



Investigation and Analysis of the Current Status of Overseas Young Talent's Intention to Stay in Shandong

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Abstract

In the context of increasingly fierce global competition for talent, attracting and retaining overseas young talents has become a critical issue for regional high-quality development. In recent years, Shandong Province has continuously intensified its efforts to recruit talents. However, whether overseas young talents are willing to develop in Shandong over the long term still requires systematic analysis through empirical investigation. Based on this, this paper takes overseas young talents working in Shandong as the research object, employs a questionnaire survey method to collect 210 valid sample data, and utilizes descriptive statistical methods to analyze their basic characteristics, the level of intention to stay in Shandong, and relevant influencing factors. The research results indicate that: (1) Overall, the intention of overseas young talents to stay in Shandong is at a moderately high level, with an average score of 3.87; (2) Approximately 72.4% of respondents expressed being "relatively willing" or "very willing" to develop in Shandong long-term; (3) Career development opportunities, urban development prospects, and the quality of the living environment are the three factors most concerned by respondents; (4) Some respondents still exhibit a certain degree of dissatisfaction with policy information acquisition channels and personalized service support. Based on these findings, this paper proposes countermeasures and suggestions such as further optimizing talent service mechanisms, improving policy precision, and enhancing urban comprehensive attractiveness. The research results can provide a reference for Shandong Province to improve its service system for overseas young talents.

Keywords

Descriptive Analysis; Intention to Stay in Shandong; Overseas Young Talents; Shandong Province; Talent Service

1. Introduction

In today's deep integration of globalization and the knowledge economy, high-level talents have become the primary resource for driving regional innovation and leading industrial transformation (Xi, 2021). With the rapid development of a new round of technological revolution and industrial change, countries worldwide and various regions within China have launched

a fierce “talent war.” For China, overseas young talents, as a group with international vision, mastery of cutting-edge technologies, and innovative vitality, are an important force for achieving high-level scientific and technological self-reliance. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly stated the need to “accelerate the construction of world-important talent centers and innovation highlands, and promote the rational layout and coordinated development of regional talents.” In this context, how to not only “attract” but also “retain” overseas young talents has become a top priority for talent work by governments at all levels.

Entering the “post-pandemic era,” the logic of global talent mobility has undergone profound changes (Li, 2023). Geopolitical fluctuations, the popularization of remote work technologies, and the transformation of the domestic economic structure have jointly driven a new wave of overseas talent return (Liu & Zhang, 2022). However, this return is not a simple “spatial displacement” but a complex “value reconstruction.” When choosing a destination, overseas young talents no longer focus solely on salary and benefits but pay more attention to the sustainability of career development, the livability of the environment, and the precision of social services. For Shandong Province, a major economic province on China’s eastern coast, it is currently in a critical period of transitioning between old and new growth drivers and achieving high-quality development. The Shandong Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government attach great importance to talent work and have successively introduced a series of competitive talent recruitment policies, such as the “Taishan Talent Project” and the “Young Outstanding Talent Introduction Plan.”

However, talent mobility is a dynamic decision-making process. Initial “policy attraction” does not equate to a long-term “residency commitment.” The job satisfaction, living adaptability, and expectations for future development of overseas young talents in Shandong directly determine their ultimate intention to stay. Currently, research on talent retention intention mostly focuses on first-tier cities or the national macro level, while micro-empirical research targeting specific regions like Shandong, especially for overseas young talents already in post, remains insufficient. This study aims to systematically characterize the current status of overseas young talents’ intention to stay in Shandong through a questionnaire survey of 210 individuals working in the province and to deeply analyze the key factors influencing their residency decisions, providing decision-making references for Shandong Province to optimize its talent ecosystem and improve the precision of talent services.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Basis

2.1.1 Push-Pull theory

Push-Pull theory is one of the most classic models for analyzing population migration and talent mobility (Wang & Tian, 2023). The theory posits that talent mobility is the result of the combined action of “push factors” from the place of origin and “pull factors” from the destination. For overseas young talents, competitive pressure, cultural barriers, or career ceilings abroad constitute “push factors,” while economic growth, hometown ties, policy dividends, and career development space in China (such as Shandong) form strong “pull factors.” In the current international environment, the “push” from overseas environments is intensifying, while the “pull” of domestic regional development exhibits differentiated characteristics. As the birthplace of Qilu culture, Shandong’s profound cultural heritage and increasingly mod-

ernized industrial system together constitute a unique “composite pull.”

