

**Reverse entrepreneurship and integration in poor areas of China: Case studies of
tourism entrepreneurship in Ganzi Tibetan Region of Sichuan**

ABSTRACT

In the context of urbanisation and the decline of the countryside, reverse entrepreneurship cannot be separated from integration, referring to a process of mutual trust and cooperation between reverse (returnee or immigrant from urban areas) entrepreneur, host community and external stakeholders for sustainable livelihoods. With a geographic focus on poor areas of China, this paper aims to reveal key factors behind successful initiatives of reverse entrepreneurship to address challenges facing local communities, and pathways for mobilising and effectively using various resources, both internally and externally. These objectives are addressed through multiple cases of tourism development in Ganzi, a Tibetan Minority Prefecture of Sichuan. This paper contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial integration to debates on reverse entrepreneurship in three aspects. Firstly, entrepreneurial integration starts from social embeddedness, interconnecting and interacting between reverse entrepreneur(s) and the host community to understand local challenges and share a new vision for sustainable livelihoods. Secondly, entrepreneurial integration is essentially an innovation platform to develop or enhance social capital (both bonding and bridging) for mobilising and effective use of critical resources. Finally, the study outlines five pathways of tourism entrepreneurship, which reflects variations in livelihood strategy, critical capitals, business models, innovation diffusion and application potential.

Key Words: reverse entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial integration, tourism development, poor areas of China, case studies.

1. Introduction:

Rapid and wide scale urbanisation in China has had a profound impact on its countryside, causing large-scale outflows of financial capital, labour and talent from rural to urban areas (Ye and Flemming, 2009; Hualou et al., 2016; Li, et al., 2021). According to official statistics, urbanisation rates increased from 38% in 2000 to 60% in 2019 and “rural migrant workers” reached 290 million (CPGPRC, 2020). The impact of rural-urban migration and brain drain in particular is more severe in the poorest areas characterised by geographic remoteness, high mountains, complex climate and resource conditions, poor economic performance and infrastructure development, low education and social welfare, all of which add constraints for rural development (Wu et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021).

To cope with the challenges of rural decline and rural poverty in particular, the Chinese government launched a national campaign; “targeted poverty alleviation” (TPA) between 2014 to 2020 to mobilise resources from all sectors (government agencies, industrial companies, non-government organisations) and geographic locations (including big municipals and cities in east coast region) to address these issues (Li, Y et al., 2016; Li, L et al., 2019; Zeng, 2020). With an emphasis on “industrial poverty alleviation”, i.e. accelerating development of local pillar industries/products/services for poverty alleviation, rural tourism was identified as an important aspect of the campaign (Feng et al., 2018; Liang and Bao, 2019).

The literature on the poverty alleviation strategy falls into three aspects: roles of government intervention (Li, Y et al., 2016; Li, L et al., 2019; Zeng, 2020); external participation from enterprises and social organisations (Leong, et al., 2016; Ye and He, 2020); pro-poor industrial, product or service development, e.g. rural tourism, particular technology,

education and training e.g. e-commerce (Li, L et al., 2016; Leong et al., 2016; Feng et al, 2018; Liang and Bao, 2019).

Given the shortages of talent in poor, rural areas of China, external intervention or participation for poverty alleviation might not be sustainable without reverse entrepreneurship (Fanxiang/Nixiang Yimin Cuangye in Chinese 反向或逆向移民创业), a process of entrepreneurship made by either returnees or new migrants from urban areas, who resettle and establish businesses in rural areas. Compared with the overwhelming attention paid to return migration and entrepreneurship in other locations of China, we know little about the reverse entrepreneurship in poor areas and its contribution to poverty alleviation. This paper attempts to address this lacuna by applying a lens of entrepreneurial integration to understand the relationship between reverse entrepreneurs, host communities and multiple stakeholders for sustainable livelihoods.

Viewing entrepreneurial integration as a process of innovation platform building for the participation of local people and external stakeholders, the paper aims to understand the conditions and pathways underpinning successful reverse entrepreneurship and its impact on rural revitalisation and sustainability in poor areas of China. Based on multiple case studies of rural tourism development in Ganzi, a Tibetan Region of Sichuan with high levels of relative poverty, in particular, this paper intends to address following questions: 1) what are key factors behind successful reverse entrepreneurship in addressing challenges facing local communities? 2) How does reverse entrepreneur mobilise and effectively use various resources, both internally and externally, for community participation and sustainable livelihoods?

This paper contributes to the debates of reverse entrepreneurship for rural development . Firstly, it provides insight into the importance of entrepreneurial integration for local participation and the interface with external intervention for sustainable livelihoods in poor

areas of China. Secondly, it reveals key factors behind entrepreneurial integration for multiple participation and the effective use of resources and opportunities, both internally and externally. Thirdly, based upon comparative case analysis, this paper highlights variations of tourism entrepreneurship in terms of resource endorsement, development vision, social capital, business model, and application potential to draw out practical implications.

2. Literature Review

In the context of urbanisation and rural decline, reverse entrepreneurship and integration is a complicated and multidimensional phenomenon. Relevant literature is reviewed from three aspects: rural restructuring and reverse entrepreneurship, sustainable livelihoods for poverty alleviation, innovation platform and social embedment.

2.1 Rural restructuring and reverse entrepreneurship

In the 21st century, rural development cannot be separated from globalisation and urbanisation, resulting in a relocation of various resources (financial, labour, talents and other capitals) across geographical, sectoral, regional and national boundaries (Ashley and Marwell, 2001; Adisa, 2012; Long et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018). In this sense, rural development and revitalisation can be viewed as a process of rural restructuring to cope with the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities. According to Woods (2009), rural restructuring is a process of “the reshaping of social and economic structures in rural areas during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century produced by various, interconnected processes of change including the declining economic significance of agriculture, the rise of the service sector, urban to rural migration, and so on” (Woods, 2009).

Rural restructuring consists of three dimensions: 1) spatial restructuring (rural production, living and ecological spaces); 2) economic restructuring, (employment, land use mode, economic structure), 3) social restructuring (farmers’ organisation and community

building) (Long and Liu 2016). Among many factors or conditions of successful rural restructuring, human and social capital are vital to cope with the changes brought about by outward migration of skills and the fragmentation of rural communities (Wu and Liu, 2020; Wu and Liu, 2022), and to “support the entrepreneurship in new activities with access to credits, labour, human capital, external markets and external knowledge for learning and innovation” (Li, et al., 2019:135).

