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Recenzja rozprawy doktorskiej

Mgr Yi Zhang pt.:

The influence of cultural and individual characteristics on decision-making logic: a case of Chinese immigrant entrepreneur in Poland

Podstawę formalną do sporządzenia recenzji rozprawy doktorskiej Mgr Yi Zhang pt.: „*The influence of cultural and individual characteristics on decision-making logic: a case of Chinese immigrant entrepreneur in Poland*”, przygotowanej pod kierunkiem prof. dr hab. Aldony Glińskiej-Noweś oraz prof. Miguela Pereira Lopesa (foreign scientific supervisor) stanowi pismo Przewodniczącej Rady Dyscypliny Naukowej Nauki o Zarządzaniu i Ekonomii dr hab. Agaty Sudolskiej, prof. UMK z dnia 10.10.2024 r.

Dissertation topic assessment

Evaluating the dissertation topic, it should be noted that the doctoral candidate is from China, which explains her interest in the Chinese community in Poland and the differences and similarities in running businesses (specifically in decision-making) between the representatives of Confucius' nation and Poles. This topic is significant for two reasons. First, it fits into the ongoing discussion on the entrepreneurial process and the role of effectuation in it. The issue of the influence of effectuation on decision-making has been the subject of research for many years, with scholars seeking answers regarding the factors that affect it. Second, it introduces a cultural factor into the research, examining how Chinese immigrants make business decisions in a country with a different culture, such as Poland. The above indicates the scientific importance of the chosen topic.

It is also significant from a practical point of view. Immigrant entrepreneurship is the subject of few studies in Poland (see for example B. Glinka). At the same time, we have become a country receiving more and more immigrants, which means greater cultural diversity among both employees and entrepreneurs. Understanding the cultural background of decision-making is therefore essential for easier, for example, cooperation.

Hence, the topic is important from a practical and interesting from a scientific point of view.

Assessment of Goals and Research Questions

The candidate aims to investigate the impact of individual characteristics and cultural factors on the use of decision-making methods by Chinese entrepreneurs operating in Poland. The literature analysis covered several thematic areas: cultural issues, the foundations of decision-making, and the entrepreneurial process, which allowed for the formulation of research questions. No hypotheses were posed in the dissertation, which seems appropriate given the subsequent research methods adopted.

The author formulated seven research questions:

RQ1a. How does the related entrepreneurial experience influence the entrepreneurs employing effectual logic compared to novices who tend to use causal logic?

RQ1b. How does educational level influence the entrepreneurial decision-making logic preferences?

RQ2. How does entrepreneurs' risk perception affect their preference for decision-making logics?

RQ3: How does uncertainty avoidance influence entrepreneurs' decisions?

RQ4. How do collectivist versus individualist cultural orientations influence entrepreneurs' decision-making logic?

RQ5. How does long-term orientation impact the use of decision-making logic?

RQ6. Do entrepreneurs exhibit a shift between effectual and causal logic in their decision-making processes at different stages of entrepreneurship?

RQ7. How do individual characteristics and cultural factors influence entrepreneurs to make the shifts in their decision-making logic at different entrepreneurial stages?

These questions are largely based on the works of Sarasvathy and others who analyze decision-making logic: effectuation versus causation. The wide variety of aspects addressed may at first glance raise concerns about the feasibility of obtaining answers to the posed questions. These aspects include issues related to personal traits (entrepreneurial experience, educational level, risk perception, uncertainty avoidance), cultural aspects (collectivist versus individualist cultural orientation, and long-term orientation), and the entrepreneurial process (different stages of entrepreneurship), all in the context of the decision-making process among Chinese entrepreneurs running businesses in Poland. However, the candidate has handled this diversity very well, partly by applying various research methods to seek answers to the posed questions.

Evaluation of the Structure

The reviewed dissertation consists of an introduction and seven chapters, spanning over 165 pages. It can be divided into two thematic sections and a conclusion, which follows the traditional division into a literature review section and a research section. The first section, comprising the three chapters, describes the literature foundations of the studied issue, including entrepreneurship and its process as well as cultural diversity, with a particular focus on Chinese culture. Third chapter describes the factors influencing decision-making logic, related to cultural aspects. This chapter serves as the basis for formulating the research questions described above.

The research part of the dissertation includes chapter four, which provides a detailed description of the research methodology, and two chapters presenting the research findings from study one and

study two. The dissertation concludes with a section that includes a description of contributions, limitations, and the final conclusions.

The individual chapters and subchapters form a logical whole, although I have some comments regarding the structure of the first chapter, which describes five thematic threads in just 21 pages. At the same time, the main topic of the dissertation, decision-making logic, based on the theory of effectuation, is covered in less than three pages. Section 1.6 could be successfully moved to chapter three, which details the factors influencing decision-making, frequently referencing the theory of effectuation. This would allow for a focus on the theoretical foundations of effectuation, both in terms of its description and the research conducted on this topic.

