

## SOCIO-ECONOMICS BACKGROUND AND FAMILY-BUSINESS GOALS AMONG SILVER WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN LINFEN CITY, CHINA: CASE ANALYSIS

### *SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND FAMILY BUSINESS GOALS AMONG SILVER WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN LINFEN CITY, CHINA: A CASE STUDY*

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#### **Abstract**

This study examines the socio-economic backgrounds and family-business goals of silver women entrepreneurs in Linfen City, China, using ten narrative case analyses. The participants, aged 55–70, operate small-scale businesses such as restaurants, food stalls, and mobile vending carts. The findings indicate that their entrepreneurial activities are largely motivated by family-oriented goals, including supplementing household income, supporting children or grandchildren, covering medical expenses, and maintaining family harmony, rather than pursuing profit maximization or business expansion. The analysis shows that socio-economic background shapes entrepreneurial pathways. Some women relied on pensions, savings, or family support for startup capital, while others independently financed their businesses, demonstrating resilience and autonomy. Education level and prior work experience influenced their confidence, decision-making, and management capacity. Although traditional gender norms persist—particularly in major household decisions—the majority reported increased self-worth, financial independence, and greater influence within their families.

**Keywords:** Silver Women Entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial Intention. Family-Business Goals. Empowerment. Socio-Economic Background.

#### **Resumo**

*Este estudo examina os contextos socioeconômicos e os objetivos dos negócios familiares de mulheres empreendedoras da terceira idade na cidade de Linfen, na China, por meio da análise de dez casos narrativos. As participantes, com idades entre 55 e 70 anos, administram pequenos negócios, como restaurantes, barracas de comida e carrinhos de venda ambulante. Os resultados indicam que suas atividades empreendedoras são motivadas, em grande parte, por objetivos voltados para a família, incluindo complementar a renda familiar, sustentar filhos ou netos, cobrir despesas médicas e manter a harmonia familiar, em vez de buscar a maximização do lucro ou a expansão dos negócios. A análise mostra que o contexto socioeconômico molda os caminhos empreendedores. Algumas mulheres contaram com pensões, poupanças ou apoio familiar para o capital inicial, enquanto outras financiaram seus negócios de forma independente, demonstrando resiliência e autonomia. O nível de escolaridade e a experiência profissional anterior influenciaram sua confiança, tomada de decisão e capacidade de gestão. Embora as normas tradicionais de gênero persistam — particularmente nas principais decisões domésticas —, a maioria relatou aumento da autoestima, independência financeira e maior influência dentro de suas famílias.*

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres Empreendedoras da Terceira Idade. Intenção Empreendedora.



*Objetivos de Negócios Familiares.  
Empoderamento. Contexto Socioeconômico.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

China has an early retirement age, a long-life expectancy, and a high growth rate. According to the Statistical Communiqué on the 2023 National Economic and Social Development released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the population aged 60 years and above reached approximately 296.97 million, accounting for 21.1% of the total population. Women constituted about 53.8% of this older population, reflecting their higher life expectancy. In addition, population sample survey data indicate that approximately 60.46 million women were aged 55–59 in 2023. By combining the estimated number of women aged 60 and above (approximately 159.82 million) with the female population aged 55–59, the total number of women aged 55 years and above in China can be reasonably estimated at around 220.3 million. This sizeable demographic group provides an important population foundation for examining silver women entrepreneurship in China.

The importance of researching silver women entrepreneurs is likely to grow as demographic trends accelerate. The shrinking working-age population and the dependency ratio increase are intensifying the need for older adults to remain economically active (Cai & Wang, 2021). For women, who often have lower lifetime earnings and pensions due to interrupted careers and unpaid care work (Li & Du, 2021), entrepreneurship offers an avenue for financial independence and self-actualization in later life. Moreover, the growing global discourse on “active ageing” emphasizes extending not only life expectancy but also healthy and productive years (WHO, 2015). In the Chinese context, silver women entrepreneurship could emerge as a critical socio-economic force contributing to community development, intergenerational support, and rural revitalization strategies (Zhang et al., 2020).