Rural restructuring is interwoven with rural entrepreneurship, which refers to “the creation of a new organization that introduces a new product, serves or creates a new market, or utilises a new technology in a rural environment” (Wortman, 1990:300). In the context of rural decline, rural revitalisation involves the reverse flows of resources (financial, capital, talent and other capitals) in which reverse entrepreneurship is a predominant type of rural entrepreneurship. We define the term *reverse entrepreneurship* here as rural entrepreneurship initiated by either returnee or immigrant entrepreneur(s) to exploit opportunities afforded by rural restructuring through relocating, interconnecting and intermediating various resources, internally and externally, leading to a series of changes towards new technological (or production, service), marketing and organisational systems for sustainable livelihoods in rural communities. This definition positions the nature of reverse entrepreneurship as multidimensional (technological, economic and organisational innovation), multi-level (spatial, economic and social), multiple sources (internally and externally), and no less importantly, includes participation and contribution from local communities and external stakeholders to develop sustainable livelihoods.

Bearing in mind this multidimensional nature, there is an increasing literature on reverse entrepreneurship focusing on economic restructuring (Ma, 2002; Skuras et al., 2005; Woods, 2005; Murph, 2010; Korsgaard et al., 2015, Batista et al., 2017; Koyana and Mason, 2017; Deller et al., 2019). Often labelled returnee entrepreneurship, this literature has largely focused on

migrants who return from overseas to emerging economies and begin ventures in high-tech industries (Ma et al., 2019). This stream of literature discusses how social ties (Pruthi, 2014), knowledge transfer (Lin et al., 2016), international networks and entrepreneurial orientation (Dai and Liu, 2009), venture resources, and overseas experience (Qin et al., 2017) affect returnees' entrepreneurial activities. Scholars have also examined the benefits that returnee entrepreneurs bring to emerging economies (e.g., Kenney et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2010).

Tourism entrepreneurial migration to rural areas has drawn academic interest (Madanaguli et al., 2021; Snepenger et al., 1995). For example, researchers have explored the role of in-migrant entrepreneurship in the rural tourism economy of Northumberland, UK (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). Others have examined the features and motives of tourism entrepreneurs who migrated to rural areas in Norway (Iversen and Jacobsen, 2016). Still others have investigated organizational outcomes of Chinese inward entrepreneurial migrants to rural tourism destinations (Xiong et al., 2020).

By contrast, fewer studies have focused on how reverse entrepreneurs, both returnees and immigrants, initiate and contribute to social restructuring to enhance bonding social capital (trust, identity and reciprocity) for community participation and benefit from the project, a key of social restructuring for community building in rural revitalisation (Wu and Liu, 2020).

2.2 Sustainable livelihoods for poverty alleviation

In the context of rural decline and restructuring, the most salient challenge in less-developed areas is the large flows of rural-urban migration, brain drains, associated with the fragmentation of families and communities in rural areas (Buckley et al., 2020). This results in "poverty traps" caused by multiple factors, including: cross-scale interactions, path dependencies, external factors, and social-ecological diversity (Haider et al., 2018).

Breaking poverty traps in those areas requires identification, demonstration and dissemination of alternative livelihoods for local people. Depending largely upon external initiative and inputs, reverse entrepreneurship plays an important role in mobilising and coordinating various resources (nature, financial, physical, human, social) and opportunities, both internally and externally, for sustainable livelihoods. In this sense, the sustainable livelihoods framework provides a useful lens to understand reverse entrepreneurship as interconnecting between livelihood resources (or capitals/assets), strategies (new technology, production, service or non-farm employment) and outcomes (DFID, 1999, Scoones, 2009).

Along the lines of sustainable livelihoods, many researchers identify rural entrepreneurship as creating rural enterprises that employ local people, utilise local resources and generate income for the overall rural development (McElwee and Smith, 2014). Some researchers have found that return entrepreneurs are more likely to have good basis for both human capital and social capital within the rural communities (Temple, 2001; Ma, 2002; Deller et al., 2019).

Reverse entrepreneurship, often facilitated by the tourism industry, is considered as positive, restoring family opportunities within rural communities (Feng et al., 2018; Liang and Bao, 2019). The importance of reverse entrepreneurship for sustainable livelihoods in poorer areas has attracted increasing attention as such movement brings new investments, entrepreneurial talents, experience, market knowledge and capitals for enhancing the overall income (Stathopoulou et al, 2004; Deller et al., 2019; Koyana and Mason, 2017).

Reverse entrepreneurs in poor areas are key concerns for analysts and policy makers in China (Murphy, 2010). Much research and policy has argued that entrepreneurship should be emphasised within rural economic development strategy (Drabenstott, 2001; Dabson, 2007; Olfert and Partridge, 2010; Lyons, 2015). Existing studies have identified challenges that return

entrepreneurship faces in poor areas. For example, the smallness and remoteness of the rural area could make difficulties in creating economies of scale (Koyana and Mason, 2017).

Given the complexity and multiple constraints in poor areas, there is a knowledge gap about the conditions of successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship.

2.3 Innovation platform and social embeddedness

Reverse entrepreneurship may not be successful without external participation or support to mobilise various resources or capital assets towards a reverse flow from advanced to disadvantaged regions and from urban to rural areas. In this regard, an innovation platform (IP) is vital for reverse entrepreneurs to bring together local community and external stakeholders (government agencies, development professionals, agribusiness companies, traders and investors, NGOs, etc) for rural innovation and poverty alleviation.

By comparing the formation and functioning of such platforms in livestock value chains in India and Mozambique, Swaans et al. (2014) find the vital role of innovation brokers in facilitating the innovation through innovation bundles (combinations of technological, organisational and institutional innovations), reflective learning (systematically challenging and constraining factors), and process. Along the same vein, Zhang and Wu (2018) identify the special role of Chinese government at local level in creating and maintaining an innovation platform for farmers to gain access to and better use of public or private resources for the development and dissemination of a green technology. Without government participation and support, they argue that it would be difficult for grassroot entrepreneurs to overcome many constraints in terms of knowledge, resources and networking with external stakeholders. (Zhang and Wu, 2018: 706)

With a focus on poverty alleviation in rural China, Li, et al. (2016) construct a model of government-led e-commerce ecosystem to reveal specific position and contribution from

different stakeholders. Additionally, Leong et al. (2016) draws attention to community driven development through a perspective of digital empowerment for a self-organising e-commerce ecosystem.

