

Push and Pull Factors Influencing Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions among Chinese College Students: Evidence from Zhejiang Province

XING JUAN^{a,1}, Cheok MuiYee ^{a,2},

^aUniversiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNIRAZAK)

¹xing.juan@ur.unirazak.edu.my

²cheokmy@unirazak.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Rural entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in promoting balanced regional development and advancing rural revitalisation strategies, particularly in emerging economies such as China, where structural employment pressures and urban–rural disparities remain prominent. Despite increasing scholarly attention to entrepreneurial intention, limited research has systematically examined how push and pull factors jointly shape university students' intentions to engage in rural entrepreneurship. Grounded in push–pull theory, this study develops an integrated analytical framework and employs partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse survey data collected from 507 university students in Zhejiang Province. Specifically, the study investigates the effects of Employment Obstacles (push factor), Sense of Belonging to the City (contextual attachment factor), and Government Support (pull factor) on Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions. The empirical findings indicate that Employment Obstacles and Government Support significantly and positively influence rural entrepreneurial intentions, whereas Sense of Belonging to the City exerts a significant negative effect. By extending push–pull theory to the rural entrepreneurship context, this study enriches the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial motivation and provides practical policy implications for encouraging graduate participation in rural revitalisation initiatives.

Keywords: employment obstacle, government support, rural entrepreneurial intention, the sense of belonging to the city

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Global Trends in Rural Revitalization

Rural revitalization has become a central development strategy worldwide as governments seek to reduce regional disparities and address demographic imbalances between urban and rural areas. Rapid urbanization has accelerated economic growth but has simultaneously produced spatial inequalities, particularly in emerging economies

where development resources tend to concentrate in metropolitan regions. These imbalances often manifest in rural population decline, reduced industrial diversity, and limited innovation capacity.

China provides a prominent example of these structural challenges. Decades of rapid urban expansion have triggered significant rural-to-urban migration, resulting in the loss of young labor and human capital from rural regions. The long-term consequences include weakened local economies, demographic aging, and declining rural sustainability (Li et al., 2020). Such structural transformations have intensified concerns regarding balanced regional development.

The migration of highly educated individuals has further exacerbated rural decline. The concentration of young graduates in cities contributes to a persistent human capital gap in rural areas, limiting modernization and economic diversification (Cui et al., 2021). Consequently, policymakers increasingly recognize the importance of attracting educated youth back to rural regions.

Encouraging college graduates to engage in entrepreneurship has emerged as a key solution. Rural entrepreneurship is widely considered an effective mechanism for stimulating innovation, generating employment opportunities, and supporting regional development (Lin et al., 2026). Therefore, understanding the determinants of rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students is essential for designing effective rural revitalization strategies.

1.2 Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions as a Behavioral Determinant

Entrepreneurial intention is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of actual entrepreneurial behavior. It reflects an individual's readiness and motivation to initiate business activities, functioning as a critical cognitive antecedent to venture creation (Suanpong et al., 2025). Empirical research consistently confirms that intention plays a decisive role in shaping entrepreneurial actions across diverse contexts.

A comprehensive meta-analysis demonstrates that entrepreneurial intention strongly predicts entrepreneurial behavior and serves as a key explanatory variable in entrepreneurship research (Alshibani et al., 2024). This relationship is particularly relevant in rural settings, where entrepreneurial decisions often involve relocation, risk tolerance, and long-term commitment.

Moreover, rural entrepreneurial intentions are influenced by both internal and external factors. Environmental conditions such as labor market competition, institutional support, and socio-cultural attachments significantly shape individuals' entrepreneurial motivations (Smith & García, 2024). Therefore, examining the interplay between structural and psychological determinants is crucial for understanding entrepreneurial decision-making among college graduates.

