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URBAN DISTANCES, INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES, AND MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CONFIGURATIONAL ANALYSIS IN CHINA

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Abstract. Given its significance for economic and social sustainability, migrant entrepreneurship (ME) has attracted increasing attention from scholars and policymakers. However, existing research provides limited insights into how various antecedents jointly affect ME. To address this gap, this study develops a theoretical model that integrates mixed embeddedness theory and entrepreneurial opportunity construction theory to explain the processes of opportunity construction and exploitation in ME. Using 130 cross-city migration cases in China – each comprising individuals from the same origin and destination cities – we examine how urban distances and individual resources jointly shape ME. The analysis identifies three pathways to high ME: the opportunity-resource endowed path, the resource bricolage path, and the opportunity-resource matching path. Although no single factor is necessary for high ME, greater geographic distance consistently promotes it. This study advances our understanding of the interplay between urban conditions, individual resources, and ME, and further enriches the mixed embeddedness theory by integrating the opportunity construction perspective.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneurship, mixed embeddedness, urban distances, individual resources, opportunity construction, opportunity exploitation, configurational perspective.

JEL Classification: L26, R23.

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1. Introduction

Migrant entrepreneurship (ME), defined as the engagement of migrants in entrepreneurial activities in their current region of residence rather than their region of origin (Dabić et al., 2020), plays a crucial role in addressing employment discrimination (Blennerhassett et al., 2022) while also improving migrants' quality of life and socio-economic status (Dheer, 2018). Given its significance for the sustainable development of both the economy and society (Jones et al., 2019; Mago, 2023), scholars have increasingly focused on identifying the factors that contribute to regional variations in ME levels.

Scholars investigating regional variations in ME have underscored the importance of individual resources, such as human capital (Zou & Deng, 2023) and social capital (Zhang et al., 2024). While these individual-level resources are essential, external business environments also play a critical role in shaping entrepreneurial activity (Ram et al., 2017). The

mixed embeddedness perspective (Fraudatario et al., 2025; Kloosterman, 2010) emphasizes the relevance of both the region of residence and the region of origin, including cultural and administrative factors (Yang & Zhang, 2023; Bach, 2023). As a complex phenomenon, ME is influenced by a range of interrelated conditions, with different combinations of conditions potentially leading to the same outcome (Solano et al., 2022). This perspective highlights the interaction between contextual environments and individual resources as central to understanding ME, solidifying its position as a leading theoretical framework in the field (Ram et al., 2017). However, traditional statistical methods often focus on net effects or two-way interactions, which may overlook the complex interdependencies among three or more conditions (Douglas et al., 2020). This methodological limitation is not aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of mixed embeddedness, calling for more interactive analyses to capture the complexity of ME (Wang & Warn, 2018). Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), a configurational approach that accommodates causal complexity and the interdependence of multiple conditions, is better suited for examining the synergistic effects of various conditions on ME and uncovering complex causal relationships (Douglas et al., 2020).

Building on the above analysis, this paper explores two main questions: (1) What is the configurational effect of business contexts and individual resources on ME? (2) How do business contexts and individual resources interact synergistically to promote ME? Existing research on the determinants of ME, typically based on traditional statistical methods that emphasize single net effects or simple interactions (Douglas et al., 2020), has offered limited insights into the configurational effect of multiple antecedent conditions. To address this gap, we propose a theoretical model using fsQCA, which is well-suited to examining complex interplays among conditions (Fiss, 2011). This model explores the configurational effects of urban distances – cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic distance – and individual resource endowments, including human, social, and financial capital, on ME. By integrating mixed embeddedness theory and entrepreneurial opportunity construction theory, we aim to capture both opportunity construction and exploitation. We posit that individuals who undertake long-distance migration typically possess entrepreneurial spirit (Ye et al., 2018), making them more alert to entrepreneurial opportunities and more likely to transform potential opportunities into actionable ones (Tang et al., 2012). When entering environments with adequate resources for opportunity development, they are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Our analysis focuses on internal migration within Chinese cities, making China an ideal context given its substantial urbanization-driven internal migration. By the end of 2020, approximately 376 million internal migrants were recorded, representing nearly one-third of the total population (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). According to data from the China Migrants Dynamic Survey 2017, around 40% of internal migrants choose to start new businesses in their city of residence (Zhou et al., 2022), highlighting the importance of ME in China. Choosing China as our research context also offers broader insights into human agency in the pursuit of economic opportunities (Fu, 2020).

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the theoretical background; Section 3 outlines the method, data, measurement, calibration, and analytical approach; Section 4 presents the sufficiency and sensitivity analyses; Section 5 discusses the findings; and the final section presents the conclusions and limitations.

