

## Factors affecting peasant entrepreneurs' intention in the Chinese context

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**Abstract** In the extant literature, research attention has been largely given to explore the issue of Chinese peasant entrepreneurship based on strategic entrepreneurial perspective. The current study examines the intention of Chinese peasant entrepreneurs based on entrepreneurial behavior perspective and hypothesizes that self-efficacy positively moderates the relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention and the relationship between institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention. An analysis of a sample of 298 Chinese peasants proved most of the hypotheses. Results show that the need for power has a positive influence on the entrepreneurial intentions of the selected low-social-status population. Results also reveal the positive effect of the institutional environment perceived by individuals on entrepreneurial intention. The finding indicates that the government can enhance the entrepreneurial intention of rural individuals by updating entrepreneurial policies, by training and education in entrepreneurial activities that target the rural masses, and by promoting a successful entrepreneurial model. Moreover, positive moderation of self-efficacy on the relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention is proven, which indicates that the effects of these two factors on entrepreneurial intention mutually reinforce each other. The finding also indicates that moderation of self-efficacy on the relationship between the institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention is negative that shows that self-efficacy and institutional environment can substitute for each other.

**Keywords** Need for power · Institutional environment · Self-efficacy · Entrepreneurial intention

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## Introduction

When the central government in 1976 began gradually loosening control over a few industries (Lu and Tao 2010), modern forms of entrepreneurship emerged in China. The continuing transformation from a planned to a market economy facilitated a concomitant increase in jobs, consumption, and the production of goods with the result that entrepreneurial activities began to be an accepted part of the economy (McMillan and Woodruff 2002). Since then, research studies examining entrepreneurial behavior in China have been published in academic journals that focus on entrepreneurship or strategy (Li and Zhang 2007; Bruton and Ahlstrom 2003), but a large proportion of the studies focus on entrepreneurial activities, such as technology entrepreneurship initiated by urban residents (Li and Atuahene-Gima 2001; Wright et al. 2008). Non-city dwellers, or so-called Chinese peasants, who form a group that constitutes a significant portion of China's population according to government statistics, present a worthwhile area of investigation since their behavior can promote or impede the country's future socioeconomic development. Scholarly interest in the entrepreneurship of this group will repair the regrettable omission in entrepreneurial research in China (Yu et al. 2013). Though general theoretical studies and empirical research on entrepreneurial intention are abundant, this study fills a gap by focusing on the entrepreneurial intention of Chinese peasants.

Reliable models for entrepreneurial activities have been developed. To establish theories based on different research objects, several studies have relied on, or modified, the entrepreneurial activity model developed by Shapero and Sokol (1982) and the theory of planned behavior developed by Ajzen (1991). Because modern-day Chinese peasants tend to be confined to their specific context, both models require us to adjust the core variables used to describe the decision-making process leading to entrepreneurship among Chinese peasants. The confinement of residents to their rural areas, with housing and families located in home villages and on plots of land which they may farm themselves or share with agricultural workers, indicates the uniqueness of their entrepreneurial decisions.

With this unique context in mind, three appropriate characteristics were chosen. The need for power, the institutional environment, and individual self-efficacy were selected as antecedent variables of entrepreneurial intentions. Since the need for power and institutional environment correspond to perceived venture desirability, and self-efficacy corresponds to perceived venture feasibility, the study posits a new theoretical framework through which the influence of desirability and feasibility on possible entrepreneurial intentions in a specific social group can be studied.

## Theoretical background

The anthropological definition of "peasant" is broad, and the concept includes rural poor, rural residents, serfs, agricultural laborers, fisher folk, pastoralists, and small-scale miners (Firth 1946). The term can be used in a pejorative sense to refer to members of lower socioeconomic class (Edelman 2013). The word "peasant" has been established as an analytic category since the 1950s (Silverman 1979). Peasants are generally defined as agricultural producers who retain effective control of land (Wolf 1955) and whose goal is subsistence, not reinvestment (Redfield 1956). Nevertheless, the broad concept of the term peasant still involves different "mixes" of peasant classes or

ethnic groups in different societies (Mintz 1973). In China, the word “peasant” in English is still widely used, probably because of its historic significance during the Cultural Revolution. We continue to use it here in this study because of its continued use in state published documents and studies.

Entrepreneurial studies related to peasants are scarce (Yu et al. 2013). Fan et al. (1996) examined the characteristics of Chinese peasant entrepreneurs and obstacles they encounter. Using the term “rural entrepreneur,” other scholars have focused on both challenges in the entrepreneurial process of peasants and relative solutions (Van Horn and Harvey 1998; Meccheri and Pelloni 2006; Yu et al. 2013). No study has yet analyzed the entrepreneurial intention or motivation of peasants, which is the research focus of this article.

In cognition psychology the concept of propensity is used to reflect an individual’s belief that motivates engaging in a specific behavior (Krueger 2000). Entrepreneurial intention is a special propensity, and as such, can guide an individual’s attention to objectives, paths, and methods concerning behavior; thus, propensity may lead to subsequent actions (Bird 1988). Entrepreneurial intention is the first link in the entrepreneurial process (Liñán and Chen 2009; Lee and Wong 2004). Entrepreneurial intention reflects an entrepreneur’s basic assumptions regarding entrepreneurial actions and the social context (Krueger and Carsrud 1993).

Shapero and Sokol (1982) proposed an entrepreneurial event formation model that is the generally acknowledged theoretical source of entrepreneurial intention research; perceived desirability and perceived feasibility are used as the major antecedents of entrepreneurial intention. Several related studies (Krueger 1993; Guerrero et al. 2008; Liñán and Santos 2007) of undergraduate students proved the relationships.

