

# Homecoming Employment Intentions Under Rural Talent Revitalization Policy: A Case Study in Guizhou

Gui Chu<sup>1</sup>, Cheng\_Yoke, Tan<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Anshun University, Guizhou Province, P.R. China

<sup>2</sup>Nilai University, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author email: [drcytan@nilai.edu.my](mailto:drcytan@nilai.edu.my)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400262>

Received: 12 April 2026; Accepted: 18 April 2026; Published: 06 May 2026

## ABSTRACT

In the context of China's Rural Talent Revitalization Strategy and mounting employment pressures on college graduates, this study examined how rural-origin students form homecoming employment intentions. Drawing on qualitative-led mixed methods with 11 participants from Guizhou, the findings revealed a strong yet conditional willingness shaped by economic, social, familial, and personal push-pull factors. The study extended Push-Pull Theory by incorporating psychological and cultural dimensions. From a policy standpoint, the results pointed to the importance of strengthening policy communication and improving rural job quality to better align student aspirations with rural revitalization goals. By focusing intently on the formative process of career intention within the high-stakes context of Rural Revitalization, this study contributed not only to academic knowledge but also to inform more effective and empathetic strategies for engaging the next generation in the vital work of rural reconstruction.

**Keywords:** Rural Talent Revitalization; Homecoming employment intentions; Rural-origin college students; Push-Pull Theory

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of "homecoming employment" for college students has risen to prominence as a potential engine for China's Rural Revitalization Strategy. This policy emphasis responds to a well-documented rural crisis, where accelerated urbanization has drained population and stifled economic vitality in the countryside (Fan, 2015; Hu, 2023). While the revitalization of rural human capital is universally recognized as foundational to the strategy's success (Han, 2018), this goal is continuously challenged by the steady migration of students to urban centers—a dynamic that perpetuates a rural brain drain while exacerbating employment pressures in cities (Wu et al., 2024).

China's formidable employment landscape sharpens this contradiction. The nation faces the dual pressure of a record 12.70 million university graduates entering the job market in 2026 (Ministry of Education, 2025) and the lingering structural impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor demand (Cui, 2020; Liu, 2020). Within this challenging landscape, national policy documents have reframed rural talent recruitment not merely as a developmental objective, but as an integral component of national employment stability. Students are consequently positioned as essential agents of rural transformation, whose contemporary knowledge and skills are deemed crucial for modernizing local economies (Dong, 2024; Y. C. Liu, 2024). However, a pronounced

disconnect endures between this official policy narrative and the empirically observed aspirations of students. Pre-implementation studies noted a profound lack of interest in rural-sector careers (Xue, 2015), and more recent research continues to document pervasive hesitation and low entrepreneurial intent regarding a return to one's hometown (Chen & Chen, 2023; Xiao et al., 2020), even among those who express abstract, positive sentiments toward rural communities (Wu et al., 2024).

### **Problem Statement, Research Gap and Purpose**

The enduring chasm between top-down policy imperatives and bottom-up individual career agency thus constitutes a pressing scholarly and practical problem. Existing research has made progress in cataloguing a range of factors that influence this decision, spanning personal, familial, and societal domains (Zhang et al., 2022). Yet, the literature remains fragmented. Studies have often examined these factors in isolation—focusing separately on familial influences (Pan, 2022; Zhou, 2017), structural urban-rural disparities, or awareness of policy incentives (Y. C. Liu, 2024). What is notably absent is an integrative framework that elucidates how these multi-level factors interact dynamically to shape the decision-making process itself, within the unique and evolving context forged by the Rural Revitalization Strategy. Furthermore, documented shortcomings in policy implementation and emerging new contextual challenges point to significant, unresolved questions that require deeper, situated investigation (Zhang et al., 2022).

Hence, the study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How is the willingness to return to their hometowns for employment formed among college students?
1. What are the students' perspectives regarding their homecoming employment willingness?
2. What are the factors influencing students' homecoming employment willingness?

### **Theoretical Foundations**

To unpack this complex psychosocial process, our analysis is grounded in Push-Pull Theory (Lee, 1966). This framework offers a structured means to analyze the competing forces in a student's calculus: the "pushes" away from urban areas (e.g., high living costs, occupational stress) and the "pulls" toward the hometown (e.g., familial ties, local policy support), which exist in constant tension with the countervailing "pulls" of the city (e.g., career prestige, professional networks) and "pushes" of the countryside (e.g., perceived limited services, fewer advancement opportunities). While seminal in migration studies, the theory's targeted application to decipher the formative process of return intentions among Chinese rural-origin students—specifically within the active, interventionist context of the Rural Revitalization Strategy—remains a distinct gap in the literature.

### **The Macro-Structural Context: China's Employment Landscape and Graduate Challenges**

Any serious examination of homecoming employment intentions must begin with the structural realities confronting Chinese college graduates. The employment situation in China has reached unprecedented scale and complexity. Since higher education entered its popularization phase in 2020, graduate numbers have climbed sharply—from 8.74 million that year to a projected 12.70 million in 2026 (Ministry of Education, 2025). This supply-side expansion has unfolded alongside demand-side contractions. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced recruitment demand, curtailed internship opportunities, and introduced new uncertainties into job searches (Wang & Wang, 2024; Zheng et al., 2022). Chen and Lai (2020) identified four structural shifts reshaping the landscape: the rise of online job selection, graduate movement from primary to secondary labor markets, reduced hiring by enterprises participating in global value chains, and diminished overseas study opportunities that have intensified

domestic market competition. The empirical evidence paints a sobering picture. China's urban unemployment rate for those aged 16-24 reached 13.2% in June 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). This macro-structural context provides the essential foundation for understanding homecoming employment. It establishes the push dynamics emanating from urban labor markets that make return migration an increasingly considered—if not always ultimately chosen—alternative.

### **The Policy Landscape: Rural Revitalization and Talent Engagement**

Running parallel to the employment crisis narrative is a policy opportunity narrative centered on China's Rural Revitalization Strategy. First articulated at the 19th National Congress in 2017, the strategy explicitly positioned talent revitalization as foundational to rural transformation (Han, 2018). The 2018 No. 1 Document laid out the five revitalizations—industry, talent, culture, ecology, and organization. The 2021 "Opinions on Accelerating Rural Talent Revitalization" called for developing rural human capital. The 2024 No. 1 Document reaffirmed the need to strengthen rural talent teams and implement support programs.