While innovation platforms are important for external stakeholders' participation in rural entrepreneurship, the question is raised of how reverse entrepreneurs can initiate a process of platform building and ensure the local community can participate in and share benefits from the platform. In this regard, social embeddedness perspective provides valuable insight. According to Jack and Anderson (2002: 468), entrepreneurial embeddedness involves "understanding the nature of the structure, enacting or re-enacting this structure which forges new ties, and maintaining both the links and structure". With regard to gaining and acquiring local knowledge, the embeddedness creates opportunities "which exist within the local structure but only become manifest by the action of embedded entrepreneurial agency". (ibid: 469). As a result, entrepreneurial embedding "creates a link between the economic and the social spheres" (ibid: 469).

In the context of reverse entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in the global south, social embeddedness is very important because "it helps the entrepreneur identify social resources, an essential step to founding organisation" (Hansen, 1996; Jack and Anderson, 2002: 471). In that context, Peredo and Chrisman (2006) introduce the concept of community-based enterprise (CBE) in which all individuals forming the community act as an entrepreneur, and such enterprise is "typically rooted in community culture, natural and social capital are integral and inseparable from economic considerations" (Peredo & Chrisman, p. 309). Along similar lines, Ye and He (2020) illustrate how mutual trust and participation between the rural poor and the urban population led to a successful process of sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation.

With respect to entrepreneurial mechanisms for sustaining communities (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2010: 140), Mckeever et al. (2015) suggest embedded entrepreneurship through engagement with place and community could address challenging issues facing depleted communities in which “social bonds and an affinity to community enable entrepreneurship to create, renew and reify a positive identity of place by combining understanding with entrepreneurial purpose”. Zhang (2015: 391) suggests the relationship between entrepreneurship, context, and trust: “a low-trust environment restricts market entry and enterprise growth, and encourages unproductive and parasitic entrepreneurship”.

In summary, reverse entrepreneurship in poor, rural areas can be understood as a process of innovation platform building made by reverse entrepreneurs for alternative livelihoods with twin aspects: multiple stakeholders’ participation with external resources and opportunities on the one hand, and an entrepreneurial embeddedness to learn from, adapt to, and then mobilise a host community to participate and contribute internal resources on the other. Bringing together two perspectives, knowledge gaps emerge for reverse entrepreneurship in poor areas: 1) what are key factors contributing to innovation platform building for successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship? 2) How is entrepreneurial embeddedness and innovation platform development interconnected and linked to host community participation and effective use of resources and opportunities, both internally and externally?

3. Context, conceptual framework and research design

3.1 Chinese context

In the context of China, rural development faces challenges from rural decline, referring to a process of the outflows of capital, labour, talents, land, and financial resources from rural to urban areas. This process results in increasing development gaps and income inequality

between east and west regions, urban and rural areas, and rich and poor communities in particular (Liu, et al., 2010; Ye, 2009; Li, et al., 2016; Long, et al. 2016).

In response, the Chinese government's "targeted poverty alleviation" (TPA) programme is designed to accelerate rural economic development in remote and marginal areas of West China, and ensure an end to rural poverty. As a political commitment and the top priority of national development, all of government agencies across China have involved the TPA through various ways to mobilise all sectors (public, private and non-government), enterprises (state-owned and private ones) and resources (finance, technology and personnel) to offer their support to the targeted households, villages in poorer counties. In practice, some 832 counties and 128,000 villages have been targeted by the TPA strategy, involving 56.3 million people in 2015, most of which are located in poor areas featured by remoteness, mountainous topography and ethnic minority crowded population. The TPA strategy has offered a unique opportunity to remove the constraints from rural development (e.g. infrastructure, shortage of talent, access to financial, technology and information resources) on the one hand, and accelerate the development of local pillar industries, products or services for external markets on the other. For the latter, rural tourism has been recognised as the most effective measure for the TPA in tourism potential areas.

The Chinese government identified 6,000 poverty-stricken villages to carry out rural tourism, which covered 12 million poor people, or 17% of the rural poor nationwide (CPGPRC, 2014). A series of favourable policies have been issued to facilitate rural tourism development, including: infrastructure development, regional tourism planning, paired assistance between advanced and poor areas, tourism entrepreneurship and leadership training courses, etc. While there is a trend of increasing reverse migration for entrepreneurship which has reached to 7.8 million nationwide by 2018 (NPC, 2019), we know little about the conditions of successful

initiative of their projects, as well as their contribution to rural development, including poverty alleviation in poor areas.

3.2 A concept of entrepreneurial integration for research design

With a focus on reverse entrepreneurship, we propose a concept of entrepreneurial integration to understand the process of entrepreneurial embeddedness, components of innovation platforms and their function in facilitating community participation and interfaces with external resources and opportunities. Accordingly, we define *entrepreneurial integration* as a process of interconnection, mutual trust and cooperation between reverse entrepreneur(s), host community and external stakeholders to address the challenges facing the local community through mobilising and effectively using resources and opportunities, internally and externally, for sustainable livelihoods. This definition contains key elements:

- *New vision* indicates a new or alternative livelihood strategy to cope with challenges facing local community, to mobilise multiple participation, internally and externally;
- *Critical resources* include new knowledge, technologies, skills, financial and human capitals from multiple sources which match with new livelihood strategy;
- *Social capital* refers to mutual trust and collaboration between reverse entrepreneur(s), local community and external stakeholders (e.g. government agencies, agribusiness companies, traders and investors, NGOs) who share the vision, interests for joint action;
- *Business model*: a package of business objectives, products or services designed for the targeted customers, and coordination between multiple stakeholders (local and external people) to deliver business plan in effective and sustainable ways.

