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Understanding Faculty Turnover Intention in Selected Chinese Public Universities: The Roles of Service Quality and Work Motivation

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Abstract

Faculty retention is a critical concern in public higher education, where institutional conditions may influence employees' decisions to remain or leave. This study examined the relationship between service quality (SQ) and turnover intention (TI) among faculty in selected public higher education institutions in Henan Province, China, and tested the moderating role of work motivation (WM). A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed with 364 full-time faculty members selected through stratified random sampling from a population of 4,065. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire for SQ, WM, and TI and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and Hayes' PROCESS Macro. Faculty rated SQ as good (M = 3.04, SD = 0.34) and reported high WM (M = 3.48, SD = 0.31) and low overall TI (M = 2.52, SD = 0.74). SQ was positively associated with WM ($r = 0.34$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with TI ($r = -0.28$, $p < .001$), whereas WM was not significantly associated with TI ($r = -0.06$, $p = .281$). Moderation analyses showed significant negative associations between SQ and TI for intrinsic ($B = -.637$, $p < .001$), extrinsic ($B = -.607$, $p < .001$), and overall WM ($B = -.645$, $p < .001$). However, none of the interaction terms was significant: intrinsic ($B = .286$, $p = .187$, $\Delta R^2 = .004$), extrinsic ($B = -.319$, $p = .430$, $\Delta R^2 = .003$), and overall WM ($B = .138$, $p = .736$, $\Delta R^2 = .0004$). The findings indicate that WM does not significantly alter the association between SQ and TI, underscoring the importance of service quality in faculty retention.

Keywords: service quality, turnover intention, work motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, faculty retention, public higher education, China

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INTRODUCTION

Faculty retention has become an important concern in higher education as universities face increasing demands for teaching quality, research productivity, institutional competitiveness, and faculty performance. Rising workloads, performance-based accountability, career uncertainty, and changing employment conditions may contribute to faculty turnover intention, with potential consequences for institutional continuity, teaching quality, and research capacity (Zhao et al, 2024). International evidence similarly indicates that working conditions, workload, administrative demands, employment conditions, and opportunities for career progression are important considerations in teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2025).

The issue is particularly relevant in China, where reforms in academic personnel systems and increasing competition for high-level talent have intensified pressures on universities and their faculty. Research on Chinese higher education indicates that institutional personnel reforms and increasingly demanding performance assessment systems can influence academic staff turnover (Yin et al., 2024). In this context, the quality of institutional services may represent an important but relatively underexamined aspect of the faculty

work environment. For faculty members, service quality encompasses the reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility of the delivery of administrative, academic, research, human resource, and other institutional support services that facilitate the performance of their responsibilities.

Service quality may be particularly relevant to turnover intention because institutional services form part of employees' everyday organizational experience. When faculty perceive institutional support as reliable, responsive, and supportive, they may develop more favorable attitudes toward their organization. Conversely, inadequate, or inefficient services may contribute to unfavorable work experiences and greater consideration of leaving.

Despite growing research on faculty turnover and organizational conditions, limited empirical evidence has directly examined whether work motivation moderates the relationship between perceived service quality and turnover intention among university faculty, particularly in public higher education institutions in central China. Moreover, existing studies have often focused on specific organizational conditions rather than examining service quality as a multidimensional construct. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between service quality and turnover intention among faculty in selected public higher education institutions in Henan Province, China, and by testing work motivation as a potential moderator.

The findings can inform institutional retention strategies by identifying whether improvements in service quality should be pursued as a broad organizational priority or supplemented by motivation-specific interventions. More broadly, the study contributes to efforts to strengthen faculty working conditions, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable higher education, particularly in support of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Objectives of the Study. This study aims to: (1) determine participants' profile in terms of sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service; (2) determine the level of service quality in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy as assessed by faculty as an entire group and classified according to sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service; (3) determine the level of work motivation in terms of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation among faculty as an entire group and classified according to sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service; (4) determine the level of turnover intention in terms of thoughts of quitting, job search behavior, and willingness to leave among faculty as an entire group and classified according to sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service; (5) determine if significant relationships exist among service quality, work motivation, and turnover intention among faculty; and (6) determine if work motivation in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between service quality and turnover intention among faculty.

Hypotheses. Based on the objectives mentioned above, the following hypotheses were tested:

Ho_1. No significant relationships exist among service quality, work motivation, and turnover intention among faculty.

Ho_2. Work motivation in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic has no significant moderating effect on the relationship between service quality and turnover intention among faculty.

Scope and Limitations of the Study. This study examined the moderating role of work motivation on the relationship between perceived service quality and turnover intention among faculty in three selected public universities in Henan Province, China. Conducted from January 2026 to August 2026, the participants comprised 364 full-time faculty members selected using stratified random

sampling from a target population of 4,065. The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire developed by the researcher with reference to SERVQUAL for service quality, the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS) for work motivation, and the Turnover Intention Scale (TIS-6) for turnover intention, with items contextualized for Chinese public university faculty. The survey was administered through Star Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's product-moment correlation, and Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022). Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

Theoretical Framework of the Study. This study is primarily grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Mobley's Turnover Process Model, with SERVQUAL serving as the framework for assessing service quality. SERVQUAL conceptualizes service quality in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, providing a structured basis for examining faculty perceptions of the quality of services provided by their universities. Social Exchange Theory provides the principal explanation for the relationship between service quality and turnover intention. The theory posits that employees develop reciprocal attitudes and behaviors based on their experiences of organizational support and treatment.

