



## Article

# The Livelihood of Chinese Migrants in Timor-Leste

Ajito Fernandes \*, Titi Susilowati Prabawa and Wilson M. A. Therik

Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Satya Wacana Cristian University, Salatiga 50711, Indonesia; titi.susilowati@uksw.edu (T.S.P.); wilson.therik@uksw.edu (W.M.A.T.)

\* Correspondence: ajitofernandes@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article aims to describe, in depth, the experiences of migrant workers from China in maintaining their livelihoods in Timor-Leste through entrepreneurial activities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study discusses sustainable livelihoods with the knowledge of migration, adaptation, and entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste. To fulfill these aims, a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach was adopted by interviewing eight Chinese migrants who run businesses in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, the framework for the concept of sustainable livelihoods of the Department for International Development (DFID) was adapted to explain, in depth, the phenomena. The finding reveals that economic reasons encourage and attract Chinese migrant workers and entrepreneurs to Timor-Leste. The adaptation process of migrants in Timor-Leste relies on social capital to synergize with local communities in terms of culture, further affecting the comfort and security of entrepreneurship. From the perspective of sustainable livelihoods, migrant workers take advantage of human capital in the process of accumulation of financial capital to enhance their business activities. Meanwhile, migrant entrepreneurship expands their financial capital and human capital into social capital, physical capital, and natural capital. The findings also explain that the mobility and access to financial capital of Chinese migrants are supported through institutional structures, entrepreneurship activities, and policies. Furthermore, to ensure livelihood sustainability and business, Chinese migrants in Timor-Leste can carry out business intensification, extensification, diversification, and transformation strategies.

**Keywords:** Chinese workers; migrants; entrepreneurship; livelihoods; Timor-Leste



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## 1. Introduction

Studies on the activities of Chinese migrant workers have become popular among academics. Academics have used an economist's perspective to analyze the impact of the global economic crisis on the livelihoods of migrant workers from China in 2007–2009 (Wang et al. 2017). In addition, sociological and anthropological perspectives were also used by previous researchers to identify the livelihoods of migrant workers from China, which were more specific to job security and expectations of happiness in the midst of the problem of the floating population according to employment (Gao and Smyth 2011). An institutional perspective is also used to analyze the livelihoods of migrant families from China in rural areas, which precisely describes the case of educational gaps in the education of migrant children from China. Wang et al. (2017) believe that rural livelihoods in China are constantly faced with two choices: Maintaining a livelihood through work or sending children to school. Not limited to analyzing the educational performance of children from Chinese migrant workers, the results of this study implicitly illustrate the impetus for overseas migration to seek better economic and educational opportunities. Yuk-ha Tsang (2020) describes the critical conditions of male migrant workers from China due to the lack of opportunities to succeed. It becomes a driving factor for personal involvement in dangerous activities (consumption or buying and selling of drugs and becoming commercial sex offenders). Although the research discussion is more dominant in discussing the phenomenon of China's masculinity crisis in the post-socialist transition period and social

and cultural conditions, these kinds of conditions should also be considered for migration from China to other countries with better livelihood opportunities.

The aim of this study was to survey the livelihoods of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste. Several studies on the push and pull factors of the migration of workers from China to several countries can be classified based on the characteristics of the country and continent, as is the case in Europe (Lee et al. 2002), Asia (Ong 2003), and Australia (Blignault et al. 2008). Zongwe (2015) argues that the migration of Chinese workers to Africa is institutionally mobilized and supported by policies of inter-country cooperation. However, the existence of Chinese migrant workers in Africa forms a myth that affects the relationship between migrants and residents. These myths can be in the form of a statement that the migration of Chinese people in Africa is only to become dominant, has imperialistic motives, and appears racist, thus creating negative sentiments from relations with residents. This condition affects the adaptation process of Chinese migrant workers in Africa related to mobility and access to resources to survive. Apart from Africa, Leung (2003) discusses the survival strategy of Chinese migrant workers in Germany as restaurant entrepreneurs. The livelihood challenges of Chinese migrant workers in Germany relate to access capabilities and efforts to accumulate resources, especially in entrepreneurship. These challenges can be both policy-related and institutional, but Chinese migrant workers can start a restaurant business in Germany following the country's regulations with financial and human capital. Based on previous literature reviews, studies of migrant workers from China are prevalent among academics. Still, there are gaps in studies on the livelihoods of migrant workers from China that are more contextual, one of which is in Timor-Leste.