The concept of entrepreneurial integration provides a foundation for us to design an empirical approach to reveal the process, performance and impact of reverse

entrepreneurship, which can be divided into four parts for the purpose of data collection and analysis:

- 1) Entrepreneurship initiative and new vision to reveal challenges, opportunities and livelihood strategies taken by reverse entrepreneur(s);
- 2) Entrepreneurial integration for multiple participation to understand how reverse entrepreneur(s) builds mutual trust with local and external partners to share visions, common interests and action plan;
- 3) Business model for sustainable livelihoods to outline key elements of business plan for multiple participation and distribution of benefits from project;
- 4) Innovation diffusion and sustainability to reflect consequences and social impact of reverse entrepreneurship contributing to rural revitalisation in wider community.

3.3 Research Site: Sichuan and Ganzi Tibetan Prefecture

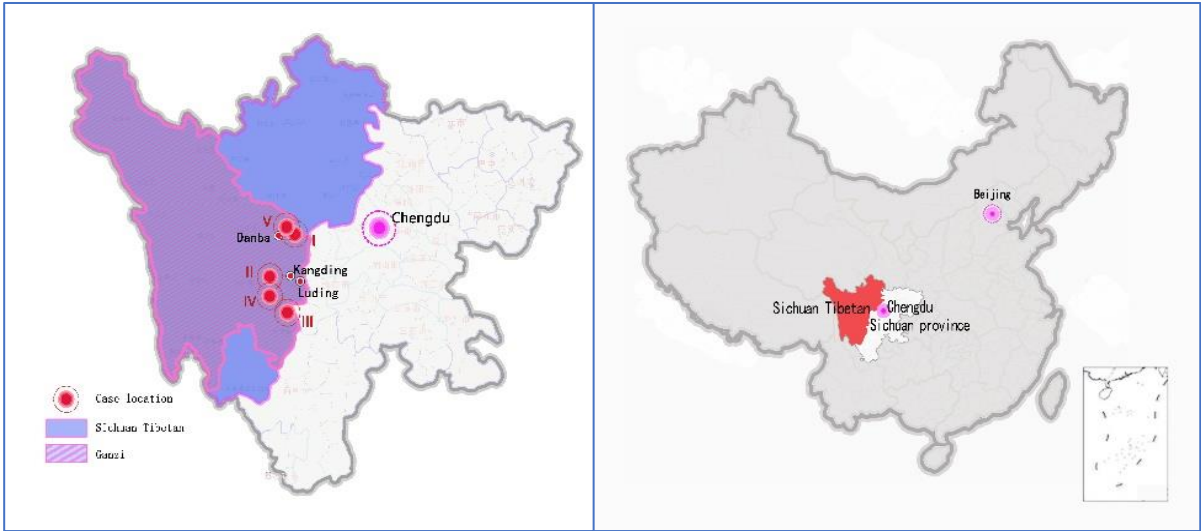
Empirical research was located in Sichuan, one of largest provinces in terms of land and population in China, with land area of 486,000 KM² and population of 83.75 million (2019), of which 38.701 million are recognised as rural population. We chose Sichuan for case studies due to following considerations. Firstly, Sichuan is one of most complicated regions in terms of geographic, cultural and rural development in China. For instance, 85% of its territory is covered by mountains/hills. In addition, Sichuan is a major location of 26 ethnic nationalities, which share 4.3% of China's ethnic minority population (2010). Thus, Sichuan can represent Southwest China in terms of rural development.

Secondly, Sichuan province is a major location of the rural poor in China. By the end of 2013, there were 6.25 million people in the region classified as rural poor, accounting for 7% of rural poor in the national total. Among them, the Tibetan region of Sichuan (comprised by two Prefectures, Ganzi and Aba) share 51.49% of the province's land and 2.4% of its population,

but 5.76% of the province's rural poor. So Tibetan areas of Sichuan have been listed as a core battle-field in the national TPA strategy.

Thirdly, Sichuan is rich in terms of rural tourism resource and potential, which was ranked among the top four of rural tourism destinations nationwide (CASS, 2016). This is particularly true for its regions comprised by three Ethnic Minority Prefectures: Liangshan Yi plus Two Tibetan (Ganzi and Aba), which have been increasingly attractive to urban tourists due to its unique landscape, cultural and historical factors plus the TPA strategy. Among three areas, Ganzi is a leading position due to its geographic location (the entrance of the national road to Tibetan Automatic Region), advance in rural tourism development. For instance, Ganzi Prefecture received more than 100 million tourists in 2017, accounting for one-fifth of the total number of tourists in the province. Therefore, Ganzi can represent the regional characteristics needed for this research.

Figure 1 Locations of Sichuan, Tibetan Areas and Ganzi Prefecture



Ganzi is located in the southwest of Sichuan, with land area of 153,000 KM², the largest Prefecture in Sichuan. There are about 1 million Tibetan people, accounting 82% of Ganzi's

population. Ganzi is one of the most poverty-stricken areas in China, with 1,360 poor villages, 51,775 households and 220,289 people recognised as targets of the TPA strategy.

Ganzi is the home of Kangba culture, a branch of Tibetan culture, and its folk customs, music and history are very popular and attractive in tourism market across China. The attractiveness of Kangba culture is enhanced by its beautiful natural scenery and unique tourism resources, including: snow-capped mountains, grasslands, glaciers, hot springs, forests, and more.

Having recognised the importance of rural tourism for local economic growth and poverty alleviation and environmental protection, the Ganzi government has defined rural tourism as top-priority and leading pillar industry since 2013. A serious effort has been made to mobilise Tibetan people in participating in rural tourism development and changing their attitudes and production styles, which were heavily dependent on traditional agriculture and grazing in the past. In return, more than 200,000 farmers and herdsmen involve rural tourism directly or indirectly, which contributed 85,000 jobs and 15,000 people out of poverty, and a drop of the poverty rate from 23.17% in 2013 to 3.52% in 2018 (PGGTAP, 2019).

3.4 Case study methodology

Given that reverse entrepreneurship in poor areas is a novel phenomenon in rural China, a qualitative research through a series of field visits, observations and interviews with entrepreneurs and key informants was deployed. Taking into account the complexity of Ganzi (mountainous, Tibetan culture and poverty stricken), diversity of reverse entrepreneurship in terms of motivation and resource endorsement, furthermore, multiple cases studies are necessary to reveal different pathways of entrepreneurial initiative and integration.

In terms of data collection and sampling, we adopted the following process. Firstly, we collected good practices of reverse entrepreneurship in tourism development through online

media reports, calls for contributions from our social contacts, and literature searches. Secondly, we distinguished collected cases into different types according to challenging issues, geographic location, and pathways of entrepreneurship. Thirdly, we developed an information table to examine the coverage of information and the access to conduct interviews with entrepreneurs and key informants.

