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ENTREPRENEURIAL STRESSORS AS PREDICTORS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL BURNOUT[1, 2]

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Summary.—Research on the effects of entrepreneurial stressors is limited, especially regarding its relation to the burnout that frequently occurs in the process of starting and growing a venture. The effect of the role of entrepreneurial stressors (workload, competitive comparison, demands-of-knowledge, managing responsibility, and resource requirements) on burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) was examined in a Chinese sample of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial stressors emerged as a significant predictor of burnout in the process of entrepreneurship in a sample of 289 entrepreneurs (63.8% men; *M* age = 26.2 yr.; 39.6% of their parents have been self-employed). The findings clarify the functional relationship between entrepreneurial stressors and burnout. Entrepreneurial stressors played multiple roles. Managing responsibility was an active contributor to the sense of achievement and to emotional exhaustion. Workload was an active contributor to emotional exhaustion. Demands-of-knowledge negatively affected three of the dimensions of burnout. Theoretical and practical implications for management of the effect of these relationships are discussed.

Researchers have examined the relationship between self-employment and positive emotional experience. For instance, Baum and Locke (2004) felt that entrepreneurship is an experience of high passion—full of emotional energy, drive, and spirit (Bird, 1989, pp. 7–8). Schindehutte, Morris, and Allen (2006) suggested that entrepreneurship produces excitement, happiness, and feelings of flow. Other studies suggested that self-employed individuals are more satisfied with their lives than those who are employed (Bradley & Roberts, 2004; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Although there is substantial interest in self-employed individuals' positive

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emotional feelings, some empirical findings and information on negative emotional feelings provide another point of view (Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997; Cristina, Aleksandra, Sara, & Sabrina, 2009; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Wesolowski and Mossholder (1997) described burnout among self-employers. Cristina, *et al*. (2009) empirically supported the three burnout dimensions in a sample of 284 self-employed individuals. Previous results (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011) suggested that the tasks connected with entrepreneurship could be sources of considerable negative experience for those that pursue this career path, despite the positive feelings that also occur. Entrepreneurship is usually linked with high risk-taking, job uncertainty, heavy workload, decision conflict, and responsibility, which can yield considerable negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, strain, and ultimately emotional exhaustion.

In this study, entrepreneurs' negative feelings were explored and the symptoms of burnout and the path to entrepreneurial stress were examined. Job stress is a matter of great concern in China (Sun, Wang, Zhang, & Li, 2007), especially for the self-employed (Wei, 2008). Stress and burnout have been recognized as problems for both the self-employed and entrepreneurs (Wei, 2008). Recognizing and understanding entrepreneurial stressors and analyzing the path to burnout can be important in developing support systems for entrepreneurs. Identifying entrepreneurial sources of stress will also help clarify aspects of the entrepreneurial process (Akande, 1994; Vasumathi, Govindarajalu, Anuratha, & Amudha, 2003; Gong & Wang, 2005; Wei, Wang, & Duan, 2009).

Drawing on the framework of stress-strain (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the theory of job demands-resources (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), this study furthers the knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurial stressors (job demand) and strain (entrepreneurial burnout) and reports a potential relationship between entrepreneurial stressors and entrepreneurial burnout in Chinese entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Stressor and Burnout

Job stressors are defined as "attributes of the work itself that require sustained cognitive, emotional, or physical effort on the part of employees" (De Jonge & Dormann, 2006). Entrepreneurial stressors refer to the stimulus in an entrepreneurial context as well as the personal stressors experienced by entrepreneurs (Wei, 2008, 2012). Prior empirical studies on entrepreneurial stressors (Akande, 1994; Vasumathi, *et al*., 2003; Gong & Wang, 2005; Wei, *et al*., 2009) have laid a solid foundation for this study. Akande (1994) investigated stressors in Nigerian entrepreneurs and found four major sources: loneliness, time demands of business, con-

flicts with partners and employees, and the need to achieve. Vasumathi, *et al*. (2003) found three dimensions of entrepreneurial stressors: achievement-related stress, power-need related stress, and affiliation-need related stress in a sample of 50 entrepreneurs from Tamil Nadu, India. Gong and Wang (2005) designed a scale to measure attitudes related to entrepreneurial stressors, the e-Commerce Venturing Stressor Scale, which has four dimensions: e-market competition stressor, e-system management stressor, e-work adaptation stressor, and e-entrepreneurial role stressor. Entrepreneurial stressors have the attributes of conventional stressors, such as workload, managerial roles, and relationships with people. However, there are some unique features implicit in entrepreneurial stressors. Drawing on these empirical studies, the particular problems of entrepreneurs were workload, competitive comparison, demands-of-knowledge, managing responsibility, and resource requirements (Wei, *et al*., 2009), as well as entrepreneurial burnout and its three symptoms that reflect strain and adverse reactions to stressors.