Older women’s entrepreneurial motivation in China is multidimensional, encompassing economic necessity, family responsibility, psychological fulfilment, and structural constraints. Due to relatively lower pension benefits and interrupted career

trajectories. many older women pursue entrepreneurship as a means of securing financial independence and supplementing household income. Family-related considerations, such as supporting adult children and maintaining intergenerational stability, further shape their entrepreneurial decisions. In addition, entrepreneurship provides opportunities for self-realization, social participation, and identity reconstruction after retirement. Faced with age- and gender-based barriers in the formal labor market, older women often regard entrepreneurship as a flexible and accessible pathway to continued economic engagement. These motivations jointly influence entrepreneurial intention and contribute to the economic empowerment of silver women in the Chinese context.

Linfen City, located in Shanxi Province, has seen increasing involvement of elderly women in small-scale entrepreneurship due to the aging population and retirement reforms (China Today, 2025). Retirement reforms, combined with rising living costs, are prompting many elderly women to seek supplementary income and social engagement through small-scale businesses (Feng et al., 2019). These women are known as silver women engage in various informal or micro-businesses, including home-based catering, fruits, vegetable and Aquatic products. Their motivation to start a business is often shaped by a mix of economic necessity, personal fulfillment, and family responsibilities (Xie & Wu, 2023). Therefore, the goal of supporting the family becomes a central aspect of their business engagement. However, scholarly attention to this group remains limited, particularly in second-tier and third-tier cities such as Linfen, where socio-economic conditions differ significantly from China's major metropolitan areas. Understanding their motivations, strategies, and constraints is crucial for designing policies that enhance late-life economic participation and improve social well-being.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Silver women entrepreneur**

In Western studies, the term “silver” generally applies to women aged 50 years and above, sometimes extended to 55+ depending on national retirement norms (Singh & DeNoble, 2003; Weber & Schaper, 2004). The term is rooted in positive aging and active aging concepts, portraying older women as experienced, independent, and capable of

contributing to the economy through entrepreneurship, volunteerism, or creative pursuits (Kautonen, 2012; Maritz et al., 2015). Studies emphasize choice, self-actualization, and lifestyle entrepreneurship as common motivations (Merrill, 2018). Entrepreneurship is often positioned as a voluntary, self-directed pathway that allows them to maintain financial independence (Merrill, 2018), pursue self-actualization (Singh & DeNoble, 2003), achieve work–life flexibility (Weber & Schaper, 2004), and re-purpose professional skills into lifestyle-oriented businesses (Maritz et al., 2015).

In Asian contexts, “silver women” also refers to women aged 50 and above, but the literature often frames them within the socioeconomic realities of developing or rapidly aging societies. The term is linked to post-retirement livelihoods, family caregiving roles, and economic necessity rather than purely lifestyle choice (Nguyen et al., 2019; Asian Development Bank, 2020). Cultural expectations around filial piety and intergenerational support influence their work or entrepreneurship trajectories (Xie & Wu, 2022). In Confucian-influenced societies, this age marks the transition to elder or matriarch status, with increased focus on caregiving for grandchildren or elderly parents (Nguyen et al., 2019; Xie & Wu, 2022). Asian literature frames silver women through a socioeconomic necessity lens, particularly in emerging economies or rapidly aging societies where pension systems are underdeveloped or inadequate (Asian Development Bank, 2020), formal employment opportunities for older women are scarce (ILO, 2018), family obligations including financial support for adult children and caregiving remain central to identity and decision-making (Liu, 2014).

## **2.2 Socioeconomic of silver women entrepreneur**

In Western literature, silver women are typically positioned within the paradigm of active and positive aging (Singh & DeNoble, 2003; Maritz et al., 2015), wherein entrepreneurship is viewed as an elective pathway following formal retirement or late-career transitions. Age ranges often span from 50 to 65, with many engaging in part-time or lifestyle-oriented ventures that align with personal passions and self-actualization goals (Merrill, 2018; Weber & Schaper, 2004). Their comparatively higher levels of formal education—frequently including university degrees—combined with professional backgrounds, contribute to stronger competencies in strategic management, marketing,

and financial planning (Kautonen. 2012). Motivational factors are frequently opportunity-driven, with ventures initiated to enhance life satisfaction, maintain social engagement, and pursue creative or personal interests rather than to address financial insecurity (Maritz et al., 2015). This positive orientation is supported by higher average educational attainment, robust pension systems, and access to financial and training resources, reducing the perceived necessity to engage in entrepreneurship purely for survival (Merrill, 2018).