Hu (2019) highlights two main pathways. The first involves "Bringing Culture, Science and Technology to the Countryside" programs, where students contribute professional skills through wall painting, teaching support, and technological guidance. The second is the College Student Village Official program, which by 2016-2017 had attracted nearly 7,000 doctoral and master's graduates to grassroots governance positions (Chen & Gong, 2024). Lai and Chen (2018) traced policy evolution back to 2000, noting systematic efforts to channel graduates to rural grassroots units. More recent initiatives—the "Rural Revitalization—Youth Dugong" program and the "My Hometown, My Construction" campaign (2024)—have further institutionalized student engagement.

Yet scholars also identify persistent barriers. Yang (2024) observed that despite opportunities to serve as village cadres, rural teachers, or entrepreneurs, graduates face insufficient job demand, constraining public opinion, and poor infrastructure. Lin (2024) and Yen et al. (2024) document challenges including insufficient capital, market instability, and unclear policies. K. Liu (2024) pointed to the dilution of rural sentiments and the absence of rural-focused curricula as formidable obstacles. These studies collectively revealed a complex picture: policy intent is clear and multi-faceted, but translating that intent into student willingness remains fraught with difficulty.

### **The Empirical Core: Students' Willingness to Return Home for Employment**

Early studies documented minimal interest in rural employment. Xue (2015) found that only 1.8% of college students preferred rural areas, with 65.3% selecting coastal open cities and major metropolises. Significantly, even among rural-origin students, 70.5% expressed unwillingness to return home—a finding that has resonated throughout subsequent scholarship. Zhou (2017) nationwide survey similarly found only 0.8% willing to work in rural areas. These studies established the baseline: homecoming employment was, at least initially, a marginal preference. Fortunately, more recent research suggests partial shifts alongside persistent ambivalence. (Lin, 2022) revealed that 54.8% of students willing to return—a dramatic increase from Xue's figures. Chen and Chen (2023) reported that 40.6% willing or considering return entrepreneurship, while 59.4% remain unwilling.

Wu et al. (2024) captured a crucial nuance: rural college students demonstrate higher willingness to "serve rural areas" in the abstract but lower willingness to actually "return to their hometowns" in concrete terms. This distinction between general pro-rural sentiment and specific hometown commitment recurs throughout the literature. Students express abstract goodwill toward rural communities (Wu et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2020), yet when confronted with actual decisions, urban options often prevail.

The sources of this ambivalence are multiple. They included self-perceived inadequacy in entrepreneurial capacity (Chen & Chen, 2023), insufficient social capital in hometowns (resources accumulated during

university years tend to concentrate in cities), and limited policy awareness. Dong (2024) pointed to job incompatibility—rural positions often require low technical skills, failing to utilize students' specialized knowledge. Chen (2022) documented policy ignorance (only 10% aware of relevant policies), inadequate university publicity, and family opposition rooted in traditional aspirations for children to escape rural hardship.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The case study method was selected a priori for its inherent capacity to support in-depth, contextually grounded exploration of real-world social phenomena (Yin, 2009) and its particular suitability for addressing descriptive and exploratory research questions in rural studies (Merriam, 1988). Drawing on the Push-Pull Theory, this study adopted a two-stage, qualitative-dominant embedded mixed-methods design to explore the antecedents and formation of college students' homecoming employment intentions in Guizhou Province. Stage 1, the qualitative core phase, involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. Stage 2, the quantitative embedding phase, entailed administering a structured questionnaire to the same 11 participants for methodological triangulation. Quantitative data served a sole corroborative function in this design, and no inferential statistical analyses were performed. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to quantify the strength of participants' homecoming employment willingness, while demographic data from the questionnaire verified sampling heterogeneity.

### Research Setting

This study was situated in Anshun City, Guizhou—a mountainous agricultural region highly relevant to China's national rural talent revitalization strategy. The research setting is defined by these interrelated contextual dimensions: i) Geographic - According to the 2020 National Population Census, rural residents account for 53.59% of Anshun's total population. Half of the city's 8 county-level administrative districts are designated as national or provincial key assistance counties for rural revitalization; ii) Institutional - The research was anchored in the Rural Regional Development undergraduate program at Anshun University, where 86% of enrolled students are from rural areas of Guizhou.

### Research Participants

The study's target population was operationally defined as students with rural household registration enrolled in the Rural Regional Development program at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Anshun University. Participants were recruited using criterion sampling (Chu et al., 2021; LeCompte et al., 1993), with two a priori defined inclusion criteria: (1) formal matriculation in the Rural Regional Development program at Anshun University; (2) possession of a valid rural household registration (i.e., rural residential origin). The sample size of 11 participants ( $n=11$ ) was determined by the attainment of theoretical and information saturation (Chu et al., 2021): no new thematic constructs emerged from the 9th interview onwards, and the 10th and 11th interviews yielded only redundant coding results.

### Instrumentation

Research instruments were used for primary data collection: semi-structured interview protocol and self-administered questionnaire. Table 2.1 depicts a one-on-one semi-structured interview protocol that was developed to elicit demographic characteristics and in-depth qualitative response data (Potter & Sage, 1996). The protocol comprised six sections and 20 items, covering basic participant attributes, perceptions of the contemporary rural-urban labor market, career planning trajectories, cognitive appraisals of rural revitalization policies, homecoming employment willingness, and the four theoretical dimensions of influencing factors.

Table 2.1 Components of Interview Protocol on College Students' Willingness to Return Home for Employment and the Influencing Factors

Section	Particulars	No. of items
A	Basic information about college students	2
B	Insight of employment situation	2
C	Career planning	2
D	Perspectives of Rural Revitalization	3
E	Homecoming employment willingness	3
F	Influencing factors	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>

Table 2.2 indicates the components of questionnaire.

Table 2.2 Components of College Students' Homecoming Employment Willingness Questionnaire

Section	Particulars	No. of items
A	Demographic information	3
B	Basic family information	5
C	Willingness to return home for employment	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>

A structured questionnaire, adapted and validated from Gui (2023), was used to assess the magnitude of participants' homecoming employment willingness via a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of 3 distinct sections and 18 items: demographic information, family socioeconomic background, and homecoming employment willingness—the latter operationalized into three latent dimensions: attitude tendency, behavioral preparation, and situational regulation. The questionnaire underwent a pre-test phase to establish face validity, and was administered on a one-to-one basis to the participants interviewed.

## Reliability and Validation

### Interview reliability

Inter-rater reliability was evaluated through independent dual thematic coding of interview transcripts by two qualified qualitative research experts. The Cohen's kappa coefficient was averaged at 81.82%, indicating high consistency among inter-raters.

### Questionnaire reliability

The adapted questionnaire (Gui, 2023) demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.978—well above the 0.7 threshold for acceptable reliability in social science research (Cronbach, 1951). A pre-test with 30 participants confirmed the absence of item comprehension barriers.