The following criteria were adopted in screening and selecting cases: 1) representativeness of entrepreneurship in terms of both address challenges facing local communities and also typology of reverse entrepreneurs (e.g. return and immigrant entrepreneurs); 2) initiatives by reverse entrepreneurs (excluding government-led projects); 3) community participation and benefits (excluding external investment and external benefit projects); 4) geographic representativeness: among 18 counties of Ganzi, three zones can be distinguished. For each zone one county in rural tourism development is selected (Kangding, Danba and Luding); 5) gender and ethnic factors. Table 1 summarizes the basic information for the five selected cases. Two types of reverse entrepreneurship were selected: return entrepreneurship (4 cases) and immigrant entrepreneurship (1 case, Ms. Liu) for the comparison of similarities and differences between two types of reverse entrepreneurship and integration.

Table 1 Description of sample entrepreneurs

Item \ Case	I	II	III	IV	V
Entrepreneur	LIU X	Gongbu	Abu	MU pengcuo	Deji
Theme	Social innovation	Ethnicity	Rurality	Transformation	Higher standard
Reverse type	Immigrant	Returnee	Returnee	Returnee	Returnee
Ethnic/Gender	Han, F	Tibetan, M	Han, M	Tibetan, M	Tibetan, F
Startup time	2015	2012	2014	2017	2018
County/City	Danba	Kangding	Luding	Kangding	Danba

In practice, case studies started from a process of the collection and review of secondary information about selected entrepreneurs, ending at a list of key questions sent to individual interviewees respectively in advance. Due to the constraints from the Covid-19 Pandemic, four out of five interviews were conducted online around one hour and Mandarin Chinese was

adopted. All of interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded/recorded according to the framework in Figure 1. A follow-up interview, and field visit if possible, was taken for each case to learn the voices and comments from their business partners, employees, community members and government officers.

Following the integration framework shown in Section 3.2, data analysis started from a narrative employed to all of cases to cover key information (e.g. personal background, motivation, challenges and solutions, investment and team work, business model and local participation, etc), and understand their visions and pathways of entrepreneurship to cope with challenging issues facing local communities. This was followed by case comparison to reveal similarities and differences according to entrepreneurial initiatives, innovation platform, diffusion and sustainability.

4. Results

4.1 Entrepreneurial initiatives and new visions

All of five cases share some common features in preparing and initiating their projects in local communities. Firstly, all of entrepreneurs have had higher education and experience living in urban areas for many years. Different from other four cases of return migration for the entrepreneurship in their home communities, Ms Liu (Case 1), was born in Beijing and her home is in Shanghai.

Secondly, before their project initiatives in the villages, all entrepreneurs had relevant knowledge, skills and working experience through different channels: international training courses (in USA) and rural development planning in west China (Case 1); serving as a tourism guider for both international (to Nepal, Case 2) and domestic routes (Case 3, Case 4), and internship as rural tourism manager in Zhejiang (Case 5).

Thirdly, it is commonly consideration or emphasis on the nature of community's participation of their projects to cope with challenges facing local tourism development. Two outstanding issues emerge from our interviews: the predomination of external capital in many tourism projects which ignore voices and needs of local people; lacking of Tibetan cultural element in project design and implementation for local people's participation except cheap labour. The former can be illustrated from a quote below:

“Having spent seven months on rural investigation in this County, we found lacking of local participation in rural tourist development is a common issue in many rural tourist projects here which should be responsible for the tension between local communities and external investment companies. As a result, the investment company concentrates on the collection of administration fees from external tourists while local households do nothing but shut their doors” (Case 1).

For the latter , Mr. Gongbu in Case 2 suggest that the motivation of their (four entrepreneurs) return was related to the domination and exclusion of external invested projects in his home community, leading to marginalisation and fragmentation of local community. Here is his quote:

“The scenery here is amazing which attracts about 30,000 to 40,000 tourists each year. There were only 7-8 inns run by locals themselves, the remaining 60/70 owned by outsiders who recruit staff from outside while purchase materials from other places as well. These hotels can provide standard catering and accommodation services which are not much differences from their counterparts in urban areas. [Before our firm set-up], furthermore, there was no a platform that can provide comprehensive information and services for customers to cover snowy mountains, rich grasslands, local (Muya)

Tibetan culture, and so on. As a result, tourism sector could not make more contributions to poverty alleviation and the development of local community". (Case 2)

Fourthly, to cope with above challenges, all of entrepreneurs share a common view about inclusive development for better use of local resources. However, different entrepreneurs offer different visions of rural tourism development for local participation and gain benefits from their projects.

- Ms. Liu and her husband decided to invest ten million yuan RMB to establish a Yunhe Centre (YHC thereafter), a social enterprise and community centre in Danba, with the vision and mission of sustainable environment protection and community development through a series of environmental education courses for the international and domestic students, and training courses for local entrepreneurs and community members. (Case 1)
- Mr. Gongbu and his three partners (all Tibetan returnees) decided to build the GGZ Manor in their hometown by joint investment of over 5 million yuan RMB through their personal savings plus borrowing from others to promote Tibetan culture, offer employment and training opportunities for local people, and service as an information centre to promote local tourism products and services. (Case 2)
- Mr. Abu started to build the first tourist house in his home village through his own investment of 500,000 yuan, which offers customers about adventure spirit, peaceful environment, and space to develop their imagination for the harmony between nature and human being. To achieve this goal, he has changed not only his own Han Chinese name to current name standing an ethnic minority member, but also the name of the location of his guest house from the original "Boar Hill" to the now elegant "Ruoding Mountain." (Case 3)
- After three year preparation, Mr. MU decided to quit his governmental job to open the first guest house, namely DG Inn with eight rooms in his village to demonstrate the

feasibility and development potential of rural tourism as an alternative source of livelihoods for poverty alleviation. (Case 4)

- Deji, a native Tibetan woman born in a family of the first guest house in the village, had a different view from her father in terms of the service quality and standard. It was her dream to open a Tibetan Palace in the village with a high end of service standard. With a joint investment of 5 million yuan investment, she returned home to build her “Deji Palace” for the high end of customers in rural tourism market.

