

Exploration of Impact of Distant Family Support on Chinese Migrant Women Entrepreneurs' Motivation

Key words: distant family support, Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs, motivation

Over the last few decades, migration has been on the rise. 23 million people (5.1 %) of the 447.3 million people living in the EU on 1st January 2020 were non-EU citizens (Eurostat, 2021). For instance in Germany alone, until 2021, 10,969 women with migration background in the wider sense are reported to live in Germany, consisting of one fourth of the whole female population in the country (German national statistic department, 2022). As a consequence, the rise of migrant entrepreneurship — small business activities carried out by migrants in their destination countries — has become the focus of a large body of academic research (Barberis and Solano, 2018). Despite the prosperous development of scholarships available in the domain of migrant entrepreneurship, scarce attention has been paid to the gendered nature of it. The theoretical progress of the concept of migrant entrepreneurship has also been constrained within a normative explanation relating to male entrepreneurs (Vershinina and Cruz, 2021). Entrepreneurship is argued to provide ‘flexibility’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘empowerment’ for female entrepreneurs as they are able to escape from male domination in their occupations to achieve i.e., breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ and generally living within their societies more confidently (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). The advantage of female migrant entrepreneurship includes, flexibility guaranteed by running a business, which has given women more chances to reconcile conflicts between work and family, and this has been mostly addressed in the literature (De Luca and Ambrosini, 2019). In this vein, a family embeddedness perspective (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003) posits that families and businesses are interwoven bodies, and that family dynamics impinge on fundamental entrepreneurial processes.

The presence or absence of the family evidently plays a role in shaping the relational and economic context in which immigrant entrepreneurs mobilise and this family factor can facilitate female entrepreneurs’ strategies. Studies show Chinese migrant women in Italy opened their businesses to improve their economic and working conditions by following the example of other family members, and they also manage the business with the help of other family members (De Luca and Ambrosini, 2019). A study about recent Chinese migration to Germany suggests, there is the traditional, ethnic niche economy, structured around extended families and still dominating the market for Chinese (low-skilled) labour. On the other hand, results of research about the reality of living of Chinese-speaking skilled, female, family migrants (Hsu, 2021) show that Chinese female immigrant spouses are exposed to an alternative ideal of integration that is tied to their domestic role. Particularly their German mothers-in-law, and exhibited the deliberation of the necessity to imply with German norms and behavioural patterns of being German wives. Therefore, family can impose dual factors to women in their independent life: family as support and encouragement; and family as responsibility and causes of work-life conflict. Deriving from this evidence, it is further to question, how does distant family support from country of origin of women and family support from their host country influence these migrant women entrepreneurs?

Motivation, Persistence and Action

More specifically, women who start for internally oriented reasons (such as need for autonomy) are suggested to have greater chances of successfully completing the prestart-up phase (Gelderen et al, 2005). Nonetheless after running the business for few years, when making a living or making profit has been stabilized, the next stage for the women migrant entrepreneurs, is the post-start-up phase which is characterized by gaining strategic focus and professionalizing the organization of the team (Clarysse and Moray, 2004), which varies

among people in their motivations and abilities to act. This motivation to sustain and thrive then has an important effect again, on all phases of the entrepreneurial process (Tominc and Rebernik, 2007). Stemming from this notion, another question is brought forward: how does family role effect the motivation of women migrant entrepreneurs to sustain business in their post startup stage?

In addition, Cogan (et al., 2022) propose instrumental and emotional support from household members facilitate entrepreneurial action and persistence. A number of researches show entrepreneurial passion has been proposed as a central characteristic of entrepreneurs, theorized to influence a host of entrepreneurial behaviors as well as firm performance (Mueller et al., 2017). In a post startup entrepreneurial context, entrepreneurial persistence is an ongoing feat because individuals often traverse all phases of business development and experience multiple types of motivation throughout their entrepreneurial journey (Murnieks et al., 2020). Therefore there is a need to study entrepreneurs' engagement in support process and their action towards discouraging and demotivational household support (Cogan et al., 2022).

In the contemporary Chinese context, Chinese women micro-entrepreneurs are demonstrated to struggle to support themselves and meet responsibilities associated with traditional patriarchal Chinese families. In a study, young Chinese women with college education stressed self-employment opportunities, and prioritized work over family, hoping to postpone marriage/childbearing to achieve a career (Zhang and Jurik, 2021). Nevertheless in China, family support is important for the success of female entrepreneurs as families may provide child rearing assistance, psychological support and security (Sequeira et al., 2016). In addition, Hu (et al., 2021)'s research on the impact mechanism of Chinese migrant entrepreneurship of rural migrants in urban China found that Chinese rural migrants living with family members in urban cities in China are more likely to start an entrepreneurial activity as well as to engage in necessity-based entrepreneurship, which also supports the previous idea that the presence of cohabiting family members has a positive effect on entrepreneurship. Consequently, the focus of this research specifically on women highlights the gaps for understanding familial role as a vital factor in analysing diversity in individual behaviour, especially that of female entrepreneurs, and specifically how distant family support from China may affect the development of entrepreneurship among Chinese migrant women (Lin, 2018).

