


## Article

# Students' Career Intention to Teach in Rural Areas by Region and Household Registration: A Study of Students at an Eastern Chinese Local Normal University

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**Abstract:** The exodus of potential teachers from rural schools has resulted in a current imbalance in the source of teachers for primary education in China, exacerbating the inequality in the allocation of teacher resources between urban and rural areas and limiting the sustainable development of education. To address this issue, the Chinese government has recently implemented a localized rural teacher training policy to provide sufficient quality teachers for rural schools in remote areas. However, the effectiveness of this policy still needs improvement, as some students in teacher education lack enthusiasm for rural education and are reluctant to teach in rural areas, and do not truly view the rural teaching profession as one that provides individuals with economic stability and a sense of personal fulfillment. Using a spatial sociological framework, this research explores the disparities in students' intention to teach in rural areas by region of origin, such as eastern and central-western China, and urban/rural household registration. Gender is included as a predisposing factor in further examining if students are interested in teaching in rural schools in their hometown. This study analyzed 990 teacher education students at a local normal university in an eastern region of China using a questionnaire survey and logistic regression analysis. The findings indicate that college students' willingness to teach in rural areas relates negatively to urban household registration, and their willingness to teach in their hometowns does not relate to their household registration; college students' willingness to teach in rural areas relates negatively to eastern region, and their willingness to teach in the local village relates positively to eastern region. Based on the findings, this paper reflects on China's existing rural teacher support policies and suggests paying attention to the influence of spatial culture on college students' career intentions. It also emphasizes the need for individual cultural reconstruction in rural teacher training and policy restructuring in rural teacher development in the current era. In this approach, the sense of wholeness of individual life and love for rural education can be fostered, and the integration of individual life areas in the rural teaching profession can be improved, thereby increasing rural teacher retention and decreasing turnover.

**Keywords:** students in normal university; plans to teach in rural areas; place of origin; household registration; cultural psychology



**Citation:** Wang, Y.; Yang, L.; Zhang, X.; Shao, Z. Students' Career Intention to Teach in Rural Areas by Region and Household Registration: A Study of Students at an Eastern Chinese Local Normal University. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 11755. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151511755>

Academic Editors: Michela Cortini, Stefania Fantinelli, Teresa Galanti and Ferdinando Toscano

Received: 12 June 2023

Revised: 23 July 2023

Accepted: 25 July 2023

Published: 30 July 2023



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## 1. Introduction

College students' increased desire to teach in rural areas is considered a symptom of China's current growth of urban–rural education integration, and it also means that the rural teaching profession is increasingly viewed as one that provides individuals with economic stability and a sense of personal fulfillment. However, rural Chinese schools and schools in the central and western areas continue to face the core challenge of a shortage of quality teachers and difficulty recruiting quality teachers. Consequently, numerous college students hesitate to pursue teaching opportunities in rural areas, particularly in remote rural locales in central and western regions. The Chinese government has recently placed

significant emphasis on optimizing the allocation of teacher resources, aiming to enhance the quality and balanced development of compulsory education. This educational objective is primarily based on the gradual enlargement of the quality difference in China's present teacher resources between urban and rural areas, as well as among the eastern, central, and western regions of China. Along with China's urbanization, the persisting reluctance among college students to engage in remote rural teaching remains a concern.

This study aims to investigate the spatial differences between urban and rural areas and explore the correlation between college students' willingness to teach in rural areas with their household registration and their region of origin, as well as to pay attention to the possible influence of the different spatial cultures in urban and rural organizations on the choice of college students' teaching behavior. Individual career happiness and well-being may be improved, as well as the retention rate of rural teachers, by paying attention to the pertinent elements and using them effectively in teacher recruiting programs.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was a pioneering figure in the study of society's spatial differences. He developed the idea that space is more than just a physical dimension in his Essays, such as *The Social Division of Labor* and *The Basic Forms of Religious Life*. Durkheim argued that spatial differences carry social significance, suggesting that different spatial representations reflect dominant patterns of social organization. Building on Durkheim's theory, the German scholar Georg Simmel (1858–1918) contended that space is a psychic space characterized by "fixity to social forms". He emphasized the impact of space on group structure and the fixation of "hubs" in regional space, which gives rise to specific forms of relationships around them [1]. Later, in *The Production of Space* (1974), French researcher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) proposed a universal theory of (social) space. Lefebvre endeavored to integrate the three "domains"—spiritual, social, and material—into a single concept of space (Social). According to Lefebvre, space comprises three dialectically related domains or dimensions: imaginative space, perceptual space, and living space. He deeply understood the complicated dialectic of spatiality, historicity, and sociality in the context of production. He contended that space is neither a subject nor an object; instead, space is a social reality or a set of relations and forms. According to Lefebvre, (social) space is a product of society [2]. Several academics have detailed and reiterated Lefebvre's framework, and "production of space" has become a significant analysis tool enabling geographers to think critically about the various political-economic, cultural, classed, gendered, and racialized processes that form socio-space [3]. The scope of research in spatial sociology has evolved from objects in space to the production process of space itself, substantially increasing spatial sociology's research connotation.

