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PUSH AND PULL FACTORS INFLUENCING THAI IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS CONDUCTING BUSINESS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the push and pull factors that influence Thai immigrant entrepreneurs (TIEs) to conduct a business in Malaysia. As a neighbouring country, Malaysia is one of the favourite migration destinations for TIEs, with an influx of them involved in restaurant businesses across the country. This phenomenon offers this study with an unconventional background for immigrant entrepreneurship as it occurs within the context of developing, non-Western countries.

Methodology: Outlined by previous studies on push and pull factors of immigration and immigrant entrepreneurship, this research employed a qualitative approach focusing on the experiences of six TIEs operating Thai/Siamese restaurants in Bandar Baru Bangi, a town located approximately 30 km south

of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Data were collected mainly through face-to-face interviews among owners of restaurants in their premises, which ensures richness in the data.

Findings: The findings indicated several categories of business-based emigration factors for TIEs to Malaysia, spanning from economic, political, and social factors.

Contributions: Overall, the present research extends the knowledge of immigrant entrepreneurship especially within the non-Western context. Practice-wise, this study provides implications for policymakers in relation to business activities conducted by migrants in neighbouring countries, which are useful for both Malaysia and Thailand as the host and the origin country respectively.

Keywords: Thai immigrant entrepreneurs, Thailand, Malaysia, restaurant business, push and pull factors.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Migration of individuals from one country to another for entrepreneurial activities is not a new phenomenon. Immigrants have been observed to possess the ability, ambitions as well as the aggressiveness to be involved in business and to become self-employed (Crockett, 2013). This nature of the movement (migration of self-employed) has become an effective strategy for many immigrants, which affects not only their economic survival in the host country (Brzozowski, 2017), but also the economic development of the host country (Kushnirovich, 2015). For the latter, immigrant entrepreneurship is an important socioeconomic phenomenon, as it creates new jobs and contributes to the wealth creation of a host country (Lin, 2014).

Malaysia is one the developing countries that has become a major destination for immigrants. Based on the data reported in 2017, about two million immigrants reside in Malaysia (United Nations, 2017), with increasing number of immigrant entrepreneurs especially those hailed from nearest neighbouring countries (Moha-Asri, 2018). Thailand, for example, has shown a high number of established entrepreneurs conducting their ventures in ASEAN countries, from 17.7%, 23.3% and 13.7% respectively from 2013 to 2015. The study found that they mostly choose Malaysia as the preferred destination (Moha-Asri, 2018).

Several reasons could be attributed to why Thai immigrant entrepreneurs (TIEs) choose Malaysia as their ideal destination. The presence of an Islamic government, a multicultural social structure, and relatively open social liberties (Rahmandoust, Ahmadian, & Shah, 2011) as well as perception of Malaysia as the most stable nation in the region (Ab Rahman & Abu-Hussin, 2009) are among the reasons cited. In addition, Malaysia's geographical location in the middle of South East Asia makes her easily accessible, either by air, sea or land. As such, the TIEs are able to cross the border easily through states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, Perak, and Terengganu, which are the neighbouring states closely located to Thailand (Suwannathat-Pian, 1988).

As for the preferred entrepreneurial activity, over the years, many TIEs have been found to be engaged in restaurant businesses across the globe. In the year 2003 alone, it has been reported that there were about 7,000 Thai restaurants located outside of Thailand; half of them in the USA while about 14% located in Asia. The majority of these Thailand restaurants were owned by the ethnic Siamese (Joy, 2017). Indeed, food is considered as one of Thai identities that have been recognised internationally (Tohtubtiang & Anuntoavoranich, 2017). In a study by Abd Hamid, Everett, and O'Kane (2018), it was explained that Malaysians found Indonesian cuisine as attractive due to their resemblance in culture and heritage, similarly in this case, the cultural similarity explains why Thai food is favoured by the Malaysians. Hence, as explained by Bunmak (2013), the wide acceptance of Thai food in Malaysia has prompted the TIEs to go for economic independence in the host country through self-employment, such as operating their own restaurants.

The host country's business environment is a significant factor that shapes the immigrant's entrepreneurial activities. Even though the situation in each country differs from another, immigrant entrepreneurs still face or experience somewhat similar challenges in their business (Abd Hamid, Everett, & O'Kane, 2015). These challenges include financial, products and services offered, communication skills, and personal characteristics, among others (Ayadurai, 2010). As such, having the skills of international entrepreneurial orientation will ensure the success of their business ventures (Che Senik, Md Sham, Mohd Nor, & Omar, 2018). Additionally, even with the host country's conditions, immigrant entrepreneurs also need to rely on their own traditional values brought from their home countries in order to ensure their entrepreneurial success (Borges-Mendez, Liu, & Watanabe, 2005; Li, 1993).