The stress-strain and job-demand resources models provide some clues about the path to entrepreneurial burnout. These theories indicate that people with stressful job environments may perceive that they have insufficient resources to cope with job demands or to achieve professional goals. When work demands are greater than available resources, burnout can occur (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The theory is valuable because it directs attention to the effects of stress and its results within a group or organization. Although only a handful of prior studies have indicated that stress is positively associated with burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Leiter, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach, 2006), most of this research has focused on employees. Maslach and Jackson (1981) indicated that burnout was related to the occupations of respondents (e.g., employees). A meta-analysis of the relationship between job demands (role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload) and burnout suggested that high job demands are generally more strongly related to burnout (Alarcon, 2011). The samples in that meta-analysis were from human services and non-human services professions. The results shows that role ambiguity ($\rho = .32$, $k = 51$, $N = 22{,}145$), role conflict ($\rho = .53$, $k = 37$, $N = 13{,}568$), and workload ($\rho = .49$, $k = 86$, $N = 51{,}529$) were positively associated with emotional exhaustion; role ambiguity ($\rho = .31$, $k = 37$, $N = 16{,}616$), role conflict ($\rho = .40$, $k = 29$, $N = 10{,}178$), and workload ($\rho = .31$, $k = 58$, $N = 39{,}786$) were positively related to cynicism; role ambiguity ($\rho = .31$, $k = 39$, $N = 16{,}745$), role conflict ($\rho = .18$, $k = 28$, $N = 9{,}076$), and workload ($\rho = .11$, $k = 42$, $N = 28{,}763$) were positively related to reduced personal accomplishment (Alarcon, 2011). More recently, research on burnout has been expanded, and burnout is now defined as a crisis connected with work in general and not only as a

crisis mainly coming from job demands/job stress, role conflict, and interpersonal conflict (Leiter, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). The concept has also been broadened and expanded to encompass many occupations.

Originally, the three dimensions of burnout have described only job-related issues. The broadened definitions of burnout include three dimensions: exhaustion, i.e., fatigue regardless of its cause; depersonalization, or an indifferent attitude toward the job or other people; and a lack of occupational achievements, now conceptualized as both social and non-social (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003; Buunk, Peiro, Rodriguez, & Bravo, 2007). According to Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998, p. 33), "Burnout is generally considered to be work-related and it occurs in normal individuals who do not suffer from psychopathology and who have functioned at adequate levels before." Previous research has found stressors to be a major factor influencing job burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Leiter, 1993; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach, 2006). Wesolowski and Mossholder (1997) and Cristina, *et al*. (2009) found that entrepreneurs have described emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of a sense of achievement.

The above-cited studies did not explore the results of these propositions among entrepreneurs. The current study furthers the present understanding by assessing the entrepreneurial stressor-burnout relationship posited in previous research. The specific focus was the severity of the symptoms of entrepreneurial burnout in entrepreneurs.

Functions of Entrepreneurial Stressors in the Stress–Burnout Relation

Entrepreneurial stressors play a different role in the process of self-employment, because entrepreneurship is characterized as having long work days, risk-taking, and significant additional responsibility (Wiklund, 1999). These stressors have not only the negative effects of burnout but also motivate an entrepreneur to work differently and harder (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Based on equity theory, social exchange theory was proposed as the most influential by Buunk and Schaufeli (1993) and Schaufeli (1996) as a dual-level burnout model explaining that the lack of reciprocity (i.e., inter-personal and organizational) was the key cause of burnout. If an individual experiences an imbalance between the investment and gains, high-level burnout will occur. Entrepreneurs assign a different cost to burnout-related stressors; for example, the entrepreneurial workload could be an investment too large to generate a sense of achievement. That means entrepreneurs have initiative and want to manage the general investment and success of the enterprise. Employees have job demands, and their sense of achievement is based on doing the job itself. Competition and resources often demand an entrepreneur obtain additional resources for the enterprise, which can lead to exhaustion and stress-related prob-

