

The Influence of Post-Materialist Values on the Slow Employment Phenomenon of College Students - Based on a Qualitative Research of a Certain University in Zhengzhou

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Abstract: With the accelerated expansion of the globalization process and the rapid development of the social economy, the post-materialistic value concept has gradually emerged among the youth in today's society. The phenomenon of slow employment has emerged in the context of the present era and has increasingly attracted widespread attention from all sectors of society. This article aims to explore the specific impact of post-materialistic values on the phenomenon of slow employment, that is, through a qualitative study of undergraduate students majoring in liberal arts at a certain university in Zhengzhou, to deeply analyze the motivational factors and behavioral logic of young people in the choice of slow employment. This article comprehensively reveals the intrinsic connection between post-materialistic values and the phenomenon of slow employment through methods in-depth interviews, and analyzes the choices and motivations of young people in employment.

Keywords: Post-Materialist Values; College Students; Slow Employment

1. Problem Raising

Under the waves of globalization, the rapid development of the social economy has brought about a great enrichment of material wealth, and people's living standards and quality have been significantly improved. However, at the same time, people's values are also changing quietly. Post-materialistic values are gradually emerging and becoming an important factor influencing the employment choices and motivations of contemporary youth. The phenomenon of slow employment, as a concrete manifestation of this value shift in the field of youth employment, has received

increasing attention from society in recent years. This article aims to deeply explore the influence of post-materialistic values on the phenomenon of slow employment, analyze the employment choices and motivations of young people, with the expectation of providing new perspectives and thoughts for understanding and solving the current employment problems of young people. Post-materialist values emphasize that after material needs are met, people will pay more attention to pursuits at the non-material level. Under the influence of post-materialist values, the employment concepts and behavioral choices of young people have undergone significant changes. They no longer regard employment merely as a means of survival, but pay more attention to the meaning of work, personal growth and the balance of life. This change has made the phenomenon of slow employment gradually become a new employment trend. Slow employment refers to the phenomenon where young people, after graduation, do not rush to find jobs immediately but choose to temporarily refrain from employment through study Tours, further education, or business start-up investigations. The emergence of the phenomenon of slow employment is not only related to objective factors such as economic and social development and the improvement of family and social capital, but also closely related to subjective factors such as the transformation of post-materialistic values.^[1] Studying the influence of post-materialistic values on the phenomenon of slow employment is of great significance for an in-depth understanding of the employment choices and motivations of contemporary youth. This article will start from the perspective of post-materialist values and combine the actual situation of the slow employment phenomenon to deeply explore the influence of post-materialist values on the employment

choices and motivations of young people. This article hopes that through comprehensive and in-depth research, it can help understand and solve the current employment problems of young people.

2. Theoretical Perspective and Literature Review

In recent years, with the continuous increase in the number of college graduates, the phenomenon of "slow employment" among college students has increasingly drawn social attention. Since 2015, relevant research has emerged in China. The existing literature generally defines "slow employment" as the state where college students, after meeting the graduation standards of universities, temporarily remain unemployed through study Tours, further studies, exam preparation, entrepreneurship, unemployment and other means^[2]. For the majority of graduates, "slow employment" is a choice for them to move from campus to the workplace. The adaptive adjustment of career expectations will have a long-term impact on an individual's economic situation and social status. At present, domestic scholars have conducted discussions on "slow employment" and employment and entrepreneurship from multiple aspects and fields, laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent research, but there is still room for optimization. Firstly, the existing studies on the motivation of "slow employment" mostly remain at the surface level. However, employment motivation directly affects individual behavioral decisions. In-depth research on the motivation of "slow employment" is crucial for predicting individuals' future behaviors and improving employment. The business environment has significant practical significance. Secondly, when analyzing the slow employment choices of college students, the influence of values is often overlooked. Ultimately, macro and meso factors need to exert their effects through the micro factor of college students' values.

