

INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LEGITIMACY

A Study of Chinese International Firms

国际企业家精神与合法化 基于中国国际企业的研究



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore what is the motivation of international entrepreneurship in the domestic market and how international entrepreneurial firms survive in foreign market. Based on a sample of 212 Chinese international firms, it examines the internationalization of organizational field as an antecedent of international entrepreneurship from a neoinstitutional theory perspective. Exploitative and exploratory learning are considered as consequences of international entrepreneurship, because firms seek to achieve legitimacy in the host country. The nonlinear relationship between exploitative and exploratory learning and performance are further tested. Findings suggest that isomorphic pressure from the organizational field will cause firms to engage in international entrepreneurial activities. In order to get legitimacy in a host country, international entrepreneurship, in turn,

is positively associated with the above two learning processes. Results also support that although exploitative and exploratory learning are beneficial, they would weaken a firm's performance in a foreign market, after a certain point.

Keywords: international entrepreneurship, institutional isomorphism, neoinstitutional theory, legitimacy

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter lays the foundation for this study. After a brief review of the international entrepreneurship, research gaps will be identified. Two research questions and the theoretical model will be proposed. I will also explain why the research was carried out in China. Research methods including data collection and analysis method and the outline of this study are presented.

1.1 International Entrepreneurship — a Brief Review

With the globalization of the world economy, international entrepreneurship has received more attention over the past decade (Brush 1993, 1995; Hitt & Bartkus, 1997; Hisrich et

al. , 1996 ; Zahra & George 2002). Particularly , in China , the biggest emerging market , with its “ Open Door ” policies after 1978 and accession to the Word Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 , its integration with the global economy has been at an accelerated pace . Currently , internationalization is of paramount importance to Chinese firms .

Extant research in international entrepreneurship explores the organizational factors such as top management team’s characteristics (Bloodgood, Sapienza & Almeida , 1996 ; McDougall & Oviatt , 1996 ; Oviatt & McDougall , 1995) , and firm resources (Oviatt & McDougall , 1995) as antecedents of international entrepreneurship . There have also been investigations into the influence of strategic factors such as generic strategy (McDougall , 1989 ; Oviatt & McDougall , 1995) and functional strategy (Bloodgood, Sapienza & Almeida , 1996 ; McDougall , 1989) on international entrepreneurship . However , these studies focus only on the technical and organizational level without mentioning institutional level (Parsons , 1960 ; Petit , 1960) .

Organizations are in an open system instead of a closed-system (Petit , 1960) . They have to survive in their institutional environment and attempt to secure legitimacy (Tompson , 1967) . According to neoinstitutional theory , organization