1.3 Push–Pull Theory and Employment Obstacles

The push–pull theory provides a comprehensive framework for explaining entrepreneurial motivation. According to this theory, individuals may be pushed toward entrepreneurship by unfavorable conditions or pulled by attractive opportunities. Push factors typically include unemployment, job insecurity, and limited career prospects, while pull factors encompass perceived opportunities, autonomy, and institutional support (Giotopoulos et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurial motivation often arises from the combined influence of these two mechanisms rather than a single factor (Xie et al., 2025). In rural entrepreneurship contexts, Employment obstacles represent critical push factors. Intense competition in urban labor markets, underemployment, and rising living costs may discourage graduates from pursuing traditional employment pathways.

At the same time, Government support functions as a powerful pull factor. Institutional policies such as financial subsidies, tax incentives, and entrepreneurship training programs significantly enhance the feasibility of entrepreneurial activities (Audretsch et al., 2022). Such support mechanisms can reduce perceived risks and increase the attractiveness of rural business ventures, thereby strengthening rural entrepreneurial intentions.

1.4 The Sense of Belonging to the City as a Psychological Influence

Beyond structural factors, psychological determinants also play an important role in shaping entrepreneurial decisions. One critical factor is The sense of belonging to the city, which reflects individuals' emotional attachment, identity alignment, and social integration within urban environments.

Urban belonging strongly influences career choices. Strong emotional attachment to urban environments often encourages graduates to remain in cities due to established social networks and lifestyle advantages (Wu, 2022). This psychological connection can increase the perceived costs associated with relocating to rural areas.

Furthermore, The sense of belonging to the city may weaken rural entrepreneurial intentions by reinforcing urban identity and reducing perceived compatibility with rural environments. Individuals with strong urban attachment may perceive rural entrepreneurship as less socially prestigious or professionally rewarding. Despite its potential significance, this factor remains underexplored in existing rural entrepreneurship literature.

1.5 Research Gaps and Regional Context

Existing studies on rural entrepreneurial intentions have primarily focused on institutional support, entrepreneurship education, and individual psychological traits. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy and personality characteristics are frequently identified as important predictors of entrepreneurial behavior (Hossain et al., 2024). Similarly, entrepreneurship education has been shown to enhance entrepreneurial skills and strengthen entrepreneurial motivation among students (Saoula et al., 2023).

However, few studies integrate Employment obstacles, Government support, and The sense of belonging to the city within a unified analytical framework. The lack of integrative analysis limits theoretical understanding of how structural and psychological factors jointly influence rural entrepreneurial intentions.

Additionally, empirical research focusing on Zhejiang Province remains limited. Zhejiang is widely recognized for its dynamic private economy and advanced digital infrastructure, which create favorable conditions for rural entrepreneurship (Meng et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the factors shaping rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students in this region remain insufficiently examined.

1.6 Research Objectives and Contributions

This study aims to address these research gaps by examining how Employment obstacles, Government support, and The sense of belonging to the city influence rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students in Zhejiang Province. Using survey data analyzed through SPSS and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this research provides empirical insights into the interplay of push and pull factors. This study makes three main contributions. First, it extends push–pull theory by integrating structural and psychological determinants into a unified framework of rural entrepreneurial intentions. Second, it introduces The sense of belonging to the city as a novel explanatory variable in entrepreneurship research. Third, the findings offer practical policy implications for encouraging college graduates to participate in rural revitalization through entrepreneurship.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation: Push–Pull Theory in Entrepreneurial Intention

Push–pull theory, originally developed in migration studies, has been widely applied to entrepreneurship research to explain why individuals choose self-employment. The theory distinguishes between push factors, which are adverse conditions that drive individuals toward entrepreneurship, and pull factors, which are positive incentives that attract them to business creation (Li, S., & Sanusi, E. S., 2025). Push factors include job scarcity, career barriers, or dissatisfaction with current employment, while pull factors encompass autonomy, potential financial rewards, and supportive institutional environments (Brazierl et al., 2024).

Empirical studies demonstrate that both necessity-driven and opportunity-driven motives simultaneously shape entrepreneurial intention. University students facing limited employment options often perceive entrepreneurship as a practical alternative, whereas supportive policies and favorable entrepreneurial ecosystems act as motivating pull forces (Yin, 2022). For rural entrepreneurship, push factors such as urban labor market constraints may encourage graduates to consider rural ventures , while pull factors, including government programs promoting rural revitalization, enhance perceived feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship (Li, 2022).