2.1.2 Human capital theory

Human capital theory emphasizes that talent mobility is a rational investment behavior based on the maximization of expected returns (Xing & Zhang, 2024). When choosing a place of residence, overseas young talents comprehensively weigh the space for human capital appreciation in the local area. This includes not only explicit salary and benefits but also implicit skill spillover effects and a sense of professional achievement. If a region can provide continuous opportunities for skill enhancement and clear promotion paths, talents are more likely to view it as a platform for long-term development. This study will explore overseas talents’ perceptions of the industrial environment and personal professional alignment in Shandong, which is directly related to the preservation and appreciation of their human capital.

2.1.3 Social capital and psychological contract theory

Social Capital Theory points out that an individual’s social network, sense of belonging, and community participation have a significant impact on their stability. Additionally, Psychological Contract Theory provides a new perspective for understanding retention intention. Between talents and local governments or enterprises, there exists not only a legal labor contract but also a psychological contract based on expectations and promises. When talents perceive that the policy support provided by the government aligns with their expectations, their intention to stay will be significantly enhanced.

2.2 Current Status of Domestic and International Research

2.2.1 Research on return motivations of overseas young talents

In recent years, the return of overseas talents has shown a trend of “improvement in both quantity and quality.” Gao (2022) found that the return decisions of overseas scientific and technological talents have shifted from a single motivation of “serving the motherland” in the early stages to a dual motivation of “career development” and “quality of life.” Young talents are returning significantly earlier and place more value on the regional innovation ecosystem. Meanwhile, geopolitical factors have played a significant positive moderating role in the return intention of high-end talents, making the domestic “stable environment” a scarce attraction.

2.2.2 Retention intention and its multidimensional influencing factors

The academic community generally believes that retention intention is a core indicator for measuring talent stability. Wu (2023) found through a survey of young talents in large cities that public service quality, such as housing costs, medical resources, and children’s education, has surpassed mere salary to become a key variable affecting long-term settlement. Xing (2024) further pointed out that the social adaptability of returnees is significantly positively correlated with their retention intention. Furthermore, research has shown that Perceived Organizational Support (POS) plays an important mediating role between talent policies and retention intention; that is, talents’ perception of policies must be transformed through their actual sense of gain within the organization.

2.2.3 Comparison and evaluation of regional talent policies

Talent policies are the primary tools for local governments to intervene in talent mobility. The

Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta regions, with their early institutional advantages, lead in internationalized talent services. Song (2024) argued that the combination of policy tools is superior to a single policy, but information asymmetry in policy implementation often weakens talents' sense of policy gain. Research on Shandong shows that while brand effects such as "Taishan Scholars" are significant, there is still a gap compared to advanced southern regions in terms of grassroots implementation and inclusive services, especially in policy flexibility and response speed.

2.3 Review of Existing Research and the Entry Point of This Study

In summary, existing literature has provided a solid theoretical framework for understanding talent mobility, but several deficiencies remain: first, the research areas are biased toward Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, with insufficient attention paid to major economic provinces in transition like Shandong; second, the research methods are mostly macro-statistical, lacking refined descriptive analysis based on specific groups (overseas youth). This paper will focus on Shandong, through an empirical investigation of 210 overseas young talents, attempting to answer: in the current complex and volatile international landscape, what is the true evaluation of Shandong by overseas young talents? What factors truly affect their intention to stay in Shandong? This study will reveal the differences in demands among talents from different backgrounds through multidimensional cross-analysis.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Objects and Sampling Process

The research objects of this study are overseas young talents employed or starting businesses in enterprises and public institutions within Shandong Province. The specific defining criteria are: having one year or more of overseas study, work, or research experience; being 35 years of age or younger (including 35); and currently having joined a post or started an enterprise within Shandong Province.

To ensure the representativeness of the sample, the study adopted a combination of stratified sampling and snowball sampling. First, questionnaires were distributed through talent service centers and overseas student pioneer parks in various cities in Shandong Province, covering cities with high talent concentration such as Jinan, Qingdao, and Yantai; second, they were disseminated through overseas talent communities of university talent offices and research institutes. The survey period was from October to December 2025. A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed, and 218 were recovered. After excluding questionnaires with too short response times (less than 60 seconds), missing key information, or logical inconsistencies, 210 valid questionnaires were finally obtained, with an effective recovery rate of 96.3%.

3.2 Measurement Tools and Scale Validation

The survey questionnaire used in this study consists of five parts. In addition to basic demographic variables, the core scales are all adapted from mature domestic and international scales.

1) Intention to Stay in Shandong Scale: Referring to the measurement indicators of Xing (2024), it includes 4 items: "long-term development intention," "recommendation intention," "intention to remain in the current unit," and "re-selection tendency."

