Grounded Research on Influence Mechanism of Knowledge-based Retirees' Returning to Hometown

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Abstract. The key to rural revitalization is revitalizing the talent. Under the background of rural hollowing out, many knowledge-based retirees are crucial resources to make up the talent gap of rural revitalization. This study uses Grounded Theory to extract factors that influence knowledge-based retirees' returning-home behavior. The results show that, environmental factors, personal characteristics, practical premise and return benefit jointly influence the returning behavior of the knowledge-based retirees. Specifically, environmental impact, personal characteristics are internal and external motivation factors that determine knowledge-based retirees' willingness to adopt returning home practice; while practical premise and return benefit, as practical moderating factors, influence the strength of the relationship between willingness and behavior.

Keywords: Retirees; Returning Home; Influence Mechanism

1 INTRODUCTION

The rural revitalization strategy is the wise decision and top-level design of the CPC Central Committee to develop agriculture and rural areas in the new era, in which "talent revitalization" occupies an important position. The "Opinions on Accelerating the Revitalization of Rural Talents" pointed out that the development of rural human capital should be put in the first place, vigorously cultivate local talents, guide urban talents to go to the countryside, promote professional talents to serve the countryside, and attract all kinds of talents to make contributions to rural revitalization. However, with the advancement of urbanization, the gap between urban and rural areas in China is widening, and young and middle-aged people in rural areas are more willing to go to cities, resulting in a talent gap that has become a bottleneck restricting rural revitalization. In July 2023, nine departments, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the National Development and Reform Commission, jointly issued the "Implementation Plan for the "My Hometown, My Construction" Activity (hereinafter referred to as the "Plan"), emphasizing that rural revitalization should introduce a group of talents and orderly guide university graduates to the township, migrant workers to return to their hometowns, capable people to return to their hometowns and entrepreneurs to enter the township.

According to the data of the 7th Population Census, China has 260 million elderly people aged 60 and above. Many of them left rural hometowns in their early years to receive a good education and work in the cities, and after retirement, they are still in good health and have the nostalgia of returning to hometowns. In addition, for the elderly, daily outings increase opportunities for social engagement and enhance perception of competence and emotion [1]. Work beyond retirement age may have a protective effect on all aspects of the well-being of older persons[2], and meaningful employment promotes their mental and physical health [3]. Therefore, if this part of human capital is not fully and rationally utilized, it will inevitably lead to the idleness and waste of valuable labor resources.

At present, most of the literature focuses on the return of migrant workers and college students to their hometowns, although there are some re-employment of the elderly and their influencing factors, but for the knowledge-based retirement group, which factors affect their return to their hometowns, there is little discussion. In view of this, this study uses the grounded analysis method to explore the influencing factors and mechanisms of knowledge-based retirees' return behavior. According to labor market data in Europe and the United States, the re-employment rate of older people has been increasing in many countries in recent decades [4], and government intervention can increase the employment of older people, especially men over the age of 60 [5]. Therefore, results of this study are intended to provide a theoretical basis and path reference for government departments to adopt corresponding incentive policies.

2   DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the grounded theory method was used to explore the factors affecting the return of retirees to their hometowns by using the MAXQ-DA qualitative research software. Grounded theory is a bottom-up method of establishing theories based on raw data, that is, constantly sorting, analyzing, inducting, and summarizing the original data, and fully exploring the internal logical relationships between various categories until the theory is saturated. This study generated a large number of original data through multiple in-depth interviews, which met the requirements of grounded theory and inference.

At present, there are no conceptual categories, mature measurement scales and theoretical models that are closely related to the influencing factors of knowledge retirees' return to their hometowns. In order to more effectively explore the impact mechanism of knowledge retirees returning to their hometowns, the research group conducted interviews with interviewees in Zhenjiang, Nanjing, and Suzhou in Jiangsu Province in September-December 2022 and March-May 2023 to obtain textual materials for research.

According to the requirements of grounded theory, the interviewees should have a certain understanding of the content involved in the interview topic, so the research team tried to select interviewees who had a certain understanding of rural revitalization. Respondents in this study are generally between the ages of 45 and 70, with at least a tertiary education, and they are about to retire or have not been retired for a long time,

so they are more likely to have the idea of returning home. The survey was conducted through one-on-one in-depth interviews, with pre-designed interview questions and follow-up questions to maximize data collection. The research team interviewed 98 respondents to obtain textual materials for research, and uses the grounded theory method to explore the factors affecting the return of retirees to their hometowns.

