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# UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MANDAN VILLAGE, CHINA

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**Abstract:** *This qualitative study delves into the intricate interplay of cultural norms, social networks, and unique challenges impacting female entrepreneurship in Mandan Village, Yunnan Province, China. Amidst evolving economic realities and entrenched traditional values, this research aims to unravel how these factors shape women's entrepreneurial endeavors in a rural context. The study's objectives are threefold: (1) to explore the influence of cultural norms on female entrepreneurship, (2) to investigate the role of social networks in supporting or challenging female entrepreneurs, and (3) to identify the unique challenges and opportunities faced by female entrepreneurs in Mandan Village. Employing semi-structured interviews, field observations, and analysis of government documents, the study captures diverse perspectives from 3 village committee members, 6 local residents, 3 NGO representatives, and 3 female entrepreneurs, totaling 15 individuals. Results uncover that conventional social standards altogether impact ladies' choices to become entrepreneurs and the kinds of organizations they lay out. Social networks are found to assume an essential part, offering fluctuating levels of assistance and assets. Female entrepreneurs face difficulties like adjusting business and family obligations, restricted admittance to resources, and exploring the digital gap. These experiences add to a nuanced comprehension of the variables influencing rural female entrepreneurship, offering important ramifications for policymakers, educators, and local area leaders. This research enriches the academic discourse on gender, culture, and entrepreneurship and underscores the importance of considering local contexts in fostering female economic empowerment and entrepreneurial choices in rural settings.*

**Keywords:** *female entrepreneurship, cultural norms, rural China, social networks, Mandan Village, gender and culture, rural business development*

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## Introduction

In the dynamic sphere of global entrepreneurship, the distinct experiences of rural women are garnering increasing scholarly and socio-economic attention. Mandan Village in Yunnan Province, China, with its rich cultural diversity, offers a unique lens to study these phenomena. This research focuses on understanding the cultural and social

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influences shaping female entrepreneurship in this locale, a subject vital in the broader context of gender studies and entrepreneurial research. Recent findings indicate personal traits, societal elements, and economic factors significantly impact female entrepreneurial decisions (Cavada et al., 2017). In China, while many women entrepreneurs are driven by necessity, such as family income improvement, a growing number are opportunity-driven, buoyed by enhanced educational access (Franzke et al., 2022). This trend aligns with He et al. (2022) findings on the influence of family cultural values on entrepreneurship, based on the China Family Tracking Survey. The importance of local, neighborhood, and family networks in shaping female social enterprise is immense, as entrepreneurship intertwines with place-based social, economic, and cultural patterns (Halberstadt & Spiegler, 2018). Furthermore, the significance of village entrepreneurs in combatting rural poverty is emphasized by Huang et al. (2017) and Naminse and Zhuang (2018), thereby emphasizing the intricate relationship between entrepreneurship and socio-economic advancement.

Social approval and support are crucial for female entrepreneurial intention, as observed in Gul et al. (2021) study, where a significant majority of Chinese women achieved success in socially supportive environments. Education also emerges as a key factor, with Gawel (2021) emphasizing its role in promoting entrepreneurship. Chen et al. (2018) further investigates this by dissecting the effect of social networks and business on territorial financial development in China.

Cultural factors are equally influential. Dai (2021) examines how culture shapes entrepreneurial behavior in China, while Lin and Kloet (2019) discuss the state's use of digital technology and entrepreneurship as solutions to socio-economic challenges. Xiao et al. (2020) investigates the convergence of traditional principles and digital business ventures, offering valuable insights into the cultural and institutional framework of China. On the contrary, Wang et al. (2023) and Yeh (2021) delve into the analysis of family dynamics in entrepreneurship and the cultural dynamics of Tibetan entrepreneurship, respectively, thereby presenting a more comprehensive view of the entrepreneurial landscape in China.

Hence, this investigation situates itself at the crossroads of cultural anthropology, gender studies, and entrepreneurship research, presenting a distinctive vantage point on the dynamics of female entrepreneurship in rural China, particularly in Mandan Village. Its primary objective is to contribute to our comprehension of how local circumstances shape women's economic empowerment and their decisions related to entrepreneurship.

## **Literature Review**

### **Female Entrepreneurship in Global and Chinese Contexts**

In China, the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship has seen a continual increase over the past 30 years, with a significant role in rural areas Dewitt et al. (2022). The relevance of education in encouraging entrepreneurial activity is highlighted by the favourable correlation between female entrepreneurship and educational attainment (Gawel, 2021). The influence of gender equality on bridging or buffering the entrepreneurship gender

gap has been investigated, indicating variations in the influence of female economic and political participation on female entrepreneurship across different countries (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020). Furthermore, the ingenuity and experience of female business people have been found to emphatically affect their wellbeing, showing the perplexing interchange among business and prosperity (Jia et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study on improving the entrepreneurial competence of college social entrepreneurs in China highlights the positive influence of digital government building and entrepreneurship education on female social entrepreneurs (Xiang et al., 2022). While the quantity of female business visionaries in China has been on the ascent, this pattern doesn't seem, by all accounts, to be converting into higher wages for ladies, which asks the issue of how economical their organizations are (Hernández et al., 2012). At long last, reflections on female business venture through its set of experiences, improvement, and orientation division have been introduced, revealing insight into the addition of ladies in the business area in various territorial, social, monetary, and social environments (Santos et al., 2019). These examinations all in all give an exhaustive comprehension of female entrepreneurship in China and its worldwide circumstance, enveloping elements like family dynamics, training, gender equality, wellbeing suggestions, entrepreneurial competence, and the difficulties and possibilities related with female entrepreneurship.