4.2 Entrepreneurial integration for multiple participation

The entrepreneurial initiatives are hardly successful without the participation and support from local communities and relevant stakeholders. In this regard, entrepreneurial initiative is process of interconnection, interaction, and integration of entrepreneur(s) in local community. A number of observations and research findings can be drawn from five cases.

Firstly, all of cases are located in tourism resource rich areas in terms of natural scenery, infrastructure development, reputation of local history and culture, etc. For instance, GGZ Manor (Case 2) is located in the entrance of national road of No. 318 from Sichuan to Tibet Region, with a long history of Tibetan culture, rich tourism resources (e.g. Grassland, Snow Mountains) and reputation recognised as "photography paradise". Different from established tourism sites, “Ruoding Mountains” brand created by Mr. Abu (Case 3) is no far away from a national tourism attractiveness (5A HLG Scenic Spot) but was not tourism business at all before Abu came back.

Secondly, all of cases are located in the areas where rural tourism had been planned/prioritised by local governments as a key industry (called as “local pillar industries”) to develop despite no funding support directly. For instance, Ms. Liu (Case 1) was invited by local government to conduct a local tourism development planning before she decided to invest

the YHC here. Since his “DG Inn” opened, Mr. MU (Case 4) has become a “star” promoted by many public medias and recognised by local government as “model of reverse entrepreneurship”.

Thirdly, the entrepreneurial initiative can be viewed as a process of social embedment which allows local people to trust and share the vision with entrepreneurs, an important condition for local participation and support. In reality, it is never easy unless entrepreneurs show their commitment, long term perspective and sometimes extra investment on “mutual trust”. To overcome above barrier for instance, Ms Liu (Case 1) offered opportunities for local residents to participate in design and refabricating an abandoned Tibetan building as YHC although it costed more (up to 50%) time and financial budget. In addition, she promised to transfer the property to the village community after 10 years running. All of above measures were helpful for local people to develop ownership, mutual trust and long-term cooperation with the YHC.

Fourthly, the vision proposed by entrepreneurs offers a foundation to test and attract internal and external resources to participate, a key indicator for successful initiative of their projects. Dependent upon the nature and aims of projects, for instance, team building can be used to measure the variation of successful initiative and attractiveness:

- For international environment education, Ms. Liu’s project attracted 10 multidisciplinary background young professionals, both natural sciences and social sciences, most of which have had overseas education experience. In addition, the YHC has an advisory board with a wide range of expertise covering environmental protection, social innovation, sustainable agriculture and community development (Case 1);
- Gongbu’s idea to build a GGZ Manor for ethnicity identity, local participation and common prosperous in home community was shared with his three partners (Wujijiao,

Norbu and Nima) who had had tourism-related experience outside and happy to jointly invest and manage this project (Case 2). So was Abu's project which attracted two returned entrepreneurs plus his brother to join his project team (Case 3);

- DG Inn is a family business without external involvement (Cases 4).
- Differently, Deji Palace is a joint adventure company by four external investors, and Deji as the largest shareholder and CEO of the company run the Palace independently. (Case 5)

4.3 *Business models for sustainable livelihoods*

The interconnection and integration to local environment provides a sound foundation for entrepreneurs to deliver their promises or visions through various business models which are comprised by four interwoven elements: targeted customers, quality services, job division and beneficial distribution. Accordingly, five cases can be summarised as follows:

Community participation in environmental education and protection (Case 1).

Based upon the vision of Ms Liu, the missions of the YHC are to provide environmental education and training courses to international and domestic students in charge of tuition and service fees, and to offer free training courses to community members (both this and nearby villages) who are interested in participating in this project by providing various services (accommodations, catering and others), and who need to learn basic knowledge or skills about local environment, communication with guests, service procedure and standards, etc. To ensure long term and sustainable community development, furthermore, the YHC helped to establish the first rural tourism cooperative in Danba, which enable all villagers to participate and equally share the benefits from the project; discuss and make collective decision about community development projects, and nonetheless develop their collective identity, confidence and competences for self-organisation and management.

Local entre for ethnic tourism services (Case 2). With a vision and emphasis on the ethnicity element for inclusive tourism development, GGZ Manor provides a range of tour routes and services packages to attract potential customers spending more days to enjoy the various services provided by local community members. To do so, GGZ Manor has developed its reputation for not only high quality service to complete with its counterparts invested from the external capital, but also partnerships with local small and ethnic business owners or managers who can provide quality and different services for the long stay of GGZ Manor's guests.

Rurality narrative for tourism development (Case 3). Having seen the similarity with a missing of local content and cultural confidence as a common issue in rural tourism projects, Abu developed a vision of his rurality narratives for potential customers to relieve the pressure of urban professionals from hard work and fast rhythm on the one hand, and meet their dream for Xanadu (a place of peach and blossoms) on the other. A legal barrier emerged against his project was a connection road built between main road and the Mountain which involved the occupation of collective land owned by village collective organisation. He removed this barrier successfully by inviting all of 146 relevant households to join the project through the establishment a tourism cooperative to access and share the project dividend. "Ruoding Mountain" has become a popular brand in tourism market due to Abu's publication and dissemination through the TikTok about his stories and narratives about this Mountain, village and beyond.

Social entrepreneurship through tourist development (Case 4). Having been substantial experience in charitable work to support poor Tibetan people in urban and rural areas, Mr. Mu found that subsistence agriculture impedes tourism development in local communities. To demonstrate the feasibility of tourism development, he opened the guest house targeted at those customers who want to learn Tibetan culture and society in depth by living

together with Tibetan families for a while. Having shared his idea with all his family members, his business model went well, resulting in an increase of his guest rooms from eight to currently 24 rooms within three years, which are fully booked throughout year due to the excellent service and a high proportion of repeated visitors. The success of his business has stimulated his neighbours and villagers to learn copy his building style, business mode and service standards. It has resulted in four guest houses opened and another 20 in the process to be opened soon.

High end of tourism market for upgrading service standards (Case 5). Targeting at the high end of rural tourism market, Deji's company's mission is to provide a package of tourism services by combining photography, Tibetan cultural experiencing, sightseeing, leisure in addition to luxurious facilities, delicious food and high service standard. The successful opening of her business has influenced many householders in her village to upgrade their service packages/or standards, and also resulted in an extension of agricultural value chains for new opportunities to local farmers in organic agriculture, transport and logistic supply.

