

FEMALE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN JAPAN - A STUDY ON BUSINESS LIFE CYCLE STAGES OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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มีการเน้นความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างสตรีอพยพและธุรกิจเพิ่มมากขึ้น ปัจจุบันเป็นที่รู้กันว่าการประกอบการของผู้อพยพขึ้นอยู่กับโอกาสและแหล่งทรัพยากรที่ได้รับจากประเทศที่พำนัก และสิ่งนี้เป็นตัวกำหนดการเติบโตของธุรกิจขนาดกลางและขนาดเล็ก การทำธุรกิจใหม่ๆ และกิจกรรมในการประกอบการ ในภาพรวมการประกอบการในประเทศญี่ปุ่นค่อนข้างช้า แม้แต่ข้อมูลล่าสุดก็แสดงให้เห็นถึงคะแนน TEA ของประเทศที่ต่ำ สตรีมักจะมีส่วนร่วมอย่างจำกัด และมักจะถูกคาดหวังให้ทำกิจกรรมทางบ้านมากกว่า ถึงแม้ว่าจะมีการเปลี่ยนแปลงมากขึ้นแล้ว เนื่องจากมีประชากรสูงวัย โครงสร้างทางสังคมที่เปลี่ยนแปลงและความจำเป็นในการกระตุ้นเศรษฐกิจ ผลกระทบที่มีต่อการประกอบการของผู้อพยพ โดยเฉพาะที่มีสตรีเป็นเจ้าของ ยังคงเป็นเรื่องที่ต้องทำความเข้าใจ งานวิจัยนี้สำรวจการทำธุรกิจตามขั้นตอนวงจรชีวิตธุรกิจ โดยระบุแรงจูงใจหลัก ความท้าทายและอุปสรรคที่สตรีอพยพส่วนใหญ่ประสบในการสร้างและพัฒนาธุรกิจในประเทศญี่ปุ่น และเสนอการเปลี่ยนแปลงในระบบเพื่อสร้างสภาพแวดล้อมที่เอื้ออำนวยและการทำให้การประกอบการของผู้อพยพในประเทศญี่ปุ่นเข้มแข็งขึ้น

Abstract

There is a growing emphasis on the relationship between immigrant women and businesses. With time, it has come to knowledge that immigrant entrepreneurship is largely dependent on the opportunities and resources offered by the host country and this will determine the growth in small and medium enterprises, new ventures and overall entrepreneurial activity. Japan has traditionally been slow in entrepreneurship even as recent data shows a poor TEA score for the country. Women also have a limited participation and they are expected to be more involved in domestic activities. Although much is

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now changing in the face of an aging population, changing social structure and the need to boost economic activity, its impact on immigrant entrepreneurship, especially by owned by women, is yet to be understood. This paper looks at the issue by exploring such businesses across stages in a business life cycle. It identifies key motivators, challenges and barriers that most immigrant females face in business creation and development in Japan. Finally it proposes instrumental changes in the system to build a more positive environment and strengthen the prospects for immigrant entrepreneurship in Japan

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, entrepreneurship has been seen as a phenomenon that has given people the ability to use their skills the way they wanted in the form most desirable. In her book *Business as Unusual: My Entrepreneurial Journey - Profits with Principles*, Anita Roddick, founder and CEO of the world famous cosmetics brand Body Shop said “*Nobody talks of entrepreneurship as survival but that’s what it is and what nurtures creative thinking*”.

Academic research on female entrepreneurs and their involvement in business activities is on a rise as they are increasingly being considered as important influencers on economic development. Verheul and Thurik (2001) emphasize that these sections of businesspeople boost economic growth and contribute to the diversity of entrepreneurship in the economic process. But actually, the numbers of females in entrepreneurial activities still lag behind their male counterparts (Reynolds et al, 2002). The 2009 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicates a clear distinction between high and low entrepreneurship countries. Delmar (2003) states that countries which have high female entrepreneurial activity exhibit high

total entrepreneurial activity and influences contribution of women entrepreneurship towards total economic growth of a specific economy. Immigrant entrepreneurship has shown a steady increase with migration activities and globalization (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). However it is evident that minority group of female immigrant entrepreneurs has not been adequately investigated (Halkias, 2008). Hence, it is critical to identify key social and business factors that can contribute to the life cycle of these small businesses started by female immigrants by looking at industry sector, use of technology, firm employment growth potential, and work-family balance issues and finally their economic impact on host societies. However, what is necessarily basic is the presence of lucrative opportunities and secondly the presence of enterprising individuals (Venkatraman, 1997).

