

Research on the Employment Problems of College Students Returning to Hometowns and Solutions in the Background of Rural Revitalization

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Abstract: The 20th CPC National Congress report specifically proposes to comprehensively promote the revitalization of the countryside and prioritize development of agriculture and rural areas. Although China has declared a complete victory in the fight against poverty, there are still many persistent problems and hard nuts in rural development. The development of agriculture and rural areas urgently needs young scientific and technological talents to go deep into the front line and give advice. This paper investigates the willingness and difficulties of college students to return to their hometowns for employment through questionnaires, and finally puts forward solutions from four perspectives: government, university, family and college students.

Keywords: Rural Revitalization, College Students, Return to Hometown for Employment.

1. Introduction

In 2020, after a long struggle, the CPC has led the nation to achieve a complete victory in the fight against poverty, the rural landscape has greatly improved, and people's living standards have continued to rise, but the development of agriculture, the countryside and farmers still has hard nuts, such as the problems of children left behind in remote areas and hollow villages, rural environmental pollution, insufficient economic development, and the low spiritual and cultural level of farmers are also prominent. The 20th CPC National Congress report made a major decision on rural issues to comprehensively promote rural revitalization, give priority to the development of agriculture and rural areas, consolidate and expand the results of poverty alleviation. At the same time, it affirms the important role of scientific and technological talents in the transformation and upgrading of agriculture and rural areas, and actively guides college students to join the cause of rural construction, promote the modernization of agriculture and rural areas, and accelerate the construction of a strong agricultural country.

2. The Necessity of College Students Returning to Hometowns for Employment

2.1. The Actual Needs of Agricultural Development

The key to rural revitalization lies in people, and high-

quality scientific and technological talents are the first resource. At present, the aging population and shortage of talents have become the main problems of rural revitalization. Therefore, we should put talent revitalization in the primary position of rural revitalization, insist on attracting and nurturing at the same time, enhance the sustainable development ability of talents, and strengthen the support of rural talents.

After 12 years of systematic education and 4 years of specialization in university, the university students have accumulated a rich knowledge reserve, and if they can put their strengths to work in the countryside, it can surely help modernize agriculture and rural areas. The No. 1 Central Document for many consecutive years has emphasized the importance of scientific and technological talents to the transformation and upgrading construction of the countryside. The latest document, "Opinions on Accelerating the Revitalization of Rural Talents", makes clear the necessity of building the rural talent system and promoting talents from various fields, including college students, to devote themselves to the construction of the countryside. And college students put into grassroots work can largely solve the current situation of rural talents shortage, which is an important path to comprehensively promote rural revitalization [1].

2.2. The Severe Employment Situation

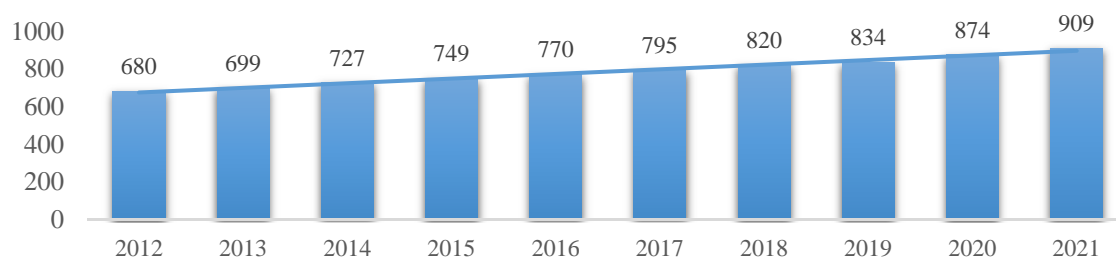


Figure 1. Number of college graduates, 2012-2021
Source: China's Ministry of Education official website

According to the latest data from China's Ministry of Education, the total number of college graduates in China has reached a record high of 9.09 million in 2021, an increase of 350,000 year-on-year. The number of students studying abroad has also plummeted due to the epidemic, intensifying domestic employment competition. The Report on Employment of College Graduates in 2021 shows that only 34% of graduates got jobs in 2021. The fierce employment environment has led to serious industry involution, and the employment situation faced by the graduate group is grim year by year.