4.4 Innovation diffusion and sustainability

Owing to the short duration (only one or two years for Cases 4 and 5) and interruption by the Covid-19 Pandemic, it may be difficult to measure and compare impact between five cases. From the perspective of sustainability, nonetheless, the value and potential of each model can be observed from the scope of beneficiaries, social and environmental impact, and innovation diffusion.

The value and potential of the YHC project (Case 1) can be summarised from following facts:

- Village guest houses have created 298 jobs. Equally important is the high service standards which have had influence surrounding villages.
- The first organic agriculture garden in Danba has been established in this village for experiment and demonstration with a financial support from Danba government.

- The first natural museum in Ganzi has been set up in this village, which provides a base for systematic collection, display and research on biological resources in Tibetan areas of Sichuan.
- The YHC has become a base of extra-curricular activities for natural and environment education serviced for all of primary and secondary schools in Danba County
- The YHC training package has been recognised and adopted by the National Reserve Park Administration (NRPA) in many western provinces of China as its staff and grassroots workers' development training courses for better working with local ethnic communities to improve environmental protection and community development.
- The experience of the YHC has also been recognized by EU authorities, leading to an opportunity to develop a joint funding application to develop and demonstrate YHC project.

Similarly, the GGZ Manor (Case 2) has become a local tourism centre, which help more than 500 local Tibetan people to secure their jobs directly or indirectly, and 50 local business owners to share information and service opportunities. Through its coordination and mediation, furthermore, the Manor has played a vital role in improving local business environment, leading to the establishment of a health and fair competition and cooperation among small business owners. Nonetheless, the Manor have led to a process of upgrading both physical facility and service standards by providing training courses to local entrepreneurs every year, leading to a soaring of local reputation in rural tourism market. Recently, two branches of GGZ Manor have been opened in other two locations of Ganzi Prefecture, a symbolic of business model dissemination for more opportunities to reverse migration and entrepreneurship in Tibetan areas.

The success of the rurality narrative (Case 3) can be seen the increase of cooperative members to nearby villages, reached to over 500 households. After five-year exploration, "Ruoding Mountain" has become a well-known tourist destination in China, and Abu's Tiktok

has 3 millions of fans across the country. Go beyond the Mountain, Abu has successfully set up a company in Chengdu with the mission of training, incubation and promotion through short video programme for rural tourism projects in Sichuan and beyond. Having seen the great potential of his new vision, Abu's new company received its first cohort funding of 5 million yuan from a venture capital in 2020, associated with two leading figures from renowned IT companies joined his new project. This has led to an adjustment of his management team, a symbolic of new stage of his company development and also new mission of entrepreneurship training provision to young professionals and university graduates by promoting rurality and localism across China.

For the Case 4, Mr. Mu's ambition is not limited to tourism business but transformation of local attitudes and production style depicting from subsistence agriculture. This is his belief that tourism development in his village has offered a good opportunity to bring together all of villagers to adopt a new mode of agriculture production through scaling-up local characteristic products and creating market brand. Therefore, he has founded a DG Tourism Development Company, a cooperative for all village members to join as shareholders without capital investment requested. The mission of this company is to coordinate, purchase, and sell highland barley flour through all of cooperative members working together to replace self-sufficiency model of barley production and consumption within families in the past.

It may be difficult to estimate the impact of Deji (Case 5) on the new generation of young people nation-wide given the fact that this case has been promoted by many influential public/social medias including IQIYI (a well-known video website in China). As a symbolic of Tibetan woman contributing to ethnic community development, she has encouraged a great number of ethnic university students to rethink about the value of ethnic culture for rural tourism development in their home communities.

5. Discussion:

Based upon the analysis and comparisons of five cases of reverse migration and entrepreneurship, we argue that reverse entrepreneurship cannot be successful without a process of integration, referring to interconnection, mutual trust and cooperation between reverse entrepreneur(s), host community and external stakeholders. Accordingly, research findings and theoretical implications of this paper can be summarised from three perspectives: social embeddedness, innovation platform and variation of tourism entrepreneurship.

5.1 Social embeddedness for understanding local challenges and sharing new vision

Reverse entrepreneurship is not merely an adaption to and better use of local resources and business opportunities, but also a process of social embeddedness to identify challenges and offer new solutions, a key to gain trust and support from local community. Two common challenges identified and shared by five cases: lacking of community participation due to the predomination of the external investors or government agencies; lacking of ethnicity element to reflect local history, culture and tradition. Despite differences in terms of entrepreneurial background and resource endowments, all of entrepreneurs in this study shared a process of embedding socially, interconnecting with and building mutual trust and interactions with host communities. This was key for the successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship for them to understand local challenges and develop a new vision to gain support from both local and external stakeholders. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this finding:

- 1) Social embeddedness is a precondition of successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship to develop their understanding on local challenges and developing coping strategies for alternative or more sustainable livelihoods.
- 2) The value of reverse entrepreneurship through social embeddedness is not limited to the introduction of a new technology (or product, services), but more importantly, new vision

for local people and stakeholders to share, leading to a series of changes (Jack and Anderson, 2002: 469).

- 3) The potential of rural innovation initiated by reverse entrepreneur(s) is largely dependent upon whether or how the new vision addresses or tackle the challenges facing local or wider community, which influences or determines the attitude and participation of both local and external stakeholders (Ye and He, 2020).

These findings support those found in other contexts, including: farmer self-organising innovation in marginal areas (Wu, 2003); social capital for rural revitalisation in China (Li et al., 2016; Li et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020).

5.2 Innovation platform for the development of social capital and other critical resources

Entrepreneurial integration is important not only to gain the participation and support from local communities, but also to facilitate working together with multiple stakeholders for effective use of various resources and opportunities, internally and externally, resulting in multiple gains. In this regard, successful reverse entrepreneurship can be viewed as a process of innovation platform building for multiple participation and collaboration for the development of social capital and assembling of critical resources (Swaans et al., 2014; Zhang and Wu, 2018). The necessity and evidence of innovation platform can be seen from following aspects.

