. We are westernized in our system and working style. We do not depend on *guanxi* or relationships. Our standards and attitudes to the rule of law are completely different. (*Straits Times*, 14 August 2009)

The emphasis on rules, laws and procedures of doing business in Singapore is widely appreciated by the immigrant entrepreneurs, and they themselves exhibit a legalistic and technical attitude in their business culture. For example, that they employ local staff and adhere to clear administrative and management rules within their companies and behaviors expose their Singapore face. All of the interviewees expressed their appreciation of Singaporean commercial/cultural values, particularly efficiency, fair competition, social mobility, absence of corruption and meritocracy, which, some of them mentioned were factors that motivated them to migrate to Singapore. This point is specifically highlighted by one entrepreneur:

> In 1986, I had a chance to visit Singapore. Through several days' observations and talks with local Singaporeans, I found that many successful Singapore businessmen did not come from a privileged family background. Their achievements were mostly based on their diligence and sincerity. I was very impressed by Singapore as a fairly competitive society. In contrast, at that time in my Chinese workplace, there were many people from powerful and bureaucratic families. I felt that the space for me to develop my career in that environment was very limited. Therefore, I made up my mind to start a new life in Singapore when my Singaporean friends told me there were job opportunities here. (Interview 11, Singapore)

The Chinese face. In contrast to the "Singapore face," the "Chinese face" highlights the crucial importance of *guanxi* (connections), *renqing* (favor) and *mianzi* (face) in business practice instead of laws and rules (Yang, 1994). Despite the appreciation and identification with Singapore business

culture, immigrant entrepreneurs simultaneously displayed a typical "Chinese face" in their business culture. Having grown up and having been socialized in China, they are familiar with Chinese culture and have well-cultivated social networks in China. Compared with "outsiders" or non-Chinese, they have better social knowledge and are good at utilizing personal *guanxi* in doing business in China. They can adapt and can easily handle some "Chinese style" business issues and problems. In a highly competitive environment, their Chinese background can be an asset. One interviewee told us:

> For a small start-up consulting company, we are not very competitive in Singapore compared to most local companies and other big foreign corporations. However, we are from China, which is a huge market. So far, all of our customers are from China. Although our small company is not competitive in the global market, we have a lot of advantages in China which they do not have. We know better how to find and deal with Chinese customers through our networks. This is also why my company can survive in Singapore even in such a fierce competitive market. (Interview 9, Singapore)

Usually, the two faces co-exist peacefully and immigrant entrepreneurs have no difficulty to "auto-switch" between the two different business cultures. Their bilingual and bicultural capacities help them to respond appropriately to cultural cues, which, in turn, contribute to their dual embeddedness in two different social value systems.

Mechanisms of dual embeddedness

We now turn to the question concerning the mechanism of dual embeddedness. How do integration and transnationalism interact with each other? What theoretical frameworks can be applied to explain the relationship of the two simultaneous processes? As some scholars have suggested, "we must analyze immigrants' simultaneous engagement in both the host and home societies as related processes that affect each other instead of as separate processes that can simply occur together" (Tsuda, 2012: 634).

Findings from the study indicate that transnationalism and integration have been constructed as a mutually reinforcing strategy in the immigrant entrepreneurs' efforts to accumulate economic and social resources in both the origin and destination countries.

First, integration and transnationalism are part of the immigrant entrepreneurs' survival strategies to accumulate economic and social resources.

Related studies about ethnic entrepreneurs have shown that the ethnic economy has experienced a shift spatially or socially from intra-enclaves to inter-ethnics (Greve and Salaff, 2003; Marger, 2001; Nee et al., 1994; Zhou, 2004) and from the local field to both local and transnational fields (Portes et al., 2002; Saxenian et al., 2002).

Our analysis of immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore indicates that transnationalism is a socio-economic process in which the entrepreneurs sustain and make full use of the economic and social capital from China—business information, markets and social networks help the immigrants survive and become established in Singapore's competitive environment. The multi-sited strategy, the use of the "Chinese face" in their business orientation and active participation in Chinese social organizations are all strategies employed by entrepreneurs to utilize and enhance their transnational economic and social capital from China. However, transnational ethnic embeddedness also has a downside: the exclusion of out-group members, restrictions on individual freedom and increasing ethnic internal competition. Therefore, integration into the destination society and availing of local resources are the other strategies simultaneously taken up by immigrant entrepreneurs.