This study uses Levi Vogel's notion of space as a social product framework to explore instructors' career choices, focusing on the varied nature and significance of space or place in the human experience. It investigates if various individual antecedents connected with space, such as students' region of origin and household registration in urban and rural areas, are related to their motivation to teach in rural areas. From a socio-spatial standpoint, how can the "spatial division of labor" in the teacher labor market be understood? How can we effectively solve the issue of students' aversion to teaching in rural areas? We examined gender as a factor in determining whether students are interested in teaching in rural schools in their hometowns. The study proposes two research hypotheses: one is that students' gender, urban–rural household registration, and region of origin are related to their willingness to teach in rural areas; the other is that students' gender, urban–rural household registration, and region of origin are related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas.

The key value of this study is that it focuses on college students' occupational inclination to teach in rural areas, which, as a psychological aspect of sustainable behavior, implies a specific level of pleasure and enjoyment in their future careers. This study reveals a correlation between some individual predisposing factors associated with urban and rural working environments, such as urban–rural household registration and region of origin, and college students' willingness to teach by examining the factors related to the

willingness to teach in rural areas. This study may contribute to a better understanding of the challenge of hiring rural teachers and the mechanism of spatial and social role formation in rural education development. At the same time, this study intends to serve as a guide for improving the relationship between individuals and their work settings.

## 2. Literature Review

Several studies have explored the state of teacher preparation and supplementing in underserved areas, such as rural areas, as well as the factors associated with the willingness of new teachers to teach, offering food for thought for this study.

### 2.1. Research on Teacher Shortages in Underserved Areas

Currently, many countries are grappling with a teacher shortage in vulnerable areas, particularly in rural districts. Rural schools in less developed areas of China confront a severe teacher shortage. Rural teachers face several challenges, including low pay, inadequate social support, limited professional development, a lack of incentive mechanisms, a higher number of problem students, complex class management, low social status, poor living conditions, potential cultural conflicts, and so on [4,5]. According to a survey of 5554 instructors in China's Wuling Mountains Zone, the supply of teachers in rural schools is also limited by geography, emotion, and institution [6].

More than half of European countries and virtually all school districts in the United States have chronic issues attracting and retaining teachers [7]. Teacher shortages in England are particularly severe in certain subjects and areas and are especially acute for math, science, and language teachers [8,9]. People leaving the profession early contribute to the teacher shortage [10]. Workload, policy changes, and accountability pressure are believed to be among the top factors for teacher attrition [11]. Several studies have also shown rural teacher shortages. In the United States, rural schools' student population and teaching force have declined significantly in recent decades, and rural schools have struggled to fill teacher posts [12]. Other research has revealed rural school districts with different urbanicity classes. Some of these disparities can be explained by district-level factors, such as the percentage of poor children in the area, and the topography of rural regions can also explain the high levels of staffing challenges [13].

### 2.2. Research on Potential Teachers' Career Choices and Their Associated Factors

Factors related to potential teachers' willingness to teach, how they choose a school, and whether they want to stay for a long time, such as education policies, individual new teachers' emotions and abilities, and the attractiveness of the recruiting schools' objective environment, have been repeatedly mentioned as scholarly issues.

First, educational policies such as policy values, teacher selection systems, school finance systems, and wage systems impact students' career choices. Several studies have found a legacy of historical influences and a metrocentric bias in policy texts [14]. It has also been asserted that teacher shortages in England are created partly by government policies, such as problems in the selection and school finance systems, the official expansion of the education and training leaving age, and growth in small schools [15]. Researchers have also looked into teacher pay. They contend that teacher shortages appear to be exacerbated by initiatives that make pay uniform across academic topic areas and geographical locations [16]. However, "these financial incentives (TFI) were initially effective in attracting teachers to hard-to-staff regions, but the effect on retention rates lasted only as long as the economic incentives remained in place [17,18]. Financial incentives are merely one of several regulatory settings, personal and professional variables, and other factors influencing teachers' decisions to apply for a TFI position and administrators' recruitment procedures [19]. According to an OECD report on teacher recruitment policies, extrinsic financial incentives are insufficient for attracting high-quality teachers. They may serve to attract applicants whose career decisions are based on salary levels rather than on fit with

the profession [20]. People worldwide are drawn to jobs for various reasons, including occupational status, work environment, personal contribution, and financial incentives [21].

Second, FIT-choice and expectancy-value theory show that individuals examine numerous components of future career worth and judge their success expectations, i.e., competence beliefs [16]. Those who have considered but rejected teaching are less likely than those who wish to be teachers to view professors as intellectually challenging. Furthermore, face-to-face interactions with secondary-level T&E educators, alums, and T&E teacher education faculty members were found to statistically significantly impact students' decisions to enroll in the T&E teacher preparation programs. Some enrollment criteria, like secondary school counselors, pamphlets, and social media platforms, had little influence on students' enrollment decisions [22].

Third, the impact of the school environment where new instructors are needed on individual career goals is visible. Teacher turnover needs to be more consistent across rural settings. In particular, research has shown that novice teachers in rural schools located in sparsely populated areas are more prone to attrition compared to novice teachers in urban and suburban schools within the same demographic context [23]. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased concerns among undergraduate students considering a teaching career, including factors such as pay, safety, workload, and the treatment of instructors [24]. To address the issue of teacher quality in challenging school settings, alternative teacher training programs have become more prevalent globally in recent years [25].

