

Original Research Article

A study of the entrepreneurial process of tourist small enterprise owners: A life course viewpoint

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Abstract: Tourism small enterprise is the most dynamic, inventive, and segment-creating force in destinations, and they may operate as direct destination attractors. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 small tourist entrepreneurs and a fieldwork of 37 small enterprises, this article attempts to investigate the link between the small tourism entrepreneurs' course of life and the entrepreneur process. The research found that the life course of small tourism entrepreneur is closely tied to the entrepreneur process, and that the majority of small tourism entrepreneurs gained job experience before starting their firm endeavor. Life experiences may exert impact in the form of a chain of influence, interaction influence, or accumulation influence. The development and alteration of life events in various situations might define the entrepreneurial process of a small tourist entrepreneur. These life events serve as watershed moments for small business entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Small tourism enterprise; Entrepreneurship process; Life course; Small entrepreneurs

1. Introduce

The primary goal of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between the entrepreneurial reasons that influence small tourism enterprises in their choice of tourist locations, and the personal life paths of the entrepreneurs. Small tourism enterprises (STEs), being highly dynamic entities, exert considerable influence in tourist areas (Elliott & Boshoff, 2008; Giannoni & Maupertuis, 2007; Ivanovic et al., 2010; M. Hampton, 2015; Pholphirul et al., 2022). Their inherent flexibility is predisposed to fostering innovation in destinations, engendering niche markets, and assuming pivotal roles as tourist attractions (Buhalis, 1996; Marinescu, 2017; Shmygol et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the rationale behind small tourism enterprises opting to establish enterprises in tourist destinations and the nexus between this entrepreneurial process and their life trajectories pose intriguing questions (Jayawarna et al., 2013; Poylova & Polukhina, 2017). This study endeavors to address these queries through an examination of small tourism business owners in Guangzhou's Huangpu Ancient Village.

The utilization of life course theory allows for the examination and elucidation of individual pathways within various social domains, including but not limited to family and employment (Buhalis, 1996; Grajcevci & Shala, 2016; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Poylova & Polukhina, 2017). Originating from the Chicago School in the early 20th century and gaining widespread application in the 1940s, life course theory has found extensive use in sociological research. Its applications span studies on educational opportunities acquisition, transitions from school to work, career metamorphoses, timing of marriage and childbirth, as well as transitions from work to retirement (Abbott, 2017; Elder Jr, 1994; Goodson, 2001; Warr, 2017). Current areas of focus encompass the consequences of labour migration on the timing of initial marriage, investigations into the phenomenon of elderly poverty, studies on second-generation migrant workers, and examinations of childhood migration experiences

and the subsequent prospects available in early adulthood (Abbott, 2017; Collins & Shubin, 2015; Elder Jr, 1994; Forman et al., 2013; Goodson, 2001; Rutter, 1989; Scutaru, 2021; Warnes & Williams, 2006; Warr, 2017; Windzio et al., 2011).

The fundamental analytical paradigm of life course theory posits that an individual's life course is an amalgamation of sequences of multiple life events (Goodson, 2001). Even when faced with a similar series of life events, varying sequences might result in very diverse effects on an individual's life. Life trajectories and transitions are essential analytical concepts that arise in academic discourse (Beige & Axhausen, 2012; Cappeliez et al., 2008; Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). Trajectories delineate developmental pathways in domains such as work, marriage, and self-esteem across the lifespan. Life trajectories are punctuated by transitions, which are often defined by significant life events such as the initiation of one's first employment or marriage (Georgellis et al., 2012; Raz-Yurovich, 2010). The dynamic relationship between trajectories and transitions gives rise to critical junctures in the life cycle, exerting an impact on significant choices within an individual's life (Georgellis et al., 2012; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014; Poylova & Polukhina, 2017). This requires academics to explore the utilization of processes and life path approaches in entrepreneurial research, understanding the cumulative impacts of career choices and decisions.