2. Theoretical background

Around the year 2000, Kloosterman and colleagues introduced the mixed embeddedness perspective (Kloosterman, 2010), which emphasizes the interplay between migrants' individual resources – such as human, social, and financial capital – and the economic and institutional contexts of both their regions of residence and origin, shaping the available opportunity structures (Yang & Zhang, 2023; Bach, 2023). To capture the contextual influences of both the origin and residence cities, we adopt Ghemawat's (2001) cultural-administrative-geographic-economic (CAGE) distance framework, which identifies four types of urban distances – cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic – that reflect the differences in urban conditions between these two locations. Building on the foundational work of Kloosterman (2010) and Ghemawat (2001), we specify the key urban contextual conditions and individual resources that influence ME.

The pertinent literature helps identify the key conditions in the scoping stage (Furnari et al., 2020). This study follows the three iterative stages of the configurational theorizing process – scoping, linking, and naming (Furnari et al., 2020). In this section, we identify the core conditions and develop an overarching framework (scoping stage), followed by a brief discussion of the interrelationships among these conditions (linking stage). The analyses presented in Section 4 correspond to the stages of linking and naming.

2.1. Cultural distance

Cultural distance (CD) refers to the differences in cultural values between an entrepreneur's city of residence and their city of origin (Sousa & Bradley, 2008). Some scholars argue that greater CD generates differentiated cognitive perspectives, which can spark idea collisions between migrants and locals, fostering the emergence of new ideas and knowledge and thereby creating more entrepreneurial opportunities (Kemeny & Cooke, 2017). However, other research suggests that while CD may enhance access to diverse information and knowledge, it can simultaneously hinder migrants' ability to interpret that information effectively (Mrożewski & Hering, 2023). Furthermore, CD can cause social exclusion, limiting social interactions and reducing migrants' identification with the local community (Zhang et al., 2024), which negatively impacts entrepreneurial traits such as self-efficacy and creativity (Mrożewski & Hering, 2023).

2.2. Administrative distance

Administrative distance (AD) refers to the institutional differences between a migrant's city of residence and city of origin, encompassing variations in policies, market regulations, and legal conditions (Tokas & Deb, 2020). Scholars generally acknowledge that the institutional environment influences entrepreneurial opportunity structures (Fraudatario et al., 2025). Greater AD between cities implies greater disparities in government efficiency. Migrating from a city with low government efficiency to one with high government efficiency can unlock additional entrepreneurial opportunities, benefiting potential migrant entrepreneurs. However, some studies argue that migrants facing greater AD encounter greater challenges in local acceptance and trust-building (Nguyen, 2023, 2021), making it more difficult for them to access the resources necessary for entrepreneurship.

2.3. Geographic distance

Geographic distance (GD) refers to the physical distance between migrants' city of residence and their city of origin (Tokas & Deb, 2020). A large GD signifies long-distance migration, typically chosen by adventurous migrants with a higher tolerance for uncertainty (Bhachu, 2017). These migrants view uncertainties as entrepreneurial opportunities, remaining alert to objective opportunities (Tang et al., 2012). Additionally, migrants who undertake long-distance migration are driven by the desire to improve their economic status, motivating them to engage with the contextual environment of their city of residence to subjectively construct entrepreneurial opportunities (Mathias et al., 2015). Moreover, long GD can be associated with a higher level of innovative opportunities, as knowledge gained through the collision of distant ideas is often perceived as having greater novelty and commercial value (Su & Moaniba, 2020).

2.4. Economic distance

Economic distance (ED) refers to the differences between a migrant's city of residence and city of origin in terms of individual wealth or consumer income (Tokas & Deb, 2020). Variations in the level of economic development across cities influence the regional availability of business support for entrepreneurship and the structure of opportunities (Zhang et al., 2024). Cities with high levels of economic development attract production resources and facilitate their agglomeration. These cities often feature well-developed resource markets, where information is concentrated and disseminates rapidly. Migrants in these cities can quickly identify gaps in market supply and uncover entrepreneurial opportunities (Fraudatario et al., 2025). Furthermore, a high economic level indicates higher income levels, which can create a large demand market, thereby fostering valuable business opportunities.

2.5. Human capital

Human capital (HC) refers to individuals' knowledge and skills, often measured by their level of education (Xie et al., 2021a). Education enhances migrants' managerial capabilities and increases the legitimacy of their businesses, making it easier for them to gain support from resource providers (Guerrero et al., 2021). Moreover, the negative effect of cultural distance on entrepreneurship may be positively moderated by a high level of human capital within the migrant group (Mrożewski & Hering, 2023). However, some scholars argue that education can also hinder entrepreneurship, as highly educated individuals often have more attractive job market alternatives, leading to a higher opportunity cost of starting a business (Xie et al., 2021a).