Substantive assessment of the dissertation

First chapter

The candidate begins with the definition of entrepreneurship and its place in mainstream economic research, adding the specific context of activities such as running a business while in emigration. A subsection 1.3 is dedicated to this latter aspect, pointing out three theoretical foundations of the research: embeddedness theory, cultural theory, and capital theory. The chapter also covers aspects related to the perception of running a business and includes a brief subsection on the theory of effectuation. I get the impression that too many different topics are attempted to be covered in this chapter. However, this does not mean that they are not relevant to the subsequent discussion. Perhaps, it would have been possible to combine the two subsections: Entrepreneur and Theories of Immigrant Entrepreneurship into one. The first subsection, on entrepreneurship, is mostly dedicated to entrepreneurship abroad, which corresponds well with theories of immigrant entrepreneurship.

I have some reservations about section 1.5, titled: *The Entrepreneur's Perception of Entrepreneurial Venture*. First, I find the title inappropriate for the content. It is unclear whether it refers to existing businesses or decisions about starting a business. Second, I do not think that one can comment on a key topic in entrepreneurship studies based on a source from 1999 (page 44, first sentence of the paragraph). Furthermore, the uncertainty related to running a business today, often described by the acronyms VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) and the newer BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible), affects all entities, both large and small. This raises the question again of what the term entrepreneurial venture means: small or big companies. On the other hand, I agree that the entire concept of risk-taking fit into the considerations on cognitive processes (biases, etc.) and the main topic of the dissertation, however the choice of this particular element could have been better justified.

Second chapter

Chapter two, in contrast to the first one, is thematically homogeneous and entirely dedicated to national culture. The candidate reviews the main theoretical concepts related to national culture, such as those proposed by Hofstede, Schwartz, Gesteland, and Inglehart, identifying Hofstede's model as the leading one. Hofstede's framework is then used to describe Chinese culture. The choice of this concept is justified by its dimensions, which are similar to Chinese Confucianism: power distance, individualism, and masculinity according to Hofstede's theory. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the national cultural dimensions of Poland and China. However, it is worth considering how stable these cultural dimensions are, especially in the context of individuals who migrate and are



influenced by another culture – they might even need to adapt to it. It would be valuable to include a subsection addressing this issue, especially since the author raises this issue when discussing the research findings later in the dissertation.

Third chapter

This chapter is crucial for creating a foundation for research on the chosen topic. It serves as the basis for formulating the research questions (the author did not propose hypotheses). The selection of factors influencing decision-making logic is appropriate. However, I can imagine expanding this set to include additional factors, such as the concept of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which belongs to the group of individual factors and influences decisions in situations of uncertainty, which the candidate discusses.

I wonder why there is only one publication from the last ten years in the entire third chapter. The aspects such as individual characteristics of entrepreneurs (past experience, education, and risk perceptions) and cultural dimensions are still the subject of scientific research, especially in the context of the entrepreneurial process, particularly its initial stage – entrepreneurial intentions/initiations is broadly discussed in the literature. Extensive literature on this topic addresses education versus intentions/initiations (see, for example, Linan, Fayolle), while risk perceptions are studied, among others, within the broader construct of Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation (see, for example Clark, Pidduck, Lumpkin). I understand that some publications are core references for a given topic, but science does not stand still, and subsequent generations of entrepreneurs change as well. This comment only applies to chapter three, since in the chapters discussing the research results the candidate has already referred to more recent literature.

Forth chapter

This chapter is dedicated to the research methodology proposed based on the subject and object of the study and the questions posed in chapter three. I highly appreciate the thorough explanations of the entire research process in proposed studies (study one and study two). These explanations cover both the selection of the research sample and the justifications for the chosen data processing method. All elements of the process are described in detail, demonstrating the ability to plan original scientific research. For the study conducted among the Chinese community, the author used the Chinese version of the Value Survey Module, which is more suitable for the respondents' cultural and linguistic background.

Chapter Five and Six

Chapters five and six present the results of the two studies and discuss the findings in the context of results obtained by other authors.

The author thoroughly analyzed the impact of ten configurations of the examined factors on effectuation or causation decision-making logic, dividing them into five groups based on the leading decision-making factor. Additionally, the author conducted an in-depth analysis of the results, comparing her observations with the findings of other researchers. This demonstrated inconsistencies with some previously published results, highlighting more complex relationships, for example, between educational aspects and the utilized decision logic. The discussion of the answers to each research question was carefully conducted and supported by both citations from the literature and proposed explanations for deviations from commonly perceived relationships. Drawing conclusions from the research was not easy, as the applied data analysis method using fuzzy logic does not provide



unequivocal answers but indicates the best-fitting configurations of factors affecting a given construct – in this dissertation, the decision-making approach. Answering the posed questions required additional analysis of five configurations, each involving more than one factor.