This study examines the status of female immigrant entrepreneurs in Japan, the second largest economy of the world on basis of official exchange rate and third largest on purchasing power parity (CIA World Fact Book, 2010); while also being recognized as an ‘Innovation driven economy’ due to its ability to create new products and services through sophisticated and pioneering

methods (Porter, Sachs and McArthur, 2002). As the economic development index increases there is more focus on service sectors that will cater to the needs of an increasingly affluent society. This results in an increase in the number of opportunities towards formation of small innovative firms. Therefore while basic requirements and efficiency enhancers are in a developed stage, the key focus of an innovation driven economy are the entrepreneurial conditions required to keep entrepreneurial activity high. Therefore for this paper, 'entrepreneurship' is defined as "the creation of new enterprise" (Low & MacMillan, 1988, p.141) and an 'entrepreneur' is an "individual who perceives an opportunity and partakes in the necessary functions, activities and actions associated with creation of an organization to pursue that opportunity" (Pearce, 2005) have been considered. Also, this paper will identify the key elements that can be obstacles to the maintenance of entrepreneurial conditions in innovation driven economy Japan. The paper begins with a literature review about the status of global migration to Japan and the profiles of immigrant women. It explores the lifecycle status of businesses owned by female immigrant entrepreneurs (FIEs), their experiences and challenges in an immigrant society. It draws attention to hindrances in the process and proposes that changes in governance structure such as policies, support systems and entrepreneurial management of the local and state government in encouraging social acceptance, in terms of tolerating differences and diversity in other people or groups, can help in overcoming barriers to immigrant entrepreneurial activity.

BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of migration is explained as an effect of various socio-cultural and economic reasons in the country of origin and the chosen destination (Adewale, 2005). Small and medium sized enterprises, micro-enterprises, start-ups, personal business ventures are also highly affected by a country's social and economic system. It is sent that the impact is stronger in migrants from developing countries to stronger, more stable economies as they search for stable employment and an improved quality of life (Nwajiuba, 2005, 2008). Opportunity structures, availability and access of resources including funds and a general acceptance from society are presumably the most important determinants. This conforms to the theory of the 'three driving forces' postulated by Timmons (1990) where the framework speaks of determining factors in new venture creations (Figure 1). At the center of the framework is a business plan, in which the three basic components are integrated into a complete strategic plan for the new business. The parts must fit together well and together they form the foundation for the success of a new firm. Weak strength of interlinks results in high uncertainty thereby hampering the entrepreneurial spirit in a given economic situation. Hence attention must be focused on making the three factors strong and appealing to the overall integration of the business framework. As the space for opportunities expand, it must be reinforced with accessible resources that can attract current and prospective entrepreneurs in order to further build on the existing business frameworks and help enlarge prospects for busi-



Figure 1: Three driving forces

Source: Based on Jeffrey Timmons' framework, as presented in Jeffrey A. Timmons, *New Venture Creation* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1990)

ness development and expansion. Difficulty in understanding opportunities and available resources can be highly disappointing to the enthusiasm of the new venture creators. This is especially crucial in societies where difficulties in communication and low relatedness to native society are commonly experienced problems.

Involvement of Females in Business in Japan

Japan is characterized by economic factors such as high focus on technological development, increased exposure to global society and social factors such as low birth rates, an aging population, late marriages, and shifting contribution of the role of men and women in the Japanese social life.

The traditional social system of Japan did not encourage women from playing an active, decisive role in society. Most were

prevented from excelling in education and gaining special skills or personal connections that could support their business acumens. According to a 2005 United Nations Human Development Report, titled "Gender Empowerment Index", Japan has been ranked 43rd among 80 countries evaluated. In contrast, the United States was ranked 12th, and Norway was ranked first. This report examines the environment of various countries regarding their women's involvement in economic, political activities and their general role in the process of decision-making.

