

Women, Family, and Entrepreneurship: Oral Research of Women Entrepreneurial Experience

Caihong Zhang^{1, a*}

¹School of Economics and Management, Pu'er University, Pu'er, China

^agooggoog321@163.com

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Female Entrepreneurs; Work-Family Conflict; Work-Family Balance

Abstract: Female entrepreneurship plays an important part in promoting employment, innovation and economic growth. Through the case study, this paper dynamically analyzes the relationship between family and work of female entrepreneurs and their coping strategies. The results indicate that the process of female entrepreneurship includes the entrepreneurial capital accumulation stage, the adaptation to the operation stage and the stable development stage. And the female entrepreneurs adopted establishing and supplementing family relations, maintaining and expanding family relations, and responding to and repaying family relations to balance the work-family conflict respectively in these different stages. However, even if entrepreneurship can bring economic empowerment to female entrepreneurs, they still cannot get rid of the traditional family responsibility influence. They want to maintain family-work balance and life coordination so they make great personal efforts and interests sacrifice. Finally, the research proposed a dynamic theoretical framework of family-work balance strategies for female entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Female entrepreneurship plays an important role in promoting employment, innovation and economic growth [1]. The group of women entrepreneurs is special: from the point of personal characteristics, the entrepreneurship characteristics of women entrepreneurs is distinct from male entrepreneurs [2], such as they are in the responsibility of bearing children, they often underestimate their abilities and performance, being lack of confidence. From the perspective of social characteristics, the female often belongs to vulnerable groups. For example, female entrepreneurs are more likely to be discriminated against by industry investors and suppliers [3]. Therefore, the difficulties and costs that women need to overcome in starting a business are much higher than men.

A woman's entrepreneurial behavior is embedded in the family relationship [4]. Family is particularly critical in the process of the woman's entrepreneurship. Studies have shown that family factors influence female entrepreneurs more greatly than male entrepreneurs [5]. Every female entrepreneur faces the problem of balancing family and entrepreneurship. Moreover, most female entrepreneurs want to control the scale and workload to a degree that can balance work and family, and maintain the harmonious relationship between career and life [6]. At present, studies on the work-family conflict of female entrepreneurs have made some achievements. For example, the study on the housework burden of female entrepreneurs in Singapore found that the division of housework between female entrepreneurs and their husbands was unequal, and they could not get the help from their partners. And other research indicated that the more intense the work-family conflict, the less happy the female entrepreneurs' marital well-being. Some studies have focused on strategies for female entrepreneurs to reduce work-family conflict and recognize role elimination, role reduction, and role sharing are three balancing strategies. But the result also emphasizes that compared with the global phenomenon of strong growth in the numbers of women entrepreneurs, research for female entrepreneurs and their work-family conflict as well as balance is still relatively limited [9]. Besides, the present research focuses on the descriptive summary for successful women entrepreneurs, but the private owners of small enterprise and female individual industrial and commercial households have been ignored. Also, entrepreneurship is essentially a social process and it is dynamic [10], but the

existing research on family-work conflict strategy lacks consideration from the time perspective. Therefore, exploring the work-family conflict and coping strategies of small-scale female entrepreneurs systematically and dynamically from the perspective of the entrepreneurial process is worthy of in-depth study, which can be a powerful supplement to a comprehensive understanding of female entrepreneurial experience.

Research Design

Data Sources This paper mainly adopts the case study method. According to the research questions and research objectives, the principles of this study are as follows: (1) The female is an independent entrepreneur with her own profound experience and feelings; (2) To facilitate the observation of the influence of social factors such as gender, original family and present family on female entrepreneurship, the female entrepreneurs selected in this paper are all over 30 years old (born before 1985); (3) The female entrepreneurs are good at communication, willing to share their own entrepreneurial experience and feelings; (4) The female entrepreneurs agree to participate in this study. Based on the above criteria, the researchers selected 2 female entrepreneurs born in rural areas in southwest China through purposeful sampling. The basic information of the cases is shown in table 1, and the age and business years calculated in 2019. From November 2018 to January 2019, the researcher conducted an oral history interview with the interviewees firstly, including their age, family structure, growth background, entrepreneurial experience, and status. The whole research process lasted more than half a year, and covered many relatively private topics, such as profit income and marital relationship, obtaining a large amount of first-hand information.

Table 1. Information on the Cases.

