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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An anthropological perspective on contextualizing entrepreneurship

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Abstract This paper develops an anthropological perspective on contextualizing entrepreneurship. We argue that interconnectedness is the quintessence of such a perspective and takes the form of (1) sociocultural ties between people; (2) interrelationships between micro, meso, and macro levels; and (3) connections between the past and the present. We illustrate this perspective through our research among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, identifying three kinds of sociocultural ties among the ethnic Chinese (kinship, spiritual, and patron-client ties) and positioning these ties in the historical and contemporary experiences of Chinese migration, settlement, and business venturing. In doing so, we show that an anthropological perspective broadens the empirical scope (including developing countries, minority groups, and "everyday" entrepreneurship), the methodological scope (employing ethnographic methods), and the conceptual scope (considering sociocultural ties at the interpersonal level) of entrepreneurship research. The contribution lies in operationalizing and theorizing context: we operationalize context through interconnectedness – comprising our three forms as well as ethnographic methodology to examine these – and theorize interconnectedness by elaborating how entrepreneurs "do" context through enacting the sociocultural ties that "embody" this context, while considering the micro-meso-macro and past-present connections that have engendered these ties. Our anthropological perspective presents a fine-grained and holistic analytical framework for contextualizing entrepreneurship.

Plain English Summary Anthropology can broaden current understandings of how context is perceived in entrepreneurship research. As the study of how people live and experience the world around them, anthropology explores social relationships and their cultural meanings – sociocultural ties – to provide insights into the everyday of the people and communities studied. Such sociocultural ties can also illuminate how entrepreneurs enact context, a missing link in entrepreneurship research. Based on research among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Cambodia and Indonesia, three kinds of sociocultural ties are presented that play a key role in their entrepreneurship: kinship ties (shared family and ethnic background), patronage ties (interdependence of politicians and entrepreneurs), and spiritual ties (membership of religious communities). It is through these ties that context is enacted at the micro level and entwines with

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the entrepreneurial process. To debunk the idea that context equals external setting, we invite entrepreneurship researchers to include sociocultural ties to reveal how entrepreneurs enact context.

Keywords Anthropology · Interconnectedness · Kinship · Spirituality · Patronage · Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship

JEL Classification F22 · F54 · L14 · L26 · N45 · O53 · Z13

1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship research has witnessed several "waves" of increasing sophistication in thinking about the relationship between context and entrepreneurship (Baker & Welter, 2018; Welter et al., 2019). Initially, context was merely considered in terms of a range of factors in the external environment that may enable or constrain entrepreneurship. More recently, successive waves of contextualization have fostered scholarship that moves away from such limited understanding to an examination of how entrepreneurs "do" context. Paralleling this shift to more enactive approaches has been a shift from the "standard model" of entrepreneurship – male, white, high-tech, high-growth – to a focus on "everyday" entrepreneurship and greater diversity in organizational forms, people, places, and entrepreneurial development paths (Welter et al., 2019). These shifts culminate in the currently unfolding new wave of contextualization, which "challenges us to deepen our theorizing by broadening our understanding of what is usefully to be included in the domain of entrepreneurship research" (Welter et al., 2019, p. 324). The aim of this paper is to take up this challenge by developing an anthropological perspective on contextualizing entrepreneurship.

Very few anthropologists study entrepreneurship, and anthropological insights are only sporadically used in entrepreneurship studies (for exceptions, see Pfeilstetter, 2022, and Rosa & Caulkins, 2013). Yet, anthropology has much to offer, for example, in terms of guarding against ethnocentrism or providing insight in generally neglected research settings such as developing countries or informal networks (Rosa & Caulkins, 2013; Stewart, 1991). We suggest that the promise of anthropology – its ethnographic methodology, empirical focus, and conceptual toolbox – lies in the notion of interconnectedness (Dilley, 2002; Strathern, 1987). In our proposed anthropological perspective, interconnectedness takes three forms, namely (1) sociocultural ties between people; (2) interrelationships between micro, meso, and macro levels; and (3) connections between the past and the present. We illustrate this through our research among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. We identify three kinds of sociocultural ties among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs: kinship, spiritual, and patron-client ties. By positioning these ties in the historical and contemporary experiences of Chinese migration, settlement and business venturing in Southeast Asia, we discuss the enactment of these sociocultural ties in entrepreneurship. The contribution of this paper lies in developing an analytical framework for contextualizing entrepreneurship that can be taken forward by other researchers. We argue that anthropology allows us to consider the enactment of context in everyday entrepreneurial activity and, indeed, to deepen our theorizing.

In the next section, we review recent literature on entrepreneurship and context, after which we develop our anthropological perspective in the third section. In section four, we illustrate our anthropological perspective through the case of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. In the discussion and research agenda sections, we draw on this case to revisit the promise of an anthropological perspective on contextualizing entrepreneurship and offer several future research directions.

2 Context in entrepreneurship studies

A core question emerging from recent debates on the role and meaning of context for entrepreneurship is how entrepreneurs "enact" or "do" context (Baker & Welter, 2018; Johannisson, 2011; Welter et al., 2017, 2019). This is an important question that reflects the realization that entrepreneurship and context can only be examined in conjunction because entrepreneurship is "always in situ and mediated" while, vice versa, context is always "part of (constituting) the entrepreneurial process" (Steyaert, 2016, p. 30). It also reflects an attempt to consider how the interrelationships of human agency and social structures emerging from multiple contexts are constitutive of entrepreneurial

processes (Fletcher & Selden, 2016). Multiple contexts refers to diversity in terms of location, economic sector, modes of value creation (economic, social, or environmental) and to historical context. With reference to the literal meaning of context – "weaving together" – Fletcher and Selden argue that context and agency connect "the past, present and future dimensions of an unfolding entrepreneurial activity" (2016, p. 83). Recent approaches thus work towards an understanding of context as "endogenous" to entrepreneurship, studying "the real-time functioning of context as part of ongoing interactions" (Steyaert, 2016, p. 31). This focus on enactment and endogeneity follows from previous stages in the development of contextualizing entrepreneurship, moving from the various dimensions (business, social, spatial, and institutional) and the why, what and how of context, to a focus on variety and diversity – or "everyday" entrepreneurship (cf. Welter et al., 2019).