When faculty perceive institutional services as reliable, responsive, and supportive, they may develop more favorable attitudes toward their institution and a stronger inclination to remain. Conversely, perceptions of inadequate or poor-quality services may weaken the exchange relationship and increase intentions to leave. Complementing SET, Mobley's Turnover Process Model explains the cognitive process through which employees evaluate their work experiences and develop intentions to leave. From this perspective, unfavorable evaluations of workplace conditions may generate dissatisfaction, thoughts of leaving, and ultimately turnover intention. The model therefore provides a theoretical basis for examining how perceived service quality may be associated with faculty turnover intention.

Conceptual Framework. Presented in Figure 1 is the conceptual paradigm of the study. Service quality is the independent variable, turnover intention is the dependent variable, and work motivation is examined as a moderating variable. The moderating role of work motivation is considered to determine whether the relationship between service quality and turnover intention varies according to employees' level of work motivation. Demographic characteristics in terms of sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service are included as profile variables to describe the composition of the faculty sample and provide contextual information about them. Service quality was measured across five dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; while turnover intention was measured in terms of thoughts of quitting, job search behavior, and willingness to leave. Work motivation as a moderating variable was measured in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions.

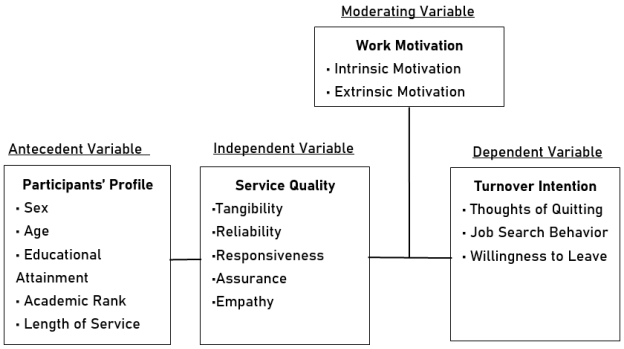


Figure 1
Conceptual Model of the Roles of Service Quality and Work Motivation in Understanding Faculty Turnover Intention in Selected Chinese Public Universities

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality. The SERVQUAL framework developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) conceptualizes service quality through five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibility concerns the adequacy of physical

facilities, equipment, and other resources; reliability refers to the consistent and accurate delivery of services; responsiveness concerns the promptness and willingness to provide assistance; assurance reflects competence, courtesy, and professionalism; and empathy refers to individualized attention and understanding of users' needs (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Although originally developed for service organizations, these dimensions provide a useful framework for assessing the quality of institutional services experienced by faculty in higher education.

The importance of institutional conditions to faculty outcomes is particularly evident in the Chinese higher education context. Yin et al. (2024) found that reforms in China's academic personnel system and increasingly demanding performance expectations can influence academic staff turnover across institutional, organizational, interpersonal, and individual levels. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2024) found that multiple job demands were associated with turnover intention among Chinese university teachers, indicating that faculty responses are influenced by the conditions under which academic work is performed.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory (SET), institutional services represent an important part of the resources and treatment exchanged between employees and their organizations. When faculty perceive that their institution provides reliable, responsive, competent, and supportive services, they may view the employment relationship more favorably and reciprocate through positive attitudes and continued organizational membership (Blau, 1986). Conversely, inadequate institutional support may weaken the perceived exchange relationship and contribute to withdrawal tendencies.

Work Motivation. Work motivation refers to the forces that initiate, direct, and sustain employees' work-related behavior. In the present study, work motivation is considered in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in work because it is interesting, meaningful, or personally satisfying, whereas extrinsic motivation is associated with external outcomes such as compensation, recognition, promotion, job security, and other organizational rewards (Zhao et al., 2025).

The distinction is particularly relevant in higher education because faculty work involves both professional and organizational considerations. Faculty may derive satisfaction from teaching, research, intellectual development, and professional contribution while also responding to institutional rewards and employment conditions. Thus, faculty may differ in how strongly they depend on the work itself or on external organizational conditions to sustain their motivation.

Recent evidence from Chinese higher education demonstrates the importance of organizational conditions for faculty motivation. Using data from 394 Chinese university faculty members, Zhao et al. (2025) found that value-based leadership was positively associated with intrinsic work motivation, with growth mindset and teaching self-efficacy contributing to this relationship. Similarly, Li et al. (2025), in a mixed-methods study involving faculty from eight public universities in eastern China, found that intrinsic motivation was associated with self-efficacy and innovative teaching, while administrative workload was identified as an important barrier to faculty motivation and innovation. These findings suggest that faculty motivation is closely connected with the organizational environment in which academic work is performed.

