

The Affect Mechanism of Higher Vocational Students' Prosocial Motivation on Entrepreneurial Persistence in China-Myanmar Border Areas

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence among higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border, with intuition serving as a mediating factor. Data were collected from higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border in January 2026 using purposive sampling and an online questionnaire (covering prosocial motivation, intuition, and entrepreneurial persistence scales). A total of 2,068 valid responses were obtained (response rate: 89.91%). Employing quantitative research methods, this study utilized correlation and mediation analyses to test hypotheses.

Results indicate that prosocial motivation among higher vocational students in the China-Myanmar border region exhibits significant positive correlations with entrepreneurial persistence and intuition, with intuition serving as a mediator. This suggests that vocational institutions must not only cultivate students' individual desire to assist others or contribute to societal well-being but also establish connections with emotionally driven decision-making processes to effectively foster entrepreneurial persistence. Furthermore, the study found that prosocial motivation among higher vocational students in the China-Myanmar border region is a decisive factor influencing entrepreneurial persistence. Moreover, the study indicates that intuition mediates this relationship, meaning that through intuition, students' prosocial motivation can further enhance the development of entrepreneurial persistence. Therefore, Chinese vocational colleges should prioritize cultivating students' individual desire to help others or contribute to others' well-being, enhance

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their emotionally driven decision-making processes, and thereby effectively promote their persistence in entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Prosocial Motivation; Entrepreneurial Persistence; Intuition

Introduction

China's entrepreneurship strategy has effectively promoted entrepreneurial activities. However, societal progress requires not only heightened developmental vitality but also expects entrepreneurs' behavioral decisions to benefit broader groups. Prosocial motivation a key psychological driver of entrepreneurial behavior rooted in concern for others' well-being can effectively guide entrepreneurs toward decisions aligned with societal expectations (Ali et al., 2025). Since Shepherd (2015) called for greater attention to prosocial motivation in entrepreneurship, this theme has gained increasing theoretical and practical significance, with evidence demonstrating its substantial impact on sustainable development, digital innovation, and resilience.

However, while research indicates that prosocial motivation can indeed exert positive effects, studies examining its relationship with entrepreneurial persistence remain relatively scarce, with findings exhibiting considerable ambiguity. Notably, entrepreneurial persistence serves as a critical prerequisite for business survival, development, and even success, impacting the well-being of diverse stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, partners, and customers. Clarifying how prosocial motivation influences entrepreneurial persistence holds significant theoretical and practical implications. Yet, perspectives among scholars attempting to explore this relationship are inconsistent. For instance, Grant et al. (2007) found that individuals with high prosocial motivation recognize the significance of their actions for others' well-being, leading to greater persistence in their work. Conversely, studies focusing on social entrepreneurs suggest that high prosocial motivation may reduce job satisfaction, increase anxiety, and consequently lower the likelihood of entrepreneurial persistence. Furthermore, other research indicates that entrepreneurs persevere through adversity by prioritizing the well-being of stakeholders such as partners and employees, particularly when operating larger enterprises with more employees (Srivastava & Singh, 2025). Thus, refining the focus on research subjects and uncovering the underlying mechanisms through which prosocial motivation

influences entrepreneurial persistence is crucial for clarifying this relationship. Moreover, a review of existing literature reveals that most studies exploring prosocial motivation have focused on social entrepreneurs. However, student entrepreneurs also exhibit varying degrees of prosocial motivation. Researchers both domestically and internationally have emphasized the need to increasingly examine how prosocial motivation influences the psychological and behavioral aspects of student entrepreneurs (Safitri, Huseini, & Kusumastuti, 2025). Furthermore, according to motivational information processing theory, prosocial motivation helps individuals transcend their own perspective limitations when examining decision information (Rudolph & Popp, 2007). This implies that business entrepreneurs with prosocial motivation not only focus on self-interest information but also consider the significant value of persistent decisions for employee employment, client ventures, and partner interests from stakeholders' perspectives, thereby increasing their likelihood of persevering (Srivastava & Singh, 2025). However, no existing research has confirmed the relationship between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence, nor the mediating effect of intuition between these two factors. This gap inspires the present study, which focuses on higher vocational students as entrepreneurs to investigate this relationship. Therefore, based on the China-Myanmar border region, this research explores whether higher vocational students' prosocial motivation is associated with entrepreneurial persistence and whether intuition mediates this relationship.

