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A Study on Indonesian Female Migrant Initiating Entrepreneurship Overseas

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Abstract

The Asian financial crisis in 1997 and 1998 experienced by Indonesia produced an imbalance in the labor market that created a gap between demand and job availability. Job competition for employment takes place in both formal and informal sectors. Skilled workers in the informal sector make the situation more challenging, resulting in a rugged case for unskilled workers, especially women. This situation encourages women to choose an overseas low-skilled job over the unemployed. They decide to leave the country for a better life, support their family's finances and job opportunities overseas with higher wages, gain property motivated by the success stories of other female migrant workers, and be influenced by family members or friends who have worked or are working abroad. However, on their way, the reality is not to the expectations. Some of them experienced many bad things unmentioned, so they decided to shift their careers into entrepreneurs. This paper presents findings on the crucial factors behind the decision to shift the job from their life stories, efforts to initiate the venture, and obstacles in starting and running the business in the host country with a different cultural background. Qualitative research was used in the study. In-depth exploratory interviews were conducted with three Indonesian female worker migrant entrepreneurs to obtain data related to this study proposed approach.

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1. Introduction

The workforce has become one of the severe problems in Indonesia (Susilo, 2016), especially since Indonesia experienced the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and 1998 (Melchert, 2017). The Indonesian government has to face an imbalance in the labor market. The opportunity to get a job without a good education and skills is difficult to reach. As a result, the gap between demand and job availability occurs. Accordingly, competition for employment takes place in both formal and informal sectors. Skilled workers in the informal sector make the situation more challenging. Job competition in the informal sector has increased, resulting in a rugged case for unskilled workers, especially women. To this end, the Indonesian government officially put policies on unskilled workers' opportunities to emigrate, especially young women (Lan, 2006; Silvey, 2004).

This regulation of women's mobility is seen as the opportunity that encourages young women to choose an overseas low-skilled job over the unemployed. Moreover, other essential push crucial reasons drive them to migrate. For example, they decide to leave the country for a better life, supporting their family's finances and job opportunities overseas with higher wages and gaining property motivated by the success stories of other female migrant workers. At the same time, it is influenced by family members or friends who have worked or are working abroad to have an opportunity to reduce or eliminate poverty (Firdausy, 2006; Lan, 2006; Tambunan, 2019). Furthermore, the attraction factor of possibilities and influencing advertisement promotes work overseas to achieve a better fate. As a result, people are likely to explore moving while they are young, living and working circumstances are undesirable, and other possible alternatives (Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018).

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics Republic of Indonesia (BPS) in 2019 noted that the number of Indonesian workers overseas is dominated by female workers at 69.15% or reaching 191,237 people. Majority of them with a level of education ranging from elementary (30.17%) through junior high school (40.5%) (Nuraeny, 2017). This number is increasing year by year. According to the Indonesian Migrant Workers' Protection Bureau (BP2MI), in 2020, the percentage of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers was about 70.2 percent (184,640 out of 262,899), 70.2 percent (198,974 out of 283,640), and 69.2 percent (191,238 out of 276,554) over the last three years (Pratikto et al., 2020). Indonesian labor demand is increasing in some East Asia, such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. A large number of workers as required for the domestic sector, and construction workers do not need particular and qualified skills and high education (Nuraeny, 2017; Silvey, 2004).

Additionally, data from The Catalogue of Indonesian Overseas Workers (BNP2TKI) revealed that since 2012, some destination countries had been the workers' priority. Indonesian female workers' favorite destination countries are Malaysia, Taiwan, Arab Saudi, Hongkong, Singapura, Uni Emirate Arab, and Qatar (Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018). For various reasons, Malaysia has become the most popular country for Indonesian female migrant workers. First, there is a shared history of people mobility between Indonesia and Malaysia. The proximity also allows for frequent trips, vast social networks, and cultural similarities regarding language, religion, and traditions (Kaur, 2010; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018). Other countries in East Asia that have become another choice destination are Taiwan, Singapore, and Hongkong, which attract many Indonesian migrant workers. Afterward, the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, is another destination because it attracts and provides higher wages. Aside from that critical reason, it is a recognition of the *hajj*, a yearly pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims should do at least once in their lives. Therefore, it is an important reason for Indonesian female workers to make Saudi Arabia the preferred workplace (Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018).