The contradiction between the huge group of fresh graduates and the shortage of jobs in cities has intensified, and more and more college students are turning their attention to rural agricultural jobs. Guiding college students to respond to the national policy to help revitalize the countryside and promote the modernization of agriculture and rural areas is a good strategy to alleviate current employment problem. College students returning to their hometowns can not only bring advanced science and technology, capital and management experience to promote the transformation and upgrading of agriculture and rural areas, but also enhance the spiritual and cultural level of residents and improve the soft power of rural culture. In addition, local governments are inclined to college students in terms of entrepreneurial support, so we can say that college students returning to hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship itself has the advantages of talents, policies, capital and market competitiveness, and has great potential in the rural arena.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1. Push-Pull Theory

Push-pull theory is one of the most important theories of population mobility, which focuses on the factors that influence migration, including the push and pull forces.^[2] The push-pull theory suggests that the purpose of migration is to improve one's conditions and to obtain better living conditions. The unfavorable factors of the rural areas drive talents to leave, which has a negative effect on the return of rural talents, while the favorable factors of the rural areas attract talents to return. The two forces play against each other and ultimately determine the direction of population movement.

Combining the push-pull theory with the current situation of rural areas, this paper analyzes the push and pull forces of rural areas. Through literature review, this paper believes that the push force of rural areas mainly includes poor living conditions, low level of economic development, small space for development and lack of support, which inhibit college students to work in rural areas. However, with the improvement of environment, the pull force of rural areas is also increasing, such as the guidance of public opinion, government policies, national financial support, publicity of universities, etc., and the increasingly intense employment environment, employment in rural areas is becoming the first choice of many college students ^[3].

3.2. Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The hierarchy of needs theory was proposed by Maslow, who believed that humans have some innate needs, the lower and more basic level of needs, the closer to animals; the higher and more complex level of needs, the closer to humans.

Needs can be generally divided into five levels, namely physiological needs, security needs, emotional and belonging needs, respect needs and self-actualization needs ^[4].

Through literature review, the explanation of hierarchy of needs theory for college students to return to their hometown for employment is mainly reflected in the following aspects ^[5]. From the basic needs of survival and security, one of the reasons why many college students choose to return to their hometowns for employment is that they cannot adapt to the fast-paced life in the city and to temporarily escape from the fierce competition. From the perspective of emotional and belonging needs, rural areas are the roots of college students, where there are generations of relatives and the place where they grew up, so returning to work in their hometowns is a kind of emotional belonging. In a deeper way, a big reason for college students to return to their hometowns is that rural areas can provide a harmonious working atmosphere, which makes them happy and can be recognized and respected by others at the same time. When all these needs are met, college students would like to make a career, or even help the countryside improve its appearance, enhance people's living standards and realize their own values.

4. The Dilemma of College Students Returning to Hometowns for Employment

In order to truly understand authentic thoughts of contemporary college students on employment in their hometown and the actual difficulties, this study chose the form of questionnaire survey. 438 valid questionnaires were distributed, involving different groups of college students, undergraduates and postgraduates and above, and the regions involved Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, Fujian and remote mountainous areas in Yunnan and Guizhou, with a wide coverage and strong representation.

Summarizing the questionnaires, this paper finds that there are indeed problems for college students to return to their hometowns, mainly at the level of government (imperfect supporting policies and insufficient popularization), universities (insufficient propaganda and imperfect professional skills training system), families (no support for returning to hometowns for employment) and college students themselves (lack of professional skills and insufficient satisfaction with the economic level of villages).

4.1. Imperfect Rural Talent Policy and Lack of Policy Popularization

Although the state has introduced a series of incentive policies to guarantee the employment and entrepreneurship of college students returning to hometowns, such as providing start-up capital, lowering financing interest rates, tax relief, etc., which indeed increase the enthusiasm of students to a certain extent, but in the process of actual execution in many regions, there will be the problem of inadequate implementation ^[6]. Moreover, the large number of college students and their different needs, the lack of targeted regional incentive policies, the imperfect training programs for returning to their hometowns, and the lack of corresponding social security mechanisms in rural areas all inhibit the motivation of college students to a certain extent. The operation process of many policies is too cumbersome, which not only reduces the efficiency, but also fails to stimulate the

vitality and potential of college students, and eventually

drives some of them to leave again.

