

# JOURNAL OF ASIA ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

REFEREED EDITION - ISSN 1176-8592

EDITORS: ROSEL FONACIER & JENS MUELLER

VOLUME II, ISSUE 3

© 2006, JOURNAL OF ASIA ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY  
NO REPRODUCTION OR STORAGE, IN PART OR IN FULL, PERMITTED  
WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION.

[EDITORS@ASIAENTREPRENEURSHIPJOURNAL.COM](mailto:EDITORS@ASIAENTREPRENEURSHIPJOURNAL.COM)

## THE FOOCHOW ENTREPRENEURIAL CHARACTERISTICS: COMPARISON BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Associate Professor Dr. Ernest Cyril de Run, Miss Malar Subramaniam and  
Mr. Michael Wong Sing Lung  
Email: [dre Ernest@feb.unimas.my](mailto:dre Ernest@feb.unimas.my)

Deputy Dean (Research and Postgraduate), Fakulti Ekonomi dan  
Perniagaan, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak.

### ABSTRACT

This study identifies the current motivation and entrepreneur characteristics of the second / third generation Foochow Chinese in Sarawak as compared to their forefathers. This is then compared to determine what has been lost or gained in the Foochow entrepreneurial spirit. Data was obtained through in-depth interview of thirty Foochow entrepreneurs. The study utilizes

Evolutionary Psychology Paradigm and is analyzed using frequency and Crosstabulation. The findings indicate specific generation based perception and motivators of entrepreneurship.

Key Words: Foochow, Sarawak, Entrepreneurship, Perception, Evolutionary Psychology Paradigm

## THE FOOCHOW ENTREPRENEURIAL CHARACTERISTICS: COMPARISON BETWEEN GENERATIONS.

### INTRODUCTION

The success of Foochow Chinese businessmen, particularly in Sarawak, is attributed to their industry, thrift, innovation, enterprise, resourcefulness, ambition, hard work, adaptability, and cooperative characteristics (Freedom, 1979). Among the contributing factors for Sarawak's success in trade and commerce was partly because of the arrival of Chinese immigrants, particularly the Foochow community from Mainland China in early 1990. Most of the Chinese dialect groups in these two provinces i.e. Foochow and Hakka are represented in Sarawak. It is believed that there had been some form of business contacts between the Chinese and Sarawak as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently, waves of Chinese immigrants came to Sarawak until the Second World War where new immigration restrictions were imposed (Chew, 1941; Chin, 1981; Lee & Tan, 2000).

The emigration of the Chinese to Sarawak was in response to their desperate reaction towards the harsh living conditions, such as poverty and overpopulation, in their homeland. This push factor when coupled with the pull factor of the opportunities offered to them by the Sarawak government then, work opportunities and the presence of relatives resulted in mass migration. By the 1960's, it is believed that 80% of the Chinese were locally born, depicting the slow-down of migration. In term of occupation, most Chinese are engaged in service industries, commerce, manufacturing, timber, construction and agriculture (Leigh, 1988).

The Foochow dialect group migrated to Sarawak from Fujian province during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They came to Sarawak to escape the harsh living conditions in China and to rebuild their lives. In the early days of migration, the Foochow immigrants adopted a survival mentality and a materialistic or wealth oriented approach to life in Sarawak as their priority. In order to survive in such a foreign and hostile environment, they had to be exceptionally hardworking, frugal, innovative and enterprising.

The Foochow, were considered by the Rajah Vyner Brooke as “assets of the state of Sarawak,” and much appreciated by the present Sarawak government today. This is mainly due to their economic contribution to the state, built upon the solid foundation laid by their forefathers. H. F. Deshon, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's resident in 1902 stated: “...The Foochow immigrants have proven themselves in every way a desirable class of immigrant. They are sober, hardworking, law abiding people of domesticated habits and have readily adapted themselves to their new surroundings...(Deshon, 1902).”

Fong (1996) accurately highlights some of the reasons behind the success of the Foochow's in Sarawak, be it in political, commercial, or in other arenas, as follows: “Ever since the Foochow Chinese entered into the commercial and industrial world in 1950s, they have been sensitive to all the commercial and industrial opportunities and have been successful in their endeavors as a result of their fore-sight, sincere and committed attitudes to work, their abilities to co-operate and united spirit. They were the descendents of the pioneer settlers who migrated to the Rejang basin from Fujian in China a century ago. Their success have been built on the foundation made by their ancestors who led a frugal life of living from hand to mouth experiencing hardships, sufferings and arduous struggles”(Fong, 1996).