Life course methodologies encompass exhaustive examinations of life turning points and redirection paths, accentuating individual self-identity and life planning (Beige & Axhausen, 2012; Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). Within an individual's life course, entrepreneurship emerges as a choice with ramifications for both personal and professional domains. Key experiences and events during the entrepreneurial process wield influence over entrepreneurial decisions, ideas, business resources, and performance (Foss et al., 2019; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014). The family assumes a pivotal role in the career progression of entrepreneurs and the initiation, expansion, and succession of new businesses. Family members may impart experiences and exert influence on the business (Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014). This study conducted surveys on 37 tourism small enterprises in Huangpu Ancient Village and engaged in in-depth interviews with 15 small tourism enterprises. These findings underscore the close correlation between the life trajectories of entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process. In Huangpu Ancient Village, a majority of small tourism enterprises accrue experience through employment before embarking on entrepreneurial endeavors. Events in their life trajectories may have cascading effects on entrepreneurship, manifesting as interactive or cumulative influences. The evolution and variations in life events across different contexts delineate the entrepreneurial trajectories of these small tourism enterprises, with these life events serving as pivotal turning points in their lives (Buhalis, 1996; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014; Poylova & Polukhina, 2017; Schoon & Duckworth, 2012).

2. Literature review

2.1. Small tourism enterprise

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector are commonly referred to as tourism small businesses. The scale of these enterprises is typically determined by the number of employees. For example, Morrison et al. (2010) define small businesses as those with fewer than 20 employees, while Alonso and O'Neill (2009) classify businesses with no employees or fewer than 5 employees as micro-enterprises. According to Ateljevic (2007), these enterprises are usually owned individually and are not part of an industry chain or large corporation. Ownership can be in the form of either a partnership or individual ownership, and those with fewer

than 20 full-time employees are considered small enterprises(Alonso & O'Neill, 2009; Ateljevic, 2007; Morrison et al., 2010; Richards, 2000).

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial and influential role within the tourist sector(Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022). According to McCamley and Gilmore (2017) state that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have the ability to provide unique tourism products and services that meet the diverse needs of tourists. These enterprises generally operate within certain geographical regions and possess the capacity to draw tourists to more secluded or less popular locales(Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) exhibit greater flexibility and agility compared to larger enterprises(Fiegenbaum & Karnani, 1991; Johns, 1987). This enables them to promptly respond to shifts in market demands and offer tailored tourism experiences that cater to the diverse requirements of travelers. This, in turn, enhances the quality and depth of tourism content and experiences. In the realm of tourism, small businesses play a pivotal role in fostering local economic growth, generating job opportunities, and elevating residents' living standards. They possess the capacity not only to flexibly allocate tourism resources but also to positively influence the income levels, employment prospects, and living conditions of the local community(Alammari et al., 2016; Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022; Camilleri, 2015; Fiegenbaum & Karnani, 1991; Yilmaz, 2008). Leveraging the enhancement of local residents' living standards, augmented income, and increased employment opportunities serves as effective means to mitigate local poverty (Spektor & Naira, 2021). Concurrently, Camilleri underscores that small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism and hospitality industry can stimulate job creation, economic advancement, and competitiveness through their support for access to financing.

Consequently, small and medium-sized enterprises enable the promotion of local economic growth, generates employment opportunities, and improves the living standards of the inhabitants. Furthermore, it is worth noting that these enterprises frequently place a high emphasis on the conservation and advancement of local culture through the provision of tourism products and services that possess unique local attributes. As a result, they actively contribute to the promotion and perpetuation of local cultural heritage(Liwieratos, 2007; Richards, 2000; Yu-Yan, 2009).

Based on their operational purposes, tourism small businesses can be categorized into lifestyle-oriented, subsistence-oriented, and commercial-oriented. SMEs in the tourism industry can be classified into three categories based on their business approach: lifestyle, corporate, and conservative. These categories have distinct motivations and aims(Wei et al., 2010). Alternatively, they can be classified as transportation, warehousing, and postal services; accommodation and catering; leasing and commercial services; water, environment, and public facilities management; and culture, sports, and entertainment(Yu-Yan, 2009). Additional classifications include tourist attraction-based, family-style, and rural tourism small businesses(Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2015).

