Cover Letter

Dear Selection Committee,

I am Meijia Fang, a PhD candidate in Urban Economics at The University of Hong Kong. My research explores how networks and informal institutions facilitate new ideas within firms and across cities. I am applying to the NBER Innovation Research Boot Camp with great enthusiasm because it offers a rare, focused environment that combines rigorous training with direct engagement in the innovation research community. This structure is exactly what I need at this stage to solidify my foundations in innovation economics and align my ongoing projects with the field's core conversations.

My journey into innovation research began with work on knowledge creation and management in service industries, which has been published in top journals. Studying how organizations capture, store, and mobilize knowledge shaped my understanding of idea generation inside firms and taught me to translate abstract concepts into disciplined, measurable constructs. This early work provided both a conceptual and empirical foundation that now informs my broader interest in innovation as a process deeply embedded in social and institutional contexts.

Building on this base, my current research agenda focuses on innovation in firms and urban settings through the lenses of networks and institutions. I investigate how firms convert bridging and bonding ties into exploratory innovation, how institutional imprints shape diffusion and search breadth, and how changes in internal migration barriers affect diversity and innovative activity. This cross-field perspective closely mirrors the Boot Camp's emphasis on innovation as a unifying force linking growth, firm dynamics, inequality, and the labor market, while also connecting to public policy, trade, and organizational economics.

I see this Boot Camp as a critical bridge from frameworks to execution. During the instructional days, I plan to translate course material into a concise identification checklist for my innovation-based project, which I can implement immediately upon returning to campus. Because the program embeds participants within the innovation research community, I will develop a one-page benchmarking note on empirical measurement choices, including firm registry linkages, patent text-based novelty, and city-level institutional exposure. I intend to refine this note through targeted conversations this week so that my empirical pipeline reflects current best practices rather than isolated judgment.

I am eager to contribute to the Boot Camp in practical and collaborative ways suited to a small cohort. First, I will share a short, reproducible methods note documenting my workflow for constructing within-firm network measures and building patent text novelty indicators with other participants. Second, I will bring comparative evidence from mainland China and Hong Kong to enrich discussions of diffusion, institutional heterogeneity, and external validity,

complementing many US-centered projects. Third, I will circulate a concise summary of Boot Camp takeaways to my department and collaborators, extending the program's impact beyond my own research.

I have included this letter and other materials in a single PDF, as requested. Thank you for considering my application. I would greatly value the opportunity to learn from and contribute to the NBER Innovation Research Boot Camp, and to carry the insights directly into my research and scholarly community.

Sincerely

Meijia Fang

The University of Hong Kong

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Recommendation Letter Writer:

Prof. Alex Shuai Shi

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Meijia FANG

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Affiliation: Department of Real Estate and Construction, Faculty of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong

EDUATION

- **PhD candidate (Urban Economics, 2024/08--present)**

  PhD candidate, *The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, CN*

- **M.S. (Tourism Management, 2024)**

  GPA: 3.92/4; TOP 1%, *Sun Yat-Sen University, Zhuhai, CN ('Project 985')*

- **B.S. (Economics and Management of Exhibitions, Financial Economics (*Double Degree*), 2021)**

  GPA: 3.91/4; TOP 1%, *South China University of Technology, Guangzhou, CN ('Project 985')*

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Innovation; Knowledge management; Social networks; Entrepreneurship; Informal Institutions

WORKING PAPERS (First author/Corresponding author)

- Walking on Two Legs: Antecedents of Network Capital Ambidexterity (with Alex Shuai Shi), under review at *Journal of Management Studies*
- Raise a Glass and Start a Business? Explore the Impact of Premium Alcohol Consumption on Urban Entrepreneurship (with Alex Shuai Shi), submit to *entrepreneurship and regional development*
- Merchant Guild Culture and Innovation: Evidence from China (with Wanting Xu, Chenghua Guan)
- Relaxation of Internal Migration Barriers, Diversity and Innovation (with Wanting Xu, Chenghua Guan)

PAPERS IN PROGRESS

- Network Capital Ambidexterity and Disruptive Innovation (with Alex Shuai Shi)
- Unpacking the Effect of Merchant Guilds Diversity on Corporate Exploratory Innovation (with Wanting Xu, Chenghua Guan)
- Artificial Intelligence and Top Inventors: Productivity and Talents Flow

PUBLICATIONS

- Women's Knowledge Empowerment and Elimination of Implicit Gender Discrimination in Chinese Rural Tourism Entrepreneurship (with Yong Rao)

  International Journal of Tourism Research (Q1, IF=5.7), forthcoming

- Memory-based knowledge management in tourism firms (with Yong Rao, Chao Liu)

  Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (Q1, IF=13.761, Category rank-TOP 5%), 2025