2.6. Social capital

Social capital (SC) refers to the assets or resources an individual possesses through their relationships within networks or communities (Afandi et al., 2017). SC emerges through migrants' interactions with others, and varying levels of SC can lead to different subjective perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, SC facilitates the acquisition of additional resources. Migrants with high levels of social capital are more likely to receive legitimacy endorsements, access financial capital, and secure early orders (Colombo et al., 2015), thereby reducing the risks associated with resource constraints in entrepreneurship. The deeper an

entrepreneur is embedded in a social network, the greater their capacity to mobilize resources (Zhang et al., 2024; Linder et al., 2020), which is crucial for entrepreneurial success.

2.7. Financial capital

Financial capital (FC) encompasses both formal capital, sourced from banks or venture capital firms, and informal capital, obtained from relatives or friends (Xie et al., 2021a). FC is crucial for businesses, particularly those in the early stages of development. New ventures often require substantial FC to launch products and enter markets; as such, FC is frequently a major constraint for newly established businesses (Xie et al., 2021a). Migrant entrepreneurs with significant FC appear to be less affected by financial constraints, as they have access to ample capital to sustain their business operations (Linder et al., 2020). Available capital provides migrant entrepreneurs with the time needed to explore additional opportunities and overcome challenges.

2.8. Configurational analysis of ME

Understanding the net effect of a single condition on ME is important; however, ME is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors (Fraudatario et al., 2025). The mixed embeddedness framework, which posits that ME results from the interaction between contextual factors and individual resources, provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding ME (Solano et al., 2023). Further research is needed to explore how these conditions interact and contribute to ME (Wang & Warn, 2018). To elucidate how urban distances and resource endowments synergistically facilitate ME, we integrate the theories of mixed embeddedness and entrepreneurial opportunity construction, developing a theoretical model of opportunity construction and exploitation in the context of ME.

The theory of entrepreneurial opportunity construction contends that entrepreneurial opportunities do not exist objectively but rather depend on entrepreneurs (Alvarez & Barney, 2007) and are proactively constructed through their unique cognitive structures and information-processing abilities (Sarason et al., 2006). When it comes to migrants, we argue that, compared to locals, migrants possess psychological traits that make them more inclined to construct entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increasing their potential to become entrepreneurs. First, long-distance migration is a choice fraught with uncertainty, requiring individuals to relinquish their accumulated resources and venture into unfamiliar environments (Bhachu, 2017). As such, the inherent uncertainty of long-distance migration functions as a natural filter, selectively identifying individuals with higher entrepreneurial potential (Ye et al., 2018). Migrants who choose long-distance migration often display a stronger sense of adventure and a higher tolerance for uncertainty. They are more willing to bear the risks and uncertainties that may arise from entrepreneurship. Second, unlike locals, migrants face the liability of foreignness – referring to the additional, often tacit, costs borne by outsiders that are not encountered by native individuals (Denk et al., 2012). This motivates migrants to pursue wealth accumulation with greater ambition. They tend to exhibit heightened entrepreneurial alertness (Tang et al., 2012) and are more likely to perceive ambiguous realities as actionable entrepreneurial opportunities and to proactively pursue them (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003).

By integrating mixed embeddedness theory and entrepreneurial opportunity construction theory, our theoretical model captures two essential aspects of entrepreneurship: opportunity

construction and opportunity exploitation. Opportunity construction refers to the process through which entrepreneurs create opportunities via subjective cognition and information processing (Sarason et al., 2006), whereas opportunity exploitation involves acquiring and utilizing resources to transform identified or constructed opportunities into actual business activities (Tang et al., 2012). Urban distances influence migrants' entrepreneurial motivations and opportunity construction behaviors, while resource endowments serve as critical enablers or constraints in translating constructed opportunities into entrepreneurial actions. When adequate resources are available, migrants with entrepreneurial spirit actively engage in entrepreneurial activities. However, in resource-scarce contexts, heightened entrepreneurial motivation drives long-distance migrants to pursue entrepreneurship through resource bricolage – leveraging available resources and recombining them in novel ways, rather than adhering to established norms and practices (Tasavori et al., 2020). The studies by Mrożewski and Hering (2023) and Ye et al. (2018) provide empirical support for our argument. Mrożewski and Hering found that human capital positively moderates the relationship between cultural distance and migrant entrepreneurship, while Ye et al. (2018) demonstrated that both human and social capital strengthen the relationship between institutional distance and migrant entrepreneurship. Our research extends these studies by incorporating additional dimensions of regional distance and individual resource endowment.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Method

We employ fsQCA, a set-theoretic method, instead of traditional statistical approaches, to examine the interaction effects of urban distances and individual resource endowments on migrant entrepreneurship (ME) for three main reasons. First, fsQCA assumes that antecedent conditions interact synergistically to influence the outcome (Fiss, 2011), making it ideal for exploring the configurational effects of urban distances and individual resources on ME. Second, fsQCA accounts for the asymmetrical nature of causal relationships (Ragin, 2008). Our findings reveal both conditional asymmetry (Misangyi et al., 2017) and causal asymmetry (Fiss, 2011) in the relationships between multiple conditions and ME. Third, fsQCA assumes equifinality – the idea that different configurations can lead to the same outcome (Douglas et al., 2020). Our results show that various combinations of contextual and individual conditions can effectively foster ME.