Reciprocal Relationships between Entrepreneurs and Family Support

In this specific Chinese context, one evidence is also apparent, that is China's fertility rate has strongly declined and the proportion of elderly people has increased in the last decades.

Whenever it comes to Chinese familial context, it's undeniable that elders' dependence on their children for support is one of the core values of the culture of filial piety in China (Cong and Silverstein, 2012; Liu et al., 2021). As a result, those married Chinese women in 'sandwich generation' who need to care for their parents and raise children at the same time, are expected to offer equivalent caring and support back to the elders in China, except their financial support to parents through entrepreneurship. Since most studies examine how family support affects entrepreneurship by concentrating on the support provided by elders to youngers, close attention should be paid to the adverse impact of the ageing of the family's population structure on residents' entrepreneurship (Liu, et al., 2021). This potential

reciprocal relationships between entrepreneurial stressors and family support, as well as how these relationships evolve and change over time are there to be understood. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate whether women entrepreneurs can provide equal amounts of support to family members, either in the form of economic returns or emotional support, so that we can examine the supportive reciprocity mechanism between them (Xu et al., 2020).

Coping Strategy

Coping strategy is the process of managing taxing circumstances, expending efforts to solve personal and interpersonal problems, seeking to master, minimize, reduce or tolerate stress induced by unpleasant and stressful situations (Drnovsek et al., 2010). Previous research result suggests female entrepreneurs cope with role conflict between family and work by pleasing all and seeking social support, while those with abundant personal resources respond more to their entrepreneurial roles as they move up from one stage of a business to the next and less on social role expectations (Hundera et al., 2019). From there, an interesting angle to look deeper at the negotiation with others to reduce role expectations while giving female entrepreneurs the motivation and endurance to react to multiple role demands is to be viewed. Moreover, how this process of negotiating and reducing expectations can be fulfilled, needs to be answered by active participants themselves, possibly through their reflection of their experiences. Besides, it is appealed that researchers could further distinguish female entrepreneurs' different coping strategies—for example, sorting into low-revenue industries to avoid gender role incongruity (aiming low) versus challenging gender stereotypes, and entering into male-dominant high-growth industries (aiming high)—and the different social incentives for coping with and constraints on these choices across regions. It is expected that these coping strategies need to be seen as socially appropriate to varying extents depending on local institutional contexts (Zhao and Yang, 2021).

Research Questions

This present study is a conceptual short paper that explores the role of family support which is a crucial factor for comprehending the entrepreneurial process. The complex delineated phenomenon highlighted above has raised a question: how do the Chinese migrant women carry on their business whether being motivated or demotivated by their families in the country of origin and in the country of host.

This research also contains further questions:

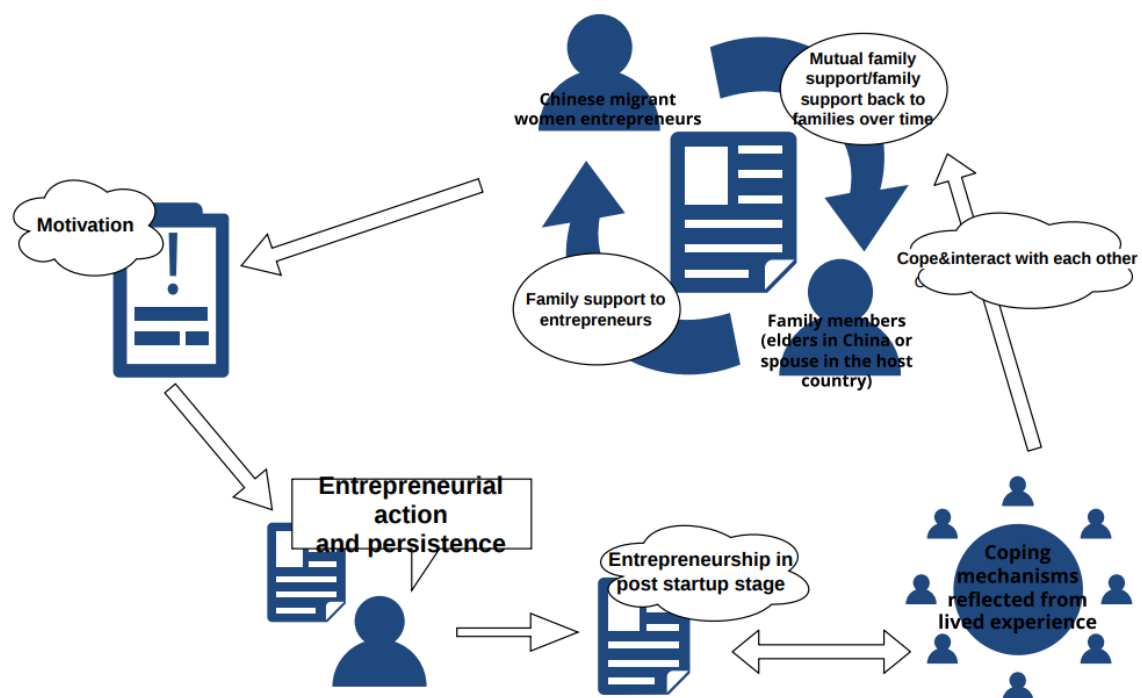
1. How does distant family support from country of origin and family support from the host country influence the motivations of migrant women entrepreneurs to sustain business in a post startup stage?
2. Has the family support changed from younger women entrepreneurs to elders families in China over a period of time?
3. What is the coping strategy adopted by Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs in relation to family roles?