In contrast, Asian scholarship presents a different socioeconomic profile for silver women entrepreneurs. Here, the term encompasses women generally aged 50 to 60, often entering business earlier than their Western counterparts due to structural labor market limitations, early retirement policies, or the need to reconcile economic participation with ongoing caregiving responsibilities (Asian Development Bank, 2020; Xie & Wu, 2022). Educational attainment is more heterogeneous, with many possessing secondary-level education or vocational training rather than higher education qualifications (Nguyen et al., 2019; ILO, 2018). Consequently, entrepreneurial competencies are frequently acquired through self-directed learning and informal, experience-based skill development. Motivations for business ownership are predominantly necessity-driven, encompassing the need to generate income for daily living, compensate for pension shortfalls, and provide financial and caregiving support to extended family members (Liu, 2014; ADB, 2020). Cultural norms in many Asian societies also embed women's business goals within family-oriented priorities, aligning entrepreneurial intentions with the preservation of household harmony and community obligations (Powell & Eddleston, 2013).

Despite these differences, literature from both contexts converges on several shared characteristics. Across regions, silver women leverage accumulated life experience as a source of resilience, resourcefulness, and credibility in business (Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Entrepreneurship serves as a mechanism to maintain social relevance, personal dignity, and psychological well-being in later life, while also facilitating continued contributions to family and community (Cole, 1997; Danes et al., 2009). Thus, while Western studies tend to emphasize personal agency, lifestyle aspirations, and self-fulfillment, and Asian studies highlight economic survival, intergenerational obligations, and social responsibility, both perspectives affirm the role

of silver women's entrepreneurship as a vital component of later-life socioeconomic participation.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study involved ten silver women entrepreneurs in Linfen City, Shanxi Province. Participants were identified through purposive sampling, which is appropriate for research exploring specific populations with unique characteristics (Palinkas et al., 2015). Inclusion criteria required participants to be 55 years of age or older, actively engaged in a small or micro-enterprise, and possess at least one year of operational experience to ensure sufficient entrepreneurial experience. Recruitment was conducted through direct outreach to potential participants in public markets. We can build rapport with older entrepreneurs in a familiar and comfortable environment, clearly explain the objectives of the study, and assess participant eligibility.

In LinFen, there are 17 districts, which including Yonghe County, Xi County, Fenxi County, Huozhou, Gu County, Anze County, Daning County, Pu County, Hongtong County, Fushan County, Yaodu, Ji County, Xiangning County, Xiangfen County, Houma, Quwo County and Yicheng County. These ten entrepreneurs are located in two areas of Linfen City: Yaodu District and Houma City. Their businesses include family restaurants, fruit stalls, seafood retail, and vegetable sales. They primarily operate in high-traffic areas, such as the Chenghaogou Market in Yaodu District and the Zhishang Agricultural Products Wholesale Market in Houma. The Chenghaogou Market, located in the urban core of Yaodu District, is one of Linfen City's busiest traditional marketplaces, attracting a constant flow of local residents and small-scale traders. It hosts a diverse range of vendors selling fresh produce, meat, seafood, and prepared foods. The market is well-known for its dense vendor layout, competitive pricing, and daily customer volume, which make it a prime location for micro-entrepreneurs seeking steady foot traffic and a loyal customer base. The Zhishang Agricultural Wholesale Market in Houma serves as a major distribution hub for agricultural products, connecting rural producers with urban retailers and end consumers. It specialises in wholesale transactions of fruits, vegetables, grains, and aquatic products, but also accommodates small-scale retail stalls. The market operates from early morning until late afternoon, with peak trading hours in

the morning. Its strategic location near transportation routes facilitates large-scale product movement. but it also provides opportunities for silver women entrepreneurs to establish regular supply networks and attract bulk and walk-in buyers.

### Figure 1

*The Subdistrict of LinFen*



This research adopted a case study. A case study is a qualitative research strategy that involves the in-depth exploration of a bounded system, such as an individual, group, organization, or community, within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that focuses on the collection and analysis of personal stories to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives are not only a recounting of events but also a way of constructing identity, values, and cultural context. In this study, narrative methods allowed participants to describe their entrepreneurial journeys, motivations, challenges, and achievements in their own words. By using narrative inquiry, the research captures the subjective and emotional dimensions of entrepreneurship, which may be overlooked in purely statistical or survey-based approaches. This method also fosters a more personal and trusting relationship between the researcher and participants, enhancing the depth and authenticity of the data collected. These narratives were not only factual accounts but also reflections shaped by personal values, family responsibilities, and cultural expectations, providing deeper insights into the intersection of ageing, gender, and entrepreneurship.