Motivation may therefore influence how faculty interpret and respond to institutional conditions. Faculty with stronger intrinsic motivation may derive considerable satisfaction from academic work itself and may consequently remain engaged despite some institutional deficiencies. In contrast, faculty whose motivation is more strongly dependent on external rewards may be more sensitive to compensation, recognition, promotion, job security, and administrative support. This

distinction provides a basis for considering work motivation not only as a direct employee characteristic but also as a potential condition that changes responses to institutional service quality.

Turnover Intention. Turnover intention refers to an employee's conscious intention or inclination to leave the organization. It is commonly viewed as an important precursor of actual turnover because employees generally experience a process of considering withdrawal before deciding to leave. In higher education, turnover intention is particularly consequential because the loss of experienced faculty may affect instructional continuity, research activities, institutional knowledge, and organizational stability.

Mobley's Turnover Process Model provides a useful framework for understanding turnover intention as part of a cognitive withdrawal process. Mobley (1977) proposed that dissatisfaction may lead employees to think about quitting, evaluate the costs and benefits of leaving, consider alternative employment, and eventually develop an intention to leave. This perspective emphasizes that turnover is not necessarily an immediate response to dissatisfaction but can develop through a series of cognitive and behavioral considerations.

Recent research indicates that turnover intention remains an important concern among Chinese university teachers. Zhao et al. (2024) found that multiple job demands were associated with turnover intention among Chinese university teachers, demonstrating the relevance of work conditions to faculty withdrawal intentions. Likewise, Yin et al. (2024) reported that changes in China's academic personnel systems, including increasingly stringent performance assessment mechanisms, can contribute to academic staff turnover. These findings reinforce Mobley's (1977) view that employees' withdrawal decisions are shaped by their experiences within the work environment.

Turnover intention can therefore be understood as an outcome of the interaction between employees and their organizational context. When faculty experience unfavorable working conditions, insufficient support, or organizational practices that do not meet their expectations, they may increasingly consider alternatives and develop stronger intentions to leave. Conversely, supportive institutional conditions may strengthen employees' willingness to remain.

Service Quality and Turnover Intention. The relationship between service quality and turnover intention can be explained through Social Exchange Theory and Mobley's Turnover Process Model. From the perspective of SET, employees assess the quality of their relationship with the organization based partly on the resources, support, and favorable treatment they receive (Blau, 1986). For faculty, reliable administrative assistance, adequate facilities, responsive academic and research support, competent personnel, and appropriate human resource services may signal that the institution values and supports their contribution. Such favorable exchanges may strengthen employees' willingness to maintain their organizational membership.

Conversely, poor service quality may create perceptions of inadequate organizational support and weaken the employment exchange relationship. When services are unreliable, delayed, inaccessible, or insufficient, faculty may experience frustration and dissatisfaction, potentially increasing their consideration of withdrawal. This interpretation is consistent with Mobley's (1977) model, in which unfavorable work experiences can initiate a cognitive process that progresses from dissatisfaction and thoughts of quitting toward consideration of alternatives and eventual turnover intention.

Empirical evidence from Chinese higher education provides support for the importance of organizational and work conditions in faculty turnover. Zhao et al. (2024) demonstrated that multiple job demands were related to turnover

intention among Chinese university teachers, while Yin et al. (2024) showed that institutional personnel reforms and performance expectations can influence academic staff turnover. These findings suggest that faculty turnover-related attitudes are connected to the broader conditions and experiences associated with their employment.

Accordingly, perceived service quality may be associated with turnover intention because institutional services form part of the everyday employment experience. When faculty perceive services as dependable, responsive, competent, and supportive, they may be more likely to maintain a positive exchange relationship with the institution. When these services are perceived as inadequate, the resulting dissatisfaction may contribute to thoughts of leaving and stronger turnover intentions.

Work Motivation as a Moderator. Recent evidence supports the relationship between faculty motivation and organizational conditions. Zhao et al. (2025) found that leadership practices were positively associated with intrinsic motivation among Chinese university faculty, while Li et al. (2025) identified administrative workload as an important barrier to intrinsic motivation and innovative teaching. These findings suggest that faculty motivation is not independent of the institutional environment but is shaped, at least in part, by how academic work is organized and supported.

The potential moderating role of motivation can be further understood through Social Exchange Theory. Although faculty may evaluate the quality of institutional services, their responses to favorable or unfavorable conditions may differ according to their motivational orientation. Highly intrinsically motivated faculty may be more capable of maintaining commitment when institutional services are less satisfactory because they derive satisfaction from the work itself. Conversely, faculty who rely more heavily on external rewards may be more sensitive to deficiencies in organizational support and services. Thus, motivation may influence the strength of the relationship between service quality and turnover intention.

This reasoning is also compatible with Mobley's Turnover Process Model. If motivation affects how faculty interpret and respond to their work environment, it may influence whether dissatisfaction with institutional services develops into thoughts of quitting, consideration of alternatives, and stronger intentions to leave (Mobley, 1977). Motivation may therefore either attenuate or intensify the relationship between service quality and turnover intention.

METHODOLOGY

Design. This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationships among service quality, work motivation, and turnover intention among faculty in selected public higher education institutions in Henan Province, China. The design enabled the description of the study variables and the examination of their associations, including the moderating effect of work motivation on the relationship between service quality and turnover intention. The findings are interpreted as associational rather than causal, as the design does not establish temporal precedence or causal direction (Mohajan, 2020; Lim, 2025; Jhangiani et al., 2025).

