NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp 2026
Applicant Summary

Name	Xilan Zhang
Email	lxz@stanford.edu
Phone	(+1) 312-477-1233
Address	475 Via Ortega, Room 338, Stanford, CA 94305
Website	https://xilan-zhang.github.io/
University	Stanford University
Department	Management Science & Engineering
Program	Ph.D. (Organizations, Technology and Entrepreneurship)
Area of Interest	Entrepreneurship, Field Experiments, Emerging Economies
Year of Entry	2024
Expected Completion	2029
Faculty Recommender	Charles Eesley, Professor Management Science & Engineering, Stanford University cee@stanford.edu

Xilan Zhang

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Education

Stanford University 2024 – Present

Ph.D. in Management Science & Engineering
Fields: Organizations, Technology and Entrepreneurship

Tsinghua University 2019 – 2024

Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Finance

The University of Chicago 2022 – 2023

Undergraduate Visiting Student in Economics

Working Papers

Zhang, C., Li, N., **Zhang, X**, Deng, Y, & Yang, L. Time the Surge: Theorizing and Examining Team Pacing in Multiple Membership Contexts. Forthcoming at *Academy of Management Journal*

Mikel-Hong, K., Li, N., **Zhang, X.**, & Pan, J. (2023). Turnover Sequences and Cascades. *Academy of Management Proceedings*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amproc.2023.15064abstract

Works in Progress

Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Opportunity Recognition Among Refugees
With Zahra Hejrati, Medhanie Gaim, Charles Eesley, 1st Round R&R at *Strategic Management Journal*

Framing Process for Stakeholder Activist Mobilization: A Field Experiment
With Katherine DeCelles, Charles Eesley, Ananya Sen

From Contacts to Contracts: Rebuilding Social Capital for Refugee Entrepreneurs
With Charles Eesley

Start-Up Chile: Cohort Learning and Opportunity Discovery
With Mike Leatherbee, Charles Eesley

Conference Presentations

"The Tradeoff Between Social Proximity and Local Integration: Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Opportunity Recognition Among Refugees ", UCLA Price Center winter research workshop, Mar 2026.

"From Contacts to Contracts: Rebuilding Social Capital for Refugee Entrepreneurs", Innovation Growth Lab Webinar, Dec 2025.

"From Contacts to Contracts: Rebuilding Social Capital for Refugee Entrepreneurs", CFXS: Field Experiment in Strategy Conference, San Francisco, CA, Oct 2025.

"Framing Process for Stakeholder Activist Mobilization: A Field Experiment", the Strategic Management Society 45th Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, Oct 2025.

"Turnover Sequences and Cascades in Social Network", the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, Boston, MA, Aug 2023.

Teaching Experience

MS&E 272: Entrepreneurship without Borders, Stanford University 2026

Teaching Assistant

ENGR 145: Technology Entrepreneurship, Stanford University 2025

Teaching Assistant

Awards and Honors

IGL Seed Grant Award ($5000) 2026

SCPKU Fellowship, Stanford University 2026

Nomination, Best PhD Student Paper (SMS Conference) 2025

The Mackenzie Family Fellowship, Stanford University 2025

Engineering Graduate Fellowship, Stanford University 2024

Academic Excellence Scholarship, Tsinghua University 2021, 2022

Excellent Student Leadership Award, Tsinghua University 2022

Science and Innovation Scholarship, Tsinghua University 2021

Freshman Scholarship, Tsinghua University 2019

Research Positions

Research Professional for Prof. Emanuele Colonnelli and Prof. Tommaso Porzio, Chicago Booth 2022 – 2024

Research Assistant for Prof. Letian (LT) Zhang, Harvard Business School 2023 – 2024

Research Assistant for Prof. Erica Jiang, USC Marshall 2022

Research Assistant for Anderson Behavioral Lab, UCLA 2022

Professional Positions

Zhipu AI (Z.ai) May 2021 – Jan 2022

Data Science Intern *Beijing, China*

Selected Service

Mentor for Undergraduate Research Programs at Stanford Mar 2025 – Present

REU (Stanford Engineering) and MS&E Undergraduate Diversity in Research Program (5 students)

Stanford–SJSU University Partnership Program Mar 2025 – Jun 2025

MS&E Graduate Student Mentor

AOM Annual Meeting Aug 2023

STR Division Ambassador

Science and Technology Association of Students, Tsinghua University Jan 2020 – Aug 2022

Vice President

Miscellaneous

- Programming: Python, R, JavaScript, Stata, SPSS, MongoDB
- Languages: English, Mandarin
- Reviewers for: *Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management*

Research Statement

Xilan Zhang — Stanford University, Management Science & Engineering

My research investigates how behavioral interventions can foster inclusive entrepreneurship, with a focus on field experiments in emerging economies. I study how mentorship, peer exposure, and team structures reshape the behaviors that enable entrepreneurial success—and how these mechanisms can be leveraged to include populations traditionally excluded from entrepreneurial ecosystems.