3.2. Data and measurement

The data regarding ME and the individual conditions in this study are derived from the China Labor-force Dynamics Survey (CLDS). The raw data cannot be shared with third parties due to ethical considerations, but can be obtained via contacting the Center for Social Survey, Sun Yat-sen University. The CLDS is a large-scale, nationally representative database of China (Wang et al., 2017), particularly valuable for ME research due to its comprehensive information on demographic characteristics, social mobility, and entrepreneurial resources (Fu, 2020). Launched in 2010 and conducted biennially, the most recent wave was completed in 2018. For the purposes of this study, we utilize the 2016 wave of the CLDS, which uniquely provides detailed information distinguishing between migrants' cities of residence and their cities of origin. Moreover, China's internal migration patterns and institutional drivers – such as hukou

policies and regional development disparities – have remained structurally consistent up to the present, ensuring the continued relevance of the 2016 data. Following a comprehensive analysis of migration data and alignment of contextual information across cities, we constructed a sample comprising 130 cases, each representing all individuals originating from and residing in the same pair of cities. This sample captures the broad regional distribution of migrants across China, providing sufficient variation in the relevant conditions and thus meeting the requirements for the chosen methodology. Table 1 shows the outcome variable, independent variables and data sources used in this study.

Table 1. Variable construction and data sources

Variables	Abbreviation	Description	Data source
Migrant entrepreneurship	ME	the proportion of migrants who start their own businesses	CLDS
Cultural distance	CD	the dialect distance	CSMAR
Administrative distance	AD	the distance of the marketization index	Fan et al. (2011)
Geographic distance	GD	the great-circle distance based on the latitudes and longitudes	Baidu Maps
Economic distance	ED	one minus the economic similarity based on GDP	China City Statistical Yearbook
Human capital	HC	the average level of educational attainment of migrants	CLDS
Social capital	SC	the average number of local friends/ acquaintances migrants have to whom they can turn for support and help	CLDS
Financial capital	FC	the average number of friends migrants have from whom they can receive financial support amounting to at least 5000 RMB	CLDS

3.2.1. Migrant entrepreneurship

Migrant entrepreneurship (ME) is measured as the proportion of migrants who start their own businesses in their cities of residence (Liu et al., 2019).

3.2.2. Cultural distance

Language or dialect, as a reflection of cultural elements and a key symbol of identity, is often used as a proxy indicator for culture (Mao & Mao, 2021). Therefore, we measure the cultural distance (CD) between the city of residence and the city of origin using dialect distance.

3.2.3. Administrative distance

The administrative distance (AD) between a pair of cities is mainly reflected in the inconsistency in the degree of marketization between cities in China, and the marketization index consisting of five dimensions from Fan et al. (2011) provides a comprehensive representation of the institutional environment influencing inter-regional interactions, making it one of the most comprehensive measures available (Mao & Mao, 2021). So, this study also uses the marketization index to measure AD.

3.2.4. Geographic distance

Geographic distance (GD) is the spatial distance between the city of residence and the city of origin (Su & Moaniba, 2020). According to the literature, we measure GD as the great-circle distance based on the latitudes and longitudes of the focal cities according to Baidu Maps (Su & Moaniba, 2020).

3.2.5. Economic distance

Economic distance (ED) between cities is often measured by GDP. Following the literature, we first employ the calculation method introduced by Egger and Pfaffermayr (2004) to determine the economic similarity between the focal cities based on GDP; then, we calculate ED between the city of residence and the city of origin as one minus the economic similarity (Falck et al., 2018).

3.2.6. Human capital

Education is often used as a measurement for human capital (HC) in existing literature (Xie et al., 2021a), so we use the average level of educational attainment of migrants (Fu, 2020) with coding as follows: 1 = no schooling, 2 = primary school, 3 = middle school, 4 = high school or technical school, 5 = an undergraduate degree, and 6 = a graduate degree.

3.2.7. Social capital

Social capital (SC) can be measured based on local personal networks, so following the literature (Fu, 2020), we use the average number of local friends/acquaintances that migrants have in their city of residence to whom they can turn to for support and help to measure SC.