- 1) Attracting talent (Case 1), entrepreneurs (Cases 2 and 3) and external advisors or partners (Cases 1 and 5) to join project teams;
- 2) Share information, knowledge and skills, service standards via opening visit and regular training courses (all of cases);
- 3) Create job opportunities (Cases 1, 2), supply chains (Cases 1, 2, 3, 5), and share the access to external market without a share of costs or investment (Cases 2, 3, 4);
- 4) Establish tourism cooperative to share production elements and profits (Cases 1, 3, 4);

- 5) Establish community centre to develop “bonded community” to enhance community cohesion, collaboration and collective actions (Case 1, and Case 4 in phrase two);
- 6) Highlight the value of local, rurality and ethnicity culture to promote community identity for the recognition and attraction of local tourism resources (all of cases).

Our findings seem to suggest that reverse entrepreneurship is not limited to community participation and sharing of visions, but a process of community building (development of “bonding social capital”) to attract external stakeholders’ participation (development “bridging social capital”) and contribute critical resources to community development and rural transformation in local or wider communities of China. Compared with top-down government intervention or external-led rural development (Li, L. et al., 2016; Leong et al., 2016), this paper contributes to rural revitalisation from below via an innovation platform building.

Furthermore, this paper offers insight to opportunities for multiple stakeholders (e.g. government agencies, agribusiness/tourism companies, adventuring investors, NGOs) to participate and contribute to community development, for the effective use of external resources and opportunities and interfaces with top-down government intervention (Wu, 2003, Wu and Zhang, 2013, Li et al., 2016; Zhang and Wu, 2018).

5.3 Pathways of tourism entrepreneurship and innovation diffusion

Depending upon resource endowments, visions and other factors, five pathways of tourism entrepreneurship can be distinguished: social innovation for community participation (Case 1); ethnic centre for tourism development (Case 2); rurality narrative for tourism innovation (Case 3); social entrepreneurship for alternative livelihoods (Case 4); partnership for upgrading services (Case 5).

A stratification can be found among five cases in terms of targeted customers in tourism markets: international and domestic students whose interested in ecological and cultural

diversity (Case 1); those whose interests in ethnic history and culture (Case 2); those who desire for rurality atmosphere and narratives (Case 3); those who enjoy ethnic culture and society (Case 4); those who need high quality services (Case 5).

In terms of social impact, all five cases can be viewed as a local innovation incubator to facilitate innovation diffusion with different scales: global environment education (Case 1), ethnic entrepreneurship training (Case 2), rurality and digital entrepreneurship training (Case 3), and innovation demonstration bases (Cases 4 and 5).

Regarding to the application potential of tourism entrepreneurship, it seems that Case 1 is more suitable to attract those who have a global view (e.g. sustainable development goals) or who had overseas education background and intend to develop their career through social innovation. In contrast, the partnership for high quality and service standard (Case 5) may be more attractive to adventurous investors who need to find right candidates for further cultivation and training before financial investment.

Bringing together research findings in Section 5, key characters and variations of reverse migration and integration can be summarised and highlighted as Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of key factors and pathways of entrepreneurial integration

Item \ Case	I	II	III	IV	V
Symbolic	YHC Centre	GGZ Manor	RD Mountain	DG Inn	Deji Palace
Key issue	Local participation	Marginalisation	Homogeneity	Subsist. agriculture	Service standard
Vision	Social enterprise	Ethnic tourism	Rurality tourism	Alternative livelihood	Luxurious tourism
Business M.	Environ. education	Service packages	Digital narrative	Experiment & demo	Ethnicity palace
Social capital	Cooperative Community bonding	Shared platform Community bonding	Shared platform Cooperative	Shared platform Cooperative	Shared platform
Critical resources	Own investment, Overseas training, Regional planning	Own investment, Four returnees, Tourism expertise	Person experience Own investment Social media skill	Charity experience Civil servant	Tourism family Internship in costal Joint venturing
Innovation diffusion	Global campaigns for climate change	Ethnicity identity, entrepreneurship	Social media	Demonstration for alternative livelihood	Demonstration for high quality service
Application potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversea returnees • Soc. enterprise 	Reverse entrepreneurs	Entrepreneurs via social media	Social organisations	Business circle

6. Conclusions

In the context of rural development in poor areas of China, this paper aimed to develop an understanding of reverse entrepreneurship through two questions: What are key factors behind the successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship to address challenges facing local communities? How can reverse entrepreneurship contribute to community development and sustainable livelihoods? Based upon analysis and comparison of five tourism cases in Ganzi of Sichuan, a number of conclusion can be drawn as follows.

Firstly, entrepreneurial integration through social embeddedness is vital for the successful initiative of reverse entrepreneurship to understand local challenges and develop a new vision for sustainable livelihoods. Secondly, entrepreneurial integration is essentially a process of an innovation platform building to develop or enhance of social capital (both bonding and bridging social capital) for multiple participation, both local and external stakeholders, mobilising and effectively using critical resources (e.g. knowledge, technological, financial, human capitals). Thirdly, five pathways of tourism entrepreneurship have been identified in this paper, reflecting variations in new vision, critical resource, business model, innovation diffusion and application potential.

Not limited to poor areas of rural China, this paper has potential to contribute to the debates around reverse entrepreneurship and rural revitalisation in China and beyond in the following aspects: 1) insight to entrepreneur-led and bottom-up development to interface with top-down government intervention (Wu, 2003; Wu and Zhang,2013; Li et al., 2016: Li, L., et al., 2016; Leong, et al, 2016; Zhang and Wu, 2018; Ye and He, 2020). 2) A holistic view on an innovation platform (or ecosystem) created by reverse entrepreneur(s) to bring together and coordinate all elements (stakeholders) for poverty alleviation and rural revitalisation in poor areas, which is differentiated from government-led or external dominated ecosystem (Feng et

al., 2018; Buckley et al., 2020; Feng and Li, 2020). 3) Conditions and features of the entrepreneurial integration for successful initiative and sustainability of rural development in this regions. 4) Five pathways of reverse entrepreneurship as a reference for sustainable tourism development in the poor and tourism resource rich areas of China and beyond.

There are two limitations of this paper to be addressed in future research: an indicator system needed to measure and compare outcomes of different pathways of tourism entrepreneurship for sustainable development, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Secondly, more evidence or comparative studies for reverse entrepreneurship in other sectors (e.g. cropping, animal husbandry, food processing) or different regions (e.g. poor and advance regions, China and other developing countries).

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