The theory of post-materialism values provides a new perspective for the study of "slow employment" among college students. This theory was proposed by American scholars such as Ronald Inglehart based on a large number of observations and empirical studies. Its core includes the scarcity hypothesis and the socialization hypothesis, and expounds the

transformation of people's values in the process of social development. During the transformation from an industrial society to an information society, people's employment value orientation has gradually shifted from merely pursuing economic income to paying more attention to spiritual needs such as a sense of belonging^[3]. With the continuous development of China's economy, post-materialist values have also developed in Chinese society, presenting local characteristics and intergenerational differences. The group of college students represented by Generation Z is regarded as the leader of this value. Post-materialism values emphasize self-centeredness. Influenced by them, college students attach importance to both material and spiritual wealth when making employment choices. They pay less attention to the external value of work and are more inclined to start from their own needs, taking salary income as a necessary condition for employment. This has had a certain impact on the phenomenon of "slow employment" among college students.

3. Research Methods and Data

This thesis adopts the methods of random sampling and interview to conduct a sampling survey and analysis of 14 undergraduate graduates with "slow employment" from a certain major in a certain university. To obtain sample representativeness, it is selected that from a geographical perspective, Zhengzhou is a city where higher education institutions are relatively concentrated. At the same time, there is no restriction on the place of household registration for local employment in Zhengzhou, which is convenient for the undergraduate student group to find employment. From an economic perspective, among the students surveyed, there are those from new first-tier cities with a relatively high level of economic development like Zhengzhou, as well as those from other cities with relatively backward economies except Zhengzhou. As can be seen from the following table (as shown in Table 1), in terms of student composition, among the 14 college students who chose slow employment, 3 are from the 2023 undergraduate class, and the remaining 11 are from the 2024 undergraduate class. The number of students who chose slow employment accounts for 37% of the total number of undergraduate graduates in this class

that year.

Table 1. Summary Table of Basic Information of Interviewees

number	sex	Job-hunting situation	Social internship experience
A1 Mr. Zhao	man	Second postgraduate entrance examination	not have
A2 Mr. Sun	man	apply to study abroad	have
B1 Ms. Zhang	girl	Second postgraduate entrance examination	have
C1 Mr. Li	man	Second postgraduate entrance examination	not have
C2 Ms. Feng	girl	Sign up for military service	not have
C3 Ms. Ma	girl	Second postgraduate entrance examination	have
C4 Ms. Wang	girl	Second postgraduate entrance examination	not have
D Ms. Chen	girl	Temporarily unemployed	not have
E1 Ms. Zhang	girl	to apply for a job	have
E2 Ms. Wang	girl	to apply for a job	have
F1 Ms. Gan	girl	to apply for a job	have
F2 Ms. Yang	girl	take part in civil servant exam	not have
F4 Ms. Dong	girl	apply to study abroad	have
F5 Ms. Wang	girl	to apply for a job	not have

4. The Reasons for the Formation of Materialistic Values after Slow Employment Among College Students

Ingelhardt emphasized that the intergenerational shift of post-materialistic values in Western countries is closely linked to economic prosperity. Moreover, he pointed out that this transformation of values is not only influenced by economic factors, but also shaped by cultural and historical factors^[4]. For students who show a post-materialistic value tendency and engage in "slow employment", the formation of their values is closely related to the progress of China's economy and society, the accumulation of family and social capital, the influence of the media environment, and their personal life experiences.

4.1 The Improvement of the Material Foundation Provides College Students with More Opportunities to Choose Employment

According to the scarcity hypothesis theory, the prosperity of the material base is a key element for individuals to transform from the value of survival to the value of self-development. Post-materialistic values usually emerge at a stage when the economic development level is relatively high and material conditions are relatively abundant. When social wealth accumulates to a certain extent and people's basic living needs are met, their focus of attention will shift from the material aspect to areas such as the value of life and environmental protection^[5]. With the rapid development of modern industrialization and

economy, the parents' generation has provided a good material foundation for the growth of college students. For many students, the existing material foundation means that college students basically do not have to worry about basic survival, and thus turn to focus on personal freedom, the realization of personal value and other aspects. It is precisely because of the material foundation laid by their parents that college graduates have a reduced economic demand to support themselves through work right after graduation, allowing them to temporarily slow down their employment.