The Government of Timor-Leste supports entrepreneurship to build the national economy (Ingram et al. 2015). McGregor (2007) believes that the government of Timor-Leste provides policy and institutional support at the community level to support the community's economy. These programs are sector-based initiative programs, institutional capacity-building programs, grant programs, and community collaboration. On the other hand, Aldairany et al. (2018), in a study on entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste, show that entrepreneurship in conflict and post-conflict areas tends to be fragile, so it needs to receive ongoing policy and institutional support. One of the policies and institutional supports that can grow and maintain entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship education for sustainable development (Capelo et al. 2014).

Based on the previous description, although there are already many studies about Chinese migrants in other countries and several empirical studies on local community entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste exist, not yet present is research regarding entrepreneurship in Chinese migrants in Timor-Leste. To fill this gap, this study sought to examine the entrepreneurial aspect concerning the livelihoods of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste.

This article aims to describe the livelihoods of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste concerning entrepreneurial practices. Therefore, the framework for the concept of sustainable livelihoods constructed by the Department for International Development (DFID) was adopted as a reference to discuss the process of mobility and access capabilities to resources (financial capital, physical capital, social capital, human capital, and natural capital) and support policies and institutions in dealing with various aspects of vulnerability (DFID 2008). The framework for the concept of sustainable livelihoods proposed by DFID can be used by multiple researchers in identifying more contextual community livelihoods in each country. Chambers and Conway (1992) believe that people's livelihoods can be sustainable if resources, capital, capabilities, claims, and access are available. Chambers and Conway's perspective does not conflict with the DFID conceptual framework (DFID 2008), so several researchers adopted it to examine the problems of people's livelihoods. In the context of migrant livelihoods, Tian et al. (2016) show that the livelihoods of Chinese migrant workers are a popular topic among researchers. This is indicated by the interest in research on the livelihoods of migrant workers in China (Qin 2010; Zhan 2019). On the other hand, there are gaps in studies that describe the livelihoods of migrant workers in

different countries, one of which is Timor-Leste. This research can also contribute to the development of science in development studies through studies on livelihoods.

Based on the results of scientific research, there are research gaps regarding migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste seen from the theoretical (theoretical gap) and empirical (empirical gap) aspects. The popularity of using qualitative and quantitative research methods and the case study approach can be seen in previous studies ([Chu et al. 2015](#); [Guo and Liang 2017](#)). In contrast to adopting methods and techniques in earlier research, this study utilized a qualitative research method with a life history approach. The life history approach was undertaken to obtain in-depth information to answer research problems ([Abu Bakar and Abdullah 2008](#)). The appeal of employing the life history approach in this research concerns the in-depth description of the experiences of migrant workers from China to maintain their livelihood by accessing resources and entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste. Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe, in depth, the experiences of migrant workers from China maintaining their livelihoods in Timor-Leste through entrepreneurial activities. The theoretical perspective used falls under the sustainable livelihood framework.

Researchers are interested in studying in-depth aspects of the livelihoods of migrants from China in Timor-Leste through specific studies on the dynamics of maintaining business continuity and strategies for dealing with various contexts of vulnerability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this study, the aim is to describe, in depth, the experience of migration and adaptation of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste, entrepreneurial ventures, and strategies to maintain business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Objective and Methodology

The present study used a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach, which aims to interpret the phenomenon (reality) that occurs from the perspective of the perpetrator. The data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews where the interview was based on core questions in the interview guide related to the focus of the problem ([Brito 2017](#)). In this study, the observation and document studies also were adapted.

The triangulation technique was used to ensure the credibility of information in the argument development ([Freire et al. 2018](#)). Thus, the presentation of data and information in this research can be discussed within the framework of sustainable livelihoods to fill the gaps in previous research. In the in-depth interview process, the participants were selected with the following requirements: Having a clear legal status as a migrant, having been domiciled in Timor-Leste for more than five years, and owning a private business in Timor-Leste. Regarding the participant, after eight respondents had been interviewed, no new information was recorded. Thus, data saturation had been reached, therefore it was not necessary to involve more participants in this study.