These relatively recent developments must be seen as a progressive refinement in establishing how context matters, and as a fundamental critique on what might be referred to as the ongoing mainstreaming of entrepreneurship research. There is still a widespread tendency to perceive context primarily as the "environment" that is external or exogenous to the entrepreneurial phenomenon being researched (Steyaert, 2016); an objectified perception of context still predominates (Fletcher & Selden, 2016). This manifests most clearly when context is treated as a "static indicator" (Welter & Baker, 2021, p. 1156), as a range of factors that are "out there" and that can be "brought in" by researchers for their analysis. Such de-contextualized accounts of entrepreneurship must be seen within the broader positivist-deductive or "scientistic" paradigm that has a strong presence in entrepreneurship research and that aims to generalize across populations (Watson, 2013, p. 29). This seems at odds with producing localized and contextualized understandings: "contextualizing comes with a few trade-offs between simplicity, accuracy, and generalizability of our theories" (Welter, 2019, p. xxvii; cf. Fletcher & Selden, 2016; Welter, 2011).

This preoccupation with generalization has implied less attention to the diversity of entrepreneurship within and across societies. The field has been characterized by rather homogenizing ideas of what entrepreneurship is, and where and how it takes place. The dominant idea of "successful" entrepreneurship remains associated with images of Silicon Valley – high-tech businesses, catapulted by venture capital, amassing shareholder value, and established by men – that stem from research conducted in industrialized (mainly Western) countries (Welter et al., 2017). As a response, critical scholars have urged researchers to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, arguing for example that "motivations are far more heterogeneous and interesting than the narrow economic functions which our scholarship too often assumes and assigns practicing entrepreneurs" (Baker & Welter, 2015, p. 5). Accomplishing heterogeneity requires shifting the empirical focus from developed or Western countries to developing or non-Western countries (Rosa & Caulkins, 2013), from high-tech/high-growth to "everyday" entrepreneurship (Steyaert & Katz, 2004; Welter et al., 2017), and from majority to minority groups (Vershinina & Rodgers, 2019). Striving for such empirical variety is, however, not necessarily obstructing further theorization. Conceptual development, we argue, is contingent upon empirical settings, and so the neglect of empirical settings implies incomplete conceptual insights on the interplay of context and entrepreneurship. It is against this backdrop that Steyaert argues that we should not avoid differentiation but embrace it and think of theorization as "knowledge in context" because knowledge production is "place bound" by nature (2016, p. 33).

The critical scholarship addressed above invites us to examine how entrepreneurs enact context, and to embrace diversity and differentiation to advance our theoretical understanding of how such enactment unfolds. It has been suggested that making more use of the resources of other disciplines – notably anthropology – may invigorate this endeavour (Baker & Welter, 2018; Pfeilstetter, 2022; Watson, 2013; Welter, 2011). In the next section, we outline an anthropological perspective on contextualizing entrepreneurship, which is aimed at offering novel ways to explore and understand how entrepreneurs "do" context.

3 An anthropological perspective on contextualising entrepreneurship

Context is at the heart of anthropology. Ever since the early twentieth century, when Frazer's evolutionary argument that all societies pass through various stages of savagery towards civilization – an argument

indifferent to context – was dismissed, anthropologists on both sides of the Atlantic have argued that general theoretical claims should not be abstracted from the matrix of social relations and cultural meaning of which they are formed (Bernard, 2004; Strathern, 1987). This emphasis on contextualisation also characterises the study of entrepreneurship in anthropology, which, as Pfeilstetter (2022) explains, has two diverging origins. One is found in the work of Fredrik Barth and in line with Schumpeter's premises, with entrepreneurship being perceived as agency-driven social change. In his work on Northern Norway, Barth (1963) argued that through experimental and risk-taking activity, entrepreneurs sometimes uproot established norms, values, and statuses within their communities (Stewart, 1991). The other relates back to Clifford Geertz and Mary Douglas who pioneered culture theories of entrepreneurship, perceiving the entrepreneur as a culturally specific character corresponding to the moral and ideological order of the community. Drawing on fieldwork in two Indonesian towns, Geertz (1963) for instance identified the "peddler" as the type of entrepreneur embodying the bazaar economy that is held together by small-scale credit arrangements among a class of traders, and the "prince" as the type that emerged from the indigenous aristocracy, who moved from political leadership to enterprise at the offset of Dutch colonialism. Thus, whereas the "social change" school focuses on how entrepreneurial agency transforms or incrementally alters community and society contexts, the more structure-oriented "culture theories" school is interested in how specific types of entrepreneurs emerge from specific historical, moral and ideological contexts. Drawing on both traditions – albeit implicitly more than explicitly – the few contemporary anthropologists who study entrepreneurship focus on behaviour and meaning-making in conjunction with the context in which it unfolds (Pfeilstetter, 2022). As such, what anthropology offers is a middle ground between the "methodological individualism" of many entrepreneurship studies (Drakopoulou Dodd & Anderson, 2007, p. 342) and the "crude cultural determinism" that characterises Hofstede's work, which undoubtedly is the dominant culture paradigm in business schools (Rosa & Caulkins, 2013, p. 116).

Building on the different traditions in anthropology, contextualization implies the need to understand the dynamic relationship between phenomena (Eriksen, 2004b), connections between phenomena making up "complex and often invisible webs" (Nolan, 2021, p. 151) or "sets of connections construed as relevant to someone, to something, or to a particular problem" (Dilley, 2002, p. 440). In line with these definitions, we consider "interconnectedness" as the quintessence of an anthropological perspective on context (cf. Strathern, 2020). In our reading, interconnectedness takes three forms (cf. Engelke, 2017).

First, interconnectedness takes the form of sociocultural ties, by which we mean social relationships imbued with cultural meaning. Rather than isolated individuals, we are enmeshed in and partly defined by our relationships with others: people "cannot not relate" (Strathern, 2020, p. 13). The primacy given to human relationships and interactions in anthropology dates to Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), who asserted that aggregations of interpersonal ties make up the social structure and hence that such ties are the building blocks of society (Strathern, 2020). In labelling these as *sociocultural* ties we commit to Geertz' (1973) aspiration to simultaneously attend to the social and cultural aspects of human relationships, recognizing that it is through cultural norms, values and assumptions that social ties acquire meaning and efficacy while, vice versa, "it is through the flow of behaviour – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation" (p. 17). Below, we will discuss three kinds of ties – kinship, spiritual and patron-client ties – and examine how these are enacted in the entrepreneurial activities of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia.