The motivational information processing theory posits that prosocial motivation influences behavioral decision-making by affecting how individuals process information (Rudolph & Popp, 2007). However, current research on the mechanisms underlying prosocial motivation has primarily focused on analyzing its role in psychological perception (Hu et al., 2020), relatively neglecting the impact on information processing. With the advancement of entrepreneurial cognition research, it has been demonstrated that how entrepreneurs think and process information is closely related to their entrepreneurial persistence decisions (Lin et al., 2022). Intuition, as a rapid, holistically connected, and emotion-driven information judgment process, not only influences prosocial behaviors like helping others through traits like prosocial motivation and benevolent personality, but also serves as a key mechanism for interpreting entrepreneurial behavioral decisions (Van, 2025). Individuals with prosocial motivation, when processing information, exhibit a tendency to prioritize

others' interests. This tendency activates their latent intuitive thinking, thereby promoting spontaneous and rapid prosocial decision-making such as helping others or cooperating that benefits others (Mohammadi & Sadeghi, 2025). Accordingly, entrepreneurs with high prosocial motivation perceive the prosocial impact of persistence in entrepreneurship, making them more likely to follow intuition in persistence decisions. Therefore, this study employs intuitive information processing as a mediating variable to explore the internal process through which prosocial motivation influences entrepreneurial persistence among higher vocational students.

Moreover, the geopolitical advantages of the China-Myanmar border region, coupled with intensified support for its development, hold significant implications for regional high-quality economic growth (Khin, 2025). Simultaneously, the Chinese government prioritizes advancing the construction of the China-Myanmar border areas and promoting prosperity for border communities, elevating the strategic importance of this region within national development strategies (Tan, 2026). However, the current economic level in the China-Myanmar border region remains significantly lower than that of the developed eastern coastal areas. The slow pace of industrial transformation and development has led to a series of issues, including population imbalance, land idleness, and desertification, all of which increase the difficulty of overcoming development challenges in the border region (Ma, 2025). Therefore, promoting future economic development in the China-Myanmar border region has become an urgent priority, holding significant implications for advancing sustainable development in this area. While research on China-Myanmar border trade has garnered attention in recent years, it has expanded from macro to meso and micro-levels. However, no research has yet explored the factors influencing entrepreneurial persistence among higher vocational students in cross-border trade within the China-Myanmar border region. Consequently, this study aims to examine the mediating role of intuition in the aforementioned relationships in the China-Myanmar border region.

Given this, this study constructs a framework to deeply analyze the influence mechanism and boundary conditions of higher vocational students' prosocial motivation on entrepreneurial persistence. The primary research value lies in: First, transcending traditional social entrepreneurship frameworks, this study uses the relationship between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence as an opportunity. It not only clarifies their connection

but also responds to Shepherd (2015)'s call to expand research on prosocial motivation in entrepreneurship, advancing exploration of its impact within entrepreneurial contexts for higher vocational students. Second, by examining the mediating role of intuitive information processing, it enriches existing research on entrepreneurial intuition. This reveals the black box process through which prosocial motivation influences entrepreneurial persistence. Furthermore, by establishing a logical chain of motivation-information processing-decision-making, it proposes a novel pathway mechanism for studying the effects of prosocial motivation.

In summary, the objective of this study is to investigate higher vocational students' perceptions of prosocial motivation along the China-Myanmar border, observe their levels of entrepreneurial persistence, and examine the mediating effect of intuition. Clarifying these relationships provides a basis for enhancing entrepreneurial persistence among these students and contributes to the theoretical advancement of this field.

Research Objectives

1. To exploring the relationship between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence.
2. To exploring the relationship between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and intuition.
3. To exploring the relationship between higher vocational students' intuition and entrepreneurial persistence.
4. To analyze the mediating effect of higher vocational students' intuition between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This quantitative study employs Motivational Information Processing Theory to explore the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence among higher vocational students in the China-Myanmar border region, examining the mediating role of intuition. It aims to clarify the influence and mediating effects of prosocial motivation and intuition on entrepreneurial persistence, proposing corresponding improvement strategies and measures to provide insights for advancing future entrepreneurial development in the China-Myanmar border area.