- Understanding the process of a new product category from birth to maturity in the restaurant market: a knowledge evolution perspective (with Yong Rao, Chao Liu and Xinying Xu)

  International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (Q1, IF=11.1, ABS: 3, Category rank-TOP 10%), 2023

- Understanding the FLE-based organizational knowledge creation process in hospitality firms (with Yong Rao, Chao Liu)

  Tourism Management (Q1, IF=13.761, ABS: 4, Category rank-TOP 5%, Top Journal), 2022

- Community-based Development Pathways of Rural Tourism and Driving Factors: A Case Study of Longshan Village in Yixing, Jiangsu Province (with Yong Rao)

  Social Scientist (in Chinese). 2025

ACADEMIC PROJECT EXPERIENCE

- Leverage Network Capital for Hong Kong's Carbon Neutrality Goal 2025-present

  Public Policy Research Funding Scheme Co-I: Prof. Alex S. Shi

  Responsibilities: Assisted in drafting the proposal and conducted data collection and processing.

- Development level of 'Beautiful China' and its impact on the change of inbound tourism flow and quality 2020-2021

National Social Science Foundation Program Co-I: Prof. Weiwei

Responsibilities: Questionnaire design and collection (533); data processing (SPSS &GIS)

- Mainlanders' experience of gaming tourism in Macau: based on the perspective of consumption space 2019-2020

School-level student research project Co-I: Prof. Danping Liu

Responsibilities: Questionnaire collection (421) and interviews (56), analysis (Mplus), and writing of the main part of the final report

SEMINAR and CONFERENCE

- The 3rd Summer Meeting in Urban Economics, Guangdong, China, 2025.
- Regional Studies Association's Annual Conference, Porto, Portugal, 2025.
- Tourism Tribune's Annual Conference, Fujian, China, 2024.
- Tourism Tribune's Annual Conference, Anhui, China, 2023.

HONORS and AWARDS

- **National Scholarship for Postgraduates** (**TOP 1%**, highest scholarship from Ministry of Education of China) 2023
- The First Prize Scholarship of SYSU (Award Amount: ¥ 20000-the same as the national scholarship for postgraduate students) 2022
- The First Prize Scholarship of SYSU (Award Amount: ¥ 20000-the same as the national scholarship for postgraduate students) 2021
- The Sixth China College Students' 'Internet+' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, **Golden award, National level** 2020

  Position: Team leader

  Rank: TOP 110 / 38k teams (Award Amount: ¥ 50,000)
- The 12th 'Challenge Cup' Guangdong Undergraduate Business Plan Competition, **Golden award** 2020

  Position: Team leader

  Rank: TOP 129 / 7.4k teams (Award Amount: ¥ 20,000)
- **National Scholarship** (**TOP 1%**, highest scholarship from Ministry of Education of China) 2020
- **National Scholarship** (**TOP 1%**, highest scholarship from Ministry of Education of China) 2019

WORKING EXPERIENCE

- **The University of Hong Kong,** Research assistant Oct 2023 - Apr 2024

  Responsibilities: Collecting and analyzing data; Assisting in grant application; Assisting in manuscript writing
- **Poly Real Estate,** New media marketing specialist Aug 2023 - Dec 2023

  Responsibilities: Official account operation; Advertising; User research and maintenance; Data monitoring
- **China Foreign Trade Center,** Central Office Intern (Outstanding Internship Award) Oct 2021 - Nov 2021

  Responsibilities: Public opinion monitoring; Market research; Activity follow-up

OTHER EXPERIENCE

- **Teaching assistant experience:** Teaching assistant for Principles of Management
- **Volunteer experience:** Bottle line space environmental protection conference (2021); Kids Utopia Project (2024)
- **Practice Projects:**

Cruise Tourism Cooperation Development across the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong and Macau 2023-2024

Responsibilities: Conducting field research and writing research reports; Participating in planning a cultural and tourism integration scheme by land and sea

Analysis on the model and path optimization of targeted poverty alleviation 2021-2023

Responsibilities: As the leader of students, conducting field surveys and data collection in Yunnan province; Writing the poverty alleviation analysis report; The findings have been adopted by the university's organization department and local companies

SKILLS – Stata, GIS, Nvivo, Ucinet, SPSS, Mplus

HOBBIES - Hiking, Reading, Music

Current and Completed PhD Courses

Responsible Conduct of Research, 2024-25 Sem 1

Stream-based Responsible Conduct of Research, 2024-25 Sem 1

Introduction to Qualitative RM, 2024-25 Sem 1

Real estate management, 2024-25 Sem 1

Land economics, 2024-25 Sem 1

Doing Research, 2024-25 Sem 2

Introduction to Thesis Writing, 2024-25 Sem 2

Housing Markets and Policies, 2024-25 Sem 2

Research seminar II, 2025-26 Sem 1

Research Design Seminar Series, 2025-26 Sem 2

Institutional analysis for urban studies, 2025-26 Sem 2

Research Statement and Motivation for the Camp

I came to innovation economics through work on knowledge creation and knowledge management in services, where I examined how organizations capture, organize, and mobilize knowledge and how frontline processes turn dispersed information into new offerings. That experience taught me to look inside the firm at routines and information flows, and it also convinced me that understanding how knowledge becomes measurable innovation requires the broader frameworks of innovation economics.

