The strengths of close ties: Taiwan online entrepreneurship, gender and intersectionality

Leung Wing-Fai 梁穎暉 (訪問學人，中研院／King’s College London)
• March-April 2014: Sunflower Movement
• Jun-Aug 2014: Fieldwork (IOS, Academia Sinica)
• Jan 2016 - : Fieldwork (IOS, Academia Sinica)
• Internet, new media and mobile startup (新創工業)
• Gender and intersectionality

Introduction
• 是本來的economic machine is not working anymore。
台灣本來的經濟系統 that we were based on …硬體、
IC（資訊）[現在] 那個產業condition，比2010差很
多。所以自然而然，大家就必須找新的replacement。
(Partner at an start-up accelerator, Taipei)
• OEM industry ➔ OBM and innovation, entrepreneurship
• E.g. HTC

Rationale
• ‘New model workers’ (Ross 2009)
• Community of like-minded workers where ‘network [is] a constitutive and constructive process and entity’ (Pratt 2000, 432)
• Network sociality (Wittel 2001) – social relations turning into social capital
• Compulsory sociality (Gregg 2006) – required networking
• Social, cultural and educational capital (ref. Bourdieu, 1984)
• Individual explanations
• More likely to perform gendered roles as they are seen as less technical (Guerrier, Evans, Glover, & Wilson, 2009; Michie & Nelson, 2006)
• Two genders; IT skills or emotional and social skills (Kelan, 2007)
• Technology is socially constructed concept (Trauth, 2002)
• Technology assumed to be aligned with masculinity (Cockburn, 1983, Woodfield, 2002)
• Tech sector adopts a masculine culture; women perform gender (Bury, 2010)

Gender and Intersectionality
• Structural explanations
• Gendered organization (Acker, 1992)
• Barriers: extremely long hours (Computer World suggests 71 hours) – presenteeism
• Silicon Valley are more likely to fund the youngest ‘alpha-ist’ type male. ‘Women founders were pushed out or into lesser roles as a condition for investment, while similarly inexperienced male founders were given the benefit of the doubt and supported.’ (Lafrance, 2015)

Gender and Intersectionality
• Intersectional ethic
• Men also silence conflict of work and care and cannot take home issues to work (Cooper, 2000)
• ‘intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege.’ (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304)
• overlapping systems of subordination (Crenshaw, 1991; Brah & Phoenix, 2004)

Gender and Intersectionality
• social network analysis and visualization, content analysis of web sources, semi-structured interviews and observation

• 60 interviews with nascent entrepreneurs and the 17 venture capitalists, business angels and mentors, co-working spaces, 30 organisations, 7 trade events (2014)
• 11 follow up interviews so far, 13 industry events (2016)
• Homophily, intersectionality and the family decision have impact on gender
• ‘The Strengths of Close Ties: Taiwanese Online Entrepreneurship, Gender and Intersectionality’ (Information, Communication and Society, 2015)

Research and Findings
Age Distribution of Founders/Interviewees (2014)
Categories of Entrepreneurs (2014)

- Married/Female, 1, 1%
- Single/Female, 8, 14%
- Husband/Wife, 9, 16%
- Single/Male, 17, 30%
- Single/Team Male, 9, 16%
- Married/Male, 13, 23%
• 7/13 married male founders were parents
• 3/13 (MM) have wives with stable job and income
• 我們這個世代臺灣還蠻多雙薪家庭，那我老婆自己也在上班，所以說真的她有在上班對我來說，在創業上也比較沒有那麼大的壓力，即使是我沒有賺到什麼錢，也可以撐一段時間。

• 4/7 (MM with child/ren) FT job + founding companies PT
• One is going FT and expecting his second child (2016)
• ‘It is difficult to talk about women and work without talking about childcare. The same is not true of men and work and this is still one of the most obvious difficulties to be managed by working women, even those who choose not to have children’ (Natalie Wreyford 2013, p. 1).

