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Lara Pecis & Bingbing Ge

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The bittersweet taste of family business: exploring the dynamics gendering and racializing entrepreneurship

Lara Pecis [a] and Bingbing Ge [b]

[a]Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; [b]Entrepreneurship and Strategy Department, Lancaster University Management School, Bailrigg, Lancaster, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Family businesses are rich in stories and narratives and offer a fertile ground to explore 'everyday life of family businesses' that 'may be difficult to access through other forms of empirical material' (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020, 122–123). In this paper, we use Helen (Tse's 2007) biography *Sweet Mandarin* to explore the complex dynamics of gender, race, and entrepreneurship in a transnational migrant family business. We regard this biography as Helen's attempt to make sense of her family's entrepreneurial past, to give voice to the women in her family and gain legitimacy in their entrepreneurial practices. Adopting an intersectionality lens attentive towards Chinese feminism and cultural contextualities, we contribute to current entrepreneurship feminist works that aim at unveiling structures reproducing gender and racial inequalities. Our theoretical approach reveals how Helen understood and legitimized Lily's entrepreneurial journey as a Chinese woman entrepreneur through three mechanisms: i) silently appropriating traditional assumptions of entrepreneurship; ii) associating family legacy to the entrepreneurial future; iii) anchoring on a hopeful future to overcome sacrifices. Our research demonstrates the power of biography as a unique genre of literature that offers in-depth insights into the intersection of gender and racial dynamics in family business that would go otherwise unnoticed.

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Fiction; intersectionality; race; family business; biography; entrepreneurial imagination; Migrant women entrepreneurs

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
SDG 5: Gender equality

In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives. – Bruner (1987, 15)

Introduction

Scholarship on family business has only recently begun to explore the intricacies of families and their businesses by engaging with fiction and literature, including novels, plays, and poetry (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020). As one of the most popular forms of enterprise, family business is particularly rich in stories or narratives (Dawson and Hjorth 2012; Hamilton, Cruz, and Jack 2017).[1] Recent research shows how these narratives, common in the literary genre of auto/biographies, can provide a unique lens through which to examine the internal workings of families, their history, and social structures while intersecting with business systems (e.g. Ge, De Massis, and Kotlar 2022; Hjorth and Dawson 2016). These auto/biographies, as a form of discursive artefacts (Ge, Hamilton, and Haag 2024), are socially constructed; they hold a revealing power of the authors' own agencies, motives, and

CONTACT Lara Pecis pecisl@cardiff.ac.uk Cardiff University, Cardiff Business School, Aberconway Building, Colum Road, Cathays, Cardiff, CF10 3EU

assumptions (Saylors et al. 2021; Suddaby et al. 2023), and constitute a fertile terrain to explore entrepreneurial imaginations, entrepreneurs' identities and their aspired futures (Gartner 2007). More importantly, auto/biographies can reveal specific dynamics in family business that would be otherwise inaccessible (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020), such as the construction and performance of gender and race.

Despite the increasing number and relevance to business of racialized women entrepreneurs, particularly those with migration backgrounds, over the past years (Smith-Hunter 2006), they endure persistent inequalities and challenges, including language challenges at the start-up stage (Collins and Low 2010) and emotional and instrumental issues with accessing social support (Davidson, Fielden, and Omar 2010; Fielden and Davidson 2012), unfavourable entrepreneurship policies (Hopp and Martin 2017), lower profits and limited mobility (Anselm 1994; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Baxter and Raw 1988; Phizacklea 1988). Two fields of research have attempted to address why and how these inequalities happen.

On one side, critical women's entrepreneurship research has analysed individual women's characteristics and styles, and how barriers are created to their entrepreneurial activities (Bruni et al, 2004a, b and c; Gherardi 2015; Hughes *et al*., 2012; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). This body of literature has challenged the inherent institutional gender bias in entrepreneurial discourse (Ahl 2006; Marlow and McAdam 2013), where ascribed characteristics are deemed the mere reason for the lack of and barriers to access entrepreneurship. Instead, these works have shown how the masculine ideal (of the white, heterosexual man) 'sticks' to entrepreneurship, thus disabling women's contributions to entrepreneurial activity. In short, as Marlow (2014) points out, there seems to be a tendency to map gender onto femininity as a devalued construct. These works, however, tackle women entrepreneurs as a homogeneous category, overlooking the implicit assumptions of heteronormativity, whiteness (Ogbor, 2000) and place (Al-Dajani et al., 2015) embedded into this prevailing critique (Marlow and Dy, 2017).

A second stream of research has instead focused on the experiences of entrepreneurship of ethnic minorities and migrants (Alkhaled and Berglund 2018; Ram et al. 2021, among others), predominantly in Western contexts. These studies recognize that racialized women are severely affected by issues in economic and social participation, translating into entrepreneurial disadvantage. Yet again, the 'disadvantaged' is here used as an umbrella category of what is a significantly heterogeneous group of entrepreneurs (Dy, 2020). As such, this body of literature flattens the link between racial agency and structures of oppression. Critiques to the race neutral perspective dominating entrepreneurship studies (Bruton, Lewis and Chapman, 2023) suggest that whilst race is often acknowledged as a characteristic of the entrepreneur, i.e. when discussing ethnic minorities entrepreneurship, it 'lack[s] an overarching explicit ontology of entrepreneurial advantage and disadvantage'. (Dy, 2020: 667). Racial agency is key here, as diverse agents act in relation to existing social structures and institutions with varying modes of exchange and outcomes (Lambrecht and Beens, 2005; Carter, 2011). Bruton et al (2023) outline that racial disadvantage in entrepreneurship literature often neglects actors' agency, by coupling the agency of underrepresented minorities with structures underpinning entrepreneurship. As such, interactions of structure and agency are still undertheorized and both fields of research, namely critical women's entrepreneurship and ethnic minority entrepreneurship, tend to prioritize a single axis of oppression (gender and race and/or ethnicity respectively) (Dy, 2020) and to conflate structure with agency.

Building on critiques of the lack of nuances within racialized women's entrepreneurship, their agencies and how they relate to social structures of oppression (Bruton et al., 2023; Dy, 2020), we examine *how narratives of family dynamics at the intersection of gender and race creatively produce entrepreneurship* in *Sweet Mandarin*. We use the 2007 biography written by third-generation female entrepreneur Helen Tse who recounts her grandmother's journey of migration and entrepreneurship. Guided by the creative interplay between biography as a type of imaginary artefact (Czarniawska 1999) and entrepreneurial imagination (Gartner 2007), we explore the nexus of

agencies between the storytellers (the grandmother and mother, first- and second-generation female entrepreneurs) and the writer (the third-generation, British-born, Chinese female entrepreneur). Our interpretation is guided by Helen's 'dominant point of view' (Carroll 2018, 136) as she becomes part of the narrative, giving voice to the different protagonists (Bruner 1987). In so doing, we acknowledge Helen's agency in presenting the naturally chaotic and multi-voiced entrepreneurial journey in a coherent storyline (Fletcher 2007), showing her efforts to make sense of the entrepreneurial journey, family legacy, and her mixed British-Chinese identity.

As *Sweet Mandarin* narrates the experiences of Asian women, we connect intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) with Chinese feminism to discuss the performance of 'silent feminism' to advance the role of minority women within the family and the business (Lin, Liu, and Jin 1998; Z. Liu and Dahling 2016). By focusing on how discourse constructs gender (Hamilton 2006b, 2013b), as well as the role of the margins as a site for innovating gender and racial relations through fiction (Pecis and Berglund 2021), we advance an intersectionality agenda in family business research, and entrepreneurship studies more broadly. First, our research advances conversations within entrepreneurship studies in considering the intersectionality of both race and gender as a heavier barrier than if considered as single axis of oppression. Second, we contribute to the use of literary genre, in our case from biographies, as a fertile terrain for advancing entrepreneurship and family businesses research. Following Nordqvist and Gartner (2020), we reveal the nexus of agencies, of the reader, narrator and the author of the biography, and how it becomes a site that can convene important topics in family businesses, including identity, legitimacy, and legacy.