Ajzen’s theory of planned behavior (1991) is another relied-upon theoretical source of entrepreneurial intention research. It posits that three factors influence entrepreneurial intention: the individual’s attitude toward the behavior, the individual’s subjective norms, and the individual’s perception of behavioral control. This model has been supported by many research studies (Souitaris et al. 2007; Liñán 2008; Liñán and Chen 2009).

The entrepreneurial event formation model and the theory of planned behavior do not contradict one another, as several studies have pointed out. Krueger et al. (2000) proved the existence of numerous structural relationships between them and asserted they can coexist: “Both of these two intention-based models offer researchers a valuable tool for understanding the process of organizational emergence” (Krueger et al. 2000: 424). Liñán (2008) also argued that the two models overlap considerably, “Shapero’s construct of perceived venture desirability is equivalent to Ajzen’s determinants of attitude towards the behavior and subjective norms; and [the construct of] perceived venture feasibility proposed by Shapero is similar to Ajzen’s perceived behavioral control or to the idea of perceived self-efficacy” (Liñán 2008: 259–260).

Research since 2000 has studied the influence of exogenous variables on the perceptions of entrepreneurial desirability and feasibility. These exogenous variables are related to personal experience or background, such as experience in entrepreneurial training projects (Souitaris et al. 2007), close valuation, social valuation, entrepreneurial skills (Liñán 2008), human resources, other demographic elements, (Liñán and Chen 2009) and social capital (Liñán and Santos 2007). Another series of studies has explored the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and several psychological traits, such as the need for achievement (Kristiansen and Indarti 2004), self-efficacy (Zhao et al. 2005), and locus of control (Obschonka et al. 2010).

Lee et al. (2011) modified the variables in the classical activity model in a recent study. The following variables were employed relative to the desirability factor: personal innovation orientation, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy along with organizational, innovative climate and technical excellence incentives. And they proposed self-efficacy an equivalent of the feasibility factor. Results verified the hypothesis.

A drawback in most of these empirical studies to date has been in the sampling, specifically in using university students as samples. Although students can be categorized by country, background, level, and major (Guerrero et al. 2008), they generally lack the social and business acumen necessary to start a business. Conclusions drawn from student samples cannot have strong universality when used to prove entrepreneurial intention models.

For this study of Chinese peasants, some conceptual problems need to be considered. Although the Shapero and Sokol and Ajzen models were followed by most of the research, the variables chosen have become diversified. When Chinese peasants are sampled, the frameworks employed require major adjustments in the choice of variables. Chinese peasants are generally regarded as rarely receiving higher education (Biao 2007) and often lack work experience in the industries in which they aspire to establish a business; therefore, the variables generally used to study individual backgrounds are almost entirely unsuitable. Psychological traits that affect entrepreneurial intention are difficult to establish among Chinese peasants and their incipient entrepreneurial behaviors almost impossible to measure, largely because their living conditions and social status are so different from those of other groups (Fan et al. 1996). Only the individual psychological traits of Chinese peasant entrepreneurs themselves can reliably be measured.

Another consideration was to avoid inappropriate models. Instead of mechanically applying the current entrepreneurial event-formation model or the theory of planned behavior (both grounded in middle-to-upper-class Western capitalistic models originating from countries with a longer tradition of upward social mobility), we delved further into the influential elements of entrepreneurial intention in the Chinese context.

## Variables and hypotheses

### Rural and peasant issues in China: an overall view

People who live in rural areas and work on land assigned to them by the State, the official owner, were defined by Fan et al. (1996) as “peasants.” Two realities about the modern context for Chinese peasants are the power contrast between cities and the countryside, and the political confinement of rural residents.

Regardless of communist rhetoric or stated intentions, the overall contrast between rural and urban areas in China has a long history, with officials and political rulers having almost always resided in cities, (for example, see Xu 1965). The contrast tended to increase after the People’s Republic of China was founded. To a certain extent, the Great Cultural Revolution can be seen as a failed attempt to lessen this contrast. As communist doctrine evolved, the liberalization of the Chinese economy has, despite overall improvement in material circumstances, reinforced the inequality. To vigorously promote the industrialization of the nation, modern China draws resources from the

countryside and invests them in industries that are mainly established in cities (Knight 1995), thereby intensifying the difference in economic levels between urban and rural areas.

The increase in income and consumption of rural residents was and remains far smaller than that of urban residents, but neither do rural workers have the option of moving their place of residence to cities. Mandated systems of household registration and land attachment have confined peasants to the countryside (Chan and Zhang 1999). China’s household registration system is closely related to the social welfare of common people, labor security, and the land distribution system. Regardless of the possible positive intent behind the establishment of such systems, Chinese peasants consider the restrictions burdensome and, as a rule, encounter major challenges in obtaining rights similar to those of other social groups. One can infer that peasants are relegated to a low power-status position. Data in Fig. 1, which compares the average income and consumption of urban and rural residents, shows that although the averages of common people increased after 1978, the average income and consumption of rural residents have been markedly lower than those of urban residents.

Because of its advantage over other models, this study employed the method of Lee et al. (2011) but used, as variables, relative elements drawn directly from the research context of Chinese peasants, rather than variables influencing entrepreneurial intention used in traditional models. Need for power was considered an attitude toward entrepreneurial behavior, and institutional environment as perceived by peasants was considered a subjective norm. Both variables are equivalent to perceived venture desirability in Shapero’s model. Self-efficacy was regarded as a form of perceived behavioral control equivalent to perceived venture feasibility in Shapero’s model. Using the three variables, three hypotheses were constructed.

