

Migration Intentions through Dual Motivational Forces: Integrating Push–Pull–Mooring and Planned Behavior Approaches

Shiu-Wan Hung*, Chi-Yun Chiu, Siu-Bing Lam

National Central University, Taiwan

*Corresponding author : (e-mail:shiuwan@mgt.ncu.edu.tw)

Extended Abstract

1. Background and Research Problem

This study examines international migration intention by integrating structural push–pull factors with internal psychological determinants. Low fertility and population aging are reshaping demographic structures across advanced economies, intensifying global competition for skilled workers. As labor shortages deepen and age-dependency ratios rise, international migration has become a central instrument of demographic and economic governance. Many governments actively deploy tax incentives, labor pathways, and talent-attraction programs, yet migration outcomes remain uneven; the existence of favorable structural conditions does not guarantee actual migration flows.

Classical migration research emphasizes push–pull dynamics shaped by wage differentials, safety, quality of life, and political stability. However, growing empirical evidence shows that psychological readiness, self-efficacy, and cultural-adaptation confidence critically determine whether migrants convert structural advantages into intention and eventual mobility. This reveals a persistent theoretical gap: external incentives alone cannot explain migration intention.

To address this gap, the study proposes an integrated dual-motivation framework that combines the Push–Pull–Mooring Model with the Theory of Planned Behavior. The objective is to explain how external forces and internal cognitive evaluations—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—jointly shape migration intention. The model also incorporates heterogeneity by examining whether age and personal financial resources moderate behavioral pathways. In doing so, the study advances migration theory and offers policy insights relevant to talent governance and demographic planning.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Push–Pull–Mooring Model

The Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM) framework conceptualizes migration as a consequence of interacting structural forces. Push factors arise from pressures in the origin context, including environmental insecurity, high living costs, and limited

opportunities for upward mobility. Pull factors reflect the attractive conditions offered by destination countries, such as economic opportunity, welfare provisions, educational resources, and overall stability. Mooring factors represent forces that discourage relocation, including emotional ties, place attachment, and subjective social expectations. While PPM provides important insight into the structural motivations behind migration, recent studies suggest that mooring constraints have weakened, particularly among globally mobile populations and younger professionals less bound by geographic identity.

2.2 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains migration intention through three psychological determinants. Attitude captures an individual's positive or negative evaluation of relocating. Subjective norms reflect social expectations from family members, peers, or other influential groups. Perceived behavioral control represents the degree to which individuals believe they can successfully complete the migration process; in this study, perceived control is reflected as cultural-adaptation confidence. Integrating PPM and TPB allows structural motivations and psychological determinants to be linked, with push and pull forces conceptualized as antecedents of pro-migration attitudes and cultural-adaptation confidence treated as perceived behavioral control.

2.3 Moderating Variables

To capture heterogeneity among prospective migrants, the model incorporates two moderators. Age reflects the likelihood that older individuals perceive greater family responsibility, identity negotiation, and settlement barriers. Disposable income captures financial capacity, which may increase the ability to act on favorable evaluations of migration opportunities. Including both moderators helps explain variation in the extent to which structural and psychological factors translate into behavioral intention.

3. Data and Methods

A two-wave online questionnaire survey was administered between January 20–29 and February 12–March 12, 2024. Participants were adults with recent cross-border migration experience or concrete plans for overseas relocation. After data cleaning and removal of incomplete cases, the final sample consisted of 390 valid responses. All constructs in the model were measured using five-point Likert scales adapted from established migration-intention literature. Reliability and validity were confirmed through Cronbach's α and confirmatory factor analysis.

The research hypotheses were evaluated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) conducted in AMOS 21. In total, eight direct-effect hypotheses were examined

to assess the influence of push, pull, and mooring forces on attitudes and intention. Moderation effects of age and disposable income were tested using interaction terms to determine whether demographic characteristics altered the strength of the structural pathways.

4. Results and Discussion

The results show that economic and social pull forces exert the strongest influence on migration attitudes. Respondents evaluated relocation more favorably when destination countries offered higher wages, employment prospects, welfare, and stability. Origin-side pressures also encouraged positive attitudes, though less strongly. These patterns confirm that destination incentives remain the dominant drivers shaping migration evaluations.

However, favorable attitudes alone do not produce intention. Attitude and cultural-adaptation confidence significantly predict intention, indicating that structural advantages translate into mobility only when individuals feel able to adapt socially and culturally. In this context, cultural-adaptation confidence reflects perceived behavioral control within the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Mooring forces, operationalized as subjective norms, do not significantly affect intention, suggesting weakened place attachment among contemporary migrants, particularly younger individuals accustomed to transnational movement—an observation consistent with recent demographic research.

Moderation tests further reveal behavioral heterogeneity. Age weakens the effect of cultural-adaptation confidence, implying stronger identity, career, or family constraints among older adults. Disposable income strengthens the relationship between attitude and intention, showing that financial resources facilitate the conversion of favorable evaluations into concrete plans.

Overall, migration intention reflects the interaction of external opportunity and psychological readiness. Strong pull forces create favorable conditions, but only individuals who feel able to adapt—and who possess sufficient financial flexibility—are likely to act on positive attitudes. These findings explain why destination countries may offer generous incentives yet still face gaps between policy design and actual inflows, underscoring the need for economic measures paired with social and cultural integration support.

5. Contributions and Conclusion

This study makes several theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of migration intention. Theoretically, it proposes a dual-motivation framework that integrates the Push–Pull–Mooring model with the Theory of Planned Behavior, bridging structural explanations with cognitive and psychological

mechanisms. By demonstrating that cultural-adaptation confidence operates as a form of perceived behavioral control, the study provides empirical validation for linking sociological migration theory with behavioral models. The inclusion of age and disposable income as moderating factors further refines the behavioral explanation of migration intention, showing that the strength of psychological pathways differs across demographic groups.

Practically, the findings suggest that talent-oriented migration strategies must go beyond economic incentives. While higher wages, welfare, and employment opportunities generate positive attitudes, successful mobility depends on whether prospective migrants believe they can adapt and thrive in a new environment. High-income individuals are better positioned to act on favorable attitudes, but low-income migrants may require additional support, such as affordable housing, financial assistance, or relocation subsidies. Older migrants face distinct barriers related to family responsibilities, career stability, and perceived social adjustment, indicating a need for tailored programs such as family-inclusive policies, simplified credential recognition, or mid-career pathways.

Overall, migration intention emerges from the combined influence of external incentives and psychological readiness. Policies that rely exclusively on labor-market pull factors or visa schemes may fail if migrants lack the confidence or resources necessary to relocate and integrate. A balanced policy approach—pairing economic opportunity with integration measures such as language training, cultural orientation, and credential recognition—enhances both attraction and long-term retention. These insights offer practical guidance for governments seeking to strengthen international talent mobility and sustain demographic resilience in the context of aging populations and labor shortages.

Keywords: International migration, migration intention, Push–Pull–Mooring model, Theory of Planned Behavior, cultural adaptation, integration policy, talent mobility, demographic governance.