lems (Schaufeli, Bakker, & van Rhenen, 2009). On the other hand, Thomas and Daniel (2012) felt that individuals could regulate the flow of resources and exchange resources with other people or the organization itself by either self-directed or other-directed means (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Entrepreneurs will view some entrepreneurial stressors (i.e., managing responsibility and demands-of-knowledge) as controllable and changeable (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Karasek (1979) introduced a stress-management model of job strain that explains the conditions under which high job demands could lead to mental strain. He found that among individuals with high decision autonomy, there was a weaker relationship between job demands and exhaustion. Of course, not all the high demands of entrepreneurship necessarily translate into negative emotional experiences such as mental strain symptoms (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). Because the nature of self-employment is the enterprise's development, an entrepreneur can control his job and time. That autonomy may help an entrepreneur counterbalance some entrepreneurial stressors and adjust some of the stress from work. In other words, management autonomy might play a positive role.

From the perspective of practical aspects of management, it is essential to identify culture-specific features of burnout that are relevant to entrepreneurs in firms that operate in various countries. In fact, what is known about employee burnout in Western countries may not be similar to the experience of entrepreneurs, particularly in such developing countries as China. Chinese culture supports the importance of mutual interactions and the strong desire to adapt oneself to interpersonal contingencies (Bond, 1993). Workload, competitive comparison, demands-of-knowledge, managing responsibility, and resource requirements may play different roles in burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments in Chinese entrepreneurs; specifically, entrepreneurs' effective management of their varied responsibilities may help them avoid burnout. The main objective of this study was to describe the aspects of burnout among Chinese entrepreneurs. A second objective was to model entrepreneurial stressors' effects on burnout.

Hypothesis 1. Entrepreneurial stressors (workload, competing comparison, demands-of-knowledge, managing responsibility, and resource requirements) will be positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2. Entrepreneurial stressors will be positively related to depersonalization.

Hypothesis 3. Entrepreneurial stressors will be related to a sense of lower achievement.

Method

Participants

Using Reynolds, Bosma, Autio, Hunt, De Bono, Servais, *et al*.'s (2005) definition of entrepreneurs in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, the research participants were 289 entrepreneurs from the National University Science Park and the National Trade Exposition in mainland China.

The sample was 63.8% men, with a mean age of 26.2 yr., 39.6% with self-employed parents, and 24.5% with business alliances. Of the total, 44.5% had some college or were college graduates, 36.3% vocational and technical college (3-yr. course), and 19.2% had a Ph.D. The sample was 43.4% married, 52.0% single, and 4.6% divorced. They were from a variety of industries (retail and service, 26.8%; computer-related, 51.1%; manufacturing, 22.1%). Most (67.7%) had 4 to 5 yr. of experience in business, and 59.1% of the businesses had been established for 4 to 5 yr.

Procedure

To ensure the validity of the Chinese version of the questionnaire in this study, the questionnaire was translated from English into Chinese, the wording of items was modified to reflect entrepreneur's perception of burnout and entrepreneurial stressors. Then the Chinese versions of questionnaires were back-translated into English to verify the content and meaning. Overall, the questionnaire was evaluated by three native English researchers and translated again into Chinese by a native English speaker; the face validity was verified by 20 participants in a pilot study (see Wei, 2008; Wei, *et al*., 2009). Some minor alterations were made to conform to the Chinese language. A psychologist and an entrepreneurial researcher confirmed the content validity and final Chinese version of the questionnaire.

Participants were first invited through a letter explaining the procedure and objective of the study. Then participants from the Chinese Entrepreneurial Garden and the National Trade Exposition were recruited through social networks using the snowball method. The questionnaire and instructions were provided to any interested entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs completed their questionnaires using a coded number and returned it within a 1-mo. interval. Each participant then received a participation gift of 50 RMB. The data were collected in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuxi, Liaoning, and Hangzhou. The process of completing the questionnaire took each respondent approximately 10 min. There were 289 valid questionnaires returned from 367 entrepreneurs, a 78.7% response rate.

