



# Research on the Impact Mechanism of "Slow Employment" on College Students' Employment Behavior

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the impact mechanism of the "slow employment" phenomenon on the employment behavior of college students. By analyzing the driving factors such as the pressure of the employment market during the economic transformation period, the effect of educational expansion and academic inflation, the transformation of intergenerational values, and the improvement of family support capabilities, this research reveals the behavioral characteristics of this group in aspects such as the reconstruction of career decision-making patterns, the innovation of human capital accumulation methods, the bidirectional effect of employment quality, and the differentiation of social capital accumulation. The study finds that the "slow employment" phenomenon not only exacerbates the mismatch between supply and demand in the labor market, exposes the insufficiency of the social security system's adaptability, highlights the lag of the education evaluation system, but also triggers intergenerational conflicts and social cognitive conflicts. Based on this, the research proposes a sustainable development path for the "slow employment" group from four dimensions: the construction of an individual dynamic career development model, the reform of the university talent cultivation system, the improvement of the government policy support system, and the cultivation of inclusive employment culture in society. This provides theoretical references and practical guidance for optimizing the employment ecology of young people.

**Keywords:** slow employment; college students' employment behavior; impact mechanism

## 1. Introduction

"Slow employment" is an emerging phenomenon in China's youth employment field at present, reflecting the deep interaction between the values of young people during the social transformation period and the employment market. Data from the Ministry of Education shows that in 2023, there were 11.58 million college graduates in China, among whom approximately 15% chose to postpone employment. The size of this group has increased by nearly three times compared to five years ago. This proactive delay in entering the labor market breaks the traditional linear development model of "graduation and immediate employment", forming a buffer period centered on career exploration, skill improvement, and psychological adjustment. Under the dual background of economic restructuring and the popularization of education, "slow employment" has evolved from an individual choice to a social phenomenon with characteristics of the times. Its influence on the employment behavior of college students is gradually penetrating into multiple dimensions such as career planning, market supply and demand, and educational reform.

## 2. "The Driving Mechanism and Group Characteristics of the 'Slow Employment' Phenomenon"

### 2.1 Employment Market Pressure during the Economic Transformation Period

In the process of China's economy transitioning from high-speed growth to high-quality development, a structural contradiction has emerged between the shrinking demand for jobs in traditional manufacturing industries and the insufficient supply of talents in emerging industries. According to data from Zhaopin in 2023, there was a job gap of 3 million in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence and new energy, but graduates from relevant majors in universities could only meet 40% of the demand. The coexistence of "difficulty in finding jobs" and "difficulty in recruiting workers" has led some college students to choose "slow employment" as a way to avoid the risk of structural unemployment. At the same time, after the pandemic, enterprises have become more cautious about hiring, with the number of campus recruitment positions decreasing by 12.3% year-on-year in 2023, further exacerbating graduates' wait-and-see attitude towards employment.

### 2.2 Education expansion and the effect of academic qualification inflation

The gross enrollment rate of higher education has increased from 30% in 2012 to 59.6% in 2023, with the number of

undergraduate graduates growing by 78% over the past decade. The devaluation of academic qualifications has led to an "academic arms race". In 2023, the number of people registering for postgraduate entrance exams reached 4.74 million, a 60% increase compared to 2019. Some students have transformed "slow employment" into a passive choice of "preparing for the second round of postgraduate entrance exams" or "preparing for civil service exams". A survey shows that 62% of the "slow employment" group regard "improving academic qualifications" as their primary goal, reflecting the group anxiety caused by the malfunctioning of the education signaling mechanism. Academic inflation has led to the phenomenon of "high academic qualifications but low employment" in the job market, with some master's degree graduates taking on jobs originally undertaken by undergraduates, further squeezing the employment space for undergraduates. This distortion of education signaling forces college students to prolong their education to maintain their competitiveness, forming a vicious cycle of "academic arms race". At the same time, employers excessively emphasize academic qualifications thresholds in recruitment, leading to a disconnect between talent selection criteria and actual job requirements, exacerbating structural contradictions in the job market.

### **2.3 Transmutation of intergenerational values**

Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2009) stands as the primary force behind "slow employment," exhibiting a notable shift in values: a transition from survival-oriented needs to self-actualization needs. According to a survey conducted by Maimai Data Research Institute, 78% of Generation Z graduates prioritize "a sense of purpose at work" over salary, and 65% consider "matching career with interest" as the primary criterion for employment. This shift in values challenges the traditional concept of "getting a job first and choosing a career later," giving rise to new employment buffering models such as "gap year" and "career study tour."

### **2.4 Improvement of family support ability**

The household savings rate in China has long remained around 45%, providing a material foundation for "slow employment". According to the 2023 China Youth Development Report, 68% of "slow employment" graduates can receive financial support from their families, with the average monthly support amount reaching 3,200 yuan in first-tier cities. Behind this controversy of "dependent on parents", the essence lies in the increased willingness of families to make long-term investments in their children's career development, extending the education cycle from campus to the period of career exploration.