Population and Sampling. The target population was the 4,065 full-time teachers of the three selected public universities. A sampling formula, $n = N/1+Ne^2$, was used to calculate the sample size of 364. Stratified random sampling technique was employed, with the three participating institutions serving as the strata (Fraenkel et al., 2023). The sample was proportionally allocated across the three institutions: University A (150), University B (118), and University C (96). Participants were randomly selected from de-identified faculty lists obtained from the participating institutions' Human Resources and Academic Affairs offices using computer generated numbers in Microsoft Excel.

Instrumentation. Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire. Item development was guided by SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), WEIMS (Van den Broeck et al., 2021), and TIS-6 (Bothma & Roodt, 2013), which served as conceptual references rather than directly adopted instruments. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) respondent profile; (2) service quality, covering tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; (3) work motivation, covering intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; and (4) turnover intention, covering thoughts of quitting, job search behavior, and willingness to leave. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree) was used for the rating scales on service quality, work motivation, and turnover intention. The items were contextualized for faculty in Chinese public universities.

Content and face validity was established through expert review by five specialists with relevant expertise in higher education, human resource management, and research methodology. The experts assessed the items for relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the study variables, and their recommendations were incorporated into the revised questionnaire. A pilot test involving 30 faculty members was conducted to assess reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .861 for tangibility, .884 for reliability, .904 for responsiveness, .873 for assurance, .891 for empathy, .835 for intrinsic motivation, .912 for extrinsic motivation, .823 for thoughts of quitting, .901 for job search behavior, and .876 for willingness to leave, indicating satisfactory to excellent internal consistency. Empirical construct validation using factor analysis (EFA/CFA) was omitted during this pilot phase because factor extraction requires substantially larger sample sizes, i.e., $N \geq 100$ or a minimum of 5:1 subject-to-item ratio (Hair et al., 2018, Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Consequently, the absence of factor analytic evidence is acknowledged as a limitation, with formal structural factor analysis recommended for future research employing larger cohorts.

Data Gathering. Following ethical approval and institutional permission, the researcher administered the survey online through the Star Questionnaire platform. Participants first reviewed the RERB-approved bilingual informed consent form and indicated their voluntary consent before accessing the questionnaire. The survey was completed anonymously, and responses were automatically recorded and exported for analysis. Data were securely stored and reported only in aggregate form.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages summarized the faculty profile, while means and standard deviations described service quality, work motivation, and turnover intention. Mean scores were interpreted using a five-point scale. For service quality, scores of 4.21–5.00 were interpreted as excellent, 3.41–4.20 as very good, 2.61–3.40 as good, 1.81–2.60 as fair, and 1.00–1.80 as poor. For work motivation and turnover intention, the corresponding interpretations were very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine relationships among the study variables. Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 1 tested the moderating effects of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and overall work motivation on the service quality–turnover intention relationship. Continuous variables were grand-mean centered before creating interaction terms, and 5,000 bootstrap samples were used to generate 95% confidence intervals. Demographic characteristics were included as covariates. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$, with findings interpreted as associational given the cross-sectional, nonexperimental design.

Ethical Considerations. This research has obtained the ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Central Philippine University. All subjects have signed an informed consent form, and anonymity, confidentiality and right of withdrawal were strictly guaranteed.

RESULTS

Participants' Profile. Table 1 presents participants' profile. Women accounted for a majority in the sample (52%), and most of the participants are ages 36 and 45 years old (44%). Almost half are master's degree holders (49%), while 44% are doctoral degree holders. In terms of rank, the half of the participants are lecturers (50%), and 42% of respondents have 11 to 20 years of teaching experience.

Table 1
Participants' Profile

Category (n = 364)		f	%
Sex	Male	175	48
	Female	189	52
Age	35 and below	75	21
	36 to 45	161	44
	46 and above	128	35
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	25	7
	Master's Degree	179	49
	Doctoral Degree	160	44
Academic Rank	Teaching Assistant	39	11
	Associate Professor	100	27
	Professor	43	12
	Lecturer	182	50
Length of Service	10 years and below	138	38
	11 to 20 years	152	42
	More than 20 years	74	20

Level of Service Quality in Selected Public Universities. Table 2 shows that the service quality of the selected public universities was good (M = 3.04, SD = 0.34) when participants were taken as an entire group. Similar results were found across groups in terms of sex, age, educational attainment, academic rank, and length of service, with the highest mean rating of 3.14 (SD = 0.34) from the faculty with more than 20 years of service.