Taiwan in East Asia is well-known as a country with the epithet of the Asian "*four tigers*" (among Singapore, Hongkong, and South Korea). With faster industrial growth, Taiwan has become a promising and a favorite destination for Indonesian female workers (Lan, 2006; Susilo, 2016). It provides higher wages and security guarantees through work protection by the state, both for foreign and female workers (Susilo, 2016). Migrant workers can fill jobs in construction sites, fishing boats, manufacturing sectors, and domestic work (Kaur, 2010; Lan, 2006; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018). However, since Indonesian female workers have low education, they get an unpopular occupation and face labor deficits as domestic workers. The activities involve household work, child care, older adults of several ill or disabled persons, and helpers in restaurants, schools, and kindergarten (Loveband, 2006).

However, these overseas Indonesian female workers experienced many bad things unmentioned. On their way, the reality is not by the expectations. One's journey is frequently seen as a trigger full of obstacles and frustrations that push one to pursue independence, self-fulfillment, and other desirable outcomes (Ramkissoon-Babwah, 2015). To survive, based on knowledge and social relations what they get, these female workers be able to detect some business opportunities that can be a crucial resource for them (Yuniarto, 2014). Therefore, this study tries to identify the critical factors for immigrant ladies to initiate and succeed their entrepreneurs; based on their life stories and career journeys investigation, some female workers decided to shift their careers into entrepreneurs.

2. Materials and Methods

More and more women started to join entrepreneurship and must admit that women entrepreneurs contribute positively to economic development, poverty reduction, and societal welfare globally. Female entrepreneurs start a business as a life choice to balance earning potential with familial responsibilities (Mattis, 2004). It was noted, there were 187 million women who created and ran the business. Almost 42% of entrepreneurs worldwide are women (Kelley et al., 2011). However, the study of women's entrepreneurship is still relatively rare, whereby recent literature proposes that studies about women entrepreneurs comprise less than 10% of all research in the field. Several studies on female entrepreneurship issues highlighted female entrepreneurship in developing countries and connected with immigrant female entrepreneurs in developed countries (Parker, 2010; Poggesi et al., 2016).

Some studies reported that female immigrants started their businesses for some reasonable reasons. For example, they need to have a job, overcome the traditional barriers, financial, family member choices (their husbands), religious matters, and so on (Audretsch et al., 2007; Heilbrunn & Abu-Asbah, 2011). At the same time, according to GEM 2012 survey, some papers focused on women entrepreneurs' life stories as another critical reason woman shifts to become entrepreneurs. In addition, other push factors are identified for women to start up a business, such as the need to help their families, strong gender inequity, self-achievement, self-fulfillment, and also need to be financially independent (Poggesi et al., 2016). While, women's entrepreneurship in developing countries (i.e., Indonesia and Bangladesh) shows that women-owned businesses operate in the informal sector. They tend to employ micro-enterprises such as small shops, restaurants, and hotels since their activities are characterized by low skills, capital, and easy entry (Tambunan, 2009).

In contrast, studies on female entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006; Gundry et al., 2002) in developed countries (in particular, the US, Canada, and the UK) discussed women entrepreneurs' characteristics, psychology, motivations, and networking activities, performance, and its growth. Women undertake

entrepreneurship in developed countries driven by some concerns. For example, the life history, the traditional dichotomy, ignores the complexities of women's working and domestic lives, adheres to social feminism, and balances responsibilities in the family. Moreover, women need achievement, locus control, self-efficacy, risk aversion, etc (Poggesi et al., 2016).

Objectives, Proposed Research, and Methodology

Previous researchers have explored many aspects of migrant entrepreneurs but have rarely focused on female migrant job displacement. Accordingly, this research examined detailed factors of these Indonesian female migrants shifting their job to entrepreneurship, establishing and managing their businesses, and overcoming the challenges of their business with different cultural backgrounds.