The interview and observations were conducted in two stages. The first stage was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic, between December 2018 and January 2019, involving eight participants. The first interviewee was Chau Chen Hua with the initials CCH, who is 42 years old, married with two children, and was born in China with previous work as an entrepreneur and a construction worker. CCH migrated to Timor-Leste in 2000. Currently, CCH lives in Lahane Oriental Village, Nain Feto District, Dili, Timor-Leste. The second participant was Ellen (ELN), 28 years old and married with one child. Ellen was born in China with a previous job as a hotel worker. ELN migrated to Timor-Leste in 2010. Currently, ELN is domiciled in Audian Village, Nain Feto sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The third interviewee was Chon Hoy (CHY), 29 years old and single. CHY was born in China with a previous job as an entrepreneur and a hotel worker. CHY migrated to Timor-Leste in 2009. Currently, CHY is domiciled in Audian Village, Nain Feto District, Dili, Timor-Leste. The fourth interviewee was Linca (LNC), 32 years old and married with two wives. LNC was born in China Fujian with a previous job as an entrepreneur. LNC migrated to Timor-Leste in 2010. Currently, LNC is domiciled in Lahane Village, Nain Feto sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The fifth participant was Jhon Chan (JCH), 58 years old and

married. JCH was born in China, and his previous job was as an entrepreneur. He moved to Timor-Leste in 2007. Currently, he is living in Becora village, Critsto Rei sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The sixth interviewee was Lincion (LC), 43 years old and married. LC was born in China Fujian with a previous job as a shop worker and moved to Timor-Leste in 2011. He is living in Bairopite village, Dom Aleixo sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The seventh participant was Ting Teing (TT), 32 years old and single. She was born in China, her previous job was as an entrepreneur, and she moved to Timor-Leste in 2012. Currently, TT is living in Lahane Osidental village, Nain-Feto sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The eighth interviewee was Suiniya Tjhai (ST), 65 years old and married. ST was born in China, her previous job was as an entrepreneur, and she moved to Timor-Leste in 2010. She is living in Fatu-Hada village, Dom Aleixo sub-district, Dili, Timor-Leste. The result of in-depth interviews and observations also indicated that the interviewees established a building shop business (CCH, JCH, and ELN), an entertainment business (CHY), a grocery store business (LNC, LC, and TT), and an office stationery shop (ST). Observations were made to ensure that the interviewees involved in this study had met the specified qualifications. In addition to in-depth interviews and observations, document studies related to business legality coherence between the context and theoretical perspectives on entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods were also carried out.

In 2020–2021, the COVID-19 pandemic in Timor-Leste affected economic activities that impacted the business continuity of Chinese migrants in Timor-Leste. This shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the contexts of vulnerability within the concept of sustainable livelihoods. Considering this, the second stage of research was realized by in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies related to strategies to maintain business during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Only four of the interviewees were involved, specifically the participants with the initials JCH, LC, TT, and ST, due to the lockdown situation. The results indicated that each interviewee had different experiences in dealing with the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain business continuity and livelihood sustainability.

The obstacle faced before the COVID-19 pandemic in the data collection process was determining the right interview time in the schedule of entrepreneurship. Another obstacle faced was the conservative attitude of the interviewees, who tended to be reluctant to provide information. The obstacle in the data collection process during the COVID-19 pandemic was access to interviewees for face-to-face meetings, so the alternative strategy used was online interviews. The in-depth interview is a challenge for the writer because it uses a life history approach that relies on the depth of information. In addition, openness and transparency of interviewees are needed to obtain detailed information. To gain the interviewees' trust in the protection of private information, the researchers discussed the limitations of the research, including the details that would be published. Thus, the interviewees became more flexible in conveying data to researchers at each stage of the research, from in-depth interviews to observations and document studies.

The description in the discussion is divided based on the theoretical perspective of sustainable livelihoods to analyze the experience of migration and adaptation of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste, the experience of Chinese migrant workers in entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste, as well as the experience of maintaining a business amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This study discusses the perspective of sustainable livelihoods by describing the experiences of migrant workers from China when migrating, adapting, undertaking entrepreneurship, and maintaining a business during the COVID-19 pandemic in Timor-Leste.