Second, an anthropological perspective considers interconnections between sociocultural ties at the micro level and more meso- and macro-level structures and circumstances (cf. Wang & Warn, 2018). At the micro level, by way of ethnographic methodology, anthropologists examine everyday talk, action, and interaction as expressions of "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983). Ethnography's toolbox – including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and shadowing – is especially suitable for uncovering the lived experiences and behaviours of people. Ethnographic description, however, also transcends the micro level – after all, contextualization is considered a main aim of ethnography (Strathern, 2020). At the meso level, sociocultural ties aggregate to form collectives of people – organizations, networks, and communities – that may reveal various degrees of

coalescence around shared values, codes of conduct or taken-for-granted understandings of social roles (Durão & Seabra Lopes, 2011). In interacting with others and engaging broader collectives, people also enact more macro-level political and economic structures in which they are embedded. Thus, beyond people's immediate settings, anthropologists are interested in the extra-situational context of societal or global circumstances that shape more localized experiences (Dilley, 2002). These dimensions will come to the fore when we discuss the sociocultural ties in action below.

The third and last form of interconnectedness comprises connections between the past and the present. Anthropologists are no historians but look for what Malinowski coined "living history" – legacies of the past that appear in present conduct, customs, discourses, rituals, and so forth (Bate, 1997). At the micro level, historicization takes the form of biographical accounts or life stories that "connect the inner world to the outer world, speak to the subjective and the objective, and establish the boundaries of identities" (Plummer, 2001, p. 395). At the macro level, it implies recognizing and incorporating the history of society that – to an extent – people embody (Huen, 2009). Taken together, anthropological accounts tend to alternate between "extreme close-ups" showing detail of everyday situations and "long shots" showing panoramic views of the temporal, spatial, and relational context (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 7), thus showing how people "act out" context. Acknowledging micro, meso, and macro, and past and present interconnectedness, in the next section, we outline the history of Chinese migration, settlement, and business venturing in Southeast Asia and show how this history has prompted the enactment of the mentioned sociocultural ties in entrepreneurship.

Mindful of these three forms of interconnectedness and "how all the bits move together" (Engelke, 2017, p. 26), an anthropological perspective amounts to a holistic perspective. Holism – another anthropological trope, closely associated with Malinowski's fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands of more than a century ago – refers to the aspiration to uncover the dynamics of society's different spheres (power structures, marriage arrangements, economic exchange, food culture, and so on) and identify the "internal connections in a system of interaction and communication" (Eriksen, 2004b, p. 40). Although it may be analytically useful to distinguish various sociocultural ties, at various levels, past and present, holism signals the inclination to examine all these concurrently and acknowledge that, in everyday life, they are "mutually recontextualizing" (Huen, 2009, p. 154). By way of interconnectedness and holism, an anthropological perspective goes beyond a limited understanding of "contexted" and "context" as "part" and "whole", instead thinking in terms of "foreground" and "background" and engaging in "perspectival movement" between the two (Huen, 2009, p. 153; cf. Strathern, 2020). Anthropology thus offers an endogenous understanding of context. We illustrate the proposed perspective through the case of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. We will first briefly describe the history of their migration, settlement, and business venturing and subsequently draw on our research in Cambodia and Indonesia to illustrate three core sociocultural ties that have emerged throughout this history and that are enacted in entrepreneurship.

4 Contextualising ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia

Chinese people have migrated to Southeast Asia for centuries. In the pre-colonial period, in particular people from South China (Teochiu, Cantonese and Hokkien dialect groups) migrated, pushed by war and famine but also pulled by economic opportunities in Southeast Asia (Kuhn, 2008). While Chinese communities emerged in the countryside, dialect-based associations in major Southeast Asian cities absorbed most arrivals. The height of migration occurred under colonial rule when Europeans – including the French in Cambodia (1863–1953) and the Dutch in Indonesia (1800–1949) – actively promoted the inflow of Chinese migrants to work as labourers on plantations or as economic middlemen between the colonial administration and local populations. Another wave of migration occurred in the slipstream of Mao's takeover in China in 1949, but migration largely ceased during the Cold War. Since the 1990s, migration picked up again as a result of China's economic rise in the region.

The history of Chinese populations in Southeast Asia is characterized by their economic prominence as well as their political marginalization. On the one hand, they attained a dominant position in the

economy, instigated by an ethnic division of labour between rural populations and Chinese merchants since colonial times. This was further perpetuated by the banning of Chinese people from civil servant positions or land ownership, thus forcing them into the tertiary sector. To this day, this division underscores a persistent discourse denoting all ethnic Chinese as wealthy business people while in fact most run small-scale family businesses (Jomo & Folk 2003). On the other hand, economic predominance has gone hand in hand with political marginalization and, at times, persecution. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, at the height of post-colonial nation-building efforts and Cold War tensions, ethnic Chinese people were repeatedly "othered" in public discourse (Hoon, 2006). Since the 1990s, in many parts of Southeast Asia, relations improved as a result of cultural mingling, generational change and the fading of Cold War tensions. At the same time, however, ethnic tensions resurface occasionally and in some countries there is fear among ethnic Chinese communities that the current rise of China and the accompanying new wave of Chinese migrants may reignite suspicion and animosity towards expressions of Chinese identity.

While this pattern of economic dominance and political repression characterizes the position of ethnic Chinese populations in Southeast Asia at large, there are differences between countries, such as between Cambodia and Indonesia, the two countries that are the focus of our own research. In Cambodia under the communist Khmer Rouge (1975–1978), Chinese people were forced to "become Khmer" in the way they dressed, the food they ate, and the language they spoke (Edwards, 2009, p. 203). An estimated fifty per cent died due to execution or starvation in rural labour camps, while many others fled the country. Outside this destructive period, however, the relationship between the Khmer majority and Chinese minority is cordial. In the 1960s this relationship was "probably better than in any other country in Southeast Asia" (Willmott, 1967, p. 40), and more recently – in part due to intermarriage and the merging of interests within the business-state elite – ethnic boundaries between Khmer and Chinese have blurred (Verver, 2012). Indonesia's process of nation building has been characterized by forging a national identity out of a multi-ethnic populace through strict assimilation (Tan, 2001). During Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998) restrictive laws were installed that eliminated Chinese cultural expression, media, and schools (Suryadinata, 2005). This systematic othering, a result of ethnic categorization under colonial rule of "indigenous" (children of the soil, *pribumi*) and "non-indigenous" (immigrant Asians) has resulted in lingering anti-Chinese rhetoric (Hefner, 2001) and a continuing scape-goat position of people of Chinese decent in times of crisis. In 1998, people took to the streets suffering from a prolonged economic crisis, and protests turned into massive attacks on those considered to be ethnic Chinese. Tensions remain to this day – such as when electoral candidates are discredited on the grounds of having Chinese ancestors – but the fall of the Suharto regime and the subsequent reformation years also resulted in an upsurge of Chinese cultural and political expression.