Content validity (Haynes et al., 1995)

The interview questions were peer reviewed by three methodological experts, with 100% of their revision recommendations adopted. The questionnaire underwent formal expert content validation by five rural development and labor economics specialists, with all items achieving a content validity index (CVI) of  $>0.83$ —meeting the standard for excellent content validity (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Construct validity (Bhandari, 2023; Messick, 1995)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed robust construct validity (KMO=0.891, cumulative variance explained=68.7%, all item factor loadings>0.6) and strong criterion-related validity (Pearson  $r=0.92$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) for the questionnaire.

### Data Collection

Primary data collection was conducted over a two-month fieldwork period. Firstly, formal institutional research approval was obtained from the Academic Research Office of the Faculty of Economics and Management at Anshun University. Written informed consent was obtained from all potential participants, with full and transparent disclosure of the research purpose, methodological procedures, data storage and management protocols, and confidentiality guarantees.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in private settings (Patton, 1987), in strict compliance with Xiao (2013)’s four-stage interview process: preparation, implementation, transcription and initial thematic coding, and conclusion. All interviews were audio-recorded and verbatim transcribed. Questionnaires were administered immediately after each interview.

### Analysis of Research Results

#### Formation of Homecoming Employment Willingness

As shown in Table 3.1, socio-demographic analysis of the sample showed all participants were of rural origin; 81.8% of their parents worked in agricultural production, 90.9% had only primary or middle school educational attainment, and 90.9% of the sample were non-only children.

Table 3.1 Demographic Profile of Students (n=11)

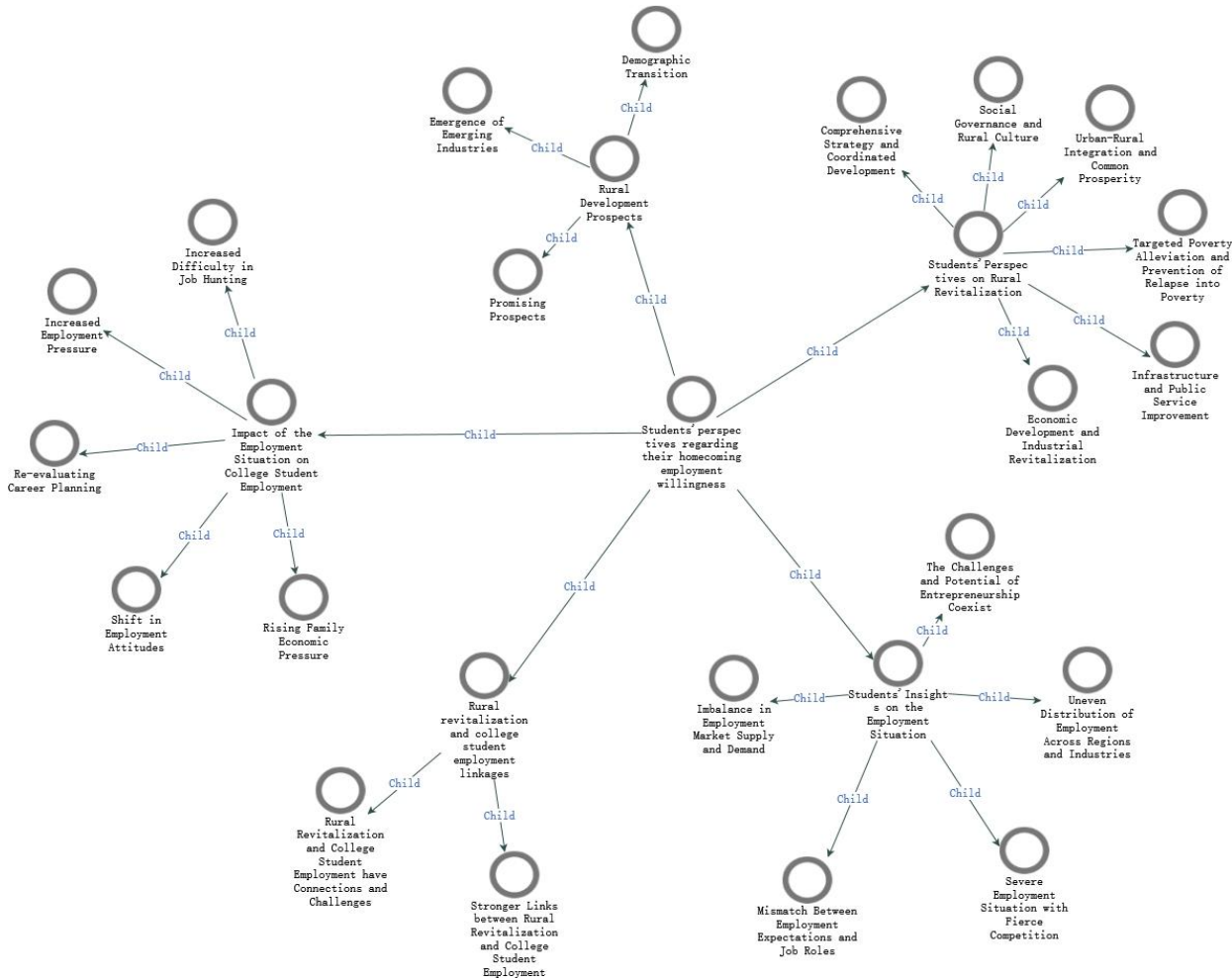
Section	Profile of Students		Frequency	Percentage
A Participant’s Demographic Status	Gender	Male	6	54.5
		Female	5	45.5
	Only Child Status	Yes	1	9.1
		No	10	90.9
B Participant’s Parents’ Demographic Status	Parental Occupation	Self-employed	1	9.1
		Agricultural worker/Farmer	9	81.8
		Industrial worker/Skilled laborer	1	9.1
	Highest Level of Parental Education	Primary School or Below	6	54.5
		Middle school	4	36.4
High School		1	9.1	
C Participant’s Family Status	Location of the Family	Rural Areas	11	100

Quantitatively, measures of homecoming employment willingness showed 27.3% of participants held a strong intent to seek rural employment; 72.7% reported a general willingness, with an overall mean willingness score of 4.26 (SD=0.467). Familial attitudes toward students’ homecoming employment were predominantly supportive (M=4.09, SD=0.301).

Psychological preparedness for homecoming employment was assessed across non-mutually exclusive categorical dimensions: 45% of participants expressed uncertainty about rural employment, whereas 43% demonstrated moderate confidence (nearly 0% of the sample reported strong confidence). Concurrently, 53% stated they were prepared for rural work, with only 3% indicating thorough preparation.