While there has been an increase in female entrepreneurship in China, especially in provincial districts, there has been no relating expansion in ladies' income, as per the exploration (Dewitt et al., 2022; Hernández et al., 2012). Education has been found to well affect entrepreneurial exercises, as per review (Gawel, 2021). Vracheva and Stoyneva (2020) found a complicated link between gender equality and entrepreneurship in different nations. However, the implications of these trends for long-term sustainability and wellbeing (Jia et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2022) remain underexplored, particularly in rural Chinese contexts.

## **Cultural and Family Influences on Entrepreneurship**

Both the objectives and the results of an entrepreneur are heavily impacted by cultural and familial factors. Research has shown that family dynamics and early exposure to entrepreneurship within the family can influence an individual's entrepreneurial intent Carr and Sequeira (2007). Additionally, family resources have been found to impact the long-term outcomes of entrepreneurship, such as exit from entrepreneurship, highlighting the enduring influence of family on entrepreneurial endeavors (Bird & Wennberg, 2016). Family culture, and Confucianism in China in particular, is a potential driver or brake on entrepreneurial spirit (He et al., 2022). The impacts of family history on students' plans to establish their own firms have been studied (Georgescu & Herman, 2020), and one finding is that an entrepreneurial family background may limit a student's entrepreneurial aspirations. Cultural factors, in addition to those inherited from one's family, play a significant influence in molding entrepreneurial behavior, according to research. For instance, the cultural roots of entrepreneurship have been explored, suggesting that durable, portable, and intergenerationally transmitted cultural imprints influence the likelihood of individuals becoming entrepreneurs, particularly among second-generation immigrants (Kleinhempel et al., 2020). In addition, it has been brought

to light that national culture has a part in shaping entrepreneurship. This highlights the importance of looking at subcultural variances within a culture to fully grasp how it affects entrepreneurship (Valliere, 2019). Furthermore, scholarly investigations that have prioritized the examination of situating entrepreneurship within its appropriate cultural framework have provided insights into the fundamental contextual elements and consequences that promote entrepreneurial activities in nations such as China (Huang et al., 2019). The influence of family environment on entrepreneurial interest has been a subject of study, with findings indicating that family support and positive influence significantly contribute to inspiring and supporting individuals' decisions to pursue entrepreneurship (Arfah et al., 2023). The amount of familial support has been demonstrated to exert an impact on students' inclination towards entrepreneurship (Suharto et al., 2022). Furthermore, scholarly investigations examining the impact of entrepreneurship on development, interpersonal dynamics, and familial life have revealed that entrepreneurs have significant repercussions in their personal lives, with a special emphasis on their familial relationships (Gholami & Tahoo, 2021). In sum, research shows that cultural and familial aspects, including family dynamics, cultural origins, national culture, and the impact of the home environment on entrepreneurial goals and achievements, have a major bearing on the entrepreneurial process.

Research highlights the significant impact of family dynamics and culture on entrepreneurial intent and outcomes (Bird & Wennberg, 2016; Carr & Sequeira, 2007; He et al., 2022). While family background can inspire entrepreneurial aspirations, it may also impose limitations (Georgescu & Herman, 2020). National and subcultural differences within China play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial behaviors (Huang et al., 2019; Valliere, 2019), but the specific influence of these factors in rural settings like Mandan Village needs more examination.

## **Social Networks and Community Support**

Social networks and community support play crucial roles in shaping entrepreneurial activities and outcomes. Research has shown that the scale of social support networks and the activities of individual and group members within the network are positively correlated with the level of users participating in online health tasks, highlighting the significance of social support networks in influencing user participation Lin and Li (2021). Furthermore, the impact of social networks and online communities on research and communication platforms has been emphasized, underscoring the need to consider the social desirability tendency of community members in these settings (Massara et al., 2012). Additionally, the linkage between social support and social networks and health education programs has been explored, emphasizing the implications for natural helper and community-level interventions (Israel, 1985). Likewise, earlier examinations have shown that social capital, which is gathered through social networks and trust, connects with local area personal satisfaction (Singh, 2022). This underscores the significance of communal involvement and social networks in facilitating community adaptation. In addition to social networks, family environment and support have been identified as influential factors in determining entrepreneurial career decisions and students' interest in entrepreneurship (Arfah et al., 2023; Hidayat & Veronica, 2022). The influence of the

social environment, particularly the support of the family environment, especially the elderly, has been highlighted as important for determining entrepreneurial career decisions (Hidayat & Veronica, 2022). Furthermore, the impact of family resources within the family and ethnic community on immigrant entrepreneurs' exit from entrepreneurship has been studied, emphasizing the enduring influence of family resources on entrepreneurial endeavours (Bird & Wennberg, 2016). Furthermore, academic examinations have dove into the meaning of family dynamics and connections with regards to female business venture. These studies have shed light on the transformative shifts in family dynamics that foster female entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, they have acknowledged the obstacles and inequitable expectations imposed on women who opt for entrepreneurship as a profession (Dewitt et al., 2022).