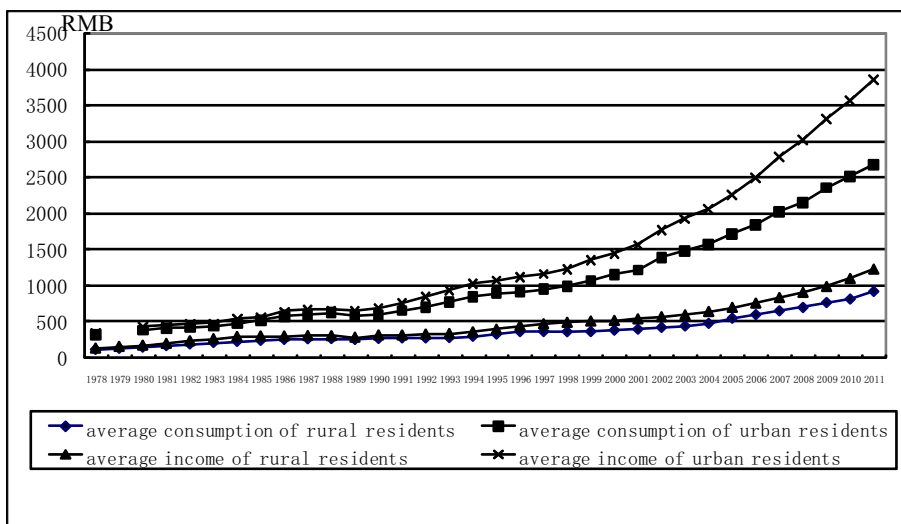


Fig. 1 Comparison between the average consumption and income of Chinese urban and rural residents

## Need for power

Since power is an important element in Chinese society, the need for power was considered an attitude toward entrepreneurial behavior. Chinese peasants, at the bottom of society's power distribution hierarchy, are generally eager to improve their power status. The eagerness develops into a need for power to enhance their aspirations for entrepreneurship.

Power as the center of human affairs is a key concept in social sciences (Turner 2005), and an important dimension that affects cultural differences (Spencer-Oatey 1997). The terms status, dominance and authority are used synonymously with power, but not as frequently (Spencer-Oatey 1996). Definitions of power used in previous studies emphasized an individual's influence or control over others. French and Raven (1959) pointed out that power is an individual's maximum potential ability to influence others. Brown and Gilman (1972) maintained that "one person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other" (1972: 255), and such control can cause others to modify their behavior (Foucault 1982). Power may be an authorized or unauthorized form of material control imposed through economic distribution and physical force, or a form of metaphysical control exerted through metaphysical forces subscribed to by others (Brown and Levinson 1987). Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) stressed that power involves a comparison of the status of individuals. If power is, therefore, a connection between people, the linkage perspective means power depends on rights and obligations of the players in that linkage (Spencer-Oatey 1996).

Cultural studies assert that China is a country with high power distance, as compared with Western societies (Pye 1985; Tjosvold and Sun 2005). High power-distance societies have strict social hierarchies, and with most privileges reserved for individuals at the top. Individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy respect, even revere, their superiors.

Research studies on the need for power have sometimes used other terms. In the in-depth studies by Winter, the term "power motive" was described as an individual's need for "establishing, maintaining, or restoring his power—that is, his impact, control or influence over another person, group of persons or the world at large" (1973: 250). McClelland and Burnham (1976) employed the term "power motivation" to refer to an individual's psychological desire for power, to "have impact, to be strong and influential" (McClelland and Burnham 1976: 102). Researchers equated the "need for power" to "power motive" or "power motivation" in subsequent studies (McClelland et al. 1982; Hirschowitz and Nell 1983, 1985).

Power is inseparable from control, according to generally accepted analyses, but research linking need for power and entrepreneurial activities is uncommon. In that the possession of a strong need for power indicates desire to control all that involves them as much as possible, the need for power is similar to internal locus of control, and several studies have been conducted on locus of control (or control belief) and entrepreneurial activities. When they consider putting up a business, individuals pay attention to factors such as their ability to deal with the challenges of entrepreneurial activity (Kristiansen and Indarti 2004). Furthermore, individuals with an internal locus of control consider their life outcomes the result of their own efforts (De Pillis and Reardon 2007); have a clear vision of long-term business development plans

(Kristiansen and Indarti 2004; Entrialgo et al. 2000); and engage in actual control processes that form entrepreneurial intention, which further develops into entrepreneurial actions (Obschonka et al. 2010).

Power also is related to social status, and the need for power to the need for high status (Crockett 1966; Winter 1973). In China, where many major economic and other resources are possessed by a small set of individuals with great power, most of the other citizens are eager to increase their social status to control resources (Hwang 1987). Chinese peasants, at the bottom of the power distribution hierarchy, want control of resources but face hurdles in trying to increase their power through agriculture or by urban employment. In the Chinese context, itinerant urban workers cannot easily move themselves or their families to the cities for more lucrative jobs. Peasants' success through entrepreneurship may be a suitable option for their achievement of power. Hypothesizing the need for power motivates peasants to engage in entrepreneurial activities, we propose:

**Hypothesis 1** The need for power of peasants has a positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.

### **Institutional environment**

In the Chinese context, institutional environment is important because the possibility of peasants engaging in entrepreneurial ventures has increased considerably in the past 20 years. China has modified its economic policies during past decades as the once-dominant planned economy has transformed into a market economy, and positions and interconnections of market entities changed. Despite restrictions, peasants have an increased autonomy, some peasants, for example, leaving traditional crop planting for production in multiple forms (Nee 1992). In the time that China's industrial landscape underwent adjustments, changes in government policy helped private enterprise enter monopolized industries and gave birth to provide novel business opportunities (Li et al. 2008).