3.2.8. Financial capital

Following the literature (Liu et al., 2019), we use the average number of friends that migrants have in their city of residence from whom they can expect to receive financial support amounting to at least 5000 RMB as a measurement of financial capital (FC).

3.3. Calibration

Following the analytical procedures of fsQCA (Greckhamer et al., 2018), archival measures of the conditions and outcome are calibrated into fuzzy membership scores from 0 to 1, which is called calibration. The fully-in point, the crossover point, and the fully-out point should be set as three anchors to define fuzzy sets (Ragin, 2008). Considering that our sample is very representative of all the regions of the Chinese mainland, we conduct calibration in relation to the sample and use the 75th, 50th, and 25th percentiles to denote the three anchors (Judge et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2021b). In addition, we conduct sensitivity analyses to check whether the results are robust to the use of alternative coding for the sets of conditions and the set of outcome. We used fs/QCA 3.0 software to conduct the calibration and analyses. For membership scores of 0.5, To avoid dropping cases due to ambiguity in set membership, a constant of 0.001 is added to the membership scores of variables less than 1 (Fiss, 2011). Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the measures and the calibration anchors for the antecedent conditions and the outcome.

Table 2. Fuzzy-set membership calibrations and descriptive statistics

Variables	Fuzzy set calibrations			Descriptive statistics			
	Fully in	Crossover	Fully out	Mean	SD	Max	Min
ME	1.00	0.50	0.33	0.62	0.35	1.00	0.02
CD	3.00	2.53	1.92	2.23	0.88	3.22	0.00
AD	1.38	0.60	0.00	0.94	1.19	4.86	0.00
GD	772.12	417.87	236.68	575.10	503.47	2635.40	30.49
ED	2.71	2.13	1.86	2.31	0.57	4.26	1.69
HC	4.00	3.00	2.50	3.26	1.04	6.00	1.00
SC	10.00	5.00	2.00	7.66	9.91	55.00	0.00
FC	5.00	3.00	1.00	3.94	5.67	50.00	0.00

3.4. Analytical approach

3.4.1. Necessity analysis

If a condition is absent, the focal outcome will also be absent, making it a necessary condition for the outcome. Consistency is a crucial criterion for assessing the relationship between the two sets (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012), with the consistency threshold set at 0.9 (Fiss, 2011). The results presented in Table 3 indicate that the consistency of each condition does not exceed 0.9. Therefore, no single condition is deemed necessary for either high ME or the absence of high ME. This suggests that neither an urban contextual factor nor an individual condition can singly act as a bottleneck for ME.

Table 3. Analysis of necessary conditions for ME

Sets of conditions	High ME		Absence of high ME	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
CD	0.5362	0.5667	0.5511	0.5413
~CD	0.5660	0.5757	0.5589	0.5283
AD	0.5882	0.6010	0.4970	0.4720
~AD	0.4833	0.5083	0.5799	0.5668
GD	0.6030	0.6318	0.4560	0.4440
~GD	0.4693	0.4814	0.6219	0.5928
ED	0.4782	0.5120	0.5738	0.5710
~ED	0.5993	0.6021	0.5096	0.4758
HC	0.6419	0.6135	0.5561	0.4940
~HC	0.4705	0.5329	0.5648	0.5944
SC	0.5696	0.6170	0.4890	0.4923
~SC	0.5313	0.5281	0.6196	0.5723
FC	0.5506	0.5836	0.4939	0.4865
~FC	0.5155	0.5229	0.5772	0.5442

Note: The notation "~" denotes the absence of the condition.

3.4.2. Sufficiency analysis

If a condition or configuration consistently leads to the focal outcome, it is considered sufficient for the outcome. The raw consistency threshold, which indicates the extent to which a particular configuration is consistent with the outcome, is set at 0.75 (Ragin, 2008). To address contradictory configurations – where the same configuration is linked to both the outcome and its negation – the proportional reduction in inconsistency (PRI) threshold is set to 0.65 (Greckhamer, 2016), and the frequency threshold is set to one case per configuration (Ragin, 2008).

There are three types of solutions generated by fs/QCA 3.0 software: complex, intermediate, and parsimonious solutions. In line with the literature, we primarily report and interpret the intermediate solution, complemented by the parsimonious solution (Fiss, 2011). Together, these two solutions help distinguish between core and peripheral conditions. The core condition is consistently present in both solutions, while the peripheral condition appears only in the intermediate solution. The core condition is considered more important for generating the outcome, as it persists in the solution even with difficult counterfactuals (Greckhamer et al., 2018).

3.4.3. Supplemental analysis

Following the best practices for fsQCA recommended by Greckhamer et al. (2018), we not only examine the sufficiency of conditions for the presence of high ME but also explore their sufficiency for the absence of high ME (Misangyi et al., 2017). We conduct a comparative analysis of the configurations between the presence and absence of high ME to assess the asymmetric relationship between the antecedent conditions and ME.

