

# A Study on Factors Influencing and Pathways for Enhancing Rural Social Integration Among Returning Youth: A Case Study of Zhejiang Province

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**Abstract:** Under the rural revitalization strategy, the issue of returning youth "physically returning but failing to integrate into the village" has become prominent. Based on 428 valid questionnaires collected from 19 villages across 4 cities in Zhejiang Province, this study constructs a four-dimensional social support theoretical framework encompassing emotional, material, institutional, and organizational dimensions. Using multiple linear regression analysis, it empirically examines the factors influencing rural social integration among returning youth. Findings reveal that the four-dimensional social support framework explains 47.8% of the variance in integration levels. Emotional support and organizational support emerge as core drivers ( $\beta$  values of 0.383 and 0.367, respectively), while material and institutional support require synergistic coordination to be effective. The integration patterns of returning youth exhibit structural disparities: strong psychological identification and social interaction, but insufficient economic integration and public participation. Based on these findings, this paper proposes targeted pathways to strengthen emotional support, optimize organizational support, address material deficiencies, and enhance institutional effectiveness. These strategies provide theoretical and policy support for overcoming integration challenges and advancing rural talent revitalization.

**Keywords:** Returning Youth; Rural Social Integration; Social Support; Rural Revitalization; Influencing Factors

## 1. Introduction

As the rural revitalization strategy advances, the influx of young people returning to their hometowns for entrepreneurship and

employment has become a core driver of rural development. However, in reality, these returnees often face significant challenges in social integration. Having been detached from rural social contexts for extended periods, their existing social support networks have weakened or even fractured [1], leading to a growing dilemma: "They can return physically, but struggle to integrate into the village [2]." As the birthplace of the "Ten Million Project," Zhejiang Province hosts a substantial cohort of returning youth, yet a disproportionately low percentage achieve stable, long-term development—underscoring the urgency of this issue. While existing research confirms the critical role of social support in integration, it lacks an integrated analytical framework tailored to the needs of returning youth and insufficiently explores the mechanisms of support across different dimensions.

Therefore, this study focuses on returning youth in Zhejiang Province, aiming to: (1) clarify the types of social support influencing their integration and construct a network system; (2) empirically analyze the impact and interactive effects of support across dimensions; (3) propose targeted support strategies to provide theoretical and policy support for overcoming integration challenges and revitalizing rural talent.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework Design

### 2.1 Literature Review

#### 2.1.1 Research on social support theory

Systematic research on social support theory began in the 1970s. Caplan first conceptualized social support as a key mechanism for alleviating individual social stress and promoting social adaptation in Support System and Community Mental Health. He proposed that support systems reduce psychological and

physiological strain during stress by providing emotional comfort and resource provision, establishing a core framework for subsequent research [3]. Building upon this foundation, Cobb further deepened the conceptualization of social support, emphasizing that its core essence lies not merely in material assistance or the physical presence of others, but rather in the informational exchange process that enables individuals to perceive themselves as cared for, valued, and embedded within reciprocal relational networks. This perspective directly propelled research on social support from a focus on "unidirectional assistance" toward an emphasis on "networked interactions" [4]. Subsequent scholars refined the typology of social support. House established the foundational framework for classification research with his instrumental-emotional dichotomy, where instrumental support focuses on resolving individuals' practical survival challenges, while emotional support centers on alleviating psychological distress [5]. Shuiyuan Xiao, integrating China's local social characteristics, categorized social support into three dimensions: objective support, subjective support, and support utilization [6], further expanding the theoretical framework's applicability.

#### 2.1.2 Research on social integration theory

Social integration theory originated from immigration studies, centered on analyzing the processes, dimensions, and influencing factors of outsider groups adapting to their new societies. It evolved from a "unidirectional assimilation" paradigm to a "multicultural integration" framework. Early assimilationist theories, exemplified by Park, viewed social integration as a one-way process where minority groups gradually adopt mainstream culture while abandoning their own cultural characteristics [7]. Gordon further segmented the assimilation process into seven stages—cultural adaptation, social structural integration, marital assimilation, identity assimilation, etc [8]. — refining the evolutionary pathways of social integration. However, this theory faced widespread criticism for neglecting cultural diversity and group agency.