4.2 The Promotion of Family Social Capital Has Broadened the Choice Space for College Students

Students' social capital includes pre-assigned social capital and continuously accumulated post-assigned social capital, which are mainly concentrated in family resources and their own social networks. The social capital of college students' families in our country has been enhanced thanks to the rapid economic development after the reform and opening up^[6]. According to the "China Wealth Report 2022" jointly released by Zeping Macro and a wealth institution, the total wealth of Chinese residents reached 687 trillion yuan in 2021, ranking second in the world after the United States, and the average household assets also reached 1.34 million yuan. The compound annual growth rate from 2005 to 2021 reached 14.7%^[7]. Under the influence of the educational philosophy that "no matter how hard life is, it

can never torment the child; no matter how poor the family is, it can never impoverish education", the family's investment in their children's education has been rising steadily. For instance, Wang, a student from F5 who was interviewed, mentioned: "The second attempt at the postgraduate entrance examination and the three major battles around me are quite common. As for individuals, it mainly depends on whether their families can offer support." The enhancement of family social capital, on the one hand, brings more employment possibilities and a more relaxed employment environment to college students, allowing them to select ideal employment opportunities. On the other hand, it is prone to cause college students to have a fear of difficulties when seeking employment, prompting them to evade passively, and thus making the situation of "slow employment" even more serious.

4.3 Lack of Life Experience Prompts College Students to Have Idealized Expectations for Work

As the first generation to live on the Internet, the values of college students nowadays have been greatly impacted in online media. With the advent of the era of self-media, as an important platform for college students to get in touch with society and gain social experience, Internet media has become the main platform for college students to obtain employment information. Research indicates that 48.5% of college students believe that their views are greatly or relatively greatly influenced by new media, while only 10.7% think that they are minimally or not influenced by new media^[8]. The frequent emergence of online platforms can mislead college students' perception of the real world, job positions, etc. It often intensifies college students' aversion to the workplace, which in turn raises their expectations for their careers. Some scholars have proposed that both behavioral motives and the basis for value judgments point to the self. The thinking of college students in the Internet era presents the characteristics of egoism^[9].

5. The employment Predicament of Young people: The Collision of Value Evolution and Structural Contradictions

The continuous fermentation of the employment predicament of contemporary

college students is not only the product of the disconnection between educational expansion and industrial transformation, but also reflects the reshaping of the career choice logic of young people by post-materialist values. When individual ideals encounter the barriers of reality, this game concerning survival and development is weaving structural contradictions and psychological anxiety into the collective pain of a generation.

5.1 The Long-Term Existence of the Slow Employment Phenomenon Among College Students is Bound to Lead to the Aggravation of the Employment Predicament of Young People

According to the socialization assumption of post-materialistic values, there are intergenerational differences in post-materialistic values, and these differences are stable. Even though the previous generation was the direct beneficiary of the reform and opening up, this change in values has already manifested in contemporary college students. Therefore, the sluggish employment situation of college students affected by post-materialistic values has a certain stability. This situation is expected to persist for a relatively long period of time in the future. In subject education, liberal arts education is prone to make students tend towards romanticism and liberalism. The expansion of higher education enrollment has seen a faster increase in liberal arts majors than in science. The problem of mismatch between the disciplinary structure and the industrial structure has not been resolved. This leads to a more prominent contradiction between supply and demand for college students' employment. In the future, the employment difficulties for college students, especially for liberal arts students, may intensify. Under the national policy of "ensuring employment", measures such as expanding the enrollment of postgraduate students and increasing the recruitment of policy-based positions can alleviate the employment pressure on college students, but they only delay the pressure in some years and may increase it in future years.

5.2 Increase the Degree of Cognitive Bias Among College Students and Make them Alienated from Society

Under the influence of post-materialistic values,

college students are prone to fall into self-centeredness. Among the 14 students interviewed, more than half of them felt confused about the actual working situation in the workplace and had no idea what preparations were needed to enter the workplace. "They are not ready to enter the workplace and are unwilling to start working too early," they declared when making the choice of slow employment. However, most undergraduate graduates are around 22 years old and should have the ability to strive when entering the workplace. When students discuss the issue of difficult employment, almost no one mentions the requirements of macro industrial changes in society for future jobs. Most of them start from the perspective of the huge number of graduates and the large number of postgraduate entrance examination candidates. Such deviations resulting from the macro social environment and self-perception will further drive college students towards a slow employment path, leading them to fully devote themselves to various exam preparations while paying insufficient attention to the actual needs of society and thus being detached from it.