Social networks and community support are pivotal in shaping entrepreneurship (Israel, 1985; Lin & Li, 2021; Massara et al., 2012). The literature underscores the role of social capital and community quality of life (Singh, 2022), but there's a gap in understanding how these dynamics specifically affect rural women entrepreneurs in China.

## **Education and Entrepreneurship**

Rural women's entrepreneurship can contribute to economic growth in developing countries, representing an untapped potential Kabagerayo et al. (2022). Nonetheless, the level of education assumes a critical part in deciding the degree to which rustic ladies can take part in entrepreneurial exercises. Studies have indicated that women with low education can pursue rural entrepreneurship if they are supported through training and access to networks (Semkunde et al., 2021). Furthermore, access to competitive markets and entrepreneurial education, supported by adequate funding, is fundamental for achieving economic empowerment through resilient rural women's livelihoods (Jaka & Shava, 2018). The influence of education on rural women's economic empowerment has been a subject of study, with findings indicating that low educational status has limited rural women in attaining equitable livelihood opportunities and decision-making capabilities (Obayelu & Chime, 2020). Moreover, the improvement of women's entrepreneurial competence in rural tourism has been linked to the need for action learning, particularly as rural women typically have less access to formal education and extensive social networks (Yong et al., 2021). Additionally, functional literacy has been identified as an effort to develop home businesses for rural women, recognizing the pivotal role of women in supporting family economies (Arbarini et al., 2020). With regards to provincial regions, education has been viewed as a mediator among strengthening and conceptive health care, with suggestions for rural women's dynamic power in family matters, including medical problems (Alishah et al., 2019; Aly, 2021). Furthermore, the determinants of economic empowerment of rural women through agricultural activities have been analysed, highlighting the significance of education in enhancing their economic empowerment (Didana, 2019). Furthermore, the section of rustic ladies into advanced education has been considered to grasp its commitment to the change and defeating of man centric social relations, revealing insight into the possible effect of education on social change and empowerment (Falciro & Farias, 2017).

While rural women's entrepreneurship is recognized as a driver of economic growth, education is a critical determinant of their participation in entrepreneurial activities (Jaka & Shava, 2018; Kabagerayo et al., 2022; Semkunde et al., 2021). However, the specific educational needs and challenges of rural women entrepreneurs in China, and their impact on economic empowerment, are not adequately addressed in current literature.

## **Rural Entrepreneurship and Its Unique Challenges**

The obstacles encountered by female entrepreneurs in rural areas are deeply influenced by the intricate dynamics of economic and social elements. The problems faced by women entrepreneurs in rural regions have been recognized as access to investment capital, availability of resources, and state financial support (Ghouse et al., 2021). Additionally, limited access to farmlands and profitable markets, lack of business networks, limited time, poverty, and insufficient financial resources constrain women's engagement in entrepreneurship (Semkunde et al., 2021). Furthermore, rural women entrepreneurs face primarily social and cultural, financial, and skill-related challenges, which impact their ability to survive in family entrepreneurship (Rahman et al., 2022). The challenges are exacerbated by gender-specific barriers, as rural entrepreneurship can be more challenging for women due to societal norms and expectations (Elkafrawi & Refai, 2022). Likewise, the barriers experienced by female entrepreneurs in rural areas are shaped by the wider social and economic circumstances. Entrepreneurs who conduct commercial activities in geographically isolated rural regions have unique challenges that might hinder the growth and sustainability of their enterprises. These challenges include limited access to resources and constrained market opportunities (Besser & Miller, 2013). Additionally, women entrepreneurs in rural areas encounter difficulties in taking financial risks, mitigating organizational risk, and empowering themselves as a social collective, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the challenges they face (Kumar, 2013). Rural women entrepreneurs have additional difficulties due to the absence of adequate support systems and limited prospects. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas often encounter obstacles in accessing financial services and entrepreneurship opportunities, which can hinder their economic empowerment and poverty reduction efforts (Koomson et al., 2022). Furthermore, the entrepreneurship model of rural women's cooperatives has been identified to have problematic areas, indicating the need for comprehensive support and interventions to address these challenges (Lassithiotaki & Roubakou, 2014).

Rural female entrepreneurship faces unique challenges, including access to capital, resources, and support (Elkafrawi & Refai, 2022; Ghouse et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022; Semkunde et al., 2021). While these challenges are acknowledged, there is a lack of in-depth exploration of how these barriers specifically manifest and are navigated in rural Chinese contexts.