### *2.3. Research on Spatial Sociological Theoretical Perspectives on Public-Sector Issues*

Many papers discuss Levi's conception of space, revealing the main theories and methods for constructing the spatial concept of place [26] and elucidating the spatial genealogy he proposed, which forms the core of his spatial science. The Lefebvrian social space is more than a collection or system of objects and subjects; it is a diverse and dynamic space, in constant transformations, juxtapositions, developments, and contradictions [27]. Spatial sociological theory is applied in a radical examination of spatiotemporal production, assisting in spatializing the underlying issue of alienation and providing a transformative viewpoint for geography [28]. Space has been used to investigate the public sphere and the concept of modernity [29]. Lefebvre's three-element theory of space (envisioned, perceived, and lived space) is widely used in the study of organizational behavior in workplaces and living spaces, such as the promotion and use of informal contact and the purpose of space in the workplace's living space [30], the assessment of spatial power dynamics, and workplace resistance opportunities [31]. Rural living spaces are formed and reproduced in the space-time of development, (social) rural reproduction, and the concept of land as a place, representing a spatial cross-section distinguished by socio-environmental inequalities [32]. These investigations shed light on the creation of space and its possibly various expressions. It has broadened our understanding of how space and human relationships interact.

Scholars have extensively investigated the issue of teacher replenishment in rural or underserved schools, with a focus on understanding the current state of teacher replenishment and the various factors influencing this challenge. Researchers have focused on the role of education policies and systems from a macro perspective, such as the teacher selection system, school funding system, and school salary system, as well as individual teachers' career decisions from a micro perspective, such as the individual's acceptance and adaptation to the geographical environment; perception of career status, work environment, and personal emotions; and individual motivation. According to extant study, the factors associated with new teachers' career decisions are highly complicated and idiosyncratic, and individuals' job decisions may be associated with various predisposing characteristics such as gender, birth area, and urban or rural life experiences. Currently, not much research has been carried out to examine the individual predispositions to teaching (focusing mainly on gender), with insufficient emphasis paid to the correlation between other individual predispositions on teachers' teaching behavior, mainly whether they are willing to teach in

impoverished areas. Based on this foundation, the main goal of this study is to determine if individual predispositions, such as birth region and urban/rural household registration, are related to the willingness to teach in rural schools. Since these predisposing factors embody specific geographic spatiality, based on the spatial sociological domain, “space” (mainly rural living space) can be produced or reproduced in the developmental space-time. The idea behind spatial differences has social significance; therefore, with the help of spatial sociological theory, we expect to explore social psychological characteristics and spatial behavioral choices.

### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1. Data Sources

We conducted an empirical survey based on the research topics listed above. Our group conducted a sample survey at S Normal University in Zhejiang Province, eastern China, in November 2022. S Normal University is a comprehensive university with a strong legacy of teacher education and unique application qualities. The institution has 53 majors as of the end of 2022, 16 of which are teacher training majors. Over 10,000 undergraduate students are enrolled, including around 4600 teacher-education students.

Second- and third-year teacher education students participating in 16 teacher training programs were identified as the primary research subjects throughout the university based on the study’s goal and the availability of the sample. A total of 1127 students were invited to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis. The subject group self-administered a questionnaire as the survey tool. The survey included demographic characteristics, and information on students’ gender, household registration, and place of origin was retrieved and analyzed as antecedent impacts on students’ inclination to teach in rural areas. Commercially available software based on Questionnaire Star v 2.0.75 was used to collect data. After removing invalid samples, such as those with incomplete or erroneous information, 990 valid samples were retrieved, including 535 representatives from second-year students and 455 from third-year students.

#### 3.2. Hypothesis and Methodology of Research

In this study, two sets of research hypotheses are put forth. College students’ willingness to teach in rural areas relates to students’ gender, urban–rural household registration, and region of origin, according to research hypothesis  $H_1$ . The same factors also relate to students’ willingness to teach in their local rural schools, according to research hypothesis  $H_2$ . As a result, the explanatory factors in this study were divided into two groups: those who intend to teach in rural schools and those who intend to teach in the rural schools closest to their homes. Through this analysis, we attempted to elucidate certain factors associated with college students’ willingness to teach in rural areas and, based on this, to identify the possible controlling elements for the imbalance in rural teaching structure and suggest relevant paths to solve them.

The explanatory variables in this study were chosen using the logic of the spatial sociological analysis framework, which selects factors such as household registration and region of origin that reflect geospatial orientation to some extent while accounting for the potential influence of gender as a predisposing factor on teaching behavior.

We used the East-West division criteria from the Chinese Health Statistical Yearbook, with 11 provinces (including municipalities directly under the central government, see below) in the eastern region (Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Liaoning, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Guangdong, and Hainan), 8 provinces in the central region (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, and Hunan), and 12 provinces in the western region (Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang). The variables are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Essential characteristics of the study sample (descriptive statistics).