Table 2
Overall Service Quality in Selected Public Universities as Assessed by Faculty

Category (n = 364)	Service Quality		
	SD	*M*	Description
Sex			
Male	0.34	3.04	Good
Female	0.34	3.03	Good
Age			
35 and below	0.32	3.03	Good
36 to 45	0.35	3.01	Good
46 and above	0.34	3.07	Good
Educational Attainment			
Bachelor's Degree	0.37	3.04	Good
Master's Degree	0.33	2.98	Good
Doctoral Degree	0.33	3.10	Good
Academic Rank			
Teaching Assistant	0.34	2.92	Good
Associate Professor	0.35	3.05	Good
Professor	0.36	3.09	Good
Lecturer	0.32	3.04	Good
Length of Service			
10 years and below	0.32	3.01	Good
11 to 20 years	0.34	3.01	Good
More than 20 years	0.34	3.14	Good
Entire Group	0.34	3.04	Good

Mean Scale: 1.00-1.80 Poor, 1.81-2.60 Fair, 2.61-3.40 Good 3.41-4.20 Very Good, 4.21-5.00 Excellent

Table 3 indicates that faculty rated all five service quality dimensions as good, with mean scores ranging from 3.03 to 3.04. Reliability, assurance, and empathy received the highest ratings (M = 3.04), while tangibility and responsiveness were slightly lower (M = 3.03). Generally, service quality was rated good across dimensions and demographic groups.

Table 3
Service Quality Dimensions as Assessed by Faculty

Category (n = 364)	Service Quality Dimensions									
	Tangibility		Reliability		Responsiveness		Assurance		Empathy	
	SD	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*
Sex										
Male	0.40	3.01	0.40	3.07	0.43	3.02	0.43	3.06	0.44	3.06
Female	0.39	3.04	0.44	3.02	0.40	3.04	0.46	3.02	0.43	3.02
Age										
35 and below	0.38	3.03	0.39	3.00	0.39	3.01	0.46	3.06	0.40	3.03
36 to 45	0.40	2.99	0.44	3.05	0.44	3.02	0.44	2.99	0.43	3.03
46 and above	0.40	3.07	0.41	3.06	0.40	3.06	0.44	3.10	0.45	3.06
Educational Attainment										
Bachelor's Degree	0.37	3.04	0.40	3.00	0.46	3.01	0.41	3.02	0.53	3.13
Master's Degree	0.40	2.98	0.42	3.01	0.40	2.97	0.45	2.97	0.42	2.99
Doctoral Degree	0.38	3.08	0.42	3.09	0.41	3.11	0.42	3.13	0.43	3.08
Academic Rank										
Teaching Assistant	0.41	2.95	0.39	2.87	0.43	2.94	0.47	2.95	0.39	2.90
Associate Professor	0.41	3.00	0.44	3.05	0.43	3.06	0.43	3.05	0.43	3.09
Professor	0.40	3.12	0.47	3.07	0.45	3.09	0.45	3.11	0.48	3.08
Lecturer	0.38	3.03	0.39	3.07	0.39	3.02	0.44	3.04	0.43	3.03
Length of Service										
10 years and below	0.39	2.98	0.41	3.01	0.38	3.01	0.46	3.03	0.42	3.01
11 to 20 years	0.38	3.00	0.41	3.03	0.43	3.02	0.43	2.99	0.44	3.03
More than 20 years	0.39	3.17	0.45	3.14	0.42	3.11	0.42	3.16	0.44	3.12
Entire Group	0.39	3.03	0.42	3.04	0.41	3.03	0.44	3.04	0.43	3.04

Mean Scale: 1.00-1.80 Poor,1.81-2.60 Fair, 2.61-3.40 Good, 3.41-4.20 Very Good, 4.21-5.00 Excellent

Level of Work Motivation Among Faculty. Table 4 shows that faculty reported high levels of work motivation overall (M = 3.48, SD = 0.31), with both intrinsic (M = 3.54, SD= 0.51) and extrinsic motivation (M = 3.42, SD = 0.38) rated high. Intrinsic motivation was consistently high across all faculty characteristics, while extrinsic motivation was moderate among associate professors, professors, and faculty with more than 20 years of service. In general, motivation remained high across all groups,

indicating that faculty generally demonstrated strong motivation toward their work.

Table 4

Level of Work Motivation Among Faculty

Category (*n* = 364)	Work Motivation								
	Intrinsic			Extrinsic			Overall		
	SD	*M*	*Description*	*SD*	*M*	*Description*	*SD*	*M*	*Description*
Sex									
Male	0.52	3.55	High	0.39	3.40	Moderate	0.32	3.47	High
Female	0.49	3.52	High	0.37	3.45	High	0.30	3.49	High
Age									
35 and below	0.46	3.56	High	0.43	3.44	High	0.32	3.50	High
36 to 45	0.52	3.51	High	0.38	3.42	High	0.31	3.47	High
46 and above	0.52	3.55	High	0.35	3.42	High	0.31	3.49	High
Educational Attainment									
Bachelor's Degree	0.51	3.45	High	0.38	3.41	High	0.30	3.43	High
Master's Degree	0.51	3.49	High	0.38	3.44	High	0.31	3.46	High
Doctoral Degree	0.49	3.60	High	0.38	3.41	High	0.31	3.51	High
Academic Rank									
Teaching Assistant	0.39	3.43	High	0.42	3.49	High	0.35	3.49	High
Associate Professor	0.56	3.61	High	0.37	3.38	Moderate	0.31	3.49	High
Professor	0.43	3.53	High	0.31	3.31	Moderate	0.27	3.42	High
Lecturer	0.51	3.52	High	0.38	3.46	High	0.25	3.46	High
Length of Service									
10 years and below	0.45	3.54	High	0.39	3.47	High	0.29	3.50	High
11 to 20 years	0.54	3.48	High	0.38	3.41	High	0.32	3.44	High
More than 20 years	0.52	3.65	High	0.34	3.37	Moderate	0.31	3.51	High
Entire Group	0.51	3.54	High	0.38	3.42	High	0.31	3.48	High

