

Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs of Chinese Higher Education Graduating Students towards Slow Employment and its Associated Factors

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Abstract: In recent years, as the number of university graduates in China continues to increase, the phenomenon of "slow employment" has garnered growing attention. As a complex social issue, different groups hold varying views on its causes and impacts. Research shows that the factors influencing graduates' acceptance and choice of "slow employment" are particularly complex, involving diverse personal career expectations, social support, and market changes. This paper, after defining the concept of "slow employment" and its theoretical basis, analyzes the development characteristics of this phenomenon and its profound impact on higher education, summarizing the related influencing factors. Based on this, the paper employs a combination of qualitative and empirical research methods to analyze graduates' attitudes towards "slow employment," deeply exploring the multiple factors influencing it, and proposes targeted strategies to guide graduates towards employment.

Keywords: Slow Employment, Graduating Students, China.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous growth of university graduates in China, the phenomenon of "slow employment" has gradually become a focal point of public attention. "Slow employment" refers to graduates who, after graduation, are neither in a rush to find a job nor pursue further studies but instead explore various paths through activities such as travel, part-time work, or entrepreneurship to gradually find a suitable career path [23]. While "slow employment" reflects contemporary youths' diverse attitudes towards career choices, its proliferation has sparked widespread discussion on its effects on individual career development, social resource allocation, and higher education [11].

China's 2024 graduating class reached 11.79 million and the 2025 graduating class is expected to exceed 12 million. If a large number of graduates remain unemployed for an extended period, it may negatively impact personal growth, the effective use of national talent resources, and the long-term healthy development of higher education [13]. Therefore, in-depth research on the phenomenon of "slow employment" and its underlying causes holds not only academic significance but also important practical relevance for current socio-economic development and higher education reform [9].

The quality of university graduates' employment is directly related to the long-term development of the country and social stability, and it is also an important indicator of the level of talent cultivation in higher education [4]. "Slow employment" is a reflection of the underutilization of higher education resources; it has a significant impact on the labor supply in China's job market; it affects the personal interests of every college student and the future of his or her family, thus indirectly affecting the stability and harmony of society [18]. Although research on graduate employment has been extensive, systematic studies on the "slow employment" phenomenon remain relatively scarce [23]. Through the study of "slow employment" among university graduates, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the changing

employment perspectives of contemporary students, especially their psychological adjustment and coping strategies in the face of social changes, labor market pressures, and personal career choices [22].

As an interdisciplinary research topic, studying the causes of "slow employment" and its multifaceted impact on society and individuals can not only enrich the research objects and contents of education, psychology and other disciplines, but also provide theoretical support for employment guidance and career planning in colleges and universities [9]. Additionally, examining the employment behavior of the "post-95 generation" under the backdrop of rapid social, economic, and cultural change helps reveal the deep-seated impacts of societal transformation on young people's career choices, offering scientific evidence for policy formulation [6].

University graduates are a key human resource for national economic and social development. Studying the influencing factors and countermeasures of "slow employment" can not only help improve graduates' employment situations but also provide insights for promoting employment education reform in universities [21]. Through the investigation and analysis of the "slow employment" phenomenon, this paper aims to propose concrete policy recommendations to help address actual employment problems, lay the foundation for high-quality graduate employment, and facilitate reasonable adjustments in the labor market [9]. Furthermore, as the "slow employment" group continues to expand, studying this phenomenon's impact on public perception and media discourse can help guide society to pay attention to and participate in resolving graduate employment issues, fostering a more scientific and reasonable employment evaluation system [16].

The problem of "slow employment" among university students is a comprehensive subject involving a number of disciplines, such as pedagogy, ideological and political education, psychology, sociology, etc., and its causes, influencing factors and the impact of this phenomenon involve all aspects of social life. This study systematically

examines both internal and external factors influencing the "slow employment" phenomenon using a combination of qualitative research and empirical analysis, proposing corresponding countermeasures. By analyzing the intrinsic motivations and external inducements behind graduates' choice of "slow employment," this paper will offer constructive suggestions for the government, universities, and families in guiding students' career planning and improving their employability, encouraging collective efforts from all sectors of society to create a positive employment environment, and facilitating graduates' smooth transition to the workforce [2].

2. Review of Relevant Literature

In recent years, as the phenomenon of "slow employment" has become more and more common among Chinese college graduates, the number of related studies has gradually increased since 2015. By searching for the keyword "slow employment" on the China Knowledge Network platform, it was found that a total of six studies on this phenomenon were published in 2015, and the number of studies has been increasing year by year since then. This trend suggests that the attention of academics to the phenomenon of "slow employment" is gradually increasing [23]. Before 2020, the increase in the number of related literature was relatively stable, while by 2021, the number surged from 55 in 2019 to 142 in 2024, suggesting that the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on the employment of graduates may have exacerbated the phenomenon [11].

Despite the increase in the number of studies, the number of core journals and high-quality academic studies remains relatively insufficient. As of August 2024, there were only 21 articles in core journals and 18 dissertations, indicating that there is still much room for improving the quality of research on the phenomenon of "slow employment" [20].

In terms of research methodology, most of the early studies adopted qualitative research methods, focusing on the description of the phenomenon itself, and gradually developed into a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. However, there are still fewer quantitative empirical studies on this phenomenon, especially multivariate exploration and fine analysis of influencing factors [4].