4. Results

4.1. Configurations sufficient for high ME

Table 4 presents four configurational solutions that are sufficient for high ME, with favorable solution consistency and coverage values of 0.83 and 0.25, respectively. Solution E1 exhibits the highest unique coverage among all configurations, indicating the degree to which it independently explains the outcome, excluding overlap with other solutions. This suggests that E1 is the primary solution to achieving high ME, as the majority of cases reach high ME through this path. In this solution, high ME is generated when high CD, high AD and high GD occur alongside high levels of HC, SC and FC. These six are considered core conditions, as they are all essential for generating high ME. Unlike the other conditions, high ED is irrelevant in this solution. A typical case for this solution is migration from Longnan to Jiaxing. Longnan, located in northwest China, and Jiaxing, located on the southeast coast, belong to different large dialect areas and exhibit the largest institutional differences among all the cases. With adequate resource endowments provided by high levels of HC, SC, and FC, individuals undertaking longer-distance migration are more alert to entrepreneurial opportunities and actively construct potential entrepreneurial opportunities into actionable ones (Tang et al., 2012). This configuration aligns closely with our theoretical model, which includes two aspects of migrant entrepreneurial activities: opportunity construction and opportunity exploitation. In this solution, conditions for both opportunity construction and opportunity exploitation are present, and therefore, we refer to it as the opportunity-resource endowed path.

Table 4. Configurations sufficient for high ME

	E1	E2	E3	E4
CD	●	⊗	⊗	⊗
AD	●	•	•	⊗
GD	●	●	●	●
ED		●	⊗	⊗
HC	●	⊗	●	•
SC	●	⊗	⊗	⊗
FC	●	⊗	⊗	●
Consistency	0.8099	0.8268	0.8282	0.8556
Raw coverage	0.1480	0.0760	0.0502	0.0397
Unique coverage	0.1212	0.0533	0.0209	0.0119
Overall consistency	0.8296			
Overall coverage	0.2458			

Note: Large, full black circles "●" denote the presence of core conditions; small, full black circles "•" denote the presence of peripheral conditions; large, crossed open circles "⊗" denote the absence of core conditions; small, crossed open circles "⊗" denote the absence of peripheral conditions; blank spaces denote the irrelevant conditions.

The core conditions of solution E2 are the absence of high CD, high HC, and high FC, along with the presence of high GD and high ED. Its peripheral conditions include the absence of high SC and the presence of high AD. Thus, in the absence of other favorable conditions, high GD and high ED contribute more significantly to high ME than high AD. A typical case for this solution is migration from Shangrao to Guangzhou. Although Shangrao and Guangzhou are located in neighboring provinces, they are not geographically close and exhibit a large disparity in economic development. Migrants from Shangrao to Guangzhou demonstrate a stronger drive for wealth accumulation and heightened entrepreneurial motivation. Despite lacking essential resources for developing entrepreneurial opportunities, their motivation drives them to engage in entrepreneurial activities by creatively leveraging available resources (Tasavori et al., 2020). As we can see, for long-distance migrants, insufficient entrepreneurial resources do not hinder their entrepreneurial endeavors. Instead, entrepreneurial spirit drives them to creatively recombine available resources to initiate entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, we refer to this solution as the resource bricolage path.

The core conditions of solution E3 are the absence of high CD, high ED and high FC, along with the presence of high levels of GD and HC. Its peripheral conditions include the absence of high SC and the presence of high AD. Therefore, when other conditions are absent, high GD and high HC play a more important role in generating high ME than high AD. The core conditions of solution E4 are the absence of high AD and high SC, combined with the presence of high GD and high FC. Its peripheral conditions include the absence of high CD and high ED, and the presence of high HC. This configuration indicates that when other conditions are absent, high GD and high FC play a more important role in generating high ME than high HC. Representative cases for these two configurations include migration from Xiangyang to Zhuhai and from Qiqihar to Jinzhou. Both migrations are geographically distant and occur non-neighboring provinces. Migrants undertaking long-distance migration exhibit alertness in identifying objective entrepreneurial opportunities (Tang et al., 2012) and motivation to

construct subjective entrepreneurial opportunities (Mathias et al., 2015). Supported by the corresponding entrepreneurial resources (high HC in solution E3 and high FC in solution E4), they develop opportunities and initiate entrepreneurial activities. Thus, we refer to these two solutions as the opportunity-resource matching path.

