Fuelling the Entrepreneurial Fire:
An Exploration Into the Importance of ‘Cultural’ Resources in Fueling the Fire of 1st and 2nd Generational Ethnic Entrepreneurial Activities Within Professional Services

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Abstract: Addresses the question of whether ethnic minority enterprise is a routinely rational economic activity no different from other small-scale business endeavours or whether it is a distinctive small business phenomenon, demonstrating the importance of cultural resources within entrepreneurial activities. Britain is one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world. There is a particular cultural backdrop of societal norms and cultural influences to ethnic entrepreneurs in the UK. Their needs, beliefs, hopes, expectations, aspirations, attitudes, work values and perceptions of what constitutes desirable conduct all form part of the make-up of the ethnic entrepreneur and stem from their cultural roots. These influences, coupled with their ‘home-country’ statistics, form a very interesting picture of where the ethnic entrepreneur comes from: a massive population fast-approaching 1.5 billion possess 15 recognised languages, 2378 castes, 7 religious categories, enormous income gaps between rich and poor, and the largest middle class in the world of 120 million people. Diversities are reflected in patterns of life, styles of living, land tenure systems, occupational pursuits and inheritance and succession roles, thus making generalisations about the impact of ethnic culture on the ethnic entrepreneur risky. Qualitative research involving 8 (four 1st generation and four 2nd generation) ethnic entrepreneurs in professional services. Provides a rare insight into the importance attached to cultural influences and how this affects eventual entrepreneurial cognition, client targeting and marketing communications. The research identified ‘4 different types of wood’ that ethnic entrepreneurs used to fuel their fire:

1. The meaning of, and characteristics associated with, the word entrepreneur and reflections of the individuals’ feelings about themselves.
2. The cultural background of the ethnic entrepreneur and its influences on the business.
3. Ethnicity and values as a contributor to entrepreneurial activities.
4. Differences between 1st and 2nd generation ethnic entrepreneurs.

Concludes, with surprise, at the revelation of the relatively low level of importance which is placed on cultural resources by 2nd generation ethnic entrepreneurs in professional service firms. The widespread stereotypical belief that Asian business ‘success’ in the UK is that those who succeed (in surviving or expanding their businesses) do so by virtue of their cultural characteristics is misleading and in light of these findings cannot be used to describe all ethnic enterprise.