Analysis of the Current Situation and Exploration of Reform Pathways for Employment and Entrepreneurship among College Graduates

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Abstract: This paper focuses on employment and entrepreneurship initiatives in Chinese higher education institutions over the past five years (2019–2024), analyzing their effectiveness, challenges, and development trends in a complex and evolving environment. Research indicates that supported by policies such as “Stabilizing Employment” and “Securing Employment,” universities have maintained stable employment rates and enhanced innovation and entrepreneurship vitality. However, persistent challenges include intensifying structural contradictions, disparities in employment quality, and shifts in student attitudes. Future efforts should deepen industry-education integration, optimize educational structures, strengthen career education, improve entrepreneurial ecosystems, and establish new systems for employment and entrepreneurship work in higher education institutions that meet high-quality development requirements.
Keywords**:** university graduates,employment and entrepreneurship, structural contradictions, industry-education integration, career education; high-quality development

1. Overall situation of employment and entrepreneurship for college graduates

In recent years, the scale of college graduates in China has continued to rise, with the total number reaching historic highs year after year. From 8.74 million in the class of 2020, it surged to 11.79 million in the class of 2024. This persistently expanding supply poses a severe challenge to the job market's capacity[1]. Additionally, the sluggish global economic recovery, accelerated restructuring of industrial and supply chains, and the shift in domestic economic growth rates — particularly the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (late 2019 to 2022) — have led to contractions in certain industries (such as education and training, real estate, and some offline service sectors). The reduction in traditional large-scale job absorbers has intensified volatility and uncertainty in the employment market. Furthermore, the rapid development of strategic emerging industries like artificial intelligence, big data, and new energy has created numerous new professions and job opportunities. However, it has also introduced new demands for knowledge structures and skill sets, exacerbating the structural mismatch between talent supply and demand.

Against this backdrop, employment and entrepreneurship efforts for college graduates carry unprecedented social expectations and political responsibilities. Their effectiveness directly impacts economic development, livelihood security, and social stability.

2. Current situation and cause analysis of employment and entrepreneurship among college graduates

2.1 Key achievements

(1) Overall Stability in Employment: Despite fluctuations, the employment placement rate of college graduates (formerly the employment rate) has remained relatively high under unprecedented pressure and strong policy interventions, achieving the core objectives of "stabilizing employment" and "securing employment".Policy-driven positions (such as grassroots employment, military enlistment, and research assistant roles) have played a crucial "safety net" role.

(2) Sustained Stimulation of Innovation and Entrepreneurship: The national "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation" strategy has been deeply implemented, and reforms in college innovation and entrepreneurship education have advanced steadily. University science parks, makerspaces, and other platforms have flourished, while support policies for student entrepreneurship have continued to improve.

(3) Enhanced Precision in Employment Services: College employment service systems have accelerated their upgrade. The "Internet + Employment" model has been widely adopted, with smart employment platforms becoming commonplace. Online recruitment and virtual interviews have become the norm. Career planning and employment guidance curricula have gradually improved, and employment assistance (particularly for disadvantaged groups) has become more targeted and effective.

(4) Diversification of Employment Perspectives: Graduates' career choices have become more open and pragmatic. Acceptance of non-traditional paths such as "slow employment," flexible work, and freelancing has increased, while the desire for personal fulfillment and work-life balance has grown.

2.2 Prominent issues and underlying causes

2.2.1 Growing structural imbalances

Lagging Discipline Structure: Some colleges have been slow to adjust their academic programs and training plans to keep pace with industrial upgrading and market changes, resulting in an oversupply of graduates in traditional fields and a shortage of high-quality technical and skilled talent in emerging sectors, advanced manufacturing, and modern services.

Regional Imbalance: Graduates are heavily concentrated in eastern coastal areas, first-tier cities, and emerging first-tier cities, while central and western regions, grassroots communities, counties, and rural revitalization fronts struggle to attract talent. This has led to coexisting phenomena of "jobs without people" and "people without jobs."

Skills Mismatch: Some graduates lack the practical skills, innovation capabilities, interdisciplinary literacy, digital competencies, and professional qualities demanded by employers. The depth and breadth of industry-education integration and collaborative talent development between schools and enterprises remain inadequate.

2.2.2 Divergence in employment quality and rising pressure

"Involution" and Expectation Gaps: Some graduates have high expectations for salaries, career platforms, and growth prospects, leading to psychological frustration and anxiety in an increasingly competitive environment. The phenomenon of being "unwilling to settle for less but unable to achieve more" persists. The rising proportion of graduates attempting postgraduate or civil service exams multiple times ("second or third battles") reflects either avoidance of direct entry into the labor market or an obsession with "prestigious positions."