The entrepreneurs
• 50% female founders started companies with their husbands/boyfriends (9/18 women)
• 2/9 couples have children
• 2016: one couple now has a baby, one single female founder had a baby
• Only 1 married male founder takes a larger share of childcare than his wife
• Family as the unit of entrepreneurship

The entrepreneurs
• Reliant on 4Fs – founders, family, friends and fools
• Close ties with founders but loose networks (through incubators, VCs)
• Deals with risks
• No longer only family ties but shared social, cultural and educational capital

Social networks
• 因為夥伴是我們長時間朝夕相處的對象，就像結婚一樣，要合得來。 (Male co-founder, sports app)
• Homophily, therefore harder for women to get in
• Different types of close ties (different from Granovetter’s conceptualisation)
• educational and cultural capital (close ties)
• supplemented by networks of acquaintances (weaker ties)
• Unique in East Asian context: senpai-kohai (前輩 or 學長-後輩/學弟，學妹) system

Social networks
- Geeks...fellow students, colleagues and military service
- Family consideration (collective decision)
- Many also EE, CS, worked large corporations Young men continue to complete military service/research as alternative experience
- Sense that military service still delays development of work and personal skills (future research?)

Gender, Family and Intersectionality
我覺得台灣其實，台灣的年輕人，很多身賦異稟，他有很厲害長才的年輕人，他可能在大公司裡面只被當小螺絲利用，我覺得太浪費了。他私底下為了讓收益多一點，他會出來接案子賺錢。這些人其實只要一合在一起，做出來的東西都很漂亮很棒。

我覺得成功很簡單，就是想做什麼就做什麼。
• Came from electronics and manufacturing (traditional corporations)
• First generation to use computer
• Though social network can still be a problem
• Independence but likely to have family commitments
• Few are pushed but choose to be entrepreneurs

40s – pioneering generation
• Many also EE, CS, worked large corporations, sometimes have already had a ‘failed’ business, ‘serial entrepreneurs’
• Inspired by .com boom (but crash)
• Creative thinking process (later than US? – accelerator partner): beginning to change?
• Looking to North America and Europe

• 我以前國中的時候，我爸爸是電腦老師，所以我自己很喜歡寫網站，然後我很喜歡網路，因為網路可以讓很多人一次進來。
• If you really look at the games, this kind of virtual environment, virtual world, it’s really the ultimate medium...because it has voice, image, text, all the previous media

30s – Internet generation
• Independence (family influences), confidence
• Doing what’s right for oneself, for society
• 幫人家賣命，跟幫自己賣命的差別。
• I don’t really fit into the big company culture.
• Personal freedom ‘I hope this company will empower its members. You can freely do things you want to do.’

30s – Internet generation
• Social networks (senpai-kohai system) — NTU，交大
• 因為像竹科，跟清大、交大，其實很密切，很多老師有作產學合作案，學生畢業就去工作，甚至出來start-up這樣。就是在這個，電機，semi-conductor, 那個領域是這樣hardware。但是not in software。臺灣嚴格講，沒有一個真的software的industry存在。It’s something I’d like to see changed。所以，我其實也是同時試著想build up一個better model between company and schools, especially universities.
• 爸爸媽媽講的話，有時候畢竟是希望你活在一個舒適圈裡面。他希望你穩定一點，就是保護你。就是說，我們現在會22k啊，就是因為沒有開創新東西。我們如果說這代年輕人都很願意去做新的想法，新的東西，讓臺灣的那些投資人看到，就覺得，不要不敢投。我是覺得我們會慢慢改變啦。與其在那邊罵政府的話，倒不如起身做一些事情。

30s — Internet generation
• Children of first post-49 entrepreneurs (but invariably different sectors)?
• My father is an entrepreneur… my other two co-founders’ family backgrounds are also business. Their parents are entrepreneurs. (Male founder, social network site)
• Finance mostly from 4Fs

30s – Internet generation
• Grown up with computer; programming from young age
• Young men continue to complete military service/research as alternative experience
• Sense that military service still delays development of work and personal skills (future research?)

• Lack social network or their own different educational, cultural and social capital (esp. Uni)

• Most understand risks (less/nothing to lose)
• 如果錢花光了，你沒辦法成功，撐過去，但至少這些事情是我很想做的，而且這段時間學了很多，認識了很多在公司上班不會碰到的人與事，這對我來說是最棒的

20s – post-1990s generation
• Doing something they like, and family has no/less demand on them
• Dare to dream
• Meaningful work, not only following orders
• Children of entrepreneurs ‘父母也是這樣起家的’
• ‘You got to fully control your life and your time’
• ‘Steve Jobs as role model’
• ‘I couldn’t find a job. I am a boss material’

20s – post-1990s generation
• Intersectionality as a concept to understand experience, not only gender but there’s evidence of ‘masculinized’ culture
• Family units as decision makers
• Network sociality (Wittel 2001) and Compulsory sociality (Gregg 2006)
• Close ties and loose networks are both there to mitigate against risks
• Generational change, reflective of Taiwan’s industrial and social history

Discussion