Integration is a process in which the immigrant entrepreneurs cultivate and accumulate economic and social resources in the host society. A common pathway for entrepreneurs to gain local economic resources is to localize their business ownership, company employees and business culture, as discussed earlier. Further, by joining and taking leadership positions in local social organizations, immigrants accumulate local social capital and cultivate the trust of local partners. In our case study, transnationalism and integration positively interact and reinforce each other through enhanced transnational engagement and/or the conversion of economic and social resources. Portes' study on Latin American immigrant entrepreneurs (Portes et al., 2002) highlighted that transnationalism and integration are positively correlated with each other but how they interact in a positive way was not systematically analyzed. Some studies have found that some factors—social interaction (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008), human capital (Erdal and Oeppen, 2013) and self-confidence (Kivisto, 2001; Vertovec, 2009)—may contribute to the positive relationship between integration and transnationalism. Nonetheless, the exact mechanism of the association between integration and transnationalism is not known. The study demonstrates that a conversion mechanism is key to this process, i.e., economic and social resources accumulated from the homeland and the host land can be converted from the local sphere to a wider transnational sphere or vice-versa. In the process of transformation, the new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' embeddedness in

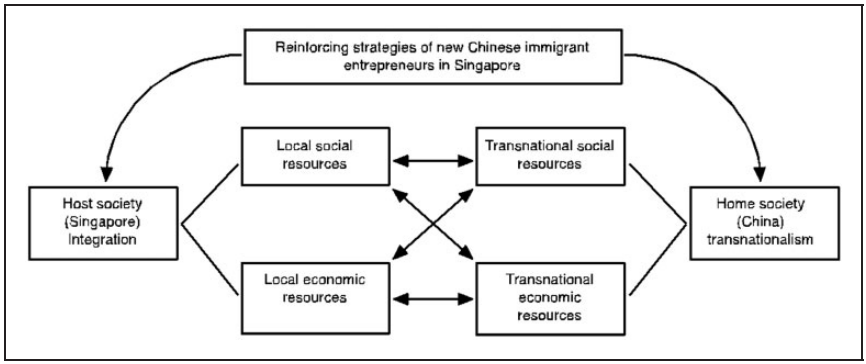

Figure 1. A model of the interactions between transnational and local social and economic resources.
Note: Arrows indicate putative routes of conversion or reinforcement.

Singapore (integration) provides resources or capital for them to develop their transnational links or activities in China (transnationalism). Simultaneously, their embeddedness in China (transnationalism) increases their resources or capital to enhance their integration in Singapore. Figure 1 summarizes the four types of economic and social interaction or transformation occurring during the conversion process.

The first type is that integration and transnationalism reinforce each other by the mutual enhancement of transnational social resources in their home society and local social resources in their host society. For example, Entrepreneur B's Chinese background and work experience in China gained him social capital in China, enabling him to develop links with Chinese government officials. When he migrated to Singapore, these transnational ties with China became a critical resource that he could draw upon to increase his local social capital. By leveraging on his Chinese human resources, he could more rapidly establish his business in Singapore and consequently increase his embeddedness in local society. His strong links with China were critical in his being invited to join an organization with close connections to the Singapore government, which aims to foster business links with China. Meanwhile, his active involvement in social organizations in Singapore helps him accumulate local social resources, which makes him a popular host for visiting Chinese government officials which then strengthens his transnational linkages with China.

The second type of interaction is the synergy between integration and transnationalism. For example, in the multi-sited coordinated business strategies employed by the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs, critical

business information that the entrepreneurs gain from their Chinese links (transnational economic resources) is helpful to attract investment from local business partners and develop their local economic resources (economic integration). Simultaneously, the entrepreneurs take advantage of Singapore's conducive business environment and outward looking global vision (local economic resources) and use these advantages to expand their businesses and investments in China (transnational economic resources).

The third interaction is that of integration and transnationalism, enhancing each other by converting local social capital into transnational economic resources and vice versa. For example, the expansion into China of Entrepreneur H's company (transnational economic resources) was partially attributed to her positive reputation and wide networks in Singapore (local social capital), which significantly increased her social trust in China. At the same time, her business growth in China (transnational economic resources) improved her financial power to be more actively involved in social activities in Singapore, thereby strengthening her networks in the local society (local social capital). According to some scholars, a sense of ethnic pride or self-esteem that immigrants obtained from increased transnationalism is also closely related to their active engagement in the host society (Portes, 1999; Vertovec, 2009).

The last type of interaction between integration and transnationalism is the mutual reinforcement of local economic resources and transnational social resources. The people who are integrated in the local economy or have acquired more economic resources from local society are more likely to engage in reinforcing transnationalism in a positive way (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Tsuda, 2012). For the Chinese immigrant community, business success in the host society is an important prerequisite for entrepreneurs to develop their transnational social resources or capital in the home society. For example, Entrepreneur B, the owner of one of the 10 biggest human resources companies in Singapore, was invited to take leadership positions in social organizations in China (transnational social capital) on account of his successful business in Singapore (local economic resources). The greater his transnational social involvement in China, the more resources he can gain through transnationalism, and as a result, he accumulates more resources or capital to invest in the host society, ultimately improving his economic status (see also Tsuda, 2012: 637). Entrepreneur B's growing transnational social networks with China (transnational social capital) simultaneously provides more commercial opportunities or resources for his rapid business growth in Singapore (local economic resources). These transnational links remain crucial to his company: China is his main market and 60 percent of his customers

are from several provinces where he has established most of his social networks.