A comparative analysis of all configurations sufficient for high ME reveals that high GD is present in all cases and consistently acts as a core condition. This indicates that high GE plays a universal role in the generation of high ME. Compared with the other three distances (CD AD and ED), GD is more perceptible and can more intuitively reflect long-distance migration. Migrants who have migrated over long GD tend to be more adventurous and exhibit a higher tolerance for uncertainty (Bhachu, 2017). When confronted with uncertainty, migrants possessing a greater spirit of adventure and higher uncertainty tolerance are more likely to interpret ambiguous realities as actionable entrepreneurial opportunities (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003). Thus, these solutions offer strong evidence that long-distance migration acts as a natural filter, selectively identifying individuals with higher entrepreneurial spirits.

4.2. Configurations sufficient for absence of high ME

Table 5 presents the results of 11 first-order configurational solutions that are sufficient for the absence of high ME, with favorable solution consistency and coverage (0.80 and 0.42, respectively). Taking solutions AE1a and AE1b as examples, they are neutral permutations, sharing the same core conditions of the presence of high CD and the absence of high GD and high FC. These two solutions demonstrate that, without high GD and high FC, high CD alone is insufficient to generate high ME. Comparative analyses of the presence and absence of high ME show that configurations leading to high ME are not the opposite of those that lead to the absence of high ME, indicating that the causal asymmetry exists. Furthermore, the absence of GD emerges as a core condition in six of the eleven configurations sufficient for the absence of high ME, while none of the configurations include high GD as a core condition. This finding, from another perspective, underscores the critical role of high GD in the generation of high ME.

4.3. Sensitivity analyses

We conduct two additional robustness checks to validate the results. First, we rerun the sufficiency analysis using a higher consistency threshold of 0.80 (Greckhamer, 2016). The resulting solutions are similar, and the interpretations remain unchanged. Second, we recalibrate all conditions and the outcome using an alternative crossover point set at the 45th percentile (Fiss, 2011). While minor changes are observed in the number of solutions, the overall interpretations continue to hold.

5. Discussion

This study identifies three distinct paths, shaped by combinations of urban distances and resource endowments, that can lead to high levels of ME: the opportunity-resource endowed path, the resource bricolage path, and the opportunity-resource matching path. Among these, the opportunity-resource endowed path, which exhibits the greatest coverage, accounts for the largest share of high-ME cases. This path involves all three resource types – HC SC, and FC – suggesting that most high-ME outcomes result from the co-occurrence of favorable

Table 5. Configurations sufficient for the absence of high ME

	AE1a	AE1b	AE2	AE3	AE4a	AE4b	AE5	AE6	AE7	AE8	AE9
CD	●	●	●	●	●	●	⊗		⊗	⊗	⊗
AD	⊗	•	⊗	⊗	•		⊗	•	⊗	●	●
GD	⊗	⊗	•	⊗	•	•	⊗	•	⊗	⊗	•
ED		•	⊗	●	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	⊗	●
HC	•	•	⊗	•	⊗	⊗		●	⊗	⊗	●
SC	⊗		•	•	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	●	•	
FC	⊗	⊗	•	•		⊗	⊗	●	•	●	●
Consistency	0.9155	0.8788	0.9640	0.9867	0.7907	0.7700	0.7568	0.8523	0.8530	0.8460	0.9176
Raw coverage	0.0792	0.0639	0.0650	0.0804	0.1280	0.1134	0.0995	0.0879	0.1106	0.0556	0.0673
Unique coverage	0.0268	0.0227	0.0157	0.0217	0.0064	0.0028	0.0378	0.0170	0.0392	0.0093	0.0001
Overall consistency	0.7953										
Overall coverage	0.4228										

Note: Large, full black circles "●" denote the presence of core conditions; small, full black circles "•" denote the presence of peripheral conditions; large, crossed open circles "⊗" denote the absence of core conditions; small, crossed open circles "⊗" denote the absence of peripheral conditions; blank spaces denote the irrelevant conditions.

conditions for both opportunity construction and exploitation. The opportunity-resource matching path reveals that when two dimensions of urban distance are present, high ME can be achieved with only one type of resource, such as HC in solution E3. However, when only one dimension of urban distance is present, achieving high ME may require multiple types of resources, such as HC and FC in solution E4. Supporting this finding, Ye et al. (2018) provide empirical evidence showing that human and social capital can strengthen the relationship between economic or institutional distance and migrant entrepreneurship. The resource bricolage path shows that when three or more dimensions of urban distance are present, high ME can still occur, even without the full set of resource types. Notably, the resources involved in this path are those with proven capabilities for specific applications. Their absence means that they cannot be deployed according to established norms; however, they can be creatively combined and applied in novel ways to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities (Tasavori et al., 2020). Supporting this view, Desa and Basu (2013) find that in supportive environments, ventures engaging in ideational bricolage can develop superior competencies compared to those built through conventional resource deployment.