#### 3.1. Migration Experience and Adaptation of Migrant Workers from China in Timor-Leste

The history of the migration of entrepreneurs from China to Timor-Leste is inseparable from the cooperation between the government of Timor-Leste and the Chinese govern-

ment in improving the economy in Timor-Leste. This can be seen in the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the República Democrática de Timor-Leste regarding economic and technical cooperation between both countries (Timor-Leste 2017). Lanteigne shows that the Chinese government plays an essential role in economic development in Timor-Leste. This began in 1990. To accelerate the economic growth in Timor-Leste, choosing cooperation with the Chinese government is the right strategy (Huntley and Hayes 2000). Strating (2013) believes that the position of Timor-Leste after its independence (Hood 2006) requires administrative support, including strengthening international relations for sustainable development. Several previous studies have shown that post-independence Timor-Leste has focused on improving the economy (O'Connor et al. 2012; Tanter 2000). In addition to China, the government of Timor-Leste is also building cooperation with Australia in terms of formulating optimal bureaucratic policies (Ishizuka 2004; Leaver 2001). Thus, multinational cooperation is the trigger for the migration of Chinese businesspeople to Timor-Leste.

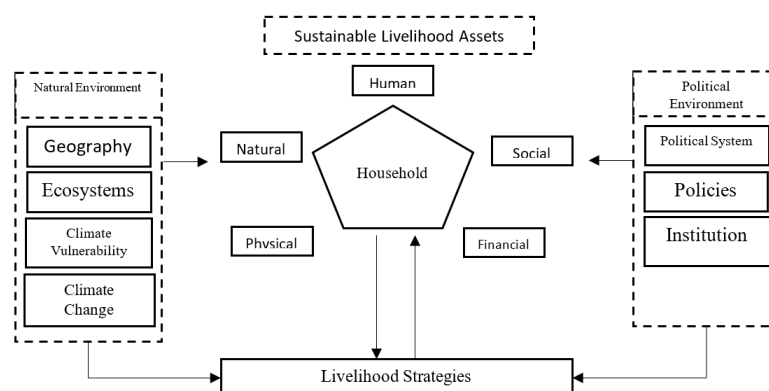
Development in Timor-Leste opens up business opportunities for entrepreneurs. The Government of Timor-Leste is building a more comprehensive cooperation network, including with Japan (Kikkawa 2007; Walton 2004). International relations are the key to the development in Timor-Leste. On the other hand, the socio-cultural aspects of the people of Timor-Leste are vulnerable to horizontal conflicts. They require an adaptation process to build social capital development (Kingston 2006; Robinson 2001). Timor-Leste's growth will be sustainable if international cooperation relations run well (Islam 2000). This shows that the migration of entrepreneurs from various countries to develop the economy in Timor-Leste is seen as positive for increasing state, regional, and community income, which in turn shows that development in Timor-Leste is holistic. Therefore, this research focused on examining the livelihoods of migrants from China concerning economic growth in Timor-Leste.

In general, studies of migration experiences are contextual. The aspects that encourage someone to migrate are also different. Noer (2018) discusses migration from rural to urban areas using a gender perspective, unlike the case with previous research Yuniarto (2016), which discusses the context of international migration and then focuses on observing the workforce dynamics in the formation of migrant businesses in different countries. Czaika (2015) argues that migration does not necessarily positively influence economic development in a country. Migration flows cause fluctuations in expectations of economic prospects. Based on the perspective of previous researchers, it can be seen that the theoretical discussion of migrants is complex, so it is necessary to limit the discussion to clarify the scope of the debate. This sub-topic includes the perspective of sustainable livelihoods, namely the experience of migration and adaptation of migrant workers from China to Timor-Leste.

The migration experience is inseparable from the aspects that encourage and attract migration. The driving elements of migration can be economic, social, cultural, environmental, and political reasons that urge individuals to leave their area of origin. Meanwhile, the pulling aspect of migration is the opportunity for individuals to achieve their goals, namely the economic, social, cultural, environmental, and political needs of different regions. In addition, the process of adaptation of migrants in the destination area needs to be identified to establish efforts to accumulate capital based on a sustainable livelihood perspective, as shown in the following figure.