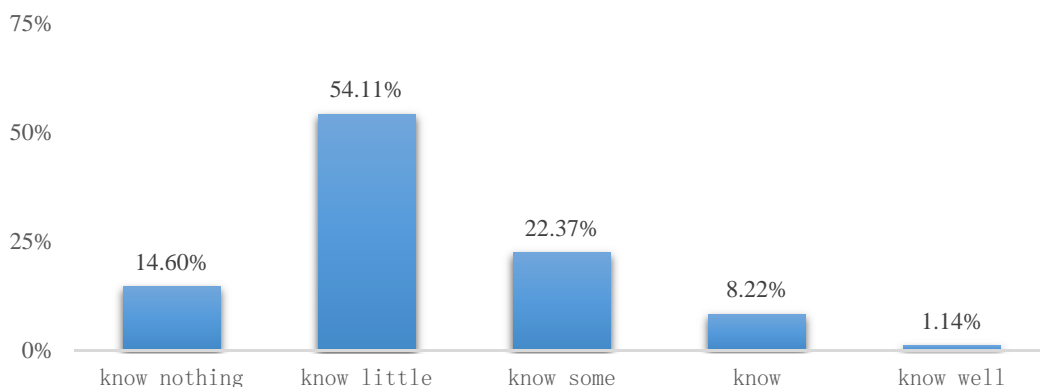


Figure 2. College students' knowledge of rural employment policies
Source: Collated from questionnaire

In addition, there are some problems in the promotion and guidance of the policy. Among the 438 questionnaires collected, 14.16% of college students said that they know nothing about policies for college students to return to their hometowns, 54.11% of college students know very little about the policy, and only less than 10% of them knew the policy relatively well. This fully illustrates that there is a functional deficiency of the government in popularizing the policies for college students to return to their hometowns, and the mainstream media also fails to synchronize the effective policy information to college students, resulting in the unsynchronized situation. In addition, when asked about some grassroots employment programs for college students, such as "College Student Village Officials", "Western Program", "Community-Level Posts in Education, Agriculture, Health Care and Poverty Relief", and "Special Post Teachers", many college students still do not understand

them. The lack of publicity objectively affects the enthusiasm of college students to return to their hometowns.

4.2. Insufficient Guidance for Employment in Colleges

College is the main place for college students to receive high quality education. The formation of college students' employment concept and the expansion of their employment ability are inseparable from college education. And college is a watershed in life, college students need to receive systematic learning of their majors, which has a profound impact on their future career. But at present, many college courses are out of touch with the reality, which leads to many students' mismatch of majors and the phenomenon of graduate unemployment.

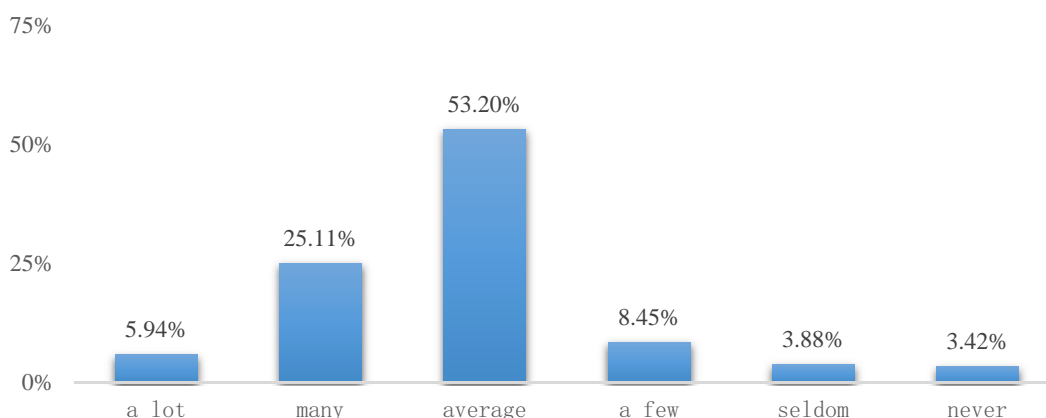


Figure 3. Propaganda of hometown employment in colleges
Source: Collated from questionnaire

In addition, colleges fail to promote and guide some policies. The questionnaire results show that only 31% of college students said that their schools actively carry out corresponding courses or lectures to promote policies related to rural revitalization, provide corresponding guidance, and establish employment guidance mechanisms to help them better adapt to the employment work in their hometowns. However, about 15% of college students still said that their colleges seldom carry out publicity work on rural revitalization, and 3.42% of respondents even said that their

colleges have never carried out publicity work on rural revitalization. The inaction of some colleges largely affects the career choice of students. Although some colleges have implemented relevant policies, they mechanically convey the "flooding" propaganda. For example, "Community-Level Posts in Education, Agriculture, Health Care and Poverty Relief" is very suitable for medical and education college students. Colleges should take the initiative to cooperate and provide facilities, which can not only increase the employment rate, but also enhance the welfare of remote

areas, but many colleges only convey the information without providing immediate guidance, so that many students miss a good opportunity. What's more, the government and colleges jointly carry out a series of employment promotion activities, but there are still many colleges that lack action in performing their duties and cannot actively promote the policy, nor do they guide college students to return to their hometowns and contribute to the construction of their hometowns.