According to a 2004 report from the Ministry of economics, trade and industry, government of Japan, Japanese small and medium sized enterprises comprise more than 99 percent of the total number of Japanese enterprises. These one million-plus businesses employ 72.7 percent of workers, account for more than 50 percent of the total value, and almost 60 percent of

the value added. In this shift, Griffy-Brown and Oakland (2007) emphasize that Japanese economic system has also changed to favor women who take an active part in the business world, although the male-dominated traditional economic system persists. Women are now recognized as a capable workforce to help reduce Japan's labor shortage. The report issued by the Ministry of Finance, Government of Japan "Women Activities and Enterprise Operating Results", recommends that firms increase productivity by encouraging women to participate in the firm's activities. Among several supports provided by the Japanese governments, many local government offices and community organizations are providing female entrepreneurs with information and programs on how to start businesses. The Japan Finance Corporation Survey Report (2000-2001) states that, in 1999, the public sector Life Finance Corporation extended special loans exclusively to women at a very low rate of 1.5 percent. This survey was repeated in 2002 and found that as compared to 1,315 cases approved during the first year of the program, the number of approved cases had now escalated to 3,277 cases as most women took up business activities in services sector such as small restaurants, take-out food stores, nursing, massage centers, relaxation clinics, and pet grooming. A similar program, called the Center for the Advancement of Working Women, was launched in 2001 by Japan's Health, Welfare and Labor Ministry to aid women entrepreneurs. The official reports from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare that Japanese women from 1997 to 2002 have started their own businesses at twice the rate of businesses initi-

ated by Japanese men (Kanbayashi, 2002). Debroux (2006) identified women as 'necessity entrepreneurs' who needed to start a business more as a source of self realization after having spent considerable time and energy in family and children. He reported that women account for 15% of total new business creations in Japan including 'male' professions such as accounting, financial advisory, tourism and health care. However, while woman entrepreneurship has been accepted completely in large cities of Japan such as Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya; it is still rare in the rural Japan. This low involvement of Japanese women in business is also reflected in the Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) score in which Japan scores the lowest rank among the 29 countries. The TEA score for Japan is 1.8, and the score for Japanese females is 0.6 as compared to 3.0 for Japanese males. In this report, the highest position of TEA score is obtained for India which has a total TEA score of 17.9, and the score for Indian females is 14.1 as compared to 21.4 for Indian males. Again, Japan scores the lowest position for the female share in entrepreneurship scoring to 17.5% only as compared to the highest score of 44.3% in South Africa. (Note: The TEA score is divided into female, male and total entrepreneurial activity rates that refer to the share of adults in the female, male and total population of 18 to 64 years old and who are actively involved in starting a new business or in managing a business less than 42 months old.)

STUDY OVERVIEW

This paper aimed at having an insight

into two aspects of immigrant female entrepreneurship in Japan:

a. to determine the situation of the female immigrant entrepreneurs in this developed nation, given that there is a serious lack of academic research in this area.

b. To understand how the entrepreneurial opportunities are explored and used by the immigrant female population.

It was thought that in-depth understanding of the subject could be done by focusing on following areas: Origin and personal profile of immigrant females, types of business in which they are involved and their location and finally the experiences at varying stages of their business. Therefore, a qualitative study approach was adopted with a semi structured questionnaire that covered 3 main aspects - Personal profile, Business stage profile and Personal Perception Factors. In depth interviews were conducted with the help of a topic guideline that was created based on a semi structured questionnaire developed by Harkiolakis and Halkias (2007) as part of a 2-year cross-national study on surveying the social and business characteristics of FIEs in 30 different countries and regions. The questionnaire is based on the life cycle theory of a minority owned business proposed by Bernard and Slaughter (2004) and looks at four distinct phases of a business viz: birth, adolescence, maturity and death. The model emphasizes that questions related to female immigrant entrepreneurship can be answered through researches that follow individual businesses in order to understand opportunity structures and associated challenges. The qualitative approach to the research was adopted as it provides subjective and in-depth analysis about what the respondents

think or perceive for a given research issue (Walle, 2001; Marimpoloski, 2006). The open ended questions were primarily used as it allowed respondents to participate freely without setting any boundaries or providing clues that could influence the answers (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Because of difficulties in contacting the target respondents, the purposeful respondent selection via a chain or snowball process (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) was adopted. A total of 56 female immigrant entrepreneurs were contacted for the study and in most cases responses were obtained within the first week. The average age of the respondents was 43 years and maximum respondents were Americans, followed by Chinese and Indians (N = 56 - American (12), Chinese (10), Indians (14), South Korean (4), Britain (4), France (2), Israel (2), Russia (2), New Zealand (1) and Germany (1), Nepal (2) and Ukraine (2)). Due to the scarcity of female entrepreneurs and subsequent difficulty in getting information about them, data collection required a period of 5 months from August 2009 to January 2010.

FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, the semi structured questionnaire focused on 3 main aspects when exploring the immigrant female entrepreneurs and their status in Japan -

1. Personal profile
2. Business stage profile - Business at Inception and Business in early stages
3. Personal perception factors

The following section will provide the findings obtained for each section explored here.

Personal Profile

A profile of the female immigrant entrepreneurs (N = 56) is given below:

1. Age group between 26 and 52 and an average age of 41.
2. Approximately 42 % of them were married and had at least 1 child.
3. The average years spent in Japan was estimated at 15 years of stay in the host country
4. 33 respondents had come to Japan alone while the remaining had accompanied their husbands or fiancés to Japan.
5. Maximum number of respondents (27) came to Japan as tourists while some (20) said that they had come here for business or job opportunities.
6. When asked about why they chose Japan as their host country, 28 respondents said that they wanted to explore business and job opportunities in Japan while nearly 17 said that the unique culture and life of Japan was a strong appeal factor for them to try their future in Japan. 9 respondents said that that came to Japan to practice their

Japanese language skills that they had learnt in their native country.

7. 80% of the respondents said that Japan was the first foreign country that they had visited.

8. All the respondents were well qualified professionally with Master's degree or Diploma qualifications and nearly 83% of the respondents were able to communicate in the English language.

9. 78% respondents expressed a desire to continue working in Japan and had no plans to immigrate to other countries in the near future.

10. Figure 2 gives the distribution of businesses owned by the immigrant female entrepreneurs.

Business Stage Profile

With the Life cycle approach as a theoretical base for the questionnaire of this study, various stages of the business were explored - Birth, Early years (up to 3 years since inception), Maturity (3 years +) and

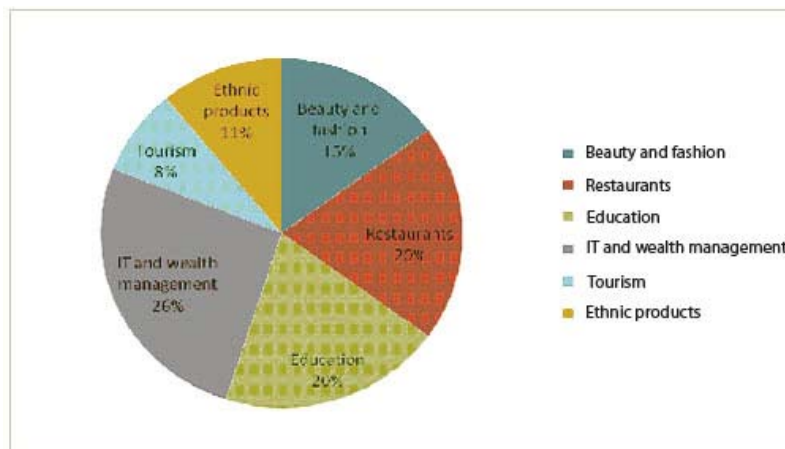


Figure 2: Business profile categorization of respondents

Death. Questions focused on why the reason for the respondents to become entrepreneurs, their role as an individual and as a family member, employee, customers and supplier profiles associated with their business and their relationship and types of barriers and supports experienced in the new country.

1. Business at Birth:

Motive - The primary motive for most respondents (47) was freedom to work and self dependence. Parents appeared to be the source of motivation for most respondents (40% - father and 20% - mother). The rest were inspired by friends, colleagues and other social relations.

Ownership and funding - Most respondents had 100% ownership of their firms and only a few opened the venture with friends or foreign partners. 60% of the respondents started their business within the first five years of their coming to Japan and today look after the entire management of the firm. It was therefore evident that most of the businesses were individual ventures rather than family owned or in partnership. 82% of the respondents said that they had opened the business with only their personal funds while the remaining depended for some part of their funding on loans from banks.