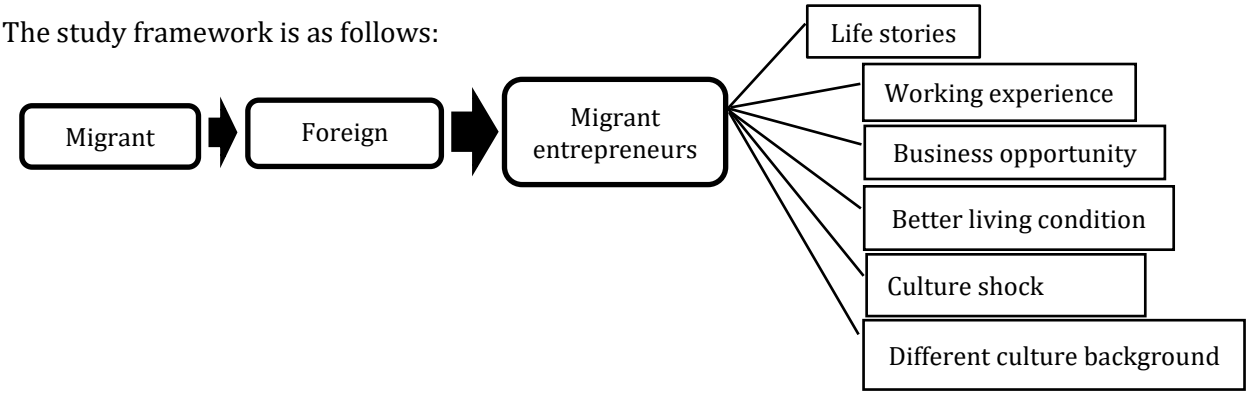
Three proposed research questions were sought to answer: (1) What are the crucial factors that encourage Indonesian female workers to shift their jobs to be entrepreneurs in Taiwan? (2) How did they initiate their ventures? (3) What are the challenges of starting and running a business with a different cultural background in Taiwan?

Methodology

This paper conducts a qualitative research approach. The characteristic of qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing data to understand theories, assumptions, or experiences (Mohajan, 2018). The most common qualitative methods are observation, interview, focus group, survey, and secondary research. An in-depth exploratory interview was conducted through questions and answers to get data on the crucial factors that encourage the participants to shift their job, efforts to set up businesses, and obstacles faced in starting and running a venture in a host country with different cultural backgrounds.

Research Framework

The study framework is as follows:



Sources of data

This study employed in-depth interviews as the primary data related to the crucial factors that encouraged three Indonesian female migrants to shift their job to entrepreneurs, efforts to set it up, and obstacles within a venture in a host country, Taiwan, with a different culture.

Table 1. List of Participants

No.	Participants	Age	Education	Period of stay	Business Activities
1.	P (1)	52 years	Junior High school	25 years	restaurant, and salon
2.	P (2)	30 years	University	18 years	retails, and remittance
3.	P (3)	57 years	Senior High School	35 years	restaurants

Data Collection Procedure

In-depth exploratory interviews were conducted with three Indonesian female migrant entrepreneurs that live and run their businesses in Taiwan. The interview is driven by a question and answer to get information or opinions on a specific matter (Moleong, 2021), in this case, related to the proposed approaches in this study. The interview guideline provided by the researcher encompassed participants' histories and experiences of displacing the job, some essential factors that encouraged them to initiate entrepreneurship in Taiwan, and the challenges in starting and running their enterprise with the different cultural backgrounds in the host country.

Data Analysis

The exploratory method uses to analyze the researcher's findings. The interview manuscript was a transcript, recorded, and analyzed through coding, labels to code, whereby comparing and contrasting data. At the same time, the exploratory theory is "the preliminary research to clarify the exact nature of the problem to be solved" (wikipedia.org, 2020). It is used to investigate a problem that is not clearly defined. One of the collecting data techniques is formal qualitative research through in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective methods, case studies, or pilot studies. This study data analysis focuses on the primary research issues and a significant theme.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted in Douliu city, Yunlin county in Taiwan, and randomly selected the participants. The data collected focused on three Indonesian female workers migrants. In addition, the study was based on oral answers given by the participants. Thus, the limitation was linked to the Indonesian female story of a life journey that shifted the job to entrepreneur, efforts to start it up, and obstacles faced during the business in the host country.