4.3. The Influence of Family Education

Family is the cradle where people live and grow up, and a

person forms his or her values, habits and speech under the influence of family atmosphere from childhood to adulthood. Parents and other immediate family members accompany college students to grow up and play an important role in their growth and development. In the process of growing up, college students will experience many decision points in their lives, and they need to consult their parents for advice. We can say that parents' perceptions can largely influence college students' judgments and their life trajectory.

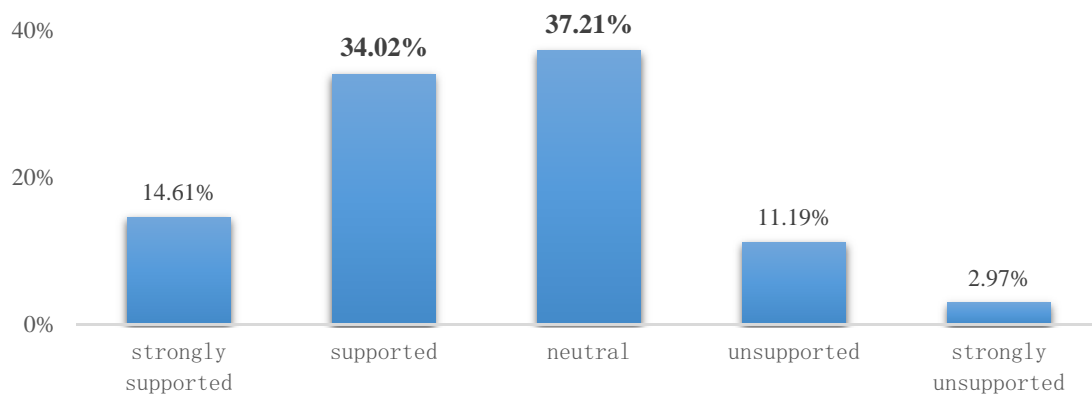


Figure 4. Family attitudes toward children returning to work
Source: Collated from questionnaire

When investigating parents' attitude towards college students returning to their hometowns for employment, the questionnaire results show that less than 48% of parents support their children's decision to return, and 14% of parents explicitly oppose. The reason is that some parents, influenced by traditional thinking, put the hope of the whole family on their children and invest a lot of time and money in their children's growth, so they hope that their children will find decent and stable jobs after graduation, which undoubtedly increases the psychological pressure of their children. Moreover, because of the low economic level and imperfect infrastructure in the countryside, many parents do not want their children to come to the countryside to suffer. Therefore,

family has become a great obstacle for college students to return to the countryside for employment.

4.4. Lack of Dedication and Professional Skills

College graduates have high expectations of themselves, and due to the lack of understanding of the job market, they can easily set their goals too high. In the study, 46% of the interviewed students expect a salary of 5,000-10,000, and 17% of them aim for a salary higher than 10,000. As a relatively backward region in China, the average salary in the countryside is far below 5,000, which lost its attractiveness to many college students. Therefore, college students expect high salaries and lack grassroots dedication.

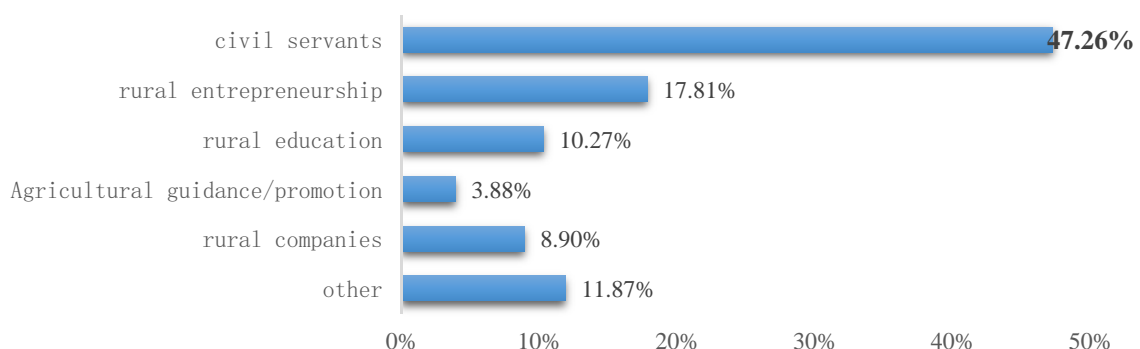


Figure 5. College students return to their hometown employment intention jobs
Source: Collated from questionnaire