Fear and Confidence - Fear of failure and confidence in skills was measured on a 5 point scale in ascending order. Fear of failure among the respondents was quite strong in the initial stages of their business enterprise. 30 respondents said that they were 'afraid' of conducting business activities and creating customer and supplier relations. This was attributed to fear of rejection,

criticism and not being able to express things in the right manner to the right people. On the other hand, a contrasting reaction was seen as nearly 28 respondents said that they were 'very confident in their knowledge and skills'. So even though they experienced initial fear and hesitation, the ability to believe in what they had to offer to the markets was a big boost for business persuasion and making strong efforts to make their ventures a success.

Family and friends - Two aspects were questioned: *Perceived conflicts between work and family* and *Perceived support from family*. Most respondents identified that Time management between work and family responsibilities was a huge challenge. As most respondents were mothers of young or growing kids, it was difficult for them to find the right support system to take care of their kids. In this situation however, most families also gave high credit to their own families for solving this difficult situation. As a result, perceived support was ranked high and 40 respondents said that the support that they received from their family for their entrepreneurial efforts was very good.

Employees - All businesses employed native Japanese. Approximately 50% businesses also employed other foreigners while only 30% businesses employed people from the same ethnic community as theirs.

Suppliers - Both Japanese and same ethnic group suppliers were involved in supplying raw and finished goods to the enterprise. This indicated that immigrant business enterprises contributed immensely to the job creation, employment, purchase of raw materials and their sale - thereby enhancing businesses cycles in the host country.

Customers - The main customer segment largely consisted of Japanese people as for all businesses they formed approximately 92% of all customers; indicating a strong interaction with local community and prospective customer base.

Barriers - Language, Japanese laws and policies, premise acquisition and cultural differences emerged as strong barriers for business activity. In most cases, respondents faced some degree of resistance from Local community (defined as community where business is located), particularly in matters of renting premises and making the first contact with foreigners because there was:

“Fear among local community that foreigners do not understand nor follow the rules” (Denny, American, 32, New York style restaurant) and identified as

“Ethnic stereotyping” (Barkha, Indian, 48, Indian restaurant).

The respondents experienced some peculiar gender related barriers.

“Lack of understanding of the product due to cultural differences and prejudice against non Japanese females” Nicole (29, New Zealand Tourism) and

“Prejudice against females due to cultural differences” (Sumi, Korean, 29, Beauty Salon)

Support from host country and local community - There was a mixed response for this factor of examination. While approximately 52 % of the respondents said they got either no or very weak support from the host country for their business start-up, a small section of 23% respondents claimed that they were very satisfied with the way Japan and the local government helped them. This response was mostly seen in certain industries such as restaurants and beauty

salons. Tammie (36, French, French restaurant) stated that:

“Licensing is so much easier for restaurants in Japan”. As she puts it further, “international cuisine is particularly popular in Japan and well appreciated by Japanese people. Such businesses are one of the easiest to enter into”.

Regarding support from local community, almost 85% of the respondents said that local community eventually accepted them as part of their business circle.

“Making relations with neighboring Japanese business people takes time initially and one needs to be comfortable with it. However, slowly, friendship with them as well as customers becomes more firm and helps in our confidence” Geeta (41, Nepal, Indian restaurant)

“After a couple of months, I could go to my Japanese neighbors and they helped me with translating some of the Japanese post that I received from time to time”. Dyna (American, 48, International school for kids)

Some other interesting responses were that the local community was much supportive as compared to government agencies as they helped in language related difficulties and even helped to spread information of the enterprise through word of mouth and local networking. Debbie (52, American, Financial advisor) sums it up in saying that *“There is no overt discrimination”*.

Support from ethnic community emerged as a very strong component of female immigrant entrepreneurs. Approximately 90% of the respondents said that support from ethnic community was very strong and encouraging and this helped im-

mentally in taking the next step forward to business stabilization. This can also be attributed to the ability of women in general to use existing networks as women are more dependent on social networks in ethnic communities rather than formal business networks (Baker, Aldrich and Liou, 1997).

