

Conclusion:

Learning from Eight Countries' Women Entrepreneurs Studies in Asia

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Abstract

Problem: Women entrepreneurs have been and will continue to play an important role in sustaining and advancing the economic development of Asian countries. It is in the best interest of the Asian countries and International HRD professionals to develop an in-depth understanding of this population so they can develop policies, strategies, and resources to support the development of women entrepreneurs. This special volume has revealed some of the motivation, challenges, and opportunities women entrepreneurs face in Asia. This can contribute to the understanding of this newly emerged phenomenon of growing women entrepreneurs in Asia.

Solution: The growing of women entrepreneurs in Asia is a complex phenomenon. It requires the involvement of scholars and practitioners to study, understand, and theorize before meaningful solutions can be proposed that will have an overarching impact. This special volume by including a diversity of studies in eight different countries offers a glimpse into this newly emerged field of study. Human resource development initiatives and expertise are needed to provide a fighting chance for these women entrepreneurs to succeed.

Stakeholders: Entrepreneurs, HRD scholars, and practitioners who are interested in entrepreneurship development, specifically the development of women entrepreneurs in the context of Asia.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs, motivations, challenges, opportunities, and business success, Asia

Learning from the Studies of Women entrepreneurs in Asia

As stated in the preface, the purpose of this special volume is to examine women entrepreneurs' motivations, challenges, and opportunities in Asia. We took a particular interest in women entrepreneurs in Asia for the following reasons. First, Asia has been the fastest-growing region that has shifted the balance of the economic landscape of the world (Khanna, 2019). Second, gender inequality has remained not only a social issue but also a business issue in Asia (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). Third, to the best knowledge of all the authors of this special volume, women entrepreneurs in Asia is an area that has not been well studied. By publishing this special volume, we hope to bring Asian women entrepreneurs to the forefront of scholarly discussion. Through this effort, we can not only improve our understanding of this population but more importantly encourage the scholar community to produce relevant research to further inform and support the development of women entrepreneurs in Asia.

We included eight Asian countries, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysian, Thailand, and Vietnam. It might be of interests to point out that all the authors of this special volume are women. As we, a group of Asian women scholars, gathered at a hotel room during an Academy of Human Resource Development International Conference a couple of years ago, the passion in the room was clear - we need to speak out about women in Asia with our research. As mentioned in the Preface and in all the eight country studies, women are commonly discriminated because of social tradition, religious beliefs, and male-dominated business culture practices (World Economic Forum, 2018).

While recognizing there are many differences between Asia countries and to ensure a focused discussion, we asked the authors of this special volume to frame their study around three important questions: What motivated women entrepreneurs to start/own/manage a business?

What challenges did they face in business development? What opportunities contributed to their business success? As we concluding this special volume on *Women Entrepreneurs in Asia: Eight Country Studies*, we believed that it is important for us to discuss the lessons learned around the three leading questions that are particularly relevant to women entrepreneurs. We first review each country study using these three leading questions, then summarize our findings.

The China Case

The China case is a study of second-generation women entrepreneurs in family-owned businesses. This study is particularly meaningful for China because a significant number of family-owned businesses are facing succession the first time since the economic reform policy was initiated in 1979. As more and more family-owned businesses will be facing succession soon, this study makes a meaningful contribution to Chinese family business succession studies (Chen, 2015).

The study revealed that women second-generation entrepreneurs were faced with both internal pull and external push motivational factors. Internal pull factors were of this well-educated group of women seeking self-actualization and willing to take on new challenges to prove themselves. External push factors included parental influence and family obligations as the only or first child of the family. Challenges were the relationship with parents, role conflict and alignment issues. Opportunities were reflected by these women optimistic outlook for the future and self-confidence in their education, capability, and support from the family.

The India Case

There is a recent surge in women's participation in economic activities as entrepreneurs in India (Rajvanshi, 2017). One of the motivations for Indian women to become entrepreneurs was highlighted as a way to alleviate themselves from gender discrimination of the mainstream

society and business environment. Other push factors were unfriendly and inflexible work environment of the corporate world. The pull factor mainly discussed in the paper was the chance to pursue their interest and being a role model for their daughters. Challenges were work-life balance, gender bias and stereotyping in a dominantly patriarchal society. The opportunities could be summarized as support and coaching from family, colleagues, friends, and a network of other women entrepreneurs.

The Indonesia Case

This study was designed to investigate how passion, future orientation, and identity conflict would impact the success of women small business owners in Indonesia. Using a survey-based quantitative study, the authors first separated women into two types: the necessity-oriented and the growth-oriented entrepreneurs. The data showed that growth-oriented entrepreneurs were likely to have a better education than necessity-oriented entrepreneurs. Coaching and training had a similar impact among the two groups and have shown a significant correlation with their self-assessed entrepreneurial success. Role conflict had very little influence on growth-oriented women, however, it showed statistically significant influence on necessity-oriented women entrepreneurs. Moreover, the findings suggested that both passion and future orientation had a positive influence on growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in their perceived success. On the other hand, for necessity-oriented women entrepreneurs, identity conflict presented mediating impact between passion and success. It is important to point out that the majority of necessity-oriented women entrepreneurs did not have university-level education.