Furthermore, this study will collect data from higher vocational students in January 2026 using purposive sampling and an online questionnaire (covering prosocial motivation, intuition, and entrepreneurial persistence scales). Hypotheses will be tested through correlation and mediation analyses. Additionally, before sample collection, consent has been obtained from both respondents and their respective institutions before proceeding with the research.

2. Population and Sample

The sample for this study comprised higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border, with 2,068 valid questionnaires collected (response rate: 89.91%). Additionally, the sample was obtained through purposive sampling and virtual questionnaire distribution, with all respondents being currently enrolled higher vocational students.

3. Data Analysis Methods

This study will use higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border as its sample, employing prosocial motivation, intuition, and entrepreneurial persistence scales (virtual questionnaires) to collect data. The survey was conducted in January 2026, yielding 2,068 valid responses (response rate: 89.91%). Simultaneously, purposeful sampling was employed to select participants from nine higher vocational schools along the China-Myanmar border. Furthermore, this study will utilize descriptive analysis, reliability and validity testing, correlation analysis, and mediation analysis to describe and test hypotheses.

4. Research Instrument

The research instrument comprised a structured questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale (1–5 denoting strongly disagree to strongly agree), encompassing 3 concepts (prosocial motivation; entrepreneurial persistence, and intuition). Furthermore, the questionnaire underwent evaluation by 6 doctoral candidates specialising in educational administration, demonstrating sound validity. Prosocial motivation scale: Drawing by Grant et al. (2008), single-factor, comprising 4 items ($\alpha=0.933$). Entrepreneurial persistence scale: Designed by Li et al. (2018), single-factor, comprising 6 items ($\alpha=0.893$). Intuition scale: Designed by Epstein et al. (1996), single-factor, comprising 5 items ($\alpha=0.847$). The questionnaire employs a 5-point scale for self-assessment, with gender, Grade, and household registration category as demographic variables.

Results

1. Distribution of Population Characteristics

This study will conduct a descriptive analysis of the collected samples, aiming to understand the distribution of demographic characteristics within the sample.

As shown in Table 1, the effective sample size comprised 306 respondents, predominantly male at 66.88% (1383). Additionally, 3 grade students accounted for the highest proportion (68.91%, 1,425). Meanwhile, students with rural household registration constituted the largest share (65.76%, 1,360).

Background variables	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	1383	66.88
	Female	685	33.12
Grade	1	256	12.38
	2	387	18.71
	3	1425	68.91
Household registration category	Municipal household registration	708	34.24
	Rural household registration	1360	65.76

Table 1 Distribution of population characteristics

Analysis of demographic distribution revealed that male students showed a stronger preference for entrepreneurship than female students; 3 grade students were more inclined to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the future; and students with rural household registration exhibited a greater affinity for high-risk entrepreneurial ventures.

2. Model Fit

The purpose of model fit analysis is to assess the degree of correspondence between the sample data and the model. As shown in Table 2, the overall model had an SRMR=0.035, a good match. Therefore, this indicates that the sample aligns with the model.

	O	M	95%	99%
Models of saturation	0.035	0.037	0.039	0.041
Estimated model	0.035	0.037	0.039	0.041

Table 2 Root mean square error

3. Correlation Analysis

The purpose of correlation analysis is to examine the relationship between variables. The mean values for prosocial motivation, intuition, and entrepreneurial persistence were 0.218***, 0.378*** and 0.203***, respectively, indicating a high level of acceptance of the variables among the sample.

Correlation analysis indicates that higher vocational students' prosocial motivation exhibits a significant positive correlation with entrepreneurial persistence and intuition ($r=0.378^{***}$, 0.218^{***} , $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H1 and H2; Intuition exhibits a significant positive correlation with entrepreneurial persistence ($r=0.203^{***}$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H3. Therefore, this also demonstrates that higher vocational students' prosocial motivation exhibits a significant association with entrepreneurial persistence and intuition.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Prosocial motivation	3.66	0.89	0.72		
2. Intuition	3.72	0.92	0.218**	0.74	
3. Entrepreneurial persistence	3.59	0.93	0.378**	0.203**	0.75
α			0.87	0.87	0.89
CR			0.71	0.78	0.79
AVE			0.53	0.56	0.57

Table 3 Correlation analysis

4. Mediating Analysis

The purpose of mediation analysis is to examine the mediating effect of the mediating variable; the purpose of moderation analysis is to examine the moderating effect of the moderator variable. As shown in Table 4, intuition had a mediating effect (2.135^{***} , $p < 0.001$) on the path of prosocial motivation to entrepreneurial persistence, and H4 holds (prosocial motivation $\rightarrow$ intuition $\rightarrow$ entrepreneurial persistence).