“My community was very supportive and always gave sound advice to help prevent losses and disappointment” Joan (28, French, Fashion house)

The Business demographics in early years: ‘Early years’ was identified as the time up to three years since inception of the business. The questions asked in startup were repeated to observe any changes - marked or otherwise in the next phase of the business cycle. It was observed that the respondents did not identify any changes for most of the aspects that were reexamined at this stage. Some changes were observed in the funding of the business because a small section of the female entrepreneurs now also depended on loans taken from banks and revenues generated from their business in order to fund their business into further growth and expansion plans. 74% of the respondents indicated that they had reduced the share of their personal funds in the business by as much as 70% and now depended largely on other sources including revenues of the business. Almost 60% of the respondents also claimed that they had not made any major changes to their marketing and growth strategies during this time and they had continued to follow the same pattern of conducting business as they had since the inception of the business. There was also an increase in the number of Japanese employees as the business enhanced in volume.

Like in the previous phase, the respon-

dents were again questioned about the fear of failure and confidence in skills. The respondents showed a drastic change in this parameter as nearly 68% of them chose rank 1 for fear of failure. At the same time, approximately 77% of the respondents chose rank 5 and 19% chose rank 4 for confidence on skills. This indicated that they still maintained the same self confidence in their skills and abilities towards establishing and conducting entrepreneurial activities successfully. All the respondents maintained that they were very optimistic about the growth of their business and most agreed that their business was successful.

Barriers from host country, local community and support from host country, local community and ethnic community were the same as before.

2. Responses for Business at Maturity and Death were not obtained as none of the participants had crossed more than 5 years since birth and none had faced the unfortunate event of the death of their business. For a better comprehension, a comparison between business at birth and business at early stage is provided for various aspects in Table 1.

Personal Perceptions:

Various aspects were explored in the personal perception of the female immigrant entrepreneurs in Japan. Once again difficulties in dealing with Japanese laws and policies, difficulties being a foreigner, racism and gender related issues emerged in this sec-

Table 1: Comparison for various factors on stages of business life cycle

Parameter	Business at Birth	Business at early stages
Funds for business	Personal	From other sources
Confidence in skills	Very confident	Very confident
Fear of failure	High	Very Low
Perceived conflict between work and family	Time management as a critical issue	Much more controlled management
Perceived support from family	Good	Good
Employees in organization	Japanese and Ethnic (Sometimes foreigners)	Mostly same as earlier
Most suppliers	Both Japanese and ethnic	Mostly same as earlier
Maximum customer segment	Japanese	Japanese
Primary perceived barrier	Language - Japanese	Same as earlier
Secondary perceived barrier	Laws and policies for immigrants	Same as earlier
Support from host country	Weak	Weak
Support from local community	Weak	Comparatively stronger
Support from ethnic community	Very strong	Very strong

Note: Data was not available for business at maturity and death because of the young age of most businesses explored in this study.

tion.

“White or European immigrants have a much easier time than non white” (Lezalov, 28, Tourism, Russia)

“I wish that Japan was less strict regarding visas but can understand that they want to prevent people from living here illegally” (Nicole, 46, French, Beauty salon)

“Sometimes being a foreigner evoked curiosities regarding competitiveness and survival in a foreign land which made it more challenging” (Nirmala, 52, School, Indian)

Perceptions regarding religion, gender discrimination and adaptation evoked a very positive response and majority of the re-

spondents said that they did not face any problems related to religion, dress code or culture in Japan. They were given a lot of freedom and independence in these issues and there was no interference from the government bodies or the Japanese community towards these issues. It also appeared that the respondents were very happy with safety and security issues of females in Japan and this appeared to be a prime motivator for confidence and the desire to continue in Japan for a long time. They also said that their status as a female immigrant entrepreneur in Japan did not endanger their personal safety in any manner.

Although Japanese policies still favor the male gender as compared to females, most

of them claimed that Japan is lenient and adaptable to the needs of Immigrants and that in recent times, it has become comparatively easier.

“Nowadays doing business is easier for foreign women in Japan, but we cannot ignore that having a male partner or advisor makes it very easy” (Koechlin, 44, Jewellery designer, Russia).

However, 20% of the respondents claimed a benefit of position for immigrant females and the remaining 50% claimed that business support and guidance was similar to both genders.