Their success has outstripped almost all others in its economic potential, development capacity and professional manpower (Chin, 1981). However,

it is not obvious whether such well-known motivation and characteristics of the Foochow community are still the outstanding marks of the current generation. It is the objective of this research to note the motivation and characteristics of Foochow entrepreneurs of the first, second, and third generation. This is then compared to determine what has been lost or gained in the Foochow entrepreneurial spirit. The findings will also provide an indication of the capacity of the Foochow as entrepreneurs of the future as well as the trend of entrepreneurship in this specific community.

This paper addresses some important knowledge gaps by developing a scale of factors, to diagnose what Foochow's perceive as their entrepreneurship traits. Most studies look at Chinese as a whole instead by their dialect groups (Lee and Chan, 1998; Collins, 2002). The data is based on an initial interview of twenty-seven entrepreneurs from one dialect group, the Foochow's of Sibiu. A further study is planned by using the data obtained here in a questionnaire format to obtain higher reliability and generalizability. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first discussion of the relevant literature is presented; then the methodology is discussed; findings presented; and finally the paper concludes with a discussion of academic and managerial implications and areas for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sarawak is located on the island of Borneo, with Kalimantan Barat, Brunei, and Sabah. Together with Sabah, it makes up what is known as East Malaysia as opposed to West Malaysia, which consists of states in the Peninsular. The people of Sarawak are mainly indigenous people such as the Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu. The Chinese were migrants under the invitation of the Rajahs of Sarawak (Chew, 1941; Chin, 1981; Lee & Tan, 2000).

The dynamics of the East Asian Economic is built upon by the Chinese family business (Kao, 1993; Yeung, 1998). In addition, Chinese in East Asia such as Indonesia have lived in a very volatile environment with political uncertainty. However, these Chinese have constructed their business strategies in such a way that provide flexibility to tackle political uncertainty. Also, in many Chinese establishments today, the founders often grow up in very poor and difficult backgrounds. Examples of these are the prominent Foochow businessmen such as Datuk Lau Hui Kang of KTS, Tan

Sri Tiong of Rimbunan Hijau and Datuk Wong TK of WTK Group of Companies. Besides, most Chinese firms have succeeded by exploiting market opportunities, using the strategy of guerrilla force (Lam, 1992). They tend to seek out an opportunity for high profit margins in a particular good, developed formula, and exploit it immediately.

The traditional Chinese culture believes that a successful business depends on three (3) external factors: Luck, compatible environment and harmonious social relation. New generation Chinese entrepreneurs nowadays actively pursue strategies that attempt to “match” with these three factors. They believe that the success of all enterprise does not depend on sheer luck but on alertness to the opportunity (Kirzner, 1985). The Chinese culture also regards harmonious relations among family members as the foundation for a prosperous business. Harmonious group relations, in view of the Yin-Yang philosophy, give rise to flexibility in business dealings.

When Chinese migrants were forced to up root from their homeland to seek their fortunes overseas, their motivation was fundamentally economic, that is to earn a decent livelihood (Chew, 1941; Chin, 1981; Lee & Tan, 2000; Leigh, 1988). This is particularly true to the Foochow Chinese businessmen in Sarawak. The Foochow faced hardships in China and sought greener pasture in Sarawak. Nobody would dream of their economic success today. This may be attributed to the of the Foochow forefathers who had been very hard working, innovative, high-risk takers, and enterprising, readily to adept to new environment and united. The question will be will the second-generation Foochow businessmen posses the same resilience and winning characteristics of their forefathers.

Chinese entrepreneurs were on the whole “successful and innovative” (Level, Phillips, & Tracy, 1991) with a strong co-operative overseas Chinese network (Kraar, 1994). The operations of the Chinese business networks, is in fact, an extension of the Chinese family culture. To ensure that such networks operate reliably, Chinese business pays special attention to trust in business transactions. In Chinese practice, trust is limited to partners in the bond. It works on the basis of personal obligations, maintenance of reputation and face (family name) (Yeung & Tung, 1996). For older Chinese generation, they trust their relatives absolutely but trust their friends and acquaintances only to the degree that mutual dependence has been established (Redding, 1990).

The entrepreneurial advantage of Asians especially Chinese immigrants is because of their “cultural baggage” and motivation (Stromback & Malhotra,

1994). They emphasized the importance of this oversea network of ethnic entrepreneurs; links with relatives and friends in the country of origin were often used to provide a reliable source of supply, access to a market, advice about the market prospects and to secure credit.

For Chinese business, it is crucial to relate entrepreneurial practices to Chinese values. The basic value underlying Chinese entrepreneurship is networking, hardworking and diligence. These personal values will help them to link the past to the present and the future and are fundamental to the process of alignment and attainment that define intention action (Bird, 1989). Personal values provide a powerful explanation of human behavior and often serve as standards or criteria of conduct (Rokeach, 1973). The academic literature also details characteristics and traits of successful entrepreneurs that are similar to Foochow entrepreneurs. These include innovation, creativity, willingness to take risk, aggressiveness, hard work, competitive, self confident, and superior in conceptual ability (Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984; de Vries, 1977; Schumpeter, 1934).