Synthesizing previous research, this paper summarizes the characteristics of tourism small businesses as follows:

- a) They operate on a small scale with fewer than 20 employees(Alonso & O'Neill, 2009; Yu-Yan, 2009);
- b) The majority of business owners are motivated by lifestyle considerations and non-economic goals (Morrison et al., 2010; Yu-Yan, 2009);
- c) There is a strong entrepreneurial spirit with a focus on innovation and identifying opportunities(Buhalis, 1996; Lee & Jeong, 2021; Prima Lita et al., 2020);
- d) Business operations often align with the personal interests and hobbies of the business owners, with some

entrepreneurs deriving self-value from these pursuits(Wei et al., 2010);

e) They have stronger connections to local culture, are more flexible, and facilitate local employment opportunities(Alonso & O'Neill, 2009; Richards, 2000).

These characteristics underline the diversity and flexibility of tourism small businesses in the industry, providing significant support for the sustainable development of local economies and cultures.

2.2. Life course of small tourism entrepreneurs

Social scientists employ two primary ways to study human behavior: the snapshot method and the structural method(Manski, 1981; Pierson & Paul, 2000). This entails recognizing the effects of personal internal factors or taking into account the influence of the social context on individuals. Similar to the cinematic time-lapse or dynamic method, it traces the life course within a certain period(Rauch & Hulsink, 2015). The life course notion was initially proposed by Elder Jr (1994), who posits that an individual's life trajectory is shaped by the interplay of personal attributes, societal arrangements, and historical epochs. He places significant emphasis on the concept of continuity and variety in human development, specifically examining how an individual's experiences at various phases of life impact their subsequent developmental trajectory. Subsequently, Havighurst (1956) developed the idea of developmental tasks in the life cycle. In doing so, he suggests that people face different developmental tasks and obstacles at different stages of their lives. Inability to finish these duties could cause psychological and emotional anguish, which could have an impact on one's physical and mental well-being. Elder Jr (1994) conducted a comprehensive study that examined how historical periods and social organization impact individual life experiences, including significant life changes and critical moments. This research builds upon the previous work of Elder Jr (1975). A major concept in his theory of the life path is the influence of historical epochs and societal frameworks. He asserts that these factors significantly influence an individual's life experiences, underscoring the role of social and historical circumstances in shaping people's life paths and subsequently determining their evolution and metamorphosis. Mayer (2009) highlights the considerable influence exerted by social structure and institutional modifications on the trajectory of people' life courses. The scholar examines the developmental trajectories of individuals from diverse social origins and analyzes the influence of social structure and institutional changes on the decision-making and opportunities available to individuals across various stages of their lives. In general, scholarly literature pertaining to the life course underscores the significance of both internal and external forces in shaping individual development(Elder Jr, 1975, 1994; Havighurst, 1956; Mayer, 2009). Life course theory offers a structure for analyzing the several factors that influence the entrepreneurial behavior of small business owners in the tourist industry over the course of their lives. Meanwhile, life course events also have an impact on the entrepreneurial path of small business owners in the tourism industry(Foss et al., 2019; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014).

From an internal individual perspective, tourism entrepreneurs of small enterprises may be local residents or non-local residents. For some lifestyle tourism enterprises, many of the entrepreneurs are non-local residents who have pursued their lifestyle goals by escaping from their previous jobs (Warnes & Williams, 2006). They often have completely different life trajectories before starting their small business ventures. Therefore, the entrepreneurship of small enterprise owners is the outcome of certain life "events". Although the reasons for individuals ultimately becoming tourism entrepreneurs are diverse, they are closely related to the life course of individuals(Foss et al., 2019; Jayawarna et al., 2014; Poylova & Polukhina, 2017). Here, life "events" refer to marriage, childbirth, resignation, and other life events, which often become turning points in life, thus impacting

life trajectories and directions (Beige & Axhausen, 2012; Elder Jr, 1975; Mayer, 2009; Raz-Yurovich, 2010).