## **Digital Technology and Entrepreneurship**

Digital technology can enhance rural women's entrepreneurship by providing access to information, markets, and financial services, thereby enabling them to identify new

opportunities and innovate (Fahmi & Savira, 2021). The development of digital technology can help entrepreneurs by facilitating faster and easier information acquisition, which is particularly beneficial for rural communities (Fahmi & Savira, 2021). Besides, computerized innovation can act as a way to strengthening and more noteworthy monetary interest for under-resourced and socially minimized rural women (Dy et al., 2018). It can support women in various ways, such as saving time and labor, shaping their abilities, and improving the infrastructure of their work (Sharma, 2022). However, the digitalization of entrepreneurship also presents challenges, including the potential to increase inequality and disrupt sustainable development goals (Prasetyo & Setyadharma, 2022). The transformation of entrepreneurship through digital technology has the potential to increase inequality, particularly in rural areas, and disrupt sustainable development goals (Prasetyo & Setyadharma, 2022). Additionally, the digitalization of entrepreneurship can lead to increased inequality, posing challenges for sustainable development (Prasetyo & Setyadharma, 2022). Moreover, the role of digital technology in provincial ladies' entrepreneurship is firmly connected to monetary consideration and admittance to digital financial services. With the help of digital inclusive finance, rural families, particularly women, are showing unprecedented entrepreneurial enthusiasm, which can contribute to poverty reduction and economic empowerment (Chen et al., 2022). Financial digitalization, banking proximity, financial inclusion, financial care services, and government support systems can enhance rural women's entrepreneurial productivity and reduce poverty levels (Nso, 2022).

While some research suggests that digital technology might help rural women start their own businesses (Dy et al., 2018; Fahmi & Savira, 2021; Sharma, 2022), others are worried that it would worsen issues of inequality and sustainable development (Chen et al., 2022; Prasetyo & Setyadharma, 2022). The literature suggests a need for more nuanced understanding of digital technology's impact on rural female entrepreneurship in China.

The present research covers most facets of Chinese female entrepreneurship. Significant knowledge and insights into rural places like Mandan Village are lacking. Current study focuses on general trends or metropolitan contexts, limiting its investigation of rural female entrepreneurs' unique challenges and opportunities. Further research is needed to understand the intricate connection between cultural, educational, and technical factors that foster rural Chinese women's entrepreneurship. This study is essential for creating effective policies and support systems.

## **Methodology**

Thorough, semi-structured interviews were significant in social occasion information for this qualitative examination. Qualitative research methodology encompasses a range of approaches and traditions that aim to provide a deep understanding of social phenomena through systematic, self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication (Mays & Pope, 2000). It is exploratory in nature, aiming to explain the "how" and "why" of a certain social phenomena or program's operation in a given setting, and it is defined by the collecting of data directly from respondents in the field (Alam, 2008). Interviews are the backbone of qualitative research, which seeks to describe and

illustrate the use of qualitative interview methods in many contexts. It is a research method that effectively supports a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodology and is based on Lewin's action-research principles, including planning, action, observation, and reflection (Britten, 1995; García-Sampedro, 2018). This approach is chosen for its effectiveness in exploring the complex, nuanced, and context-specific experiences of individuals, particularly in a culturally rich setting like Mandan Village.

## Data Collection

Each participant will have semi-structured interviews. This format allows for flexibility in exploring topics deeply while ensuring that all relevant areas are covered. The study will involve 15 participants, 3 village committee members, 3 small business owners, 3 NGOs, and 6 residents (Table 1). They will be divided into four distinct groups to capture a range of perspectives. Deliberate testing, otherwise called purposeful examining, is a non-likelihood inspecting strategy oftentimes utilized in qualitative examination. This method is effective in gathering data from knowledgeable experts and ensures the quality of the information collected (Tongco, 2007). In qualitative exploration, two separate examining procedures are utilized: convenience examining and intentional testing. While convenience sampling entails picking individuals who are easily available to the researcher, purposive sampling follows a deliberate and purposeful approach to choose participants (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). Each interview session is expected to have a duration of around 60 minutes and will take place in a conducive and confidential environment, aimed at fostering candid and transparent conversation. The interview guide will include open-ended questions tailored to each group of participants, focusing on their experiences, perceptions, and opinions related to female entrepreneurship in Mandan Village.

The selection criteria for participants and the composition of the interview question sample:

### Village Committee Members (3 Participants)

- **Criteria:** These individuals play a crucial role as key informants in providing insights into the administrative and policy viewpoints pertaining to entrepreneurship within the village.
- **Sample Question 1:** " Could you at any point portray the ongoing scene of entrepreneurship in Mandan Village, particularly corresponding to female entrepreneurs? What changes have you seen throughout recent years?"
- **Purpose:** This question expects to accumulate bits of knowledge into the more extensive entrepreneurial climate in the village from a strategy and managerial point of view.
- **Sample Question 2:** " What difficulties and opportunities do you suppose ladies face while beginning and running organizations locally?"

- Purpose: This question tries to comprehend the committee members impression of the impediments and benefits that female entrepreneurs encounter in Mandan Village.