#### Evolutionary Psychology Paradigm

The psychological view of human kind throughout different generations has been evolving through various processes of knowledge transfer. Evolutionary psychology paradigm explains this transfer through the cognitive structure of the mind evolving over time and that this occurs through adaptive problem solving, cognitive programming and neurophysiological basis (Cosmides & Tooby, 1990; Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Cosmides & Tooby, 1997). The goal of Evolutionary Psychology Paradigm is to understand human behavior that is universally aimed at the passing of one's genes into the next generation (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992)(Cosmides & Tooby, 1997). Its basic tenet is that, just as evolution by natural selection has created morphological adaptations that are universal among humans, so it has created universal psychological adaptations (Buller, 2006).

A common view among philosophers and scientists has been that the human mind resembles a blank slate, virtually free of content until written on by the hand of experience. According to this orthodoxy, all of the specific content of the human mind originally derives from the "outside" -- from the environment and the social world -- and the evolved architecture of the mind consists solely or predominantly of a small number of general purpose mechanisms that are content-independent, and which sail under names such

as "learning," "induction," "intelligence," "imitation," "rationality," "the capacity for culture," or simply "culture" (Cosmides & Tooby, 1990; Cosmides & Tooby, 1997).

The study of psychology, indeed, the study of any of the behavioral science, is incomplete without giving serious consideration to the ecological, cultural and ethnic factors that contribute to human variability (Lonner & Malpass, 1994). When studying the perception of Foochow's holding the evolutionary psychology paradigm as a theoretical framework portrays the reason why there is any change in their mind set (Cosmides & Tooby, 1987). If the theory applies to our present study it suggest that there should be some common elements or factors that mould the generation's character in a specified time. Finding these elements and studying how they are related to Foochow's perception will give an overall picture of Foochow's entrepreneur's perception has remained or changed.

## METHODOLOGY

The population of this study consists of all the Foochow entrepreneurs in Sarawak. In order to develop descriptive terms for perception of Foochow entrepreneur's traits, in-depth interviews were conducted. This was followed by an exploratory analysis of Foochow entrepreneur's perception of entrepreneurial traits.

### In-depth interview

In order to obtain a better answer to the research question, a qualitative method of data gathering is required. Previous research has suggested that the widest accepted range for sample size for in-depth interview to be 4 to 15 (Perry, 1998). This will provide the answers to the 'why' as well as providing a richer data that can be used in understanding the motivation and characteristics of Foochow entrepreneurs of different generations. Trained enumerators interviewed respondents comprising of Foochow entrepreneurs in Sibul, Sarawak. The interviews included details such as demographics, ethnic identification, motivation, and individual characteristics. The interview utilized a modified word association technique, where respondents were asked questions and asked to respond with their initial thoughts, which are often considered to be the most salient and valid one (Friedmann & Fox, 1989; Stafford & Stafford, 2003; Weeks & Muehling, 1987). Respondents were required to respond to open-ended questions during the interview.

## FINDINGS

Twenty seven male respondents were interviewed and most of the respondents were above 51 years (44.4%) with declared income level of less than RM5,000 (66.7%) who had served for more than 30 years in their line. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent Profile of Respondents Interviewed

Demographic Factor		%
Gender	Male	100
	Female	0
Age	< 30 years	11.11
	31 - 40 years	37.04
	41 - 50 years	7.41
	> 51 years	44.44
Income level	< RM1,000	0
	RM1,001 – RM5,000	66.67
	RM5,001 – RM10,000	18.52
	> RM10,001	14.81
Work experience	< 5 years	11.11
	6 - 10 years	30
	11 - 15 years	3.7
	16 - 20 years	11.1
	21 – 25 years	14.8
	26 – 30 years	7.4
	> 30 years	22.2

Table 2 provides listing of terms used in the literature to describe Foochow's and Foochow entrepreneurs. Table 3 provides an exhaustive listing of the terms used by the respondents in describing their perception of Foochow entrepreneurs, their motivations to become entrepreneurs and traits.

Table 2: List of Terms Associated to Foochow Entrepreneur's Characteristics/traits From Past Literature

Industrious, Thrifty, Innovative, Enterprising, Resourceful, Ambitious, Hard working, Adaptable, Cooperative, Frugal, Sober, Law abiding, Fore-sight, Sincere, Committed attitudes to work, United spirit, Alert, Risk takers.