In the three sub-sections that follow, we describe the sociocultural ties that have emerged under the umbrella of Chinese migration and ethnicity in Southeast Asia, and that are enacted in entrepreneurship. In doing so, we draw on our research conducted in Cambodia's capital of Phnom Penh (in 2010–2011) and in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta (in 2004, 2007, and 2011). This research was informed by anthropological concepts and ethnographic methodology. We consider ethnography and anthropology to be inseparable. Ethnography is not just a set of methods but also a way of writing and a research paradigm – including notions of actor-centeredness, process, history, criticality and, indeed, context (Bate, 1997) – while, vice versa, anthropological comparison and theorizing across contexts cannot do without the empirical grounding of ethnography (cf. Ingold, 2008). Core to ethnography is conversing with people and participating in and observing activities for an extended period. This is ethnography's strength because it engenders insights into what activities mean to the people involved; it is, however, time-consuming and thus often irreconcilable with other academic responsibilities. During fieldwork, we combined (participant) observations of business and social, cultural, and religious life with the deconstruction of life-business histories and in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs, their family members and employees, community stakeholders, and other key participants. For example, the first author mingled with the Cambodian elite and accompanied entrepreneurs during their working days, while the second author followed her research participants

to their Pentecostal-charismatic church on Sundays to participate in their worship practices and to listen to their testimonies (which were often enterprise-related). Both authors spent time "hanging around" shop floors upon being invited into businesses by research participants. Below, we build on the results of this research to illustrate our anthropological perspective. We describe three distinct ties – kinship, spiritual and patron-client ties – including the socio-cultural dynamics that underpin these ties (based on anthropological insights), how they manifest among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in our research locations, and how they are enacted in entrepreneurship.

4.1 Kinship ties

The anthropology of non-Western societies has a long history of explaining the economic, political, and other spheres in kinship terms, or as Fox argues, "kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy and the nude is to art" (1983, p. 10). Following Carsten, kinship can be conceptualized as interpersonal ties that are grounded in "relatedness" and that "carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively" (2000, p. 1). Traditionally, the anthropology of kinship centres on the qualities that render kinship ties especially strong. Fortes (1972) for example speaks of the "axiom of amity" within families, which he argues prescribes solidarity and altruism "regardless of whether kinsfolk actually love one another" (pp. 288–289). More recent literature seeks to balance the biological and sociocultural foundations of kinship, recognizing that although the affective and moral qualities of kinship ties may seem inherent to these ties themselves, in fact they are socially created and culturally articulated as much as genealogically given. This reorientation has spurred a more flexible, open-ended approach that does not take for granted what constitutes kinship, but aspires to capture "the lived experiences of relatedness in local contexts" (Carsten, 2000, p. 1). In particular, recent studies have argued that relatedness is not restricted to blood- and marriage-based ties within nuclear families but may also be nurtured in ways that were earlier disregarded (McKinnon, 2016), such as within same-sex marriages, across geographical locations, or based on forms of "metaphoric kinship" such as shared ethnic identity and descent (Eriksen, 2004a, 2004b, p. 59).

The flexibility of kinship is ubiquitous among ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, who nurture a wide variety of kinship ties that differ in nature, strength, and role in entrepreneurship (Tong & Yong, 1998; Verver, 2012; Verver & Koning, 2018). Many ethnic Chinese businesses in the region are typically family businesses. Kinship bonds tend to be strongest among closest kin – parents and children – and hence nuclear family ties are especially vital in the precarious start-up phase. As much as children help out running the family firm when they are young, so do parents provide start-up capital, connections and knowledge when their children establish their own firm, such as in the Indonesian case:

> When I was still working for my father I got to know many traders. Quite a few of them told me: if you open your own business I shall give you some materials to sell, you can pay back later. These owners already trusted me because of my father. This trust has been very important in setting up my own business. (as cited in Koning, 2007, p. 144)

Also, during the start-up phase and beyond, management positions are mostly reserved for nuclear or extended family members, not only because family labour is inexpensive but also because non-family is distrusted with sensitive information and finances. A common pattern observed in many of the nuclear family-run firms in the Indonesian case is the "hidden" involvement of women, who were often found in the back – literally in the back rooms – but involved in core activities of the company, including finance, bookkeeping and product ordering. Such observations also highlight the interwovenness of kinship and gender (cf. Wang & Warn, 2018). Beyond immediate family members, due to complex migration histories many ethnic Chinese people have distant relatives in China and across Southeast Asia. Cambodian Chinese often also have family members who fled the Khmer Rouge and found refuge in the USA, France, or Australia. These relatives are engaged in entrepreneurship by way of supplying consumer goods, machinery or raw materials, or for example, providing investments for joint ventures: "even if we are in a far relationship we are close already" (as cited in Verver & Koning, 2018, p. 646).

In the Chinese cultural context, there is a thin line between family and ethnicity-based forms of kinship

as both are described by research participants in terms of "sameness", "being the same people", and "being closer" (as cited in Verver & Koning, 2018, p. 640). This manifests most clearly by way of family name associations, whose members claim to have descended from the same ancestor who lived in South China millennia ago. As such, these associations are ambiguously situated in between shared ancestral locality, actual family connections and "fictive kinship" (Tong & Yong, 1998). Shared family name and shared dialect group membership are grounds for doing business together. The prominent role of dialect-based ties in entrepreneurship for example surfaced in the Thai-Cambodian border region in the 1980s. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodia was in desperate need of all kinds of consumer goods, the import of which hinged on ethnic Teochiu connections across the border. Shared business culture and language – which entrepreneurs argue "creates a feeling of friendship easier" (as cited in Verver & Koning, 2018, p. 641) – fostered mutual trust among the Teochiu traders at the border, which was of crucial importance: the cash-strapped Cambodian traders had to acquire the goods on credit, which meant that their Thai counterparts had to trust that they pay it back upon their next visit to the border (Verver & Koning, 2018). Into the 1990s, these credit arrangements evolved into exclusively Teochiu trading networks that control many economic sectors in Cambodia to this day:

> It's helpful [to have a Chinese background] because of the Teochiu from Thailand, Singapore, or Malaysia; we understand each other. Teochiu they trust each other more. There is a saying in Chinese, something like; "if you're the same people, even if you beat each other to death it's no problem". (as cited in Verver & Koning, 2018, p. 640).