At the same time, 48% of college students were willing to work as civil servants and lacked recognition of other jobs in the countryside. Rural revitalization is a national strategy, but rural areas also represent difficult living and working conditions, incomplete infrastructure construction, inadequate economic conditions, and even the need to work

for a long time to get results. They lack the true spirit of dedication and are not willing to engage in rural education, agricultural technology promotion and other work to improve the appearance of the countryside. The countryside lacks practical college students who really want to get down to earth and make a career from zero to one for the benefit of the

people.

When studying the willingness of college students to return to their hometowns for employment, 64% of them are willing to work in rural areas and help revitalize countryside. However, only 44% of them have the right majors, which is because the professional settings and talent training methods of some colleges in China are out of touch with the reality and fail to integrate changes with the development of society and the times, and the training direction of many colleges is aimed at popular industries, and the direction of rural areas is weak, resulting in many college students never participating in grassroots exercise and lacking in grassroots experience.

5. Solutions and Paths

5.1. Improve Supporting Policies

To promote the employment of college students returning to hometowns, the top-level policy construction is fundamental. The government must finish the overall layout first. The countryside planning should come first, the key areas should be the key points, and the professionals should be introduced. Secondly, the infrastructure construction must be strengthened. Only by providing a good social foundation for college students, the pull of the countryside can be increased, and more college students can be attracted to countryside construction. Thirdly, the government should give preferential policies in taxation and financing to attract more social idle funds into rural areas and build a diversified investment pattern. Finally, it is also necessary to give customized solutions according to local characteristics, not to take the old way of one-size-fits-all, but to be flexible, simplify the process of college students returning to their hometowns for employment and give support from various aspects.

5.2. Strengthen the Guidance of Employment Publicity in Colleges

Colleges are one of the most important parts of students' professional learning, and the skills of college students are inseparable from the professional training in schools. In view of the problem that some colleges focus on theoretical teaching and little practical teaching in employment and entrepreneurship education, which leads to college students' inability to adapt to the job market of their hometowns, in the next stage, colleges must improve the talent training solutions and faculty, encourage classrooms to go deep into the front line of the countryside and make field visits to understand the real countryside and the actual needs, in order to prescribe the right medicine and optimize the cultivation of college students' vocational skills. At the same time, the publicity and guidance of the policy also need to strengthen. In addition to lectures, exhibitions, thematic class meetings and other activities, colleges can also join local enterprises to hold job fairs to attract outstanding talents to participate in the rural construction arena. Finally, it is better for colleges to carry out following visits for college students who have returned to their hometowns to provide necessary help for the problems encountered in the workplace. And excellent cases should also be followed up to achieve wide dissemination and more reports.

5.3. Enhance Families' Recognition

College students' career decision will be influenced by various factors. Family support is an important one. Parents

and other immediate family members' recognition of rural work will comfort hesitating students. If we want to promote college students to return to their hometowns to work, we must start from the ideology and increase family's recognition of it. On the one hand, society and the media should actively popularize the government's attention to rural work, promulgate relevant policies, promote typical role models and excellent cases, and stimulate graduates' enthusiasm and initiative to return to their hometowns for employment. On the other hand, the community can reach families most quickly. Front-line workers can popularize the advantages of returning to hometowns for employment through door-to-door visits, and talk with parents face to face to listen to their concerns and dispel their doubts.

5.4. Enhancing College Students' Skills and Improving Career Concepts

For one thing, based on rural revitalization strategy, it is necessary to improve the professional skills of college students and cultivate professional talents suitable for rural work, which not only requires colleges to provide supporting vocational courses for students to learn skills, but also requires college students to pay attention to self-improvement. Learning is an active process, and colleges curriculum is not enough for rural work, which requires students to take the initiative to learn contents other than the curriculum, such as communication skills, national policies, rural geography knowledge, etc., and to improve themselves by applying their knowledge continuously. For another, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, college students should consider more about social significance and responsibility when it comes to returning to hometowns for employment. Many college students lack dedication and are unwilling to work in the countryside. In order to solve this problem, we should strengthen the ideological education of college students and guide them to combine their personal obligations with social responsibility to help them cultivate correct development view and a sense of responsibility, inject vitality into rural economy and industrial upgrading, and also highlight their self-worth through rural revitalization platform, forming a positive cycle.

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