The extensive definition of institutional environment includes macro-level socio-environmental factors, such as political, legal, and cultural elements (Lim et al. 2010) that can extend or limit the range of entrepreneurial opportunities. Social regulations, attitudes, and other elements of the institutional environment affect which resources that entrepreneurs can employ (Manolova et al. 2008; Welter 2011). A classic research study on this issue introduced the concept developed by Kostova (1997) and Scott (1995) that the institutional environment consists of regulatory, cognitive, and normative dimensions. Studies by Busenitz et al. (2000), Manolova et al. (2008), and De Clercq et al. (2010) verified the reliability and validity of these three separate dimensions.

Through the adoption of this conceptual framework, we derived the hypothesis that an appropriate institutional environment has a positive effect on the entrepreneurial attitude of peasants. A discussion of the three dimensions is appropriate.

The regulatory dimension primarily involves government laws, regulations, and policies on entrepreneurial activity. Current policy support for the entrepreneurial



activities of peasants includes a reduction in the enterprise registration fee as well as low-interest loans, which do generate resources and reduce risks for individual entrepreneurs (Busenitz et al. 2000). By helping potential entrepreneurs realize that they can obtain external assistance, the policies enhance the attractiveness of entrepreneurship.

The cognitive dimension refers to the knowledge and techniques about entrepreneurial activities possessed by most people at the local level. The environment for potential entrepreneurs will increase considerably when a majority of the region's population acquires the understanding and skills related to entrepreneurial activities. Institutionalized knowledge, by contrast, refers to the specific knowledge possessed or shared by most people (Busenitz et al. 2000). As potential entrepreneurs obtain relevant information on entrepreneurial opportunities and resources, and enterprise management and operations, their attraction to entrepreneurial activity will increase. When the workers necessary for entrepreneurial development are easy to obtain, for example, individuals will realize the convenience of launching an entrepreneurial activity in the region.

The normative dimension refers to the general view by the locals in the region about entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurs relative to the social culture and ideology. Ideology related to enterprise operation has a significant influence on entrepreneurial activity (Manolova et al. 2008; Busenitz et al. 2000). If the local population approves of entrepreneurial activity and provides strong, positive feedback, the attractiveness of entrepreneurial activity in the region will be enhanced. On the other hand, the passion for entrepreneurship would dampen if most locals viewed entrepreneurial activity as an illicit or anti-social attempt to gain exorbitant profit. This effect is critical because in Chinese culture individuals are expected to act in accord with people's judgment.

**Hypothesis 2** A positive institutional environment as perceived by peasants has a positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.

### **Self-efficacy**

In entrepreneurial intention research, self-efficacy has been thoroughly investigated, finding that perceived behavioral control is compatible with perceived self-efficacy (Ajzen 1987). Self-efficacy reflects an individual's ability to execute specific actions and is directly connected to competence and control within context (Krueger and Brazeal 1994). Because self-efficacy reflects one's confidence about performance, it relates to an individual's self-judgment with respect to taking action (Boyd and Vozikis 1994).

Self-efficacy is considered closely connected to entrepreneurial intention in entrepreneurial research (Prodan and Drnovsek 2010), and is used as a direct variable to influence entrepreneurial intention (Krueger and Brazeal 1994; Krueger et al. 2000; Sequeira 2007). Empirical studies rarely have examined the moderation effect of self-efficacy on other variables and entrepreneurial intention. To address this situation, Lee et al. (2011) studied self-efficacy's moderation effect on the relationship between job satisfaction and entrepreneurial intention, and we adopted their research framework to



explore self-efficacy's moderation effect on the relationship between the need for power and institutional environment.

Shapero and Sokol (1982) indicated that perceived venture desirability and perceived venture feasibility interact, such that venture desirability will be reduced if feasibility is low. Although the authors did not conduct further theoretical and empirical analysis), an empirical study by Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011) found that the interaction of perceived feasibility and perceived desirability has a negative impact on entrepreneurial intention.

The need for power and institutional environment were regarded in the present study as attitudes toward entrepreneurial behavior and as the subjective norms of Ajzen's (1991) model, as well as the equivalent to perceived venture desirability in Shapero's model. Self-efficacy, regarded as perceived behavioral control in Ajzen's (1991) model, is believed to correspond to perceived venture feasibility in Shapero's model. Thus, the moderation effect of self-efficacy is in line with the original theory proposed by Shapero and Sokol (1982) and in accord with Fitzsimmons and Douglas' (2011) theoretical research.

The need for power and entrepreneurial intention among Chinese peasants are closely related mainly because Chinese peasants are at the bottom of the power distribution hierarchy in China. The process in which the strong aspirations of Chinese peasants to change their power status develop into entrepreneurial desirability is related to their judgment on the feasibility of entrepreneurial behavior. This process begins in ambiguity and uncertainty (Sequeira 2007), and uncertainties tend to hinder entrepreneurial behavior (Wilson et al. 2007). The ongoing entrepreneurial activities, such as opportunity identification, resource access, enterprise creation and management formation, are complex and uncertain (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). The strong need for power cannot develop into venture intention if the uncertainty of entrepreneurial opportunity is perceived as so large that the corresponding behaviors are too difficult for an individual to control. However, when faced with challenging situations a peasant can enhance his or her persistence level and coping efforts if he or she has a high level of self-efficacy (Beefink et al. 2012); he or she can thereby obtain increased confidence with respect to entrepreneurial activities (Sequeira 2007).

The preceding analysis suggests that the effect of institutional environment on entrepreneurial intention mainly originates in the support or restriction provided by that environment. The moderation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention is similar to its moderation effect on the relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention. This phenomenon indicates that stimulating individual entrepreneurial intentions would be difficult, even with a favorable institutional environment, when an individual is uncertain of his behavior control. An individual's high degree of self-efficacy turns perception of a positive institutional environment into willingness to implement entrepreneurial behavior. We hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3** The self-efficacy of peasants moderates the relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention; the higher the self-efficacy is, the greater the influence of the need for power on entrepreneurial intention.