“I believe it is the individual who makes the difference, not the gender issues” (Lezalov, 28, Tourism, Russia)

“Personally, I did not find any difficulties as a female owner of a business. But considering how conservative the Japanese culture is, I might say that male owners build more trust in Japan than female owners” (Suji, 31, restaurant, Korea)

Given these responses it can be said that such business environment conditions can be a prime motivator for most of the respondents to continue with their businesses in Japan and approximately 80% of the respondents showed a readiness to explore further for opportunities to expand their business in Japan.

DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the status of female immigrant entrepreneurs in a highly developed and economically strong economy of Japan. By exploring the various stages of a typical business life cycle for small and

medium sized enterprise, this paper shows the ambitions of immigrant female entrepreneur's and the challenges they face when operating in this country. The profile of female entrepreneurs broadly came across as well educated, broad minded females with an ability to take risks, manage situations single handedly, fulfill both family and business responsibilities strive towards success in a system that was traditionally labeled as conservative and narrow minded. These strong characteristics support their purpose and capacity to face the challenges that they have identified to be part of the traditional or cultural system in Japan. While factors such as Japanese language constraints, difficulty in dealing with and understanding Japanese policies and legal systems for immigrant businesses emerge as major barriers, they are also concerned about social factors such as nationality and gender biases. On the other hand, the safety and security of the Japanese society for women in general, the strong support of ethnic community, the slowing developing affinity with the local community and freedom to pursue religious beliefs serve as motivators for them to continue pursuing their business ventures here. As the business expanded, the respondents continued to have a high level of confidence and there was a decrease in the fear of failure in business and lesser dependency on personal funds for running the business too. Overall, female immigrant respondents showed a high willingness to continue searching for new opportunities to firmly establish and expand their business in Japan.

It can be said that immigrant women to Japan are strong and possess a very confident outlook to life. They can be summa-

rized as individuals who

1. Are capable of taking risks and enjoy decision making
2. Not afraid of obstacles and challenges while working towards their ambitions. They understand that this is inevitable but there can always be a solution.
3. Are ready to adapt to surrounding alien/new culture, change with the needs around them and strive to meet expectations.
4. Have excellent social and networking skills as is evident by the support they get from people around them and engage in healthy relations with employees, suppliers and partners
5. Are dedicated, persistent and aim to grow big while maintaining their personal and professional fronts

Over time, Japan has improved in its policies regarding encouragement and guidance towards female entrepreneurs by shedding much of their traditional attitudes. The present study indicates that to a large extent these changes have been realized and the effects can be seen in the readiness of the female immigrant entrepreneurs to begin a self dependent approach to life in Japan.

Through this research, some points have come across as essential areas where more effort can be put so that Japan, as a host country, can add to the positive experience of the FIE's.

- The foremost challenge of the Japanese language needs to be dealt with as a way towards creating a cultural blend that can be attractive to business investors. As was observed in the some of the responses, Japanese language and the country's unique, unexplored cultural image was one of the

appealing factors for people to come to Japan. Considering the fact that number of immigrants in Japan is increasing every year, the Japanese policies regarding usage of Japanese language needs to be altered or modified. Use of English and other foreign languages in communicating with foreigners, dissemination of information during counseling and guidance sessions for business opportunities will make a vast positive impact on the initial decision making process towards entrepreneurship.

- Time management has been recognized as yet another challenge that women face due to the needs of family members and children. Japanese policies may find scope of improvement by creating enhanced support systems for families and child rearing. Immigration has a direct impact on the entrepreneurial activities of a country. This is basically because the adjustment problems faced by immigrants lead to difficulties in finding a job as compared to native residents (SER, 1998). Stevenson and Lundstrom (2001) suggest that any country can draft specific policies for female entrepreneurs based on categories such as education, age, country of origin and experience.

- Problems such as racism, prejudice against females and skin color are deeply rooted to cultural values such as acceptance of foreigners, attitude towards feminism and the social legitimacy of the relationship between the two (Reynolds et al, 1999). Also, the status of women in Japanese society and the acceptance of the female entrepreneurial abilities do not show a very positive correlation. In this paper, this aspect comes across very clearly as a majority of the FIE's talk about instances where

they feel that the country is more prepared for accepting male entrepreneurs rather as compared to females. These changes will evolve and come about only slowly, however given that they have an influence in the overall impression and image of a nation, governmental initiatives can be drawn up that help to encourage participation of foreigners in Japan's business world while also showing positive acceptance and encouragement of female immigrant entrepreneurs in Japan.