Basic Information	Category	N	Marginal Percentage
Gender	Male	225	22.7%
	Female	765	77.3%
Grade	Year 2	535	54.0%
	Year 3	455	46.0%
Household registration	Urban	384	38.8%
	Rural	606	61.2%
Area of origin	East	868	87.7% *
	Mid-West	122	12.3%
Major	Literature, History, Civics, and Politics	429	43.3%
	Art, Physical Education, and Sports	203	20.5%
	Other Education	195	19.7%
	Mathematics	96	9.7%
	Physical, Chemical, and Biological Sciences	67	6.8%
Intention to teach in rural areas	No intention	120	12.1%
	Intention (hometown)	721	72.8%
	Intention (non-hometown)	149	15.1%
Total		990	100.0

\* The chosen university is a local normal university with a primarily Zhejiang Province enrollment and a relatively low percentage of students from China's Midwest. The sample can reflect the percentage of students' region of origin in the university.

To analyze the data, we used SPSS 26.0 software. Discrete selection is used because this study divides "Intention to teach in rural areas" into three categories: "No intention", "Intention (hometown)", and "Intention (non-hometown)". The model made use of multinomial logistic regression analysis.

#### 4. Results

The viable sample for this study comprised 990 people, including 535 second-year students and 455 third-year students. Regarding the study sample's overall profile, around 87.9% were interested in teaching in rural schools, 72.8% in returning to their native rural schools, 87.7% were from the eastern region, 38.8% were urban students, and 22.7% were male students. The demographic variables of the sample were acquired via a self-administered questionnaire, specifically covering students' gender, household registration, region of origin, and other predisposing information as probable factors related to students' willingness to teach in rural schools.

The results of the multivariate unordered logistic regression study revealed that the regression model fitting information  $p = 0.000$  ( $<0.05$ ), the goodness-of-fit  $p = 0.871$  ( $>0.05$ ), and the Nagelkerke pseudo R-squared is 0.071. The likelihood ratio test reveals that gender  $p = 0.037$  ( $<0.05$ ), household registration  $p = 0.000$  ( $<0.05$ ), and region of origin  $p = 0.000$  ( $<0.05$ ), implying that the model is generally valid and can reflect the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables (gender, household registration, and region of origin) and accurately observe what factors are significantly associated with students' intention to teach.

##### 4.1. Examination of Factors Associated with College Students' Willingness to Teach in Rural Areas

Based on the research hypothesis  $H_1$ , we investigated whether students' willingness to teach in rural areas was related to gender, household registration, and region of origin. Using "No intention" as a reference, we investigated the factors related to the choice to teach in rural areas. The following test results were obtained (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Results of multinomial logistic regression (dependent variable: intention to teach in rural areas).

	Variables	B	Std. Error	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Intention (hometown)	Intercept	1.637	0.287	32.527	0.000	
	[gender = male]	−0.160	0.238	0.451	0.502	0.852
	[gender = female]	0				
	[domicile = town]	−0.880	0.201	19.205	0.000	0.415
	[domicile = rural]	0				
	[Region of origin = East]	0.686	0.287	5.730	0.017	1.985
	[Region of origin = Mid-West]	0				
Intention (non-hometown)	Intercept	1.034	0.312	10.971	0.001	
	[gender = male]	0.379	0.285	1.771	0.183	1.461
	[gender = female]	0				
	[domicile = town]	−0.836	0.252	11.006	0.001	0.433
	[domicile = rural]	0				
	[Region of origin = East]	−0.661	0.316	4.369	0.037	0.516
	[Region of origin = Mid-West]	0				

Factors significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (hometown), based on "No intention" as a reference:  $p = 0.000$  ( $<0.05$ ) for household registration (urban), indicating that urban household registration is significantly associated with teaching in rural areas (hometown) when other variables are controlled for;  $B = -0.880$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.415$ , indicating that there is a negative correlation between urban household registration and students' intention to teach in rural areas (hometown), and the proportion of urban students who intend to teach in rural areas (hometown) is 41.5% that of rural students.  $p = 0.017$  ( $<0.05$ ) for the region of origin (East), indicating that there is a significant correlation between eastern region and students' aspiration to teach in rural areas (hometown);  $B = 0.686$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.985$ , indicating that there is a positive correlation between eastern region and students' intention to teach in rural areas (hometown), and eastern students are 1.985 times more likely to teach in rural areas (hometown) than mid-western students.

Factors not significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (hometown), based on "No intention" as a reference: The overall significance of gender is  $p = 0.502$  ( $>0.05$ ), indicating that gender is not significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas (hometown).

Factors significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (non-hometown), based on "No intention" as a reference:  $p = 0.001$  ( $<0.05$ ) for household registration (urban), indicating that urban household registration is significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas (non-hometown) when other factors are controlled for;  $B = -0.836$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.433$ , indicating that there is a negative correlation between urban household registration and students' intention to teach in rural areas (non-hometown), and the proportion of urban students who intend to teach in rural areas (non-hometown) is only 43.3% that of rural students.  $p = 0.037$  ( $<0.05$ ) for the region of origin (East), indicating that eastern region is significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas (non-hometown);  $B = -0.661$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.516$ , indicating that there is a negative correlation between eastern region and students' intention to teach in rural areas (non-hometown), and the proportion of eastern students who intend to teach in rural areas (non-hometown) is 51.6% that of mid-western students.