From an external environmental perspective, due to the uncertainty and seasonality of the tourism industry, small business owners need to possess flexible business strategies and adaptability, which have special influences on their life courses and career development (Kirby & Kaiser, 2003; Thomas et al., 2011). With the development of internet technology, Buhalis and Amaranggana (2013) emphasized in their research the impact of digitization and technological innovation on the life course of small business owners in the tourism industry. They pointed out that digitization and technological innovation provide new business opportunities and challenges for small business owners, significantly influencing their career development paths.

These studies by scholars highlight the differences between the life courses of tourism entrepreneurs in small businesses and those in other industries, particularly in terms of market environment, operational challenges, and development opportunities they face. Their research provides important theoretical and empirical foundations for understanding the life course of tourism entrepreneurs in small businesses, contributing to guiding policies and practices.

2.3. Entrepreneurship of small tourism enterprises

Motivations for small business owners to start a business can be categorized into two types: one is pursuing profits and economic gains, while the other is combining interests with work, driven by lifestyle motivations (Jayawarna et al., 2013; Jayawarna et al., 2014). Entrepreneurial behavior of tourism small business owners is characterized by uncertainty, strong innovation, and high sensitivity to opportunity recognition (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Therefore, tourism small business owners also exhibit different characteristics from general entrepreneurs, such as a higher tendency to possess entrepreneurial spirit, including innovativeness, sense of achievement, need for independence, responsibility, and power (Carland et al., 1984).

Small tourist business owners' entrepreneurial decisions are influenced by a multitude of circumstances. Local perceptual experiences and a sense of identity strongly influence the entrepreneurial behaviors of small business owners (Hallak & Schott, 2011). Additionally, personal social capital is of utmost importance in the business process (Atherton et al., 2018). Moreover, entrepreneurial behavior is influenced by gender disparities (Atherton et al., 2018; Coleman, 2016; McGehee et al., 2007). McGehee et al. (2007) discovered that women exhibit greater initiative in creating agricultural tourism businesses, however Jaafar et al. (2010) observed that the majority of small hotel owners in Malaysia are male. Furthermore, the accumulation of prior work experience significantly influences entrepreneurship. According to Ateljevic (2020), small business owners that have extensive job experience frequently possess varied professional backgrounds. Moreover, small business owners play a crucial role in the prosperity of small firms (Jaafar et al., 2011). To summaries, small entrepreneurs' motivations can be broadly classified into two categories: those driven by the pursuit of profit and economic advantages, and those who integrate their personal interests with their business, motivated by lifestyle considerations (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Jayawarna et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2011). These particular categories of small business proprietors are also frequently encountered within the survey sample of this research.

3. Sample selection and research methods

3.1. Sample selection

Huangpu Ancient Village, located in the south of Guangzhou, covers an area of 2.5 square kilometres and was once an overseas trading centre since the Song Dynasty. Until the end of the Qing Dynasty, Huangpu Ancient

Port was Guangzhou's most important foreign port for trade and commerce, and had an important position in the history of China's foreign trade, being an important witness to Guangzhou's status as the commercial capital of southern China. In recent years, the Guangzhou Municipal Government has accelerated the restoration and redevelopment of the ancient village and historic area of Huangpu. Particularly driven by events such as the revisit of the Swedish ocean-going merchant ship Gothenburg to Guangzhou in 2006 and the Guangzhou Asian Games, the transformation of the ancient village of Huangpu has taken shape, and some historic districts and museums, including the Memorial Hall of the First Customs of the Guangdong Sea, the Liang Ancestral Hall and the Huangpu Pagoda, have become tourist attractions. In recent years, the local government has also continued to accelerate its efforts in tourism marketing, and Whampoa Ancient Village has gradually become a hotspot for sightseeing and tourism for residents of some neighbouring cities. At the same time, a number of tourism business stall owners have continued to arrive, and Whampoa Ancient Village has seen the emergence of tourism businesses similar to those common in historic districts such as Lijiang and Yangshuo. At present, small tourism businesses in Whampoa Ancient Village are concentrated in the Lingnan Craft Quarter (Whampoa Straight Street and surrounding blocks), with a total of 45 businesses.