- Pearce (2008) emphasizes that although women and their entrepreneurial activities are smaller, have fewer employees and operate in limited geographical regions, their contribution to the country's economic growth cannot be ignored as they stimulate business activities by purchasing raw materials, paying rent, paying taxes and interest on loans and create employment directly or indirectly. The same can therefore be said of the FIE participation in the economic progression of Japan. Hence, it is vital that lessons in policy making and societal developments be drawn upon through such studies not only to create more opportunities but also to make them easily accessible to all. As Timmons's (1990) *three factor theory* emphasizes Opportunity, Resources and Entrepreneurs must be linked to each other strongly and to the central business plan to overcome uncertainties in the process. As opportunities for business occur, entrepreneurs seize them since it has become more rewarding than any other alternate use of their resources (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). However opportunity structures available in different markets may face major obstacles due to problems in accessibility and /or rules and regulations stem-

ming from public or semi-public origin (Shane & Venkatraman, 2000). Female entrepreneurship adds to the intricacy as the gender differences due to an inherent difference in the way opportunity structures are realized and appreciated. Stevenson and Lundstrom (2001) draw attention to the ways in which policies across the globe can be targeted towards female entrepreneurs including immigrants.

These policy measures can be extended to various applications including enterprise centers, counseling services, training workshops and advisory centers, promotional activities and entrepreneurial awards to recognize the efforts and success of female entrepreneurs. Keeping in mind the fact that immigrant entrepreneurship in Japan shows participation from both developed and developing economies of the world, it can be stated that Japan has a very positive image as a country to be associated with and ambitious projects can be built around this appeal factor. Therefore by encouraging entrepreneurial activities within the female populations, it can not only add to its economic stabilization and growth but also create a fertile ground for further development and prospective business opportunities

Much of the research done in Japan has focused on Japanese entrepreneurs and domestic status of Japanese females in business. The relation between Japan and immigrant females is a largely unexplored area of research. Hence this paper contributes significantly to the existing literature by providing an insight into the opportunity structures and challenges for immigrant entrepreneurial activity in contemporary Japan.

Limitations and future extensions of the study: The paper has limitations regarding

sample size as this may, statistically, not be big enough to generalize the overall position of female immigrant entrepreneurs in Japan. However, it was a true challenge to search for respondents who were eligible to participate in the survey and could relate to its purpose objectively. Also, since most respondents were fairly new in business, the results focused mainly on the early stages of the business cycle and later stages could not be explored. The research does not include institutional factors such as support systems for entrepreneurship, capital availability and generation and other regulatory factors such as social security, taxation etc. in depth.

These areas can be included in the future extensions of this paper. At this stage of the research, responses were restricted to immigrant female entrepreneurs only and an equal opinion was not obtained from other directly related agencies such as government officers and Japanese entrepreneurs. Responses from these people can provide a more holistic analysis to the current situation and point out to the insufficiencies of the system in a more comprehensible manner. Being an international phenomenon, a cross cultural comparative study can also be built up by comparing female immigrant entrepreneurs from developing and developed countries to specifically explore the differing approach to problems and challenges and how important it is for them to establish an identity through enterprise.

CONCLUSION

Here we could use the quote of Pauline Hanson, the noted Australian politician, who

ironically was infamous for her anti immigration drive. She says:

“My view on issues is based on common sense and my experience as a mother of four children, as a sole parent, and as a businesswoman running a fish and chip shop”.

Entrepreneurs with such substantial talent and skill can also serve as a very strong motivation factor for the population in general. In view of the current global recession, entrepreneurs can serve as an important source of economic rejuvenation. Japan as a government and society must make full use of the strong appeal factor that their country holds over the women immigrant entrepreneurs. By making a conscious effort to understand the needs of the immigrant entrepreneurs and encouraging them to expand and develop further, they can create a unique pool of residents who not only support the SME section of the country's economy but truly enjoy every association with the country forever.

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