## Students' Perceptions of Homecoming Employment

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts yielded an inter-rater reliability kappa coefficient of 0.818, denoting almost perfect inter-coder consistency in thematic identification (Landis & Koch, 1977). Figure 3.1 illustrates the four key perceptual themes emerged from the analysis.



**Figure 0.1** Students' Perspectives Regarding Their Homecoming Employment Project Map

First, participants uniformly described a grim urban labor market context, marked by intense competitive pressure, structural supply-demand imbalances, and a pronounced mismatch between individual employment expectations and available positions:

*There's also an impact, perhaps, on the self. Their ability is not very outstanding, and then go to look for a job, facing all aspects of the talent, you may be a very ordinary one, and then every... That is the kind of better treatment of jobs; maybe a few hundred people would fight for a position (Participant 11, Line 79-83).*

Second, participants' understanding of rural revitalization was superficial and narrow in scope, centering on industrial revitalization, rural infrastructure upgrading, urban-rural integrated development and common prosperity. Most participants framed the rural revitalization strategy first and foremost as a rural-centric economic and industrial development initiative, with limited recognition of its social, cultural and ecological dimensions.

Third, majority of participants recognized a strong connection between rural revitalization and college student employment, describing a reciprocal relationship: rural revitalization generates policy-supported employment

and entrepreneurship opportunities (e.g., in rural e-commerce and smart agricultural development) for college students:

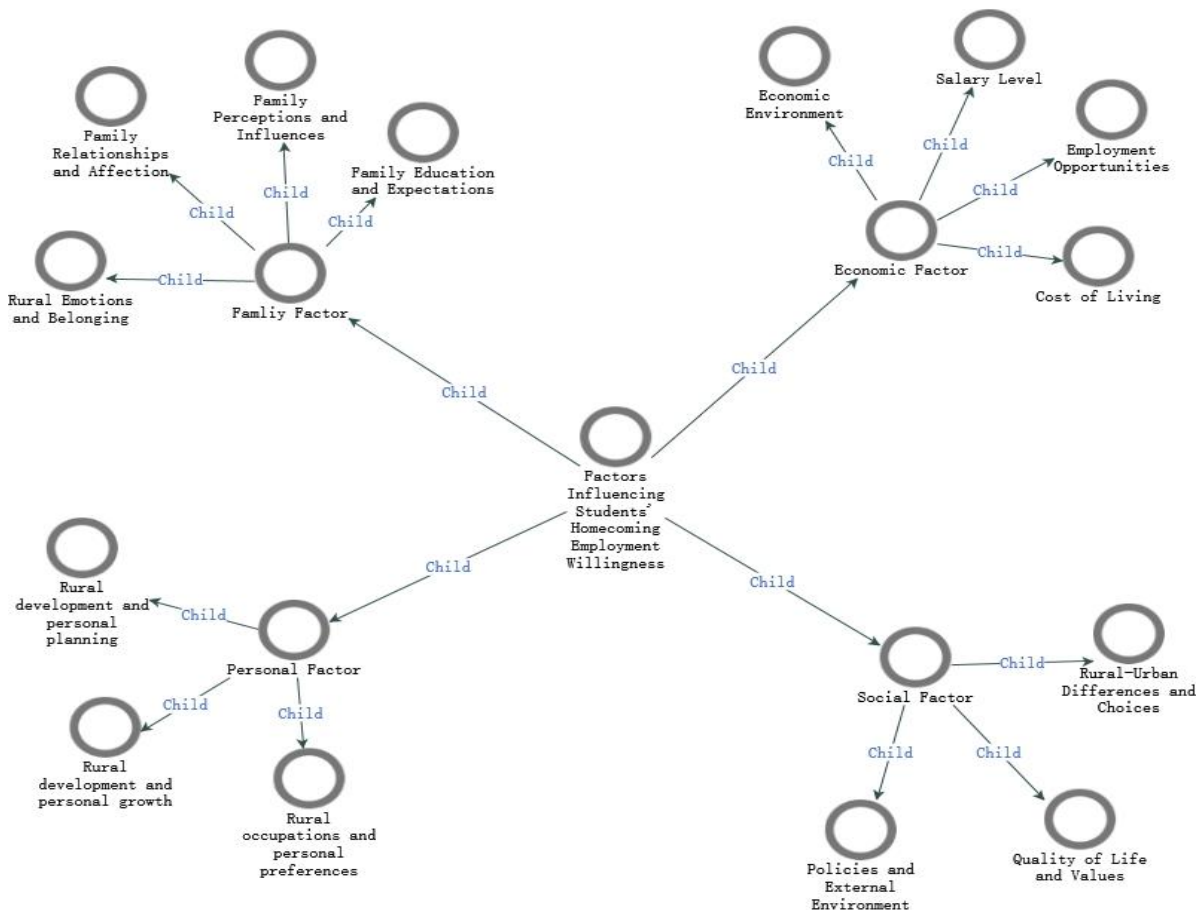
*In fact, I think the idea of working on rural revitalization is to try our best to reduce the gap between the countryside and the cities, including education and the economy, as well as the environment and other aspects, with a view to ultimately achieving common prosperity for the people. (Participant 5, Line 150-154)*

This relationship is, however, constrained by three key rural development barriers: underdeveloped local economic foundations, precarious formal sector employment opportunities in rural areas, and limited agency of resource-scarce students in local rural development.

Fourth, participants acknowledged substantial long-term development potential in rural areas but also identified pressing current challenges. The most salient challenges included severe rural youth outmigration and demographic aging, which create a critical rural labor shortage. Participants also noted emerging rural industrial development directions—such as the integration of rural e-commerce and tourism, and the rural pension service industry—yet these nascent sectors are impeded by fragmented resource allocation, inadequate infrastructural provision and elevated labor costs in rural areas.

### Multi-dimensional Influencing Factors of Homecoming Intentions

As show in Figure 0.2, four interrelated push-pull factor dimensions shaped the homecoming employment intentions of the sample, with economic factors emerging as the key determining factor in students’ decision-making.



**Figure 0.2** Factors Influencing Students' Homecoming Employment Willingness Project Map

**Economic factors:** Rural areas’ weak industrial bases, limited formal employment opportunities, and low wage levels (sufficient merely for basic subsistence) functioned as key rural push factors. In contrast, the low rural cost of living—characterized by the absence of housing pressure and the potential for food self-sufficiency—acted as a robust rural pull factor; one participant noted that living costs accounted for 40% of their overall homecoming employment decision-making process.