3.2. Research methods

In order to comprehensively examine the influence of life events on entrepreneurship, we utilized the interview methodology in our research. By conducting interviews, researchers can get comprehensive information regarding the events encountered by the participants and the subsequent effects they have experienced. This statement elucidates the significance of comprehending individuals' perspectives on entrepreneurship, behavioral incentives, and contextual knowledge. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of conducting face-to-face interactions in order to gain a deeper understanding of aspects such as the subjects' background, culture, and values, as emphasized by scholars Park and Burgess (2019). This statement offers a theoretical justification for doing comprehensive study on the entrepreneurial endeavors undertaken by small business owners within the tourism sector. In March 2015, our research team conducted six visits to Huangpu Ancient Village for the purpose of screening and engaging in dialogue with research participants. After conducting many visits, we excluded certain establishments that did not align with the criteria of being classified as small tourist enterprises. Subsequently, we endeavored to establish contact with several proprietors of small enterprises in order to ascertain their potential interest in participating in interviews. An attempt was made to conduct a survey of 37 small tourism businesses. However, due to the busy schedules of the owners, only 15 of them could be interviewed. It is worth noting that some small tourism enterprises primarily operate their establishments in their spare time or employ staff, which often makes scheduling interviews challenging. The primary subjects covered in the interviews with the owners of these small businesses included fundamental details about the company, working conditions, employment status, personal information of the owners, their motivation, industry experience, and the future trajectory of the business's development. The primary focus of these small enterprises was to serve the needs of small companies operating within the context of historic village tourism. These firms mostly engaged in activities such as retail, handcraft production, and food service. To establish a positive relationship with the business owners, we actively participated in their activities during the research period and took the initiative to engage in conversations with them in their stores at their available time. The researchers conducted formal interviews, which were subsequently recorded, transcribed, and organized into a cohesive dataset. In the event of any subsequent inquiries, we conducted additional investigations with several little tourism firms. Table 1

presents a concise overview of the interview participants.

Table 1. Overview of Interview Samples.

Code	Object	Business Category.	Code	Object	Business Category.
01	Ms. Zhou	Coffee Shop	09	Mr. Chen	Private Kitchen
02	Ms. Li	Dessert Shop	10	Mr. Zhu	Noodle Shop
03	Ms. Yang	Handicraft Store	11	Mr. Lai	Creative Handicraft Store
04	Mrs. Yang	Handmade Leather Bag Shop	12	Mr. Chen	Paper Clay Workshop
05	Mr. Leung	Sweet Soup Shop	13	Ms. Lian	Dessert Shop
06	Mr. Zheng	Creative Jewelry Store	14	Mr. Lei	Fast Food Restaurant
07	Ms. Li	Tea Art Store	15	Mr. Guo	Folk Handicraft Store
08	Mr. Lin	Handicraft Store			

Data source: Compiled by the author.

4. Survey results

This study uses the correlation between significant event nodes in small tourism enterprises' lives and small business entrepreneurship in the tourism industry as the basis for classification from a life course viewpoint. The research discovered the following categories of small travel agencies.

4.1. Part-time labor failure who became an entrepreneur

When a small business owner embarks upon establishing a business in a tourist region, the influence of their prior entrepreneurial experience has a more pronounced significance. Mr. Yang is representative of the subjects included in this study. Mr. Yang, an individual who holds a degree in art, has accumulated a decade of professional experience as an art designer within two distinct corporate entities subsequent to his graduation. In 2012, he initiated the practice of producing artistic designs on canvas shoes for customers in a modest establishment situated in Zhuangyuanfang, which is located on Shangxiajiu Road, a vibrant pedestrian boulevard in Guangzhou. The inability to attract a sufficient number of consumers has rendered the business unsustainable, thereby prompting the decision to relocate the store in pursuit of an alternate option. Fortuitously, he discovered a favorable environment inside the Red Brick Creative Park, prompting the decision to establish a handicraft store specializing in the production of innovative and commercially processed goods derived from natural resources. These products are subsequently retailed directly to consumers. In addition to operating a brick-and-mortar store, he also facilitates private bespoke orders through internet platforms, resulting in a gradual growth of the business and the accumulation of a specific amount of wealth. During this period, Huangpu Ancient Village was frequently brought to his attention by his artist acquaintances, who extended invitations for him to explore the studios and art workshops situated within the village.