Theoretical Framework: Gender Congruity Theory

Since the main theoretical perspectives pay limited attention to the gendering of social structures that facilitate/constrain migrant entrepreneurship (Ram et al., 2017), it is believed

that the theoretical framework -gender role congruity theory- can predominate our understanding of migrant women entrepreneurship. According to this theory, gender stereotypes are socially constructed, and prejudice is revealed when individuals perform roles that are perceived as incongruent with their stereotyped attributes and roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002). As one study about gender bias in team-building activities in China discloses, when Chinese women presented themselves as actively as men did, they received less favourable evaluations than their male counterparts, whereas their failures were more likely to be exaggerated (Lou et al., 2021). This result is in accordance with gender congruity theory, that perceiving a female manager or leader as very similar to her male counterpart may produce disadvantages (Eagly and Karau, 2002). According to gender congruity theory, it can be explained in a way that this disadvantage can arise from the injunctive norms (consensual expectations about women ought to do or ideally would do) associated with the female gender role. Because women who are effective leaders tend to violate standards for their gender when they manifest agentic male-stereotypical, characteristics and fail to manifest female stereotypical, communal attributes, they may be unfavourably evaluated for their gender role violation, at least by those who endorse traditional gender roles. So the question still remains, what about the above mentioned Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs' gender role and its impact on their motivation for persistence?

Accordingly, conceptual model of the study is shown in this following visual diagram with conceptual links from the context.



Research Methodology and Research Strategy

Entrepreneurial exploration is a long-lasting and challenging endeavour, one significant example being many women entrepreneurs may experience distress, when they realize that their venture is going through any unexpected fluctuations i.e. when it comes to turbulence in

their family context, which the women migrant entrepreneurs are particularly embedded in. Also in this regard, family factors have been indicated to affect the impact of venture-level attributes on entrepreneurial persistence in everchanging ventures (Coppens and Knockaert, 2021).

In line with an interpretative philosophy, qualitative research design is adopted in this research.

Taken into account that this research is concerned about the impact of the family support and the motivations of women migrant entrepreneurs, which should be influencing the sustainability of their long-term business. Also, since entrepreneurial ability is most often measured by educational status and experience (Minniti and Naudé, 2010), therefore it is the description and narratives of lived experience of migrant women entrepreneurs what will be presented in the findings. From these lived experience and the reflection of it, a conceptual and theoretical framework is believed to be generated and underpinned, phenomenology has been thus opted for for the philosophical paradigm.

Phenomenology places an emphasis on understanding the experience of people involved, whereby the research methods are the methods of philosophy (Wilson 2002). The researcher takes up the position of phenomenology, demands that one (a) rigorously explores one's experience of the world to grasp potentially fundamental aspects therein, and then (b) coordinates one's exploratory efforts to arrive at an understanding of the world as it is (Wilkinson and Hanna, 2016). Plus, the researcher contends there is indeed a valid—rather than merely viable—basis to one's knowledge according to phenomenology, and individuals can work together to arrive at a more accurate understanding of what that might be.

Phenomenology also stresses the nature of human experience and the meaning that people have attached to their experiences, hence this is in line with the expected narratives of the lived experience concerning their perception of family support and how family support interacts with Chinese migrant women's motivations in their entrepreneurial journey.