The intersectionality of gender and race in entrepreneurship and family business research

As the heart of many families and businesses, women occupy a key role in the entrepreneurial journey of family businesses, whether during the start-up phase, strategic decision-making, or the succession process (Gersick 1990; Maseda et al. 2022). The involvement of women in family businesses ranges from being a firm creator, a partner of the business, a responsible wife, and a potential successor (Gherardi 2015; Martinez Jimenez 2009). Despite the increasing acknowledgement within family business literature, and entrepreneurship literature at large, of the substantial role of women in both families and business (Aldrich et al. 2021), the field is rifled with patriarchal assumptions (Ahl 2006; Hamilton 2013a), which in turn silence and/or stereotype how women contribute to family businesses (Baker, Aldrich, and Nina 1997; Gupta and Levenburg 2013; Hamilton 2006b). This narrow conception of women's contributions reinforces their traditional family roles as 'spouse, parent, in-law, family leader' (Martinez Jimenez 2009, 53) and highlights key challenges and difficulties for women in family businesses (Campopiano et al. 2017). As such, feminist scholars in entrepreneurship studies have called for a more nuanced account of gender relations within family business contexts (Nekhili, Chakroun, and Chtioui 2018; Rowe and Hong 2000), unearthing the often invisible and hidden roles of women in family business (Xian, Jiang, and McAdam 2020).

The visibility of women in family business further depends on the context in which their entrepreneurial activities are taking place. A closer look at cultural, social, and political dimensions reveals that country contexts play an important role in shaping gender dynamics in family business (Campopiano et al. 2017). For example, countries such as Saudi Arabia might provide the support needed for women to succeed in family businesses (Welsh et al. 2014). Others, such as China, impose hierarchies that are difficult for women to overcome (Y. Liu, Schøtt, and Zhang 2019). Yet, what is often common is a cultural stereotype of the entrepreneur that is infused by masculinity (Hamilton 2006b), with the ideal entrepreneur being exemplified by the white, middle-aged male across entrepreneurship and family business literature (Marlow and McAdam 2013; Xian, Jiang, and McAdam 2020). This has detrimental effects onto who is understood to be an entrepreneur, a legitimate successor within the family business context, but also who benefits from entrepreneurship policies and support (Hopp and Martin 2017). Feminists have thus suggested that

entrepreneurship studies might benefit from focusing on the dynamic ways in which gender and race are accomplished (Dy, 2020).

Intersectionality has steadily paved its way through feminist entrepreneurship studies (Constantinidis et al. 2019; A. Dy and Agwunobi 2018), and within the context of family business. These works challenge the role of structures in creating marginalization and inequalities (Lassalle and Shaw 2021), as they explore gendered and racialized experiences (Knight 2016) and resistance strategies of racialized women entrepreneurs. Broadly speaking, women – especially women of colour – receive less institutionalized support than their male or white counterparts yet rely more on family support for success (Nielsen 2020). They may also be involved differently in their family businesses owing to individual characteristics, family relationships, family business goals (Campopiano et al. 2017), and institutional elements such as their immigration status and cultural heritage, among other things (Welsh et al. 2014). Focusing on migrant women entrepreneurs, current research illustrates the importance of gender dynamics and transnational spaces in entrepreneurship (Alkhaled and Berglund 2018; Villares-Varela and Essers 2019). Yet, the unique combination of transnational migrant status alongside gender dynamics is rarely explored within the family business context. There is a growing understanding of the importance of the role occupied by gender and race in family businesses (Campopiano et al. 2017; Welsh et al. 2014), but their interaction remains undertheorized (Maseda et al. 2022) and empirically underexplored. We argue that this is because, as with mainstream research on entrepreneurship, family business research is underpinned by patriarchal and Western-centric assumptions about entrepreneurial activities (Mulholland 1996; for a critical take, see; Mussolino et al. 2019). However, there may be alternative ways to understand entrepreneurial activities rooted in the margins – in non-Western, non-masculine ideals of the entrepreneurial self.

Capturing the intersection of Chinese and women's entrepreneurship

We mobilize the concept of intersectionality in entrepreneurship as a 'means by which to pursue and develop in-depth feminist inquiry cognizant of social structures, reflexivity, and praxis, which the field historically lacks' (A. M. Dy and MacNeil 2023, 2). In this paper, we reframe intersectionality for entrepreneurship and family business scholars by combining non-western forms of feminism (as discussed below) and a critical women's studies agenda in entrepreneurship.

Broadly defined, intersectionality refers to 'overlapping social categories, such as race and gender, that are relevant to a specified individual or group's identity and create a unique experience that is separate and apart from its originating categories' (Rosette et al. 2018, 3). In other words, intersectionality illustrates the 'interaction between non-dominant race and gender categories as a specific form of oppression' (Essers, Benschop, and Doorewaard 2010) wherein markers of social identity are 'inextricably interconnected in the production of social practices of exclusion' (Crenshaw 1997, 237). Intersectionality is rooted in knowledge from the margins (hooks, 1990), such as Black women's experiences and Asian migrant women. The latter have examined the tensions created by the family bonds of immigrant Asian women when they strongly perceived their cultural roots (see Asian Women United of California (Ed.) 1989; Chow 1987; Houston 1982; S. G. L. Lim, Tsutakawa, and Donelly 1989; Yamada 1981). These works highlight how migrant Asian women were socialized to endure the depreciation and reinforcement of gender stereotypes and subordination within their cultural community (Chow 1987). Traditional gender expectations within Chinese society have historically placed women in subordinate positions to men's (Xian et al., 2021). Woodhams et al. (2015) find that strongly gendered concepts of yin and yang have served to strengthen the division between women's and men's work, with the former confined to the household and the latter to public life. As such, social pressures halt women's independency and interactions beyond the family circles (Gao, Lin, and Ma 2016; Leung 2003), marking their presence within entrepreneurship discourse sparse. Whilst significant policy

changes have occurred over the past decades in China, there has been little consideration of Chinese women's agency in change (Leung 2003; Xian et al 2021) and their resistance to the continuing discrimination in accessing financial and social resources for their businesses (Cook and Dong 2011).

Resistance has historically taken various forms in the experiences of Chinese women. Recent feminist research further distinguishes various forms of feminism in China. For example, Chen (2011) suggests that Chinese feminism is multi-faceted, including elements of *nuxing zhuyi* (dealing with the political demands of Chinese women) and *nuquan zhuyi* (addressing women's demands for equality; see Feng 2009).[2] Both approaches reject traditional and fixed gender roles (Chow 1985), but without challenging 'male desires and abilities' (Lin, Liu, and Jin 1998, 112). Such feminism expresses the 'quieter side of feminism', advancing women's rights within traditional societal expectations around womanhood (Z. Liu and Dahling 2016, 1). Following this quieter side of feminism involves approaching societal change with more careful tones to generate discussions of women's issues in a more subtle – but still powerful – way (Lin, Liu, and Jin 1998, 116).[3]

This form of feminism is particularly relevant to analyses of family and gender dynamics in transnational settings. Within the Chinese context, for instance, hierarchies influence the experiences of migrant women (intersecting with age and generational lines) in relation to their role in society and business. These intersections position young women at the lowest level of relevance compared with other family members. The father remains the main breadwinner and central authority in the family, leaving women to take on the roles of mothers and caregivers (Chow 1987). As such, patriarchy not only places Chinese women as subordinates to the older man in the house but also suggests that the subordination of young Chinese women is complex and does not simply extend from male authority. This positioning inevitably affects how Chinese migrant women navigate the world of work alongside their family roles, becoming even more intricate when the family and the business go in tandem. By embracing a 'quieter side of feminism', an alternative way of challenging gender and racial assumptions could emerge (Z. Liu and Dahling 2016, 1). In the entrepreneurship context, Chinese women entrepreneurs face gendered and cultural barriers (McAdam, Crowley, and Harrison, 2019), namely being seen as less legitimate actors, having reduced access to resources for entrepreneurial activities and entering exclusively male networks (Marlow and McAdam 2013). This, Wiig, Schou, and Hansen (2023) suggest is often the case in patriarchal societies connoted by the overlap of masculinity and entrepreneurship.