**Hypothesis 4** The self-efficacy of peasants moderates the relationship between institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention; the higher the self-efficacy is, the greater the influence of institutional environment on entrepreneurial intention.

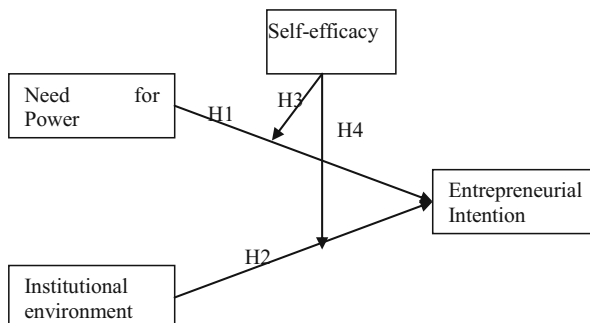
Figure 2 describes the research framework that summarizes the variables, relationships, and hypotheses.

## Sample and measure

### Sample

This study was conducted in a rural area outside Beijing. As China's political, economic, and cultural center, the metropolis statistically has a more advanced level of economic development than nearby regions, but the percentage of permanent residents in Beijing is also lower than that of other Chinese regions. With continued urbanization, the number of peasants in the Beijing region decreases despite the influx of permanent residents. According to the Yearbook of Beijing city, at the end of 2011 peasants numbered 2.779 million, or 13.8 % of permanent residents. The average annual income of peasants was 14,736.0 Yuan, two and a half times lower than that of urban residents at 37,124.0 Yuan, and the annual consumption level of peasants was 11,078.0 Yuan, almost half that of the urban population's 21,984.0 Yuan.

Interview was the primary method of investigation and data collection. A questionnaire, based on the qualitative information discussed above, was designed and distributed to 417 participants, out of which 298 completed questionnaires were collected by November 2012, a response rate of approximately 0.71. The 10-member research team made door-to-door interviews, of adults only, in the rural areas of Beijing during September to November 2012. Initial analysis of 50 questionnaires collected by late September found no obvious resistance to certain questions or excessive concentration on specific categories among those sampled. Table 1 summarizes data from the sample.



**Fig. 2** A research framework of variables and hypotheses

**Table 1** Statistical distribution of sample

Distribution feature	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	66.4 %
Female	33.6 %
<b>Age</b>	
Below 30	37.2 %
30–40	31.9 %
Above 40	30.9 %
<b>Education level</b>	
High school and below	37.9 %
Junior college	39.6 %
University	13.8 %
Graduate and above	8.7 %
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married	77.5 %
Single	22.5 %
<b>Current career</b>	
Farming	15 0.1 %
Regular outside employment	17.8 %
Employee in private enterprise	36.2 %
Unemployed	27.5 %
Other	3.4 %
<b>Annual household income (10,000 Yuan)</b>	
>0, ≤5	71.5 %
>5, ≤10	20.1 %
>10, ≤20	5.0 %
>20	3.4 %

*N*=417 participants; questionnaire return = 298; the response rate was about 0.71

## Measure

*Entrepreneurial intention* The entrepreneurial intention Likert scale used in Liñán and Chen's (2009) empirical research, which this study adopted, includes six items (see the Appendix). The mean of the six items was utilized as the value of the dependent variable. The scale's reliability was proven excellent by Liñán and Chen (2009), with Cronbach's alpha reaching 0.943. Cronbach's alpha reached 0.948 in the present study; such value demonstrates excellent reliability.

*Need for power* The binary scale developed by Good and Good (1972) was adopted, with some modification. We transformed it into a Likert scale for regression analysis. Sampling asked subjects to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the descriptions, allowing the obtained value to reflect the level of the need for power. Since the Good and Good's scale was developed for university students, some indexes were unsuitable for the peasant questionnaire, such as "I would not enjoy serving on a local

school board or on the board of trustees for a college or university.” The 25 indexes that remained, after deleting three unrelated ones, are presented in the attachment. The mean of the 25 items was seen as the value of the need for power in the regression model. Cronbach’s alpha, which reached 0.850 and indicated excellent reliability, was used in this study. Good and Good’s scale employed the KR-20 coefficient, which reached an 0.89 reliability index.

*Institutional environment* The institutional environment scale employed by Busenitz et al. (2000) and Manolova et al. (2008) was utilized, with items from each of the three dimensions. Five items in the regulatory dimension investigated whether the local government supports entrepreneurial activities. Four items in the cognitive dimension were used to study how the regional population understood or acquired information and knowledge on entrepreneurial activities. Four items in the normative dimension analyzed comments from the local population about entrepreneurial activities (see Appendix). Respondents were required to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with all of the descriptions, with a 1 denoting complete disagreement and 5 denoting complete agreement. The Cronbach’s alphas in the three dimensions had been 0.76, 0.78, and 0.81 in the study of Busenitz et al. (2000). The Cronbach’s alphas in the study of Manolova et al. (2008) were 0.75, 0.80, and 0.81. The Cronbach’s alphas in the present research are 0.926, 0.886, and 0.871; these values indicate excellent reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for institutional environment because the concept of institutional environment has three dimensions. The analysis result was satisfactory (CMIN/DF=2.984 (P=0.000), GFI=0.917, IFI=0.957, CFI=0.957, NFI=0.950, AGFI=0.878, RMSEA=0.082). The mean of the items in each dimension was then used as the value of the dimension, and the mean of the three dimensions as the value of institutional environment in the regression model.

*Self-efficacy* The self-efficacy scale developed by Wilson et al. (2007) was employed, requiring respondents to compare themselves in six aspects (see Appendix), with a 1 indicating “much worse than others” and 5 for “far better than others.” The mean of the six items was calculated as the value of the need for power in the regression model. Three groups had been investigated by Wilson et al. (2007); the Cronbach’s alpha of middle/high school students was 0.79, that of MBA students was 0.82, and that of undergraduate and graduate students was 0.884. The Cronbach’s alpha in the present study is 0.884, an indication of excellent reliability.