**Social factors:** Urban-rural disparities in career development pathways, educational resources and medical service provision created notable urban pull factors for students. Rural areas’ lower work pressure, more cohesive interpersonal relationships, and improved work-life balance served as salient rural pull factors:

*I feel that work communication inside the city is different from that in rural areas. Rural areas are a little bit more casual, not kind of... It's too... I don't know what words to use. Anyway, rural areas are probably less complicated than cities. (Participant 4, Line 487-490)*

However, the participants exhibited low awareness of rural employment support policies, though their academic major and teachers’ professional guidance exerted a significant influence on their homecoming employment intentions.

**Family factors:** Parental attitudes constituted a critical predictor of homecoming willingness. 81.82% of students with supportive parents held strong homecoming intentions, in contrast to just 18.18% for those with parents opposing their homecoming employment. Beyond parental attitudes, three additional family-related factors strengthened students’ willingness to return home for employment: family upbringing that emphasized diligence and hard work, strong familial emotional ties, and a sense of place attachment to their rural hometowns.

**Personal factors:** 92.31% of the interviewees favored stable rural governance positions (e.g., village officials and grassroots civil servants). A notable proportion of participants framed rural areas as a pivotal platform for personal professional development, with some formulating specific five-year development plans for sustained rural engagement after graduation.

Table 3.2 summarizes the multi-dimensional factors influencing home-coming intentions.

**Table 3.2 Multi-dimensional Factors Influencing Home-coming Intentions**

Factors	Underlying Situation	
	Push Factor (Negative)	Pull Factor (Positive)
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Weak Industrial Base</li> <li>■ Limited Employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Comfortable cost of living</li> <li>◇ Less housing pressure</li> <li>◇ Self-sufficient foods</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Urban-rural career development disparities</li> <li>■ Education resources</li> <li>■ Medical services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Lower work pressure</li> <li>◇ Cohesive relationship</li> <li>◇ Work-life balance</li> </ul>
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Parent opposition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Supportive parents</li> <li>◇ Emotional ties</li> <li>◇ Sense of home</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal preferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ Stable government post</li> <li>◇ 5-year professional development plan</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Formation of Homecoming Employment Willingness

Quantitative analyses revealed strong homecoming employment willingness ( $M=4.26$ ,  $SD=0.467$ ), with 27.3% expressing “very willing” and 72.7% “willing,” underpinned by supportive parental attitudes ( $M=4.09$ ,  $SD=0.301$ ). This aligns with a corpus of existing research (Liu & Zang, 2024; Pan, 2022; Wang, 2020) that identifies stability, career progression, and family proximity as key motivators for youth employment decision-making, with familial support functioning as a pivotal predictive factor—Pan (2022) notes a 1.466-fold increase in willingness corresponding to each unit improvement in family attitude.

Qualitative data, however, uncover latent contradictions: two participants overtly expressed reluctance to return, and nearly half (45%) reported “uncertainty” regarding their confidence in rural employment. This divergence deviates from historical patterns of “low homecoming willingness” (Liu & Zang, 2024; Xue, 2015) and reflects the transformative impacts of the rural revitalization agenda. Since the promulgation of the Strategic Plan for Rural Revitalization (2018-2022), holistic advancements in rural economic vitality, ecological governance, and institutional capacity have expanded employment opportunities, galvanizing student enthusiasm (Pan, 2022). Nevertheless, persistent gaps in policy awareness (Chen, 2022) persist in the sample, accounting for the 31% of participants who reported “unclear” psychological preparation for rural employment—this deficit not only erodes rural appeal but also mediates the effectiveness of employment support policies.

The complexity of decision-making is further compounded by lingering urban pull factors. Xue (2015) and Lin (2022) documented youth preferences for urban careers stemming from diversified opportunity structures and superior infrastructural provision, a finding echoed in this study: four participants cited constrained rural job prospects, and one emphasized limited upward mobility in rural occupational trajectories. Low rural income levels, inadequate social security frameworks, and intergenerational expectation mismatches (e.g., parental preferences for stable rural employment vs. students’ career aspirations) further amplify decision-making ambivalence.

### Students’ Perspectives on Homecoming Employment

Thematic analysis ( $\kappa=0.818$ , Landis & Koch, 1977) yielded four key perceptual themes. First, students uniformly characterized the urban employment environment as increasingly challenging, consistent with extant literature on oversaturated labor markets and structural expectation-position misalignment (Liu & Zang, 2024; Liu, 2020; Wang & Wang, 2024; K. Zhang, 2024; Zhang & Ahmad, 2024). The burgeoning graduate cohort, coupled with mismatches between student skill sets and employer requirements, has engendered a “double bind” wherein employers face recruitment challenges while graduates struggle to secure suitable employment.

Second, rural revitalization emerged as a critical pull factor. Students recognized the strategy’s role in expanding rural employment and entrepreneurship ecosystems (e.g., rural e-commerce, smart agriculture) while acknowledging their potential to contribute human capital to rural development—aligning with Han (2018), Chen and Gong (2024) and (Zhang et al., 2022). Enhancements in rural infrastructural provision (e.g., transportation networks, medical facilities) further augmented rural attractiveness, consistent with Pan (2022), who identifies a 2.292-fold increase in homecoming willingness associated with positive perceptions of rural living environments.

Third, distinct psychological dispositions emerged, most notably the “lying flat” mindset. Jun and Tao (2023) attributed this mindset to employment precarity and perceived competency deficits, a finding corroborated by

this study: urban competitive pressures and negative self-perceptions precipitate psychological withdrawal. Significantly, this research highlights mental health as an underexplored factor in employment decision-making—rural employment is framed as a pathway to enhanced work-life balance, offering a counterpoint to urban-centric stressors.

Fourth, students acknowledged substantial long-term development potential in rural areas while emphasizing pressing contemporary challenges: youth outmigration, demographic aging, and emerging rural industries (e.g., e-commerce-tourism integration) constrained by fragmented resource allocation and inadequate infrastructural support. This finding extends Dong (2024) focus on rural economic limitations by illuminating structural and contextual barriers to youth employment in underdeveloped rural regions.

### Multi-dimensional Influencing Factors

Four interrelated factors shape homecoming employment intentions, with analytical insights anchored in Push-Pull Theory:

**Economic factors:** Rural areas' low living costs (absence of housing pressure, potential for food self-sufficiency) function as a strong pull factor (Pan, 2022; Zhou, 2017), whereas low income levels, limited formal employment opportunities, and underdeveloped industrial bases operate as significant push factors (Dong, 2024; He, 2021; Jiang et al., 2021). Participants consistently noted that rural salaries barely suffice for basic subsistence, creating a “cost-benefit paradox” that deters homecoming. In contrast to Li et al. (2026) who found the economic pull factor that motivated minority ethnic groups to start online entrepreneurship business, this can be considered in Guizhou revitalization strategy and policy to attract homecoming self-employment instead.