No single condition is necessary for generating high ME, indicating that neither a single urban contextual nor individual condition acts as a bottleneck for ME. However, high GD plays a universal role in fostering high ME. In the comparative analyses of all the solutions sufficient for high ME, GD appears in all of them and even serves as a core condition. Compared to the other three types of distance (CD AD and ED), GD is more perceptible and more intuitively reflects long-distance migration. Migrants from areas with long GD are often more adventurous and demonstrate a greater tolerance for uncertainty (Bhachu, 2017). When faced with uncertainty, these migrants – who possess a greater spirit of adventure and tolerance for ambiguity – are more likely to perceive uncertain situations as actionable entrepreneurial opportunities (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003). Therefore, these solutions sufficient for high ME exemplify how long-distance migration acts as a natural filter, selectively identifying individuals with higher entrepreneurial spirits. Moreover, none of the configurations sufficient for the absence of high ME includes high GD as a core condition. From another perspective, this highlights the importance of high GD in facilitating high ME. Furthermore, the role of alertness in identifying objective entrepreneurial opportunities (Tang et al., 2012) and the motivation to construct subjective entrepreneurial opportunities (Mathias et al., 2015), driven by long-distance migration shown in this study, serve as compelling examples of the opportunity construction perspective (Alvarez & Barney, 2007).

There is an asymmetric relationship between multiple conditions and ME. A comparison of configurations leading to the presence and absence of high ME reveals that no configuration associated with high ME (e.g., E1) is simply the inverse of those linked to its absence, indicating causal asymmetry (Fiss, 2011). Furthermore, both the presence and absence of certain conditions are associated with high ME (e.g., CD in E1 and E2), suggesting the existence of conditional asymmetry (Misangyi et al., 2017).

The contributions of this research are threefold. First, by integrating the theory of entrepreneurial opportunity construction, this study strengthens the explanatory power of mixed embeddedness theory in the context of ME. The proposed theoretical model integrates opportunity construction and exploitation, illustrating that urban distances influence opportunity construction, while resource endowments shape opportunity exploitation. Migrants engaged in long-distance migration tend to exhibit psychological traits conducive to opportunity construction, increasing their likelihood of becoming potential entrepreneurs (Ye et al., 2018).

When conditions for opportunity exploitation improve, these migrants are more likely to convert opportunities into actionable ventures (Tang et al., 2012). Second, this study demonstrates the advantages of the asymmetric configurational approach in analyzing ME. The conventional symmetric approach, which relies on single net-effects or two-way interaction models, oversimplifies the complex interplay of multiple conditions (Douglas et al., 2020). In contrast, the asymmetric approach employed here reveals the asymmetric relationship between urban conditions and individual resources in influencing ME, identifying multiple equally effective pathways to high levels of ME. Third, by combining mixed embeddedness theory with the entrepreneurial opportunity construction framework, this study offers a deeper understanding of ME. It emphasizes the need for a more interactive analysis of multiple conditions influencing ME (Wang & Warn, 2018) and highlights the configurational effects of opportunity construction and exploitation. The findings show that high ME primarily emerges from the combined presence of favorable conditions for both opportunity construction and exploitation.

6. Conclusions

By integrating mixed embeddedness theory with entrepreneurial opportunity construction theory, this study develops a comprehensive model that links urban distances between migrants' cities of residence and origin with their resource endowments, to examine their configurational effects on migrant entrepreneurship.

The practical implications of this study are as follows. First, administrative distance appears in three of the four configurations associated with high migrant entrepreneurship, highlighting the pivotal role of institutional factors in the Chinese context. Accordingly, local governments should prioritize fostering a supportive institutional environment to attract and retain potential migrant entrepreneurs. Second, human capital emerges in three of the four configurations leading to high migrant entrepreneurship, suggesting that for migrants entering new regions, investing in human capital is more critical than cultivating social or financial capital for facilitating entrepreneurial activities in unfamiliar environments.

Despite our best efforts, this study has several limitations that point to directions for future research. First, while the CLDS data set provides valuable insights, its limitations should be acknowledged. Future research should endeavor to corroborate the generalizability of our findings by utilizing alternative data sources. Second, future research could explore alternative methods to strengthen the reliability of causal inferences, particularly in relation to GD as a consistent enhancer of ME. Third, this study primarily examines the relationships between urban conditions, individual resources, and migrant entrepreneurship from a static perspective. Future research could incorporate more recent datasets to examine the evolving and dynamic nature of these relationships over time.

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Author contributions

Zhimin Xie was responsible for conceptualization, resources, data curation, formal analysis, software, methodology, writing-original draft and project administration. Yiting Li was responsible for methodology and writing-review & editing. Lingmin Xie was responsible for conceptualization, investigation, project administration, formal analysis, methodology, validation and writing-review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No conflicts of interest.

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