### **Small Business Owners (3 Participants)**

- **Criteria:** Female entrepreneurs in Mandan Village are engaged in the ownership and operation of various companies, including restaurants, homestays, and beauty salons. The perspectives they offer will be crucial in comprehending the pragmatic obstacles and prospects associated with operating a business inside this rural environment.
- **Sample Question 1:** "What roused you to go into business, and how did your cultural and social foundation impact this choice?"
- Purpose: This question is intended to investigate the individual inspirations driving their entrepreneurial ventures and the impact of their cultural and social circumstance.
- **Sample Question 2:** "Might you at any point share a huge test you've looked at in your business and how you figured out how to overcome it?"
- Purpose: This tries to comprehend the functional difficulties experienced and the methodologies utilized to address them, giving bits of knowledge into flexibility and development in a rural business context.

### **NGOs (3 Participants)**

- **Criteria:** The forementioned individuals will contribute an external viewpoint about the support mechanisms accessible to rural businesses, as well as the wider socio-economic framework. The user's text does not provide any information to rewrite in an academic manner.
- **Sample Question 1:** "From your experience, how do NGOs uphold female entrepreneurship in rural regions like Mandan Village? Are there explicit projects or initiative you can share?"
- Purpose: This question means to assemble data on the role of NGOs in cultivating female business venture and the viability of their projects.
- **Sample Question 2:** "As you would like to think, what are the most basic requirements of female entrepreneurship in Mandan Village that are as of now neglected?"
- Purpose: This question looks for bits of knowledge into expected holes in help and assets that NGOs or different partners could address.

### **Local Residents (6 Participants)**

- **Criteria:** This collective will provide a communal viewpoint, encompassing the societal and cultural context in which female entrepreneurship is situated.
- **Sample Question 1:** "How would you see the effect of female-possessed organizations on our local area in Mandan Village?"

- Purpose: This question expects to comprehend local area view of female business venture and its socio-cultural and financial effects.
- **Sample Question 2:** " Could you at any point share any accounts or encounters you have had with nearby female business visionaries and what they have meant for your perspective on women in business?"
- Purpose: This looks to accumulate individual narratives and encounters that reflect the cultural mentalities and convictions about female entrepreneurship in the village.

**Table 1: Stakeholders with Their Information**

Code	Employment	Interview Duration
S1	Village Committee Members	57mins
S2	Village Committee Members	50mins
S3	Village Committee Members	51mins
S4	Restaurant Owner	61mins
S5	Homestay Owner	60mins
S6	Beauty Salon Owner	58mins
S7	NGOs	52mins
S8	NGOs	51mins
S9	NGOs	50mins
S10	Local Resident	62mins
S11	Local Resident	59mins
S12	Local Resident	56mins
S13	Local Resident	55mins
S14	Local Resident	59mins
S15	Local Resident	60mins

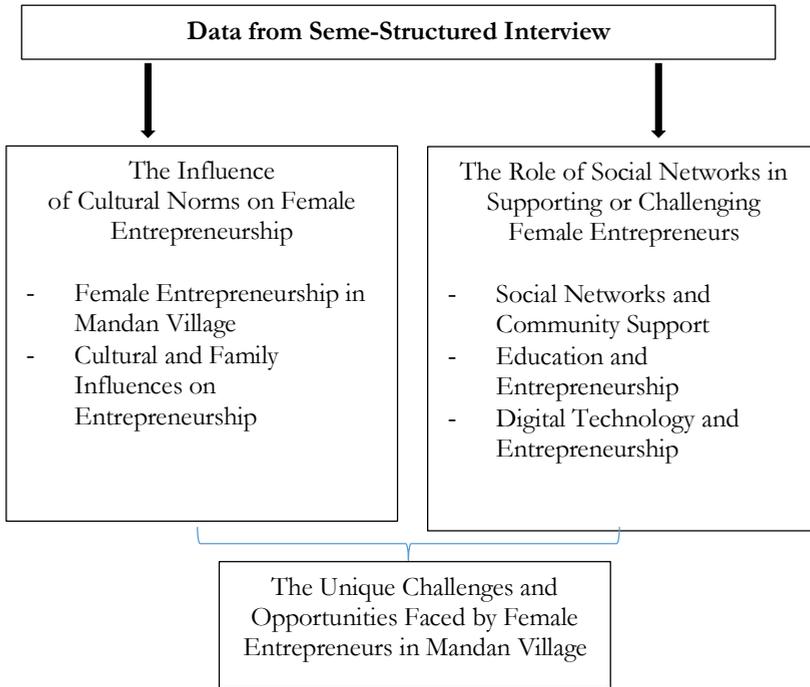
*Source: Developed by Author*

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a versatile and extensively employed approach that centers on the identification of patterns and themes within qualitative data. The forementioned approach provides a comprehensive comprehension of practical concerns and may be effectively employed to address diverse research inquiries and datasets. Unlike other approaches, thematic analysis allows for theoretical freedom and rich, detailed yet complex analytical accounts (Lochmiller, 2021; Majumdar, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023). The interviews will be documented by recording, transcribing, and subsequently subjected to theme analysis. Finding and recording recurring ideas or patterns in the data collection is the methodological approach taken in this investigation. The analysis will be an iterative process, moving back and forth between the data and emerging themes to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the narratives.