**Social factors:** Rural areas' relaxed social milieu and enhanced work-life balance exert an attractive pull (Zhou, 2017), while infrastructural deficits, limited recreational amenities, and urban-rural disparities in education and healthcare provision act as deterrents (Jiang et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2024). Despite targeted initiatives such as the “Three Supports and One Assistance Program,” gaps in policy dissemination and outreach remain a critical impediment.

**Family factors:** Familial emotional bonds and parental support reinforce homecoming intentions (Gong, 2024; Lin, 2022; Pan, 2022; Wang, 2020; Wen et al., 2014; Xu, 2016; Zhou, 2017), though intergenerational expectation gaps occasionally generate tension. In contrast to He (2021), who emphasizes parental interference, this study identifies a predominantly supportive and adaptive parental stance—reflecting evolving familial attitudes toward rural employment.

**Personal factors:** Hometown sentiment and aspirations for personal development drive return intentions (Y. Zhang, 2024), yet limited rural career trajectories and perceived lack of agentic influence hinder behavioral translation. Cultural values (e.g., filial piety, native soil attachment) operate as subtle pull factors, extending Push-Pull Theory's scope to incorporate cultural dimensions and enhancing its explanatory power for youth rural mobility dynamics.

### Implication of the Study

#### Theoretical Implications

This study makes four key theoretical contributions: First, it extends Push-Pull Theory by integrating psychological (e.g., “lying flat” mindset) and cultural (e.g., hometown sentiment) dimensions into the traditional push-pull framework, whereas the traditional Push-Pull Theory often focuses on macro-economic variables

only. Second, it enriches Developmental Career Theory (Super, 1957, 1980) by highlighting the interplay between macro-structural opportunities (rural revitalization policies) and micro-level relational dynamics (family expectations) in shaping career decision-making. Third, it broadens Human Capital Theory (Becker, 2009) by demonstrating that rural employment decisions are driven by non-economic returns (e.g., social fulfillment, community contribution) alongside skill utilization. Fourth, it addresses critical gaps in policy implementation theory (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980) by emphasizing individual policy awareness and perception as key mediating factors in policy effectiveness.

The significance of this inquiry is twofold:

**Practical/Policy Significance:** The findings are intended to generate actionable evidence to refine policy design. This involves moving past generic incentives toward more nuanced support systems—such as tailored professional development pathways and robust mentorship networks—that directly address the specific barriers and aspirations identified by students. The research also aims to equip rural communities with a better understanding of graduate expectations to enhance local talent retention strategies and to assist universities in aligning their curricula and career guidance with the practical needs of rural development. The ultimate objective is to help bridge the urban-rural talent divide and foster more equitable regional development.

**Academic Significance:** This study contributes to scholarly debates on skilled migration and rural development by delineating the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the circulation of talent. By rigorously applying and critically examining Push-Pull Theory within a contemporary, policy-saturated Chinese context, it seeks to test and potentially extend the theory's explanatory utility. Methodologically, the embedded mixed-methods design provides a replicable model for investigating complex, place-based decision-making processes.

### **Practical and Policy Implications**

Practically, the findings underscore the need to address urban-rural labor market imbalances and rural development deficits. Economically, this entails enhancing rural job quality (e.g., competitive remuneration, structured career progression) while leveraging the unique advantage of lower living costs in rural areas. Socially, narrowing urban-rural disparities in infrastructural provision and public service delivery is pivotal to enhancing rural liveability and attractiveness.

From a policy perspective, policy awareness, implementation efficacy, economic incentives, socio-cultural norms, rural public services and regional contextualization as pivotal factors shaping college students' intentions to seek homecoming employment. Notably, Lin (2022) establishes that students with a clearer understanding of relevant rural revitalization policies demonstrate a stronger willingness to pursue rural employment, underscoring the need for robust policy dissemination and consistent implementation. Policies should narrow the urban-rural wage gap, bolster rural industrial development, and upgrade rural infrastructure, healthcare and education provision to enhance rural attractiveness, while aligning with familial expectations and local cultural norms. Given the dynamic, context-dependent nature of students' homecoming employment decisions, an integrated, flexible and regionally tailored policy framework is therefore required to align policy objectives with students' behavioral tendencies and advance the goals of sustainable rural revitalization.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that rural-origin college students in Guizhou exhibit strong but conditional homecoming employment willingness, shaped by the complex interplay of precarious urban employment, rural revitalization

opportunities, and multi-dimensional push-pull dynamics. The findings align with but also extend extant literature by highlighting the previously underexplored role of psychological and cultural factors, as well as the critical mediating effect of policy awareness. Theoretically, the study enriches Push-Pull Theory, Developmental Career Theory, and Human Capital Theory by integrating contextual and cultural dynamics into their analytical frameworks. Practically, it provides actionable insights for policymakers: strengthening rural infrastructure and job quality, enhancing policy dissemination and outreach, and tailoring interventions to regional contextual realities.

Despite its limitations, this study offers a nuanced understanding of youth rural employment intentions in underdeveloped mountainous regions. Future research should adopt longitudinal research designs, expand sample size and geographic scope, and deepen exploration of psychological and cultural determinants to improve generalizability and policy relevance. Ultimately, fostering sustainable college student homecoming employment requires a holistic approach involving multiple stakeholders that bridges economic incentives, social support mechanisms, policy effectiveness, and cultural resonance—aligning youth career aspirations with the broader goals of rural revitalization.

### **Future Research Directions**

Future research should employ a longitudinal design to track how college students' homecoming employment intentions evolve over time in response to policy adjustments and key life-course events. Cross-regional comparative research is also needed to identify contextual differences in the factors shaping these intentions, which would inform the design of regionally tailored intervention policies. Expanding the sample size and improving its representativeness will enhance statistical power, enabling more generalizable conclusions about homecoming employment intentions across diverse student cohorts. The in-depth exploration of psychological and emotional constructs—including self-efficacy, resilience and cultural identity—and their interactive effects with external structural factors is essential, building on this study's preliminary analysis of the “Lying Flat” mindset among participants. Additionally, mixed-methods research should assess the implementation effectiveness of existing rural employment policies, combining quantitative metrics such as local employment rates with qualitative insights from the lived experiences of returning college students to guide iterative policy refinement. Finally, further inquiry into the non-economic motivations driving homecoming employment—such as aspirations to contribute to community development and preferences for rural lifestyles—will advance both theoretical and practical understandings of how to foster greater student willingness to return to rural areas for work.