Therefore, this further indicates that higher vocational students' intuition mediates the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence.

Effect	Path	Coefficients
Mediating	Prosocial motivation → intuition → entrepreneurial persistence	2.135*** (Sobel Z)

Table 4 Mediating analysis

Discussion

Prosocial motivation, as a key concept within social expectations, helps entrepreneurs make ethical decisions and is crucial for the long-term development of enterprises. However, while existing research has gradually explored the impact of prosocial motivation on entrepreneurial behavior, it has paid relatively little attention to the prosocial motivation of higher vocational students. Furthermore, although some literature has examined the relationship between prosocial motivation and persistence, it remains unclear whether entrepreneurial prosocial motivation facilitates entrepreneurial persistence during the enterprise development process. To address this gap, this study integrates prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence as key variables. Grounded in Motivational Information Processing Theory, we constructed a model and conducted an empirical survey among higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border. This investigation explores the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence, as well as the mediating role of intuition.

The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence. This aligns with Grant et al.'s (2007) conclusion that prosocial motivation positively correlates with job persistence. This occurs because prosocial motivation fosters greater persistence; higher vocational students with prosocial motivation tend to exhibit stronger persistence. Thus, social entrepreneurs whose core mission centers on social objectives and commercial entrepreneurs focused on financial goals exhibit differing action orientations. Consequently, research findings about the former may not fully apply to the latter, necessitating separate discussions for each group.

Results indicate a significant positive correlation between higher vocational students' prosocial motivation and intuition. This finding aligns with Allinson et al. (2000), who demonstrated a positive correlation between prosocial motivation and intuition. This occurs because, depending on information processing patterns, decision-making may rely less on deliberate analysis within traditional frameworks

and more on intuitive judgments triggered by emotional stimuli. Furthermore, entrepreneurs with prosocial motivation typically demonstrate greater empathy and creativity. This enables them to subconsciously integrate prior experiential knowledge with novel information when processing decision-making data, thereby facilitating rapid responses to external stimuli.

The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between intuition and entrepreneurial persistence among higher vocational students. This aligns with Adomako et al. (2016), who demonstrated a positive correlation between intuition and entrepreneurial persistence. This occurs because emotional bonds formed between entrepreneurs and stakeholders such as employees and customers during business development prevent decisions from being entirely detached from stakeholder interests. Entrepreneurs driven by intuitive thinking prefer to holistically integrate decision information, tending toward proactive behavioral decisions, with persistence becoming a more likely choice.

The findings indicate that entrepreneurs with higher prosocial motivation are more likely to adopt intuitive information processing. Furthermore, intuition mediates the influence of prosocial motivation on entrepreneurial persistence. These results are similar to those of Tiwari et al. (2022), who demonstrated that intuition mediates the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial behavior. This finding validates the perspective from prior research that prosocial motivation relies more heavily on intuition for decision-making (Ruskin, Seymour, & Webster, 2016). Consequently, it also indicates that entrepreneurial persistence under adversity necessitates confronting and processing more complex information, making the information processing stage crucial for entrepreneurial persistence.

New Knowledge

This study, integrating motivational information processing theory, found that prosocial motivation among higher vocational students along the China-Myanmar border positively correlates with entrepreneurial persistence and intuition. Intuition mediates the relationship between prosocial motivation and entrepreneurial persistence. Therefore, Chinese higher vocational institutions should develop targeted strategies and policies. This can be achieved by incorporating prosocial motivation and intuition into specialized training programs for students. Such initiatives would enhance their personal desire to help others or contribute to others'

well-being, develop their emotionally driven decision-making processes, and thereby effectively promote their entrepreneurial persistence.

