

Chinese Entrepreneurial Vectors and Networks on Maui : Lessons for a Sustainable Economic Future

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Principal Topic

Hawai'i, with its late 19th century intake of migrants, has witnessed form of ethnic enterprise development similar to those experienced on the mainland during the same period. Very few studies have addressed ethnic entrepreneurship, specifically Chinese and Chinese Americans, in the islands, in particular the field of entrepreneurial networking. Value transference theory has been used to develop alternative explanations regarding ethnic entrepreneurship.

Methodology/Key Propositions

This paper will use case study methodology for exploring the role of intergenerational value transference as a tool for entrepreneurial access to necessary and desired business support resources. Case studies, conducted in Maui County, will provide the empirical data. Data will be obtained through in-depth interviews guided by a structured ethnographic template, and analyzed using sociometric techniques to display and analyze data from these case studies.

Results and Implications

Once analyzed, the empirical data will be used to support or refute the primary proposition of this paper: When ethnic entrepreneurs purposefully engage in networking activities to gain access to business resources, a range of different networking techniques are employed. The secondary, but equally compelling proposition is that the effect of the first proposition is of limited duration, and lasts only as long as the period of socialization necessary to satisfy the prevailing norms. The assumptions are that ethnic entrepreneurs are interested in participating in networking activities and associated primarily with family, acquaintances, and other members of their ethnic group, in pursuit of resources for their business intercourse to be successful. The networking relationships of ethnic entrepreneurs are conducted in informal - but meaningful - social settings, attended by ethnically defined family, friends and business acquaintances. Specifically, there are no contractual or formal relationship with governmental, NGO's or ethnic social organizations. The non participation of ethnic entrepreneurs in formal networks suggests that they are able to achieve success without significant inputs from their host country such as financial, educational, advisory and other government support networks and opportunity structures. Succession of second and third generation Chinese owned family enterprises develops a type of entrepreneurial strategy that over time employs the tools of the dominant culture, i.e. governmental, corporate or associational structures. Findings are relevant to the efforts of social, financial, governmental and educational organizations and institutions, in Maui County as the players attempt to construct a sustainable economic infrastructure, in a post-plantation economy. Trade organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, service organizations such as: the Rotary Club; ethnic organizations such as Chinese American Club; educational institutions such as the University of Hawai'i and Maui Community College; along with agencies such as the Small Business Administration, may have to revise their Mission Statements, reconsider their *raison d'être*, and redefine their operational plans, in regards to the promotion of business oriented functions and objectives.

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