Subpar Job Quality: Some positions offered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups lack appeal in terms of stability, compensation, benefits, and career advancement. The support system for flexible employment remains underdeveloped.

2.2.3 Pressure on college employment systems to transform

Insufficient Market Development: Some colleges lack initiative and precision in tapping into high-quality job markets, with inadequate engagement in emerging industries, key regions, and leading enterprises. Industry-academia collaboration remains superficial[2].

Low Conversion Rate in Entrepreneurship Education: While entrepreneurship education has become more widespread, the success rate of project incubation and the proportion of high-quality startups still have significant room for improvement. The entrepreneurial support ecosystem (funding, mentorship, market access) requires continuous optimization.

2.2.4 Prolonged external uncertainties

Factors such as profound adjustments in the global economic landscape, accelerated technological iteration, and the growing pains of domestic economic transformation will continue to introduce volatility and challenges to the job market, demanding greater adaptability and foresight from colleges.

3. Strategies and outlook: building a future-oriented, high-quality employment and entrepreneurship ecosystem

3.1 Deepen supply-side reforms to foster integration between talent and industry chains

Dynamically Optimize Academic Disciplines: Establish a demand-driven, industry-trend-informed mechanism for adjusting academic programs. Prioritize disciplines related to strategic emerging industries, modernize traditional fields, and decisively reduce programs with evident oversupply.

Strengthen Industry-Education Collaboration: Promote joint efforts between colleges and enterprises to establish modern industrial colleges, specialized demonstration software schools, and other platforms. Expand models such as order-based training, work-study alternation, and on-the-job internships. Incorporate industry standards into curriculum development, shared training bases, and the cultivation of "dual-qualified" faculty. Encourage enterprises to engage deeply in the entire talent development process[3].

3.2 Build a comprehensive career education system to guide scientific planning

Early and Continuous Integration: Embed career education throughout the four-year undergraduate program (and even graduate studies), guiding students from enrollment to self-awareness, career exploration, and value formation. Avoid last-minute "sprint-style" guidance during graduation season.

Personalization and Precision: Use big data to analyze students' interests, abilities, and potential, offering tailored career counseling and guidance. Strengthen targeted support for key groups (academically, economically, or employment-disadvantaged students).

Values-Driven Leadership: Integrate national strategic needs into career education, fostering a sense of social responsibility and encouraging contributions to western regions, grassroots communities, and key sectors. Promote rational attitudes toward "slow employment" and "civil service exam fever," advocating diverse paths to success.

3.3 Expand high-quality job markets and elevate employment services

Deepen Market Resources: Proactively engage with major national strategic regions, key industries, leading enterprises, and "specialized, refined, distinctive, and innovative" SMEs. Establish stable industry-academia talent cooperation bases.

Enhance Smart Services: Improve smart employment platforms to enable precise job matching, intelligent candidate-role alignment, and data-driven decision-making. Expand online recruitment channels to boost efficiency and user experience.

Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms: Establish long-term tracking systems for graduate employment quality, using employment outcomes and employer feedback to inform enrollment planning, program adjustments, and educational reforms[4].

3.4 Refine the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem to boost startup impact

Deepen Educational Reforms: Integrate innovation and entrepreneurship education into disciplinary curricula, offering high-quality interdisciplinary courses. Strengthen practical training and simulations.

Strengthen Incubation Support: Enhance the capabilities of university science parks and makerspaces, providing one-stop services (space, funding, legal, financial, and marketing support). Build a professional, high-quality mentor database.

Foster a Failure-Tolerant Culture: Encourage exploration, tolerate failure, and protect students' entrepreneurial enthusiasm.

3.5 Strengthen collaborative synergy to unite efforts

Intra-Campus Coordination: Break down departmental silos to create a "macro-employment" framework linking admissions, training, employment, and alumni networks. Involve faculty, counselors, and career center staff in joint guidance efforts.

College-Local Government Collaboration: Partner with local governments, human resources agencies, and industrial parks to share resources, co-host job fairs, and establish internship bases. Secure local policy support.

Inter-College Coordination: Explore regional college employment alliances to share job postings, market resources, and guidance expertise, creating economies of scale.

The core mission of future college employment and entrepreneurship efforts will shift from ensuring "jobs for all" to promoting "high-quality, full employment" and "high-level innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity." Colleges must proactively recognize, adapt to, and drive change, focusing on talent cultivation quality, deepening industry-education integration, enhancing student competitiveness, and building a comprehensive, intelligent, and collaborative service system. Only then can they effectively resolve structural imbalances, elevate employment quality, unleash innovation, and continuously supply high-quality talent for national modernization.

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