2.1. Knowledge of Slow Employment

"Slow employment" has been a growing phenomenon in the employment choices of Chinese college graduates in recent years, referring to the fact that college graduates do not enter full-time employment immediately after graduation, but delay or hold off employment [8]. Graduates' understanding of this phenomenon stems from career guidance programs and social media, covering its context, economic impacts, and potential development paths [24]. Graduates from different backgrounds have different perceptions of "slow employment", with some seeing it as an opportunity to improve their career skills, while others see it as a desperate choice due to the competitive job market [3][15].

2.2. Attitudes Towards Slow Employment

Graduates' attitudes towards "slow employment" are categorized as positive and negative, and such attitudes are often influenced by a combination of their personal career expectations and external pressures. Positive attitudinal individuals view slow employment as an opportunity for self-improvement and exploration of career interests, which

is associated with high self-efficacy and family support [14][9]. Conversely, negative attitudinal individuals fear that slow employment will weaken future career competitiveness due to social and family pressures [17][15].

2.3. Beliefs about Slow Employment

Graduates' belief in "slow employment" reflects their deep-seated expectations and values about their professional future. Positive believers believe that slow employment contributes to future career development and that accumulating skills and experience through this phase can increase job satisfaction and career stability [8][16]. Negative believers, however, believe that slow employment leads to career stagnation and decreased competitiveness [3][17].

2.4. Evaluation of Slow Employment

The evaluation of the phenomenon of "slow employment" is divided. Some scholars believe that "slow employment" reflects graduates' pursuit of higher-quality employment opportunities and represents an active choice of personal career planning [1]. For example, "slow employment" can help graduates enhance their personal abilities and horizons through other activities [1]. However, some other scholars have a negative view, believing that it may lead to graduates missing employment opportunities and pose a potential threat to social and economic stability [10]. Especially in the context of intensified competition in the job market, a long period of "slow employment" may have a negative impact on graduates' personal career development.

2.5. Governance Strategies for Slow Employment

Researchers have put forward various suggestions for governance strategies. Li Ning (2019) argues that the government should formulate targeted employment policies, increase the supply of graduation positions, strengthen labor market supervision, and create a fair employment environment [9]. Zhang Yihui et al. (2018) emphasized that colleges and universities should strengthen career planning education, promote school-enterprise cooperation, and enhance graduates' practical ability through internships and traineeships [22]. In addition, guiding graduates to change their employment concepts and optimize job-seeking skills is also important.

As can be seen, graduates' choices and experiences of slow employment are influenced by personal perceptions, social pressures, family support, and clarity of career plans. An in-depth understanding of these influencing factors can provide policymakers and educators with assistance in promoting more effective career guidance and support services in higher education.

3. Foreign Research

3.1. The Origin and Development of the Gap Year Phenomenon

"Gap Year" can be traced back to the 19th-century European 'Grand Tour' tradition, aimed at enhancing the comprehensive quality of young people through travel or work [7]. After the war, gap years became popular in Europe and the U.S. as a way to enhance career skills and global perspective. Globalization has further encouraged this trend.

3.2. Causes of Youth Unemployment

Foreign scholars analyze youth unemployment from labor market supply and demand perspectives. Rama (1999) suggests higher youth unemployment during economic downturns, as firms reduce hiring. Additionally, information asymmetry and education–employment mismatch also contribute [12]. Many countries have responded with policy and social support interventions.

3.3. Influencing Factors of Slow-Employment Intention

Studies have shown that individual, family, and social environmental factors influence graduates' willingness to choose “slow employment”. In an empirical study, Hu et al. (2024) found that graduates' identity characteristics, employment psychology, and career cognition have a significant impact on slow-employment choices, with career efficacy, career values, and social support being key factors [5]. In the medical and health graduate group, Yi (2023) found that employment pressure is a main cause of “slow employment,” while social support can help these graduates adapt better by providing employment information and resources [19].

4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of “slow employment” among university graduates in China represents a significant shift in career attitudes and choices. This research highlights that it is influenced by individual psychological adjustments, societal pressures, and economic conditions. As the number of graduates continues to rise, understanding the implications is vital for improving employment quality and national economic health.

The authors suggest addressing slow employment through a multifaceted approach involving government policies, university career services, and family support systems. By enhancing career guidance and creating more inclusive job opportunities, stakeholders can better facilitate graduates' transitions into the workforce.

The research underscores the need for continued exploration of slow employment, emphasizing its impact on individuals and society. Future studies should focus on the effectiveness of proposed solutions and the evolving nature of graduate employment in a rapidly changing economic landscape. This understanding will not only contribute to academic discourse but also inform practical measures to help alleviate challenges faced by today's graduates.

5. Recommendations

Although studies have revealed the important role of social support in alleviating “slow employment,” several research gaps remain. First, most research focuses on emotional and informational support, with less emphasis on material support. Second, while the moderating effect of social support is acknowledged, its specific mechanisms and contextual applicability remain underexplored.

Future research should enhance investigations into the applicability of social support across different types of institutions and socio-economic contexts, using large-scale quantitative analyses to uncover the mechanisms by which social support influences slow-employment choices. Additionally, with accelerating job market changes, research

on optimizing social support systems for promoting high-quality employment among college graduates is an important direction.

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