Factors not significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (non-hometown), based on "No intention" as a reference: The overall significance of gender is  $p = 0.183$  ( $>0.05$ ), indicating that gender is not significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas (non-hometown).

In summary, students' willingness to teach in rural areas is significantly connected to household registration and region of origin when controlling for other factors, while gender

has no meaningful relationship. Students' intention to teach in rural areas is negatively associated with urban household registration and eastern region, and eastern region is positively associated with students' intention to teach in the local village.

#### 4.2. Examination of Factors Associated with College Students' Willingness to Teach in the Local Village

Based on the research hypothesis  $H_2$ , we investigated whether students' willingness to teach in the local village was related to gender, household registration, and region of origin. Using "Intention (non-hometown)" as a reference, we investigated the factors related to the choice to teach in the local village. The following test results were obtained (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Results of multinomial logistic regression (dependent variable: intention to teach in the local village).

	Variables	B	Std. Error	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
No intention	Intercept	−1.034	0.312	10.971	0.001	
	[gender = male]	−0.379	0.285	1.771	0.183	0.685
	[gender = female]	0				
	[domicile = town]	0.836	0.252	11.006	0.001	2.307
	[domicile = rural]	0				
	[Region of origin = East]	0.661	0.316	4.369	0.037	1.936
	[Region of origin = Mid-West]	0				
Intention (hometown)	Intercept	0.603	0.218	7.626	0.006	
	[gender = male]	−0.538	0.206	6.815	0.009	0.584
	[gender = female]	0				
	[domicile = town]	−0.044	0.191	0.054	0.816	0.957
	[domicile = rural]	0				
	[Region of origin = East]	1.347	0.230	34.202	0.000	3.844
	[Region of origin = Mid-West]	0				

Factors significantly related to "No intention" to teach in rural areas, based on "Intention (non-hometown)" as a reference:  $p = 0.001$  ( $<0.05$ ) for household registration (urban), indicating that urban household registration is significantly related to "No intention" to teach in rural areas when other factors are controlled for;  $B = 0.836$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.307$ , indicating that there is a positive correlation between urban household registration and students' "No intention" to teach in rural areas, and urban students are 2.307 times more likely to choose "No intention" than rural students.  $p = 0.037$  ( $<0.05$ ) for the region of origin (East), indicating that eastern region is significantly related to "No intention" to teach in rural areas;  $B = 0.661$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.936$ , indicating that there is a positive correlation between eastern region and students' choice of "No intention" to teach in rural areas, and students from the eastern region are 1.936 times more likely not to teach in rural areas than those from the Mid-West.

Factors not significantly related to "No intention" to teach in rural areas, based on "Intention (non-hometown)" as a reference: The overall significance of gender is  $p = 0.183$  ( $>0.05$ ), indicating that gender is not significantly related to "No intention" to teach in rural areas.

Factors significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (hometown), based on "Intention (non-hometown)" as a reference:  $p = 0.009$  ( $<0.05$ ) for gender (male), indicating that gender(male) is significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas(hometown) when other factors are controlled for;  $B = -0.538$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.584$ , indicating that there is a negative correlation between male gender and students' intention to teach in rural areas (hometown), and the proportion of men who intend to teach in rural areas(hometown) is only 58.4% that of women.  $p = 0.000$  ( $<0.05$ ) for the region of origin (East), indicating that eastern region is significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas(hometown) when other factors are controlled for;  $B = 1.347$  and  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.844$ ,

indicating that there is a positive correlation between eastern region and students' intention to teach in rural areas(hometown), and students from the eastern regions are 3.844 times more likely to teach in rural areas (hometown) than those from the Mid-West.

Factors not significantly related to students' willingness to teach in rural areas (hometown), based on "Intention (non-hometown)" as a reference: The overall significance of household registration is  $p = 0.816$  ( $>0.05$ ), indicating that household registration is not significantly related to students' intention to teach in rural areas(hometown) when controlling for other factors.

In summary, students' willingness to teach in the local village is significantly connected to gender and area of origin when other factors are controlled, whereas household registration is not significantly related. Students' intention to teach in rural areas (hometown) is negatively associated with male gender and positively associated with eastern region.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

College students' perceptions regarding rural teaching reflect their specific professional psychology. Some students lack enthusiasm for rural education and do not see it as a job that provides economic stability and a feeling of personal fulfillment. College students' opinions regarding teaching in rural regions have substantially improved as urban–rural integration has progressed, and rural teacher support programs have been widely implemented in China. Their perceptions and experiences of rural areas and education have become more diversified, and they have become more receptive to teaching in rural areas. On the other hand, rural schools have a distinct culture that differs from urban schools, impacting an individual's vocational psychology. "Spatial differentiation" in college students' motivation to teach between urban and rural areas has become a significant impediment to China's teaching force construction, exacerbating the problem of recruiting and retaining teachers in rural and other disadvantaged areas and creating a structural imbalance in teacher supply, which has steadily become an essential restraint on the teaching profession's and rural education's sustainable development in China. As a result, academics have paid close attention to it.