To date, studies on immigrant entrepreneurship in Malaysia is still insufficient (Mosbah, Debili, & Merazga 2018), particularly on how and why the TIEs operate a restaurant business in Malaysia (Bunmak, 2013). Also, there is still lack of discussion that precisely

describes the linkages between the factors influencing the TIEs to choose Malaysia as the host country (Bunmak, 2013; Mosbah et al., 2018). Therefore, the present study intends to explore the reasons for the TIEs migration to Malaysia via the push-pull perspective through qualitative research methodology. Consequently, the aim of the present study is to fill the gap in the theoretical discussion on immigrant entrepreneurship by developing a theoretical model on the push and pull factors of immigrant entrepreneurship development (TIEs), which identifies the main factors influencing the restaurant business operation in a host country, particularly Malaysia. Therefore, the development of such a model would be an important contribution of the present study to the literature of immigrant entrepreneurship.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Push and Pull Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Decisions

There are two different views of migration pathways according to the literature of international migration: (i) the push and pull factors, and (ii) the immigrants with entrepreneurial and management skills (Moha-Asri, 2018; Rahmandoust et al., 2011). Several authors have applied existing theories and models to study immigrant entrepreneurs (Kritz, Lim, & Zlotnik, 1992; Portes & Böröcz, 1989). One of such theories is Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966), which is considered as one prominent theory of migration. This theory stipulates that migration is determined by a summarised comparison of a myriad of the negative factors in the former origin country and the positive factors available in a destination country. In other words, the push-pull theory of migration explains the positive as well as negative factors attributed to certain places, leading to changes in spatial mobility of those within the environment.

In general, the decision of migrants to move to another place depends on four factors; (i) environmental, (ii) economic, (iii) cultural, and (iv) socio-political (Lee, 1966). Environmental aspects which include rising sea levels and temperature change affecting individuals' livelihood may push individuals to emigrate (Reuveny, 2007). As a chain reaction towards environmental change, individuals are also compelled for emigration by economic reasons, explained by migration of individuals from poorer countries to relatively wealthier ones (Czaika, 2015). In some cases, cultural factors can explain migration decisions of individuals, demonstrated by lifestyle migration (Ono, 2015; Cohen, Duncan, & Thulemark, 2015), while socio-political factors may explain migration, as illustrated by emigration of individuals from war-torn countries to comparatively more stable nations (Castles, 2018). Similarly, immigrant entrepreneurs differ and are motivated by their push and pull factors to be self-employed (Bates, 1997; Fairlie & Meyer, 1996). Thus, in order to understand the

motivational context of the TIEs in business, the present study focuses on the literature relating to push and pulls factors of entrepreneurship.

The push factors in entrepreneurship illustrate that entrepreneurs mainly engage in self-employment due to the urge or necessity to do so. According to Fairlie and Meyer (1996), immigrants end up in self-employment as a last resort due to the inability to place themselves in the local job market of a host country (Feldman, Koberg, & Dean, 1991). Additionally, other factors including family-related motivations (Manev, Gyoshev, & Manolova, 2005; Kirkwood, 2009), economic downturn (Rahmandoust et al., 2011; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013), unemployment in their own country (Benzing, Chu, & Kara, 2009; Kirkwood, 2009), and extrinsic reward (Manev et al., 2005; Rahmandoust et al., 2011), which all push entrepreneurs to venture into entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, the push factors that attract people to emigrate from their country are; restriction of religious activities, lack of hygiene, difficulties in getting financial support as well as a global sanction (Rahmandoust et al., 2011). In sum, immigrants are being pushed into entrepreneurial activities due to unemployment and retrenchment, low wages, lack of career development as well as the desire to escape supervision (Benzing et al., 2009). In a study of Hispanic entrepreneurs in the USA, Shinnar and Young (2008) argued that pull factors are more influential in the pursuit of immigrant entrepreneurial activities.

In contrast, pull factors are defined as the expectations which attract people to the new place. This includes the desire to become one's own boss, for wealth creation, for a desirable lifestyle, or the need to develop own experience and knowledge (Benzing et al., 2009). Accordingly, it explains that immigrants are in self-employment by choice as well as looking for attractive opportunities for their economic mobility (Fairlie & Meyer, 1996; Sanders & Nee, 1996). In several cases, the main factor influencing entrepreneurs to engage in self-employment is largely political, thus the destination country is likely to seem attractive to them (pull) because of freedom in practicing religious activity as well as embedded with stable law and regulations (Rahmandoust et al., 2011; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013).

Other studies based the pull factors on the sociological perspective relating to co-ethnic networks (social capital), human capital, and good education system for children (Kariv, Menzies, & Brenner, 2010; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013). Also, the environment and ambience in a destination country, such as hygienic environment, peaceful, and harmonious atmosphere in the surrounding community is another merit that is considered into the decision of pursuing entrepreneurial activities (Rahmandoust et al., 2011; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013). Lastly, a slightly lower living cost, attention, and respect for elites, open access to the

global market, lower start-up cost, and getting support opportunities for expansion are also several factors influencing entrepreneurship activities in a destination country (Rahmandoust et al., 2011).

Therefore, the drivers of entrepreneurship can be classified into four categories: (a) extrinsic rewards, (b) family-related (c) intrinsic rewards, and (d) independence/autonomy, which are depicted as the push and pull factors (Manev et al., 2005). The key points of push and pull factors selected from the previous literature are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Push and pull factors of immigrant entrepreneurship