My primary project is a randomized controlled trial with 450 refugee entrepreneurs in Uganda, conducted in collaboration with Innovations for Poverty Action and Makerere University (*From Contacts to Contracts*, with C. Eesley). Despite Uganda's progressive policies granting refugees the right to work and start businesses, social isolation from local business networks constrains their access to markets, suppliers, and collaborators. I designed a structured digital mentorship intervention delivered via WhatsApp that isolates two distinct behavioral mechanisms: *relationship initiation* (communication confidence, initiative, goal-setting) versus *relationship maintenance* (perseverance, consistency, follow-through). By experimentally separating these mechanisms, the study identifies which soft skills are most critical for rebuilding social capital after displacement—and does so through a scalable digital model at approximately $15 per participant. A companion paper developing the theoretical foundations is currently under first-round revision at *Strategic Management Journal* (with S.Z. Hejrati, M. Gaim, & C. Eesley).

In a second stream, I use a regression discontinuity design to study how cohort-based accelerator programs reshape entrepreneurial behaviors. Using data from Start-Up Chile, I find that accelerator participation significantly increases opportunity discovery behaviors—particularly among entrepreneurs with lower baseline self-efficacy, suggesting that accelerators can function as equalizers for underrepresented founders (*Start-Up Chile: Cohort Learning and Opportunity Discovery*, with M. Leatherbee & C. Eesley). A third project, forthcoming at *Academy of Management Journal*, examines how multiple team membership affects coordination in high-velocity entrepreneurial environments (with C. Zhang, N. Li, Y. Deng, & L. Yang).

I am eager to attend the Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp because my research sits squarely at the intersection of entrepreneurship economics, entrepreneurial finance, and development—the core topics of the program. The boot camp's emphasis on rigorous empirical methods for studying entrepreneurship aligns directly with my field experiment approach. I would particularly benefit from engaging with the program's lectures on entrepreneurial ecosystems and policy evaluation, which connect to both my Uganda intervention design and my Chile accelerator research. Exposure to the leading scholars in entrepreneurship economics—and to a cohort of PhD students pursuing related questions—would sharpen the theoretical framing and empirical strategy of my ongoing projects and help me develop new research directions on entrepreneurship policy in emerging markets.

NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp Selection Committee

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Xilan Zhang

Dear Brett and Selection Committee,

I enthusiastically recommend **Xilan Zhang** for the 2026 NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp. As Xilan's dissertation advisor at Stanford, I have worked closely with her for two years. She is an exceptionally productive and rigorous scholar whose research directly engages core questions in entrepreneurship and platform economics.

Research and Accomplishments

Xilan's dissertation examines how digital platforms design AI governance systems and how these choices shape entrepreneurial behavior in the creator economy. Using proprietary data from Kuaishou (China's second-largest short video platform), she employs field experiments and large-scale trace data to understand how algorithmic management and disclosure mechanisms affect platform-mediated entrepreneurs.

Her productivity is remarkable for a second-year student. She recently had a paper accepted at Academy of Management Journal. She is also conducting RCT fieldwork in Uganda studying entrepreneurial interventions, showing her range across both digital platforms and traditional entrepreneurship contexts.

Fit with Boot Camp

Xilan's work addresses fundamental questions in entrepreneurship economics: How do platform governance mechanisms shape entrepreneurial incentives? How do we causally identify the effects of entrepreneurial interventions? She combines strong causal inference training with exceptional field access, including a substantive research partnership with Kuaishou in Beijing.

The Boot Camp will strengthen her theoretical grounding in entrepreneurial finance and organizational economics, expose her to cutting-edge identification strategies, and connect her with the NBER entrepreneurship network. Her work on platform entrepreneurship, algorithmic management, and comparative institutional contexts would benefit enormously from engagement with the program's focus areas and faculty.

Assessment

I rank Xilan in the top 5% of doctoral students I have advised at Stanford. She combines technical rigor, theoretical creativity, and the professional maturity to execute complex field research. Her AMJ acceptance as a second-year student speaks to her exceptional promise.

I offer my strongest possible recommendation.

Sincerely,

Chuck

Chuck Eesley<http://chuckeesley.com>
Management Science & Engineering
Dept.<https://msande.stanford.edu/admissions/graduate/phd>
Stanford Technology Ventures Program<https://stvp.stanford.edu>