Following this, he developed a deep affection for the surrounding environment and mood in this particular setting, since they fostered an environment that was suitable to stimulating his creative creativity. By chance, he fortuitously stumbled onto the opportunity that the Lingnan Craft Street presented, as it was actively seeking potential investors and offered reasonably priced rental rates. In 2014, he in question procured a commercial space and established a boutique specializing in artisanal goods within the confines of Huangpu Ancient Village. The store is operated by both him and his spouse, with a primary focus on the sale of his original artworks and handmade products derived from natural resources. The aforementioned things are classified within the mid

to high price range of tourist merchandise available in Huangpu Village. Afterwards, the individual developed an affinity for the local environment, which fostered inspiration. By chance, they discovered the Lingnan Crafts District during an investment promotion and found that the rental prices for stores were relatively low. Consequently, they decided to lease a store and establish a handmade art store in the Whampoa Ancient Village in 2014. The store is jointly managed by the individual and their spouse, primarily focusing on the sale of the individual's original artwork and naturally processed handicrafts, which are priced as tourist commodities within the Whampoa Village.

According to Mr. Yang's account, working a part-time job helped him understand the agony of limitations and served as motivation for him to launch his own company. But it's evident that the first time he launched his own company, he was still inexperienced, mostly invited by friends, and engaged in less introspective thought. However, his entrepreneurial endeavor encountered setbacks, prompting a realization of the significance of product selection. Consequently, he leveraged his expertise in handicraft operation and established a business in a red brick factory. Over time, the enterprise gained stability, leading to the recognition that this particular path was better suited for their pursuits. Simultaneously, he initiated a search for opportunities to expand his operations. He found favorable rental rates at the Lingnan Arts and Crafts Block within the Whampoa Ancient Village and therefore established his presence there, commencing his journey towards expanding his small-scale tourism business within the Whampoa Ancient Village.

4.2. Part-time first-time business owners

The occupational qualities and lifestyle aspirations of small tourism enterprises have a significant role in determining their decision to engage in entrepreneurship. Mr. Chen is typical in this study. He is seen to possess a strong inclination for creating clay items and has actively pursued a formal degree in graphic design at a post-secondary institution situated in close vicinity to Huangpu Ancient Village in the year 2010. During his academic pursuits, he observed that he had the opportunity to establish a stall in this location through his regular visits to Huangpu Ancient Village. The individual commenced the production of artisanal clay items in the year 2012, subsequently engaging in local sales activities during their free time. The works of this individual have garnered appreciation from both the local community and tourists alike, resulting in a significant financial return that effectively covered the cost of his educational expenses during that period. Before completing his studies, he deliberated between pursuing a career in business or seeking work. However, his decision-making process was influenced by the informative insights supplied by Huangpu Ancient Village regarding promising investment opportunities. Furthermore, he came to recognize the importance of pursuing one's passions and living a meaningful existence upon observing the fruitless employment endeavors of fellow students. The field of graphic design is characterized by its demanding nature and the associated fatigue it entails. Additionally, the remuneration in this profession is not commensurate with the level of effort exerted, often necessitating overtime work. Furthermore, the industry is marked by intense competition. According to Mr. Chen, it is preferable to engage in foundational tasks if one does not possess distinctive qualities. Upon observing the experiences of his fellow pupils, such as the case of a roommate who endured a sleep deprivation period of 48 hours without allocating time for the completion of artistic renderings, he arrived at the conclusion that pursuing a career in this particular profession would not be feasible for him. He feels that becoming a small entrepreneur is the best approach to do what you want to do and live the life you wish.

Based on the findings derived from Mr. Chen's experience, it becomes evident that his academic background

enabled him to discern potential business prospects. Furthermore, the discouraging outlook of part-time employment and the subpar experiences had by his peers served as catalysts for his entrepreneurial drive. user's text is already academic.