Scholars like Portes further argued that an inclusive social environment promotes the transmission of group cultures and enhances social vitality, challenging assimilationism's "monolithic" cognitive limitations [9].

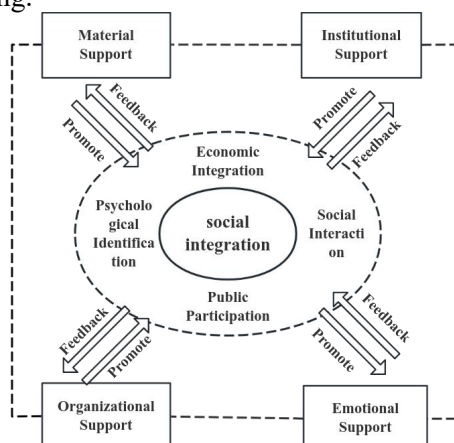
Following the 1990s, the segmentation-integration theory became the dominant paradigm. Portes and Zhou proposed that social integration is not a uniform path but is influenced by a combination of factors such as human capital, social networks, and social environment. It may result in differentiated outcomes, including integration into the mainstream, stagnation at the bottom, or maintenance of ethnic subcultures [10]. This theory provides an important perspective for analyzing the heterogeneity of group integration. Regarding measurement dimensions, Gordon's seven-dimensional framework laid the foundation, later simplified by scholars into three core dimensions: economic, sociocultural, and psychological. Economic integration manifests as material adaptation through stable employment and income growth; sociocultural integration manifests as participation in local community activities and adherence to local norms at the interactive level; psychological integration reflects adaptation at the emotional level through identity formation and a sense of belonging [11]. This three-dimensional framework has been widely applied in studies of migrant populations and immigrants, demonstrating strong generalizability and scientific rigor.

Based on the above research, this study proposes the core hypothesis: social support significantly and positively influences the social integration of returning youth (H1). This is further decomposed into sub-hypotheses: emotional support (H1a), material support (H1b), institutional support (H1c), and organizational support (H1d) each significantly and positively influence the social integration of returning youth.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework Construction

Building upon the theoretical foundations established in the literature review, and integrating the core characteristics of returning youth—namely, "returning to their hometowns and resocialization"—along with the local context of rural revitalization practices in Zhejiang Province, this study constructs a theoretical analytical framework of "Four-Dimensional Social Support—Social Integration" in Figure 1. This framework clearly defines the connotations of each core variable, their dimensional relationships, and their operational logic, providing systematic

theoretical support for subsequent empirical testing.



**Figure 1. Theoretical Analysis Framework of "Four-Dimensional Social Support-Social Integration"**

### 3. Analysis of Factors Influencing Rural Social Integration Among Returning Youth

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics**

		Freq	%	Valid%	Cum%
Gender	Male	202	47.2	47.2	47.2
	Female	226	52.8	52.8	100.0
Age	18-24 years old	106	24.8	24.8	24.8
	25-34 years old	231	54.0	54.0	78.7
	35-45 years old	91	21.3	21.3	100.0
Education	High school or below	16	3.7	3.7	3.7
	Technical college	77	18.0	18.0	21.7
	Undergraduate	264	61.7	61.7	83.4
	Master's and above	71	16.6	16.6	100.0
Annual Income Level	Below ¥50,000	56	13.1	13.1	56
	100,000–150,000 yuan	187	43.7	43.7	187
	150,000–200,000 yuan	126	29.4	29.4	126
	Over ¥200,000	59	13.8	13.8	59

#### 3.1.2 Dependent variable: Degree of social integration among returning youth

Social integration of returning youth refers to the overall degree to which they adapt to rural society in terms of living, working, socializing, and psychological aspects after returning to their hometowns. This study employs a composite index to measure the social integration level of returning youth (0-5 scale), using the average score across four dimensions—economic integration, psychological identification, social interaction, and public participation—as the comprehensive score for their social integration.