The results of interviews conducted with 12 Chinese entrepreneurs operating in Poland allowed for answers to the sixth and seventh research questions, addressing the change in decision-making methods as they move through different stages of the entrepreneurial process. This is a very interesting topic, which was described based on a synthetic division of the this process into two phases: initial decision and mature stage. This is valuable material that can be used in entrepreneurial education, which I also mention below. Interesting insights comes also from reports of Chinese entrepreneurs regarding cultural differences, highlighting cultural shock and the need to adjust to the new cultural environment.

Chapter Seven

The final chapter summarizes the contribution to the knowledge on decision-making logic and indicates possible practical applications of the obtained knowledge. The theoretical contribution demonstrated by the candidate involves showing that in the studied group of entrepreneurs, decision-making was influenced by a combination of factors, leading to the question of whether a single factor's influence can be pinpointed in a binary manner. This is an intriguing conclusion, which could be drawn thanks to the application of the fuzzy logic method. An important finding, which challenges existing research, is the variability of decision-making logic depending on the stage of the entrepreneurial process and the context. The candidate highlights the possibilities offered by fuzzy logic method in analyzing different configurations of potential factors, as mentioned above. This method allows for the demonstration of various configurations of factors that may be influential.

The practical contribution involves demonstrating the impact of the cultural environment on decisions made by immigrant entrepreneurs. It is also valuable to highlight the necessity for entrepreneurs to adapt their decision-making logic flexibly. However, for this practical contribution to be truly recognized and utilized, it would be advisable to develop educational materials in the form of case studies based on the conducted research. These could be used by educators or lecturers.

Formal assessment

Both the language and editorial aspects of the dissertation do not raise any objections. The work is written in simple, understandable language, and the vocabulary used is appropriate to the research topic.

Minor editorial shortcomings:

1. I am concerned about the quality of the printed version of the dissertation delivered for review; some sections are illegible. In many places, the content has to be inferred.
2. It would be beneficial to repeat the abbreviations used in the description of Table 5.2 to enhance the table's readability.
3. All chapters began with a brief introduction highlighted as X.1, which I perceive as a very good technique. Chapter three clearly deviates from this structure. It lacks both the introduction and the summary found in other chapters.



Evaluation of the utilized literature

The work is based on 383 literature items, including seminal works and later publications related to the discussed topics. As I have emphasized, there were several thematic threads. My only reservation, which I expressed above, points to the lack of current positions in the third chapter, although they appear in the discussion on research results in later chapters.

The general assessment of the dissertation

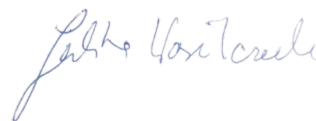
I assess the dissertation positively. This assessment concerns both the original choice of topic and the planning and execution of the research. My concerns about the minor disarray in the first chapter do not diminish this assessment. The researcher has the right to their opinion, and I respect the candidate's choice of thematic areas, despite differing views on the necessity of distributing emphasis. I highly value the preparation of the research and the discussion on the obtained results.

Final conclusion

In summary, I state that the doctoral dissertation by MSc Yi Zhang meets the requirements of the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science (*Journal of Laws of 2023, item 742, with further amendments*). The candidate demonstrated theoretical knowledge in the discipline of management and quality science, as evidenced by three chapters analyzing existing knowledge on entrepreneurial processes, the factors influencing them, and the logic of decision-making. The dissertation is framed within the theoretical foundations existing in the discipline. The ability to pose research questions and plan research, including the selection of appropriate methods and tools, indicates scientific maturity. The candidate successfully resolved the original research problem proposed.

Wniosek końcowy

Podsumowując stwierdzam, że praca doktorska mgr Yi ZHANG: spełnia wymagania *Ustawy z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce* (Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 742 z późn. zm.). Kandydatka wykazała się wiedzą teoretyczną w dyscyplinie nauki o zarządzaniu i jakości o czym świadczą trzy rozdziały analizujące dotychczasową wiedzę na temat procesów przedsiębiorczych, czynników na nie wpływających oraz logiki podejmowanych decyzji. Dysertacja jest osadzona w ramach teoretycznych funkcjonujących w dyscyplinie. Umiejętność postawienia pytań badawczych oraz zaplanowania badań, łącznie z wyborem odpowiednich metod i narzędzi świadczy o dojrzałości naukowej. Kandydatka z sukcesem rozwiązała zaproponowany przez siebie oryginalny problem badawczy.



During the defense, I would like to receive answers to the following questions:

1. What linguistic differences caused the candidate to use the Chinese version of the Value Survey Module. Did they pertain to vocabulary or the description of specific situations?
2. The quote from the dissertation: "*Unlike other types of companies, startups tend to take greater risk and proactively seek new business opportunities*" (Zbierowski, 2020), points to different types of companies. Please elaborate on what you mean by this term. I did not find satisfactory explanations in the cited work of Zbierowski.
3. How stable is national culture? To what extent has anchoring in Polish realities changed the surveyed entrepreneurs?
4. Are the values indicated by Confucianism universal for all Chinese, regardless of their place of residence?