Figure 1 shows the sustainable livelihoods conceptual framework. The conceptual framework shows that people's livelihood patterns generally depend on resources as assets or capital. Community livelihoods can be sustainable if there is a capability to access resources. On the other hand, policies and institutions can support the capacity to access resources as part of the political environment (Timisela et al. 2020). Based on the framework of the concept of sustainable livelihoods, the adaptation process of migrant workers from China can be analyzed in depth in resource utilization and efforts to expand access to different forms of capital as a strategy to sustain livelihoods in Timor-Leste.





**Figure 1.** Sustainable livelihoods approach (DFID 2008).

Studies on the livelihoods of rural communities based on the sustainable livelihood framework have become popular among academics, with various cases. Sustainable livelihoods in previous research discussed strategies to maintain household sustainability in the face of multiple problems of limited access to resources (Abdurrahim et al. 2014; Saha 2017; Tridakusumah et al. 2015; Wijayanti et al. 2016). On the other hand, the conceptual framework adopted is guided by the perspective of Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway (Chambers and Conway 1992), the view of Caroline Ashley and Dianna Carney (Ashley and Carney 1999), as well as the perspective of Frank Ellis (Ellis 1998). This shows that the views of experts in response to the framework of the concept of sustainable livelihoods are very different. This study was guided by the perspective of Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway to examine the adaptation process of migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste.

Workers from China who decided to migrate to Timor-Leste have the same push and pull aspects. Interviewees involved in this study stated that the economic condition in China was the main reason for migrating to Timor-Leste. In addition, the attractive aspect of migration to Timor-Leste concerns the availability of information about better economic opportunities, especially transactions using US dollars. In addition, other appealing aspects are recommendations from family and friends (brothers, uncles, fathers, and friends), as shown in the following table.

Table 1 shows that the factors that encourage Chinese migrants to migrate to Timor-Leste are more dominant in the economic aspect. Furthermore, the factors that encourage workers from China to migrate to Timor-Leste include the information media conveyed by family and relatives. The information regarding business opportunities and transactions using US dollars was obtained from brothers (TT), uncles (ELN), fathers (CHY), and friends (LNC). Each interviewee has a different adaptation process in the migration destination. For example, CCH, ELN, and LNC employed local communities to build positive relationships for security and convenience in doing business. On the other hand, CHY took advantage of the interaction with employees who they work with to learn Indonesian and Tetun languages. Although there is support from Chinese institutions in the homeland for providing capital, not all interviewees take advantage of this. Only two interviewees, specifically CCH and JCH, chose to use the financial capital obtained in China to open a business in Timor-Leste. The characteristics of the businesses of migrant workers from Timor-Leste are also different. The interviewees were engaged in building shops (CCH, JCH, and ELN), an entertainment business (CHY), an office stationery shop (ST), and basic food shops (LNC, LC, and TT).

Before migrating to Timor-Leste, workers from China already had the capability to access resources (capital) based on a sustainable livelihood framework, which is dominated by financial capital and human capital. After arriving at the host country, social capital is accumulated to maintain their livelihoods. Thus, it can be seen that the driving, pulling, and adapting aspects of migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste are dominated by economic interests compared to social, cultural, environmental, and political factors. Social capital is utilized in the adaptation process of migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste

(Ancok 2003; Kusumastuti 2015; Syahra 2003). This shows that the framework of sustainable livelihoods is relevant to migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste. Meanwhile, the perspective of Chambers and Conway (1992) shows that people's livelihoods become sustainable when resources are available and accessible. Thus, it can be seen that the migration and adaptation process can be reviewed theoretically using the sustainable livelihood framework constructed by DFID.

**Table 1.** Push and pull aspects of migration.

Interviewee's Initials	Driving Factor	Pulling Factor	Adaptation Process in Host Country	Home Country Policy and Institutional Support	Business Type
CCH	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by family (following brother)	Borrowing capital and entrepreneurship; building relationships by employing local people; getting support from fellow migrants (relatives);	There is institutional support (banks) in China to provide business loans	Store building
ELN	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended family (following uncle)	Collecting capital with entrepreneurship before migration; employing local people.	There is institutional support (banks) in China, but it has not been utilized.	Store building
CHY	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by family (following father)	Learning Indonesian and Tetun through association with employees (local communities); resolving conflict through a good social network.	There is institutional support (banks) in China, but it has not been utilized.	Entertainment business
LNC	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by friend	Building positive relations with local communities for business security; business-related violations are resolved amicably.	There is institutional support (banks) in China, but it has not been utilized.	Grocery business
JCH	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by friend	Collecting capital with entrepreneurship; building positive relationships with local communities	There are support institutions (banks) in China to provide loans	Construction company
LC	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by family	Collecting capital by working as an employee in a family-owned business	There is institutional support (banks) in China but not yet utilized	Grocery business
TT	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by family (following brother)	Obtaining business capital from the family; building positive relationships with local communities	There is institutional support (banks) in China but not yet utilized	Food and home appliances business
ST	Home country business competition	Business opportunities in Timor-Leste and recommended by friend	Collecting capital with entrepreneurship before migration; building positive relationships with local communities	There is institutional support (banks) in China but not yet utilized	ATK material provider business