	Case A	Case B
Entrepreneur	Female A	Female B
Age	34	36
Education background	Vocational high school	Senior high school
Marital status	In love	married
Number of siblings	1 (younger brother)	1 (elder sister)
Number of child(children)	0	1
Start-up capital	Own funds	Own funds
Start-up time (business years)	14	15
Entrepreneurial form	Independent entrepreneurship	Independent entrepreneurship
Entrepreneurial industry	Architectural decoration industry; Consulting and planning services	Clothing industry

Before the formal interview, the researcher fully explained the purpose of the study to the interviewee and asks for their permission. The specific time and place of the interview are decided by the interviewees themselves. We usually conducted interviews in quiet places like parks and cafes. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. We recorded the interview with the interviewees' permission and took notes of their body movements, facial expressions, and other nonverbal information during the interview. The text was transcribed after the interview on time, and respondents were interviewed again by phone or face to face based on the information obtained.

Data Analysis Considering the relative lack of literature on the dynamic study of female entrepreneurs, the study mainly adopted the induction method. Induction can develop new theories through repeated iterations of research problems and evidence, which is especially applicable to fields where existing theories cannot effectively explain reality. As a case study, this study focuses on developing constructs and clarifying the relationships among constructs, describing the family-work

relationship in the entrepreneurial process and the strategies adopted by female entrepreneurs. The researcher analyzed the interview data collected. At the same time, the researcher will return text to the interviewee for confirmation so as to ensure the authentic reproduction of the interviewee's experience and feelings.

Research Results

Entrepreneurial Capital Accumulation Stage and Strategy Before starting a business, female entrepreneurs often experienced a necessary accumulation of original capital, such as entrepreneurship cognition, knowledge and skills learning, capital accumulation and other preparations, laying the foundation for the formal implementation of entrepreneurship. Families play a key role in this process.

Entrepreneur A: I have a younger brother, but in my family, the boy and the girl are treated equally. So, for me, what boys can do is girls can do. Men can go out, why not women? So, I came to Shanghai alone to strive for success. My parents did not object. As long as they choose the right path, they support me.

Entrepreneur B: It has more or less to do with my parents' influence in starting a business. My older sister and I were both daughters, so our family was looked down upon in the village, but our parents taught us that girls could do things just as well as boys. And fortunately, our home is close to the city, so my parents came to the city and started a fruit business. My parents did not give up us, but they worked hard, from dawn to dusk. My parents' experience let me recognize business can also be a life, and I wanted to help them reduce the burden, so I left school just after graduating from senior high school. Moreover, being born in such a family has made me particularly interested in business since childhood. When I was a child, I often went to the fruit store of my family as soon as school was over. All of that had an impact on my later choices.

But female entrepreneurs born in rural families have limited entrepreneurial resources. They didn't start a business right out of the school gate. After graduating from vocational high school, entrepreneur A was assigned to an enterprise as a technical worker according to her major. But she was dissatisfied with the current situation and always wanted to start her own business, so she quit her job and went to Shanghai alone to find opportunities. Due to the lack of funds provided by her family, she had to rely on being employed by other companies to make a living and wait for the opportunity. And graduating from senior high school, entrepreneur B had the opportunity to be selected to work for A publishing press in Beijing. During this time, she read a lot of books, accumulated a certain amount of savings and social skills. What's most important was having developed social relationships.

Therefore, in this stage, the family plays an important role in the original capital accumulation, such as entrepreneurial cognition, skills, capital, etc., but the family can not meet the total capital need of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs still need to take the initiative to learn from outside the family and get the supplement of capital accumulation. That is to say, entrepreneurs established family relations and supplemented the original family relations by developing new social relations, and finally completed the original capital accumulation.

Adaptation to Operation Stage and Strategy After having completed the capital accumulation, the entrepreneurs then started their business formally. But in the early stage of entrepreneurship, it is a process of exploration, which needs a period to adapt to the entrepreneurial life. At the beginning of entrepreneurship, there are also many difficulties, such as the capital needed for entrepreneurship exceeds the budget, the resources owned by entrepreneurs are insufficient, the roles of entrepreneurs are too many, and so on. At this point, the family will again give entrepreneurs selfless help.

Entrepreneur A: The cost of living in Shanghai is so high that it is far beyond my budget. So I had to borrow money and loans to promote the implementation of entrepreneurship. But the amount of bank loans is also limited, and interest payments are required. So my parents invested their savings in me again and helped me borrow money from relatives and their friends to get through this difficulty. Moreover, in the beginning, there were too many things. Apart from considering how to make the business go on the right track smoothly, other things could not be considered at all.