4.3. Launching a business after quitting her career to become a mother full-time

The entrepreneurial behaviour of small entrepreneurs is influenced by several factors, including the allocation of free time, the preference for a particular firm, and the identification of opportune circumstances. In this study, Ms. Yang serves as a typical example. Following the completion of her undergraduate studies in English, Ms. Yang had professional experience for a period of six years in the field of foreign commerce in Shenzhen, followed by an additional five years in administrative roles in Guangzhou. In 2010, she relocated to Huangpu Ancient Village, where she entered into matrimony with a resident of the local community. After the birth of her first child in 2012, Ms. Yang made the decision to retire from her employment, thereby allocating additional time to engage in new personal pursuits. In 2013, Ms. Yang's acquaintance, who happened to be involved in the leather production industry, visited her. During this encounter, Ms. Yang was presented some leather, which subsequently served as a source of inspiration for her to go on the journey of acquiring the skills necessary to craft leather bags. Ms. Yang promptly established her own vacant residence in Huangpu Ancient Village, where she specializes in crafting handmade leather bags. "I've thought about opening a shop here before, but never knew what I could do well. Falling in love with leather bags was a trigger point, and opening this leather art workshop was mainly a hobby of mine," Ms. Yang explained when asked about her inspiration for starting the business. he also emphasizes that she employs someone to manage the shop during weekends, allowing her to allocate time for her family. Despite the variability in her income, she doesn't dwell much on financial concerns. She explains, "Since this property is my own, I am spared from worrying about rent. If my focus were solely on financial gains, why wouldn't I lease the shop to secure a consistent monthly income? I believe the crucial factor lies in mindset—pursuing what I am passionate about, even if it doesn't always yield profit or incurs losses. My sole future objective is to enhance the quality and exclusivity of the leather bags."

From Ms. Yang's experience, it is evident that having a full-time job provided her with ample time to dedicate to her hobby. However, her entrepreneurial inclination was also shaped by the advantageous circumstances surrounding her shop and a friend's visit that sparked her interest in crafting handmade leather bags.

4.4. A part-time entrepreneur dedicated to cultural heritage conservation.

When small tourism enterprises engage in entrepreneurial activities in tourist areas, their prior cultural background, social connections, and personal interests play a significant role in shaping their entrepreneurial endeavors. In this study, Mr. Chen serves as a representative example. Being a native of Huangpu Village, Mr. Chen has harbored a profound interest in the local history and culture since his childhood, despite having completed only secondary education. In 2009, he assumed the position of curator and guide at the village's historical museum. Subsequently, in 2010, he assumed management responsibilities for Shequ Garden, and in 2013, he commenced its commercial operation.

Shequ Garden stands as the best-preserved Qing Dynasty private garden in Huangpu Village to this day. Originally serving as the private courtyard of the Hu family, it was reclaimed by distant relatives of the Hu family in 2010 and entrusted to Mr. Chen for its management. Mr. Chen has dedicated himself to the restoration

of the weathered Shequ Garden. Despite encountering several setbacks due to insufficient funds, he has persisted in his efforts and has made the restored garden accessible to the public, aiming to showcase Lingnan garden art and local culture.

Mr. Chen emphasized, “Without visitors, the house will deteriorate faster. It’s better to have more foot traffic. I also hope more people can come and experience the ancient village culture, and more people pay attention to and protect it.” Initially, the gatherings in the Qing Dynasty Garden were infrequent and limited to relatives and friends. However, as word spread, more people were brought in by friends, and Mr. Chen began organizing private dining events. Nevertheless, he is hesitant to treat Shequ Garden as a purely commercial enterprise, considering it excessively commercialized. Instead, he aspires to transform Shequ Garden into a museum dedicated to showcasing the cultural heritage of the ancient village. His entrepreneurial activities are aimed at acquiring funds to enhance the preservation of Shequ Garden.

Mr. Chen’s experience clearly illustrates that his passion for the local culture of Huangpu Village, coupled with his cultural background, compelled him to integrate heritage conservation public welfare activities with the operation of a small tourism business when he was presented with the opportunity to manage Shequ Garden (owing to the trust of distant relatives). Even in the pursuit of part-time entrepreneurship, he remains unwavering in his commitment to heritage conservation. This case exemplifies a distinctive and noteworthy form of entrepreneurial endeavor.