Although entrepreneurship can be a tool for women to break the economic and social conditions of subordination and domination (Berglund and Johansson 2007), it also has a darker side (Alkhaled and Berglund 2018). The complexity of gender and race dynamics – alongside the exploitation these dynamics can cause – plays a key role in impacting the opportunities for resistance and change. In other words, entrepreneurship can be seen as an opportunity to overcome certain forms of disadvantage (i.e. economic); however, it also simultaneously reproduces oppressive power relations in other ways. This is particularly so in the context of Chinese migrant women, where family and work lives are intertwined in a more varied way as compared to other ethnic businesses women, mainly because of their unique colonial (and slave) histories (Song 1995). For example, the notion of 'helping out' the parent in their business has both instrumental and symbolic meaning in this context, where supporting family solidarity and membership remains a fundamental facet of Chinese family values, and where family and business interests are hard to discern from one another (Song 1995). This goes beyond the idea of public/private life enmeshment, to encompass cultural values and expectations around one's role in the family.

For the purposes of this paper, we mobilize intersectionality to reveal the structural conditions that place women of colour in a marginalized position within society (and within the business). We intersect this with one form of Chinese feminism – the 'quieter side of feminism' – to understand the complex dynamics of gender, race, and patriarchal relations within a Chinese family and their business. Combining these perspectives, we look for the creative production of entrepreneurship in the biography *Sweet Mandarin*.

Biography as a literary genre: why biographies matter for family businesses

Personal and organizational auto/biographies have grown in popularity over the past decades. 'Biography' is a genre of narrative that places an individual history 'in a narrative of social history (be it family or a nation) or even in a history of the narrative' (Czarniawska 2004, 6). As such, individual histories are often narrated in the form of a 'Biography' or 'autobiography', where the aim of the author is to understand their own lives and those of others (Czarniawska 2004). Biographies therefore become a powerful tool for capturing not only how i.e. a family member might understand her positioning in the family business but also the forces that come together to shape the narrative of one's life as such, and the positioning that take place (Davies and Harré 1991). Biographies are a literary genre typical among entrepreneurs because of such exploratory and explicatory power (Fletcher 2007). Here, entrepreneurs' life events embrace an imaginative turn to reveal their lived experiences, how the entrepreneurial process unfolded through their eyes (Komporozos-Athanasiou and Fotaki 2015). As a result, biography can be seen as a type of imaginary artefact (Czarniawska 1999) and entrepreneurial imagination (Gartner 2007), which influence how reality is perceived (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020) and received (O'Leary and Chia 2007).

At the same time, scholarly attention has been directed towards critically examining the stories in entrepreneurial narratives (Gartner 2010), where life events are carefully selected (Steyaert 2007) and purposefully articulated (O'Conor 2007) for active and emergent meaning-making (O'Leary and Chia 2007) and power games (Czarniawska 2004). Biographies embed a purposefulness in their narrations of the past (Suddaby, Foster, and Quinn Trank 2010), calling for a critical understanding of its interplay with memory (Suddaby, Schultz, and Israelsen 2020). In other words, what is often narrated in biographies is a craft of the entrepreneurial imagination, where memories are moulded into a convincing and explicatory narrative. Such narrative thus combines fictional and non-fictional elements as well as being in relation with specific cultural and historical contexts (Czarniawska 1999), to make sense of one's own past, but also to contextualize the future (Fletcher 2007). Autobiographical memory, a narrator's ongoing effort to create a coherent yet fluid past to link to present and future, for example, is particularly important in understanding both individual and organizational identities (Suddaby, Schultz, and Israelsen 2020). Biography could, therefore, be seen as a way through which the narrator communicates their preferred stories to fulfil their expressive needs (Czarniawska 2004). In the biographies of entrepreneurs and founders of family businesses, therefore, the past is intertwined with family legacy (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020; Suddaby and Jaskiewicz 2020).

Records of life events, termed as 'discursive artefacts', can exert strong influence on the coming generations' commitment to their family businesses (Ge et al. 2024), connecting the family and business systems (Hamilton, Cruz, and Jack 2017). Families, in these narrating processes, show multi-faceted needs and goal complexities where records of narrations would sometimes compete for legitimacy (Dalpiaz et al. 2014; Hjorth and Dawson 2016; Pecis, Ge, and Bauer 2024). We thus can understand the entrepreneur's published auto/biography as the material artefact embedding the surviving/successful records of histories. These show the success of dominant family values and legacies that are then embedded in business processes and that offer continuity in the family business by influencing the (future) identity of the family businesses. As such, biographies form important resources 'for the study of subjectivity, meaning, motivation and individual agency' (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2012) in the making of the entrepreneurial process.

Biographies often contain fictional elements in their narrations of the entrepreneurial processes and the family dynamics described. Here, we do not make a distinction between facts and fiction, and as such are not engaging with Gabriel's (2000) worry on discerning their structural difference. Instead, by following Czarniawska (2004), we are interested in what the text does. Sweet Mandarin, as a biography, may as well contain many fictional elements that are hard to discern from what Gabriel (2000) calls 'facts'. We do not know (and cannot know)

the extent to which it is true that hard work was a family value (as Helen describes by drawing on Lily's stories), but what interests us is that such narrative is used by the author of the biography (Helen) to make sense of her family legacy and how it entwines with the family's entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, in treating this biography (the text), and its fictional elements, in what it 'does' rather than in what it says (Czarniawska 2004), we can grasp how the entrepreneurial narration is gendered and racialized. This is particularly important, as we argue, gender (Hamilton 2006b; Larty and Hamilton 2011) and race (Bruton, Lewis and Chapman, 2023) have been traditionally silenced in entrepreneurship, and family business research more specifically.

Case context and data

Published in 2007, *Sweet Mandarin* is a 279-page biography written by Helen Tse, co-founder of the Chinese restaurant Sweet Mandarin in Manchester, UK. In the book, Tse traces the entrepreneurial and migratory journeys of three generations of Chinese women in her family over the period 1918–2003. *Sweet Mandarin* represents Helen's attempt to recount her family's entrepreneurial journey and explore her family's roots. The book evocatively highlights the entanglement of gender, race, and entrepreneurship and gives vivid voice to the feudal social suppression of women in China. The rich narratives of Helen's grandmother Lily and mother Mabel are mixed with Helen's own experiences and emotions, making them an ideal source for our research purpose (Eisenhardt 1989).

Sweet Mandarin is organized around the key life and entrepreneurial journey of the female family entrepreneurs – Lily, Mable, and Helen – from China to the UK. Helen's great grandfather, Leung, the first in the family of peasants to start up a business, moved his family to Hong Kong thanks to the booming of his soy sauce business. Leung's entrepreneurial experience influenced Lily (his daughter) and, through stories, her future generations. He 'always told her [Lily] that even though she was a girl, she could earn her place in the world and leave a legacy for her own children and grandchildren [. . .]' (Tse 2007, 16), despite these being traditional duties for boys in Chinese families. However, Leung's violent murder in 1930 brought an abrupt and tragic end to that entrepreneurial opportunity and forced the entire family to live under Leung's uncle and aunt's mercy in Hong Kong. At the same time, the family (of widow and six daughters) were aware that Leung's soy sauce business was still thriving but, by law, had passed onto his next male descendent. Forced by hardship, Lily worked as an *amah*[4] for a British family, the Woodmans, in one of the Western-populated areas of Hong Kong. She followed the British family to Somerset, leaving behind her children in Hong Kong with their grandmother Tai Po.

Upon the death of Mrs Woodman senior, the person under Lily's care, Lily received a small inheritance, which allowed Lily to set up Lung Fung in Middleton, UK. She then brought her children over from Hong Kong to help out in the restaurant. But Lily's gambling habits, which were reinforced by those of Mabel's husband Eric, pushed the restaurant to bankruptcy. Mabel and Eric moved out and started their own take-away. Years later, their daughters (including Helen and Lisa), the third generation of female family entrepreneurs, opened the Manchester restaurant Sweet Mandarin which became famous on the F Word (Golden Ramsey's show).