Recent research emphasizes the integration of psychological and socio-cultural variables into push–pull models to capture the full complexity of entrepreneurial intention formation (Freitas et al., 2025). Among these, place attachment and identity-related constructs, such as sense of urban belonging, significantly influence career decisions and are particularly relevant for understanding rural entrepreneurship intentions among educated youth (Seyb, 2025). This indicates a need to expand traditional push–pull frameworks by incorporating both structural pressures and psychological determinants.

2.2 Employment Obstacles and Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions

Employment obstacles are a central push factor influencing entrepreneurial intention. These obstacles include limited job opportunities, intense competition, skill mismatches, and career uncertainty (Ali et al., 2023). For university graduates, labor market pressures often increase perceived risks of traditional career paths, prompting consideration of alternative employment strategies, such as entrepreneurship .

In China, employment pressures among graduates have intensified due to higher education expansion and slowing economic growth. Structural unemployment and competitive job markets shape graduates' career decisions, making entrepreneurship an increasingly attractive option (Maleki et al., 2025). Within rural contexts, employment barriers have been shown to drive entrepreneurial participation, as necessity-based motivations—such as job scarcity and income instability—encourage graduates to explore flexible, self-directed rural ventures (Barbar, 2026).

Given the empirical support for employment obstacles as a driver of entrepreneurship, we propose that such obstacles function as a push factor that positively influences rural entrepreneurial intention among college students.

H1: Employment obstacles positively influence rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students.

2.3 Sense of Belonging to the City and Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions

Sense of belonging to the city reflects emotional attachment, identity alignment, and social integration within urban environments. Related to place attachment theory, this construct highlights psychological bonds individuals form with specific geographic locations (Mohseni et al., 2024).

Among highly educated youth, strong urban belonging shapes career aspirations and mobility decisions. Individuals with urban attachment often prioritize urban employment opportunities, lifestyle amenities, and social networks, which reduces their willingness to relocate to rural areas (He et al., 2023). Place attachment has been shown to influence entrepreneurial location choice; urban identity can lead graduates to prefer city-based ventures over rural alternatives due to differences in infrastructure, market access, and social capital.

Emotional and social ties to urban life increase the psychological and social costs of rural relocation, potentially decreasing rural entrepreneurial intention (Yuan et al., 2022). Despite its theoretical relevance, urban belonging has received limited empirical attention in studies of rural entrepreneurship, which mostly focus on economic incentives rather than socio-psychological factors.

Consequently, a strong sense of belonging to the city is hypothesized to negatively affect rural entrepreneurial intention.

H2: Sense of belonging to the city negatively influences rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students.

2.4 Government Support and Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions

Government support is widely recognized as a key pull factor in shaping entrepreneurial intention. Such support includes financial incentives, tax reductions, training programs, infrastructure, and policy guidance (Dackyirekpa et al., 2024). Institutional support enhances perceived feasibility by reducing financial risks and resource constraints, thereby promoting entrepreneurship.

In China, government policies play a particularly important role in rural entrepreneurship, as institutional frameworks strongly influence economic development. Rural revitalization programs encourage graduates to engage in rural ventures by providing startup subsidies, land-use facilitation, and mentorship opportunities. Studies

indicate that perceived government support improves entrepreneurial intention by increasing perceived behavioral control and opportunity attractiveness. Policy interventions also bolster entrepreneurial confidence, providing access to resources, reducing uncertainty, and enhancing the likelihood of venture success (Prasannath et al., 2024). For rural ventures, which often face greater resource constraints than urban businesses, government support serves as a strong pull factor, lowering entry barriers and increasing feasibility. Accordingly, government support is hypothesized to positively influence rural entrepreneurial intention.