### **Future Practice**

Policymakers should prioritize rural infrastructure upgrading (Pan, 2022) and the equalization of rural public services, narrowing core urban-rural disparities that deter homecoming employment. The public employment service system should be refined, with dedicated funding mechanisms and entrepreneurial subsidies established for returning college students; targeted dissemination of rural employment policies must also be strengthened to address awareness gaps (Lin, 2022). Local governments should optimize rural industrial structures to expand high-quality, skill-matched employment opportunities, raise rural salary and welfare standards, and disseminate success stories of college students who have returned to rural areas and built successful careers. This work is central to cultivating a supportive rural employment ecosystem—a key strategy for effective rural talent attraction (Gui, 2023).

Higher education institutions should align curricular design with the talent demands of rural revitalization and construct a “discipline-specialization-industry” linkage mechanism to connect academic learning with local rural

development needs (He, 2021). They must strengthen practice-oriented coursework and establish rural field practice bases, while implementing stage-specific career guidance tailored to students' academic progression (Wang, 2020). Universities should also upgrade their employment information service platforms to share timely rural job opportunities and policy details, and deepen industry-university-research collaboration with local governments and rural enterprises to enhance students' practical employability and familiarity with rural work contexts.

College students themselves should capitalize on the policy opportunities presented by rural revitalization, focusing on emerging rural industries such as rural e-commerce and modern agriculture, and proactively utilizing available policy support for entrepreneurial endeavors. They need to abandon traditional urban-centric employment biases, recognize the multi-dimensional value of homecoming employment—including contributions to hometown development and the realization of personal professional goals—and foster a strong sense of belonging to their rural hometowns. Students should also advance their professional competencies and practical skills, and explore innovative entrepreneurial projects tailored to the unique local characteristics of their rural hometowns, aligning their career plans with rural development needs.

Families must abandon ideological prejudices toward college students returning to rural areas for employment (Liu, 2019), objectively evaluating the development prospects of rural regions amid rural revitalization and avoiding excessive intervention in their children's career decision-making. Parents should strengthen open, rational communication with their children to understand their career aspirations, providing targeted emotional and practical support for those choosing homecoming employment. Additionally, families can leverage their local social networks to help students accumulate social capital in their hometowns—such as connecting them with local rural enterprises or grassroots organizations—creating a more favorable social environment for their children's rural employment and career development.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has four key limitations: First, the small sample size ( $n=11$ ) and single-case research design limit generalizability, as findings reflect the specific context of rural-origin students in Guizhou's Rural Regional Development program and may not be transferable to other regions or academic disciplines. Second, data collection is prone to biases—social desirability bias may have inflated questionnaire-based willingness scores, and subjective thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) introduces potential researcher bias. Third, the cross-sectional design captures a temporal snapshot of inherently dynamic intentions, failing to track long-term changes driven by policy shifts or evolving personal circumstances (Babbie, 2020). Fourth, the quantitative component is exploratory in nature (supplementary to qualitative data), limiting advanced statistical analyses and the generalizability of quantitative findings.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Babbie, E. R. (2020). *The practice of social research*. Cengage Au.
2. Becker, G. S. (2009). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. University of Chicago press.
3. Bhandari, P. (2023). Construct Validity | Definition, Types, & Examples. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/construct-validity/>
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
5. Chen, H. (2022). *Research on the Employment Problems of College Students Returning to Hometowns*

- and Solutions in the Background of Rural Revitalization. *Frontiers in Business, Economics and Management*, 6(2), 229-234. <https://doi.org/10.54097/fbem.v6i2.3034>
6. Chen, J., & Gong, Y. (2024). Research on the Effectiveness and Influencing Factors of College Student Village Officials
  7. Policy:Data Analysis from a National Grassroots Governance Survey. *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University(Social Science Edition)*, 64(04), 175-184.
  8. Chen, J. W., & Lai, D. S. (2020). Changes and countermeasures in the employment situation of college students under the impact of the epidemic. *Journal of Chinese College Student Employment*(11), 34-37.
  9. Chen, S., & Chen, J. (2023). Study on the Willingness Dilemma and Support System of College Students Returning to Home for Entrepreneurship under the Background of Rural Revitalization.
  10. Chu, H. L., Zhou, Y. X., Ni, K. W., Li, F. W., & Zhao, Y. M. (2021). Consideration of Sample Size in Qualitative Interviews Based on Information Power. *Chinese General Practice*, 24(10), 1274-1276+1283. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:QKYX.0.2021-10-018>.
  11. Cui, Y. (2020). The impact and thinking of the new crown pneumonia epidemic on employment in my country. *China Academy of Labor and Social Security Sciences*(07), 53.
  12. Dong, Y. L. (2024). Analysis of the Current Situation and Countermeasures for College Students Returning Home for Employment and Entrepreneurship in the Context of Rural Revitalization. *Vocational Education*, 13(05), 1553-1558. <https://doi.org/10.12677/ve.2024.135243>
  13. Fan, D. (2015). The Challenge of Rural Depopulation and Its Solutions. *Guangming Daily*, 67-67.
  14. Gong, F. (2024). Study on influencing factors of college students' willingness to return home for employment and entrepreneurship—Based on the questionnaire survey of Changjiang Art Engineering Vocational College [Master's thesis, <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFDTEMP&filename=1024658912.nh>]
  15. Gui, C. (2023). Psychological Analysis of Local College Graduates' Returning Home for Employment in the Context of Rural Revitalization. *Journal of Anshun University*, 25(6), 46-50. <https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:ASSZ.0.2023-06-008>.
  16. Han, J. (2018, 2018). Compose a new chapter in the modernization of rural agriculture in the new era. 007.
  17. Haynes, S. N., Richard, D., & Kubany, E. S. (1995). Content validity in psychological assessment: A functional approach to concepts and methods. *Psychological assessment*, 7(3), 238.
  18. He, X. (2021). A study on the willingness of Urban College students to return to their hometown for Employment—— A case study of Colleges and Universities in Taiyuan City [Master's thesis, Liaoning Normal University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202102&filename=1021640593.nh>
  19. Hu, X. (2023). Tailored Approaches for Each Village: Research on the Traps of Rural Depopulation and the Transformation of Development Pathways. *Journal of Soochow University Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition*, 44(6).
  20. Hu, X. W. (2019). Market rationality and cultural nostalgia: Youth mirror and group mentality in the rural revitalization strategy. *China Youth Study*(09), 5-10+17.
  21. Jiang, J. M., Liu, Q., & Fan, J. (2021). An analysis of the willingness and influencing factors of rural college students to return to their hometowns for employment. *Agricultural Engineering Technology*, 41(18), 79-80.
  22. Jun, P., & Tao, Y. (2023). Multi-dimensional Analysis of the Phenomenon of “Lying Flat” of Contemporary College Students: Based on the Survey and Analysis of College Students in 23 Colleges and Universities in China. *Journal of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics Social Sciences Edition*, 36(2), 174-181.