*Control variables* The foundations of power include many layers, such as physical strength, wealth, age, gender, state, military experience, and family (Brown and Gilman 1972). Many of these have been studied and restudied in entrepreneurial research (Cassar 2006; Gupta et al. 2009; Hoang and Antoncic 2003). We chose five control variables as relevant for our analysis.

Age: A person’s years of age, closely related to social experience and the cost of entrepreneurial opportunity, has a complex influence on entrepreneurial intention (Lee et al. 2011). Previous research found a comparatively intense desire for entrepreneurship among 35-year-old individuals (Sequeira 2007). The 34.13 years average age of those sampled for this study was close to that.

**Gender:** Academic studies of the career choice of males and females have proffered different conclusions (DeMartino and Barbato 2003; Carter et al. 2003; ; Zhao et al. 2005). A dummy variable was used in this study to measure gender with age as a control variable (1, male; 0, female).

**Marital status:** Marital status is regarded as an significant forecasting index in entrepreneurial activity (Davidsson and Honig 2003). Married entrepreneurs may be risk-averse and withdraw from high-risk projects (Joern and Philipp 2006). However, they can obtain support from their spouses (Constant et al. 2004). In this study, marital status was used as a control variable (1, married; 0, single).

**Education level:** Education level is closely related to individual qualifications. Bates (1990) considers education level the most powerful index in human resources in the determination of the continuance of an enterprise. According to Davidsson and Honig (2003), the education level of an individual can be used as an index to predict entrepreneurial activity. Formal education level was used as a control variable in this study. Four levels of school attendance were set (1, high school and below; 2, junior college; 3, university; 4 graduate and above).

**Work experience:** Previous work experience in small enterprise may enhance entrepreneurial intention (Wagner 2004) and is an index of human resource as well as a determinant of individual entrepreneurship ability (Pamela 2005). The measurement of this variable was simplified to a yes/no statement whether the participant had worked in an enterprise not directly related to subsistence farming (1, yes; 0, no).

**Social network:** A number of studies have shown a correlation of social networks in the entrepreneurial process, most obviously in the supply of resources (Hoang and Antoncic 2003; Ahuja 2000). The measurement proposed by Davidsson and Honig (2003) was adopted in this study. Three dummy variables were used: whether parents had or have their own enterprise (1, yes; 0, no), whether other family members had or have their own enterprise (1, yes; 0, no), and whether close friends or neighbors had or have their own enterprise (1, yes; 0, no). The sum of the three variables was used as the value of social network.

**Household income:** Previous research has emphasized that desire for wealth stimulates entrepreneurial activity (Amit et al. 2000). Since the subject is a low-income group, likelihood of entrepreneurial activity may be stimulated when the peasants' annual household income is low.

## Results

The correlation index among the different variables involved in the research, shown in Table 2, has an appropriate value. Among the independent variables no correlation index of excessively high value was found. Therefore, the data did not display evident collinearity and could be used in further regression analysis.

Several regression models were implemented in accordance with the study's hypotheses. Only the control variable in the regression model was included in Model 1. The three variables, need for power, institutional environment and self-efficacy, were added in Model 2 to test the main effect of the independent and dependent variables.

**Table 2** Table of correlation of various variables

	EI	NP	IEnv	Self-efficacy	Age	Gender	Marital status	Education level	Work experience	Social network	Household income
Entrepreneurial intention (EI)	1										
Need for power (NP)	0.478**	1									
Institut. environment (IEnv)	0.510**	0.423**	1								
Self-efficacy	0.408**	0.511**	0.232**	1							
Age	-0.123*	-0.078	-0.024	-0.159**	1						
Gender	-0.010	0.155**	-0.027	0.144*	-0.061	1					
Marital status	-0.076	-0.014	0.012	-0.067	0.589**	-0.042	1				
Education level	0.173**	0.165**	0.075	0.176**	-0.448**	-0.013	-0.247**	1			
Work experience	0.014	0.036	0.004	0.097	-0.257**	0.004	-0.146*	0.258**	1		
Social network	0.211**	0.112	0.195**	0.273**	-0.042	-0.043	0.068	0.209**	0.075	1	
Household income	0.027	0.020	0.034	0.093	-0.184**	0.032	-0.060	0.296**	0.086	0.261**	1

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The interactive items of self-efficacy and the need for power as well as those of self-efficacy and institutional environment were added to Model 3 to test the interactive effect. The regression results are presented in Table 3. Collinearity analysis revealed that no serious collinearity exists among the variables. For instance, the largest variance inflation factor in model 3 is 2.036; this value indicates insignificant collinearity.

The results confirm the presence of a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Models 2 and 3 indicate a positive correlation between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention ( $b=0.221, p<0.001$  for Model 2;  $b=0.259, p<0.001$  for Model 3) and the positive influence of institutional environment on entrepreneurial intention ( $b=0.354, p<0.001$  for model 2;  $b=0.315, p<0.001$  for model 3). Therefore, H1 and H2 are verified.

The interaction of self-efficacy and the need for power has a significant impact on entrepreneurial intention ( $b=0.201, p<0.001$  for Model 3). R2 in Model 3 increases after the interactive items are added to the models (from 0.374 to 0.399). Therefore, H3 is verified. The interaction of institutional environment and self-efficacy is also significant ( $b=-0.208, p<0.001$  for Model 3). A negative value was obtained, which is contrary to our hypothesis. Therefore, H4 is not verified.