Source: Primary data.

### 3.2. Entrepreneurial Experience in Timor-Leste

The study of sustainable livelihoods is not limited to efforts to identify the availability of resources but also includes the capabilities and mobility of resources for sustainable livelihoods (de Haan 2017). Entrepreneurship is one of the community's strategies to maintain a livelihood. Cahn (2008) shows that with entrepreneurship, household needs can be met. Nevertheless, the availability of resources and capabilities to utilize resources in entrepreneurship are essential. In addition, entrepreneurship also impacts a region's economy because it can increase job opportunities and minimize unemployment (Holland et al. 2018). Based on previous studies, it can be seen that the concept of entrepreneurship can be linked to the sustainable livelihood framework constructed by DFID. Furthermore, the discussion in this sub-topic emphasizes the entrepreneurial experience of Chinese migrant workers in Timor-Leste from a sustainable livelihood perspective.

Studies on migrant entrepreneurs have provided an overview of the dynamics of migrants' livelihoods in starting a business. Tubadji et al. (2014) show that migrants can use social capital to synergize with local communities. In addition, the success or failure of migrants in entrepreneurship needs to be supported by policies and institutions (Zapata-Barrero and Hellgren 2020). Solano (2020) argues that migrants are strengthening social relations among migrants. Migrant entrepreneurship shows capital accumulation capabilities, while migrant workers are still in the stage of capital accumulation for entrepreneurship (Lever and Milbourne 2014). Relationships between migrants (migrant entrepreneurs and migrant workers) that accumulate social capital can be used as a strategy to maintain livelihoods, including efforts to achieve business continuity (Zack and Estifanos 2016).

In the context of this research, it can be seen that the interviewees in this study have the status of migrant workers from China when viewed from the interviewee's livelihood trajectory. The families mobilized migrant workers from China in Timor-Leste to accumulate financial capital and start their own businesses. On the other hand, some interviewees accessed assistance from institutions (banks) in China to set up a business in Timor-Leste. In addition, some interviewees accumulated financial capital in their area of origin (China) first before migrating to Timor-Leste and starting a business. Migrants who can access resources (capital) will try to expand into different forms of capital, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 describes the mobility and access capabilities of Chinese migrants to social capital, financial capital, human capital, physical capital, and natural capital to sustain livelihoods in Timor-Leste. In addition, each interviewee experiences the dynamics of maintaining various businesses, such as intensification, extensification, diversification, and transformation. Based on the life history approach, each interviewee showed a similar strategy to maintain a business, namely utilizing financial capital and human capital as initial capital. Furthermore, social capital, physical capital, and natural capital are forms of expansion of financial capital and human capital. The entrepreneurial experience of Chinese migrants is contextual and important to identify from a sustainable livelihood perspective.

CCH's experience shows that entrepreneurship is a strategy to maintain sustainable livelihoods in Timor-Leste. Previously, CCH worked as a laborer in the field of house construction, shipbuilding, and opening a basic food shop in China. Before migrating, CCH accumulated financial capital in preparation for opening a business in Timor-Leste. Institutionally, banks in China are willing to provide loans to open a business in Timor-Leste, and accessible financial capital is very useful in the early stages of starting a business. CCH made observations for one month in Timor-Leste before making the decision to start a shop-building business. After observing the economic conditions in Timor-Leste, CCH was interested in staying in Timor-Leste. Although competition in the construction business in Timor-Leste is rather tight, effort and skills to find customers can sustain the business and support family livelihoods in Timor-Leste. The ease of obtaining a business license from the government of Timor-Leste is very helpful in business processes, especially in efforts to supply goods from China and Indonesia. A sustainable business allows CCH



to empower local people as workers with salaries that meet the standards of the Timor-Leste government. The sustainability of CCH's livelihood is highly dependent on the sustainability of the business they are engaged in. CCH's business income ranges from USD 1000–3000, indicating that the interviewees are able to access financial capital. In addition, CCH maintains their business by building a social network to find buyers, i.e., by accumulating social capital.