#### 3.1.3 Core independent variable: Social support

Social support serves as the core independent variable in this study, referring to the resources and assistance returning youth receive from

### in Zhejiang Province

#### 3.1 Data Sources and Basic Statistical Characteristics Analysis

##### 3.1.1 Data sources

Data were collected from June to November 2025 through surveys conducted in 19 villages across 4 cities in Zhejiang Province. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, with 428 valid responses recovered, yielding an effective response rate of 85.6%. The sample encompassed young returnees of diverse backgrounds, ages, and educational levels, as summarized in Table 1. The survey revealed that female returnees slightly outnumbered males (52.8%), with the 25-34 age group forming the core cohort (54.0%). Those holding bachelor's degrees or higher accounted for 78.3%, and the majority reported annual incomes within the 100, 000-200, 000 yuan range (73.1%).

family, government, organizations, and communities. This study categorizes social support into four dimensions: emotional support, material support, institutional support, and organizational support. A 5-point Likert scale is employed, with the mean score of each dimension's items serving as the corresponding variable score.

##### 3.1.4 Basic statistical characteristics analysis

Descriptive statistics for the independent variables presented in Table 2. show that scores across all dimensions fall between 3.0 and 3.9 (out of 5), revealing a pattern of "strongest emotional support and relatively weaker material support": Emotional support received an overall rating of 3.75, with family and friends providing the highest support (3.84);Material support scored 3.27 overall,

with financial support receiving the lowest rating (3.01); Institutional support scored 3.51 overall, with relatively balanced ratings across

all items; Organizational support scored 3.57 overall, demonstrating good efficiency in service implementation.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables**

		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Emotional Support	by family and friends	428	1	5	3.84	.781
	by Village Organization	428	1	5	3.67	.744
	by Villager	428	1	5	3.59	.783
	Overall	428	1	5	3.75	.732
Material Support	livelihood Support	428	1.	5	3.27	.875
	Tool Support	428	1	5	3.14	.895
	Funding Support	428	1	5	3.01	.880
	Overall	428	1	5	3.27	.840
Institutional Support	Awareness of Policies	428	1	5	3.57	.647
	Ease of Process for Policies	428	1	5	3.63	.787
	matching degree	428	1	5	3.49	.800
	implementation and efficiency	428	1	5	3.59	.807
Organizational Support	Overall	428	1	5	3.51	.764
	Number and Activity Level of Organizations	428	1	5	3.42	.838
	matching degree	428	1	5	3.48	.842
	Implementation and Efficiency	428	1	5	3.54	.784
	Overall	428	1	5	3.57	.647

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables**

		N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Economic Integration	Annual Income Level	428	1	5	3.31	1.130
Psychological Identification	Identifying as a "local"	428	1	5	3.88	.655
	Recognize your contributions	428	1	5	3.75	.697
Social Interaction	Daily interactions	428	1	5	3.76	.769
	Has ≥3 close friends	428	1	5	3.88	.833
Public Participation	Participation in village affairs	428	1	5	3.41	.829
	Proposed suggestions	428	1	5	3.12	.926
	Organizing public events	428	1	5	2.95	.908

Descriptive statistics for dependent variables presented in Table 3. show higher scores for psychological identification (3.88 points, 3.75 points) and social interaction (3.76 points, 3.88 points). Economic integration scored 3.31 points, while public participation dimensions scored lower—particularly "taking the lead in organizing public activities" at just 2.95 points. This indicates returning youth still have room for improvement in the depth of their engagement in rural public affairs.

**3.2 Logistic Regression Analysis**

To examine the direct impact of social support on the social integration of returning youth, this study employs a multiple linear regression

model for empirical analysis, constructing the following multiple linear regression model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + e \quad (1)$$

Where: Y represents the degree of social integration among returning youth (dependent variable); X1 denotes emotional support, X2 denotes material support, X3 denotes institutional support, X4 denotes organizational support (core independent variables); e is the random error term.

The results of the analysis presented in Table 4. show that the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.478, explaining 47.8% of the variance in social integration; the Durbin-Watson statistic = 1.375, indicating no significant autocorrelation in the residuals, confirming the model's reliable fit.