| Author | Key Points | |
|--|---|--|
| | Push Factors | Pull Factors |
| Manev, Gyoshev, and Manolova (2005) | Extrinsic rewards; Family-related motivations | Intrinsic rewards; independence/autonomy |
| Kirkwood (2009) | Employment; Family-related motivations | A desire for independence; Monetary motivations |
| Benzing, Chu, and Kara (2009) | Unemployment; Escape supervision; Retrenchment; A low paying job with little upward mobility; | To become own boss; Increase wealth; Changing lifestyle; Experience and knowledge |
| Kariv, Menzies, and Brenner (2010) | NA | Social capital; Human capital |
| Rahmandoust, Ahmadian, and Mad Shah (2011) | High living cost; High inflation; Economic downturn; Unfair access to resources; Lack of individual freedom; Restriction for religious activities; Constant fear of cornification of property; Hostility with the entrepreneur activities; Lack of hygiene and environment cleanliness; Risk of drug addiction; Difficulties in getting financial support; High start-up cost; Global sanction; Lack of technical access; | Lower living cost and higher income; Freedom and free religious activities; Laws and regulations; Environment hygiene; Highly education system for children; Peaceful and happy atmosphere; Open access to global market; Lower start-up cost; Getting support opportunities for expansion |
| | Cumbersome | |

administrative and
governmental system

Bodvarsson and Van den Berg (2013) Economic, social, political, cultural, and natural factors; Sociological, psychological, political, and ecological factors
Economic, social, political, cultural, and natural factors that enter into the migration decision; Sociological, psychological, political, and ecological factors act alongside economic factors

2.2 Thai Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Their Business Context

The community in focus for this research is the TIEs originated from the Southern of Thailand (which covers the provinces of Songkhla, Satun, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat). This study defines immigrants as the first and second-generation immigrants in a single host country (Constant & Zimmermann, 2006; Hammarstedt, 2004). The descendants of Thai immigrants who are born in Malaysia are usually called ‘Siamese Malaysians’ and hold Malaysian nationality status. Many of them cannot speak and read the Thai language anymore. For the purpose of this study, we define TIEs as ethnic Thais who are born in Malaysia or immigrated to Malaysia and conduct entrepreneurial activities at present.

In the case of economic migration (entrepreneur migration), extant literature shows that among the primary push factors for TIEs to immigrate are Thailand’s economic issues as well the political instability. In the early 2010s for example, the global economic meltdown had led to high living cost and inflation rate in Thailand (Rahmandoust et al., 2011). Hence, many TIEs migrated as a result of unemployment and low paying jobs (Benzing et al., 2009). Other than that, political factors were also the reason affecting TIEs to migrate; which had caused them lack of individual freedom and restriction of religious activities, especially among Muslim entrepreneurs (Rahmandoust et al., 2011). According to an independent monitoring group, daily shootings and bomb attacks during times of unrest in Thailand, particularly Southern Thai, had claimed more than 6,500 lives since 2004 (Pongsudhirak, 2006).

The pull factors which attracted TIEs to do business, especially in the restaurant sector, are primarily the desire to own a business and to become independent (Manev et al., 2005). In addition, as explained by Bunmak (2013), the wide acceptance of Thai food in Malaysia has

prompted the TIEs to go for economic independence in the host country through self-employment, such as operating their own restaurants. Other than that, despite being multicultural and diverse in religions, Malaysia's community is perceived to be more peaceful as well as harmonious compared to Thailand (Gomes, 2013). These reasons had attracted many TIEs to migrate to Malaysia.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Data Gathering Process

The present study is focused at Bandar Baru Bangi (BBB) in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. BBB is known as an elite, fully integrated township with extensive residential, industrial and commercial infrastructures, as well as identified as the centre of academic institutions (Kaur, 2017). Due to these reasons, the practice of eating out has become a trend among the community of BBB (Ali & Abdullah, 2017). As such, the selection of the location suits the need of the present study. The criteria for the participants of the study are as follow: (i) the entrepreneurs must be Thai immigrant(s), (ii) the restaurants serve ethnic Thai/Siamese food, and (iii) have been operating in BBB for more than two years. The potential participants were searched via the web using "Tom Yam Restaurant" or "Thai Restaurant in Bangi" as keywords. We have approached 15 Thai restaurants that fit the predetermined criteria, however, only six TIEs agreed to participate in the present study.

Data of the present study were collected mainly through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were concluded in 2018. The interviews were conducted at the participants' own premises, with each session lasted between one to two hours. Because interviewing is an art that needs to be devised fittingly (M. Salleh, Ahmad, Che Wel, & Muhamad, 2011; Muhamad, Adham, Alias, & Mohd Ali, 2018), the interviews were conducted in both Thai and Malay languages according to the participants' preference. This arrangement was possible as one of the researchers is fluent in the Thai language. Excerpts of the interview were then translated to English for the purpose of reporting.

The interview protocol consisted of three sections with open-ended questions. Each section respectively covered the restaurant background, questions related to the objectives of the study, and the entrepreneur's background. This qualitative study applied thematic analysis by adopting Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step framework to identify patterns or themes from the interviews. The steps utilised in this study are summarised in Figure 1.

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Step 1: Become familiar with the data | Step 2: Generate initial codes | Step 3: Search for themes | Step 4: Review themes | Step 5: Define themes | Step 6: Writing-up |
| • Read the data repeatedly | • Address the research objective • Conduct open coding | • Fit the codes into relevant themes • Two themes: Push and Pull factors | • Make sense of the themes and sub-themes • Get a common agreement (with the researchers) over the themes | • Identify the themes • Examine the sub-themes • Ensure that the sub-themes and themes are placed accordingly | • Report findings according to the themes (Push and Pull factors) • Support themes with verbatim |

Figure 1: The adapted 6-step framework on a thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

3.2 Participants' Profile

The profile of the six participants are summarised in Table 2. The information tabulated are the region of origin of the participants (hometown in Thailand), age, educational background, and year of establishment of restaurant.