**Table 2.** Mobility and access to sustainable livelihood supporting resources of migrants from China in Timor-Leste.

Interviewee's Initials	Mobility and Access to Capital to Sustaining Livelihoods in Timor-Leste					
	Social Capital	Financial Capital	Human Capital	Physical Capital	Natural Capital	Information
CCH	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	The same business intensification in different locations.
ELN	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Different business diversification in different locations.
CHY	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Transforming the basic food business into an entertainment and lodging business.
LNC	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Grocery store business expansion
JHC	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Business transformation from a construction material supplier to a construction company
LC	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Business expansion in different locations.
TT	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Product diversification and business extensification in different locations.
ST	Expansion results	Initial capital	Initial capital	Expansion results	Expansion results	Different business diversification in different locations.

Source: Primary data.

The same situation is reported for ELN, who is trying to maintain a livelihood in Timor-Leste via entrepreneurship. While in China, ELN worked as a hotel employee. In 2010, ELN came to Timor-Leste with his family (uncle) and helped his uncle to complete the construction project of a shopping building. The previously collected financial capital was used to start a business in Timor-Leste. ELN's business ability is formed from previous work experience, as well as experience working with his uncle. This experience becomes human capital that is used to start different businesses. ELN was able to diversify different businesses by starting an electronics business. However, business competition in Timor-Leste has increased dramatically since migrants from China arrived. In an effort to maintain business, social capital is needed. ELN employs local people as workers in their place of business and builds good relationships.

The experience of CHY in starting a business in Timor-Leste has its own dynamics. CHY had a livestock business in China before migrating to Timor-Leste. CHY came to Timor-Leste in 2009 to follow his father who started a business in Timor-Leste in 2007. CHY lives with his father, and he mingled with the employees at his father's place of business to learn Bahasa Indonesia. After learning the language, CHY started a business in Maubessi, Ainaro District. The business was a grocery store. However, the business could not be sustained due to revenue problems and a non-strategic location. After that, CHY started an entertainment and lodging business in Dili City. The entertainment business initiated by CHY is going well, and employees working in the businesses are citizens of

Timor-Leste and Indonesia. CHY admits that the survival of his business depends on social networks. In addition, the experience of LNC shows that economic opportunities and the use of US dollars in transactions in Timor-Leste are the motives for migration. Prior to migration, LNC already had a business in China. After obtaining information related to business prospects in Timor-Leste, LNC decided to conduct observations and analyze the business potential. Subsequently, LNC started a basic food shop business and employed eight East Timorese employees. Through the positive relationships formed by LNC with the community and business partners, the basic food shop business can be maintained.

Several interviewees, such as JHC, LC, TT, and ST, also have the capability and mobility of access to resources in the form of social, financial, natural, physical, and human capital. The resources utilized can be classified as initial capital or the result of expansion or conversion from the previous form of capital. The capability and mobility of access to resources are able to support migrant entrepreneurs from China in Timor-Leste to intensify, extensify, diversify, and transform their businesses to face various contexts of vulnerability such as the level of community acceptance of ethnic Chinese people and the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it can be seen how migrant entrepreneurs from China are able to maintain their business in Timor-Leste based on the framework of the concept of sustainable livelihoods.

Not all migrants are able to sustain efforts in dealing with the context of vulnerability in Timor-Leste. Previous studies have shown that migrants from China who are unable to maintain a business tend to experience a dilemma of whether to return or move to another area (Duan et al. 2020). In addition, Wei and Zhu (2020) show that migrants working as entrepreneurs who return to their areas of origin (return migrant entrepreneurs) can contribute to economic development in China. In the context of migrants from China in Timor-Leste, not all migrants are successful in maintaining their businesses. Several migrants from China in Timor-Leste decided to move to Indonesia and start a business in Bandung. In addition, migrants who manage to maintain their business in Timor-Leste cannot be separated from remittances as the results of previous research show (Correa and Girón 2020). This shows the existence of close and flexible social ties as part of Chinese culture and nationalism (Wang and Zhan 2019). Thus, it is necessary to carry out further studies on the kinship ties of migrants from China who are entrepreneurs in Timor-Leste using a socio-cultural perspective.