2.1 Open coding

Open coding is the process of conceptualizing and categorizing raw interview material. This study was carried out in strict accordance with the process of open coding, and finally extracting 30 initial categories, limited in space, and the examples of open coding are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of open coding

Number	Initial Scope	Representative Original Sentences (Initial Concepts)
A05	Ecological environment	The environment in the countryside is much better than in the city.
A23	Homestead	When returning to Hometown, we need a place to build a house.
A31	Family and friend	We have relatives in our hometown, which is also a concern for us.
A17	Subsidies	When I retired, I became a theater actor, but I didn't have that income when I returned home.
A54	Spousal support	My wife disagrees, she grew up in the city.
A27	Commendations	We have returned to our hometown and made contributions. Can we have honors? At my age, I want to have a good reputation.
A68	Medical conditions	I'm still a little worried about the hospital in the countryside, after all, I'm getting older.
A92	Leaders	Whether there is anyone to take the lead in doing things, I can't do it blindly.

2.2 Spindle coding

The main axis coding is to further summarize and arrange the initial categories obtained by open coding, and then extract the corresponding sub-categories and main categories by discovering the organic correlation and logical relationship between different initial categories at the conceptual level. In the specific analysis, the initial categories that are intrinsically related are reclassified and named in combination with the existing research results. A total of four main categories were extracted in this study, and the corresponding primary categories are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Spindle coding analysis

Scope of extraction		Corresponds to the initial scope
Main	Deputy	
Environmental factors	Rural character	Rural ecology, Rural humanities
	Infrastructure	Road, Logistics outlets, Entertainment for the elderly, Medical conditions
	Institution	Homestead, Medicare policy
	Social conditions	Social publicity
Personal characteristics	Experience	Growth background, Social relations
	Spiritual feelings	Responsibility, Emotional connection
	Self-status quo	Personal abilities, Health status, Future plan, Length of retirement
	Family background	Family and friend, Spousal support, Children's opinions
Practical premise	Financial resources	Start-up capital support, Subsidy
	Technical resources	Technology introduction, Training
	Organize resources	Leaders, Rural residents cooperate
Return benefits	Social benefits	Rural economic development, Public cultural services development
	Personal benefits	Commendations, Self-worth realization

2.3   Selective coding

On the basis of the main axis coding, selective coding analyzes the connection between the main categories, and identifies the "core categories" that can dominate other categories through the layer-by-layer induction of the main categories, and connects the collected data and the developed relationships and categories, and then constructs, integrates and forms a theoretical framework in the form of story lines. Through the comparison and analysis of the initial concept, the initial category and the main category, this study identifies the "analysis of the factors of knowledge retirees returning to their hometowns" as the core category.

Focusing on the core categories, the story line can be summarized as follows: under the rural revitalization strategy, environmental factors, personal characteristics, practical premises, and return benefits can affect the return behavior of knowledge retirees from different aspects. Among them, "environmental factors" and "personal characteristics" are linked as "internal and external motivational factors", and "practical premises" and "return to home benefits" are linked as "practical moderating factors" (the important connections between the main categories are shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Description of selective coding and coupling mechanism

Coupling mechanism	Connotation explanation
Environmental factors → Returning Willingness	Environmental impact is the external context factor, and personal

Personal characteristics → Returning Willingness	characteristics are the internal driving factors, which determine the returning willingness.
Returning Willingness → Returning behavior	The returning willingness can directly affect the return behavior of knowledge-based retirees.
Practical premise ↓ Returning Willingness → Returning behavior	Practical premise is the element of the practice process, which can regulate the intensity of the relationship between " willingness → behavior".
Return benefits ↓ Returning Willingness → Returning behavior	Return benefits is an outcome factor of practice, which can moderate the intensity of the relationship between "willingness → behavior".

3   CONCLUSION

3.1   Conclusions of the study

Based on grounded theory, this study systematically exploratory studies the influencing factors of 98 knowledge-based retirees returning to hometowns, and then the following conclusions are drawn:

Environmental factors, personal characteristics, practical premise and return benefits have an important impact on the return of knowledge-based retirees. Among them, "environmental factors" and "personal characteristics" are linked as "internal and external motivational factors", determining the returning willingness, which affects the returning behavior. And "practical premise" and "return benefit" are linked as "practical moderating factors", which moderates the relationship between the "willingness → behavior" of knowledge-based retirees to return to hometowns.

3.2   Research implications

(1) Relying on rural construction actions, we should accelerate the construction of rural infrastructure and public service systems, which build a pleasant and livable living environment for knowledge-based retirees. The grassroots governments continue to optimize the policy of returning, for example, innovating rural land-use policies, and then form the necessary policy guidance mechanism.

(2) Through traditional and new media platforms, we will publicize the typical deeds of returnees, and strive to create a good atmosphere to support retirees to return to their hometowns, so that knowledge-based retirees can take the initiative to respond to the call. And it is necessary to make good use of the thrust of nostalgia to attract knowledge-based retirees to return.

(3) For knowledge-based retirees who have returned to hometowns, local governments should have an in-depth understanding of their actual needs, and provide them

with certain funds, technology, and personnel organization to build a strong and united talent team for rural revitalization.

(4) Guiding knowledge-based retirees to establish a correct concept of pension, and motivating them to pursue higher self-worth. Knowledge-based retirees have a higher level of education and expertise that is in demand in society, and they can use honors and commendations as a means of attracting them to return.

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