2) Career Development and Urban Attractiveness Scale: Referring to the research of Zhang (2022), it includes 5 items such as industrial matching, career space, employment opportunities, and development prospects.

3) Living Environment and Public Service Scale: Referring to the research of Wu (2023), it covers 5 items: cost of living, medical care, education, livability, and service convenience.

4) Policy and Service Support Scale: A self-compiled scale examining 4 items: policy attractiveness, information acquisition channels, service effectiveness, and implementation status.

Before the formal analysis, the reliability and validity of the scale were tested. In terms of reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the total scale was 0.88, and the Alpha values for each dimension ranged from 0.82 to 0.91, indicating that the questionnaire has extremely high internal consistency. In terms of validity, the KMO value was 0.85, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$). The four factors extracted by exploratory factor analysis highly matched the designed dimensions, with a cumulative explained variance of 72.4%, proving that the scale has good structural validity.

4. Research Results and Analysis

4.1 Statistical Description of Basic Sample Characteristics

The statistical characteristics of the sample (Table 1) reflect the current status of overseas talent recruitment in Shandong Province.

Table 1. The statistical characteristics of the sample

Characteristic Dimension	Category	Frequency (N=210)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	56.2
	Female	92	43.8
Age	Under 25	33	15.7
	25-30 years old	96	45.7
	31-35 years old	81	38.6
Highest Education	Bachelor's degree	33	15.7
	Master's degree	132	62.9
	Doctoral degree	45	21.4
Overseas Experience Region	Western countries	110	52.4
	Asian countries	76	36.2
	Other regions	24	11.4
Unit Nature	Universities/Research Institutes	88	41.9
	State-owned Enterprises	60	28.6
	Private/Foreign Enterprises	51	24.3
	Self-employment	11	5.2

4.2 Current Status of Intention to Stay and Group Difference Analysis

Statistical results show that the overall mean of overseas young talents' intention to stay in Shandong is 3.87 (SD=0.76). From the item distribution, "I am willing to develop in Shandong long-term" has the highest mean (3.92), while "If given the opportunity, I would still choose to work in Shandong" has the lowest mean (3.79).

Further group difference testing found:

1) Educational Differences: The intention to stay of doctoral talents (M=4.05) is significantly higher than that of master's (M=3.82) and bachelor's (M=3.75) degree holders. This may be related to doctoral talents having more stable career establishments and higher policy subsidies in universities or research institutes.

2) Overseas Region Differences: Talents from Asian countries have a slightly higher intention to stay (M=3.95) than those from Western countries (M=3.81). Interview notes indicate that returnees from Asia have advantages in cultural adaptation and proximity to family.

3) Unit Nature Differences: Self-employed individuals have the highest intention (M=4.12), exhibiting a strong "sunk cost" effect and professional identity; while talents in private enterprises have a relatively lower intention (M=3.72), with a weaker perception of career stability.

4.3 Multidimensional Evaluation of Influencing Factors

The scores for each dimension are ranked as: Career Development (3.91) > Living Environment (3.85) > Intention to Stay (3.87) > Policy Service (3.70).

In the career development dimension, respondents gave the highest rating to "Shandong's overall urban development prospects" (3.96). However, cross-analysis revealed that respondents working in high-tech enterprises gave significantly lower ratings for "professional matching" (3.65) than university teachers (4.10), reflecting that the capacity of the enterprise side to absorb and digest overseas cutting-edge technologies still needs improvement.

In the living environment dimension, the score for "reasonableness of cost of living" (4.02) ranked first among all items. However, in the 31-35 age group, which is the peak for child-bearing, the score for "satisfaction with educational resources" was only 3.55, significantly lower than the under-25 group (3.90). This indicates that as the process of talent familiarization progresses, the pressure on public services is emerging.

In the policy service dimension, the scores exhibit a clear "dual structure." High-level talents (such as those selected for provincial-level projects or above) gave higher ratings for policy implementation (4.15); while inclusive young talents rated "policy information acquisition channels" at only 3.42. This indicates that the release of policy dividends exhibits a "Matthew effect," and the bottleneck of information reach limits the overall effectiveness of the policy.

5. Discussion

Based on the survey data of 210 overseas young talents, this study reveals the complex current situation of overseas talent retention in Shandong Province. The following is a deep analysis combined with relevant theories.