Mean Scale: 1.00-1.80 Very Low,1.81-2.60 Low, 2.61-3.40 Moderate, 3.41-4.20 High, 4.21-5.00 Very High

Table 5

Turnover Intention Among Faculty

Category (*n* = 364)	Turnover Intention											
	Thoughts of Quitting			Job Search Behavior			Willingness to Leave			Overall		
	SD	*M*	*Des.*	*SD*	*M*	*Des.*	*SD*	*M*	*Des.*	*SD*	*M*	*Des.*
Sex												
Male	0.71	2.59	L	0.68	2.36	L	0.87	2.46	L	0.72	2.47	L
Female	0.73	2.64	M	0.73	2.46	L	0.93	2.61	M	0.75	2.57	L
Age												
35 and below	0.51	3.14	M	0.53	2.87	M	0.69	3.02	M	0.50	3.01	M
36 to 45	0.71	2.79	M	0.70	2.57	L	0.93	2.78	M	0.73	2.71	M
46 and above	0.47	2.08	L	0.52	1.94	L	0.64	1.95	L	0.51	1.99	L
Educational Attainment												
Bachelor's	0.76	2.42	L	0.79	2.18	L	0.88	2.24	L	0.77	2.28	L
Master's	0.69	2.88	M	0.68	2.66	M	0.91	2.86	M	0.72	2.80	M
Doctoral	0.64	2.34	L	0.62	2.17	L	0.76	2.22	L	0.63	2.25	L
Academic Rank												
Teaching Asst.	0.64	3.13	M	0.36	2.93	M	0.88	3.17	M	0.66	3.08	M
Asso. Professor	0.70	2.44	L	0.69	2.26	L	0.94	2.38	L	0.74	2.36	L
Professor	0.64	2.24	L	0.71	2.45	L	0.81	2.18	L	0.70	2.19	L
Lecturer	0.70	2.68	M	0.67	2.15	L	0.84	2.57	L	0.69	2.57	L
Length of Service												
10 yrs & below	0.61	2.98	M	0.58	2.73	M	0.77	2.93	M	0.60	2.88	M
11 to 20 years	0.73	2.57	L	0.73	2.38	L	0.96	2.52	L	0.77	2.49	L
More than 20 yrs	0.40	2.01	L	0.49	1.88	L	0.45	1.83	L	0.41	1.91	L
Entire Group	0.72	2.61	M	0.70	2.41	L	0.90	2.54		0.74	2.52	L

Mean Scale: 1.00-1.80 Very Low,1.81-2.60 Low, 2.61-3.40 Moderate, 3.41-4.20 High, 4.21-5.00 Very High

Level of Turnover Intention Among Faculty. Table 5 shows that faculty had an overall low level of turnover intention (M = 2.52, SD = 0.74). Among the dimensions, thoughts of quitting had the highest mean (M = 2.61, SD = 0.72), indicating a moderate level, while job search behavior (M = 2.41, SD = 0.70) and willingness to leave (M = 2.54, SD = 0.90) were rated low.

Table 6

Relationship of Service Quality and Turnover Intention

Variables (*n* = 364)	Thoughts of Quitting		Job Search Behavior		Willingness to Leave		Overall Turnover Intention	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Tangibility	-0.19***	<.001	-0.21***	<.001	-0.28***	<.001	-0.24***	<.001
Reliability	-0.17***	0.001	-0.18***	<.001	-0.28***	<.001	-0.23***	<.001
Responsiveness	-0.20***	<.001	-0.19***	<.001	-0.24***	<.001	-0.23***	<.001
Assurance	-0.23***	<.001	-0.18***	<.001	-0.28***	<.001	-0.25***	<.001
Empathy	-0.12***	0.023	-0.18***	<.001	-0.23***	<.001	-0.19***	<.001
Overall Service Quality	-0.23***	<.001	-0.23***	<.001	-0.33***	<.001	-0.28***	<.001

Note. ***p < .001

Relationships Among Service Quality, Work Motivation, and Turnover Intention. Table 6 shows that overall service quality was significantly and negatively related to overall turnover intention (r = −.28, p < .001). All five service quality dimensions likewise showed significant negative relationships with the turnover intention dimensions, with correlations ranging from weak to moderate. The strongest relationship was between overall service quality and willingness to leave (r = −.33, p < .001).

Table 7

Relationship of Service Quality and Motivation

Variables (*n* = 364)	Intrinsic Motivation		Extrinsic Motivation		Overall Work Motivation	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Tangibility	0.37***	<.001	-0.02	0.675	0.29***	<.001
Reliability	0.40***	<.001	-0.08	0.130	0.28***	<.001
Responsiveness	0.35***	<.001	-0.05	0.352	0.26***	<.001
Assurance	0.34***	<.001	-0.00	0.965	0.28***	<.001
Empathy	0.37***	<.001	-0.06	0.236	0.28***	<.001
Overall Service Quality	0.45***	<.001	-0.05	0.310	0.34***	<.001

Note. ***p < .001

Table 7 indicates that overall service quality was significantly and positively related to intrinsic motivation (r = .45, p < .001) and overall work motivation (r = .34, p < .001). All service quality dimensions were significantly associated with intrinsic and overall motivation. On the contrary, extrinsic motivation was not significantly related to any service quality dimension or to overall service quality (r = −.05, p = .310).