Table 3: Summary of Findings

What are your views of entrepreneurs?	N	What do you think of Foochow entrepreneurs?	N	What do you think of Foochow entrepreneurs compared to other entrepreneurs?	N
Risk taker	11	Hardworking	11	Hard work	7
Work hard	10	Risk taker	9	Daring	4
Management	6	Daring	9	Works in group	3
Business opportunity	6	Committed	5	Risk taker	3
Start a business	5	Business opportunity	5	Management style	3
New ideas / innovative	5	Thrifty	4	Self-confident	2
Visionary	4	Management	3	Mission	2
Meet challenges	3	Innovative	3	Independence	2
Professional	2	Trustworthy	2	Good negotiation skill	2
Learn	2	Take challenges	2	Flexible	2
Knowledgeable	2	Successful	2	Determination	2

Experience	2	Start business	2	Aggressive	2
Ethical	2	Social entrepreneurs	2	Young entrepreneurs	1
Adopt strategies	2	Mission	2	Trust	each
Trustworthiness	1	Adventurous	2	Successful	
Transparent	each	Tolerance	1	Sacrifice	
Tolerance		Smart		Research work	
Strong belief	each	Show interest	each	Profit orientated	
Sacrifice time		Responsible		Outstanding	
Responsible	each	Money minded	each	Opportunity seeker	
Resilient/flexible		Learn		Never give up	
Profit seeking	each	Leadership quality	each	Negative thinking	
Meet competition		Knowledgeable		Innovative	
Intelligent	each	Initiative	each	Expertise	
Enterprising		Independence		Expand business	
Endure pressure	each	Helpful	each	Encourage	
Effort		Good planning		Customer oriented	
Dynamic	each	Firm	each	Competitive	
Credible		Excellent		Commitment	
Ambitious	each	Enterprising	each	Adaptability	
		Determination			
	each	Cooperation	each		
		Confidence			
	each	Careful	each		
		Capable			
	each	Adaptation	each		

Table 3: Summary of Findings (Continued)

What do you think motivated Foochow's to become entrepreneurs	N		What motivated you to become an entrepreneur	N
---	---	--	--	---

Family business	12	Freedom	7
Hard work	9	Profit	6
Education	9	Better future	4
To survive	8	Comfortable	4
Standard lifestyle	6	Family background	4
Expand business	6	Support	4
Influence	5	Family business	3
Business opportunity	5	Management	3
Self-motivation	4	Opportunity	3
Responsible	3	Hard work	2
Independence	3	Independent	2
Ambitious	3	Learn	2
Sensitivity	2	Skills	2
Risk taker	2	Strong belief	2
Resourceful	2	Education	1
Profile oriented	2	Honor	each
Learn	2	Inspiration	
Innovative/creative	2	Mission	
Financial support	2	Own decision	
Financial burden	2	Prestige	
Daring	2	Provide employment	
Businessman	2	Recognition	
Autonomy	2	Responsibility	
Trustworthiness	1	Rich	
Training	each	Start business	
Knowledgeable		Training	
Experience			
Confidence			
Cohesiveness			
Adaptability			

Table 3: Summary of Findings (Continued)

What do you think are the Foochow characteristics / traits that made them entrepreneurs	N	What do you think are the your own characteristics / traits that made you an entrepreneurs	N
Hard work	13	Hard work	8
Risk taker	7	Confidence	5
Opportunity	7	Risk taker	5
Management	6	Trustworthiness	5
Family business	6	Friendly	4
Education	6	Management	4
Expand business	5	Skills	4
Daring	5	Business opportunity	3
Thrifty	4	Flexible	3
Innovative	4	Leadership	3
Experience	4	Own business	3
Personal value	3	Patient	3
Financially support	3	Perseverance	3
Trustworthy	2	Responsible	3
Survival	2	Visionary	3
Relationship	2	Adventurous	2
Loyalty	2	Commitment	2
Leadership	2	Competitive	2
Knowledgeable	2	Energy	2
Independent	2	Freedom	2
Gain prosperity	2	Knowledge	2
Discipline	2	Motivation	2
Confidence	2	Planning	2
Comfortable life	2	Willingness	2

Strong belief Straight forward Sensitivity Profit orient Optimism Learnt Humble Good investor Competitive Commitment Capability Adventurous Adaptability	1 each	Careful Curiosity Discipline Diversify Education Experience Honest Improvement Interest Optimistic Thrifty	1 each
--	-----------	--	--------