## **3. The multidimensional impact of "slow employment" on college students' employment behavior**

### **3.1 Reconstruction of career decision-making model**

Traditional linear career decision-making (major → internship → employment) is being replaced by non-linear exploration models. According to research conducted by BOSS Zhipin, the "slow employment" group has experienced an average of 2.3 attempts in different career directions, 1.8 more than those who choose direct employment. This exploration behavior exhibits the characteristics of "broad scope and deep experience": tracking data from a certain university shows that among graduates who choose "slow employment", 43% have tried cross-industry internships, and 37% have participated in entrepreneurial projects, significantly broadening their career cognition. However, excessive exploration also carries risks, with 28% of respondents experiencing "choice paralysis" and extending their decision-making cycle to over 14 months.

### **3.2 Innovation in the Accumulation Mode of Human Capital**

Human capital investment during the "slow employment" period exhibits diversified characteristics: 35% opt for skills training (such as programming and design), 28% participate in volunteer services, and 22% pursue academic further education. This investment shows a trend towards "precision": LinkedIn data indicates that "slow employment" individuals who have participated in AI skills training have a 42% higher probability of obtaining high-paying positions compared to traditional job seekers. However, the return on investment varies, with the return on investment for general skills such as language training being only 11%, significantly lower than that for industry certification training (38%).

### **3.3 The bidirectional effect of employment quality**

The positive effect is reflected in the improvement of employment matching: data from Zhaopin.com shows that graduates who entered the workforce after "slow employment" have a job satisfaction rate of 76%, which is 21 percentage points higher than those who entered directly, and a turnover rate that is 18% lower. The negative effect is manifested in the increase in employment costs: research shows that for every six months of extended "slow employment", the average starting

salary decreases by 5.3%, and the career advancement speed after the age of 30 is 12% slower than that of those who entered directly. This trade-off between "time cost - matching benefit" becomes a key factor influencing individual decision-making.

### **3.4 Differentiated paths of social capital accumulation**

The social capital construction of the "slow employment" group exhibits characteristics of "weakening strong connections and strengthening weak connections." The role of strong connections (teachers and students, classmates) traditionally obtained through campus recruitment has weakened, while the proportion of weak connections established through online communities and industry salons has increased to 58%. This social capital structure is conducive to obtaining cross-sector information, but the trust level is low, leading to a decline in cooperation stability. Data from a certain entrepreneurial incubation platform shows that the survival rate of entrepreneurial teams formed based on weak connections is only 31%, lower than that of strong connection teams (58%). This difference stems from the shallow trust foundation of weak connections, which, when facing key decisions such as resource integration and benefit distribution, members are prone to internal friction due to differences in values. In contrast, strong connection teams, with their tacit understanding formed through long-term joint learning and practice, exhibit stronger cohesion in scenarios such as crisis management and strategic adjustments. However, the advantage of weak connections lies in the breadth of information acquisition, and the diversity of member backgrounds can provide cross-disciplinary perspectives for projects, which is particularly significant in industries with rapid iteration such as the internet and cultural and creative industries.

## **4. Social challenges triggered by the phenomenon of "slow employment"**

### **4.1 Increasing mismatch between supply and demand in the labor market**

"Slow employment" leads to reduced efficiency in human resource allocation: In 2023, the average job vacancy cycle for enterprises extended by 15 days, while the average job search cycle for graduates reached 89 days, an increase of 37 days compared to 2019. This mismatch is particularly prominent in emerging industries. The job vacancy rate in the new energy industry reached 28%, but the proportion of "slow employment" among relevant professional graduates was as high as 22%, forming a strange circle of "labor shortage" and "difficulty in employment".

### **4.2 Inadequate adaptability of the social security system**

The current social security system is disconnected from the "slow employment" phenomenon: the participation rate of flexible employees is only 23%, lower than that of urban workers (92%); unemployment insurance does not cover unemployed graduates, leaving the "slow employment" group exposed to risks such as medical care and pension. According to data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in 2023, 67% of graduates were not insured during the "slow employment" period, with 43% expressing concern about the impact of future social security contributions discontinuation on their rights and interests.

### **4.3 The lagging nature of the educational evaluation system**

There is a time lag between talent cultivation in universities and market demand, with the update cycle of professional settings (4-5 years) far exceeding the iteration speed of industries (1-2 years). A survey shows that 65% of "slow-employment" graduates believe that "the knowledge they have learned is out of touch with job demands," and 48% indicate "a lack of practical skills training." This structural contradiction between educational supply and employment demand forces students to undergo secondary skill transformation through "slow employment." There are also significant shortcomings in university employment guidance services, with only 32% of universities having full-time career planning teachers, and an average of over 500 graduates per teacher. This imbalance between supply and demand leads to 46% of graduates lacking effective guidance during the job search process, further exacerbating the phenomenon of "slow employment".