The sustainable growth of rural education and the creation of sustainable careers for rural teachers necessitate reducing the negative impact of inequality on teaching force construction to a reasonable level. This paper employs quantitative methods to examine the relationship between college students' household registration, region of origin, and willingness to teach. It concludes that students' intention to teach in rural areas is still primarily constrained by conditions closely related to physical space, such as household registration and region of origin, whereas whether students intend to teach in their home villages is primarily constrained by gender and region of origin. This study aims to better understand the elements connected with college students' motivation to teach in rural areas as a psychological factor related to sustainable behavior on a broader level. It suggests that certain unique factors related to individual career willingness can be supported in formulating relevant educational policies to continuously improve love for rural education and the integration of personal life.

### 5.1. Correlation between College Students' Willingness to Teach in Rural Areas with Their Household Registration

Regarding demographic characteristic variables of students in teacher education, our analysis revealed that intention to teach in rural areas differed significantly by household registration and region of origin, with the correlation of household registration being particularly pronounced. Urban students were more biased towards not intending to teach in rural areas and needed more active intention to integrate into rural schools.

Previous research has not examined whether urban and rural household variables are associated with college students' willingness to teach in rural areas. However, in rural areas, non-observable characteristics connected to employment intentions are difficult to capture with quantitative data. These include the interpretation of district-level attributes as well

as the topography of the district itself [13]. Recognizing that both domicile and region represent distinct spatial contexts, spatial selectivities have manifested as an imbalance of social influence between locations. As a result, the willingness of college students to teach in rural areas and rural teacher resource allocation must be viewed as social issues requiring sociological theory input. This research specifically examines the correlation between students' willingness to teach and urban domicile.

#### 5.1.1. College Students' Willingness to Teach in Rural Areas Relates to Urban Household Registration Negatively

There is a negative correlation between urban household registration and college students' willingness to teach in rural areas. The household registration system stabilizes and solidifies the urban–rural dualism structure, which dominates people's choices with a distinct spatial culture. The urban–rural dual system, with the household registration system at its foundation, has been revised in recent years, and the system's barrier has been reduced, but the socio-cultural influence has been underlined. Wrapped in the urbanization trend, Chinese rural society after the 1980s has been in large-scale and continuous movement across urban and rural areas. However, the traditional urban–rural dual structure does not disappear due to mobility; mobility itself reflects the existence of the urban–rural dual structure. The urban–rural social structure system, as well as the identities and roles assigned to it, have changed, and various groups have reconceptualized the spatial, social differential pattern, rethought the urban–rural social class, and repositioned their self-identity and belonging, etc., forming a distinct spatial culture.

The combination of spatial culture and spatial economy, spatial institutions, and space actors forms a unique interaction mechanism that drives spatial practices, and this interaction mechanism shapes the creation of individual socialization experiences and psychology. Watt and Richardson discovered that prior socialization experiences (social influences from family and friends, and past experiences in teaching and learning) influenced decisions about entering the workforce. Still, the higher-order factors of personal utility and social utility also influenced decisions about pursuing a teaching career. In their FIT-Choice model, "socializing influences" (including prior teaching and learning experiences) interact in the decision-making process with self-perceptions (perceived fit between abilities and teaching demands), perceived personal utility (e.g., job security), and perceived social utility (e.g., making a social contribution, shaping future of children's lives) [33,34]. Currently, many graduates are moving to rural areas due to the economy and the system, but many are failing to integrate fully. Some college students with urban household registration refuse to teach in rural schools. Teacher recruiting has become more market-oriented and flexible in an increasingly decentralized and competitive graduate labor market, drawing low- to lower-middle-ability college graduates into teaching [35]. This is unfavorable to developing a steady teaching force committed to rural education. In short, the household registration system under the urban–rural dichotomy has greatly affected the spatial culture of urban and rural areas, as well as the experience and psychology of individual socialization, and has had an impact, in particular, on the willingness of some college students living in towns and having urban household registration to teach in rural areas.

#### 5.1.2. College Students' Willingness to Teach in Their Hometowns Does Not Relate to Their Household Registration

Our findings show no significant correlation between household registration and the students' willingness to teach in the local villages. The urban–rural dualistic institutional structure, typified by the household registration system, has significantly impacted socio-economic development at the level of resource allocation. The initial implementation of the hukou registration management system has played a role in limiting agricultural population migration to cities and towns and assisting in the formation of a relatively stable "circle" between rural and urban areas, thus bringing about a relative separation of people with different household registration statuses in physical and psychological space.

However, regarding the household registration component, the differences in China's regional economic development hide many of the consequences of the urban–rural dichotomy. College students with urban or rural household registration show a certain degree of complexity in the different regions of eastern China and central and western China, with students with urban or rural household registration showing more diversity in their willingness to return to their hometowns to teach. Meanwhile, the intrinsic circles in urban and rural environments are rapidly decreasing. In contrast, new circles have not been established and appropriately listed, leading to increased social fragmentation and dispersion. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, there is a certain degree of association between household registration and the willingness to teach in the countryside. Still, there is no significant association between household registration and college students returning to the countryside to teach.