Table 4 Cross Tabulation of Views of Entrepreneurship By Age

What are your views of entrepreneurs?	Age Scale		What do you think of Foochow entrepreneurs?	Age Scale		What do you think of Foochow entrepreneurs compared to other entrepreneurs?	Age Scale	
	39 <	> 40		39 <	> 40		39 <	> 40
Work hard	30%	70%	Hardworking	36.4%	63.6%	Outstanding	0.0	
Learn	50%	50%	Firm	0.0	100%	Never give up	0.0	
Intelligent	0.0	100%	Smart	0.0	100%	Works in group	0.0	
Responsible	0.0	100%	Risk taker	55.6	44.4	Daring	25%	
Risk taker	54.5%	45.5%	Daring	55.6%	44.4%	Sacrifice	0.0	
Visionary	50%	50%	Committed	60%	40%	Competitive	0.0	
Management	50%	50%	Management	0.0	100%	Hard work	28.6%	
Professional	50%	50%	Business opportunity	40%	60%	Risk taker	33.3%	
Ethical	50%	50%	Take challenges	50%	50%	Determination	50%	
Start a business	20%	80%	Money mind	100%	0.0	Management	66.7%	

						style	
Endure pressure	0.0	100%	Innovative	100%	0.0	Flexible	100%
Enterprising	0.0	100%	Enterprising	100%	0.0	Negative thinking	100%
Strong belief	100%	0.0	Social entrepreneurs	100%	0.0	Aggressive	50%
Knowledgeable	50%	50%	Successful	50%	50%	Opportunity seeker	0.0
Experience	100%	0.0	Trustworthy	0.0	100%	Mission	50%
Meet challenges	66.7%	33.3%	Helpful	0.0	100%	Adaptability	100%
Dynamic	100%	0.0	Thrifty	25%	75%	Good negotiation skill	100%
Resilient/flexible	100%	0.0	Capable	100%	0.0	Profit oriented	100%
Transparent	100%	0.0	Excellent	100%	0.0	Trust	0.0
Credible	100%	0.0	Mission	50%	50%	Encourage	0.0
Adopt strategies	100%	0.0	Careful	100%	0.0	Expertise	100%
Business opportunity	50%	50%	Leadership quality	100%	0.0	Young entrepreneurs	0.0
Meet competition	100%	0.0	Adventurous	100%	0.0	Successful	0.0
Trustworthiness	100%	0.0	Start business	100%	0.0	Research work	100%
New ideas/innovative	60%	40%	Show interest	0.0	100%	Customer oriented	0.0
Profit seeking	0.0	100%	Tolerance	0.0	100%	Expand business	0.0
Sacrifice time	100%	0.0	Responsible	0.0	100%	Independence	50%
Effort	100%	0.0	Initiative	0.0	100%	Commitment	100%
Ambitious	0.0	100%	Determination	0.0	100%	Self confidence	50%
Tolerance	0.0	100%	Knowledgeable	100%	0.0	Innovative	100%
			Good planning	100%	0.0		
			Learn	100%	0.0		
			Cooperation	0.0	100%		
			Independence	0.0	100%		
			Confidence	0.0	100%		

Table 5 Cross Tabulation of Motivation to Become Entrepreneur By Age

What do you think motivated Foochow's to become entrepreneurs	Age Scale		What motivated you to become an entrepreneur	Age Scale	
	39 <	> 40		39 <	> 40
Family business	50%	50%	Hard work	30.8%	69.2%
Hard work	22.2%	77.8%	Gain prosperity	0.0	100%
Businessman	50%	50%	Survival	0.0	100%
Daring	50%	50%	Daring	60%	40%
To survive	50%	50%	Discipline	50%	50%
Education	44.4%	55.6%	Family business	50%	50%
Resourceful	50%	50%	Loyalty	50%	50%
Standard lifestyle	66.7%	33.3%	Risk taker	57.1%	42.9%
Sensitivity	100%	0.0	Education	16.7%	83.3%
Risk taker	100%	0.0	Management	66.7%	33.3%
Independence	66.7%	33.3%	Financial support	33.3%	66.7%
Autonomy	50%	50%	Knowledgeable	50%	50%
Responsible	33.35%	66.7%	Experience	50%	50%
Self motivation	75%	25%	Expand business	60%	40%
Business opportunity	60%	40%	Personal value	66.7%	33.3%
Influence	60%	40%	Optimism	100%	0.0
Ambitious	66.7%	33.3%	Leadership	50%	50%
Innovative/creative	50%	50%	Sensitivity	100%	0.0
Learn	50%	50%	Opportunity	57.1%	42.9%
Training	100%	0.0	Good investor	0.0	100%
Knowledgeable	0.0	100%	Thrifty	50%	50%
Profit oriented	100%	0.0	Independent	50%	50%
Expand business	50%	50%	Trustworthy	50%	50%
Cohesiveness	0.0	100%	Innovative	50%	50%
Trustworthiness	0.0	100%	Competitive	100%	0.0

Adaptability	0.0	100%	Relationship	50%	50%
Financial support	0.0	100%	Humble	0.0	100%
Financial burden	0.0	100%	Straight forward	0.0	100%
Confidence	100%	0.0	Comfort life	0.0	100%
Experience	100%	0.0	Profit orient	100%	0.0
			Adventurous	0.0	100%
			Capability	0.0	100%
			Adaptability	0.0	100%
			Confidence	0.0	100%
			Learn	0.0	100%
			Strong belief	100%	0.0
			Commitment	100%	0.0