3. Results and Discussions

This study investigated the crucial push factors that initiate Indonesian female workers to shift their previous work to entrepreneurs in Taiwan. Three female workers were interviewed and observed during the information gathered. The findings discussed the following themes: the crucial factors behind the decision to shift jobs to be an entrepreneur; the efforts to initiate their enterprise; and some challenges in starting and running their business with the different cultural backgrounds in the host country.

3.1 The Crucial Factors Shift the Job to Entrepreneur

Data analysis discloses that some driving factors motivated these ladies toward job displacement. These essential factors, as mentioned, were working experience, business opportunities, better living conditions, and culture shock. The working experience was the first factor revealed by all the participants. As the evidence of the participants says:

(P1): '*My previous work as a domestic worker was an 'unpleasant' experience;*
(P2): '*I had been got 'difficulty' by an employer to the inflexible working. So many requests were put on me. I had no chance to take my day off;*
(P3): '*I feel frustrated with the inability 'to be flexible' as a mother (caretaker of her younger children); wife; worker, and I need a job more flexibility so that I can choose my hours.'*

The dissatisfaction with their previous working experience has encouraged all the participants to start their venture as an alternative career change. All the participants admitted that working experience motivated them to shift their job. They desire to take control of their personal lives or form of their self-survive. This agrees with (Carter et al., 2001; Spaan & van Naerssen, 2018) regarding the desire for personal independence as a pull factor, motivating women to engage in entrepreneurship. For all participants, running a business makes them more independent. It provides an opportunity to realize their goal or talent to produce something of a market worth in line with their abilities and, more crucially, to enhance family income, including reducing or eliminating poverty ((BPS), 2017).

In addition, these ladies want to manage their time, organize their workload more effectively, and have more time with their families, especially their children. The working experience that all of these women get in the prior put them stronger motivation to start new alternative careers that can indeed support their economic life and as a form of self-survive. It is in line with (Abdullah et al., 2012) that working experience has emerged as the primary motivating factor in turning a foreign worker into an entrepreneur.

Then, a business opportunity was the second essential factor. All these participants assert that seeing the great business opportunity with the growing number of Indonesian students and workers from time to time in Taiwan. For example, the witness from the participants says:

(P1, P3): '*Far away from homeland brings a longing for home food taste. So, it is an excellent chance to open an Indonesian restaurant;*
(P2): '*Indonesian needs various local products from Indonesia, and the workers also want to send money to their families in Indonesia. Thus, they need remittance that is run by the same ethnicity. So, it is an opportunity for a start-up.'*

These ladies can notice business opportunities that come their way to become a primary resource for them when deciding to set up and create a new own business. Moreover, some basic principles of running entrepreneurship in Taiwan are the same identity, social relationship, and social trust, such as one homeland, ethnic sameness, language, religion, friendship, brotherhood, etc. (Chen, 2013). It revealed that the experiences and observations from the previous job inspired these three participants to set up their new business. This study agrees with (Abdullah et al., 2012) that business opportunities as another motivating factor, as stated in their finding. They described that working experiences led people to do the same business line. Foreign businesspeople certainly know the options available in these areas because they have been in this business line as an observer.

Reaching a better living condition is the third crucial factor found. All participants emphasized that by the time they quit their previous job, the new one they undertake can support the economy and well-being. This is because the economic conditions are improving, and the important one is that the family needs are met. Besides, their venture also being able to assist family life in Indonesia. Following are the statements of the participants:

(P1): '*Able to pay the business' rent place, employees, and send money to Indonesia is an achievement of success;*
(P2): *'Having a house, vehicle in Taiwan, then investments (ranch, home, car) in Indonesia indicated the stable economic condition;*
(P3): *'Children get the best education, have a place to live in Taiwan, and our hometown represents a prosperous life.'*

All the participants showed that they get a sense of well-being, personal achievement, and satisfaction by running the venture. Consistent with what is emphasized by (McGowan et al., 2012) that regarding entrepreneurship, most interviewees had positive expectations when setting up their business with their family's needs. It is an important impact on their business.