According to the data from the semi-structured interview, a conceptual research framework was generated for this study. (Figure 1)

**Figure 1. The Conceptual Research Framework**



*Source: Developed by Author*

In order to bolster the credibility and dependability of the study, various methodologies will be implemented. These methodologies encompass triangulation, which involves the comparison and cross-verification of findings across diverse participant groups, member checking, which entails sharing the findings with participants to validate their accuracy, and the meticulous maintenance of an exhaustive audit trail documenting the research process. The vital moral consent will be looked for from the fitting institutional survey board. All participants will be mentioned to give informed assent, which will guarantee that they have information in regard to the objective of the review, the deliberate idea of their association, and their qualification to pull out from the review at some random point. The review system will stick to severe conventions to guarantee the conservation of secrecy and obscurity. The restricted generalizability of the discoveries is credited to the qualitative nature of this review and the use of a little, purposive example.

The present study utilized empirical data collected during interviews conducted during two site visits that spanned two months (late-January to late-March 2023). The interviews were carried out at Mandan Village. Situated along the China-Laos border, it is a

constituent of Yunnan Province, China. The village currently has 86 farming households, with a rural population of 458 people, including 236 males and 222 females. The entire population is involved in agriculture, with a workforce of 250 people. The village is predominantly Dai ethnic group, consisting of 456 Dai people and 2 Han people. The village's primary school students attend Mandan Primary School, while middle school students go to Mengla Town Middle School. The separation from the town to the elementary school is 1.5 kilometers, and to the middle school it is 15 kilometers. There are 47 students in the village receiving compulsory education, including 34 primary school students and 13 middle school students.

Mandan Village was visited in January 2023 for the first time, with the purpose of setting up informal meetings with certain members of the Village Committee and several local women business owners. The researchers were also given an hour-long tour of Mandan by two members of the Village Committee, who gave them an overview of the town's history and ecology. The tour included stops at Mandan Village's historical archives, infrastructure, a hall showcasing traditional culture, guesthouses, restaurants, and a beauty salon. Also, when the Village Committee members were at the home of a woman who showed a strong interest in business, the researchers tagged along. A cross-section of local women was interviewed informally, including some who operate small businesses and others who live in the area. At the local level, ladies' support in business was the primary subject of conversation.

The subsequent excursion occurred toward the end of March, explicitly between the 29th and the 31st. Throughout the three days, a progression of semi-organized interviews was done, yielding a sum of 15 significant gathering records.

The research questions of the study guided the interviews.

- RQ1: How do cultural norms and values in Mandan Village influence women's decisions to become entrepreneurs, and in what ways do they shape the types of businesses women choose to start?
- RQ2: In what ways do social networks within Mandan Village support or impede women in their entrepreneurial endeavors, and how do these networks influence business success?
- RQ3: What are the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Mandan Village, and how do they navigate these challenges in the context of their cultural and social environment?

## Results and Discussion

**RQ1: How do cultural norms and values in Mandan Village influence women's decisions to become entrepreneurs, and in what ways do they shape the types of businesses women choose to start?**

Answering the above research question requires two approaches: Female Entrepreneurship in Mandan Village, Cultural and Family Influences on Entrepreneurship.

– Female Entrepreneurship in Mandan Village

The interviews with village committee members and local residents revealed the strong influence of traditional cultural norms on women's entrepreneurship. The majority of participants expressed that, “despite the growing recognition of women in the corporate realm, conventional gender roles and societal expectations continue to provide substantial challenges” (S1, S3, S10, S12, S14, S15). For example, all the interviewed local women mentioned that “we actually had the idea of starting a business a long time ago, but the traditional concept in the village is very strong. The older generation believes that women's responsibilities are to care for the next generation, farming, cooking, and washing clothes. As for entrepreneurship and other things, it is not something that rural women should consider” (S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15).

The findings from Mandan Village resonate with broader trends observed in China, where traditional cultural norms continue to exert a strong influence on women's entrepreneurial decisions (Dewitt et al., 2022; He et al., 2022). The persistence of conventional gender roles, as highlighted by the local women and committee members, aligns with the literature noting the enduring impact of such norms on female entrepreneurship (Carr & Sequeira, 2007; Georgescu & Herman, 2020). However, this study also uncovers the nuanced complexity within these norms, particularly in rural contexts. The resistance faced by women in Mandan Village, despite the growing recognition of their roles in business, points to a critical gap between societal progress and entrenched cultural attitudes. This gap mirrors the discoveries of Hernández et al. (2012), where expanded entrepreneurial action has not converted into relative monetary additions for women.

– Cultural and Family Influences on Entrepreneurship

Some interviewed small business owners shared stories about balancing business activities with expected family roles, highlighting the dual challenges faced by women. For example, “I run a homestay. Indeed, my proposition to begin a commercial venture is characterized by its simplicity, namely, the sole objective is to augment the financial resources of my household. In rural areas, except in busy farming season, I am still very busy many times, and I have been thinking about how to use the vacant rooms in my home. Finally, I chose to run a homestay. My family is very opposed to it. Although it increases my family's income by running a homestay, I need a lot of money. Take time to manage homestays. My family all believe that I did not fulfill my responsibilities as a woman” (S5).

