

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS15/H07/17 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report

(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date.
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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Re-imagining Old-time Brand Business in Present-day Guangzhou, China: A Relational Work Perspective

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	GAO Chong/Associate Professor	Sociology Department, Hong Kong Shue Yan University
Co-Investigator(s)	KUAH Khun-eng/Professor	Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China
Co-Investigator(s)	LEUNG Ho-hon/Professor	Sociology Department, State University of New York College at Oneonta, USA
Others	N/A	N/A

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	1 January 2018	N/A	N/A
Project Completion Date	31 December 2019	31 December 2020	18 May 2020

Duration (<i>in month</i>)	24	36	18 May 2020
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 December 2020	31 December 2021	18 May 2020

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. to explore the intermingling of economic transactions and community life through a case study of *laozihao* businesses in Guangzhou, China;
2. to single out *laozihao* business from concurrent economic forms and to demonstrate its present-day meaning and relevance in China;
3. to redirect attention away from the question of how to maximise the economic value of the old-time brand names and instead ask how to create collaborative interactions between *laozihao* business and the local community today;
4. to extend the newly developed theory of relational work in economic sociology to research on *laozihao* business in China;
5. to examine the role of *laozihao* business in organising the local economy in contemporary China.

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change: N/A

- 1.
- 2.
3. ...

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

To fulfil objective 1: to explore the intermingling of economic transactions and community life through a case study of *laozihao* businesses in Guangzhou, China, we reviewed the literature on community involvement of business corporations and corporate social responsibility. Also, we interviewed 15 old-time brand businesses in Guangzhou (8 in Chinese medicine industry, 3 in food industry, 2 in trading, wholesale and retailing industry, 1 in traditional Chinese stationery industry, and 1 in woodcraft products producing industry). We collected data on business operation and community involvement activities of these companies.

To fulfil objective 2: to single out *laozihao* business from concurrent economic forms and to demonstrate its present-day meaning and relevance in China, we further collected and analyzed the existing data on the current meaning of corporate culture and community for *laozihao* businesses in Guangzhou. We integrated the findings in a journal paper published in May 2020 (Thick Descriptions of Time-honored Brands' Cultural Connotation: A Case of Time-honored Enterprises in Guangzhou, published in Journal of Hangzhou Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), Vol. 42, No.3).

Apart from reviewing the relevant literature and doing interviews among *laozihao* businesses in Guangzhou, we also conducted on-site observations of *laozihao* companies (daily operations, participation of Cantonese Culture Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and others) and interviewed 46 Guangzhou residents (age range from 19 to 67). Based on the data collected, it is feasible to fulfil both objective 3 (to redirect attention away from the question of how to maximise the economic value of the old-time brand names and instead ask how to create collaborative interactions between *laozihao* business and the local community today) and objective 5 (to examine the role of *laozihao* business in organising the local economy in contemporary China). In a journal article (entitled "Navigating the landscape of Guangzhou's time-honoured business: From the 19th-century flowscape to the Belt and Road Initiative", in press by Asian Journal of Social Science, available online first), we analyzed the interactions between *laozihao* business and the local community from the 19th century to today's national project of BRI. In the other journal article (entitled "Re-imagining Corporate Community Involvement during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Pharmaceutical Companies in Guangdong Province, China", published by Human Organization in December 2021, Vol. 80, Issue 4), we further analyzed the role of *laozihao* business in organising the local economy during a public health emergency.

To fulfil objective 4: to extend the newly developed theory of relational work in economic sociology to research on *laozihao* business in China, we have reviewed the literature on theory of relational work from 1990s to 2020 and discussed how to apply relevant theoretical perspectives to the study of *laozihao* business in a book under preparation (book contract signed, see Attachment 1). We used the relational work theory as a new theoretical framework to situate the economy in community.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives (as per 5.1/5.2 above)	Addressed (please tick)	Percentage Achieved (please estimate)
1. to explore the intermingling of economic transactions and community life through a case study of <i>laozihao</i> businesses in Guangzhou, China;	√	100%

2. to single out <i>laozihao</i> business from concurrent economic forms and to demonstrate its present-day meaning and relevance in China;	√	100%
3. to redirect attention away from the question of how to maximise the economic value of the old-time brand names and instead ask how to create collaborative interactions between <i>laozihao</i> business and the local community today;	√	100%
4. to extend the newly developed theory of relational work in economic sociology to research on <i>laozihao</i> business in China;	√	100%
5. to examine the role of <i>laozihao</i> business in organising the local economy in contemporary China.	√	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

The major findings of this project can be summarized as follows:

First, our research used the case of old-time brand business to argue that it was important to re-imagine some long-established business corporations as a type of socioeconomic organization rather than pure for-profit organizations defined by neoliberal economics. The new findings of this project demonstrated the practice of corporate giving to the community where a *laozihao* business operated.