Table 2: Participants' profile

| Participant | Hometown in Thailand | Age | Education | Year of Restaurant Operation in Malaysia |
|-------------|----------------------|-----|--|--|
| TIE 1 | Pattani | 39 | Finished Form 3 at a <i>pondok</i> * | 5 years |
| TIE 2 | Pattani | 40 | Bachelor of Marketing from Rajchaphat Yala University, Thailand. | 17 years |
| TIE 3 | Pattani | 42 | <i>Pondok</i> school | 5 years |
| TIE 4 | Pattani | 45 | <i>Pondok</i> school | 13 years |
| TIE 5 | Pattani | 47 | <i>Pondok</i> school | 15 years |
| TIE 6 | Yala | 49 | High school | 10 years |

Note: Pondok is an Islamic schooling system prevalent in Southeast Asian countries, usually considered as informal education

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Case Description

Section 4.1 presents the accounts of the six TIEs who participated in the present study.

Case 1: TIE 1

TIE 1 came to Malaysia in 2005 to find a job. She was born in a poor family and completed her studies up to Form 3 at a *pondok* school in Panare, Pattani. She started to work as a cook in her friend's restaurant in Ampang, Selangor, and after nine years, in 2014 she opened her own restaurant. At the time when the interview was conducted, she owned two Thai restaurants in Bandar Baru Bangi. TIE1 came to Malaysia due to the economic downturn in Thailand, which caused the high unemployment rate and financial crisis. Thus, according to her, migrating to Malaysia seemed to be a great idea as it presented her with various prospects. At that time, she noticed that Malaysia's economy was more stable compared to Thailand as the Ringgit Malaysia currency was higher compared to Thailand's Baht. She also felt that Malaysia was safer compared to Thailand in terms of security. In addition, she thought that Malaysians, in general, had a similar culture to the Thais and noted Malaysians' familiarity and preference for *tomyam*, a Thai soup-based delicacy.

Case 2: TIE 2

TIE 2 had many Malaysian relatives as she was married to a Siamese Malaysian. By 2018, she owned two branches of restaurants in BBB and managed all the operations and marketing by herself with her husband's assistance. The first restaurant was established in 2002, followed by the second branch in 2008. TIE 2 migrated to Malaysia because the life in Thailand was harsh, and there were limited opportunities available for the locals. She figured that in case she operate a restaurant in her hometown, it might only last for a short term. Additionally, most of her relatives who were staying in Malaysia invited her to come to Malaysia and start a business. According to her, she always wanted to be independent, and in order to do so, she chose to become self-employed. TIE 2 was also drawn to the Islamic culture practiced in Malaysia, being a Muslim majority country. According to her, she had once operated a restaurant in Bangkok. Although profitable, she chose to close it down as she felt that the culture in Bangkok was not conducive for her to practice her Islamic belief. In addition, Malaysians used the same language as the locals in Pattani. Her friends' accomplishments were also one of the reasons that made her decide to migrate and operate a business in Malaysia.

Case 3: TIE 3

TIE3 migrated to Malaysia almost 20 years ago and was working in a restaurant owned by her relative when she first came to Malaysia. Thereafter, she opened her own restaurant in 2014, in which at the time of the interview, employed six employees. Recalling the time before she came to Malaysia, TIE3 faced difficulty to get a job in her hometown, coupled with the fact that income rate was generally low and unattractive. However, what concerned her more was that her hometown being a ‘red zone centre’ due to the bombings; thus became dangerous to live in and risky for business. As such, she thought that Malaysia’s peaceful environment as a country with a stable economy was good for her to set up a business. Other than that, she also noticed that Thai restaurants were in high demand in Malaysia, and there was no restriction from the local government to open a restaurant in Malaysia. She started her restaurant business in BBB with the help of her friends and her local network.

Case 4: TIE 4

TIE4 mentioned that living in Malaysia was safer compared to his hometown. He recalled that the main reason for him to migrate to Malaysia was because of Thailand’s economic downturn in the early 2000s. The situation had affected him and his family financially at that time. Because of this reason, many of his friends and families migrated to Malaysia, therefore, he decided to do the same. In the first year after his migration, he worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant. Later, he accepted his friend’s invitation to become one of the founding partners of their current restaurant business. TIE 4 observed that the cultures shared by Malaysians and Southern Thais was similar. He also mentioned that Malaysians were friendly and the fact that he had many relatives and friends in Malaysia had helped him to find the suitable location for his business. His relatives were living in Malaysia for a long time and had taught him how to do a business.

Case 5: TIE 5

TIE 5 had lived in Malaysia for almost 20 years. Her father was a Thailand national while her mother was a Malaysian born in Kelantan, a state close to the border of Thailand. Her restaurant had been in operation for 15 years. In 2018, she employed twelve permanent staff. She decided to migrate to Malaysia in order to find more stable income source due to Thailand’s economic downturn. Furthermore, the provinces in Southern Thailand, such as Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat used Malay language and had the same culture as Malaysia. Thus, she was confident to start a business in Malaysia as she had relatives in Malaysia who were ready to

assist her in cooking and looking after her business. Apart from that, she regarded herself as a passionate cook, which also motivated her to venture into a restaurant business.