The dual challenges of managing business and familial responsibilities, as expressed by the participants, underscore the dual role many women must navigate. This reflects findings by Bird & Wennberg (2016), who note the significant influence of family resources and dynamics on entrepreneurial outcomes. Nevertheless, the research emphasizes a distinctive facet of rural entrepreneurship: the need to reconcile

entrepreneurial ambitions with the pressure to conform to conventional family responsibilities. This discovery holds significant pertinence when considering the impact of Confucianism in rural China, a factor that can simultaneously stimulate and impede the entrepreneurial ambitions of women (He et al., 2022).

**RQ2: In what ways do social networks within Mandan Village support or impede women in their entrepreneurial endeavors, and how do these networks influence business success?**

To answer the forementioned research query, three methods are necessary: Social Networks and Community Support, Education and Entrepreneurship, Digital Technology and Entrepreneurship.

– Social Networks and Community Support

Social networks and community support Interviews with representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and residents indicate that social networks play a crucial role in supporting women's entrepreneurship. For example, as a vocational skills training institution, we are commissioned by local governments to provide skills training to local people in remote areas such as Mandan Village. Especially for female students, we prepare courses such as pastry, Chinese cuisine cooking, hair salon, etc. We really hope that rural women can step out of the mountains and start their own businesses after mastering the skills (S7, S8, S9). However, the experiences of small business owners are mixed. While certain individuals experience advantages from robust community affiliations, others may perceive a sense of isolation stemming from inadequate access to pertinent networks or support structures. For example, "I run a small restaurant, but on the one hand, I don't have enough variety of dishes, and on the other hand, I lack experience in business management. In addition, I don't have any fixed large customers, so my business has not been very stable" (S4).

The findings from Mandan Village regarding the role of social networks in supporting female entrepreneurship echo broader research emphasizing the significance of social support networks (Lin & Li, 2021; Massara et al., 2012). The vocational training initiatives mentioned by NGO representatives highlight how skill development can be a critical driver for rural women's entrepreneurship, aligning with Semkunde et al. (2021) findings on the importance of training and network access. However, the mixed experiences of business owners, with some benefiting from robust community ties and others feeling isolated, point to an inconsistency in the effectiveness of these networks. This variation suggests that while social networks can be a powerful asset, their benefits are not uniformly accessible or leveraged in rural entrepreneurial settings.

– Education and Entrepreneurship

Education and Entrepreneurship The interviewed village committee members and residents stated that education is very important in the process of entrepreneurship. For example, "Our village committee hopes that more education and training institutions can teach our local residents to enhance their skills and provide them with more employment

opportunities" (S1, S2, S3). Some female villagers mentioned that "our entrepreneurial idea originated from the teacher who came here to train us. We see that she is also a woman who can master skills and knowledge and lead the society independently. We are very eager to become independent women like her" (S13, S14, S15)

The impact of education on fostering female entrepreneurship, as noted by village committee members and residents, supports existing literature on the positive correlation between education and entrepreneurial activity (Jaka & Shava, 2018; Kabagerayo et al., 2022). The inspiration drawn from educated role models underscores the potential of education not only in skill-building but also in changing societal perceptions about women's roles in entrepreneurship. Be that as it may, the discoveries likewise uncover a gap in the writing regarding the educational necessities of rustic women entrepreneurs in China and how these requirements convert into monetary.

#### – Digital Technology and Entrepreneurship

**Digital Technology and Entrepreneurs** The interviewed small business owners and residents unanimously believe that digital technology is a key factor in today's social development. For example, "I ran a small beauty salon, and the business was not very good at the beginning, so I asked my cousin who worked in the city. She taught me how to use short video tools such as Tiktok. Almost overnight, I feel that everyone knows the existence of my shop. Now many customers come to me, of course, they will also make an appointment with me through WeChat and will also pay me through Alipay or WeChat. Thank you very much "The changes that technology has brought to my life" (S6). The interviewed villagers also mentioned that "almost everyone in our village now has smartphones, which greatly improves the efficiency of communication. We can also learn and learn more knowledge and information through some large websites and platforms" (S11, S12).

The positive impact of digital technology on rural women's businesses, as seen in the case of the beauty salon owner, aligns with research highlighting digital technology as a catalyst for entrepreneurship (Dy et al., 2018; Fahmi & Savira, 2021). This finding illustrates the transformative potential of digital tools in enhancing business visibility and customer engagement. Even so, the issue of digital technology worsening inequality (Chen et al., 2022; Prasetyo & Setyadharma, 2022) raises worries over its equitable accessibility, which might potentially result in a digital gap among entrepreneurs.

### **RQ3: What are the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Mandan Village, and how do they navigate these challenges in the context of their cultural and social environment?**

Collaboration between RQ1 and RQ2 is necessary to address the research inquiry specified before.