Meanwhile, a culture shock was the fourth crucial factor. It was the reality that two participants must face. The two experienced various adjustments in their early life in Taiwan. The language was a major obstacle for both of them. Each of them has differences in overcoming culture shock. The excerpts of the participants' interview results:

(P1): '*Language, environment, habit, and culture are the great constraints that influence the marriage relationship. I Had imagined that getting married and living abroad would be so proudly;*
(P2): *'Language problem and habits in the family surrounding become so sensitive. For example, when to give birth after knowing the gender of the baby born (male twins). The husband's family requires giving birth in Taiwan. Meanwhile, parents insist on giving birth in Indonesia due to its first grandchildren.'*

It cannot be denied that everyone experiences culture shock. This agrees with (Rafika et al., 2018) that the foreign workers might experience the shock in the form of language shock in the foreign country where they are working. When people live in one new country, they will begin to sense a unique culture that will encounter culture shock. Even though these two participants experienced culture shock, both have their way of dealing with this situation. As witnessed below:

(P1): *'Since I am Javanese, my culture teaches me to accept and obey my husband;*
(P2): *'The age difference is quite far, and my husband is more mature, so we try to minimize the differences.'*

Culture shock also includes habits and culture, especially in mixed marriages. These two participants tried to deal with adapting to the culture of the origin country they were in. They learned language, habits, and culture to avoid clashes in the family environment. They try to adjust, and the important thing is that they are still held to their own culture. At the same time, (Melchert, 2017) revealed that Indonesian have something distinctive in their ethnic group stereotypes. They are viewed as 'simple-

minded' but 'loyal,' 'slow' but 'obedient,' and pleased with their gain. Mainly migrants from Java are believed to be more receiving because of their Muslim background (Lan, 2006; Loveband, 2006).

3.2 Initiate their own enterprise

The journey to start their business is inseparable from their life stories, of how they started it that led them to become entrepreneurs in foreign countries. The data indicated three participants had their ways of initiating the businesses. The following interview revealed the life stories behind their success. The way they struggled to set up and develop even run their current venture. As the first participant put it:

(P1): '*Working in the fields after marriage aroused the idea of selling vegetables, corn, and cabbage to earn extra money. Half of it was to buy food for the family, and the remaining was saved. From each NT collected (around 50 NT in 1998), she tried to start a business by selling vegetables around the village using motorbikes. With the profits collected around ten years, the participant started a venture by selling Indonesian 'halal' food that was offered door to door to Indonesian migrant workers' friends, who became the main customers. Encouragement of friends, the participant opened an "Indonesian food stall" that provides various 'halal' menus from the origin region of the migrant workers to treat their homesickness. The business was growing well, but the marriage could not be sustained. The divorce occurred with her first husband, and the participant survives in the food business. Through her hobby, performing traditional Indonesian dancing brings her to meet her second husband. After marriage, the participant was sent to school as a hairdresser because her husband had a salon business. Besides running a restaurant, the participant also operates a salon and a dancer*.'

Then, how did the second participant start a business was told in the following extract of the interview:

(P2): *'Fulfilling the shopping needs, treating friends, and traveling were the initial goals of opening her business. However, seeing the needs of consumers, Indonesian workers, and students towards Indonesian products. For example, local cosmetics, cooking spices, snacks like biscuits, crackers, magazines, clothes, and so on (the observation result while she was in the previous work at 'Indonesian retail shop'), and the remittances trust more to the same ethnic groups. These reasons drive the participant to open and run her businesses. The venture capital was obtained from work in the retail shop for five years. Her husband supports all of the activities carried out. The mini store's current business provides a variety of local Indonesian products. Marketing and sales are carried out through social media and supply remittance services to Indonesia.'*

While the third participant shared her story about how did she start her restaurant through the following interview results:

(P3): '*After her husband's factory went bankrupt, the demand for household economic fulfilment encouraged the participant to start a food stall. The participant tried to collect capital by working at the market and selling cakes at the market from 10 am to 12 pm. Selling cakes also continued in the evening in front of her house. It took at least six years to raise venture*

capital. However, the hard work has led the participant to open a food stall in the market to date. The stalls provided two kinds of food, Indonesian and Taiwanese. The Indonesian menus consist of meatballs, fried rice, 'rendang' (seasoned beef), and fried chicken with fresh vegetables. This restaurant is well-known as "Warung Akim" (the owners' name). The name of this stall is popular and so familiar to Indonesian students and workers around Douliu city.'