### **4.4 Intergenerational conflict and social cognitive conflict**

"Slow employment" triggers a collision between traditional employment concepts and modern career ideas: 72% of parents born in the 1970s believe that "not working is laziness", while 85% of Generation Z believe that "career exploration is a necessary investment". This cognitive difference has led to tension in family relationships. According to data from a psychological counseling platform, the number of consultations regarding parent-child conflicts triggered by "slow employment" has increased by 45% annually, becoming a new pain point in young people's mental health.

## 5. Future development path of the "slow employment" group

### 5.1 Individual level: Constructing a dynamic career development model

(1) Precise skill investment: Adopting a "T-shaped capability structure", while deeply cultivating in vertical fields (such as data science), we also foster cross-field collaboration skills (such as project management). According to Coursera data, those who "slowly enter the workforce" and master both professional skills and soft skills have seen a 63% increase in employment competitiveness.

(2) Phased goal management: Divide the "slow employment" period into an exploration phase (1-3 months), a targeting phase (3-6 months), and a preparation phase (6-12 months), setting clear time nodes and achievement indicators to avoid aimless procrastination.

(3) Building a digital professional identity: By creating a professional image on platforms such as LinkedIn and GitHub, 78% of corporate HR representatives indicate that they pay attention to candidates' online professional footprints. An active digital presence can increase interview opportunities by 52%.

### 5.2 At the university level: reforming the talent cultivation system

(1) Flexible educational system and credit bank: Promote the "3+1" and "4+X" flexible learning models, allowing students to retain their student status for career exploration. Fudan University has piloted the "entrepreneurial suspension" system, with a graduation rate of 89% for students who suspended their studies to start businesses, which is 12 percentage points higher than the traditional path.

(2) School-enterprise collaborative education: Establish "industry colleges" and "enterprise order classes", integrating enterprise projects into teaching processes. Huawei has partnered with 50 universities nationwide to establish "Hongmeng Ecosystem Classes", with graduates enjoying an average starting salary 35% higher than those from general majors, and an employment rate reaching 98%.

(3) Pre-positioning of career development education: Career planning courses are offered from the first year of university, and AI career assessment tools are introduced to help students position themselves early and prepare accordingly. The "Career Coach Program" at Tsinghua University has increased students' clarity in career decision-making by 47% and reduced the proportion of "slow employment" by 21%.

### 5.3 At the government level: Improve the policy support system

(1) Establish a "employment buffer period" guarantee: pilot the "graduates' employment probation insurance" and provide social security subsidies to "slow-employment" individuals who participate in vocational training. Hangzhou has launched the "youth probation plan", which provides a monthly living allowance of 2,000 yuan during the probation period, with a participation rate of 76% in graduate employment.

(2) Optimize support policies for flexible employment: Incorporate skills training and entrepreneurial practice during the period of "slow employment" into the social security points system, and provide preferential policies in terms of household registration and housing purchase. Shenzhen provides a 30% subsidy for social security contributions for graduates in flexible employment, and after the implementation of the policy, the participation rate of flexible employment in social security has increased to 41%.

(3) Establish a professional information sharing platform: Integrate enterprise job demands, industry development trends, and skill training resources to establish a unified national youth career development database. After the launch of Jiangsu's "Employment Map" platform, the efficiency of job matching for graduates increased by 38%, and the average job search cycle was shortened by 22 days.

### 5.4 Social level: Building an inclusive employment culture

(1) Media guidance for rational cognition: Promote the positive value of "slow employment" through typical cases, distinguishing between "active exploration" and "passive resignation". After CCTV's "New Career Exploration" series of reports, the public's positive perception of "slow employment" increased by 29%.

(2) Corporate innovative recruitment model: Introducing flexible forms such as "flexible onboarding" and "project-based employment" to provide transitional positions for those in "slow employment". ByteDance's "talent pool" plan aims to recruit 1,200 graduates in "slow employment", with 35% of them being converted into regular employees.

(3) Transformation of family support model: shifting from economic support to capability support, assisting children in career planning and skill enhancement. The "Career Mentor Program" launched by a certain family education institution has reduced the "slow employment" period for children from participating families by 40%, and improved employment quality by 53%.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, the phenomenon of "slow employment" as a new characteristic of contemporary youth employment choices is essentially the result of the combined effects of economic structural transformation, changes in education models, and the awakening of individual values. This form of employment is neither a completely passive escape nor a purely active planning, but rather a transitional strategy for young people to seek a balance between practical constraints and ideal pursuits. Its impact mechanism exhibits a bidirectional characteristic: on the one hand, it promotes the deep accumulation of human capital by extending the career exploration period, and on the other hand, it may also lead to skill depreciation and social capital loss due to prolonged absence from the workplace. Future research needs to further focus on the heterogeneous effects among different groups, while strengthening the integration and analysis from an interdisciplinary perspective, in order to provide a theoretical basis for building a more inclusive employment support system.

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