The Japan Case

The authors focused their investigation on women social entrepreneurs in Japan and aimed to develop a theoretical framework for their development. It appeared that it was tragic

events that motivated women to initiate social entrepreneurship to support and comfort people in economic and emotional suffering. The challenges women faced in Japan were male-dominated and hierarchical and traditional views of women's roles, consequently limited access to business networking opportunities. Interestingly, gendered role expectations in Japan might have presented opportunities for women to engage in social entrepreneurship because of their perceived feminine style of compassion and care (Bobrowska & Conrad, 2017) to solve social issues, such as helping street children. The authors argued that using transformative learning theory as a framework, HRD professionals could help women make sense of the crises, reframe their values and motives, and find self-actualization in social entrepreneurship.

The South Korean Case

This is a study of three women entrepreneurs in IT startups in Korea who started, developed, grown, and sustained their businesses for over 20 years. While the three cases were quite diverse but there were some commonalities in terms of motivation: the push factors included individual career challenges and the dislike of the rigid and male-centered business culture of the corporate Korea; the pull factors comprised of an optimistic outlook for business and life, technical competencies, and financial gain. The challenges were predominately male-centered Korean business culture, macro business environment (i.e. the economic crisis in 2008), and organizational management skills. Opportunities included family support (husband, co-founders), religious faith, network support from other women entrepreneurs.

The Malaysia Case

The paper aimed to explore how self-leadership skills might influence entrepreneurial success among Malaysian women entrepreneurs. This was a qualitative interview study. While the research was aimed to identify personal characteristics, external sources of motivation, and

aspiration as related to self-leadership development, we were able to identify the motivation, challenges, and opportunities, the three core themes of this special volume.

The personal characteristics identified in the study could be linked to internal pull factors, such as high self-esteem, self-initiative (risk-taking), and persistence. External sources of motivation were linked to external push factors and opportunities, such as support from family, support from friends and government agencies. The study found an internal motivation factor, women's aspirations of empowering others, as an independent theme. The study took a development perspective that could be the reason the authors did not reveal specific challenges these women entrepreneurs faced in Malaysia.

The Thailand Case

Thailand is among the nations with the highest women participation in entrepreneurship according to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2018). Among the countries in this special volume, Thai women enjoyed the highest in gender equality followed by Vietnam (World Economic Forum, 2018). This study focused on opportunity-driven women entrepreneurs, the motivational factors identified were mostly pulling factors, need for achievement for self-actualization, autonomy, passion and personal values, and sharing and paying forward. Thai women entrepreneurs were faced with generic business challenges, such as building trust, revenue generation, managing teams, intellectual property rights. It was interesting that gender roles expectations were not found as an obstacle for Thai women, the existence of the male-dominated culture was not apparent except for some who venture into male-dominated industries. For opportunity factors, the paper presented personal traits, self-improvement, knowledge and expertise, and family support. For personality traits, the authors listed caring for

others as one to allow women to manage good relationships as one of the women entrepreneurs' key strengths in doing business.

The Vietnam Case

In Vietnam, 31.3% of the businesses are owned by women which is one of the highest percentages among Asian nations (Mastercard, 2018). Through a qualitative interview study of 12 female entrepreneurs, they found that Vietnam women entrepreneurs were motivated by both push and pull factors. The push factors were related to dissatisfaction caused by frustration for lacking recognition and rigid working hours. The pull factors were monetary incentives, passion, self-confidence, and autonomy. It was interesting gender was stated as a push factor by the women themselves who desired to spend more time with their children and the author didn't elaborate whether these women's frustration for lack of recognition at work had any direct relationships with them being women.

For challenges, financial constraints and subsequent issues associated with running a business under a very tight budget were discussed as the biggest challenge. The authors reported that gender-related bias was not mentioned by interviewed women as an issue except on social occasions, where it took them extra effort to build trust and credibility among business partners. Rules and regulations were also discussed as a challenge. In terms of opportunities to succeed, the findings listed entrepreneurial traits, continuous learning capabilities, and external support.

Cross-Case Analysis

As we examine the findings of the eight countries cases included in this volume, we found it is difficult to make meaningful comparison or contrast because of the diversity of these studies. For examples, from micro-business owners in Indonesia to IT firms' CEOs in South Korea; from women with very little education to women with graduate degrees from top

universities in the world; from women who establish small businesses for survival purposes to second-generation women successors driving for self-actualization; from gaining monetary incentive to contributing to social good. Women entrepreneurs are active in a variety of businesses, industrial sectors, and a variety of different roles. Women entrepreneurs as a field of study can be enormously broad.

When examining closely, a few overarching themes were apparent and contributed to our understanding of this special population by answering the three important questions we proposed at the beginning of this special volume. First, motivation. The external push factors might vary but these women's internal motivations were clear, they were often driven by their desire to have a meaningful life, to make life better for their family and others, and to be a valuable and contributing member of the society.

In terms of challenge, most of them revealed that role or identity conflict could become an obstacle in their success. The perceptions of conflict might be the results of external influence or internal reasons. The external factors included gender bias of a patriarchal traditional culture in many of these countries. The internal factor was highlighted by their desire to perform the traditional roles of a woman, having kids and be the care provider of the family. Lack of education, training, coaching, and network support could be another challenge face some of the women entrepreneurs, especially for someone who did not have a good education or the necessary financial resources. All seem to believe that the support from family, friends, and colleagues have increased their self-confidence, thus strengthen the opportunities for their success.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2018) has reported that women have been and would continue to be an important force to sustain economic development in Asia. Therefore, women

must continue to play an important role in entrepreneurship activities. To understand this population gives HRD professional opportunities to provide the necessary support to these women entrepreneurs with a better fighting chance to succeed.

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