## 4 RESULT

### 4.1 Case 1

Mrs. Wang, aged 58, currently operates a small home-based fruit stand in Linfen City. She graduated from middle school at the age of 16 and married at 22, while her husband was 25 years old and employed as a factory worker. Before her marriage, Mrs. Wang had no formal work experience, as she primarily assisted her parents with household duties and occasional farm work. Throughout her marriage, she was a full-time housewife. At the age of 40, she became widowed after her husband passed away following several years of battling cancer. The couple had only one child—a son.

Her son, now 34 years old, is married to a 32-year-old woman who works as a waitress. They have one son aged 8. Both her son and daughter-in-law completed high school education. Mrs. Wang currently lives with her son's family and is determined to help contribute to the household's economic well-being.

She started her fruit-selling business at the age of 55, motivated primarily by the need to supplement the family's living expenses. Her initial business capital was provided by her son, and the income generated is primarily used for daily household expenses. Mrs. Wang's primary goals are maintaining family harmony and increasing household income to reduce the financial pressure on her son. In terms of women's empowerment, she has influence over certain household decisions and control over some family resources, such as large consumer durables (e.g., refrigerator, television, sofa). However, she does not have decision-making power over major assets, such as the purchase of the family home.

In her case, family-oriented goals take precedence over business expansion goals. Her entrepreneurial activity serves mainly as a means of livelihood and a way to help her son alleviate financial stress. She engages in business because the family needs additional income, and family cohesion is highly important to her. Mrs. Wang does not have strong aspirations to grow the business into a large enterprise or accumulate significant wealth. Instead, she values the social interaction that comes with meeting customers and the satisfaction of managing a small-scale microenterprise.

## 4.2 Case 2

Mrs. Zhao, aged 63, stands at the intersection of retirement and renewed purpose, managing a restaurant that has become both her personal achievement and a hub for empowering other women. Having graduated from high school and enjoyed a stable career in a state-owned enterprise before retirement, she now draws from a lifetime of discipline, work ethic, and interpersonal skills.

Her entrepreneurial path began not out of economic desperation, but from a deep-seated self-efficacy—the conviction that she could create and manage a successful business. Meanwhile, family solidarity and social contribution also motivate her to start a business. This confidence was reinforced by her catering certificate, which gave her both technical knowledge and legitimacy. Social and familial support formed the second pillar of her decision-making. Her husband, also retired, provided the capital and emotional encouragement, while her children voiced their approval. This affirmation created a sense of feasibility and desirability that transformed her idea into action.

The restaurant, staffed with six women over the age of fifty, reflects her desire to intertwine personal success with social good. She is not merely employing staff; she is re-integrating marginalized older women into the workforce, offering them a renewed sense of dignity and income. This choice reflects a form of social entrepreneurship, where profit-making coexists with community well-being.

Through this venture, Mrs. Zhao has attained economic empowerment—full control over her income and household financial decisions—as well as psychological empowerment, characterized by self-worth, confidence, and life satisfaction. Her narrative is one of autonomy and agency, where entrepreneurship serves not only as a means of economic activity but also as a platform for identity expression and social engagement.

Her story illustrates that for some silver women entrepreneurs in China, the business is not a last resort for survival, but a deliberate and fulfilling chapter in life. Her case challenges the stereotype that elderly female entrepreneurship in post-retirement years is necessity-driven, highlighting instead the role of personal ambition, family collaboration, and social mission in shaping later-life enterprise.

### 4.3 Case 3

Mrs. Li, aged 55, represents a family-collaborative entrepreneurial model in which spousal skills and shared objectives form the foundation of the business. Her decision to start a restaurant with her husband emerged from a combination of opportunity recognition (leveraging her husband's chef's license) and family-oriented economic goals. In the context of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), her attitudes toward entrepreneurship are largely shaped by the perceived benefits of stable income, improved living standards, and customer satisfaction. Her subjective norms—particularly encouragement and participation from her husband—serve as strong motivators. Perceived behavioral control is bolstered by shared expertise and the security of bank financing.

The couple's family-business goals are clear: increasing household income, ensuring their son's university education, and maintaining a harmonious domestic life. Profit growth and customer retention are key operational aims, but they are underpinned by a larger vision of sustaining family stability. This reflects the literature's view of family businesses as entities where economic and non-economic goals coexist (Sharma, 2004; Danes et al., 2009). Their focus on repeat customers aligns with the long-term orientation commonly seen in family enterprises.