4.5. Chain store openings and online stores

When small tourism enterprises venture into tourist areas for entrepreneurship, family events, changes in consumer habits, and accumulated experience in online store operations all have significant impacts on their entrepreneurial behaviors. In this study, Mr. Lin serves as a typical representative. Mr. Lin had been working as a clerk in a newspaper office, and his career path changed after the birth of his child in 2007. Due to frequent safety issues with commercial cleaning products, he decided to develop his own all-natural handmade soap, which he successfully created after six months and established a Taobao store. In 2010, he signed contracts with eight distributors across the country and gained many customers. “Initially, it was due to family factors (the birth of my child) that I developed an interest in making handmade soap. With an increased sense of social responsibility, I hope to make the product better and turn it into a career,” he said. In 2011, he opened his first physical store in Guangzhou. In 2012, he became fond of Huangpu Ancient Village through friends’ introductions and opened his second physical store there. He believed that Huangpu Ancient Village attracted tourists from all over the country, consistent with the idea of the product being marketed nationwide. In 2014, he expanded his business in Huangpu Ancient Village for the second time. Regarding the future development direction of the enterprise, he mentioned, “On the basis of strengthening the management of each branch, we will expand the stores, make the market bigger and more solid. This year, we will focus on the national agent channel, and in the future, we hope to build a chain brand.”

Mr. Lin’s experience shows that the birth of his child inspired his idea to develop natural soap. The rapid development of his Taobao store (changes in consumer habits) also helped him accumulate credibility and initial capital, and he began to build physical stores while maintaining stable online store operations. The success of his first physical store in Guangzhou further propelled his expansion in Huangpu Ancient Village, where he opened two more branches and decided to develop into a chain brand in the future.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Combining life trajectory and research paradigms of change, it is believed that the entrepreneurship process of small businesses in Huangpu Ancient Village is closely related to their life trajectory. The micro-perspective of individual life trajectories is closely linked to social forces and social structures (Elder Jr, 1998). In this process, entrepreneurs can capture information in a timely manner and boldly attempt to actively demonstrate personal agency, with life events becoming turning points in life trajectories, thus creating new life directions (Jayawarna et al., 2013).

Life events have at least several ways of influencing the entrepreneurial decisions of small tourism enterprises in the tourism industry. First, there is a chaining effect, where an event over time, in a certain environmental context, influences the owner's tourism entrepreneurship consciousness (Jayawarna et al., 2014; Kambourova & Stam, 2017). For example, in case 3 of this study, Mrs. Yang's entrepreneurial subconscious was prompted by subsequent visits from friends and family, with marriage having the greatest influence on her entrepreneurial consciousness. Second, there is an interactive effect, where independent events may not necessarily lead directly to a formal entrepreneurial path, but rather two or more events interact to jointly influence entrepreneurial intentions. For instance, in case 2, Mr. Chen accumulated experience from running a stall, while also witnessing the immense pressure faced by classmates working part-time, combined with the low-cost renting opportunities in Huangpu Ancient Village, leading to his formal entrepreneurship. Third, there is an accumulative effect of life events, where certain life events unconsciously create conditions for future entrepreneurial opportunities and have an impact. For example, in case 4, Mr. Chen's long-term interest in the local culture of Huangpu Ancient Village, combined with the natural advantages of the Interest Garden, made his entrepreneurial endeavor a natural fit.

In summary, life events of entrepreneurs can have various and diverse impacts on the entrepreneurship of small businesses in the tourism industry. Studying these impacts is beneficial for a better understanding of these dynamic groups in tourist destinations, and appropriately managing them based on their individual entrepreneurial backgrounds will be more conducive to the sustainable development of the destination (Giannoni & Maupertuis, 2007; Jaafar et al., 2011; Jaafar et al., 2010). However, as this study is still in the exploratory stage, there are certain limitations in the selection of case study locations and survey samples, as well as limited attention to the length of life events of the interviewees. Further research is needed on how to better understand and measure the relationship between entrepreneurs of small tourism businesses and the development of small tourism businesses.

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