H3: Government support positively influences rural entrepreneurial intentions among college students.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

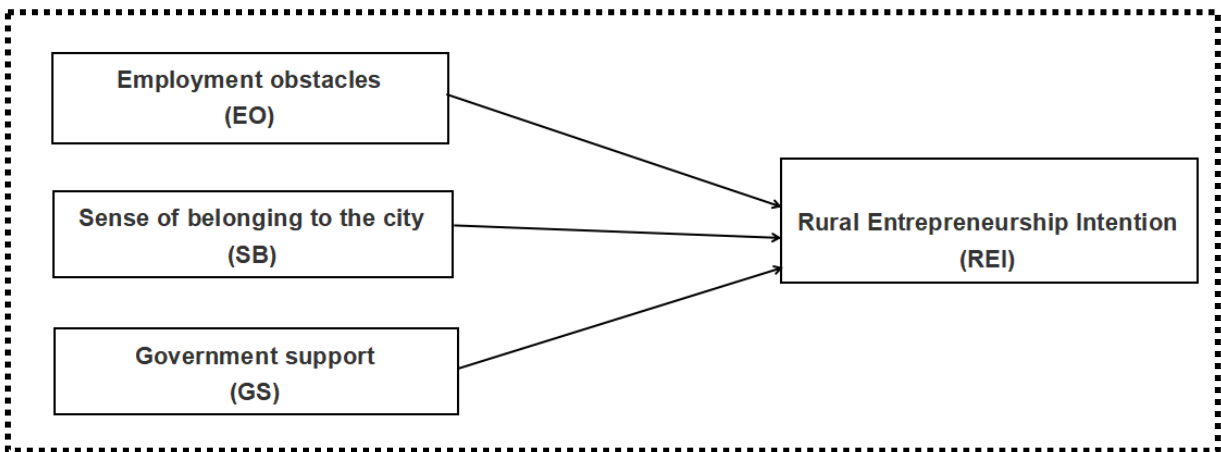
Based on push-pull theory, the proposed model integrates three key determinants of rural entrepreneurial intention: employment obstacles (push factor), government support (pull factor), and sense of belonging to the city (socio-psychological constraint). This framework combines structural, institutional, and psychological influences into a single model, providing a comprehensive explanation of intention formation among college students in rural entrepreneurship contexts.

Figure 1. The conceptual framework.

3.MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the impact of push and



pull factors on rural entrepreneurial intentions among Chinese college students. A cross-sectional survey approach was chosen because it is widely regarded as effective for examining entrepreneurial intention and its antecedents. The target population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in universities across Zhejiang Province. Zhejiang offers a favorable context due to its advanced digital economy, supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem, and proactive rural revitalization policies (Pan et al., 2025), making it ideal for examining determinants of rural entrepreneurial intention among educated youth.

Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through university mailing lists and student social media groups between March and May 2025. Convenience sampling was employed, which is common in student-based entrepreneurship research . A pilot test with 30 respondents ensured clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of questionnaire items.

A total of 512 responses were collected. After removing incomplete or invalid entries, 468 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding a response rate of 91.4%. This sample size is adequate for PLS-SEM analysis and exceeds the minimum recommended threshold for structural equation modeling .

3.2 Measurement of Variables

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from validated studies. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), a standard approach in entrepreneurial intention research for its reliability and sensitivity .

3.2.1 Employment Obstacles

Employment obstacles capture perceived constraints in the urban labor market and function as a push factor influencing entrepreneurial intention. Survey items:

1a. I think it is getting harder and harder to get a job in the city.

1b. I have difficulty finding employment in the city.

1c. City employment is very demanding for me.

This scale reflects necessity-driven motivations that may encourage rural entrepreneurship when traditional career pathways appear limited.

3.2.2 Sense of Belonging to the City

The sense of belonging to the city reflects emotional attachment, identity alignment, and social integration within urban environments (Dirksmeier, 2025). Strong urban attachment can discourage graduates from relocating to rural areas due to perceived social and psychological costs.

Survey items:

2a. The city's salary level does not meet my requirements.

2b. The cost of living in the city is too high for me.

2c. The price of the city is more than I can afford.

This adaptation focuses on economic aspects of urban attachment relevant to entrepreneurial location decisions.