From an empowerment perspective, Mrs. Li shares business ownership and decision-making with her husband, which enhances her sense of contribution and satisfaction. However, household financial autonomy remains limited—major consumer purchases require her husband's approval—indicating that full resource control is not yet achieved.

Mrs. Li's entrepreneurial intention is moderately opportunity-driven: while financial improvement is central, her satisfaction also stems from working alongside her husband, having a stable home, and enjoying a harmonious family atmosphere. This balance of personal fulfillment, shared family objectives, and stable economic returns underscores how silver women entrepreneurs can operate within joint-decision household dynamics, where empowerment grows alongside family cohesion rather than through complete autonomy.

#### 4.4 Case

Mrs. Zhang is a 60-year-old retired teacher. Once a dedicated teacher, she retired a few years ago with good health and a secure pension. Yet, retirement did not bring her peace of mind—it left her with too much free time. She did not want to withdraw from society, nor did she want to return to a purely domestic role at home. Instead, she envisioned a new chapter where her experience, knowledge, and skills could still make a difference.

When she was 57, she and her daughter decided to start a restaurant together. Drawing from her pension and her daughter's financial contribution, they opened a small but lively place. The restaurant quickly grew into a successful family venture, employing two full-time women workers over the age of fifty. For Mrs. Zhang, this was more than just a business—it was a way to stay connected to society, to prove her capability, and to create opportunities for others like her.

Family plays a central role in shaping Mrs. Zhang's entrepreneurship. The restaurant was founded using both her pension and her daughter's financial support, symbolizing a form of intergenerational cooperation. By working alongside her daughter, she integrates family support and collaboration into the business, showing how family and business goals are blended. For Mrs. Zhang, entrepreneurship is not only about generating income but also about fostering family bonding and creating opportunities for her daughter, which strengthens family harmony and collective achievement.

She and her husband are healthy, she owns her own home, and she has personal savings. But what makes her truly proud is her ability to make strong decisions—both in her household and in the restaurant. Entrepreneurship has given her a renewed sense of empowerment, independence, and happiness. For Mrs. Zhang, the restaurant is not simply a place to eat; it is a symbol of resilience, continuity, and the value of women's work at every stage of life.

#### 4.5 Case 5

Mrs. Gao, a 69-year-old widow, represents a type of silver entrepreneur whose engagement in business is largely shaped by family necessity and responsibility rather

than personal ambition. With no formal education, her entrepreneurial journey began at age 50 after the death of her husband, when she inherited his seafood stall. Because her husband had built a strong reputation and a stable customer base, Mrs. Gao was able to continue the business without needing to establish it from scratch. This highlights the importance of continuity in family businesses, where entrepreneurial activity often persists through the transfer of ownership after life events such as widowhood.

Her income primarily goes toward family-centered goals: repaying her son's debts and caring for her grandson. Although her son does not actively participate in the business, he still influences pricing and purchasing decisions, indicating a shared but unequal power dynamic within the family. Mrs. Gao sees herself as the primary breadwinner, a role that both empowers her and adds to her stress. Her entrepreneurial intention is not driven by profit maximization or business expansion, but by responsibility and necessity. She continues to work long hours, not because she has aspirations to grow, but because maintaining the family's financial stability depends on her persistence.

From the perspective of entrepreneurial intention, Mrs. Gao demonstrates a low-growth, necessity-driven orientation. She has little interest in innovation or expansion, but she possesses the resilience and skills to keep the stall running. This kind of entrepreneurship is maintenance-focused rather than growth-oriented, emphasizing survival and family well-being over individual ambition. While she feels tired and stressed, her sense of accomplishment comes from fulfilling her duty as a provider and stabilizer within the family.

Her case also reflects the unique family-business goals of silver women entrepreneurs in China. Unlike entrepreneurs who pursue wealth accumulation or independence, Mrs. Gao's goals are closely tied to family survival, debt repayment, and intergenerational support. She prioritizes family harmony and responsibility over personal fulfillment or business innovation. Thus, her business is less about entrepreneurship as a career choice and more about entrepreneurship as a necessity for family cohesion and financial security.