**Table 4. Model Summary Table**

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>										
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of Est.	Change Statistics					DW
					R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	df <sub>1</sub>	df <sub>2</sub>	Sig. F	
1	.691a	.478	.473	.40043	.478	95.425	4	417	.000	1.375

a. Predictor variables: (Constant), Organizational Support Dimension, Material Support Dimension, Emotional Support Dimension, Institutional Support Dimension

b. Dependent variable: Level of social integration

**Table 5. ANOVA Table**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
	Model	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
1	Regression	61.202	4	15.300	95.425	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	66.862	417	.160		
	Total	128.064	421			
a. Dependent variable: Degree of social integration						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Support Dimension, Material Support Dimension, Emotional Support Dimension, Institutional Support Dimension						

ANOVA test in Table 5.: F=95.425, p<0.001. The overall model is significant, and the combined predictive effect of the four dimensions of social support is statistically meaningful.

The results, presented in Table 6., reveal a significant heterogeneity in the effects across dimensions was observed: The affective support dimension exerted a significant positive influence on social integration ( $\beta=0.383$ ,  $t=9.185$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), demonstrating the strongest effect. The organizational support dimension

also showed a significant positive influence ( $\beta=0.367$ ,  $t=8.041$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), with the second strongest effect. Material support ( $\beta=0.016$ ,  $p=0.679>0.05$ ) and institutional support ( $\beta=0.067$ ,  $p=0.146>0.05$ ) showed no significant independent effects. Although both were significantly correlated with social integration, their predictive power weakened after controlling for the first two dimensions, necessitating further exploration of their indirect influence pathways.

**Table 6. Coefficient Table**

Coefficient <sup>a</sup>								
	Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.816	.177		4.623	.000		
	Emotional Support Dimension	.351	.038	.383	9.185	.000	.721	1.387
	Material Support Dimension	.019	.046	.016	.414	.679	.819	1.220
	Institutional Support Dimension	.060	.041	.067	1.458	.146	.587	1.702
	Organizational Support Dimension	.365	.045	.367	8.041	.000	.600	1.666
a. Dependent variable: Degree of social integration								

Based on the above analysis, the final regression equation generated in this study is:  
 $Y=0.816+0.351X_1+0.019X_2+0.060X_3+0.365X_4$  (2)

**3.3 Logistic Regression Analysis**

This study empirically examined the impact of the four-dimensional social support system on the social integration of returning youth in Zhejiang Province through a multiple linear regression model. The regression analysis results provide robust statistical support for the core conclusions, as detailed below.

**3.3.1 Model fit and overall significance**

The model fit and validity tests indicate an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.478. This demonstrates that the four-dimensional social support system-comprising emotional support, material support, institutional support, and organizational support-effectively explains 47.8% of the variance in social integration among returning youth. This validates the theoretical framework's strong adaptability within the rural local context. The Durbin-Watson statistic (W = 1.375) indicates no significant autocorrelation

in the residuals, confirming the model's stable and reliable fit.

ANOVA results further confirmed the overall significance of the model (F=95.425, p<0.001), indicating that the combined predictive effect of the four dimensions of social support is statistically significant. That is, the four-dimensional social support system as a whole has a significant impact on the social integration of returning youth, laying the foundation for subsequent analysis of the effects of each dimension.

**3.3.2 Impact effects of each dimension of social support**

The regression coefficient table reveals significant heterogeneity in the impact of each social support dimension on the social integration of returning youth, with specific effects as follows:

Emotional Support is the Strongest Positive Driver. The emotional support dimension exerted a significant positive influence on social integration ( $\beta=0.383$ ,  $t=9.185$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Its standardized coefficient was the highest among all variables, making it the core driver of social

integration among returning youth. This result validates sub-hypothesis H1a, indicating that emotional comfort provided by family, village organizations, and villagers effectively alleviates social alienation among returning youth. It strengthens their identity recognition and sense of belonging to the village, laying a solid psychological foundation for social integration.

Organizational Support is the Second-Strongest Positive Driver. The organizational support dimension also exhibited a significant positive impact ( $\beta=0.367$ ,  $t=8.041$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Its standardized coefficient ranked second only to emotional support, constituting another core driving mechanism for social integration and validating sub-hypothesis H1d. Regression results indicate that the quantity, activity level, service matching, and implementation efficiency of relevant organizations can establish platforms for resource sharing and collaborative exchange among returning youth. This helps them expand social networks and reduce integration costs, jointly driving the integration process alongside emotional support. Material Support is the Independent Effect Not Significant, Requires Synergistic Action. The independent effect of the material support dimension did not reach statistical significance ( $\beta=0.016$ ,  $t=0.414$ ,  $p=0.679>0.05$ ), failing to directly validate sub-hypothesis H1b. However, considering the descriptive statistics showing an overall material support rating of only 3.27 (with financial support at 3.01) and the positive coefficient in the regression equation, material support is not insignificant. It exhibits a characteristic of synergistic dependency—its efficacy as a foundational safeguard requires precise delivery through organizational resource-matching platforms. Only when combined with emotional and organizational support can its full potential be realized.