Secondly, when it comes to *laozihao* businesses, our research also suggested that it was necessary to pay more attention to their cultural roots and how the old-time cultural elements met the demand of present-day business operation. Our paper published in May 2020 explained in detail how selected cultural elements could be reinterpreted and used in the formation of today's corporate culture (see Attachment 4).

Thirdly, our research also revealed that the connection and interaction between *laozihao* businesses and local community were not merely affected by local factors but also by external forces. Our paper published in 2021 (online first in Asian Journal of Social Science, see Attachment 2) showed that the participation of Guangzhou's *laozihao* business in Cantonese Culture Festival and the Guangzhou Asian Cuisine Festival was strongly influenced by the government's efforts to promote tourism industry and the national project of the Belt and Road Initiative (see Attachment 2).

Fourthly, our research findings suggested that community involvement activities should not always be regarded as the spontaneous partnership between private sector and public sector in western capitalist society. In contrast, the Chinese government at different levels might pressure companies to make contributions to the community in which they operate. Our paper published in December 2021 used the stories of some *laozihao* pharmaceutical companies in medicine industry to highlight the critical role of government in community involvement activities (see Attachment 3).

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action

(Maximum half a page)

To make a better understanding of the whole picture of *laozihao* business in society, we could further expand the scope of research from community involvement activity to practicing corporate social responsibility in society at large. It is reported that some state-owned *laozihao* companies have taken active role in the National Poverty Reduction Program in China so it seems workable to further analyze their socially responsible activities.

In addition, the other possible way of extending this research is to put the industry in which a *laozihao* company operates into account. It is assumed that *laozihao* companies in medicine industry may have different community connection strategies with those in food industry.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

Re-imagining Old-time Brand Business in Present-day Guangzhou, China: A Relational Work Perspective

The proposed project aims to explore community involvement of old-time brand (*laozihao*) businesses in Guangzhou today. It is believed that some *laozihao* businesses can be run as a particular economic form that makes a good balance between making profits and meeting community needs. As such, some *laozihao* businesses may have great potential to be re-imagined as a kind of socially useful business and accepted as one part of local economy.

The case study of *laozihao* businesses in Guangzhou will investigate how some *laozihao* companies make use of different opportunities and strategies to get involved in local community life. It is assumed that the long-established corporate culture and profit-making motivations may work together to drive the *laozihao* companies to connect with the local community where they operate. In addition, it is necessary to note that some external forces, like pressure from the government, may also motivate the companies to make contributions to community life.

The proposed project will focus on the ongoing interactions and negotiations between operating *laozihao* businesses and the local community. The findings of this project will help us understand how old-time brand businesses play their social roles in relation to benefits of the local community.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	Chong Gao and Khun Eng Kuah*	“Navigating the Landscape of Guangzhou’s Time-honoured Business: From the 19 th -Century Flowscap e to the Belt and Road Initiative ”, in <i>Asian Journal of Social Science</i> Vol. 49, Issue 4, pp.198–206. (SSCI indexed)	N/A(first submitted)	Yes (Attachment 2)	Yes	No
2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	Chong Gao and Ho Hon Leung	“Re-imagining Corporate Community Involvement during the COVID-1	N/A(first submitted)	Yes (Attachment 3)	Yes	No

					9 Pandemic : A Case Study of Pharmace utical Compani es in Guangdo ng Province, China” in <i>Human Organiza tion</i> Vol. 80, Issue 4, pp.302–3 10. (SSCI indexed)				
2020	N/A	N/A	N/A	Chong Gao	“Thick Descripti ons of Time-hon ored Brands’ Cultural Connotati on: A Case of Time-hon ored Enterpris es in Guangzho u” (in Chinese), in <i>Journal of Hangzho u Normal Universit y (Humanit ies and Social Sciences Edition), Vol. 42, No.3, pp. 112-119</i>	N/A(first submitted)	Yes (Attachm ent 4)	Yes	Yes

N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
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9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
September/2018/ Konstanz , Germany	When China's old-time brand business meets western concept of corporate social responsibility: a community involvement perspective	European Sociological Association RN 09 Economic Sociology Midterm Conference "Crossing Boundaries: Economic Sociology and its intersections"	Yes	No	Yes	No
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

Since September 2020, a new lecture topic on community involvement of business corporations (using the data collected for this funded project) was developed and included into the course Soc307 Community Economy.

Since September 2019, some data collected on *laozihao* in Guangzhou and community-based festivals had been used for the course GED201 Cultural Insights for Business Success.

Since September 2020, some data collected on *laozihao* companies in food industry had been used for the course Soc260 Food and Society.

11. Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
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12. Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

In the process of conducting research on the funded project, the PI has opportunities to collaborate with one well-established scholar from Sociology Department, State University of New York College at Oneonta, USA and one from Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, China. The latter also discussed with the PI about the possibility to see the *laozihao* business through the lens of Overseas Chinese.

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	3	1	N/A	N/A	Type	No.
					N/A	N/A

14. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
N/A	N/A