The analysis of the mechanism of dual embeddedness reveals that transnationalism and integration continue to interact and reinforce each other in an ongoing process of enhancement and transformation between economic and social resources, and from the transnational field to the local sphere and vice-versa.

Conclusion

This case study of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore aims to contribute to the current research on the social process of transnationalism and integration. The focus on intra-Asian migration will add to the literature which, to date, is mostly based on the European and North-American contexts. Singapore, as one of the main Asian destinations of Chinese immigrants, has a strong Chinese-derived culture but is distinct from China, given the strong Malay, Indian and Western influences on Singaporean society. Thus, when Chinese immigrants arrive in Singapore, they need to adapt to the local society. Findings from the study suggest not only the co-existence of transnationalism and integration as part of business strategies of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs but also the mutually-reinforcing interaction between transnationalism and integration.

Compared with empirical studies on immigrant entrepreneurs in Europe and North America, what do our findings of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore suggest? The study's findings point to both similarities and differences vis-a-vis the existing empirical literature. Compared with Portes' study on Latin American entrepreneurs in the USA (Portes, 2001; Portes et al., 2002), we observed a similar phenomenon: transnationalism does not impede integration but instead accelerates assimilation. Also, the profiles of Latin American entrepreneurs in the USA and those of Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore are similar—well-educated, long residence in the destination countries, stable financeability and naturalized local citizens. However, compared to Ley's study on Chinese business immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan in Vancouver (Ley 2013), our observation that transnationalism and integration reinforce each other economically and socially differs from the Vancouver study. Despite similarities in their Chinese background, Ley's analysis showed "weak and variable relations between transnationalism and economic integration, but significant negative associations between transnational participation and social and cultural integration" (Ley, 2013: 935). He attributed this to "their holding of global assets in potential non-compliance with Canadian tax law, and their sojourner

habits, in which serial mobility limits participation and identity with Canada" (Ley, 2013: 921). The different findings imply the importance of paying attention to context-specific factors that shape immigrants' experience with transnationalism and integration. This point also implies why the dual embeddedness experience of new Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Singapore may not be replicated in other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia or Japan, where many Chinese have migrated to.

Furthermore, this study has explored the interaction between transnationalism and integration. Other scholars have examined this relationship in different ways (e.g., Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; Tsuda, 2012). A common finding across these studies is that at the interface between transnationalism and integration, there are positive and negative relationships. This study elaborated on how the two interact in a positive way, which has not been systematically discussed in the current literature. We identified four ways in which social and economic resources are converted in the interaction between transnationalism and integration. Transnational economic or social resources in the home-society can be converted into local economic or social resources in the host-society or vice versa. In addition, transnational economic resources can be transformed into local social resources or vice versa, as well as transnational social resources, which can transform into local economic resources or vice versa. These four inter-conversions ultimately lead to a positive relationship occurring in the social process of dual embeddedness. Finally, we would like to highlight three main points from this essay and how we can gain a better understanding of immigrants' transnationalism and integration in the home and host societies.

First, the understanding of immigrants' transnationalism and integration as a dual embedded social process should be placed within the larger context of globalization. With the rapid development of transportation and communication technology and the fast integration of regional and global economies, people's transnational mobility has dramatically increased (see also Portes et al., 1999, 2002). Nation-states are more open to the idea of cooperation, rather than exclusive isolation with each other, particularly in sharing economic resources and in socio-cultural development. In the accelerating process of globalization, dual embeddedness in both the homeland and the host land (as one of the models of global resource combination or integration) becomes a key livelihood strategy and lifestyle choice to accumulate economic and social resources for immigrants to survive and develop their career.

Second, compared to embeddedness within a nation, dual embeddedness in two countries is a more complicated process which is shaped by contextual factors in both host and home societies. In our investigation,

being transnational immigrants, the new Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore engage in economic activities with a more global outlook. The homeland where they are from and the host land where they currently settle usually become two main arenas for the entrepreneurs' economic and social activities. The government policies of both the origin and settlement countries and the transnational sphere created by the social system and culture from the two countries play critical roles in the process of dual embeddedness.

Third, immigrant entrepreneurs' dual embeddedness is further shaped by the individuals' transnational abilities and their pragmatic considerations. It is apparent that not every immigrant entrepreneur can undertake his/her social and economic activities transnationally. To sustain a dual transnational, and yet simultaneously localized life, certain characteristics are desirable, particularly the ability to be active in two or more societies, being bilingual, binational or bicultural (being familiar with the sociocultural obligations, norms and values of both societies), financial stability, social networks and transnational entrepreneurship. In this dually embedded social process, the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs simultaneously balance between transnationalism and integration by negotiating their pragmatic socio-economic strategies with the homeland and the host land, resulting in a transnational identity.

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