5.3 Slow Down the Improvement Speed of College Students' Employability and Weaken Their Career Resilience

Most students who choose slow employment tend to devote all their energy to exam preparation and do not agree with the view of "getting a job first and then choosing a career". During the period of slow employment, due to their alienation from the workplace, they may miss practical opportunities to enhance their employability, resulting in weakened resilience to setbacks among college students and further reducing their career resilience. For the improvement of employability, learning from practice in the workplace has obvious benefits. Work not only provides remuneration, but also offers areas for enhancing employability. Whether it is the demand for professional qualities brought about by the changes in the macroeconomic situation or the challenges to employability formed by the trend of technological changes, the perception in the workplace is extremely sensitive. This article classifies the slow employment of students. Among the two types of slow employment categories, namely the frustration and

concession type and the ideal opportunity type, some students enter slow employment after encountering setbacks in job hunting, while others stop looking for jobs when they fail and start preparing for the postgraduate entrance examination.

6. Conclusion

Under the influence of post-materialistic values, the slow employment situation of college students may cause them to have a negative mentality, thereby delaying the time of their first employment and bringing some adverse effects to social stability. Employment is an important link for college students to achieve role transformation, step from campus to society and demonstrate personal value. It is also an important manifestation of their assumption of social responsibilities. Therefore, we should pay close attention to the phenomenon of slow employment among college students and actively guide and support them from the perspective of values. First, by adopting an objective attitude to understand the slow employment situation of college students, as post-materialistic values continue to permeate the employment concepts of college students, the phenomenon of slow employment emerges accordingly. Moreover, this phenomenon has a certain degree of persistence and is an inevitable outcome when the economy and society develop to a specific stage, and it is difficult to change in the short term. It is worth noting that there is no clear boundary between negative slow employment and positive slow employment among college students. Under specific circumstances, the two can transform into each other. College students, due to their slow employment and reliance on family economic support, are prone to family disputes. If the situation worsens, it may also lead to an excessive burden of social welfare. All these require full attention and careful guidance. Therefore, while enhancing inclusiveness, we should rely on favorable macro policies such as stabilizing employment and promoting rational adjustment of the economic structure to provide guidance and gradually melt the "ice" of slow employment among college students. Second, in family education, emphasis should be placed on responsibility education. Once the social capital of college students' families is enhanced, the years of education they have received are likely

to be prolonged, and the age at which they first enter the workplace will also be relatively older. The phenomenon of slow employment will further extend the duration for which families support college students. When college students' economic dependence on jobs weakens and they emphasize the realization effect of ideal jobs on self-worth, their sense of responsibility shows a significant deficiency. Not only do they lack the idea of supporting themselves by their own strength, but they also completely ignore the responsibilities they shoulder for their families and society when choosing their careers. When modern families raise college students, they mostly focus on granting them rights and freedoms, but neglect the crucial link of responsibility education. Therefore, it is imperative to moderately strengthen the responsibility education of college students and enhance their sense of responsibility. Thirdly, colleges and universities should focus on promoting the process of precise employment guidance. On the one hand, colleges and universities have the responsibility to strengthen the ideological and political education of students. With the influence of the core socialist values, they guide students to establish correct values and stimulate the sense of responsibility of college students. On the other hand, refined employment guidance strategies should be implemented in accordance with the different situations of students. Through various channels such as specialized career planning courses, course practice activities, and professional internship projects, enhance college students' familiarity with society, encourage them to plan their career blueprints as early as possible, and actively engage in career preparations. At the same time, for students with slow employment, continuous follow-up counseling should be carried out, providing corresponding employment information to help them improve their employment capabilities and offering psychological counseling and other supporting measures.

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