In this paper, our presentation of the data differs from the storyline of the book. We use themes that emerged from our analysis, such as the stories of Leung, Lily, Mabel, and Helen, as they intersect at different times. Their entrepreneurial journey includes the soy sauce business (Leung), Lung Fung (Lily's restaurant), the Chip Shop (Mabel's business), and Sweet Mandarin (owned by Helen and Lisa). In Figure 1 below, we present Helen's family tree and the family's entrepreneurial journey.

A storytelling analysis of sweet mandarin

Inspired by the work of Nordqvist and Gartner (2020), we treat Helen's biography as an artefact of entrepreneurial imagination (Czarniawska 1999) and a textual tool to capture dynamics that would

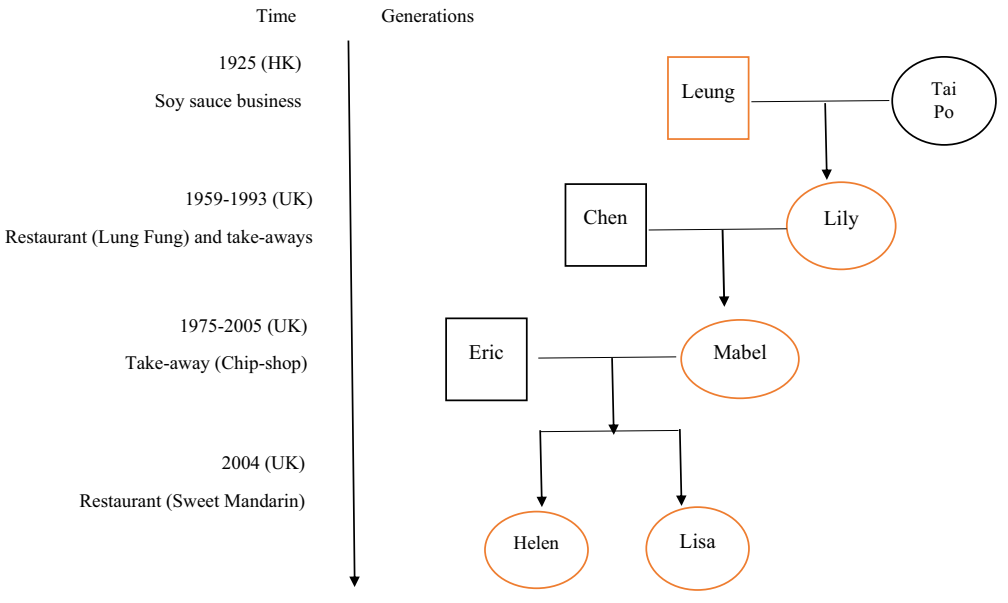

Figure 1. Family tree and entrepreneurial journey[7].

otherwise be difficult to access (Rhodes and Brown 2005). As such, we engage with a narrative perspective on the text (Gartner 2007; Garud and Giuliani 2013), wherein the story constructs a specific reality (that of the narrating voice) (Hosking and Hjorth, 2004), situated within multiple local – cultural – historical acts (Czarniawska 2004). We consider the biography as Helen's attempt to make sense of her entrepreneurial journey, given its timing (published in 2007, 4 years after the establishment of Sweet Mandarin) and theme (family legacy in the culinary business).

This understanding is expressed through reading Helen's narrations of the experiences of the generations that preceded her. We found that Helen's agency motivates spaces of imagination across multiple realities. Our interpretation is further supported by research suggesting that entrepreneurs and their narratives co-construct entrepreneurs' futures (Fletcher 2007; Saylors et al. 2021; Downing 2005) and that the narrated past can be rhetorical rather than factual (Foster et al. 2017; Oertel and Thommes 2018). Distinctions between 'facts as given' and 'facts as made' enable the importance of the texts to emerge (Gartner 2007, 617) where a deep dive into the authors' intentions reveals important insights (Czarniawska 1999). Following this line of thought, our interpretation focuses on past family stories that Helen decided to describe – ones important to her entrepreneurial imagination.

Our analysis employs storytelling inquiry (Rosile et al. 2013) to capture the interplay of grand narratives and the experiences of the women and men participating in the construction of a story. A narrative perspective enables us to capture emergent patterns, lived experiences and the authors' ways of shaping the future (Fletcher 2007). The living stories of Helen Tse, her sisters, parents, grandmother and their restaurants all intersect through narratives constructed around the family's entrepreneurial journey. This intersection is advanced by Helen and the editorial team, but also by various members of the family as they narrated their experiences to Helen (see also the 'relationality and multi-voicedness of entrepreneurs' accounts' Fletcher 2007, 650). We treat the texts as constructed narratives through which Helen made sense of her family's entrepreneurial journey based on her own mental universe (Carroll 2018).

Indeed, their family legacy is the reason Helen, and her sisters felt obliged to 'return' to the culinary trade after their own successful careers. Family experiences during colonial times and the events that followed are key to understanding the journey of the protagonists, which offers rich

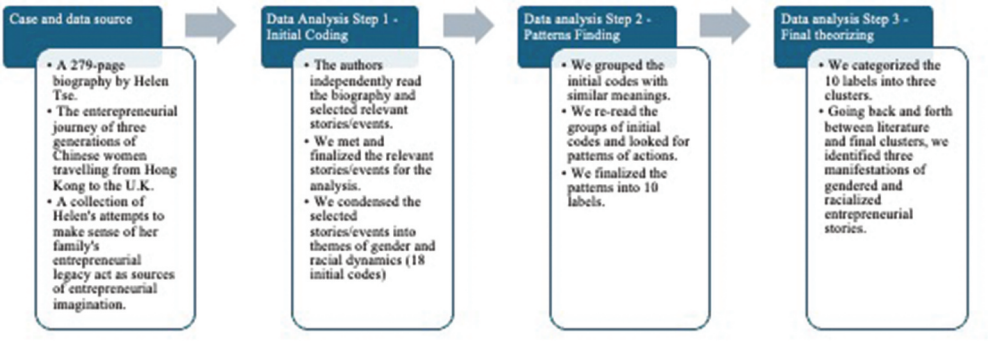

Figure 2. Process of data selection and analysis.

insight into dynamics at the intersection of gender and race. We focus on those actions and events that directly produced Helen's understanding of entrepreneurship.[5]

In using a narrative perspective, we reflexively acknowledge (Gartner 2007) that our own stories (as migrants in the UK) and frameworks (as diversity, entrepreneurship and family business scholars) shape our engagement with the texts. Audiences, including ourselves as researchers, have a constructive influence in reading and shaping a story (Boje, Luhman, and Baack 1999). In selecting passages for analysis, we play a role in scripting the story for our readers in very specific ways (Fletcher 2007). Our selection of vignettes was influenced by our reflections on how entrepreneurship is tied to gender and racial dynamics in a family business setting.

In reading the book, we became emotionally involved with the stories. This enabled us to relate to aspects of their experiences that we would otherwise not have been able to grasp (Oatley 2016), thereby exposing us to a new way of seeing their entrepreneurial journey (Beyes, Costas, and Ortmann 2019; Gartner 2007). One co-author with a Chinese background added depth to our reading by selecting culture-specific texts that reflected gender bias in China, allowing us to place this case in a broader historical context (Czarniawska 2004). Figure 2 provides a graphic illustration of how we approached data selection and analysis.

Our analysis involved three steps. First, we each read the book independently and focused on text that spoke to gender and racial dynamics. We then met and summarized these segments with codes that closely represented ongoing actions in the narrative, such as 'describing', 'linking', and 'sacrificing'. For example, the following segment was coded as 'sacrificing personal relations for building a better life':

> In her heart of hearts she knew it [leaving with Woodman to go to UK] had become a gilded cage for her, and she got no joy from realizing that her suite of rooms was as big as Tai Po's entire flat in Wan Chai where her children lived among the grubby strings of laundry and piles of rubbish. (Tse 2007, 168–169)

Further attention was paid to the unique cultural understanding of women in China.

Next, we gathered these codes into additional labels that represent patterns of actions. For example, 'sacrificing personal relations for building a better life' was linked with 'considering sacrifice as a pre-requirement for rewards'; both were located under the umbrella label of 'sacrifices are necessary for entrepreneurial activity'. In this step, we looked for similarities across the initial codes, before grouping together those that captured a specific aspect of entrepreneurship/gender/race. In the example above, both codes discuss the role of sacrifice in shaping entrepreneurial activity.