Measures

Entrepreneurial stressor.—Entrepreneurial stressor was measured with 21 items from the Entrepreneurial Stress Questionnaire (ESQ: Wei, *et al*.,

2009). This scale consisted of five subscales including workload, competition comparison, demands-of-knowledge, managing responsibility, and resource requirements. Responses were made on 5-point scales anchored by 1: Strongly disagree and 5: Strongly agree, where higher scores indicate that the participant is more stressed. Workload assessed the general load from enterprise (5 items), e.g., "My work time is unbelievable every week." Competition comparison was measured in terms of the perception of the intensity of competition (3 items), e.g., "There was vicious competition in my industry." Demands-of-knowledge (5 items) was assessed by the demands on rapidly renewing knowledge and learning knowledge, e.g., "I need to gain much knowledge just because of the rapid development of the firm." Managing responsibility (3 items) evaluated where entrepreneurs spent their energy and made significant effort to deal with any difficult problems in management of staff, e.g., "Losing current staff would bring great loss, and it is difficult to attract and retain employees." Resource requirements (5 items) were measured by its perception. e.g., "I always feel nervous about enterprise operating funds." The subscales of the entrepreneurial stressor had Cronbach's α internal consistencies of .73 to .88. The internal consistency reliability was .83 for the total scale. Previous research reported a reliability of $\alpha = .87$ (Wei, *et al*., 2009).

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with Amos 7.0 to check the discriminant validity of the subscales (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Results indicated that the five-factor model of entrepreneurial stressor had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 235.78$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.64$; CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.058; SRMR = 0.067).

Burnout.—The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), derived from Maslach and Jackson (1981, 1986) and revised by Wei (2008), comprised three dimensions measured by 16 items: Emotional exhaustion (6 items, $\alpha = .85$; example item: "I get frustrated when I can't achieve my entrepreneurial goals"); Depersonalization (4 items, $\alpha = .82$; example item: "I worry that entrepreneurship is hardening me emotionally"); and Sense of achievement (6 items, $\alpha = .87$; example item: "I have accomplished many worthwhile things during the process of entrepreneurship"). Participants rated each of the 16 items using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with anchors 1: Strongly disagree and 5: Strongly agree. Scaled scores of the three dimensions were separately computed by reverse-scoring negatively worded items. An average of the ratings across items yielded a score for each dimension of entrepreneurial burnout. Higher scores indicate that the respondent experienced higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. However, in terms of the score for sense of achievement, a larger rating indicates a higher sense of achievement. Estimates for internal consistency in the current sample ranged from .83 to .86. The internal consistency reliability was .85 for all three subscales. Previous research

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had reported reliability of α=.79 (Wei, *et al*., 2008). Confirmatory factor analyses found that this three-factor model fit the data well (χ^2=87.07, p<.001, χ^2/df=2.23; CFI=0.95, IFI=0.95, NFI=0.93; RMSEA=0.072; SRMR=0.058). The three-dimensional model had acceptable fit.

Control variables.—Sex, age, marital status, and education were controlled in the analyses, since they could affect both the independent and dependent variables (Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002).

Common method variance.—Since the study used one source of data (i.e., the entrepreneurs) and paper-and-pencil questionnaires, common methods variance was assessed. A single-factor test was done on all of the items. The results indicated that only 8% of the total variance was shared. Since according to Williams, Cote, and Buckley (1989), shared variance should be less than 25%, the results are satisfactory.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's α for all variables, as well as Pearson correlations among them. Table 2 provides the results of the regression analyses. The hierarchical regression results indicates that the control variables of sex (184 men, 105 women), age, marital status (125 married, 150 single, 13 divorced), and education of participants [129 college diploma, 105 vocational and technical college (3-yr. course), 55 Ph.D.] explained a combined 6.7% of variance in the equation for Emotional exhaustion, 7.1% for Depersonalization, and 7.2% for Sense of achievement.

Three separate regression equations were computed for Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Sense of achievement (Table 2). Workload, competing comparison, managing responsibility, and demands-of-knowledge explained a combined 42.4% of the variance (F=35.62, p<.05) in the equation for Emotional exhaustion. Workload, competing comparison, managing responsibility, and demands-of-knowledge explained a combined 27.6% of the variance (F=35.62, p<.05) in the equation for Depersonalization. Workload, managing responsibility, and demands-of-knowledge explained a combined 14.0% of the variance (F=35.62, p<.05) in the equation for Sense of achievement.