### *5.2. Correlation between College Students' Willingness to Teach in Rural Areas with Their Region of Origin*

Education administrators have begun to pay attention to the region of origin as a crucial factor in teacher deployment. The “attractiveness of hometown” has been the subject of specific research, pointing out that non-local instructors not initially stationed in their hometown are more inclined to switch schools. Additionally, non-local teachers are more prone to relocate for family reasons than for professional advancement or forced transfers by the local government. Localized teacher recruitment and deployment can help retain teachers in difficult-to-recruit areas and lower teacher turnover [36]. Some rural schools in central and western China are currently experiencing teacher shortages, and education authorities are actively promoting localized rural teacher training, i.e., training and educating local rural teachers based on shared cultural backgrounds, living habits, regional identity, and value identification, because they believe that this approach will aid in teacher retention. This policy practice is substantially supported by the association between diverse origin locations and college students' willingness to teach, as demonstrated in this study.

#### *5.2.1. College Students' Willingness to Teach in Rural Areas Relates to Eastern Region Negatively*

According to our findings, there is a significant correlation between eastern region and students' willingness to teach in rural areas and no significant correlation between the central and western regions and the willingness to teach in rural areas. Eastern region of origin is positively associated with students' choice of “no intention” to teach in rural areas, which means that students from the eastern regions are more likely to be reluctant to teach in rural areas.

In terms of the context of economic development, the eastern regions of China have a high rate of urbanization and a high overall level of growth in both urban and rural areas. Regarding the development of the primary education teaching force, to motivate people to teach in rural schools, the government grants special financial subsidies to rural teachers, and at the county level, rural teachers' salaries are higher than those of their urban counterparts. However, even so, urban schools tend to be more attractive than rural schools due to the realities of personal career development, the schooling of children in the family, and the different social evaluations of the status and position of teachers in urban and rural areas. However, for students from central and western China, there was no significant correlation between the central and western regions and their willingness to teach in the countryside, as the latter tended to be the more dominant behavioral choice for these students in terms of their intention to move out of the countryside or out of central and western China, with several students wanting to go to the eastern regions, including the rural schools in the east. This is one of the reasons why the current allocation of teachers' resources is at odds with the above study's findings, i.e., rural teacher recruitment and retention in the eastern region are not critical issues in current teacher deployment. The

primary issue that must be addressed immediately is the availability of qualified rural instructors in the central and western regions.

#### 5.2.2. College Students' Willingness to Teach in the Local Village Relates to Eastern Region Positively

According to our findings, eastern region has a positive effect on the students' desire to stay and teach in their home villages and a negative impact on teaching in non-home villages. Only students from the eastern region chose to stay in their home villages to become teachers. Although there is a positive correlation between the region of origin in the East and the students' choice of "not intending" to teach in the countryside, those students in the East who intend to teach in the countryside are more willing to stay in their home villages to teach than to leave their hometowns.

In terms of cultural background, many rural areas in the eastern region emphasize social and cultural construction, and the preservation and inheritance of local and vernacular cultures have strengthened the cohesion of the rural community and restored and developed the cultural network in the village public space. Different from the eastern region, there are significant imbalances in urban and rural economic and social development within counties in central and western China, and social, demographic, and spatial integration need to be revised, with a large development gap between the East and West. The reduction in regional socio-cultural symbols coincides with the decline of vernacular socio-cultural characteristics for pupils in the central and western areas. Students in the Midwest have finished the construction of self and society, culture, and identity through education while leaving the farm to study in the city. A considerable percentage of students (particularly some high-level students in teacher education) are unwilling to "return" to rural schools to teach but are ready to become "knowledge migrants", and the value of "ladder migration" and the resulting conduct frequently take precedence. In contrast to pupils from the eastern regions, students from the central and western regions are segregated according to their teaching areas: 62.1% of students want to return to their home regions, while 37.8% of students are more interested in teaching in rural areas in the eastern region. Therefore, how to entice students from the central and western areas to "return" may be a problem deserving of the current Chinese government's careful consideration.

Furthermore, our research discovered that female students have a significant psychological advantage when returning to their local communities to teach. Certain spatial cultures also have an impact on this. Because of China's traditional gender division of labor, women have more family obligations and do not have to work outside the home. Therefore, they suffer more considerable psychological constraints while migrating out of or re-creating their rural living area.

#### 5.3. Recommendations for Faculty Selection and Recruitment

This study gives a unique perspective for studying China's current challenge of teacher selection and recruitment in underserved areas and ideas for current teacher resourcing policy development in underserved areas. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations for optimizing teacher resources and contributing to the sustainable growth of the rural teaching profession are made.

##### 5.3.1. Focus on Individual Cultural Reconstruction of Rural Teacher Training

To begin, we should pay attention to the dual structure of urban and rural areas, as well as their psychological and spatial differences, and promote the conceptual change of urban–rural integration in integrated urban–rural development while also promoting the continuous progress of rural education to achieve a balanced allocation of high-quality educational resources between rural and urban areas. Rural instructors are perceived as teachers of disadvantaged populations due to the dual structure of urban and rural education, and there is an identity crisis among rural teachers. We should begin with the individual spiritual dimension, construct the spiritual quality of future teachers through

the optimization of the teacher education curriculum system and the educational internship practice system, and make efforts to promote the subjective reconstruction of rural teachers' identities, based on the basic balanced allocation of high-quality educational resources between urban and rural areas.