Table 8

Relationship of Work Motivation and Turnover

Note. ***p < .001

Variables (n = 364)	Thoughts of Quitting		Job Search Behavior		Willingness to Leave		Overall Turnover Intention	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Intrinsic	-0.08	0.121	-0.07	0.167	-0.15***	0.003	-0.11***	0.032
Extrinsic	0.04	0.400	0.04	0.440	0.08	0.149	0.06	0.267
Overall Work Motivation	-0.04	0.449	-0.03	0.510	-0.08	0.128	-0.06	0.281

Table 8 shows that intrinsic motivation had a weak but significant negative relationship with overall turnover intention (r = −.11, p = .032) and willingness to leave (r = −.15, p = .003). However, its relationships with thoughts of quitting and job search behavior were not significant. Extrinsic motivation and overall work motivation were not significantly related to any turnover intention dimension (p > .05).

Moderating Effect of Work Motivation on the Relationship Between Service Quality and Turnover Intention. Table 9 presents the moderating effects of work motivation on the relationship between service quality and turnover intention. For intrinsic motivation, the overall model was significant and explained 8.4% of the variance in turnover intention (R^2 = .084). However, the interaction between service quality and intrinsic motivation did not significantly improve the model (ΔR^2 = .004), indicating that intrinsic motivation did not significantly moderate the relationship between service quality and turnover intention (p = .187).

For extrinsic motivation, the model likewise explained 8.4% of the variance in turnover intention (R^2 = .084). The addition of the service quality and extrinsic motivation interaction contributed only 0.3% additional explained variance (ΔR^2 = .003), which was not significant (p = .340). Thus, extrinsic motivation did not significantly moderate the relationship.

Similarly, the model involving overall work motivation explained 8.1% of the variance in turnover intention (R^2 = .081). The interaction term contributed less than 0.1% additional variance (ΔR^2 < .001), and the change was not significant (p = .687).

Table 9

Moderating Effects of Work Motivation on the Relationship Between Service Quality and Turnover Intention

Predictor / Interaction	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Intrinsic Motivation					
Service Quality	−.637	.123	−5.16	.000	[−.880, −.394]
Intrinsic Motivation	.036	.083	.439	.660	[−.126, .199]
SQ × Intrinsic Motivation	.286	.216	1.32	.187	[−.194, .712]
Extrinsic Motivation					
Service Quality	−.607	.110	−5.52	.000	[−.824, −.391]
Extrinsic Motivation	.078	.098	.790	.430	[−.116, .271]
SQ × Extrinsic Motivation	−.319	.304	−1.05	.295	[−.916, .279]
Overall Work Motivation					
Service Quality	−.645	.117	−5.51	.000	[2.44, 2.59]
Work Motivation	.105	.128	.819	.413	[−.147, .357]
SQ × Work Motivation	.138	.342	.404	.687	[−.534, .810]

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; SQ = service quality; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = change in R^2 attributable to the interaction term. For intrinsic motivation, R^2 = .084 and ΔR^2 = .004, p = .187. For extrinsic motivation, R^2 = .084 and ΔR^2 = .003, p = .354. For overall work motivation, R^2 = .081 and ΔR^2 < .001, p = .687.

All models were estimated using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 1, with variables grand-mean centered before forming the interaction terms. The nonsignificant ΔR^2 and interaction terms indicate that intrinsic, extrinsic, and overall work motivation did not significantly moderate the relationship between service quality and turnover intention.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that faculty turnover intention is shaped more strongly by the quality of the institutional environment than by the motivational orientation of individual faculty members. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1986), the services provided by an institution are not merely administrative functions; they form part of the reciprocal relationship between faculty and the organization. When faculty experience reliable, responsive, fair, and supportive institutional services, they are more likely to perceive the organization as fulfilling its obligations toward them. Conversely, persistent difficulties in administrative processes, academic and research support, facilities, or human resource services may weaken this exchange relationship and encourage psychological withdrawal. This interpretation is consistent

with evidence that institutional reforms, work demands, and organizational conditions are important considerations in understanding turnover among Chinese university faculty (Yin et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2024).