Case 6: TIE 6

TIE 6, the owner of a restaurant in BBB had lived in Malaysia for almost 30 years. He dropped out during the final year in high school and came to Malaysia looking for a job. His first job was a dishwasher at a *tomyam* restaurant, and he continued to work in restaurants within the state of Kelantan for 20 years. His friends invited him to become a partner to open a restaurant. At the time of the interview, he owned one restaurant that has been operating for ten years and three branches in the town of Bangi and Kajang. TIE 6 was born in a poor family, thus, he lamented it was hard for him and his family to make a living in their hometown, which was why he decided to migrate. Malaysia was his first choice because he thought that the Malays of Malaysia used the similar language, practiced the same religion and observed the common culture of the people of Southern Thailand where he came from. Besides that, he felt that living in Malaysia was safer in comparison to his hometown.

4.2 Analysis and Emergent Findings

The findings of the push, pull, and other factors based on the interview data analysis are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of findings

| Participant | Push Factor | Pull Factor | Other Factors |
|-------------|--|--|--|
| TIE 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instability of Thailand economy • Unemployment issues • Financial crisis • No formal secondary/tertiary education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysia's economy more stable than Thailand • Stability of Ringgit exchange rate • Peaceful and safe environment • Consumer demand - Malaysian love to eat Thai food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same culture, language and religion |
| TIE 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic conditions - Poor living in her hometown • To be independent • To be self-employed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islamic culture in Malaysia • Using the same language • Good relation of local people with foreign country • Friend's accomplishment in Malaysia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islamic culture • More Muslims compared to Thailand • Consumer demand - Malaysians like Thailand-style cooking • Knowledgeable in marketing |
| TIE 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No formal secondary/tertiary education • Difficult to get a job • Lower income compared to Malaysia • Dangerous and risky in hometown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai restaurant is high in demand in Malaysia • Low competition between Thai restaurants in Malaysia • Peaceful country • Stable economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open a restaurant in Malaysia with help from local citizens • Most are Muslim • No restriction from the government to open a restaurant |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysian government give a good chance for TIE to set-up their business | |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|-------|---|--|---|
| TIE 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instability of Thailand economy • Financial crisis • Follow the footsteps of their friends to open a restaurant • No formal secondary/tertiary education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysia's economy more stable than Thailand • Same culture, language and religion in Southern Thailand • Peaceful and safety • Malaysia's good international relations • Strategic location | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and relatives • Self-employed |
|-------|---|--|---|

| | | | |
|-------|--|---|---|
| TIE 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand's economy was going down • Low income in their country • No formal secondary/tertiary education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysia's economy more stable than Thailand • Same culture, language and religion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and relatives • The owner's passion for cooking • Inspiration from family and friends to be successful in open up the restaurant |
|-------|--|---|---|

| | | | |
|-------|--|--|--|
| TIE 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income in their country • Financial Crisis • Not safe • Self-employed • No formal secondary/tertiary education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same culture, language and religion in Southern Thailand • Safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiration from family and friends to be successful in business |
|-------|--|--|--|

The factors derived from the findings based on the six cases of TIEs in Malaysia help the present study to propose an emergent framework of the influencing factors of immigrant entrepreneurs pursuing entrepreneurial activities in a host country. The findings recognised six (6) emergent factors in which two (2) are push factors and four (4) are pull factors (shown in Figure 2), indicating that more pull factors have attracted the TIEs to operate a business in Malaysia compared to the push factors. This is similar to the finding of Shinnar and Young (2008) that indicates pull factors are generally more influential than push factors. Further analysis of these factors are provided in the following sections on pull and push factors.

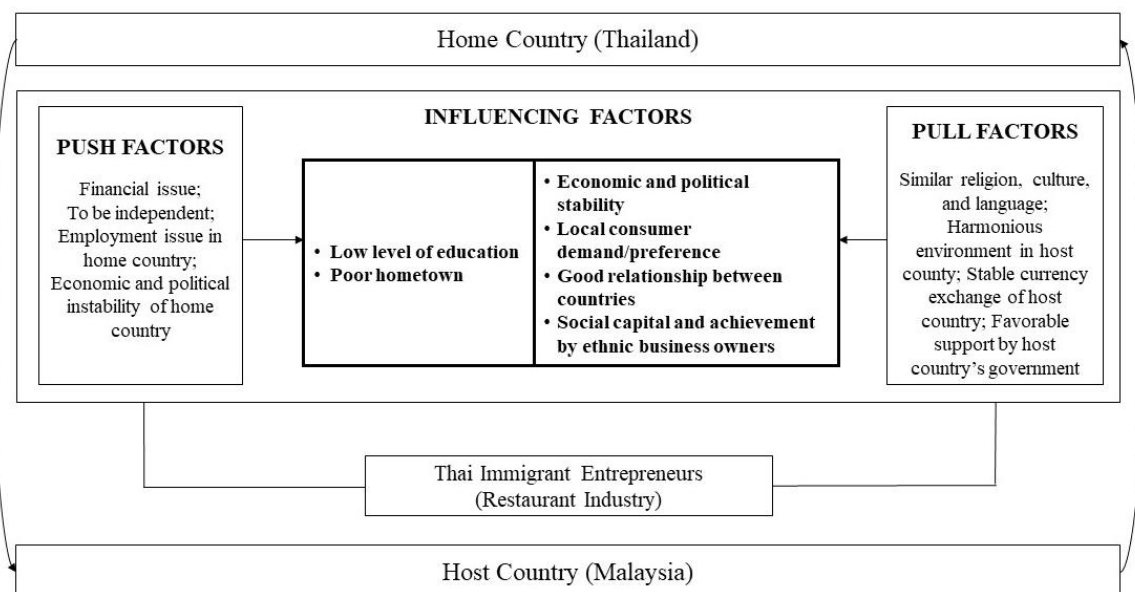


Figure 2: Push and pull factors of the TIEs conducting business in Malaysia restaurant industry.