Lastly, pan-Chinese ethnic affinity (across dialect groups) is generally considered less strong than dialect group affinity, in part because many of Cambodia's ethnic Chinese lost connections to China and Chinese language abilities as a result of the repression of Chinese identity and culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, with the "rise" of China in the region, new business opportunities are explored, and speaking Mandarin and the articulation of Chinese kinship may "smoothen" business exchanges: "because I am of Chinese descent, it is easier for me to socialize with people in China and do business with them" as an ethnic Chinese entrepreneur from Indonesia revealed (as cited in Dahles & Koning, 2013, p. 425).

Taken together, kinship relatedness among Southeast Asia's ethnic Chinese attains various forms, ranging from nuclear family loyalty to pan-Chinese affinity. Moreover, different kinship ties are differently enacted in entrepreneurship, depending on tie-strength and the kinds of resources these ties can bring (Verver & Koning, 2018). The predominance of these kinship ties in entrepreneurship is arguably grounded in interpersonal relationships based on shared backgrounds that are crucial for smooth business transactions (Stewart, 2003; Tong & Yong, 1998). In the next two sub-sections, we zoom in on Indonesia and Cambodia, respectively, to investigate two other sociocultural ties that allow us to better understand how entrepreneurs enact context, namely spiritual and patron-client ties.

4.2 Spiritual ties

The second sociocultural tie that we discuss exemplifies the entanglement of the economic and religious spheres. Religious beliefs and practices have always been among the core interests of anthropologists intrigued by the question of how the "supernatural" world relates to the "natural, human and social worlds" (Eller, 2007, p. 52). In the symbolic/interpretive anthropological approach of which Clifford Geertz is the founding father, religion is a form of symbolic communication, a system of meaning that underscores other major spheres of life (Geertz, 1973). Even though there is a long history of debating what religion is, Geertz' interpretation is still dominant in anthropology today as it focuses on "what religion means to people, how it helps to make sense of the world" (Eriksen, 2001, p. 211). An important feature of religious practice is its rituals, as these "render the content of religion concrete and recognisable" (ibid., p. 236).

How religion and spiritual ties became meaningful to ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Indonesia dates back to the upsurge and exponential growth of Pentecostal charismatic Christianity in the region in the late 1980s and 1990s. Mega churches, often run as enterprises, arose in many Southeast Asian cities (Chong

& Goh, 2014) and large numbers of ethnic Chinese middle class professionals and business people converted (Robinson, 2005). This new wave of Pentecostalism as a religious practice, also known as prosperity gospel, not only interacts with late capitalism, it also effects the "active production of social relationships, of exchange networks, and even of institutional structures" (Haynes, 2013, p. 93).

Pentecostal-charismatic organizations in Indonesia are characterised by a blending of a strong individual religious experience with a more collective dimension of sharing experiences through worship and testimonies; there is a strong leadership cult (often with former businessmen leading the way) and an entertaining worship style (music and singing); and the theology is one of practice with lessons on how to solve personal, family, career, or business problems (Koning, 2017, p. 45–46). Next to Sunday worship, people meet in smaller prayer groups according to their profession (entrepreneurs) or age (youth). The expected return from these activities is prosperity and continued spiritual development (Coleman, 2000).

The moment of conversion among many ethnic Chinese (who converted from other Christian denominations) occurred in particularly insecure times of economic crisis and a resurgence of anti-Chinese sentiments. Many opted for refuge in this booming religious movement (in itself an interesting choice in a setting in which the majority adheres to Islam), as one entrepreneur explains:

> If we look at the facts, we can say that in the past the Chinese were intimidated, they were kept low, they were afraid. This is exactly why they went looking for justice, love, mercy, spirituality, protection, God. And, they began to be blessed (as cited in Koning, 2011, p. 37).

The spiritual ties – forged during Sunday worship or meetings of the Full Gospel Business Men Fellowship (FGBMF) most belong to – can be said to offer fellowship in the form of material and immaterial support and guidance in business, as was revealed by an entrepreneur in the following way: "Before my change I had to overcome all the business problems alone, it was up to me. Now I can master such business problems with the help of the Lord" (as cited in Koning & Dahles, 2009, p. 19). The second author was invited to several of these FGBMF meetings. During one of these, she made the following notes of what the invited charismatic preacher told the group of 12 ethnic Chinese businessmen: "The Bible has many verses showing that from the very beginning businessmen took part in the work of the Lord. In their business activities businessmen can serve God and provide heavenly care to the people around them by running their business in a Christian way: by not exploiting their workers; by conducting their business in an honest way and by using the profit of their business to help develop the work of God" (see also Koning & Dahles, 2009, p. 25).

The spiritual ties forged among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs not only offer support, guidance, trustworthy entrepreneurial networks, information flows, and practical business advice, they are also an escape through a newfound global Christian identity, from their ethnic minority status, which – as history has proven – is an insecure position that is ambiguously related to their entrepreneurial position.

4.3 Patron-client ties

A third category of sociocultural ties enacted in entrepreneurship consists in patron-client ties between political power-holders and ethnic Chinese business tycoons. From an anthropological perspective, patronage comprises the exchange of non-comparable goods, in which a patron (the politician) uses his or her position of authority to provide protection or other benefits to a client (the business tycoon), creating a moral debt compelling the client to reciprocate by providing money or other services to the patron (Scott, 1972). While the exchange of political and economic "favours" through patronage occurs within elites across Southeast Asia, we zoom in on Cambodia, where patron-client ties are especially pronounced and have long constituted the primary organizing principle within the business-state elite.

In Cambodia, a patronage-based "elite pact" has emerged under the rule of Hun Sen – prime minister since 1985 – and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Since the 1990s, CPP politicians have provided protection to allied tycoons in illicit economic activities such as logging, smuggling, or tax evasion. Also, they have provided a range of privileges including land concessions to develop plantations or industrial zones, import monopolies for foreign brands, public contracts to build government buildings or infrastructure, and all kinds of licenses required to

operate particular businesses. In return, the tycoons hand under-the-table payments to their CPP patron. As one research participant argued: "Formally it's free, but informally it's something. The less you have to pay formally, the more you pay informally" (as cited in Verver & Dahles, 2015, p. 58). Through such "elite pacts" – which are further cemented through marriages among the children of CPP-affiliated ministers, governors, military generals and business tycoons – entire economic sectors are co-opted.