Finally, through re-iteration between the literature on gender, intersectionality and family business alongside the data, we identified three mechanisms that make migrant women's

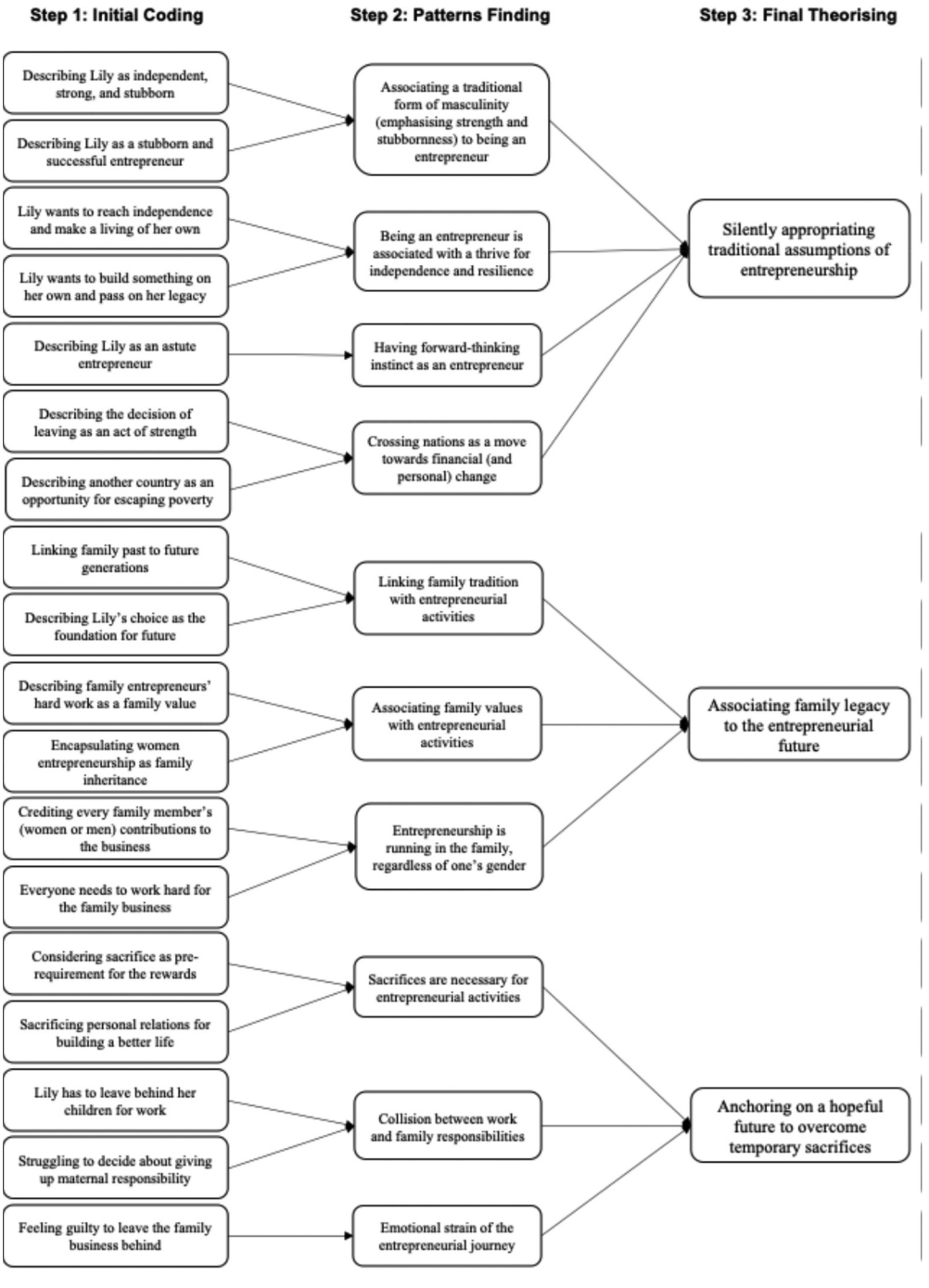

Figure 3. Data structure.

entrepreneurship possible (and through which migrant women gain legitimacy as entrepreneurs): i) silently appropriating traditional assumptions of entrepreneurship; ii) associating family values to the entrepreneurial future; iii) anchoring on a hopeful future to overcome sacrifices. Our interpretation is influenced by the unique genre of our data and reflected in

the three-level dimensions of our entrepreneurial discourse, which forms our unique contribution to entrepreneurship and family business literature. We summarize these steps in Figure 3.

Silently appropriating traditional assumptions of entrepreneurship

The biography opens with a touching tribute to Lily Kwok, Helen's grandmother who, throughout the book, is described as determined (albeit stubborn), astute and entrepreneurial:

> My grandmother Lily Kwok was born in a small village in Southern China in 1918, confounding the midwife who'd predicted that she must be a boy because she had kicked so hard in the womb. That independence, strength and energy stayed with her all her life. Lily is 88 now, and still a fit, intelligent and – I'm afraid to say – stubborn woman despite all that she has been through. (Tse 2007, 1)

In rural China in the early 1900s, only men were entitled to both family and business privileges that ranged from owning land to inheriting businesses and properties, among other things. Lily silently and strongly broke the social gendered conventions of the time, not only in relation to what it means to be a woman but also an entrepreneur. Helen offers insights into how Lily embraced some of her natural characteristics (independence, strength and energy) which are traditionally associated with men in entrepreneurship literature (Czarniawska 1999), to position herself as a legitimate actor of entrepreneurship. In the specific context of China, gender differences were viewed as biological and natural (Hu and Scott 2016), thereby assigning specific stereotypical qualities to men and women (Pecis and Priola 2019) based on their social, historical and geographical positioning:

> They were raising their family in a village that followed the same patterns of agriculture and social customs for hundreds and hundreds of years. . . To be born a farmer meant to die as one. . . It was worse for women. The same patrilineal systems of inheritance condemned girls to be a burden – they were subhuman, their birth to be dreaded. (Tse 2007, 13–14)

These gendered (masculine) traits touched many areas of Lily's life, especially in relation to expectations of who can be an entrepreneur or lead the family business. Helen describes how her grandmother's family (comprising a wife and six daughters) was devastated upon the death of Leung, the family's first entrepreneur. Leung left a thriving business behind that was automatically handed over to his next male descendent, who had 'no legal or even moral obligation to provide for them under Chinese tradition' (69). The literature suggests that entrepreneurship is often equated with the masculine (Ahl 2006; Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004a; Hamilton 2013a), foreclosing possibilities for alternative ways of simultaneously enacting gender and entrepreneurship. However, in the context of Chinese entrepreneurship of the time, it goes beyond this. Gendered traits of entrepreneurship are entwined with women's subordination across patrilinear lines (where Lily was subjected to the dominance of Leung's relatives, both financially and socially). There was no possibility for Lily's mother to lead or even participate in the family business. Any possibility of imagining an entrepreneurship future was foreclosed to her. However, Lily managed to carve out a different path for herself. She acted quietly to gain legitimacy in the dominant masculine entrepreneurial space (Martinez Jimenez 2009) that was surrounding her, which she did on several occasions. Her entrepreneurial spirit encompassed her quietly saving money from her work, to develop ties within the colonial setting of her work as an amah and eventually to move to the UK. When in the UK, Lily founded her first restaurant Lung Fung (in which her children were also working), despite her limited skills in driving and living in a foreign country alone (cf Tai Po's dependence on Leung's relatives in Hong Kong). After losing all her money and her Lung Fung restaurant due to gambling, followed by Mable (her daughter) and Eric's (Mabel's husband) moving out to start their own takeaway, Lily was still left with little money that she then decided to use to set up a takeaway not far from the first restaurant:

> She christened the takeaway Lung Fung too, and she set about making the phoenix rise from the flames once more. She had her recipes and her tenacity, and her loyal customers. She made Lung Fung [the take-away] a success, and though it never rivalled the first restaurant for fame and profit, it was enough to see her through her retirement at the age of 75 in 1993, and to provide her with a reasonable nest-egg for her old age. She had achieved much; even if she was not head of her own chain of restaurants, she had brought her children to a better life, kept them fed and clothed, and seen that they had an education. (Tse 2007, 227–228)

In the above text, we see three interlocking and interdependent systems at play: the family, business and ownership (Taguiri and Davis 1996). These dynamics characterize family businesses as socio-ecological systems with specific values and goals (Sharma and Nordqvist 2008). Specific to Chinese family values is that children are expected to help out (Song 1995), to support family solidarity and membership, and where family and business interests are hard to distinguish from one another (Song 1995). As such, we see tensions between ownership (Lily's ownership of the restaurant and her eagerness to rise from the ashes), family (Mabel taking steps to address business troubles given her pregnancy, Mabel and Eric's new entrepreneurial initiative), and Lily's new venture (the closure of Lung Fung restaurant and launch of Lung Fung takeaway), in a unique bricolage that marks loyalty to the family a central point of contention. However, the women in this story shake these expectations by initiating a different way of being involved with the family and at the same time to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

The text also highlights how these events led Helen to understand the entrepreneurial journeys of her grandmother as a determination and strong will that are traditionally associated with a form of masculinity that underpins entrepreneurship (independence, strength, and energy). As such, business failure becomes an opportunity to re-invent oneself, to re-imagine the entrepreneurial journey, and to change one's fate. We argue that traditional assumptions that mark strong will, forward-thinking and ability to move beyond one's cultural context as masculine are re-appropriated silently by these women as a mechanism to gain legitimacy as entrepreneurs.

Associating family legacy to the entrepreneurial future

The importance of family legacy links the stories of the women narrated in the biography as a bond understood to underpin their entrepreneurial spirit. Describing Lily's participation in Sweet Mandarin in contemporary Manchester, Helen recalls

> On the opening night I [Helen] saw her [Lily] sitting at the table in the back, watching us running back and forth from our guests to the kitchen and the office in a frenzy, and I realized that she was smiling broadly. I doubt she'd ever say it, but I think she was proud of us and of her own legacy. She knew what it meant to build something from nothing, and just how satisfying we would find it in the end when the restaurant was running to its own rhythm and the customers were flowing in. (Tse 2007, 179)

This part of the text is characterized by a sense of joy in their achievement and the family legacy continued in starting up this business. Helen hints at the assumption that 'being a woman' is marginal to the success of the women entrepreneurs in the family. Instead, success is about the continuity of family legacy, the collaboration within the family, the courage and stubbornness that marks their entrepreneurial achievements. In creating a narrative that focuses on family legacy as a condition for successful entrepreneurial activity, Helen resolves the challenges that women encounter in finding recognition for their work:

> Leung was ahead of his time because he felt strongly that his daughters were valuable in their own right, and that even though they weren't the much longed for sons, they too would contribute to the all-important family tree. Their efforts might not bear fruit until a future generation, but they would not be wasted. My grandmother took this conviction, and her own natural self-belief and determination, and changed her destiny; in doing so, she changed the destiny of her daughters and their daughters in turn (Tse 2007, 15).

As a contributor to business success and longevity, gender is thus 'ranked second' (Danes and Olson 2003; Rowe and Hong 2000). However, gender dynamics play out through different generations, particularly when it comes to succession in family business (Aldamiz-Echevarría, Idígoras, and Vicente-Molina 2017; Haberman and Danes 2007). Traditionally, being female conflicts with visions of who will shape family fortunes (Haberman and Danes 2007; Hytti et al. 2017; Martinez Jimenez 2009). This is especially true in Chinese culture, where social interactions shape the hierarchy between male and female offspring as well as expectations for the role of daughters within family businesses (Xian, Jiang, and McAdam 2020).

Indeed, Helen herself describes *Sweet Mandarin* on the cover page as 'the courageous true story of three generations of Chinese *WOMEN* [original emphasis] and their journey from East to West' (Tse 2007). The description highlights how Helen understands that women contribute to family business on par with men, even when they are treated less favourably from birth as in the case of her mother (Tse 2007, 11). Helen explains:

> . . . but when [her brother] Jimmy came along he became my parents' pride and joy simply because he was a boy. He could carry on the family name, and that was all that matters. Even as a four year old I [Helen] felt the injustice. It still seems extraordinary to me that the Chinese favour one sex over the other so determinedly when women contribute so much work and brain-power to the family's fortunes. Even my mother [Mabel], who just wanted us all to be happy and fit with everyone in Middleton, couldn't resist treating him differently. (32)

Despite the differential treatment, it was the hard work of women in business that paved the way for the success of future generations. It did so by changing the destiny of the women who followed, establishing specific legacy to be carried forward within the family business. Helen describes family legacy as a determinant of the entrepreneurial spirit that runs in the family, attempting to distinguish it from its gendered nature. However, gendered relations emerge prominently throughout the discussion of family legacy as women struggles with legitimacy, despite being the ones who carry on the family business (Gherardi and Perrotta 2016; Hamilton 2013a).

For Helen, Lily had dreamt of opening a restaurant since her initial travels to Hong Kong with her father, visiting local restaurants to sell his soy sauce. Retelling Lily's story, Helen explained how the family legacy started:

> Since her days accompanying her father with the little wooden cart through the Hong Kong streets she had a dream that she'd hardly dared think of – she wanted to open her own restaurant and cook her own dishes in her own kitchen. Now [after receiving a substantial sum from Mrs Woodman senior] she began to think seriously about everything she had to put in place to bring her dream to reality. (Tse 2007, 174)

Lily would fulfil her childhood dreams thanks to Mrs Woodman's inheritance. Helen thus bridges past entrepreneurial dreams with the present, illustrating changes in Lily's financial circumstances alongside her breaking from traditional patriarchal ties. Before she could realize her dream, Lily had to endure subordination to the patriarchal order as the social status of her family of origin dropped to little more than servants while cooking and caring for the house they were sheltering in (both on their arrival in Hong Kong and later, after Leung's death, when they were forced to rely on Leung's relatives). Lily uses her hard work to secure a financial future for her own family, even when Lily's husband jeopardized it. While indulging into Lily's very long and eventful life stories, we are reminded of the significance of the narrative approach (Czarniawska 1999): Helen had clearly made efforts to make the naturally chaotic life 'meaningful' from an entrepreneurship perspective, where the family legacy lied. This enabled us to interpret the alternative meanings above the narratives (Fletcher 2007). In processing all the stories about the women entrepreneurs in the family, Helen had presented her version of the monological story that reveals the important influences (Nordqvist and Gartner 2020) of her entrepreneurial endeavours – gender, race, and family legacy.

Anchoring on a hopeful future to overcome temporary sacrifices

Throughout the book, at various critical moments, Helen describes that it is Lily's hope that her temporary sacrifices would pay out. Lily negotiated family and business care, as well as engagement in entrepreneurial activities by way of transnational spaces, motivated by a desire to break from oppressive relations:

> My grandmother swore to herself she would work anywhere but in a silk factory. She wanted to prove herself and won her independence again, and free her family from Leung's relatives. They didn't need luxury, only to determine the course of their own lives once more. So she worked and considered her future, biding her time. (Tse 2007, 72)

Inequality here is not merely based on the binary terms of male/female; rather, it intersects patrilineage with gendered and generational assumptions around work – family relations (Jin 2011). Leung's relatives exert control and dominance over every aspect of the lives of Lily and her mother – from the spaces they could occupy in the house to the work they did to run the household. However, Lily imagined a different future for herself and her daughters, through economic independence. In her eyes, independence could only be achieved by seeking out opportunities outside the house and local community. Such independence is closely linked with entrepreneurship. Lily plans to find a job that could secure a reliable income and deemed colonial ties a safer option, recognizing how waves of immigration from mainland China were increasing competition for jobs as Hong Kong struggled to rebuild after the war (Tse 2007, 137).