3.2.3 Government Support

Government support serves as a pull factor facilitating entrepreneurship by providing resources, policy guidance, and financial incentives. Items were adapted to reflect rural entrepreneurship policies in Zhejiang Province.

Survey items:

3a. I think the government should provide preferential policies to support entrepreneurship.

3b. I think the government should provide financial support or subsidies.

3c. I think the government should simplify the registration, approval, and licensing process for business start-ups.

These items capture the perceived availability and importance of institutional support in encouraging rural venture creation.

3.2.4 Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions

Rural entrepreneurial intention was measured using a modified version of the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire, adapted to the rural context. Items were designed to reflect readiness and commitment to rural business creation.

Survey items:

a. I had the idea for a rural business a long time ago.

b. I am ready for a rural business.

c. I want to contribute to rural development.

This scale has been validated in previous studies and demonstrates high reliability and predictive validity for entrepreneurial intentions.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and SmartPLS 4.0 following a two-step procedure. First, SPSS was used to compute descriptive statistics, assess normality, and examine common method bias using Harman's single-factor test, a standard approach in survey-based entrepreneurship research.

Second, PLS-SEM was applied via SmartPLS to evaluate measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for prediction-oriented research and models with complex latent relationships. Compared to covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM requires fewer distributional assumptions and is robust with moderate sample sizes.

Analysis steps included:

Measurement model evaluation: reliability (Cronbach's α , composite reliability) and validity (convergent and discriminant validity) assessment.

Structural model assessment: path coefficients, significance testing (bootstrapping), and R^2 evaluation.

Predictive relevance testing: assessing model's explanatory and predictive capability.

This procedure ensures a rigorous evaluation of both measurement quality and theoretical relationships.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, with all respondents assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained prior to survey completion. The study followed standard ethical guidelines for social science research involving human participants.

4.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Common Method Bias

This study employed SPSS 26.0 to perform descriptive statistical analysis of the survey data, providing insight into the central tendency, distribution, and variability of key constructs. The sample was drawn from university students across Zhejiang Province, with demographic characteristics aligning with typical populations in entrepreneurial intention research. A majority of respondents were under the age of 24, and the sample included undergraduate, postgraduate students and specialist students, ensuring that the results reflect a diverse set of higher education experiences.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics Distribution

Name	Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	187	36.88
	Female	320	63.12
Educational Attainment	Postgraduate	45	8.88
	Undergraduate	292	57.59
	Specialist students	165	32.54
	Other	5	0.99
	Under 22	432	85.21
Age	22–25 years old	60	11.83
	26–30 years old	11	2.17
	Over 30	4	0.79
Hometown	Rural	387	76.33
	Urban	120	23.67
Total		507	100.0

Descriptive statistics for the main constructs—employment obstacles, sense of belonging to the city, government support, and rural entrepreneurial intentions—revealed moderate mean scores. For example, mean scores for employment obstacles ranged from 2.18 to 2.41 (out of 5), indicating that respondents generally perceived city employment challenges as present, though not overwhelming. Meanwhile, mean scores for government support items were higher (above 4.0), suggesting that students strongly believe in the importance of supportive policies for entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurial intention items exhibited mean values around the mid-range, reflecting a modest but notable willingness to engage in rural business creation. These results suggest sufficient variation and meaningful response distributions across key constructs, which are suitable for structural modeling.

Skewness and kurtosis values for all constructs fell within acceptable ranges (± 2), suggesting that the distributions did not deviate substantially from normality. Although partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is robust to non-normal data, reasonably symmetrical distributions can still improve stability and the interpretability of parameter estimates.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

Item	Mean [□]	Standard Deviation [□]	Kurtosis	Skewness
I find it increasingly difficult to find work in the city.	2.18	0.827	0.438	0.178
I find it very difficult to secure employment in the city.	2.41	0.879	0.328	-0.028
For me, jobs in the city have very high requirements.	2.33	0.808	0.539	0.770