The most tangible manifestation of the elite pact is the title of *oknha*, which is a title that was once bestowed upon Khmer nobility, but is revitalized since 1994 to honour business people making financial contributions to development projects. The CPP leadership identifies candidates, who subsequently receive the title after spending $500,000 on development projects, such as building a school or Buddhist pagoda in the countryside. There are currently around 1000 *oknha*, many if not most of (part) Chinese descent. Acquiring the *oknha* title is a kind of *rite de passage* for business people, signalling entry into the elite and a commitment to play by its rules. These "rules of the game", one research participant noted, are perhaps "not so much based on the law, but then at least on trust and connections" (as cited in Verver & Dahles, 2015, p. 59). One businessman put it as follows:

> You have to stay close to the powerful people, and commit toward those people. When you know someone, others will not touch you. You need to have a good heart, be patient, invest in the relationship and be true to the commitment. (as cited in Verver & Dahles, 2015, p. 61)

Anthropologists have described patron-client ties in terms of "instrumental friendship" (Scott, 1972, p. 92) or "lopsided friendship" (Wolf, 1966, p. 16). The relationship inheres a power imbalance: the patron has a monopoly position in the distribution of resources, whereas there are multiple clients who contend for access to the patron's resources. It is, however, no "pure command relationship", but one that is characterized by proximity, trust and affection (Scott, 1972, p. 93). This is also visible within Cambodia's elite. For example, Hun Sen "invites" the *oknha* to finance development projects, but it would be unimaginable for the *oknha* to deny the request. Moreover, *oknha* need to constantly reassert their loyalty to their patron. They do so for example by inviting their patrons to cut the ribbon during ground-breaking ceremonies of their subsidiary businesses, by displaying pictures of themselves with patrons in company offices and on websites, and by naming streets or schools that they built after Hun Sen. At charity events of the Cambodian Red Cross, which is headed by Hun Sen's wife, affluent Cambodians offer money to her on a plate. One *oknha* research participant invited her to give a speech at the bi-annual meeting of her Chinese family name association, which the first author attended. For the meeting, over 2,000 extended family members from across Asia descended upon Phnom Penh (Verver, 2012). The *oknha* hit two birds with one stone by hosting the meeting, connecting with the regional Chinese business networks of her kin and reaffirming her prominent position within Cambodia's elite.

5 Discussion

The three forms of interconnectedness central to our anthropological perspective clearly surface in the cases of Cambodia and Indonesia. First, ties between the entrepreneur and other stakeholders are crucial in all facets and stages of the entrepreneurial process, and such ties are markedly sociocultural in the sense that they implicate (social) interactions and categorizations underpinned by (cultural) values, codes of conduct and symbolic articulations. Kinship, spiritual and patron-client ties each attain their own dynamics and specific role within entrepreneurship: kinship affinity and trust provide the "social glue" to facilitate a variety of aspects of the entrepreneurial process, ranging from management to supply; the reciprocal patronage arrangements between political actors and business tycoons provide the latter with a range of entrepreneurial resources (licences, land, monopolies) in exchange for money; and spiritual ties offer both material (trustworthy networks, information) and immaterial (guidance, empowerment) support for the individual entrepreneur and to the broader ethnic business group. Sociocultural ties, then, are pivotal because it is through these ties that context is enacted at the micro level and entwines with the entrepreneurial process. The "real-time functioning of context", as Steyaert notes, manifests "as part of ongoing interactions" (2016, p. 31).

Second, the salience of these sociocultural ties in entrepreneurship at the micro level must be seen within prevailing political and economic circumstances at the macro level and their meso-level manifestations. From the perspective of many ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, Southeast Asian societies have been marked by economic opportunities as much as ethnic tensions, political hostility and weak formal institutions. These circumstances have arguably resulted in a tendency to employ ties based on informal trust, reciprocity and affinity derived from close circles, and to distrust people outside those circles (Kuhn, 2008; Wang & Warn, 2018). Such circles or collectives at the meso level – families, ethnic groups, business-state elites, church communities – provide security, resources and organise (business) life, and as such "mediated the impact" of macro societal circumstances (Watson & Watson, 2012, p. 700). From an anthropological perspective, then, entrepreneurship emerges in the interplay between micro-level agency and meso- and macro-level structures and circumstances.

Third, the role of kinship, patronage, and spirituality in entrepreneurship clearly reveals a "presence of the past in the present" (Bloch, 1977, p. 287). This past has produced linkages, alliances and identities that manifest in the individual entrepreneurial trajectories of Southeast Asian Chinese as well as their societal position broadly. In Cambodia, contemporary patronage relations between politicians and ethnic Chinese *oknha* trace their roots to the ethnic division of labour of the (pre-)colonial period, while in Indonesia, ethnic affiliation among ethnic Chinese business people has (to an extent) manifested as religious affiliation because the latter positions the actors outside a troublesome nation state. Similarly, kinship ties nurtured within and across national borders can only be understood as emerging from the history of Chinese migration, settlement and business venturing in Southeast Asia. We concur with Welter and Baker (2021) that historicization is integral to contextualization because entrepreneurs relate to and enact memories, narratives, hierarchies, institutions, and other historically contingent aspects of their environment.

To account for these three forms of interconnectedness is to work towards a holistic approach that considers how various elements are "mutually recontextualizing" (Huen, 2009, p. 154). While this means zooming in and out between micro, meso, and macro, and past and present, what holism entails surfaces best in our consideration of sociocultural ties. For example, patron-client ties are interspersed by kinship ties (e.g. by way of arranged marriages within the Cambodian elite) and spiritual ties are reinforced by kinship ties (e.g. within Christian church communities in Indonesia). Moreover, the role of kinship, patronage and spirituality in entrepreneurship must all be seen under the broad umbrella of Chinese ethnicity in Southeast Asia and politically loaded processes of identity construction – "us" versus "them" – that are integral to ethnicity. A holistic appraisal thus goes beyond examining one sphere of life, but starts from the proposition that in order to fully grasp peoples' experiences associated with one sphere (e.g. business) one may need to relate these to a variety of other spheres (e.g. ethnicity, politics, family, religion) (cf. Strathern, 2020). Context is "not something we can see, but something we see in" (Huen, 2009, p. 153).

With interconnectedness at its centre, an anthropological perspective is a vehicle towards an endogenous understanding of context in entrepreneurship research. Orthodox entrepreneurship research has long suffered from an analytic focus on the entrepreneur, which "precludes any significant moving beyond the non-contextual, individualistic and rational economic actor assumptions" (Watson, 2013, p. 20). From an anthropological perspective, in contrast, people are always already part of and partly composed of a relational field within which they consider their course of action (Huen, 2009). Sociocultural ties are thus endogenous to individuals undertaking entrepreneurial activity. Similarly, societal and global circumstances – both past and present – are endogenous to more micro-level personal experiences and interpersonal dynamics (Engelke, 2017). After all, such circumstances manifest by way of the role-playing individual, everyday social conventions or the classification of people, for example along religious or ethnic lines (Huen, 2009).