Second, we should concentrate on the spatial-regional inequalities in China's economic development and the socio-cultural structures that are affected by it. There is still an imbalance in the allocation of teacher resources between urban and rural areas and between schools in the eastern region and those in the central and western regions, and teacher quality in some weak counties is still low. To attract more high-quality talents to devote themselves to education in their hometowns, efforts should be made in the eastern region; in the central and western regions, localized recruitment and deployment of teachers is valuable to reduce teachers' mobility rate and retain teachers in hard-to-staff areas [36]. As a result, it is critical to establish a "localized" rural teacher training position, develop local curriculum system goals, integrate local culture into the curriculum, enrich local curriculum resources, expand the curriculum's local practice form, and carry out local educational practice experience activities to cultivate potential teachers' psychological identification with rural education.

### 5.3.2. Focus on National Policy Reconstruction of Rural Teacher Development

The first priority is to concentrate on creating an educational, ecological environment for the "attraction and retention" of teachers. High policy perception increases student teachers' intention to pursue work in rural areas, but social support and good job perception buffer the relationship between policy perception and rural employment intentions [37]. We should ensure that quality teachers cover remote rural areas and guarantee that rural teachers are given priority in terms of preparation and title indicators. Simultaneously, the teacher support policy system's design of the professional growth mechanism for teachers is a stressed dynamic space for teacher growth. To address the unique characteristics of "rural" and "rural teachers" in the central and western regions, it is recommended that the current selection processes for initial teacher training be reconsidered, an independent review of the teacher supply model be conducted, and a long-term approach to teacher supply planning be adopted, taking other policy changes into account in a more coordinated manner [15]. Rural teachers' suitable mobility should be ensured by institutional design, bridging the barriers to urban–rural teacher mobility and establishing a specific incentive mechanism for professional competitiveness to boost rural teachers' professional vitality.

The second step is to change the sole administrative purpose of "attracting and retaining" teachers. We should abandon our reliance on top-down institutional support to build rural teacher planning initiatives and instead focus on the role of school structure and leadership in the causes and solutions of teacher shortages and staffing issues. Long-term solutions would include changing school-allocation procedures and improving economic conditions in such locations to avoid the problem of staffing [38]. We need to focus on developing the countryside and creating an integrated space. Private initiatives can help improve its socio-economic, cultural, and educational aspects. New rural urbanization and beautifying the countryside can encourage teachers to return and participate in its development.

There are still some practical challenges in training and recruiting excellent teachers who love the rural education career for underserved areas such as villages, improving the satisfaction and happiness of individuals in their choice of the rural teaching profession and their career development, and understanding the role of the rural teaching profession in assisting individuals to achieve better development. This study focused on the potential impact of several antecedent elements related to geographic area on college students' career intentions. This research used an empirical study to analyze students' career intention to teach in rural areas based on household registration and region of origin. This study's main findings are as follows: The household registration and region of origin of students in teacher education have a significant impact on their intention to teach in rural areas, while

gender and region of origin have a significant impact on their intention to teach in their home villages. The findings discussed above encourage us to reflect deeply on the structural shortage of rural teachers in China today and serve as a guide for improving rural teacher support policies, in particular when preparing new teachers. The findings presented above contribute to a better understanding of China's existing structural scarcity of rural teachers and a better understanding of the sustainable growth of the rural teaching profession and individuals from the perspective of the interaction between people and space. This study underlines the importance of paying attention to the unique impact that spatial culture has on individual behavior, encouraging new teachers' cultural subjectivity in rural spaces, and realizing the subjective re-creation of rural teachers' identities to cultivate rural education-loving and stable, high-quality teacher teams.

The lens of factors connected to college students' willingness to teach in rural areas is utilized to explore the difficulties of rural teacher preparation in a changing educational environment. It reveals the elements associated with the psychological factors of sustainable behaviors. Due to some limitations, such as the small number of Midwest student participants, the relative nature of the classification of antecedent factors that are closely linked to physical space, and the inadequacy of analyses based on the effects of domicile and origin on teachers' willingness to teach, the findings of this study may not be sufficient to fully understand the structural imbalance in the teaching force as a whole. However, this study is encouraging because it, as a supplement to previous studies of factors related to teacher origin, demonstrates the spatial and cultural effects of some easily overlooked antecedents on people's rural intention to teach, which happen to be relatively small but essential influences, and it provides a first step in discussing information portraying teacher education institutions and grassroots schools, two important types of organizations. We are excited to see educational researchers develop and test innovative rural teacher recruitment tactics and a hiring landscape that promotes employee satisfaction and well-being.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, Y.W. and Z.S.; Data curation, Y.W. and L.Y.; Formal analysis, Y.W., Z.S. and L.Y.; Investigation, Y.W.; Methodology, Y.W. and X.Z.; Writing—original draft, Y.W.; Writing—review and editing, Y.W. and X.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Jiangsu Postgraduate Practice Innovation Program 2023 (Project No. SJCX23\_0536).

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to express our gratitude to Qing Wang from Nanjing Normal University for proofreading this paper. Additionally, we thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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