5.1 Career Development: From "Opportunity Pull" to "Ecological Anchoring"

The study found that career development is the core driver of overseas young talents' intention to stay in Shandong (mean 3.91). According to Human Capital Theory, talent mobility is essentially the pursuit of human capital spillover effects. Shandong Province has released a large amount of industrial dividends through the "transition between old and new growth drivers" and the construction of the "Green, Low-carbon, and High-quality Development Pioneer Zone," constituting a strong "opportunity pull." However, the "low professional matching on the enterprise side" found in the survey warrants vigilance. This implies that in the process of

attracting talent, Shandong exhibits a certain “fame orientation” rather than “demand orientation.” If talents cannot achieve a closed loop of technological value within an enterprise, their psychological contract will break. Therefore, Shandong needs to shift from simple “job provision” to “innovation ecosystem construction,” providing “ecological anchoring” for talents by building high-level R&D platforms (such as the Shandong Energy Research Institute, Qingdao Marine Science and Technology Pilot National Laboratory, etc.), so that they stay not just for a position, but for a career cluster.

5.2 Living Environment: “Public Service Deficit” Under High Cost-Performance Advantage

Shandong’s lower cost of living (mean 4.02) is its absolute advantage compared to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, which belongs to an extremely strong “centripetal pull” in Push-Pull Theory. However, as the age of the overseas talent group increases, their demand structure is shifting from “survival-oriented” to “development-oriented.” The survey shows that the 31-35 age group’s anxiety about education and medical care has significantly increased. If this “public service deficit” cannot be filled in time, Shandong’s cost advantage will be offset by the disadvantage of the soft environment. For overseas talents, they often possess stronger cross-regional or even transnational mobility; once the quality of life fails to meet expectations, they are highly likely to undergo “secondary migration.” Therefore, Shandong must be wary of the marginal diminishing effect of the “living cost-performance” advantage and accelerate the improvement of the internationalization level of public services.

5.3 Policy Dissemination: Breaking the “Information Cocoon” and Enhancing Institutional Responsiveness

The policy service dimension received the lowest score (3.70), especially the bottleneck of information acquisition channels. This reflects the high “institutional transaction costs” in the implementation of talent policies. Currently, the dissemination of policy information exhibits clear “elitist” characteristics, where top talents enjoy dedicated services while the vast majority of young talents are in a “policy fog.” From Institutional Logic Theory, the effectiveness of a policy depends not only on its content but also on its reachability. If policies become “benefits on paper,” talents’ sense of policy gain will be greatly diminished. Furthermore, the “slow policy implementation” reported by some talents reveals the deficiency in the institutional responsiveness of local governments. Shandong needs to break “information silos” between departments through digital transformation and change “people looking for policies” to “policies looking for people.”

6. Conclusion

Based on empirical evidence from 210 overseas young talents, this study offers four principal conclusions. First, respondents’ overall intention to remain in Shandong can be characterised as one of cautious optimism ($M = 3.87$), suggesting that the province has established a relatively favourable foundation for talent attraction, although variation in re-selection intentions indicates that long-term loyalty remains uncertain. Second, career development opportunities function as a critical stabilising factor in talent retention, as highly educated and high-level respondents reported significantly stronger stay intentions, reflecting the importance of meaningful professional engagement. Third, living costs serve as an initial comparative advantage in attracting talent; however, the accessibility and quality of public services—particularly education and healthcare—appear to constrain longer-term settlement decisions. Fourth, clear disparities were observed in policy awareness and service experience, with more inclusive

groups of young talents reporting weaker access to policy information and lower perceived policy gains.

These findings carry important policy implications. In the short term, provincial authorities could establish an integrated digital policy-delivery system to improve the visibility, accessibility, and timeliness of talent-related information. By coordinating cross-departmental data resources and applying AI-enabled matching mechanisms, policy communication may be tailored to individuals' educational background, discipline, and industry profile, thereby reducing information-search costs and strengthening implementation efficiency. In the medium term, stronger industry–university–research collaboration is needed to enhance opportunities for value realisation among overseas young talents. This may include supporting firms to create cross-regional talent platforms, expanding flexible employment arrangements, and promoting two-way mobility between universities and enterprises through initiatives such as industrial professorships or technical advisory appointments.

From a longer-term perspective, sustainable talent retention depends on the creation of an internationally competitive and socially inclusive urban environment. Core cities such as Jinan, Qingdao, and Yantai should strengthen both hard and soft infrastructure by improving bilingual public services, international healthcare access, and education pathways for accompanying families. At the institutional level, a dynamic monitoring and early-warning mechanism for talent attrition should also be developed through regular satisfaction surveys and real-time mobility indicators. Such a shift from reactive retention to proactive governance would enable more adaptive and evidence-based talent management strategies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

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