Entrepreneur B: In the beginning, it was very difficult. Many things need to be handled by yourself, and you need to know much, such as clothing fabric and design, color matching, body shape and style, and even financial knowledge. I was too busy. So my husband resigned from the government to help and became my right-hand man afterward.

In the stage of entrepreneurial adaptation to operation, families will continue to increase funding and support for female entrepreneurs in the face of the difficulties encountered by female entrepreneurs. The main focus of female entrepreneurs was on how to get through difficulties and adapt to the operation as early as possible, but they continued to maintain and expand family relationships.

Steady Development Stage and Strategy After having adapted to the operation, the start-up will enter a relatively stable development stage, and the entrepreneur will gain economic independence. However, there are still some problems to be solved in this process. The most obvious one is the family-work conflict caused by the entrepreneurship. Faced with the imbalance between family and work, entrepreneurs often solved it at the expense of personal interests.

Entrepreneur A: Now we have expanded from consulting and planning services to the architectural decoration industry. To ensure the quality, whenever the project enters the construction tension period, I will still personally visit the site for command, or even stay at the site all day, including eating and sleeping. Now, both markets are stable, but you still have to think about how to make them bigger and develop them better. For example, now we start to develop environmental protection materials for building decoration. Fundamentally speaking, we should be responsible for the health of our customers and the reduction of environmental pollution... There are so many things to deal with every day that I'm still not married. I have been in love for 8 years yet. I am afraid that it will affect my career and I can't be responsible for my children when I get married... Shanghai is too far away from home, it is difficult to take care of my parents. So I often feel guilty and bring my parents here to live with me. In this way, we can see each other often, communicate more and spend more time with family together.

Entrepreneur B: After opening a shop in the central city, we then set up a chain store in another business area and gave this shop to my sister to run completely. I only took a 30% dividend from it. But I have to do a lot of things on my own, such as choosing clothing styles, docking with suppliers, recruiting and training employees and so on. None of this can get help from my family... The most important thing is that now my daughter has grown up and I spend little time in accompanying. Her academic performance is always behind. I'm worried about her future. At first, I expected her father can help and share the burden, but in the end, I found it unreliable and I could only rely on myself... And my husband, in the face of other people's gossip, often said it was shameless to rely on wife to make money to support this family. So, I have to do these by myself.

It can be seen that, in this stage, although entrepreneurship helps female entrepreneurs achieve economic empowerment, they are still affected by the traditional concept of family responsibility. But they can not be in two places at once. So in the face of work-family conflict, they tend to sacrifice themselves to respond to and repay the family relationships, such as delaying marriage, reducing work time and accompanying their families, taking family responsibility imitatively as to support the elderly and raise their children.

Conclusion and Implication

Conclusion Entrepreneurship provides opportunities for women's personal development and personal value realization. For female entrepreneurs, the family is the focus of their lives. This study argues that the women entrepreneurship process includes the entrepreneurial capital accumulation stage, the adaptation to the operation stage and the stable development stage. And the female entrepreneurs adopted establishing and supplementing family relations, maintaining and expanding family relations, and responding to and repaying family relations to balance the work-family conflict respectively in these different stages. It is worth noting that even if entrepreneurship can bring them economic empowerment, they still cannot get rid of the traditional family responsibility influence. They want to maintain work-family balance and life coordination, so they make great personal efforts and interests

sacrifice. Based on the above analysis and conclusions, the research proposed a dynamic theoretical framework of work-family balance strategies for female entrepreneurs, as shown in figure 1.