Institutional Support is the Independent Effect Not Significant, Effectiveness Dependent on Implementation Quality. The independent effect of the institutional support dimension did not reach significance ( $\beta=0.067$ ,  $t=1.458$ ,  $p=0.146>0.05$ ), failing to directly validate sub-hypothesis H1c. This finding correlates with the descriptive statistics of institutional support, which indicate "relatively balanced but suboptimal levels of policy awareness, matching, and implementation efficiency." It suggests that the protective value of

institutional support requires synergistic interaction with emotional and organizational support through measures such as enhancing policy awareness, optimizing demand matching, and streamlining approval processes. Alternatively, it may indirectly influence social integration via mediating variables, with its indirect pathways warranting further exploration in subsequent research.

### 3.3.3 Practical implications of the regression equation

Based on regression analysis results, the predictive equation for social integration among returning youth intuitively reflects the contribution coefficients of each social support dimension to integration levels: Each unit increase in emotional support corresponds to an average increase of 0.351 units in social integration; each unit increase in organizational support corresponds to an average increase of 0.365 units in integration; unit increases in material support and institutional support correspond to increases of 0.019 and 0.060 units in integration, respectively. This quantitative relationship provides clear numerical references for subsequent precision optimization of support strategies.

### 3.3.4 Structural variations in social integration and their correlation with support systems

Combining descriptive statistics of the dependent variable with regression results reveals distinct structural variations in social integration among returning youth: Scores are higher in psychological identification (3.88 points, 3.75 points) and social interaction (3.76 points, 3.88 points), directly linked to the strong driving force of emotional and organizational support; Conversely, scores for economic integration (3.31) and public participation (particularly leading public activities at only 2.95) are notably lower. This fundamentally reflects structural issues: insufficient targeted provision of material support, low implementation effectiveness of institutional support, and inadequate contextualized services in organizational support. This aligns with regression analysis findings showing insignificant independent effects of material and institutional support, thereby pinpointing targeted directions for optimizing the support system.

In summary, the regression analysis clearly reveals the core integration mechanism of "emotional-organizational dual-drive," validates

the overall explanatory power of the four-dimensional social support system, and clarifies the differential roles and synergistic needs of each support dimension. This provides robust empirical evidence for developing precise and coordinated social support strategies for returning youth.

#### **4. Pathways to Enhancing Rural Social Integration for Returning Youth**

Based on these findings, policy supply must shift toward precision by integrating the functional roles of each social support dimension and addressing prominent practical challenges. This entails constructing a synergistic, multidimensional support system for returning youth, providing institutional and resource guarantees for their deep integration into rural communities, thereby injecting momentum into comprehensive rural revitalization.

**Strengthen Emotional Support to Solidify Psychological Integration:** In emotional support, establish regular interaction platforms between returning youth and local residents, leveraging contextual activities like regional cultural experiences and community mutual aid to bridge emotional gaps. Utilize village cadres and respected elders as bridges, conducting routine visits to understand youth challenges and enhance their sense of belonging and acceptance. Simultaneously, introduce professional psychological services to address role transition and developmental anxieties faced by returning youth. Targeted interventions should strengthen their identity recognition and rural belonging, solidifying the emotional foundation for social integration. Concurrently, grant returning youth greater participation rights in village public affairs to further reinforce their identity and cement the emotional roots of integration.