Two groups of individuals, one with high self-efficacy and the other with low self-efficacy, were sampled (self-efficacy points higher than the average value plus the standard deviation and self-efficacy points lower than average value minus the standard deviation). The linear relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial

**Table 3** Regression results

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control variable			
Age	-0.063	-0.032	-0.042
Gender	-0.002	-0.061	-0.040
Marital status	-0.033	-0.047	-0.048
Education level	0.128†	0.061	0.056
Work experience	-0.050	-0.046	-0.048
Social network	0.207**	0.067	0.079
Household income	-0.074	-0.046	-0.043
Main effect			
Need for power		0.221**	0.259**
Institutional environment		0.354**	0.315**
Self-efficacy		0.193**	0.235**
Interactive effect			
Need for power×Self-efficacy			0.201**
Institutional environment×Self-efficacy			-0.208**
Adjusted R Square	0.051	0.374	0.399
F	3.290**	18.773**	17.417**

\*\*means  $p<0.01$

\*means  $p<0.05$

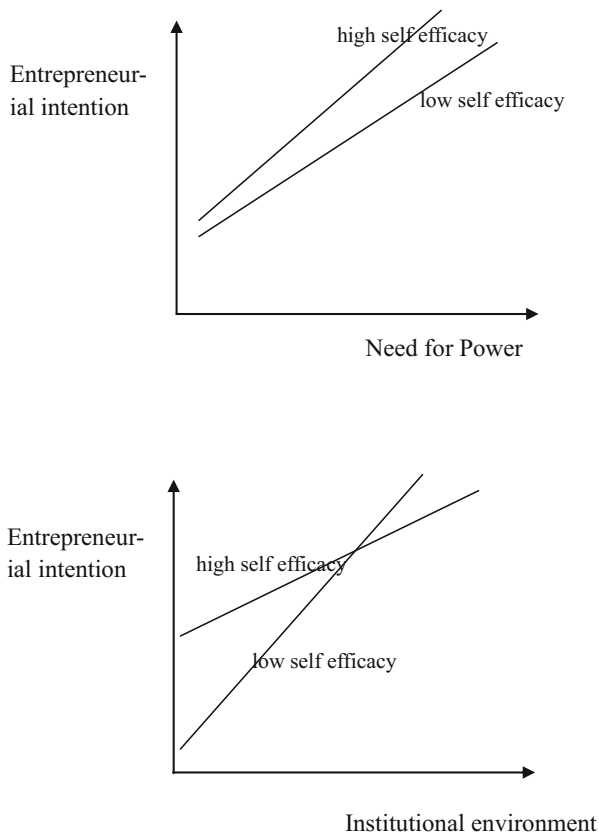
†means  $p<0.1$



intention and that between institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention were simulated to determine the moderation effect of self-efficacy (Fig. 3). The effect of the need for power on entrepreneurial intention is stronger in the sample group with high self-efficacy than in the group with low self-efficacy. This result indicates that the effects of the need for power and self-efficacy are mutual reinforcing. The effect of institutional environment on entrepreneurial intention is strong in the group with low self-efficacy. This result indicates that the effects of institutional environment and self-efficacy mutually replace each other.

## Discussion

Unbalanced distribution of power is a longstanding phenomenon in China, and thus those with low status have a strong need for power. The only way to the top for most Chinese in the past was by taking the imperial examination and becoming a member of the upper class. Anyone who obtained wealth through business operations, including scholars, farmers, workers and businessmen, remained vulnerable in the power hierarchy. Although business, historically, was at the bottom of the hierarchy in traditional Chinese society, today it is considered a vital component in the domestic market



**Fig. 3** The moderations of self-efficacy

economy. Business no longer is held in low esteem. The threshold for entry into private enterprise in China is lower than that for other classifications and entrepreneurship is feasible. The results of this research show that the need for power has a positive correlation to the entrepreneurial intention of the sampled low-social-status peasant population, and the data verify a significant correlation between these two elements.

The study also verified the positive effect of institutional environment, as perceived by individuals, on entrepreneurial intention. An individual's choice favoring entrepreneurship is related to the cognition of entrepreneurial activity and to the possibility of external support. In these results, the regression coefficient of institutional environment in entrepreneurial intention was slightly higher than that of the need for power. The data on the institutional environment, with its regulatory, cognitive, and normative dimensions, suggests that the establishment of institutions at the macro level can motivate entrepreneurship among low social status people. This shows that government can enhance the individuals' entrepreneurial intention through proper investment in entrepreneurial policies, training and education in entrepreneurial activities that target the masses, and the promotion of a successful entrepreneur model.

The influence of self-efficacy is different from our initial assumption. Research shows that self-efficacy can significantly moderate the relationship between the need for power and entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, the need for power has a strong influence on entrepreneurial intention when self-efficacy is high; a result which supports our second hypothesis. In addition, this research finding is different from that of Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011), who argued that the interaction between perceived desirability and perceived feasibility has a positive effect on individuals with promotion focus but a negative effect on those with preventative focus. Their research also found that the entrepreneurial intention formation process is mainly the process of screening and acting on venture ideas developed by individuals who have recognized an entrepreneurial opportunity. Individuals need to adopt preventative focus in the process, which results in the negative effect. By contrast, in this study, we argued that entrepreneurial intention is the first link in the entrepreneurial process according to the nature of entrepreneurial intention defined in the extant literature (e.g., Liñán and Chen 2009; Lee and Wong 2004). If entrepreneurial intention formation is the idea-generation stage, it is also concerned with the manifestation of entrepreneurial ideas (Bird 1988; Fitzsimmons and Douglas 2011). As shown in the analysis of our data, the adaptation of promotion focus by individuals results in a positive influence on the interaction between perceived desirability and perceived feasibility.