Table 6 Cross Tabulation of Entrepreneurial Traits By Age

What do you think are the Foochow characteristics / traits that made them entrepreneurs	Age Scale		What do you think are the your own characteristics / traits that made you an entrepreneurs	Age Scale	
	39 <	> 40		39 <	> 40
Learn	50.0%	50.0%	Skills	50%	50%
Skills	50%	50%	Motivation	0.0	100%
Hard work	0.0	100%	Adventurous	0.0	100%
Opportunity	33.3%	66.7%	Willingness	50%	50%
Rich	100%	0.0	Education	0.0	100%



A search of the literature has provided some early descriptions of the Foochow in Sarawak (See Table 2). In the current study, there are 36 different terms associated to perceptions of Foochow entrepreneurs. Most of the respondents still perceived Foochow entrepreneurs similarly as those in the past (Hard working, risk taker, money minded or frugal, innovative, enterprising, thrifty, initiative, good planning as in fore sight, cooperation and adaptability). Statements such as “One should work hard to be successful and learn as much as possible (Interview 1), ” “In my opinion, I think entrepreneurs are those business people with good understanding of business management, marketing and economics. They also have good ‘yen guang’ or foresight of the future (19)”, “(Foochow entrepreneurs are...) Hardworking. Struggle hard to support family. Willing to do anything to get money. Very outstanding. Never give up. Always work in a group or Association to formed cooperation among Foochow (10)”, and “(Foochow’s are...) Hardworking, ambition, ability to adapt to new environment, alert to opportunities, spirit of cooperation, independence, self confidence, willing and ability to take risks by finding resources and something to make profit (5)”.

Nevertheless terms such as industrious, resourceful, ambitious, sober, law abiding, and sincere do not emerge. New terms such as social entrepreneurs, leadership, knowledge, and determination appear in statements such as “Foochow are great social entrepreneurs when they are very clear and very driven to bring about positive social change (4).” There are also terms that indicate a self-confident attitude, such as independence, initiative and confidence. In contrast, a study on Chinese entrepreneurs in Singapore indicates them to be achievers, networkers, and also hard workers (Lee and Chan, 1998). The similarity lies in only one factor, hard worker.

An important point to note here is that there is still some form of continuity in how Foochow’s perceive themselves as entrepreneurs. This continuity hails good tidings as these traits have held the Foochow in good stead. What is more interesting is the evolution of how Foochow entrepreneurs see themselves now. They have become more confident and extrovert yet still careful. They see themselves as taking challenges yet have good planning. Foochow’s also see themselves as social entrepreneurs, indicating a more integrated position into the social fabric in Sarawak as compared to the first generation of Foochow’s.

Another interesting factor is how Foochow’s see themselves against other ethnic groups. The 29 terms in Table 3 shows an aggressive, determined

mentality with some modern modifications. These include research work and customer oriented. The aggressiveness is tempered by these modern modifications and realization of the importance of customers and that the spirit of an entrepreneur is universal. Statements such as “Foochow entrepreneurs compared to other entrepreneurs, they have hardworking spirit, thrifty, never afraid to take risks, self motivated, more ambitious and visionary (5)”, “Foochow entrepreneurs can adapt to situation, they try to learn a number of Languages and dialects as compared to others (22)”, “They are very hardworking and not afraid of hardship. They are willing to do all that it takes to be success despite adverse circumstances. They are more willing to sacrifice their time and resources to extreme limits to make their company a success (24)” and “They are no different from other entrepreneurs. In the Sarawak experience, they came from poor families to start a new life in Sarawak. Thus, they have the determination to succeed. Comparatively the Foochow appears to have better networking among relatives and friends (25)”.

The interviews also probed on what are the respondent’s perceptions of motivation factors to become an entrepreneur. Interestingly the highest mentioned motivator was that of family business yet when personally asked, respondents indicated freedom and profit (monetary gain). Statements such as “To earn more money, learn more business matter and be independence (27)” and “Money. Money is another reason for starting a new venture for men (3)” support this thinking. Family business and background as a motivator was a distant 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> point. This may tie in with Chinese values of family and filial piety (Yau, 1994). Statements such as “Firstly, my father encouraged me to venture into hardware business. My father was doing business related to daily food consumption. He thought that hardware business was good in the sense that the hardware goods would not spoil as compare to food. During childhood, I also actively assisted my father in his business operations (15)” and “Family business background. Having a parent who is self-employed provides a strong inspiration for the entrepreneur (3)” support this view. Issues such as to survive, although mentioned equally by the young and old, were not personal motivators. Statements such as “I was concerned for my future income level. With annual increment of RM45 per year on clerical level, how can I survive with that sort of income level? (16)” support this view. The motivators may also have been the perception of motivators for earlier generations of Foochow

that have been carried on through generational transference (Buller, 2006; Cosmides & Tooby, 1997).