### **Results for RQ3**

(1) Specific Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs: Women business owners in Mandan Village confront a complex set of obstacles, according to the study's results, which have their origins in the local culture and economy. These challenges include:

- Limited Access to Resources and Capital: Ghouse et al. (2021) and Semkunde et al. (2021) both point out that women business owners have a hard time getting the funding and resources they need. This includes limitations in accessing farmlands, markets, and investment capital.
- Balancing Entrepreneurial and Domestic Responsibilities: Participants noted the dual burden of managing business and familial roles, a challenge that resonates with the broader research findings of Elkafrawi and Refai (2022) and Rahman et al. (2022). This balance is particularly challenging in the context of Mandan's traditional cultural norms.
- Lack of Business Networks and Support Systems: Some women reported feeling isolated due to inadequate access to relevant business networks, echoing the findings of Besser and Miller (2013) and Kumar (2013).

(2) Navigating the Challenges: Women entrepreneurs in Mandan Village adopt various strategies to navigate these challenges:

- Leveraging Digital Technology: Consistent with the findings of Fahmi and Savira (2021), women are increasingly using digital technology to access markets and improve business visibility, thereby partially overcoming the limitations of geographical isolation.
- Skill Development through Education and Training: Aligning with the emphasis on education by Jaka and Shava (2018) and Kabagerayo et al. (2022), women entrepreneurs are seeking skill development and education to enhance their business competencies.
- Community Support and Cooperatives: Some women are turning to community cooperatives and support networks to mitigate the lack of formal support systems, as suggested by Koomson et al. (2022) and Lassithiotaki and Roubakou (2014).

### **Discussion for RQ3**

(1) Cultural and Socio-Economic Barriers: Cultural standards and financial limitations altogether frustrate female business venture in Mandan Village, as per the review. While the challenges align with broader trends in rural entrepreneurship, the specific context of Mandan Village - with its unique cultural and social environment - intensifies these challenges. The findings underscore the need for contextualized solutions that address both cultural norms and practical barriers. The research could benefit from a deeper exploration of how cultural norms specifically influence the types of businesses women choose to start. Understanding this could provide more targeted insights for policy interventions.

(2) **Strategies for Overcoming Challenges:** The adaptive strategies employed by women entrepreneurs in Mandan Village demonstrate resilience and innovation. The use of digital technology, for instance, highlights a modern approach to overcoming traditional barriers. By the by, not all women are furnished with equivalent admittance to these assets, and the progress of these actions varies. Further research should investigate the accessibility of digital tools and educational resources to all women entrepreneurs in the village. Understanding these disparities is crucial for developing inclusive support mechanisms.

(3) **Need for Holistic Support Systems:** The reliance on community support and cooperatives indicates a gap in formal support structures for female entrepreneurs in rural areas. This emphasizes the significance of comprehensive and multi-dimensional support systems that address the cultural and economic dimensions of entrepreneurship. The study points to the importance of community and cooperative structures but does not fully explore how these can be effectively integrated with formal support mechanisms. Creating integrated support models that merge community-based strategies with official entrepreneurship assistance should be the primary goal of future studies.

## **Conclusion**

The motivation behind this exploration was to look at the elements of female entrepreneurship in Mandan Village, Yunnan Province, China, with a specific concentration on the means by which social networks, cultural standards, and individual obstructions assume a part. The results show that there is a complicated relationship between long-standing cultural standards and the new goals of female entrepreneurs. Despite the progressive recognition of women in business, entrenched societal expectations and gender roles continue to pose significant challenges. Social networks and community support, while crucial, offer mixed benefits due to variability in accessibility and effectiveness. Women entrepreneurs in Mandan Village are navigating these challenges through innovative strategies, including leveraging digital technology, and pursuing skill development through education.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study, while providing valuable insights, is not without limitations. The results may not apply to other rural areas in China or anywhere else due to the study's qualitative character and its limited, purposeful sample size. Additionally, the study primarily captures the experiences and perceptions of a specific group of women in Mandan Village, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences among all rural women entrepreneurs.

## **Future Research Directions**

Future research should aim to address the following areas:

- a) Quantitative Analysis: To complement the qualitative insights, a quantitative approach involving a larger and more diverse sample could validate and extend the findings of this study.
- b) Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal research would provide deeper insights into how the entrepreneurial journey of women in rural areas like Mandan Village evolves over time, especially in the face of changing cultural norms and technological advancements.
- c) Comparative Studies: To even more likely figure out the perplexing connection between culture, gender, and entrepreneurship, looking at the tales of female entrepreneurs from different rural areas of China or different nations could be educational.
- d) In-depth Exploration of Digital Divide: To fully understand how the digital gap affects rural women business owners, more studies are required. Understanding the barriers to digital access and literacy among rural women entrepreneurs could inform more effective strategies for digital inclusion.
- e) Policy-Oriented Research: Studies focusing on the effectiveness of specific policies and programs aimed at supporting rural women entrepreneurs would be valuable. An examination of how various forms of assistance may be modified to address the specific difficulties encountered by these women could be part of this process.

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