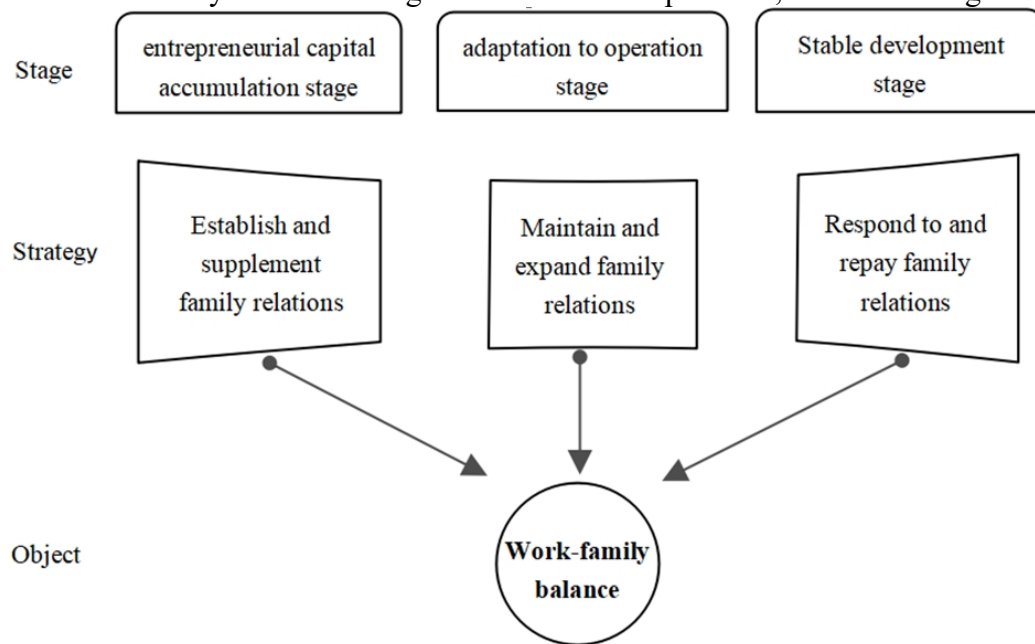


Figure 1. A dynamic theoretical framework of family-work balance strategies

Implication. Starting from the entrepreneurial process of female entrepreneurs, this study analyzes the coping strategies of female entrepreneurs for family-work balance. Because the current literature focuses on the development of entrepreneurs after entering the entrepreneurial field and the social service system, this study can be regarded as a supplement and improvement to the existing theories. Of course, the theoretical framework proposed based on the case study is still tentative, and more scholars need to provide further research and verification.

Acknowledgments

This research was financially supported by Academic and Technical Youth Leaders Project of Pu'er University, Philosophy and Social Science Planning for Youth Project Foundation of Yunnan Province (Grant NO. QN2018051) and Local Ethnic Culture Research Center of Pu'er University (Grant NO. MY202001).

References

- [1] A.D. Bruin, C.G. Brush, F. Welter. Introduction to the Special Issue: Towards Building Cumulative Knowledge on Women's Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice.* , 30 (2006) 5: 585-593.
- [2] A. Bruni, G. Silvia, P. Barbara. Doing Gender, Doing Entrepreneurship: An Ethnographic Account of Intertwined Practices. *Gender, Work & Organization.* 11 (2004) 4: 406-429.
- [3] S. Coleman, A. Robb. A Comparison of New Firm Financing by Gender: Evidence from the Kauffman Firm Survey Data. *Small Business Economics.* 33 (2009) 4: 397-411.
- [4] E.A. Howard, E.C. Jennifer. The Pervasive Effects of Family on Entrepreneurship: Toward a Family Embeddedness Perspective. *Journal of Business Venturing.* 18 (2003)5: 573-596.
- [5] C. Collins-Dodd, M.G. Irene, S. Carolyne. Further Evidence on the Role of Gender in Financial Performance. *Journal of Small Business Management.* 42 (2004) 4: 395-417.

- [6] C.R. Smith. Managing Work and Family in Small “Copreneurial” Business: An Australian Study. *Women in Management Review*. 15 (2000) 5-6: 283-289.
- [7] S.K.L. Jean. S.L. Choo. Work-Family Conflict of Women Entrepreneurs in Singapore. *Women in Management Review*. 16 (2001) 5: 204-221.
- [8] C.R. Stoner, R. I. Hartman, and R. Arora. Work-Home Role Conflict in Female Owners of Small Business: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Small Business Management*. 28 (1990) 1: 30-38.
- [9] L.M. Shelton. Female Entrepreneurs, Work-family Conflict, and Venture Performance: New Insights into the Work-family Interface. *Journal of Small Business Management*. 44(2006) 2: 285-297.
- [10] N. Michael-Tsabari, R. Labaki, and R.K. Zachary. Toward the Cluster Model: The Family Firm's Entrepreneurial Behavior Over Generations. *Family Business Review*. 27 (2014) 2: 161-185.
- [11] P. Ozcan, K. M. Eisenhardt. Origin of Alliance Portfolios: Entrepreneurs, Network Strategies and Firm Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*. 52 (2009) 2: 246-279.