Item	Mean ^a	Standard Deviation ^a	Kurtosis	Skewness
The wage levels in the city don't meet my expectations.	2.78	0.817	-0.093	0.313
The cost of living in the city is too high for me.	2.36	0.739	0.118	0.221
Prices in the city are beyond my means.	2.59	0.739	-0.356	0.336
I believe the government should support university graduates starting businesses in rural areas through preferential policies.	4.09	0.845	-0.950	1.262
I believe the government should provide financial support or subsidies for university students starting businesses in rural areas.	4.15	0.772	-0.855	1.266
I believe the government should streamline the registration, licensing and approval procedures for rural enterprises established by university graduates.	4.06	0.810	-0.645	0.248
I conceived the idea of rural entrepreneurship at an early age.	3.07	0.870	-0.134	0.265
I am ready to dedicate myself to rural development.	3.06	0.860	0.006	0.432
I am eager to contribute to rural development.	3.53	0.839	-0.375	0.739

To examine the potential for common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was conducted using exploratory factor analysis. The results indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for 33.41% of the total variance, which is well below the conservative threshold of 40% and the commonly accepted criterion of 50%. This suggests that no single factor dominated the covariance among the measurement items, and common method bias is unlikely to pose a serious threat to the validity of the findings. Together, these descriptive findings indicate that the data are reliable, suitably distributed, and free from major biases that could undermine subsequent structural model testing.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

SmartPLS 4.0 was used to evaluate the measurement model in terms of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Cheah et al., 2022). Measurement model assessment is critical in SEM research because it ensures that constructs are measured reliably and that latent variables are appropriately represented by their indicators.

4.2.1 Reliability Assessment

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 3, all constructs exhibited Cronbach's alpha values above 0.75 and CR values exceeding 0.86. These values surpass the commonly accepted minimum thresholds for reliability in social science research, indicating that the

measurement items consistently and cohesively capture their intended latent constructs (Hair et al., 2022). For instance, government support demonstrated particularly high reliability ($\alpha = 0.917$; CR = 0.947), suggesting that its indicators function as a unified construct.

Table 3. Measurement Model Results: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BT	0.755	0.776	0.860	0.674
EO	0.881	0.921	0.925	0.805
GS	0.917	0.917	0.947	0.857
REI	0.785	0.788	0.874	0.699

4.2.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the extent to which items purported to measure the same construct are correlated. This was assessed using indicator loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, and AVE values were above 0.50 for all constructs, indicating that more than half of the variance in the indicators was explained by their respective latent variables. For example, employment obstacle items had strong loadings, and the AVE for this construct was 0.805, confirming that its indicators reliably capture students' perceptions of city employment challenges.

These results provide confidence that the measurement items are valid representations of their respective constructs.

Table 4. Indicator Loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE
BT	BT1	0.711	0.674
	BT2	0.863	
	BT3	0.878	
EO	E01	0.916	0.805
	E02	0.920	
	E03	0.853	
GS	GS1	0.927	0.857

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE
REI	GS2	0.945	0.699
	GS3	0.905	
	REI1	0.825	
	REI2	0.853	
	REI3	0.829	

4.2.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was examined using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming that constructs such as employment obstacles, city belonging, and government support are empirically distinct. This finding supports the theoretical premise that push factors, socio-psychological factors, and pull factors capture different dimensions of entrepreneurial decision-making.

In summary, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and validity, providing a sound foundation for structural analysis.

Table 5. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of Correlations

Construct	BT	EO	GS	REI
BT	—			
EO	0.557	—		
GS	0.402	0.217	—	
REI	0.246	0.134	0.343	—

4.3 Structural Model Assessment

After establishing measurement quality, the structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized relationships among the key constructs.

4.3.1 Multicollinearity Analysis

Collinearity among indicators was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). As shown in Table X, all VIF values range from 1.264 to 4.558, which are below the recommended threshold of 5.0. This indicates that multicollinearity is not a concern in the measurement model.