Workload, Competing comparison, and Managing responsibility were positively related to Emotional exhaustion (β=0.27; β=0.25; β=0.36, respectively). Workload, Competing comparison, and Managing responsibility were positively related to Depersonalization (β=0.17; β=0.16; β=0.27, respectively). Workload was negatively related to Sense of achievement (β=−0.25); however, managing responsibility was positively related to Sense of achievement (β=0.28). Demands-of-knowledge was negatively related to Emotional exhaustion (β=−0.32), Depersonalization (β=−0.42),

TABLE 1
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, RELIABILITY ESTIMATES, AND PEARSON CORRELATIONS FOR STUDY VARIABLES: SAMPLE ($N = 289$)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	α	Correlation						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Age	26.2	6.4								
1. Workload	14.79	4.49	.88							
2. Competing comparison	8.48	2.24	.73	.36†						
95%*CI*				.31, .46						
3. Resource requirements	12.43	3.51	.76	.30†	.37†					
95%*CI*				.29, .41	.35, .49					
4. Demands-of-knowledge	16.11	4.11	.84	.20†	.07	.07				
95%*CI*				.21, .32						
5. Managing responsibility	9.83	2.57	.74	.31†	.28†	.31†	.28†			
95%*CI*				.26, .32	.21, .32	.21, .37	.21, .32			
6. Emotional exhaustion	18.84	6.37	.85	.41†	.43†	.21†	−.15*	.43†		
95%*CI*				.31, .52	.33, .54	.09, .32	−.26, −.02	.23, .54		
7. Depersonalization	12.35	4.03	.82	.23†	.27†	.17†	−.30†	.25†	.68†	
95%*CI*				.10, .36	.21, .42	.08, .22	−.46, −.21	.12, .36	.28, .75	
8. Sense of achievement	19.10	5.15	.87	−.22†	−.09	.40	−.21†	.13*	.17†	.34†
95%*CI*				−.40, −.19			−.41, −.15	.12, .18	.11, .28	.32, .58

*$p < .05$. †$p < .01$.

and Sense of achievement (β = −0.24). Resource requirements were not significantly related to any of the three dimensions of burnout.

DISCUSSION

Past research has explored employees' stress. This study provides empirical support for self-employer's stress and its relationship with burnout. Different from the results of prior studies, which investigated either entrepreneurial stressors or entrepreneur's burnout (e.g., Akande, 1994; Gong & Wang, 2005; Daniel, Mateja, & Joakim, 2007; Wei, *et al*., 2009), this study extends the Job demands–Resources model (Maslach, *et al*., 2001). Entrepreneurial stressors are related to burnout within the stress-strain frame, providing more evidence that this is a global phenomenon. Cor-

TABLE 2
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PREDICTION OF BURNOUT BY ENTREPRENEURIAL STRESSOR: SAMPLE ($N = 289$)

Source	Emotional Exhaustion				Depersonalization				Sense of Achievement			
	β	*p*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*p*	R^2	ΔR^2	β	*p*	R^2	ΔR^2
Control variables												
Sex	0.05	< .05			0.02	< .05			0.01	< .05		
Age	0.35	.004			0.30	.01			0.32	.004		
Marital status	0.04	.72			0.12	.25			0.08	.47		
Education	0.00	.42			0.01	.97			0.00	.55		
All control variables			6.7				7.1				7.2	
Maslach Burnout Inventory												
Workload	0.27	< .05	.42	.06	0.17	< .05	.26	.04	−0.25	< .05	.05	.05
Competing comparison	0.25	< .05	.19	.19	0.16	< .05	.28	.02				
Managing responsibility	0.36	< .05	.29	.10	0.27	< .05	.21	.12	0.28	< .05	.09	.04
Demands-of-knowledge	−0.32	< .05	.36	.08	−0.42	< .05	.09	.09	−0.24	< .05	.14	.05
Resource requirements[a]												
Full model *F*			35.62*				39.80*				15.96*	

[a]Resource requirements did not enter into the regression equations. *$p < .05$.

relations between scores among the five dimensions of entrepreneurial stressors and three dimensions of burnout were related in the expected direction. The results indicate entrepreneurial stressors are related to burnout among Chinese entrepreneurs.