### 3.3. Strategy to Maintain Business during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Government of Timor-Leste has enacted a policy to prevent and overcome the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has a negative impact on the country's economy (Gunn 2021). Liguori and Pittz (2020) show that there are obstacles to business operations during COVID-19, which have forced business actors to change their production and marketing management systems to maintain business continuity. Akpan et al. (2020) believe that the strategy to maintain a business during the COVID-19 pandemic is to increase employee awareness and adaptation in the use of technology to support product marketing activities. In the context of the livelihoods of migrants from China in Timor-Leste, resilience in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic is carried out in various ways, namely by reducing the number of workers, updating financial management, optimizing marketing strategies, controlling production, and maintaining relationships with consumers. This condition shows that the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the contexts of vulnerability that not only affects business sustainability but also affects the mobility of access to resources as a supporter of the sustainability of the livelihoods of migrants from China in Timor-Leste.

The experiences of the interviewees facing the COVID-19 pandemic have several similarities. The constraints commonly faced by Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Timor-Leste are the prohibition of employee activities in the office, restrictions on access to the distribution of raw materials, delays in the payment of goods and services, reduced income, difficulty paying employees' salaries, and business location rental fees. Meanwhile, the strategy to maintain businesses implemented by Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in

Timor-Leste is to reduce the quantity of labor, manage finances for business operations, fix marketing and production strategies, and adapt to information technology as a medium to increase sales volume by working from home. [Liu \(2021\)](#) believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant influence on economic activity in various countries, which has caused changes in the managerial aspects of the company in the midst of limited business operations. [Ratten \(2020\)](#) shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the behavior of entrepreneurs in business management in terms of paying more attention to the hygiene aspect.

COVID-19 causes economic and social problems in various countries. In the context of Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused problems in the economic system that affect the amount of per capita income ([Joffe 2021](#); [Ossome 2020](#)). In the context of China, economic mobility has been limited due to restrictions on exports and imports during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Fu et al. 2020](#)). Furthermore, China's economic recovery process is carried out by updating the product marketing strategy using information technology to reach a wider market with a higher sales volume so as to maintain business sustainability ([Liu et al. 2020](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed the product sales strategy from conventional methods to innovative methods as a strategy to maintain business ([Eikhof 2020](#)). This shows that each country has serious economic problems as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Chong et al. 2020](#)). In an effort to maintain the economy during the pandemic, the government seeks to establish policies that must consider the balance between economic mobility and social activities through large-scale social restrictions and the optimization of vaccinations ([Gibson and Olivia 2020](#); [Harapan et al. 2020](#); [Olivia et al. 2020](#)). Meanwhile, in the context of Timor-Leste, the government established a policy of restricting mobility and social and economic accessibility. As a result, migrant entrepreneurs from China in Timor-Leste are trying to maintain business continuity by reducing the quantity of labor, managing finances for business operations, fixing marketing and production strategies, and adapting to information technology as a medium to increase sales volume by working from home.

#### 4. Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that the factors that encourage and attract migrants from China to Timor-Leste are dominated by economic reasons. The adaptation process of migrants from China in Timor-Leste relies on social capital to synergize with local communities in terms of culture, which also affects the comfort and security of entrepreneurship. Migrants from China can be classified based on economic characteristics or activities, namely migrants as migrant workers and migrant entrepreneurs.

From the perspective of sustainable livelihoods, migrants as workers are in a process of accumulation of financial capital by utilizing human capital. Meanwhile, migrant entrepreneurship is a process of expansion of financial capital and human capital into social capital, physical capital, and natural capital. The mobility of Chinese migrants' access to financial capital is supported institutionally, as well as entrepreneurship activities in Timor-Leste and policy.

To maintain their businesses, migrants from China in Timor-Leste carry out business intensification, extensification, diversification, and transformation. However, the strategy to maintain business sustainability in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic is carried out by reducing the quantity of labor, managing finances for business operations, fixing marketing and production strategies, and adapting to information technology as a medium to increase the sales volume by working from home.

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