**Optimize organizational support and expand social integration networks:** In organizational support, refine tiered service structures like returning youth associations and industry alliances. Establish specialized platforms for specific sectors based on their entrepreneurial or employment fields. Simultaneously build dedicated social networks for returning youth, leveraging these networks to create cross-entity and cross-sector channels for resource and information sharing. This facilitates experience exchange and resource complementarity,

driving deeper integration between organizational services and rural industries. Provide practical support guided by scenario-based and personalized services, establishing a scientific service evaluation and feedback mechanism. Core indicators should focus on demand matching and implementation efficiency, with dynamic adjustments to continuously enhance service quality and suitability.

**Addressing material support gaps and strengthening integration safeguards:** In material support, optimize entrepreneurship guarantee loan policies by streamlining approval processes and expanding coverage and loan amounts. Establish dedicated startup funds tailored to different industries. Simultaneously, lower thresholds for applying for related subsidies and provide initial capital support to returning youth through mechanisms like "support first, verification later." Establish a multi-source supply system integrating "government + market + local leaders." The government should coordinate public resource sharing, guide market entities to provide technical and order-based assistance, and encourage local leaders to contribute through equity investments and resource connections. Implement a dynamic monitoring mechanism for material needs to achieve precise alignment between resource supply and demand.

**Enhance the effectiveness of institutional support and optimize the policy environment for integration:** In terms of institutional support, establish a multi-channel, multi-dimensional policy communication matrix to increase awareness and coverage through village bulletin boards, community push notifications, and door-to-door explanations. Optimize policy implementation processes by introducing one-stop service windows and online platforms to streamline approvals and enhance accessibility. Develop tailored policies for diverse groups of returning youth, establishing a closed-loop governance mechanism encompassing policy formulation, implementation, impact assessment, and iterative refinement to ensure relevance and prevent blanket policies from becoming mere formalities.

In summary, multidimensional optimization of policy supply will facilitate the transition of returning youth from superficial adaptation to deep integration, providing sustainable talent support for comprehensive rural revitalization.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study, grounded in the rural revitalization strategy and Zhejiang Province's rural development practices, systematically analyzes the complex relationship between social integration and social support among returning youth. It constructs a theoretical framework encompassing four dimensions of social support—emotional, material, institutional, and organizational—and their impact on social integration. Using a multiple linear regression model, the framework's applicability and the influence of each social support dimension on social integration were empirically tested. Results indicate that the four-dimensional social support framework effectively explains the variance in social integration among returning youth, with significant heterogeneity in the effects of each support dimension.

This study yields three core findings: First, it reveals a "dual-drive mechanism" of emotional-organizational integration for returning youth, emphasizing the importance of emotional identification and social network building within rural social contexts. This shift reflects contemporary returning youth's integration demands evolving from survival-oriented material security toward development-oriented emotional belonging and resource linkage. Second, it confirms that the "synergistic efficacy" of social support is crucial for integration quality, with multidimensional collaborative networks maximizing support effectiveness, thereby enriching the theoretical implications and application scenarios of social support theory within the localized context of rural revitalization. Third, it indicates that uneven social integration stems from structural imbalances in the support system, offering new perspectives for optimizing support strategies.

The four-dimensional social support theoretical framework effectively adapts to research on the social integration of returning youth: The emotional, material, institutional, and organizational framework constructed in this study explains 47.8% of the variance in social integration, confirming its relevance and scientific validity for the returning youth population and enriching the application scenarios of social support theory in the context of rural revitalization.

"Emotional-Organizational Dual Drive" as the Core Mechanism of Social Integration: The

study identifies emotional support and organizational support as key determinants of social integration among returning youth, with their impact significantly exceeding other dimensions. This finding reflects a shift in contemporary returning youth's integration needs—from traditional survival-oriented material security to development-oriented emotional belonging and resource networking—validating the core value of "psychological identification + social networks" in rural settings.

The "synergistic efficacy" of social support determines integration quality: The effectiveness of material and institutional support depends on synergistic interaction with emotional and organizational support; single-dimensional support struggles to achieve deep integration. This indicates that the social integration of returning youth results from the combined efforts of a multidimensional support system, where structural coordination within the support framework is key to enhancing integration quality.

Integration Imbalances Stem from Structural Discrepancies in Support Systems: The shortcomings of returning youth in public participation and economic integration fundamentally reflect structural issues—insufficient precision in material support provision, low implementation effectiveness of institutional support, and inadequate contextualized services in organizational support. This provides clear targets for optimizing future support strategies.

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