An important point to note from this research is that there seems to be a common theme throughout the interviews. Hard work is seen as the cornerstone of entrepreneurship, be it perception, motivator or characteristic. This may be in line with the harsh history faced by the Foochow's in the past (Leigh, 1988).

In line with the evolutionary psychology paradigm, this study found similar and differing views between the two generations studied as well as with that of the first generation Foochow's. Hard work is especially significant as an elderly Foochow perspective and not that of the younger generation. The younger generation definition of entrepreneurs include terms such as risk taker, daring, committed, innovative, money minded, capable, excellent, leadership commitment, research work and innovative. On the other hand the older generation see entrepreneurship as work hard, commitment, profit seeking, ambitions, tolerance, cooperation, business opportunity, work in groups, never give up, opportunity seeker, and work in groups (Refer Table 4).

The same occurs for motivation and entrepreneurial traits (Refer Table 5 and Table 6). The older generation is motivated by hard work and survival, the younger see a lifestyle and independence as motivators. The older generation sees hard work, inspiration, freedom, responsibility, leadership, curiosity, and thrift as characteristics of an entrepreneur. The young see education, training, family, confidence, risk taker, discipline, patience, and flexibility as their characteristics.

Nonetheless, there are also similarities between the generations as predicted by the evolutionary psychology paradigm. These includes perceptions towards entrepreneurs in statements such as visionary, management, professional, ethical, knowledgeable, take challenges, successful, aggressive, mission minded, and independent. Similar terms were also used equally by both generations for motivators, such as daring, to survive, learn, innovative, thrifty, independent, trustworthy, innovative and relationship based motivators. There were less similar and equally used statements for traits. These included Learn, skills, willingness, planning, friendly, energy and trustworthiness.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that there are differences between the generations of Foochow immigrants and the current generation businessmen. Nevertheless there are also similarities that have been passed down through the generations. This finding suggests that the evolutionary psychology paradigm can be used for understanding the movement of perception throughout generations. The accolades though are not being echoed and this is worrisome for the future of Foochow entrepreneurship. This exploratory study has looked into the Chinese values, Foochow characteristics and discussed the current situation and has now been able to look deeper into these factors.

### Implication

This exploratory paper provides basis for thought, both theoretically and managerially. It is shown that it is crucial to relate entrepreneurial activity among the Foochow in the lines of Chinese values, family, and networking activities. This can also be correlated with Western values, such as the Protestant work ethic as well as between generations for comparison.

The brief exploration indicates the need to achieve is high among the initial immigrants, partly due to the push factors from China and pull factors by the Brooke government. This external pressures may have disappeared over the generations because of the very economic prosperity sought by the earlier generations has been achieved. This allows for further exploration on the creation of entrepreneurs in a high-income economy, which has been shown to be low (Lee & Chan, 1998).

### Limitation

Although the sample of this research exceeded the generally acceptable level, a higher response rate would have further strengthened the research. Nevertheless, based on the limitations of scale and time, the response rate for the interviews was good. By utilizing enumerators and a semi structured interview format, the authors obtained twenty-seven respondents.

Biases from experience of respondents could have affected the reliability of the findings. Majority of the respondents in this research are men who have working tenure of more than ten years. Younger entrepreneurs may not have sufficient experiences in wide variety of business and entrepreneurial situations and this could lead to biases in providing feedback. Older entrepreneurs on the other hand may have other form of biases collected through the years. Nevertheless the interview allowed for respondents to respond with their initial thoughts, which are often considered to be the most

salient and valid one (Friedmann & Fox, 1989; Stafford & Stafford, 2003; Weeks & Muehling, 1987). These thought were then coded and used in the study, thus allowing for some degree of reliability.

Another limitation is that some respondents have doubt with the confidentiality of the research even after assurance. They feel uncomfortable to respond honestly about their perceptions. This will pose difficulties in getting the full co-operations and involvement of all the respondents.

#### Future Research

Future research will be to identify the current perception, motivation and entrepreneur characteristics of the second / third generation Foochow Chinese in Sarawak in a quantitative manner utilizing factor analysis. This will allow for some form of generalization of the perception, motivation and entrepreneur characteristics of the second / third generation Foochow Chinese in Sarawak.

Other interesting research that has been raised by this study is the need to determine other ethnic groups perception, motivation and entrepreneur characteristics. This then can be quantified and to note whether there exist any similar or different perception, motivation and entrepreneur characteristics of ethnic groups in Sarawak. From there, a generalizable model of perception, motivation and entrepreneur characteristics of ethnic groups in Sarawak can be created to be tested with current models of entrepreneurship.