My current research agenda integrates three questions. First, who are the productive actors, and how do they produce exploratory ideas inside firms? I study inventors and project teams and focus on network capital ambidexterity, asking how different mixes of bridging and bonding ties enable exploration without degrading exploitation. I build network-based measures at the team and firm level and pair them with applied micro designs that use within-firm variation and discrete changes in network structure to identify how social capital maps into exploration.

Second, what do cities and institutions provide that shapes the welfare and innovative behavior of these actors? My current projects study two institutional environments that matter for innovative search. One uses historical exposure to merchant guild culture to test whether inherited norms widen firms' search breadth and tilt them toward more novel combinations. The other exploits relaxations of internal migration barriers that reshape urban diversity, team formation, and the scope for idea recombination. Together, they ask how informal rules and policy settings change the incentives and matching environment that productive actors face, and how those changes register in exploratory outcomes rather than only in levels of output.

Third, how are these actors interconnected across space, and how do their connections transmit ideas? I analyze diffusion through social and professional networks and through interaction intensities in urban consumption spaces, then trace how those connections and innovation translate into entrepreneurial entry and early firm performance. To measure novelty and diffusion paths with more precision, I am building text-based indicators from patent documents and linking them to firm registries and city-level institutional exposures. The goal is a coherent empirical toolkit that interlocks with theory and allows transparent comparisons across institutional settings.

I understand that the camp includes intensive instruction with participation in the innovation research community during the same period. This format connects classroom frameworks to active research conversations, which is a key reason I am applying. It suits my goal to align measurement choices and policy interpretation in innovation projects with current research practice. The program features intensive lectures by leading scholars whose work spans economic growth, firm dynamics, inequality, and labor market outcomes. I am interested in research on diversity, immigration, and innovation, including work by scholars such a Prof. Ina Ganguli and Prof. Benjamin Jones, which speaks directly to my projects. I am also keen to learn about how artificial intelligence can be used profitably alongside human workers, such as insights from Prof. Kevin Bryan. Insights from these excellent researchers will strengthen my conceptual foundations and help me translate frameworks into implementable steps. I also value communication with researchers, especially exposure to perspectives and empirical settings beyond my own.

My plan for the week and the months after is concrete and realistic. During the instructional days, I will distill a short identification checklist, focusing on how idea production frameworks inform specification choices and robustness tests that I can implement with current data. While engaging with the community, I will keep a concise benchmarking note that documents my present measurement architecture, including firm registry linkages, text-based novelty from patents, and city-level institutional exposures, then refine variable definitions and external validity checks based on targeted feedback. Back on campus, I will update the research designs following these checklists, run a focused set of robustness checks, and circulate a brief methods memo to peers who work on related innovation topics. I will also share a short summary of Camp takeaways within my department so that the benefits extend beyond my own projects.

February 10, 2026

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to recommend **Meijia Fang** for the Innovation Research Boot Camp. I am Alex Shuai Shi from The University of Hong Kong, and I have been Meijia's supervisor since she began her doctoral studies. I have worked with her closely over an extended period and know her well.

Meijia is a rare combination of conceptual clarity and execution. In our Public Policy Research Funding Scheme project on leveraging network capital to support Hong Kong's carbon neutrality goals, she drafted core sections of the proposal, designed data pipelines, and delivered clean, well-documented datasets that my team and I could use immediately. She is equally strong in paper development. In our joint work on network capital ambidexterity, she translates theory into testable hypotheses, builds reproducible code, and runs careful robustness checks. I have seen her present internal memos that connect identification choices to measurement decisions in a way that is both transparent and efficient.

Her research agenda sits squarely in the economics of innovation. She studies how networks and institutions shape exploratory outcomes at the firm and city levels, and she works comfortably with registry data, text-based measures from patents, and policy variation. The Boot Camp's focus on foundational ideas and engagement with the innovation research community is exactly what she needs at this stage to consolidate theory and align her designs with current best practice.

Meijia is reliable, collegial, and fast. She meets deadlines, responds to feedback, and shares tools that others can adopt. I strongly support her application.

Sincerely
Prof. Alex S. Shi
The University of Hong Kong