23. Lai, D. S., & Chen, J. W. (2018). Human capital and rural revitalization. *Social Sciences in Chinese Higher Education Institutions*(06), 21-28+154.
24. Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159-174. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2529310>
25. LeCompte, M. D., Preissle, J., & Tesch, R. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). Academic Press.
26. Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57.
27. Li, L., Lu, Y., & Li, Z. (2026). An extended push and pull model of ethnic minority groups' online entrepreneurship motivation in the live streaming economy. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 1-30.
28. Lin, H. (2022). *Empirical Study on the Willingness and Influencing Factors of Jieyang College Students Returning to Employment—Analysis Framework Based on Push-pull Theory* [Master's thesis, Shantou University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202301&filename=1022824746.nh>
29. Lin, M. H. (2024). Analysis of the Current Situation and Countermeasures for College Students Returning to Employment and Entrepreneurship under the Background of Rural Revitalization. *International Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 23-30. <https://doi.org/10.70088/8k7vyf61>
30. Liu, B. Z., & Zang, X. S. (2024). Diversification and volution: Trend Analysis of Changes in Employment Intention of College Students
31. (2015-2023). *Journal of Beijing University of Technology(Social Sciences Edition)*, 24(05), 21-33.
32. Liu, K. (2024). The Predicament and the Path of Relief in the Education of College Students' Rural Feelings in the VUCA Era. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 34, 83-91. <https://doi.org/10.54097/y0kxvq56>
33. Liu, M. L. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students' employment and countermeasures. *Human Resources*(10), 122.
34. Liu, T. (2019). *Study on the Influencing Factors and Countermeasures of Rural College Students' Willingness to Return to Their Hometowns for Employment and Entrepreneurship —Taking Hubei Province as An Example* [Master Thesis, Hubei University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202101&filename=1020315482.nh>
35. Liu, Y. C. (2024). From "campus" to "village": the practical obstacles and solutions for college students to go to the countryside—A survey based on the willingness of college students to return home. *China Southern Agricultural Machinery*, 55(19), 96-99.
36. Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. Jossey-Bass.
37. Messick, S. (1995). Validity of psychological assessment: Validation of inferences from persons' responses and performances as scientific inquiry into score meaning. *American psychologist*, 50(9), 741.
38. Pan, Y. (2022). A study on the influencing factors of the willingness of rural
39. college students from Henan to return to their hometown for
40. employment [Master's thesis, Zhejiang Ocean University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202301&filename=1022078581.nh>
41. Patton, M. Q. (1987). How to use qualitative methods in evaluation.
42. Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2006). The content validity index: are you sure you know what's being reported? Critique and recommendations. *Research in nursing & health*, 29(5), 489-497.
43. Potter, J., & Sage, e. (1996). *Representing reality : discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. In Sage. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0656/96067745-t.html>

44. Sabatier, P., & Mazmanian, D. (1980). The implementation of public policy: A framework of analysis. *Policy studies journal*, 8(4), 538-560.
45. Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers; an introduction to vocational development*.
46. Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 16(3), 282-298.
47. Wang, H., & Wang, C. (2024). Review of the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the employment of college graduates in China and countermeasures to it. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1390055.
48. Wang, X. R. (2020). *A Study on the Influencing Factors of College Students' Willingness to Return Home for Employment —Based on the Investigation of College Students Majoring in Agriculture in Jilin Province* [Master's thesis, <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202101&filename=1020344538.nh>]
49. Wen, J., Tan, J., & Wang, W. (2014). An analysis of the current situation of employment and entrepreneurship among ethnic minority college students returning to their hometowns in the ethnic minority areas of southeastern Chongqing. *Journal of Chinese College Student Employment*(24), 52-56.
50. Wu, Y. W., Zhang, X. Y., & Li, X. D. (2024). Analysis of the Willingness and Influencing Factors of Rural College Students to Serve Rural Areas. *Modern Agriculture*, 49(04), 19-28.
51. Xiao, L. (2013). *Behavior of Rural Employment of College Graduates in the Context of the New Rural Construction* [Doctoral dissertation, Jiangsu University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CDFD1214&filename=1013244885.nh>
52. Xiao, Q. X., Fang, W. R., & Zhao, L. (2020). A study on the willingness of college students in Guizhou Province to return to their hometowns for employment under the background of rural revitalization: Taking Guizhou Normal University as an example. *Guangxi Quality Supervision Herald*(08), 91-92.
53. Xu, Q. (2016). A study on the factors affecting college students' employment after returning to their hometowns. *Education Modernization*, 3(22), 193-194+199.
54. Xue, X. F. (2015). *The Research of Employment intention of Rural College Graduates From Returning Home in Rural Areas* [Master's thesis, Southwest University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201601&filename=1015337616.nh>
55. Yang, H. (2024). Diverse Paths and Challenges of Employment Choices for College Graduates under the Rural Revitalization Strategy. *International journal of education and humanities*, 16(3), 131-137. <https://doi.org/10.54097/056n8e97>
56. Yen, T. T., Xie, P., Li, P., & Li, P. (2024). College Students Returning Hometown to Start a New Business for Rural Revitalization from the Perspective of Family. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 18(6), 139-146.
57. Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). sage.
58. Zhang, K. (2024). Study on High-quality Development Strategy of Rural Economy Under the Strategy of Agriculture, Rural Areas and Farmers. *Journal of Innovation and Development*, 8(3), 43-46. <https://doi.org/10.54097/k8k0w249>
59. Zhang, Y. (2024). Based on the Rural Homestay Landscape Design Strategy Under the Rural Revitalization Strategy. *Research and Commentary on Humanities and Arts*, 2(6).
60. Zhang, Y. Y., Guan, H., & Zha, X. Y. (2022). Topics, debates and prospects: A review of research on entrepreneurship and employment of rural college students returning to their hometowns. *Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Teacher Development*, 41(03), 1-5.
61. Zhang, Z., & Ahmad, H. (2024). Employment of University Students in China and Abroad: A Systematic Literature Review. *BITARA International Journal of Civilizational Studies and Human Sciences* (e-ISSN: 2600-9080), 7(3), 242-254.
62. Zheng, S., Wu, G., Zhao, J., & Chen, W. (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 epidemic anxiety on college

students' employment confidence and employment situation perception in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 980634.

63. Zhou, H. B. (2017). An empirical study of Bozhou nationality college students' willingness to return to hometown for employment and influencing factors [Master's thesis, Anhui University]. <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201702&filename=1017159777.nh>