Note: This research was funded by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Fundamental Research Grant. 03(51)/477/2004(214).

## REFERENCE

Bird, B. J. (1989). *Entrepreneurial Behavior*. USA: Scott, Foresman & Company.

Buller, D. J. (2006). *Evolutionary psychology*. Retrieved Jan 17, 2006, from <http://host.uniroma3.it/progetti/kant/field/ep.htm>

Carland, J. W., Hoy, F., Boulton, W. R., & Carland, J. C. (1984). Differentiating Entrepreneurs from Small Business Owners: A Conceptualization. *Academy of Management Review*, 9(2), 354 - 359.

Chew, D. (1941). *Chinese Pioneers On The Sarawak Frontier 1841 - 1941*: Oxford University Press.

Chin, J. M. (1981). *The Sarawak Chinese*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Collins, Jock. (2002). Chinese Entrepreneurs. *The Chinese Diaspora in Australia. International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*. 8. 1 / 2. 113 – 133.

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1987). From Evolution to Behaviour: Evolutionary Psychology as the Missing Link. In J. Dupré (Ed.), *The Latest on the Best: Essays on Evolution and Optimality*. (pp. 277-306.). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1990). The Past Explains the Present: Emotional Adaptations and the Structure of Ancestral Environments. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 11, 375-424.

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1992). Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange. In J. Barkow, L. Cosmides & J. Tooby (Eds.), *The Adapted Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (1997). *Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer*. Retrieved Jan 17, 2006, from <http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/cep/primer.html>

de Vries, M. F. R. (1977). The Entrepreneurial Personality: A Person at the Cross Roads. *Journal of Management Studies*, February, 34 - 57.

Deshon, H. F. (1902). July 1902 Report of the Upper Rejang Region. *Sarawak Gazette*, September.

Fong, H. K. (1996). A History of the Development of the Rejang Basin in Sarawak (L. J. Shau-Hua, Trans.). Sibul: The Cultural Heritage Committee.

Freedom, M. (1979). *The Study of the Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Friedmann, R., & Fox, R. (1989). On the Internal Organization of Consumers' Cognitive Schemata. *Psychological Reports*, 65(August), 115-126.

Kao, J. C. (1993). The Worldwide Web of Chinese Business. *Business Review*, March-April, 24 - 36.

Kirzner, I. M. (1985). *Discovery and the Capitalist Process*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Kraar, L. (1994). The Oversea Chinese: Lessons from the World's Most Dynamic Capitalists. *Fortune*, 14 November, 2 - 12.

Lam, D. K. K. (1992). Guerrilla Capitalism and the Limits of the Statist Theory: Comparing the Chinese NICs. In C. Clark & C. S (Eds.), *The Evolving Pacific Basin in the Global Economy*, (pp. 107 - 124). London: Lynne Boehner.

Lee, J., & Chan, J. (1998). Chinese Entrepreneurship: A Study in Singapore. *The Journal of Management Development*, 17(2), 131 - 141.

Lee, K. H., & Tan, C. B. (2000). *The Chinese In Malaysia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leigh, M. (1988). The Spread of Foochow Commercial Power Before the New Economic Policy. In Cramb & R. H. W. Reece (Eds.), *Development in Sarawak: Historical and Comptemporary Perspectives*. Melbourne: Centre of South East Asia Studies Monash University.

Level, T. C., Phillips, J., & Tracy, N. (1991). *Asia Entrepreneurs in Australia: Ethnic Small Business in the Chinese and Indian Communities in Brisbane and Sydney*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Lonner, W. J., & Malpass, R. S. (1994). *Psychology and Culture* (1 ed.). London: Allyn and Becon.

Perry, C. (1998). Processes of a Case Study Methodology for Postgraduate Research in Marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32(9/10), 785.

Redding, S. G. (1990). *The Spirit of the Chinese Capitalism*. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. London: Free Press.

Schumpeter, J. (1934). *The Theory of Economic Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stafford, T. F., & R., S. M. (2003). Industrial Buyer's Perceptions of Industrial Salespersons. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, 18(1), 40-58.

Stromback, T., & Malhotra, R. (1994). *Socioeconomic Linkages of the South Asian Immigrants with their Country of Origin*. Canberra.

Weeks, W. A., & Muehling, D. D. (1987). Students Perception of Personal Selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 16(May), 145-151.

Yau, O. H. M. (1994). *Consumer Behavior in China: Customer Satisfaction and Cultural Values*. London: Routledge.

Yeung, H. W. C. (1998). *Transnational Corporations and Business Networks: Hong Kong Firms in the Asean Region*. London: Routledge.

Yeung, I. Y. M., & Tung, R. L. (1996). Achieving Business Success in Confucian Societies: The Importance of Guanxi. *Organizational Dynamic*, Autumn, 54 - 66.