Additionally, the findings clarify the functional relationship between entrepreneurial stressors and burnout. Results indicate a link between entrepreneurial stressors and burnout. Entrepreneurial stressors played multiple roles, partly supporting the hypotheses that the five dimensions of entrepreneurial stressors are directly related to the symptoms of entrepreneur's burnout. The entrepreneurial stressors of Workload, Competing comparison, and Managing responsibility were positively related to Emotional exhaustion and Depersonalization (Hypotheses 1 and 2); Workload and Demands-of-knowledge were negatively related to Sense of achievement (Hypothesis 3). As the classical models Job demands–Resources and stress-strains postulate (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Demerouti, *et al*., 2001), job demands are a root source of occupational burnout due to depleted resources. "Demand" is the effec-

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tive factor that threatens valuable, and perhaps scarce, resources. This idea was examined as a negative function in present models.

This study explored the relationship of stressors to burnout in a sample of entrepreneurs. Alarcon (2011) analyzed these relationships by meta-analysis, confirming the relationship between stressors and burnout. However, the study only showed that three job demands (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload) had positive relations with burnout (Alarcon, 2011). Compared with the previous meta-analysis study (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), entrepreneurs with higher workload experienced higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a lower sense of achievement. Lee and Ashforth (1996) found non-significant relations between workload and lower sense of achievement on the sample of employees. Otherwise, in this self-employed sample, some of stressors had specifically different directional relations to the sense of achievement.

This study also provided empirical support for the diverse function of entrepreneurial stressors: most uniquely, managing responsibility played a positive role in this model, related to the Sense of achievement of entrepreneurs. The responsibility for management stressor had a positive effect. Possibly, a self-employed individual without some stress would not be challenged enough to perform their job well. Optimum stress could prepare an entrepreneur for peak performance (Akande, 1994). Small business owners and entrepreneurs should continually search for an optimum stress point. Social exchange theory views self-employment as self-directional. Managing people helps entrepreneurs deal with problems and promote the enterprise's development effectively, but may add pressure for personal performance. Entrepreneurs can use problem-focused coping with their employees to eliminate stressors (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). If high demands-of-knowledge are unmet due to lack of skills, frustration will occur. The entrepreneur may feel an unfulfilled expectation from the business because of a lack of competence in the business activity, which reduces the sense of personal achievement (Cristina, *et al*., 2009).

It is interesting to note that a robust correlation between Competition comparison and Emotional exhaustion was observed among these Chinese entrepreneurs. China, as a developing nation, has some peculiar business environment features in its current stage of a transition economy. The collective culture of the country tends to emphasize competition as a kind of disruption. On one hand, Chinese entrepreneurs realize that current business policy does not effectively sustain entrepreneurial development, since the current business regime is often fickle and envious and harbors extremely negative attitudes toward business failures, apparently somewhat similarly to Slovenia (Daniel, *et al*., 2007). On the other hand, the Chinese business culture currently focuses on achieving "social status," i.e., one

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does not want to be looked down upon by others. Competition comparison means that Chinese entrepreneurs need a stronger sense of self-respect. If they always feel frustrated during the entrepreneurial process, they will suffer a loss of confidence, and then emotional exhaustion may occur. Finally, competition comparison itself is followed by thoughts, i.e., analyzing competitive status and conditions, and feelings of anxiety, nervousness, exhaustion, and amotivation, affecting individuals' motivation to "win."

Responsibility for management was the best (negative) predictor of depersonalization. Utilitarianism and materialism (i.e., becoming rich or famous) are prevalent in Chinese culture today. One often asks which goal is more important. Most believe that the goal should be "practical" or "useful." Considering their employees as "useful" is a common notion of an entrepreneur, which may mean that entrepreneurs will not avoid experiencing depersonalization. The entrepreneur may not have enough energy to meet the expectations of their staff. This is perhaps the most difficult thing to deal with in the complex relationships between the entrepreneur and employees in China. It is also one of the reasons that responsibility for employee management is the strongest predictor of depersonalization.

Limitations and Further Research

The cross-sectional design used in this study has some limitations. The mechanisms underlying the relationship between entrepreneurial stressors and burnout need to be investigated further. Other factors, such as evaluation, social comparison, self-esteem, and/or positive or negative emotions could be found to have either a direct or an indirect effect on burnout. In addition, the variation and development of each entrepreneurial burnout dimension should be examined over time.

Future research needs to confirm that the entrepreneurial stress-strains and entrepreneurial burnout hold true across entrepreneurial ethnic, cultures, and demography. Consistent with the prior research (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Wei, 2012), this study suggests that although self-employment may be associated with a positive experience, an entrepreneur may also experience strong negative feelings. However, entrepreneurs "can still dance, even with shackles."

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