Further, due to the fact that the phenomenon of this study is disciplinary across gender studies, entrepreneurship and sociology, and the author is notably interested in how distant family support and its impact can be understood as a 'form of being in the world' and how it is experienced by Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs. Phenomenology can therefore be regarded as a suitable strategy to answer questions about "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Magana and Patton, 2002).

As mentioned, phenomenology is the philosophical notion aligned with lived experience and phenomenological theorists coincide on the need to conduct a detailed examination of experience on its own terms. Because experience cannot be picked up bluntly from the subconscious of participants, it requires a process of engagement and interpretation on the part of the researcher, also because Heidegger (1962) contends hermeneutics as a prerequisite to phenomenology, and the researcher agrees and believes the notion too, that part of the complication derives from the entwinement between phenomenology and hermeneutics as well as the fact that access to that experience comes from a participant who is him/herself also engaged in making sense of what is happening to them. This is why this research

proposition ties IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) to this hermeneutic perspective.

Sitting in accordance with the core commitments of phenomenology, the process of IPA is described to be engaging in a double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant who are trying to make sense of what is happening to them. More importantly, while it would be possible to conduct IPA on any type of experience, in practice it is most commonly used to examine experience which is of existential importance to the participant (Smith, 2011). Naturally in this research context, Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs do have to live under the influence of and with family support of all kinds, whether it is encouraging or demotivating. It is they who have to cope with either the pressure or take advantage of it, therefore their capability of sense making of family support and the influence of it is existentially significant to these women.

Thirdly, the researcher is in deep agreement with the notion from Smith and Shinebourne (2012) that IPA researchers realize this chain of connection is complicated – people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be multiple reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose, and the researcher has to interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say. Smith (1996) has pointed to how both social cognition and IPA share a concern with unravelling the relationship between what people think (cognition), say (account) and do (behaviour). For IPA, cognition lies at the heart of the phenomenological project but it is a cognition that is “dynamic, multi-dimensional, affective, embodied, and intricately connected with our engagement with the world.” (Smith et al, 2009). These are in consonance with the researcher's understanding of motivation involved in the entrepreneurial process. It is believed that all human actions result from motivational and cognitive factors on the one hand, and also follow as a consequence of external factors, on the other (Tominc and Rebernik, 2007). In this case, IPA working as the ideal strategy for it allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness between researcher and participants, which encourages a continuous flow of questioning, interpretation and critical sense-making of the meaning of the phenomena under investigation, for both the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2001; van Rensburg and Kanayo, 2021). Besides, the transition of individuals from one stage of entrepreneurial process to another is the result of the combination or integration of motivation and cognition (Shane et al., 2003), which need to be understood through a series of intensive questions. As a consequence, IPA can be postulated to help serve this position and help make sense of the experience.

As qualitative methods are used to describe, decode, and advance the understanding of intertwined past, present, or future eclectic data (i.e., facts, activities, actors' actions, decisions, or representations (Hlady-rispa and Jouison-laffitte, 2014), also given the limited understanding of the role of the women entrepreneurs' with regard to their overall motivation and then to the post start-up stage development of business, a qualitative research method is considered to be the most appropriate, as it is useful in areas that are not well advanced theoretically (Surangi, 2016). Since qualitative research designs invariably need to allow for flexibility, and for decision-making to take place as the research process proceeds (Mason, 2002), and considering that phenomenological inquiry works within the context of discovery, it is then crucial to examine how this research perspective enables researchers to generate theory that is both useful and credible (Cope, 2005). As a consequence, in-depth, unstructured lengthy interviews which are more similar to a conversation rather than a typical

interview talking to the interviewee and listening from the researcher (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005) would be applied. In doing that, the interviewee and the researcher will work in collaboration during the interview to "arrive at the heart of the matter" (Tesch, 1990).

What is to be achieved?

This short paper ought to be a primary and leading part of ongoing DBA research with an aim to identify and highlight the gaps in contextual studies on Chinese migrant women entrepreneurship concerning the role of family support and family relationship dynamics. Further study needs to be conducted by data collection through interviews and IPA to generate findings.

This continuing research strives to illustrate the picture of Chinese migrant women entrepreneurs in their changing life living in another country. The research has a significant meaning because such a detailed work about this group of women has not been outlined till now. The research also contributes to the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. It expands the current literature on entrepreneurship by getting to know the motivations of migrant women engaged in entrepreneurship and examines the experience between cultural constraints and motivations of women entrepreneurs that result in two environments. By understanding their coping mechanism(s) mentally and physically, it helps the followers who will walk down to this road later better tackle the difficulties.

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