As we have illustrated through the case of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, anthropology allows us to broaden the empirical scope (to include developing countries, minority groups, and "everyday" entrepreneurship), the methodological scope (employing ethnographic methods), and the conceptual scope (considering sociocultural ties at the interpersonal level) of research. By employing

these strengths of anthropology, this paper makes its contribution by operationalizing and theorizing context: we operationalize context through interconnectedness – comprising our three forms as well as ethnographic methodology to examine these – and theorize interconnectedness by elaborating how entrepreneurs "do" context by way of enacting the sociocultural ties that "embody" this context, and by considering the micro-meso-macro and past-present connections that have engendered these ties. In doing so, our anthropological perspective presents a fine-grained and holistic analytical framework for contextualizing entrepreneurship.

Context, however, is not only "produced" through entrepreneurial activity, but also throughout the research process. Context is "highly malleable" and "actively constructed" by research participants as well as researchers (Wadhwani et al., 2020, p. 11). In their accounts, research participants articulate certain aspects of past or present events (while ignoring others) and narratively integrate these into a more or less coherent story of their entrepreneurial endeavours. As Steyaert notes, "there is no context without text" (2016, p. 32). The researcher, in turn, interprets such accounts and – in the process of data analysis and writing up – decides what contexts or aspects thereof to include and leave out. Contextualisation thus also inheres a dilemma: everything may be the context of everything else, but not everything can be accounted for without resorting to "extreme relativism", and so the challenge rests in delimiting and construing relevant (aspects of) context(s) (Dilley, 2002, p. 443). Anthropological methodology provides useful tools to go about this interpretivist process and tackle the "unboundedness of context" (Dilley, 2002, p. 443), firstly through its ethnographic approach and secondly through the practice of reflexivity. The ethnographic approach strives to convey what is meaningful to research participants *within* the specific cultural context. This starts with a flexible research design that allows "emic" insights to surface (Harris, 1976), and by "being there" for a good amount of time to "sensitize" the researcher to meanings and interrelationships between phenomena. As such, what are relevant contexts need not to be established a priori by the researcher by way of "etic" scholarly conceptualization that exist "outside of the minds of the actors" (Harris, 1976, p. 331), but emerges from fieldwork and the "lived experiences" of people. An example from our Southeast Asia research is that while the entrepreneurship literature conceptualises family and ethnic businesses as distinct phenomena, the accounts and business activities of our research participants revealed similar dynamics of trust and reciprocity based on articulations of "sameness", and led us to think in terms of a continuum of kinship-based ties instead (Verver & Koning, 2018).

It has to be acknowledged however, that notions such as "being there" and the "emic/etic" distinction have been critically scrutinised within anthropology since the 1980s. Geertz (1988) argued that, by claiming to have penetrated a cultural setting and truly having "been there", ethnographers create a mirage of objectivity while obscuring the fact that ethnographic accounts "are the describer's descriptions, not those of the described" (p. 145). Similarly, it was argued that emic models are ultimately constructed by the analyst and not held consciously by indigenous thinkers. These critiques trace their roots to the emergence of postmodernism (notably Foucault's notion that knowledge is never neutral because its discursive construction is always mediated by power structures) and postcolonialism (notably Said's thesis that the West's discursive constructions of the "Orient" perpetuate processes of "othering", domination and exploitation) (Barnard, 2004).

Such questions around the authority of anthropologists to represent the "other" as well as their ability to do so objectively culminated in the "crisis of representation" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) and, subsequently, a "reflexive turn" (Koning & Ooi, 2013). Since this "turn", anthropologists have critically investigated the ways in which their preconceptions and background influence fieldwork encounters and interpretations. In our own research, practicing reflexivity has meant "suspending judgement" (Bendixsen, 2013, p. 60). The first author has for example tried to understand transactions between *oknha* business tycoons and top-politicians in Cambodia in terms of their interpersonal dynamics rather than dismissing these as corruption, while at the same time considering the fact that research participants so often brought up corruption in light of the researcher's Western European background and resultant expectations that he might work for a civil society organisation attempting to expose corruption. The second author, often feeling awkward when the religious entrepreneurs in her research repeatedly tried to convert her, by unpacking these awkward moments discovered

how relevant this converting of others is for these religious businessmen as it is a way to reconvert oneself, strengthen one's faith, and create strong bonds of trust that are crucial in business (Koning & Ooi, 2013). Reflexivity, then, is not only a matter of being transparent about the subjectivities of doing ethnography, but also offers analytical clues and as such is "epistemologically informative" (Davies, 2010, p. 13).

6 Implications of an anthropological perspective: a research agenda

So what might be the implications of the anthropological perspective that we have outlined above for (contextualized) entrepreneurship research? We will answer this question by offering several future research directions.

The first direction for future research relates to the value of an ethnographic approach and the notions of interpretation and reflexivity so central to contemporary anthropology. Ethnography aims at the "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of behaviours, meaning-making, interactions and surroundings – providing detail on people and places (more than we have been able to provide within the scope of this paper). Adopting a reflexive lens ethnographic accounts reveal the construction of context throughout the research process, a dimension that is so far largely ignored by entrepreneurship researchers, including those interested in context (Fletcher & Selden, 2016). While within the scope of this paper in our descriptions above we lean towards a "realist" style of writing (describing in the third person the behaviour and speech of the people studied), "confessional" styles (using the first person to incorporate the fieldworker's experiences, interactions and choices) or "impressionist" styles (using literary techniques to develop a compelling story and engage the reader with characters) tend to better bring out the interpretive and reflexive process (Van Maanen, 1988). By combining thick description and reflexivity and by deconstructing research participants' narrative acts as well as reflecting upon the researcher's own interpretative acts, ethnography has immense value for contextualising entrepreneurship. Echoing calls for (auto) ethnography (Fletcher, 2011), visual and arts-based methodologies (Baker & Welter, 2018) and linguistic approaches (Steyaert, 2016), we encourage future research to explore this value.

A second promising research direction is investigating the enactment of sociocultural ties in other contexts, including but also beyond the ties that we have discussed here, such as gender- or class-based ties (e.g. Wang & Warn, 2018). The importance of "the social" has certainly been recognized in entrepreneurship studies that account for context. Yet, while entrepreneurship researchers typically draw on the sociology of Granovetter or Putnam to examine the role of social networks or social capital, a focus on the cultural elements that fuel these social relations is largely absent (Light & Dana, 2013). Unsurprisingly, considering this absence, very few entrepreneurship studies draw on concepts like kinship, patronage and spirituality. Anthropology provides a rich conceptual toolbox to theorise sociocultural ties, and hence an anthropological perspective extends existing insights on the social dimension in entrepreneurship.