Table 6. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for Indicator Variables

Construct	Item	VIF
BT	BT1	1.264
	BT2	1.958
	BT3	1.928
EO	EO1	2.421
	EO2	2.828
	EO3	2.290
GS	GS1	3.911
	GS2	4.558
	GS3	2.583
REI	REI1	1.605
	REI2	1.940
	REI3	1.573

4.3.2 Hypothesis Testing and Path Analysis

To test the hypothesized structural relationships, bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was conducted. The findings show that BT has a significant negative effect on REI, suggesting that higher BT levels reduce students' rural entrepreneurial intentions. EO and GS both have significant positive impacts on REI. All t-values exceed the critical value of 1.96 and all p-values are below 0.001, confirming the statistical significance of these paths.

H1: Employment obstacles → Rural entrepreneurial intentions. The standardized path coefficient ($\beta = 0.266$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a significant positive effect, suggesting that perceived employment barriers in urban contexts encourage students to consider entrepreneurship in rural areas as an alternative. This finding aligns with necessity-driven entrepreneurship theory, which posits that individuals facing unfavorable job prospects are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial avenues (Solomon et al., 2025).

H2: Sense of belonging to the city → Rural entrepreneurial intentions. The path coefficient was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.219$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that stronger emotional attachment to urban life decreases the likelihood of engaging in rural entrepreneurship. This reflects the role of place attachment and psychological costs associated with relocation, consistent with place attachment theory and research showing that urban identity reduces mobility intentions.

H3: Government support → Rural entrepreneurial intentions. Government support had the strongest positive impact ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that institutional incentives and resources significantly enhance students' rural entrepreneurial intentions.

This result is consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of policy support in reducing perceived risk and increasing opportunity recognition for entrepreneurial activities .

These findings provide robust empirical support for the hypothesized push–pull framework, demonstrating that structural, psychological, and institutional factors jointly shape rural entrepreneurial intention formation.

Table 7.Table X. Structural Model Path Coefficients and Significance (Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples)

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Employment obstacles -> Rural entrepreneurial intention	0.266	0.262	0.073	3.656	<0.001
Sense of belonging to the city -> Rural entrepreneurship intention	-0.219	-0.224	0.059	3.740	<0.001
Government Support for -> Rural Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.274	0.273	0.053	5.191	<0.001

4.3.3 Explanatory Power (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for rural entrepreneurial intentions was 0.154, indicating that the three predictor variables account for 15.4% of the variance. While seemingly modest, this explanatory power is consistent with intention research, where multiple personal, social, and contextual factors interact to influence decision-making . R^2 values in this range are common in behavioral models, reflecting the inherent complexity of cognitive and motivational processes underlying entrepreneurial intentions.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The empirical results of this study make several important contributions to the understanding of rural entrepreneurial intentions among university students, particularly within the push–pull theoretical framework.

4.4.1 Employment Obstacles as a Push Factor

The positive effect of employment obstacles confirms that when students perceive increasing difficulty in securing satisfactory urban employment, they are more likely to consider rural entrepreneurship as an alternative career pathway. This aligns with necessity-driven entrepreneurship theories, which contend that constrained employment opportunities stimulate entrepreneurial activities (Huang et al., 2023). In the context of China's evolving labor market, where competition and skill mismatches

persist among graduates, employment pressure may serve as a significant push toward self-directed career paths.

4.4.2 The sense of belonging to the city as a Psychological Constraint

The negative impact of the sense of belonging to the city highlights the importance of socio-psychological attachment in shaping entrepreneurial choices. Students with stronger emotional and social ties to urban environments exhibited lower rural entrepreneurial intentions, likely due to the perceived psychological costs and lifestyle adjustments required for relocation. This finding resonates with place attachment research showing that identity and emotional bonds influence mobility and location decisions. It also underscores the need for rural development policies to address not just economic incentives but also psychological and cultural attachments.

4.4.3 Government Support as a Pull Factor

Government support emerged as the strongest predictor of rural entrepreneurial intention. Policy incentives, financial subsidies, streamlined registration procedures, and other institutional facilitation mechanisms provide tangible resources and reduce uncertainty for prospective rural entrepreneurs. This result supports institutional perspectives that emphasize the enabling role of governance systems in promoting entrepreneurship. In practice, comprehensive support mechanisms may boost perceived feasibility and desirability, encouraging more students to consider rural business opportunities.