The absence of a moderating effect of work motivation further suggests that motivation should not be treated as a substitute for organizational support. Theoretically, this finding is supported by both Self-Determination Theory (Van den Broeck et al., 2021) and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Under SDT, autonomous work motivation depends on environmental conditions that satisfy basic psychological needs, meaning motivation cannot function as an independent buffer when structural support is lacking. Within Chinese public universities, where administrative governance, research expectations, and support services are centralized, individual motivation cannot buffer against structural deficits. Similarly, Herzberg's framework conceptualizes organizational support and service quality as foundational "hygiene factors," whereas motivation represents "motivators." Given the complex administrative demands and performance metrics facing Chinese university faculty (Li et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2025), unresolved hygiene deficiencies directly drive turnover intentions regardless of a faculty member's motivation level. Faculty may enter their work with strong intrinsic commitment to teaching, research, professional development, or academic contribution, while also responding to extrinsic considerations such as recognition, promotion, compensation, and job security. However, individual motivation operates within an organizational context. The findings imply that highly motivated faculty are not necessarily insulated from unfavorable institutional conditions. This is particularly important because recent research in Chinese higher education indicates that leadership, self-efficacy, administrative workload, and other organizational conditions influence faculty motivation and work experiences (Zhao et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025). Thus, retention efforts that focus primarily on cultivating individual motivation may have limited value if underlying service deficiencies remain unresolved.

The findings can also be understood through Mobley's (1977) turnover process model. Faculty members' consideration of leaving should not automatically be equated with an immediate intention to resign. Cognitive withdrawal may emerge before more active behaviors, giving institutions an opportunity to intervene. The coexistence of some thoughts of quitting with relatively low job-search behavior and willingness to leave suggests that turnover intention may represent an evolving process rather than a single, uniform condition. Consequently, universities should treat early expressions of dissatisfaction, recurring concerns about institutional support, and declining engagement as potential warning signals rather than waiting until faculty begin to actively seek alternative employment. Such an approach is consistent with research showing that excessive job demands, work-family conflict, burnout, and institutional pressures can contribute to turnover-related outcomes among Chinese university teachers.

These findings point to a shift in the emphasis of faculty retention strategies from motivating faculty to improving the conditions in which faculty work. University administrators and human resource units should therefore prioritize the quality of internal services that directly affect faculty members' daily work experience. Administrative units should strengthen response times, clarify procedures, reduce unnecessary bureaucratic steps, and establish clear channels for resolving faculty concerns. Academic and research support should be sufficiently accessible and timely, particularly in areas involving research administration, funding, equipment, and institutional approvals. Human resource practices should emphasize transparency and consistency in promotion, evaluation, recognition, and other career-related decisions. These measures can strengthen faculty perceptions that the institution is responsive and fair, thereby reinforcing the reciprocal

relationship emphasized by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1986).

Importantly, the findings do not imply that work motivation is unimportant. Rather, they indicate that motivation alone does not significantly change the relationship between service quality and turnover intention. This distinction has practical value. Institutions should continue to support intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation, but such initiatives should complement not replace improvements in institutional systems. Recognition programs, professional development, career opportunities, and meaningful academic work are more likely to contribute to sustainable faculty engagement when accompanied by efficient administrative and support structures. Recent evidence that leadership and institutional conditions are associated with faculty intrinsic motivation reinforces the importance of addressing both individual and organizational factors (Zhao et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025).

Faculty retention is not simply a matter of how motivated faculty are, but also of how effectively the institution supports them in performing their work. Thus, the practical priority should be to strengthen service quality across administrative, academic and research, facilities and logistics, and human resource functions while establishing mechanisms for identifying early signs of withdrawal. Rather than relying on faculty commitment to compensate for weaknesses in institutional systems, university leaders should create work environments in which professional commitment is supported by responsive, reliable, and fair organizational practices. Longitudinal research could further examine whether sustained improvements in institutional service quality leads to subsequent reductions in withdrawal thoughts and turnover related behaviors among university faculty.

Limitations. Notwithstanding these empirical insights, the study's conclusions should be interpreted within the context of specific methodological boundaries. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences regarding the temporal ordering between service quality and turnover intention, warranting future multi-wave or longitudinal studies to trace these dynamics over time. Second, despite applied procedural controls, reliance on single-source self-reports introduces potential common method variance, which subsequent research could mitigate by incorporating objective administrative metrics or supervisor evaluations. Third, while the researcher-developed instrument established strong content validity and high internal consistency, formal factor analysis (EFA/CFA) was omitted during pilot testing due to sample size constraints (N = 30). Future research should evaluate its structural dimensionality using larger, multi-regional cohorts. Finally, because the sample was restricted to three public universities in Henan Province, expanding future investigations across diverse institutional types and geographic regions will be essential to establish broader generalizability.

Conclusion. This study evaluated the relationship between perceived service quality and faculty turnover intention in selected Chinese public universities, as well as the moderating role of work motivation. Results indicated that service quality was positively associated with work motivation and negatively associated with turnover intention. However, work motivation, whether intrinsic, extrinsic, or overall, did not significantly moderate the service quality–turnover intention link. Theoretically, these findings extend Social Exchange Theory and Mobley's Turnover Model by demonstrating that administrative and operational service quality functions as a primary organizational resource directly driving retention. Furthermore, integrating Self-Determination Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory highlights that individual motivation cannot compensate for structural support deficits; in centralized higher education environments, service quality operates as a baseline hygiene condition upon which motivation depends. Practically, university leaders must prioritize strengthening

institutional service infrastructure, such as streamlining administrative processes, ensuring transparency, and resolving operational friction, rather than relying on motivational initiatives alone to mitigate faculty turnover.

DISCLOSURES

Author Contributions. Yongliang Xia: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing-original draft | Rodalyn E. Daylo: Data processing, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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