#### 4.6 Case 6

Mrs. Han, a 65-year-old city resident, exemplifies a blended model of silver entrepreneurship, where financial motives and lifestyle aspirations intertwine. With a stable pension and good health, she and her husband jointly manage a juice and fruit stall outside a local market. Unlike many necessity-driven silver women entrepreneurs, Mrs. Han's business is not primarily about survival; instead, it serves as a way to supplement her pension, stay socially engaged, and maintain an active lifestyle. The stall, which sells juice and fruit to young people and local residents, provides both economic and emotional rewards.

Her entrepreneurial intention reflects a moderate, lifestyle-oriented approach. She carefully manages finances, tracking revenue and expenses, and maintains a strong understanding of pricing and costs, demonstrating a clear sense of financial responsibility and managerial skills. At the same time, her business is not driven by aggressive expansion or growth goals, but by personal enjoyment, family engagement, and social connections. She views the stall as an extension of her life — a source of fun, a way to interact with the community, and a way to express her self-worth beyond the traditional retirement role.

Family goals play a central role in shaping her entrepreneurship. Her husband's active involvement in daily operations demonstrates cooperative family entrepreneurship, where the business is jointly managed for both income and lifestyle enrichment. Moreover, her startup capital, drawn partly from her pension and partly from her son's contribution, underscores the intergenerational support system in her entrepreneurial journey. In return, Mrs. Han uses her income not only to support household expenses but also to contribute to grandchild care, thereby reinforcing family harmony and reciprocity.

Her case highlights the unique position of silver women entrepreneurs who balance economic empowerment with family and social well-being. Unlike necessity-driven entrepreneurs such as Mrs. Gao, Mrs. Han's business reflects opportunity-driven and lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurship, where income generation is combined with personal satisfaction, social connection, and active aging. For her, entrepreneurship is not merely about sustaining the family; it is about creating a meaningful and enjoyable later life, where financial independence coexists with strong family ties.

#### 4.7 Case 7

Mrs. Yao, aged 69, is a retired textile factory worker who turned to entrepreneurship to fill the sense of emptiness she experienced after leaving formal employment. Encouraged by a friend, she opened a vegetable stall, which now serves primarily her neighbors and community members, with additional sales managed through WeChat groups. Her produce is sourced from the local wholesale market, and the business was initially funded through the pensions she and her husband receive. Unlike many silver entrepreneurs who must surrender financial control to their families, Mrs. Yao independently manages her stall's income, enjoying autonomy in product selection, customer communication, and sales methods. However, despite her financial independence, she continues to defer to her husband on major family decisions, reflecting the persistence of traditional gender norms. While her vegetable stall does not represent the family's main source of income, it carries significant emotional value by enabling her to contribute to holiday expenses and provide gifts for her grandchildren. For Mrs. Yao, entrepreneurship is less about financial necessity and more about sustaining social engagement, maintaining self-worth, and strengthening family bonds.

Mrs. Yao's entrepreneurial intention can be described as moderate but self-fulfilling. Unlike some women who start businesses out of urgent economic need, her stall was financed by her and her husband's pensions, reflecting relative financial stability. This background allows her to focus on autonomy, social interaction, and personal enrichment rather than aggressive expansion or wealth accumulation. Her use of both physical stalls and digital platforms (WeChat) also demonstrates adaptability, blending traditional and modern business practices to stay relevant.

From a family-business perspective, her goals are emotionally supportive rather than financially central. The income from her stall is not the household's main source of livelihood; instead, she uses it for holiday celebrations and gifts for her grandchildren. This highlights the symbolic role of her business: it sustains family cohesion, strengthens intergenerational bonds, and provides emotional value, even if it does not significantly change the household's financial situation. In this way, her entrepreneurship bridges the gap between family support and personal independence.

#### 4.8 Case 8

Mrs. Ma, aged 64, has only a primary school education and lives alone following her divorce, with her married daughter living independently and no longer relying on her for financial support. To sustain herself, Mrs. Ma operates a mobile fruit cart, a form of entrepreneurship that provides her with flexible working hours and manageable physical demands, aligning well with her health and solitary lifestyle. She raised her initial capital through personal savings, using simple equipment to start her business. Unlike other silver entrepreneurs who receive significant support from family, Mrs. Ma's entrepreneurial drive is rooted in her desire for independence and securing a basic income, with little involvement or assistance from relatives. She exercises full control over her business operations, making decisions independently about work hours, locations, and the types of fruit she sells. All of her business income is managed solely by her, without the need to share or report to others. For Mrs. Ma, entrepreneurship is not about family obligations but about maintaining autonomy, ensuring self-sufficiency, and preserving her dignity in later life.