4.2.1 Pull Factors

Pull factors in the present study are defined as the expectations which attracted Thai entrepreneurs to start their own businesses in Malaysia. The researchers of this study obtained many reasons why TIEs chose Malaysia as the best location to run their business. The pull factors that attracted the TIEs to open their businesses in Malaysia are discussed in this section:

Peace and Safety

According to Rahmandoust et al. (2011), the pull factors in terms of the social aspects by some immigrant entrepreneurs in Malaysia, include laws and regulations in society, attention and respect for elites as well as entrepreneurial activities, environmental hygiene, a highly

educational system for their children, peaceful and happy atmosphere in the community compared to their country. Malaysia is a peaceful country. The TIEs mainly gain more security and protection in Malaysia than in their home country. Furthermore, religion-based conflicts in Thailand also caused our Muslim participants to feel insecure; thereby, they seek for peace in Malaysia.

Based on our data, the most mentioned pull factor that attracted the TIEs to open restaurants in Malaysia is peace and safety. Four participants stated that Malaysia is a peaceful country and the communities live in a harmonious environment. It is distinctively different from Thailand, especially in the three provinces of Southern Thailand, where there are always incidences of terrorism towards Muslim. As stated by the participants:

Malaysia is a peaceful country with a stable economy and it provides a good chance among the Thai entrepreneur to set up a business. (TIE 3)

I find that Malaysia is much safer compared to my hometown. (TIE 4)

Besides that, I feel safer when I am in Malaysia. This is because, in my hometown, bombing is considered a daily routine for the locals. (TIE 6)

Similar Religion, Culture and Language

According to Abd Hamid et al. (2018), similarities in culture, which span from religion and language can contribute to immigrant entrepreneurs' engagements in business ventures in the host country. More so, a little learning is needed for entrepreneurship activities, in comparison to immigrant entrepreneurs from more distant countries (Abd Hamid, O'Kane, & Everett, 2019). Malaysia is a multicultural country with Islam as the official religion and the Malays who form the majority of people. Similarly, the people of Southern Thailand are predominantly of Malay descent, and as such, the Malay language is also spoken by the locals. As such, it is easier for the TIEs to adapt to the environment and to interact with the people in Malaysia. According to TIE 5, Malaysia has the same culture, religion and language as Southern Thailand. TIE 2 stated:

I prefer the Islamic culture in Malaysia, plus we are using the same language in Pattani. These, it makes things easier for us to adopt here in Malaysia. I also had a restaurant in Bangkok before this, but then even though the revenue was good, I tend to forget my role in Islam because of the culture there. That is why I choose Malaysia as my preferred location.

They use the same language even though the accent is slightly different, and TIEs can understand perfectly when they communicate with the local people. As stated by TIE 6:

It is easier for me because Malaysians use the same language, have the same religion and use the same culture as we are used to in Southern Thailand. Even though the accent is slightly different, but we can still understand each other.

Malaysia's Economy More Stable than Thailand

In the past ten years, the Malaysian economy sat at a very stable point compared to the Thailand economy. This was an optimistic chance for the TIEs to migrate here and set up a business. Four out of six TIEs explained that the pull factors that attracted them here were that Malaysia's economy was more stable and had gained growth compared to their home country. According to the TIEs, Malaysia is perceived as one of the most successful developing countries in the Southeast Asia region. TIE 1 explained that she moved to Malaysia during the Thai economy downfall, which had led her family to face many obstacles in life at that time, as stated below:

Malaysian economy is more stable compared to Thailand. In relation to that, the Ringgit Malaysia currency is much higher compared to Thailand's Baht.

On the other hand, good economic conditions in Malaysia have provided a good chance for the TIEs to set up a restaurant business here, as stated by TIE 3:

Malaysia is a peaceful country with a stable economy, and it provides a good chance among the Thai entrepreneur to set up a business.

Consumer Demand - Malaysians' Preference for Thai Food

Consumer demand, especially in neighbouring countries is an important factor that influences immigrant entrepreneurs' opportunity structure in the host country, due to the inherent

similarities in culture (Abd Hamid et al., 2018). This is because the Thai restaurants are preferable among Malaysian citizens. This is explained by TIE 3:

I chose Malaysia as my destination because Thai restaurant here is high in demand. Malaysian locals seem to enjoy the Thai cuisine, and the competition among Thai restaurant here is low as well.

Stable Exchange Currency of Ringgit Malaysia

Extrinsic motivation, such as monetary compensation is normally categorised as a pull factor (Kirkwood, 2009). The first time the TIEs came to Malaysia, they claimed that the exchange currency of Ringgit Malaysia was stable and secured. This stability of the currency was important to guarantee their business success as the profit gained in RM were higher when it was traded to Thai Bath. Even with Malaysia's current economy not doing so well due to the devaluation of Ringgit Malaysia currency, this circumstance does not affect the TIEs too much to run their business and ensure their survival in Malaysia. This is clarified by TIE 1:

I choose Malaysia because at that time, the Malaysian economy was more stable compared to the Thailand economy. Even though Thailand economy is better now compared to Malaysia, we are not affected much because Malaysians can still afford to purchase our food even after the price has gone up. It all depends on the current currency.