Lily moves from one form of oppression (patriarchy in the form of gendered work) – working in a silk factory or serving her relatives – towards another (linked to the colonization of Hong Kong) – working as an *amah* for a Western family and then depending on their goodwill. But to Lily, this re-enactment of oppression does not feel as such. Instead, she sees her position as an *amah* as an opportunity to break free from her family's oppression, and where she can explore and define her opportunities that the context enables (Fletcher 2006). Here, Lily 'silently' but effectively shakes structural inequalities (Z. Liu and Dahling 2016) by dismantling her dependence on patrilineage relations and, at the same time, reproducing gendered work. In being entrepreneurial in her way of navigating gender, racial and colonial relations, Lily enacts a silent form of feminism that uses traditionally gendered (and colonial) forms of work (a job in a silk factory[6] or being an amah for paying Western families) to move away from oppression through patrilineage. This was also linked to Helen's own experience of working in Hong Kong and re-living in the place where her family's female role model did:

> It [the class system in Hong Kong back then] was racially based: Westerners first, Chinese second . . . As a young woman my grandmother had served in the grand homes in the city just as those Filipino women now did, and to her it was a fresh chance to make her way in the world. (Tse 2007, 77–79)

Given the opportunities afforded by Lily's passage to Robinson Road, a residential area for expats, and the possibility of leaving Hong Kong for the UK, entrepreneurship is made possible through crossing transnational spaces. Here, gendered geographies of power are at play (Mahler and Pessar 2001). Lily initiates her entrepreneurial journey as an *amah*, making her way through multiple hierarchies of power operating across different terrains – ranging from patrilineal relations in Hong Kong and subordination to her mother to her later oppression by her husband and employer, for instance.

This was not achieved without sacrifice and emotional pain. The internal conflicts of migrants are referred to as cultural borderlands, or zones of both overlap and distance between cultures (S. L. Lim and Wieling 2004; Rosaldo 1989). But here, Lily's conflict is rooted in the drive towards escaping from poverty, patriarchy and more. Internal inconsistencies derived from tension between cultures are resolved through an entrepreneurial imagination that allows her to dream of a better life in

transnational spaces. Cultural borderlands seem to be played down by associating family legacy to the construction and reproduction of the successful entrepreneur.

As in other stories of female entrepreneurship, the interwoven systems of family and business bring the negotiation of care for self/family and for the business to the forefront (Hamilton 2006b). This is true especially when women are the primary caregivers within the family (Martinez Jimenez 2009) as in the Chinese Culture (Xian, Jiang, and McAdam 2021). One of the key events in *Sweet Mandarin* is Lily's move from Hong Kong to England, which she envisioned as a 'short period of sacrifice' that would lead to 'a better life' in the future (Tse 2007, 23). Indeed, her intuition was right and she 'transformed herself from a penniless immigrant to the owner of a flourishing business in 1950s Britain' (Tse 2007, 23). But Helen reveals a significant cost to family care:

> Lily spent so much time with the Woodman's two children, and Mrs Woodman senior, that she became more or less their surrogate mother, while losing her own role as a mother to her own small babies. She only saw Arthur and Mabel twice a week, and then only for a few minutes in the morning. One of Lily's sisters became their 'mother', while Tai Po did the bulk of the childrearing. (Tse 2007, 136)

Helen references Lily's anxiety 'about what would happen to her children if she were not in Hong Kong to protect them'. She goes on to note that despite Lily knowing 'that her sisters and her mother would look after Arthur and Mabel well, and that she would see them when she travelled back to Hong Kong a handful of times every year, but that didn't calm Lily's nerves in the middle of the night – she found it hard to give up responsibility, having a mother's sense of obligation' (Tse 2007, 148). Sacrifice is for Lily a family responsibility, just as her father did when he first moved to Hong Kong on his own. Like Leung, Lily felt that leaving her children behind to continue her job would ensure that they were fed in Hong Kong and could eventually build their own lives in England. By putting an ocean between herself and her husband Chan, Lily resists the patriarchal culture that bound her to her husband regardless of his abusive behaviour as he became a cheater, gambler and drug user. As a migrant Chinese woman, she balanced her needs with those of others (S. L. Lim and Wieling 2004), negotiating between caring for her husband and children and caring for herself as a woman, mother and entrepreneur.

The current literature on female involvement in family business suggests that the family acts as an important driver for women entering into businesses through spousal support, family tradition and culture (Campopiano et al. 2017). More specifically, spouses can offer the emotional, psychological and/or practical support needed to start a businesses (Blenkinsopp, Owens, and Seaman 2010). But these findings are mainly drawn from studies in contemporary Western contexts. In the patriarchal context of the time, Lily was supported by her mother and sisters acting as carers to her children while she travelled to England in the 1950s. The Woodmans, too, offered her a place to stay and provided a lump sum for Lily to start her business.

Helen thus suggests that in different contexts and histories, other family members (and/or friends, investors) may act as advocates for the entrepreneur in the absence of spousal support. The former support may also act as a continuous reference point for the willingness to overcome the pain of personal sacrifices:

> She was grateful to the Woodmans and tried to put a brave face on things, telling them that yes, she had come to love their beautiful house and the gardens. In her heart of hearts she knew it had become a gilded cage for her, and she got no joy from realizing that her suite of rooms was as big as Tai Po's entire flat in Wan Chai where her children lived among the grubby strings of laundry and piles of rubbish. (Tse 2007, 168–169)

By resolving the tension between care for family and business through the transnational act of bringing her children to England, Lily reinvents her role as a mother and entrepreneur in a way that incorporates her entrepreneurial ambition into family responsibilities. From an early age, her children contributed to running the business by cleaning or waiting tables, in what Song (1995) reminds us is a Chinese family value:

> The two children had to grow up fast – they were in a new, foreign country and they were flung head first into the frantic atmosphere of the restaurant where their mother worked long hours and it seemed as though the world was at stake [. . .] Mabel feels she was made to work like an adult when she was still a child [. . .] In many ways Lily's childhood was merely considered to be a period of growth that marked the time until she was physically strong enough to work. She thought that it was a family's duty to work together and believed that you were never too young to do your bit. (Tse 2007, 199–200)

In blurring the lines between the roles ascribed to motherhood and entrepreneurship (Hamilton 2013b), the novel seems to remake these gender assumptions anew, by shaking the gendered discourse that positions female entrepreneurs in the realm of the home (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004a), to suggest that family legacy, gendered work and entrepreneurship work altogether to legitimize migrant Chinese women entrepreneurs place in business. Not only, we read the hopeful aspirations Lily engages with as feeding into an entrepreneurial imagination, combined with rich details of contexts (Czarniawska 2004) where crossing geographical, social and racial boundaries make entrepreneurship for a migrant Chinese woman possible.

This remaking of gendered relations questions the gender binary often reproduced in entrepreneurship literature, which positions women as struggling between family and business (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004a). Instead, we see from Helen's narratives in the family biography that migrant female entrepreneurs occupy different subject positions – as full-time carers and accomplished entrepreneurs – in what Pecis (2016) calls 'positions of displacement', signalling the fluidity and messiness of the doings and undoings of gender through entrepreneurial activities and the possibility to imagining different ways of being an entrepreneur, a mother, a daughter, and a migrant altogether.

Conclusions and implications for research and practice

Sweet Mandarin provides fertile terrain for exploring how gender and race intersect to creatively produce entrepreneurship within the family business context. Our work builds on ongoing efforts to illuminate the contributions of those often relegated to the margins of entrepreneurial and family business discourse (Hamilton 2006a; Marlow and Swail 2014; Villares-Varela and Essers 2019). In using a biography to understand entrepreneurship, we appreciate its focus on differences in textual interpretation (Gartner 2007; Vaara 2010). Our analysis of *Sweet Mandarin* is specific to an intersectional and feminist reading. We provide an understanding of entrepreneurship that reinforces the urgency to engage with the gendered and racialized dynamics of family businesses (Bruton et al, 2023). We make two contributions to current research on fiction and the entrepreneurial imagination.