#### 4.9 Case 9

Mrs. Xie's entrepreneurial narrative is a story of necessity-driven resilience and responsibility. At 68, with a high school education, she carries the sole financial burden of the household after her husband became bedridden. Unlike women entrepreneurs who pursue business for self-fulfillment or family enrichment, Mrs. Xie's entrepreneurial intention is rooted in survival and caregiving. Her small business of drying, processing, and selling aquatic products stems not from ambition for growth, but from the urgent need to provide consistent income to cover her husband's medical expenses. This highlights how later-life entrepreneurship among silver women can be shaped less by opportunity and more by family obligation.

Her fishing heritage plays an important role in shaping her business choices. By leveraging skills and knowledge passed down through generations, Mrs. Xie transforms her background into a livelihood strategy. Selling at rural markets and sourcing products from fishing villages demonstrates her resourcefulness in navigating both traditional

practices and modern market needs. While she has autonomy in pricing and purchasing decisions, her business is also interdependent: she relies on her son for transportation, illustrating a blending of individual initiative with family support structures.

In terms of family-business goals, Mrs. Xie's case reflects a complete alignment of her entrepreneurial activity with household survival. Unlike other silver entrepreneurs who direct income toward lifestyle improvements, savings, or grandchildren, her revenue is absorbed almost entirely by her husband's medical costs. This underscores the sacrificial dimension of her entrepreneurship, where business goals are subsumed under caregiving responsibilities. Despite the physical and emotional strain, she persists, reflecting a strong sense of duty and resilience that defines her role as both breadwinner and caregiver.

#### 4.10 Case 10

Mrs. Li, at 67, represents a form of post-retirement entrepreneurship that combines personal fulfillment with intergenerational responsibility. With a high school education and stable family life, her decision to open a prepared food stall (steamed buns and soup) reflects both a desire to remain active after retirement and a commitment to supporting her family, particularly her grandson's education. Unlike entrepreneurs driven purely by necessity, her motivation stems from purposeful engagement: to stay busy, productive, and socially connected, while also contributing to the household economy.

Her entrepreneurial intention is characterized by self-reliance and practical decision-making. She manages the stall's operations independently—deciding menus, pricing, and schedules—demonstrating confidence and competence in small-scale business management. At the same time, her husband's assistance with bulk purchasing highlights the cooperative dimension of spousal support, where entrepreneurship becomes a shared, though asymmetrical, family endeavor. This division of roles reflects a balance between autonomy and partnership.

In terms of family-business goals, Mrs. Li's earnings are not primarily for personal use but directed toward family-oriented outcomes, especially her grandson's education. This reveals a strong intergenerational focus in her entrepreneurship: her stall becomes a way to invest in the future of her family line, thereby enhancing her sense of

purpose and value within the household. Her rising status in the family illustrates how financial contribution strengthens elder women's empowerment and recognition, even in traditionally patriarchal settings.

Socially, Mrs. Li has developed a stable customer base and neighborhood recognition, which brings her both economic stability and social satisfaction. The stall not only sustains family finances but also enables her to remain connected to the community, reinforcing her identity beyond the household.

Overall, Mrs. Li's case demonstrates a blend of personal fulfillment, economic contribution, and family care. Her entrepreneurship is not oriented toward expansion or profit maximization, but toward maintaining activity, sustaining dignity, and fulfilling intergenerational responsibilities. Her story underscores how silver women entrepreneurs often intertwine business goals with family aspirations, making their ventures both a livelihood strategy and a source of emotional and social meaning.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The ten cases of silver women entrepreneurs demonstrate the diverse motivations and pathways through which older women engage in business. Some entrepreneurs, like Mrs. Zhao (63) and Mrs. Zhang (60), are driven by self-efficacy, education, and confidence, using their experience, family support, and managerial skills to establish successful restaurants. Their stories reflect opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, where economic independence is matched with a desire for self-worth, empowerment, and social contribution (e.g., re-employing older workers). In contrast, cases such as Mrs. Gao (69) and Mrs. Xie (68) reveal necessity-driven entrepreneurship, where business activities are pursued not from ambition but from responsibility—supporting medical expenses, repaying debts, or sustaining family survival. These women often face heavy physical workloads and emotional strain but demonstrate resilience and perseverance as primary household breadwinners.