4.4.4 Integrated Insights

Taken together, these findings suggest that rural entrepreneurial intention among students is shaped by a combination of structural pressures (employment obstacles), socio-psychological attachments (urban belonging), and institutional incentives (government support). The integrated push-pull framework provides a nuanced understanding of how external conditions and internal orientations jointly drive entrepreneurial cognition and choice.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

Drawing upon push-pull theory and rural entrepreneurship literature, this study empirically examined how employment obstacles, the sense of belonging to the city, and government support influence rural entrepreneurial intentions among Chinese college students in Zhejiang Province. Using SPSS and PLS-SEM techniques, the results provide several important findings.

First, employment obstacles significantly and positively affect rural entrepreneurial intentions. This finding supports the “push effect” logic that unfavorable labor market conditions stimulate individuals to consider entrepreneurship as an alternative career path. Prior research indicates that perceived employment difficulty increases risk tolerance and opportunity recognition in self-employment decisions. Similarly, empirical

studies of Chinese graduates show that job insecurity encourages entrepreneurial choice by increasing perceived opportunity costs of wage employment. The current study confirms that structural employment pressures in China continue to function as a major motivational driver for rural entrepreneurship.

Second, the sense of belonging to the city negatively influences rural entrepreneurial intentions, indicating a significant pull-away effect from rural return decisions. Urban social integration enhances psychological attachment and perceived life satisfaction, which reduces migration willingness and entrepreneurial mobility (Guan et al., 2024). When individuals develop strong urban identity and social embeddedness, their perceived opportunity costs of returning to rural areas increase significantly. This study empirically validates that emotional and social attachment to cities represents a key barrier to rural entrepreneurial engagement.

Third, government support demonstrates a strong positive influence on rural entrepreneurial intentions, confirming the importance of institutional pull factors. Policy incentives such as financial subsidies, tax reductions, and training programs reduce entrepreneurial risk and improve perceived feasibility. In China, government-led rural revitalization policies have been shown to significantly enhance entrepreneurial confidence and opportunity perception among young graduates. The present findings align with institutional theory, suggesting that policy support serves as a critical enabling condition for rural entrepreneurship.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature in several ways.

First, it extends push-pull theory into the context of rural entrepreneurship among college students. While prior studies primarily examined migration decisions, this research demonstrates that push-pull dynamics also operate in entrepreneurial intention formation, particularly under conditions of structural employment pressure.

Second, the study enriches rural entrepreneurship research by integrating psychological and institutional perspectives. Previous research often focused on economic incentives alone, whereas this study confirms that emotional attachment factors such as urban belonging significantly shape entrepreneurial decision-making processes.

Third, the findings contribute to entrepreneurship intention theory by highlighting contextual determinants beyond traditional cognitive predictors such as self-efficacy or attitude. This supports recent calls for integrating structural and environmental variables into entrepreneurial intention models.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings provide important policy and managerial implications.

First, policymakers should address employment structural mismatches by promoting entrepreneurship as a viable alternative career pathway. Career guidance programs should explicitly incorporate rural entrepreneurship opportunities, as employment uncertainty significantly drives entrepreneurial intention formation.

Second, reducing urban-rural psychological barriers is essential. Initiatives that strengthen rural identity, community belonging, and social integration in rural areas may effectively counterbalance strong urban attachment effects.

Third, strengthening government support systems remains critical. Providing targeted subsidies, access to financing, and structured training programs can substantially enhance entrepreneurial feasibility perceptions and reduce perceived risks. These policy implications align with global rural development strategies emphasizing institutional support as a key determinant of sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystems .

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations.

First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how entrepreneurial intentions evolve over time.

Second, the sample is limited to Zhejiang Province, which may reduce generalizability. Future research should include multi-regional or national samples to enhance external validity.

Third, the study focuses on external factors without incorporating psychological mediators. Future research could explore mechanisms such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy or perceived opportunity recognition.

Additionally, future studies may examine moderating effects of entrepreneurship education, which has been shown to significantly strengthen the intention–behavior relationship in entrepreneurial contexts .

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