One of the six TIEs detailed that stable exchange currency of Ringgit Malaysia is the pull factor that attracted them to open a restaurant three years ago. TIE 1 added that:

The Ringgit Malaysia currency was much higher compared to Thailand's Baht.

Friends' Accomplishments in Malaysia

Friends' impressive achievement became one of the pull factors of the TIEs to migrate to Malaysia. This is because some of the TIEs were inspired by the accomplishments of their friends. For example, TIE 2 migrated to Malaysia because of her friend's success in operating a restaurant in Malaysia. Most of their friends only finished primary education, and at the beginning, they just worked as a waitress, dishwasher, and chef with Thai employer in Malaysia as affirmed by TIE 2 that:

Most of my friends that are successful in Malaysia today only studied until Standard 6.

Malaysia's Government Incentives

Although Malaysia's business environment is largely protective of the locals, yet the regulatory environment for immigrant businesses largely encourages immigrant entrepreneurs to carry out business ventures that link with their cultural heritage (Abd Hamid et al., 2019). This explains a large number of ethnic restaurants owned by non-locals in Malaysia (Abd Hamid et al., 2019).

The TIEs found no restriction from the Malaysian government to operate their restaurants. As declared by TIE 3:

I find no problem. All processes of registration, establishment, and ownership were smooth and fine.

Good Relations of Local People with Foreigners

According to the participants, the locals are helpful and generous. In general, they foster good relationships with the TIEs, and this has mainly helped the TIEs to run their business well. This is helpful for the TIEs as their local networks are usually ready to assist them in sorting the process of business registration, such as permit of employees and other legal documentation. They expressed that:

I got the opportunity to open a restaurant in Malaysia because most of my friends from Malaysia helped me from the beginning with all the legal documents and terms and conditions. (TIE 2)

Malaysians are friendly, and they have helped us to find the perfect location to open up our restaurant. (TIE 4)

4.2.2 Push Factors

Push factors are the reasons which have urged TIEs to migrate from Thailand to Malaysia and start their businesses. Typically, push factors are the negative elements in Thailand, inducing the TIEs to start a business venture in Malaysia. The following are some of the recurring themes of the push factors in Thailand:

Low Level of Education

Most of the TIE respondents received formal primary education; a majority of them had completed their formal studies at primary school and studied in *pondok* institutions. With the exception of TIE 2, all of the study's participants did not obtain formal secondary and tertiary education. They stated that this was a factor that had encouraged them to become self-employed. Therefore, this reason seems to be at the top of the push factors. This is because it appears that five out of six entrepreneurs left school at the age of 12 – 18 and they did not pursue their studies to a higher level. Most of them went to *pondok* schools after finishing their primary school as stated by TIE 3 below:

I did not get a formal education and only studied in a *pondok*.

In this regard, it can be summarised that a lack of education can be one of the push factors influencing immigrants to become entrepreneurs.

Low Income and Financial Crisis

There are several factors that have driven entrepreneurs to migrate to other countries, including low wages, lack of career development as well as the desire to escape supervision (Benzing et al., 2009). This factor is a result of the instability of the Thailand economy, as they are interlinked. Employment termination, which was one of the effects of political instability had affected their earnings, as such, they could not provide for their families:

In my district area, it was difficult to get a job, and the income I got was not as competitive as Malaysia. (TIE 3)

TIE 6 stated that:

I chose Malaysia because I was born in an unhealthy family, so it was really hard for my family and me to find a stable source of income in our hometown. Besides that, it has always been my dream to own a restaurant here in Malaysia. (TIE 6)

Financial Crisis

This factor be ascribed to the fact that three out of six entrepreneurs were facing a financial problem as their parents could not afford to support the whole family expenses. Hence, this factor pushed the TIEs to migrate to Malaysia as claimed by TIE 4 below:

It affected me and my family's financial status at that time. I saw most of my friends and family migrated to Malaysia to open up a business and with the mercy of Allah, they all succeeded.

This factor be explained by the fact that all our participants originate either from Yala or Pattani. These provinces are described as having poor living settlements and mostly dependent on agriculture, fisheries, and rural jobs. Such unstable environment mainly will influence immigrants to leave for better opportunities in nearby countries, in this case, Malaysia.

Instability of Thailand's Economic and Political Environments

According to Rahmandoust et al. (2011), as well as Bodvarsson and Van den Berg (2013), one of the factors influencing immigrant entrepreneurs to conduct business ventures in a host country is the condition of the home nation. This factor was cited by the TIEs in this study. According to them, due to economic recession, workers were often laid off in huge numbers. Other than that, job opportunities were scarce. As explained by the participants:

Our economy in Thailand was suffering badly, and it was facing a major downfall. (TIE 3)

Before this, I was staying in Thailand, but when Thailand's economy was going down, we decided to migrate to Malaysia in order to find a more stable source of income. (TIE 6)

Political aspect can be attributed for the push factors for immigrant entrepreneurs' decision to migrate. Among the factors are lack individual freedom, the constant fear of confiscation of property, restriction of religious activities, and no peace of mind in their home country (Rahmandoust et al., 2011). Conversely, political instability becomes a factor influencing their life decisions, as all TIEs we interviewed came from Yala and Pattani; these provinces located at Southern Thailand are often unstable due to political unrest. As stated by TIE 3 below:

My place is also known as a red zone district due to the bombing area. It is dangerous and risky.