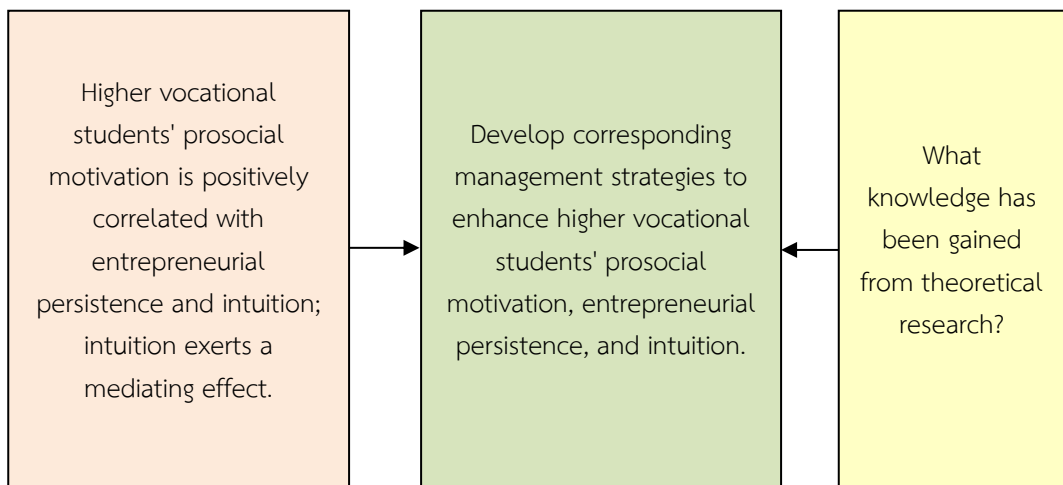


Figure 1 New Knowledge

Conclusion and Suggestion

Research findings indicate that higher vocational students' prosocial motivation is positively correlated with entrepreneurial persistence and intuition ($r=0.378^{***}$, $p < 0.001$), while intuition is positively correlated with entrepreneurial persistence ($r=0.203^{***}$, $p < 0.001$). 0.218^{***} , $p < 0.001$), while intuition positively correlates with entrepreneurial persistence ($r=0.203^{***}$, $p < 0.001$). Intuition mediates this relationship (2.135^{***} , $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher vocational schools must not only cultivate students' individual desire to help others or strive for others' well-being, but also establish connections with emotionally driven judgment processes to fully promote their entrepreneurial persistence. Thus, it is confirmed that higher vocational students' prosocial motivation is a key antecedent of entrepreneurial persistence, while intuition serves as a crucial process mechanism for further enhancing it.

Furthermore, based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Policy recommendations: The current policy framework for entrepreneurship in China's vocational education system is generally driven by economic efficiency, emphasising quantitative indicators such as entrepreneurship rates, contributions to output value, and employment generation. The findings of this study call on

policymakers to re-examine this underlying assumption: in the specific region of the China-Myanmar border, the sustainability of entrepreneurship among higher vocational students is not driven solely by rational calculation, but is deeply rooted in the interplay between altruistic motives and emotional decision-making. Consequently, at the policy level, a paradigm shift from instrumental rationality to value-based rationality must be prioritised. Specifically, it is recommended that the Chinese Ministry of Education, in subsequent revisions to the Modern Vocational Education Quality Improvement Plan, explicitly incorporate the capacity for social value creation and entrepreneurial psychological resilience into the core indicators for talent development, granting them equal weight to professional skills assessments. Furthermore, policy documents should explicitly reference the cultivation of an altruistic spirit, thereby establishing it as a legitimate component of the official discourse.

Practical recommendations: Existing entrepreneurship education curricula generally follow a linear logic of ‘opportunity identification → resource integration → business plan → risk management’, with the implicit assumption that entrepreneurs are rational economic agents. This study recommends a fundamental restructuring of this curriculum system to introduce a parallel logic of value-driven → emotional decision-making → sustained action. Specific implementation pathways encompass three levels: Firstly, compulsory modules on social entrepreneurship ethics and entrepreneurial psychology should be added to the theoretical teaching component, systematically covering the psychological mechanisms of altruistic motivation, the cognitive science foundations of intuitive decision-making, and their interaction under resource-constrained conditions. Secondly, within the practical teaching module, a ‘border community’ component should be designed, requiring students to immerse themselves in cross-border ethnic villages and develop entrepreneurial proposals within real-world social problem contexts. Thirdly, the assessment methods should reform the traditional business plan defence by introducing sections on value statements and reflection on the decision-making process, thereby evaluating students’ sensitivity to and ability to integrate emotional information during the proposal development process.

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