Third, we would especially also welcome studies on the enactment of sociocultural ties in Western entrepreneurship settings. There is a risk involved in maintaining the academic division of labour between business school researchers focusing on the "West" and anthropologists on the "rest". If it is true that "mainstream" entrepreneurship studies adhere to the idea of the strategic, individualistic entrepreneur while anthropology instead emphasizes the social and cultural dynamics of entrepreneurship, this division of labour also perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes about Western rational, meritocratic and arms-length ties versus trust-based, affective and informal ties in other parts of the world. Anthropological studies on entrepreneurship in Western settings debunk such stereotypes (Rosa & Caulkins, 2013), for example drawing on Mary Douglas' distinction between communitarian, individualistic and hierarchical culture to show that in Manchester's tech scene the sociality associated with the "start-up community" and its events goes hand in hand with employing the legitimacy derived from this "community" for competitive self-promotion and self-interest (Pfeilstetter, 2017). Examples from the USA include Alex Stewart's work on the tension between the "moral order of kinship" and the "amoral logic of markets" (2003, p. 385) and a study employing Levi-Strauss' modes of action – bricolage, art, craft, and engineering – to identify "less rational" forms of entrepreneurial behaviour

(Stinchfield et al., 2013). In all, while we started out this paper calling for more research on non-Western countries to foster heterogeneity in entrepreneurship studies, we also wish to make a case for feeding the conceptual insights that this engenders back into entrepreneurship studies broadly, hopefully working towards a more global orientation of the field.

A fourth research direction pertains to the negative human and societal consequences of entrepreneurship. A basic assumption of most entrepreneurship studies is that entrepreneurship is good (Shepherd, 2019) – be it for development, growth, or employment and meaningful work – whereas anthropology may bring out the "dark" as much as "bright" the side of entrepreneurship in context. This is reflected in existing anthropological studies of entrepreneurship. On the one hand, these studies reveal the ways in which entrepreneurship fosters emancipation, resilience and social change, especially among the poor. Joos (2017) provides an ethnographic close-up of how women in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, mobilise the power of so-called shotgun houses, which allow blending private and commercial life, to build moral economies and egalitarian ties based on solidarity, religion and caretaking. In another example, Vertovec (2021) argues that entrepreneurship in Cuba must be understood as a meaningful form of resistance against the political and economic order of the communist state. On the other hand, Stewart (2003) for example reminds us that strong kinship ties often come with expectations from family firm members that, even if at odds with entrepreneurial aspiration, must be conceded to avoid feuds. Considering the "dark" side, anthropologists are especially critical towards the phenomenon of entrepreneurship as the epitome of neoliberalism. Pfeilstetter argues that corporate and government elites sell "Silicon utopias", especially to youth, thereby promoting precarious forms of self-employment in developed as well as developing countries (2022, p. 110). Similarly, cases ranging from natural disaster recovery in Ecuador (Faas, 2018) to the reintegration of prisoners in Uganda (Marshall, 2018) show that the emphasis of international NGOs on capitalist "empowerment" and the self-reliant, self-motivated entrepreneur often conflicts with more communitarian solutions and aspirations to rebuild personhood through social ties. Anthropology – in its empirical focus on the disadvantaged, on backstage or hidden dynamics, on the shopfloor level, on the difference between what people do and say they do, on discursive performances and policy manipulations – has a long history of criticality towards powerful actors, notably states, corporations and international organisations. As the few existing studies on entrepreneurship from an anthropological perspective show, anthropology is well-positioned to rebalance the excessive focus on the good of entrepreneurship.

The fifth and last direction for future research derives from the observation that, whereas entrepreneurship studies focus especially on how context affects entrepreneurship, anthropologists are inclined to consider the reverse relationship. This is already implied in the above-mentioned literature, which ultimately deals with the question of how entrepreneurs and the phenomenon of entrepreneurship impact relationships, societies and cultures. In another recent study, Frost and Frost (2021, p. 1) describe how a Shanghai taxi company "actively re-imagined and transformed" its context, for example by filling gaps in urban connectivity and harnessing nationalistic symbols. Anthropology thus invites to think of "value creation" (and destruction) not only in economic but also in social and cultural terms (Pfeilstetter, 2022; Steyaert & Katz, 2004).

In all, we are convinced that anthropology and entrepreneurship studies have something to offer each other in contextualising entrepreneurship. Combined, anthropology's rich tradition of studying sociocultural dynamics – at the interpersonal level and beyond – and entrepreneurship studies' in-depth knowledge on the intricacies and dimensions of the entrepreneurial process may work towards a fine-grained understanding of entrepreneurs as socially and culturally embedded change agents, and entrepreneurship as a form of "situated creativity" (Watson, 2013, p. 17). We hope that future research will engage in further disciplinary cross-fertilization to uncover the recursive relationship between entrepreneurial agency and sociocultural contexts (cf. Pfeilstetter, 2022) and brings about a more holistic appraisal.

7 Conclusion

Responding to calls to "deepen our theorizing" (Welter et al., 2019, 324) of the interplay between entrepreneurship and context, in this paper, we set out to develop an anthropological perspective.

While anthropology is seldom used in entrepreneurship studies, the discipline holds great promise in contextualising entrepreneurship. We have argued that interconnectedness is the quintessence of an anthropological perspective and takes the form of (1) sociocultural ties between people; (2) interrelationships between micro, meso, and macro levels; and (3) connections between the past and the present. We have illustrated this perspective through the case of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia, based on our research in Cambodia and Indonesia. This case reveals three kinds of sociocultural ties – kinship, spiritual, and patron-client ties – that are differently enacted in entrepreneurship, and that must be seen as emerging from historical and contemporary experiences of Chinese migration, settlement and business venturing in Southeast Asia. Hence, our paper offers novel conceptual insights on sociocultural ties and develops a fine-grained perspective on how, by enacting these sociocultural ties, entrepreneurs "do" context. The research agenda that we envision centres around (1) interpretivist and reflexive modes of writing ethnography, (2) examining sociocultural ties in other entrepreneurship contexts, (3) particularly in Western settings, (4) focusing on the "dark" side of entrepreneurship in addition to the "bright" side, and (5) the recursive relationship between entrepreneurship and context. We hope this will inspire future scholarly engagement between anthropology and entrepreneurship studies.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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