Desire for Independence and Self-Employment

Usually, the entrepreneurs are raised in families with a business background where it is known that self-employed parents tend to become mentors and guide their children to start their own businesses (Kuratko, Hornsby, & Naffziger, 1997; Basu & Altinay, 2002; Choo & Wong, 2006). The TIEs in this study wanted to be independent and self-employed because they intended to live free from financial problems, coupled with visions to have their own restaurants in Malaysia.

Two TIEs that were interviewed wanted to have their own businesses as they did not prefer to work under an employer. TIE 6 said that:

It has always been my dream to own a restaurant here in Malaysia. I felt tired working under an employer.

Unemployment and Difficulty to Get a Job

One of the push factors for the entrepreneur movement to other country is because of unemployment rates in their own country (Benzing et al., 2009; Kirkwood, 2009). These two factors are usually caused by war and instability of the home country's economy. In relation to this, some of the TIEs found it hard to get decent jobs in Thailand because of the poor economic conditions in their hometowns. A slowdown in the local economic environment resulted in limited job opportunities and scaling down of businesses. TIE 1 claimed that:

The first reason is that, at that time, the economy in Thailand was really bad. Hence, the majority of us in Thailand were unemployed.

Poor Hometown Condition

The majority of the TIEs came from poor family background. Many of the locals in their hometowns were working as fishermen, farmers, rubber tappers, or laborers. They had no chance of become an employer. One TIE expressed that poor hometown became the push factor for them to migrate to Malaysia. TIE 2 stated that:

The push factor that forces me to migrate to Malaysia is because the lifestyle in Thailand was harsh, and there were no opportunities that can be exploited for the locals. Even if I to open a restaurant in Thailand near my hometown, maybe it will only last for a short while.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

5.1 Conclusion

The present study discovers the role of a low level of education and poor condition in hometown to influence the decision of the TIEs to become self-employed in their destination country. As found in previous studies, one of the main push factors is due to the difficulty to get a job in a home country. Thus, there would be even less opportunity for those without or with lower level of education to get a decent job. Additionally, with the political instability in Thailand that presses their people, particularly from poor hometown to find a way to survive, migrating to neighbouring country (near and easy to access) seems like a popular choice among the locals. Indeed, the disadvantage and underprivileged groups are pushed to migrate out of necessity based on their condition in their home country.

In terms of pull factors, the present research identified that the TIEs were encouraged by the stability of the Malaysia economy, local consumers demand, same ethnic business owners' accomplishment in conducting business in Malaysia, and good relationship between two countries. At first, they were being pushed out of their country due to political instability and later pulled to Malaysia due to the stability of economic and political aspects in the host country. In addition, they were able to carry out a restaurant business in Malaysia due to Malaysians' preference and demand for Thai food. More so, their social capital in the host country plays important roles which enable them to obtain information about the attractiveness and lucrative place to conduct business in Malaysia. Finally, the similarity in religion, culture, and language make it possible for them to have a very good connection and relationship with the local people.

5.2 Contribution of Study and Direction for Future Research

This study focused on the TIEs, especially those who are operating restaurant businesses in Malaysia. This research was informed by TIEs' experiences in starting their ventures in the host country. Their narratives on migration and entrepreneurial journeys were useful in understanding their push and pull factors of conducting business in the host country. Although past research in migrant entrepreneurship have generally agreed that migrant entrepreneurs'

migration and entrepreneurship activities are integrated, it would be useful for future research to decouple the motivations for migration and entrepreneurship to further identify the specific factors shaping entrepreneurship activities for migrants.

The implications of the present study are in twofold; (i) policymakers dealing with foreign businesses can learn about the factors influencing the creation of immigrant venture, and (ii) immigrant entrepreneurs can utilise the experiences of the TIEs in this study to prepare them to for business ventures outside of their home countries. Since entrepreneurial activities and their impending success are interrelated with immigrant entrepreneurs' migration decisions, entrepreneurial motives and barriers that immigrants have in their country of origin should be considered as potential categories of migration push and pull factors.

Apart from that, despite the importance of the phenomenon, they are notable lack of official statistics about foreign entrepreneurs in developing countries like Malaysia, indicating the neglect from the relevant agencies in these countries. Therefore, is suggested that a support unit should be established in order to ascertain the needs of these immigrant entrepreneurs, which can improve the host country's attraction and encourage more foreign investors and entrepreneurs into coming to the host country.

Further studies might examine the self-employment pattern of Thai-based restaurant businesses and could investigate the social resources, like funding associations, protected market, and cheap labour sources within the migrant and family networks of the TIEs. Generally, the TIEs do contribute some of their wages and profits to their families in Thailand. The contribution gives a positive impact on social and economic development by reducing poverty and unemployment as well as promoting well-being, security, education and healthcare for individuals, families, and their communities. Finally, further research is suggested to investigate how much salary the TIEs earn and spend, how much they remit to families in their villages and what are the effects of these to the households and communities in Thailand.

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