First, in introducing an intersectionality lens to family business research, we identify three mechanisms that make migrant women's entrepreneurship possible (and through which migrant women gain legitimacy as entrepreneurs): *i) silently appropriating traditional assumptions of entrepreneurship*; *ii) associating family legacy to the entrepreneurial future*; and *iii) anchoring on a hopeful future to overcome temporary sacrifices*. More specifically, our analysis shows how masculine traits associated with successful entrepreneurship, which generally carry positive connotations for the economy and growth (Ahl 2006; Hamilton 2013a; Marlow and Swail 2014), also have a darker side. For migrant Chinese women entrepreneurs, we found tensions between caring for business and family heightened by their immigration status and culture background. These tensions cannot be resolved through a traditional balancing act (e.g. by creating work – life balance), but require trade-offs. These trade-offs are made between business and family and are affected by cultural values. The culture (of the Chinese community) intersects with gender specifically in a transnational context (e.g. Villares-Varela and Essers 2019). Despite the entrepreneurial success of the women in the book, they – and thus their families – suffered immensely from the conflicts that the trade-offs created. Current research on gender in family business is underpinned by a gendered and racialized understandings of entrepreneurial activity that positions women, and particularly migrant racialized

women, as struggling to manage both family and business (Mulholland 1996). We problematize such assumptions and draw on a transgenerational and transnational context to make visible the experiences of migrant women in family businesses (Nelson and Constantinidis 2017). More specifically, we challenge current family business literature that positions women in more invisible roles, as carers and supporters (Hamilton 2006b). Instead, we suggest that the entanglement of family legacy, migrant status, and gendered work can be used productively by these women, albeit its drawbacks. Chinese women's resistance is halted by a patriarchy that is inevitably intersectional by way of gender, age, and generation (Yifei 2011). This patriarchy attributes authority and autocracy to the males in the household, with the husband exerting control over his spouse (including dominance over her work, reproductive ability, and sexuality). In our analysis, we show how these transnational spaces can act as arenas of resistance in relation to both patriarchal structures and financial dependence. Through an intersectionality lens (Crenshaw 1991) coupled with Chinese feminism (Lin, Liu, and Jin 1998; Z. Liu and Dahling 2016), conflicts between institutional and cultural pressures along with personal motivations emerged as an interesting 'enabler' of entrepreneurship. Here, resistance to cultural norms around the position of Chinese women enabled the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities. To support an understanding of (migrant) women entrepreneurs as a resource in entrepreneurial households (Marlow and Dy 2017), future research could focus on further illuminating the impacts of the gendered and racialized contemporary discourses (Bruton et al 2023) on entrepreneurial activity in family businesses. In particular, entrepreneurship research can draw on historical studies of the entrepreneurial activities of (migrant) women entrepreneurs to show how cultural (the different loci shaping the entrepreneur and their sense of entrepreneurial action) and institutional (barriers to and structural issues faced by non-native entrepreneurs) dimensions can come together to enable or halt the flourishing of entrepreneurship. We argue this can be done through theoretical lenses (intersectionality, postcolonial and feminist studies) that are attentive and appreciative of the nuances of entrepreneurship. Such lenses can change the way we study and practice entrepreneurship in a way that makes visible the contributions of marginalized communities and that reveal the different ways of doing (as a force for moving forward) and understanding (non-masculine and non-white) entrepreneurship.

Second, we contribute to recent calls to capture hidden family dynamics in new and creative ways (see, e.g. Nordqvist and Gartner 2020) through the mobilization of narratives, especially (auto) biographical ones. These, we showed, contain details of past events, life stories, and family dynamics that can provide important insights for family business decision-making, which are less observable through traditional qualitative investigation (e.g. Hjorth and Dawson 2016; Ge, De Massis, and Kotlar 2022; Ge et al. 2024). Biography, an important contemporary genre where readers step into the rich context of when decisions were made (Czarniawska 2004), is common among entrepreneurs and family businesses, but is much less used in researching entrepreneurship (Gartner 2010). We showed that biography is a powerful tool that produces space for entrepreneurial imagination for migrant women's entrepreneurship. In appreciating the intentionality of the narratives rather than facts (Gartner 2007; Savage, Cornelissen, and Franck 2018), the biography offered rich insights into the contradictions between the traditional and entrepreneurial roles of migrant women, and particularly the tensions between the family and the business that the main protagonists had experienced. The format also captured emotions in the entrepreneurial journeys, something that is not always accessible through other forms of enquiry. For example, the detailed description of Lily's difficulties when she had to give up her fourth child is a recollection of memories that circulated within the family and that the author (Helen) has decided to share. Literature on narratives suggests that identities 'are constituted through processes of narration' (Rhodes and Brown 2005, 176 in; Saylors et al. 2021; Suddaby, Schultz, and Israelsen 2020) and that life stories fit into a larger narrative (Czarniawska 2004). This narration is crucial to the making (and re-making) of Helen's (and the other women in the book) identity. Helen stated that 'Her [Lily's] story is my story' (p.I, Tse 2007), and in doing so it connects a complex past with current and future roles (of a Chinese-British woman and family business entrepreneur) where family dynamics intersect with gender and race in the crossing

of transnational spaces. Our study shows the power of memories collected through biographies and fiction in shaping imagined past and futures, and how the two are inevitably interwoven. Future research could further explore how memories in literary genres are narrated in a strategic way to re-construct less desired pasts towards a more desirable future.

To conclude, we chose this specific text (written by a Chinese British-born entrepreneur from a family business background) for the imaginative power of fictions and biographies created by entrepreneurs (Gartner 2004). The reader is often compelled to draw parallels and relate to one or some of the characters, albeit the striking differences that there might be. Sweet Mandarin resonated to us authors on several levels, despite the historical and contextual differences that mark our lives as incomparable with those of the protagonists. The text spoke to us distinctively as mothers (in our often-failing attempts to reconcile work and personal lives and the sacrifices these entail), as migrants (living and working in another country than the one of birth), and as daughters with entrepreneurial family histories. The text thus was both able to 'give voice to the uniqueness that is every person's experience, as well as to connect each story to our common humanity' (Gartner 2004, 254). The text engaged us as researchers in a form of self-reflection that moved us towards highlighting specific elements of the text to produce the narrative discussed here. We suggest future research can take advantage of the uniqueness and yet resonating elements of fiction to explore entrepreneurship dimensions that might remain otherwise uncovered, but that can speak to our common humanity.

Notes

1. For the purpose of this paper, we use the terms stories and narratives interchangeably. We nonetheless acknowledge the discussion around differences between the two terms, notably on 'whether all stories are narratives or whether all narratives are stories, and any number of other conundrums that scholars in this field can quickly mire themselves in' (Gartner 2007, 616).
2. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with this variety of feminisms, we acknowledge that feminist approaches such as *nuquan zhuyi* engage with a more balanced approach to feminist philosophies compared with their Western counterparts (see Lin, Liu, and Jin 1998; Z. Liu and Dahling 2016).
3. Z. Liu and Dahling (2016) exemplify the dangers of challenging the oppression of women's voices: when Chinese feminist activists initiated discourse against misogyny and patriarchy more vocally at the 2015 Spring Gala, their concerns were dismissed and some were arrested for public disorder.
4. Chan (2023, 445–6) notes that the term *amah* has different origins: 'The Portuguese word, *ama*, means "nurse" and denotes a nursemaid or maidservant. The Anglicized form of the Chinese term, *ah mah*, means "little mother", whereas *nai mah*, literally, "milk mother", refers to a wet nurse. Chinese household workers of the past were referred to as *ma jie*, literally, "mother" and "older sister" (as a form of respect)'. In this paper, *amah* denotes a maid, a female migrant domestic servant, who arrived in colonial Hong Kong in the 1930s and replaced Chinese men as household servants of choice as they worked for half men's wages. Although the term seems to suggest a lack of agency, we argue that this role enabled first-generation women to break out of the gender-culture trap through exposure to how other (non-peasant) Westernized families of privilege lived and thought.
5. Actions and events that were not narrated as directly affecting Lily's own entrepreneurial experience, such as recollections of racism that Lily and her children faced when moving from Hong Kong to the UK, were not included.
6. Work in the silk industry had been traditionally carried out by women and children during China's economic growth (1918–1931).
7. We use squares to represent men and circles to represent women. The entrepreneurs in the family are identified in yellow.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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ORCID

Lara Pecis http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2590-8942
Bingbing Ge http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8031-1188

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