Having various experiences and stories behind the efforts and hard work made by all the participants in starting their businesses revealed that all participants have tenacity in striving for venture capital to succeed in their business. Strong motivation is positive evidence of the achievement of the long struggles they have faced and ultimately shapes their entrepreneurial character. According to (Kirkwood, 2009), women's motivation to initiate business is a life choice. Moreover, they set up businesses to build a better balance between their ventures and families' responsibilities. Therefore, the next section will focus on the participants' responses dealing with various obstacles in running businesses with different cultural backgrounds.

3.3 Challenges of Starting and Running a business with a Different Cultural Background in Taiwan

This section focused on the participants' responses dealing with various obstacles in running their businesses with different cultural backgrounds. Opening an enterprise in a foreign country seems easy but complicated in practice (Yuniarto, 2014). Business activities require skills in managing the business, having strong social relationships, and having the attention to know the local culture is essential. The following were interview excerpts about how the participants overcame various challenges in running their businesses with existing cultural differences. As the testimony said by all the participants:

(P1): '*The expectation was that the business runs well, builds good relations with the environment in which the venture was located because it's the primary source of life;*
(P2): *'Building good friendships and networks was essential so that there were mutual understanding and cooperation with local entrepreneurs;*
(P3): '*Friendly to the environment in which the enterprise was located and also adapted to the local culture was more important.'*

All the participants agreed that building a "*friendship connection*" in the network was essential. This was related to running a business and becoming an entrepreneur in the host country. Sharing information with consumers, suppliers, shops, or other restaurants was also advantageous for the business (Yuniarto, 2014). Therefore, all the participants emphasized that friendship and networking were factors in developing a venture and adapting to cultural differences. As witnessed by two of the participants:

(P1): *'There was no competition word in running a business and served the consumers sincerely was a top priority;*
(P2): *'Advantage to consider all friends as joint venture partners can help obtain various information needed.'*

In running an enterprise, simple information can form solidarity that provides assistance, such as food taste, using social media as an '*interaction*' of selling products, and maintaining a friendship. All the examples reflected the excellent relationship between the owner, the customer, and the client (Brandellero, 2009; Yuniarto, 2014). Moreover, interaction with customers and clients creates mutual respect regardless of cultural differences. It can be addressed by providing the best quality of service involving preparing different menus as requested, having good time management, avoiding being in control, meeting new people, and hearing of various issues as advantages described by all participants.

Another benefit of running a business is having a sense of satisfaction even though they have different cultural backgrounds. As confirmed in the interview results:

(P1): '*Having the freedom to do business without being afraid of the different culture;*
(P2): *'As long as we follow the state regulations, no worry about running a business;*
(P3): *'They do not recognize the word "halal" or "not halal" in the local culture, but they are still respected.'*

However, these ladies identified several obstacles arising from their own business experiences. It involves their lack of knowledge as entrepreneurs and lack of assistance in the venture (Poggesi et al., 2016).

4. Conclusion

This study revealed that these three entrepreneurial women established their business encouragement mainly through dissatisfaction, desire to survive, and strong motivation to change fate, leading them to become successful entrepreneurs with their characters. The four crucial factors for the participants to shift job change to entrepreneurship as an alternative career encompassed working experience, business opportunity, better living conditions, and culture shock. At the same time, these ladies' life stories are behind the efforts to initiate their venture and successfully reach more extraordinary achievements in the host country. While these female entrepreneurs also learned to overcome difficulties in starting and running a business through interaction that forms solidarity and maintains friendship. Thus, sorting out and recognizing the advantages and disadvantages of controlling business gives them entrepreneurial experience. Then, a realistic awareness of cultural differences helps them understand their position, maintain harmony, and build mutual understanding to succeed in running their business.

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