Another group of entrepreneurs highlights independence and social engagement as key drivers. Mrs. Yao (69), Mrs. Han (65), and Mrs. Ma (64) view their small businesses as ways to remain active, maintain social networks, or preserve independence after retirement or divorce. Their ventures, such as vegetable stalls, juice stands, or mobile

fruit carts, provide financial autonomy and social fulfillment, even if profits are modest. Similarly, Mrs. Li (67), who runs a prepared food stall, shows how entrepreneurship allows elderly women to rise in family status by contributing to intergenerational goals, such as financing grandchildren's education. These examples emphasize how entrepreneurship functions as both an economic activity and a social identity, offering women dignity, relevance, and purpose in later life.

Overall, the ten cases underscore that silver women's entrepreneurship is deeply embedded in family dynamics, traditional gender roles, and community ties. While many women manage business income independently, major family decisions often still reflect patriarchal traditions, as in Mrs. Yao's case. Furthermore, although entrepreneurship provides empowerment and self-confidence, the small scale of these businesses, reliance on personal pensions, and physical intensity of work reveal structural vulnerabilities. Collectively, these cases show that elderly women entrepreneurs are important yet undervalued contributors to household economies and community vitality, balancing personal fulfillment with family obligations.

To strengthen silver women's entrepreneurship, policy-level support should focus on reducing barriers and vulnerabilities. Governments and local institutions could provide microcredit loans with low interest, reduced market stall fees, and simplified licensing procedures to ease their financial and bureaucratic burdens. Considering the physical strain many older women endure (as in the cases of Mrs. Gao and Mrs. Xie), entrepreneurship programs should integrate healthcare access, insurance schemes, and social protection to ensure their well-being while running businesses.

Second, capacity-building and digital literacy training are essential. Many of these women rely on traditional, small-scale methods, yet examples like Mrs. Yao's use of WeChat show the potential of digital tools to broaden customer bases and improve efficiency. Providing workshops on mobile payments, online marketing, and product innovation could empower elderly entrepreneurs to compete in modern markets while preserving their community-oriented focus. Such training could also enhance the sustainability of their businesses by enabling them to adjust to changing consumer behaviors, particularly among younger customers (as seen in Mrs. Han's juice stall targeting youth).

Finally, greater emphasis should be placed on family and community engagement. Intergenerational collaboration, such as Mrs. Zhang co-managing with her daughter or Mrs. Li receiving her husband's operational support, shows that shared responsibility can ease women's workloads and strengthen family cohesion. Policies and community initiatives should encourage younger family members to support elderly women's businesses, not only financially but also by sharing knowledge and labor. At the community level, recognizing and celebrating silver women's entrepreneurship as a form of active aging and social participation can enhance their sense of value, reduce isolation, and promote gender equity in later life. By combining financial, educational, and social supports, silver women entrepreneurs can continue to thrive as both economic contributors and role models for resilience, responsibility, and empowerment.

## **6 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on entrepreneurship, gender, aging, and family business.

First, it extends Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior by applying it to silver women entrepreneurs in a non-metropolitan Chinese context. The findings show that entrepreneurial intention in later life is shaped not only by profit expectations but also by family responsibility, social engagement, and lifestyle considerations, with subjective norms and perceived behavioral control strongly influenced by family support and accumulated life experience.

Second, the study advances family business theory by highlighting family-business goals as a dynamic moderating factor rather than a static background condition. Family goals actively shape whether entrepreneurial intention is necessity-driven or opportunity-driven and influence the extent of economic empowerment achieved. When family priorities emphasize harmony and caregiving, empowerment remains limited; when they align with autonomy and mutual support, empowerment outcomes are stronger.

Third, the research refines the concept of economic empowerment by demonstrating its multidimensional and relational nature. Empowerment among silver women entrepreneurs encompasses not only income generation but also decision-making

authority, psychological well-being, and social recognition. Economic participation alone does not guarantee full empowerment, particularly where traditional household power structures persist.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on active aging and silver entrepreneurship by challenging deficit-based views of older women. The findings show that silver women leverage experience, family networks, and social capital to create meaningful economic and social roles in later life, positioning entrepreneurship as a pathway to dignity, identity reconstruction, and social inclusion rather than merely a survival strategy.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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