The moderation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between institutional environment and entrepreneurial intention is the opposite of that postulated in our hypothesis. This may be because the components of institutional environment do not entirely belong to perceived desirability; regulatory and cognition dimensions of institutional environment are related to both desire for entrepreneurship and control of entrepreneurial activity. The possibility of entrepreneurship increases as policies beneficial to entrepreneurship are implemented and local people acquire the knowledge and techniques necessary. Self-efficacy and some components of institutional

environment are mutual replacements as perceived feasibility factors. Entrepreneurial intention may even increase when the venture feasibility perceived by an individual decreases, accompanied by a huge increase in self-efficacy.

The study has two limitations. First, we considered characteristics of Chinese peasants for whom the need for power could be the most important feature. However, the results might be more convincing if the demand for achievement, wealth, and other elements were integrated into the model and then compared with the need for power. Second, our samples were confined to rural areas around Beijing, which may not be representative of other parts of China. Researchers should consider these limitations in future studies.

## Conclusion

This study extended the theoretical framework of entrepreneurial intention research and provided a multilevel perspective of an individual's psychological processes in engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Lee et al. (2011) pointed out that "individual or organizational variables alone do not sufficiently explain the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial intentions" (Lee et al. 2011: 133). A new model wherein the need for power, institutional environment, and self-efficacy are used as antecedents of entrepreneurial intention was developed. These three variables not only affect entrepreneurial intention directly but also exert a mutual interactive influence on one another. The need for power, institutional environment and self-efficacy correspond to perceived venture desirability and perceived venture feasibility in a classical model, respectively. Thus, this study offers a new understanding of a specific group in relation to the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship. Because the three variables influence individual decision-making at different contextual levels and affect one another together with individual entrepreneurial intention, the study can be viewed as an exploration of the influence of entrepreneurial context on entrepreneurial activities. This connection was initially posited theoretically by Welter (2011) but was not followed with sufficient in-depth study.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

#### Entrepreneurial intention

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement)

- 1) I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur
- 2) My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur
- 3) I will make every effort to start and run my own firm
- 4) I am determined to create a firm in the future

- 5) I have very seriously thought of starting a firm
- 6) I have the firm intention to start a firm some day

The results of confirmatory factor analysis are: CMIN/DF=12.335 ( $P=0.000$ ), GFI=0.892, IFI=0.977, CFI=0.944, NFI=0.939, RMSEA=0.195.

#### Need for power

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement)

- 1) I would probably enjoy being elected to an influential political position.
- 2) I would not enjoy developing the regulations governing things like governmental or educational institutions.
- 3) I would not enjoy supervising other people.
- 4) I would enjoy functioning in a high-level, decision-making capacity.
- 5) I would enjoy influencing the career decisions of my associates.
- 6) I would not enjoy directing decision-making processes.
- 7) I would not enjoy functioning in a managerial or executive capacity for a corporation.
- 8) It is unlikely that I will ever seek a leadership position.
- 9) I would enjoy making the arrangements for an organization's activities.
- 10) I would enjoy deciding how institutional procedures or regulations should be interpreted.
- 11) I would enjoy influencing the social relationships of my associates.
- 12) I would dislike managing or being in charge of the financial resources of an institution.
- 13) I would enjoy deciding upon educational or social standards.
- 14) I would dislike having to make the decisions concerning who should be promoted.
- 15) I would dislike having to set the work-schedules or the work-standards for other people.
- 16) I would enjoy assessing the qualifications of trainees in my field.
- 17) I would be interested in being involved in personnel decisions concerning who should be hired for certain jobs.
- 18) If I were in a professional field, I would not wish to serve on a committee in charge of admitting new members to the field.
- 19) I would dislike delegating work to subordinates.
- 20) I would enjoy being in a position to decide points in a merit system.
- 21) I would not be interested in deciding who is best qualified for a particular assignment or mission.
- 22) I would enjoy being employed by a prestigious institution.
- 23) I would enjoy being appointed director of a department in government or industry.
- 24) I would not care to be regarded as an influential person in the community.
- 25) I would find influencing the lives of others to be a very rewarding experience.

The results of confirmatory factor analysis are: CMIN/DF=6.464 ( $P=0.000$ ), GFI=0.708, IFI=0.647, CFI=0.644, NFI=0.590, RMSEA=0.111.

### Institutional environment

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement)

- 1) Government organizations in this country assist individuals with starting their own business.
- 2) The government sets aside government contracts for new and small businesses.
- 3) Local and national governments have special support available for individuals who want to start a new business.
- 4) The government sponsors organizations that help new businesses develop.
- 5) Even after failing in an earlier business, the government assists entrepreneurs in starting again.
- 6) Individuals know how to legally protect a new business.
- 7) Those who start new businesses know how to deal with much risk.
- 8) Those who start new businesses know how to manage risk.
- 9) Most people know where to find information about markets for their products.
- 10) Turning new ideas into businesses is an admired career path in this country.
- 11) In this country, innovative and creative thinking is viewed as the route to success.
- 12) Entrepreneurs are admired in this country.
- 13) People in this country tend to greatly admire those who start their own business.

The results of confirmatory factor analysis are: CMIN/DF=2.984 ( $P=0.000$ ), GFI=0.917, IFI=0.957, CFI=0.957, NFI=0.590, RMSEA=0.082.

### Self-efficacy

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy was measured by asking respondents to rate themselves against their peers on the following measures. 1 means much worse and 5 means much better.

- 1) Being able to solve problems
- 2) Managing money
- 3) Being creative
- 4) Getting people to agree with you
- 5) Being a leader
- 6) Making decisions

The results of confirmatory factor analysis are: CMIN/DF=2.793 ( $P=0.000$ ), GFI=0.970, IFI=0.982, CFI=0.982, NFI=0.972, RMSEA=0.078.

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