

## A Strategy to Overcome Great Pressure for Graduates Employment in China

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**Abstract** The great employment pressure on Chinese graduates is rooted in a variety of factors: the imbalances of supply and demand in the labor market, problems of unreasonable setting in the curriculum system leading to structural unemployment, as well as graduate's wishes regarding jobs. It is necessary for the government and universities to innovate the systems of the enrollment, curriculum and employment, in order to solve graduates' employment difficulties.

**Keywords** Employment - Economic system – Graduates - Curriculum reform - Innovation

The fast increase of popularization of higher education in China brings a great employment pressure for graduates. Since this problem is becoming more serious year by year, it has attracted a lot of attention from the Central Committee of the Party and the state council. The central government has introduced a number of policies to promote the employment of graduates. On November 29, 2013 the Ministry of education published a document on its website<sup>1</sup>. In that document, it pointed out that the party's eighteenth plenary session clearly put forward the slogans "improve the promotion of employment and entrepreneurship mechanism" to upgrade and to focus on college graduates of the youth employment", and set a comprehensive plan for job opportunities for graduates. At present, the employment pressure on ordinary university graduates and structural contradictions are still prominent, and the employment situation is complicated and grim. In order to carry out the spirit of the party's eighteenth plenary session fully, we should deepen the reform.

In addition, college graduates employment is a system engineering. Since there are not only the government's factors that affect the employment of graduates, but also some other even more important factors, such as psychological factors of graduates and their parents, huge gaps between textbooks, practice and teaching standards. So it is not scientific to think that we might solve the employment problem only through government's policies.

The Ministry of education should pay more attention to the unemployment rate of graduates. Colleges should improve the professional curriculums adapting them to the society, and the government should carry out a policy strengthening students' employment motivation. However, to promote the employment of university students, we need the help from government, society, colleges and students.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Document of the Ministry of Education. From the website: <http://www.moe.edu.cn/>

<sup>2</sup> Liu Yan, Li Shumin. The college students' employment structural contradictions analysis [J]. Taiyuan Journal of <University of science and technology: Social Science Edition>2008(2):27.

Currently, there are three major difficulties for the employment of Chinese college graduates: the first one is the supply of graduates in excess compared to demand; the second one is the unreasonable setting in the curriculum system that leads to structural contradictions between supply and social demand; the third is a part of the graduates who would rather stay unemployed than accept the non-ideal job. These three employment predicaments need innovation in terms of recruitment, training and employment, in order to overcome the current employment problems.

### 1. Lower enrollment to university could solve the contradiction of too many graduates for real valuable job opportunities

The development scale, structure and speed of the higher education must adapt to the development of economic and social needs, which is the guarantee for the continuous development and health of higher education. At present, China's employee market is characterized by a situation where complete disequilibrium and structural imbalances exist at the same time. Thus the employment problem is very severe. On the one hand, the basic pattern of the oversupply of labor will not disappear in the future, labor supply exceeds by far the labor demand produced by economic growth, which leads to an unemployment disequilibrium in total. On the other hand, in the process of reforming the economic system and the adjustment of industrial structures, workers' quality and skills cannot meet the needs of the society, which leads to the emergence of a large number of jobs vacancy. There is a shortage of skilled labor in many areas and enterprises, which is called structural unemployment, leading to the rise of the natural unemployment rate.

After 15 years of Chinese higher education expansion, in 2014, the total number of higher education graduates reached 7.270.000, hitting an all-time high, with a relative ranking far exceeding the demand of developed Society.

Number of college graduates in 2001-2014 (Figure)

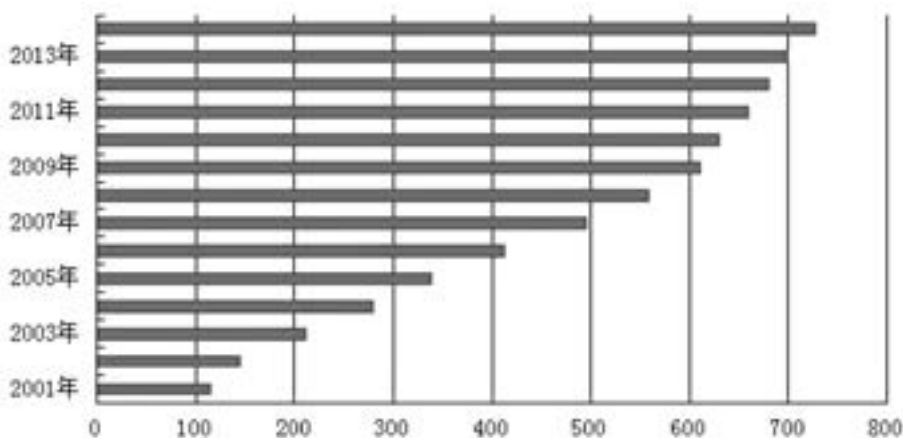


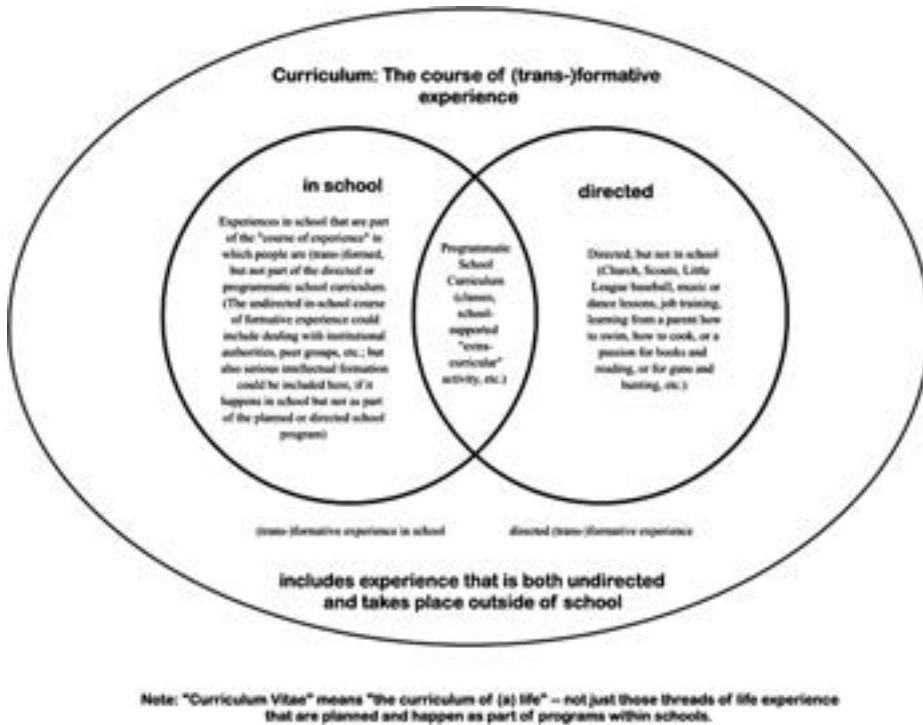
Figure 1: Number of college graduates in 2001-2014. (From website: China Education Online<sup>3</sup>)

According to the forecast, during the “Twelfth Five Year Plan” period, the average annual supply of urban labor force is about 25.000.000 people, while the average annual urban

<sup>3</sup> China Education Online: [http://career.eol.cn/kuai\\_xun\\_4343/20131210/t20131210\\_1050496.shtml](http://career.eol.cn/kuai_xun_4343/20131210/t20131210_1050496.shtml)

vacancies can provide only about 12.000.000 jobs. Hence, the annual unemployment is about 13.000.000. According to the high, middle, low level of talents with structure about 1:3:6 in, suitable senior and intermediate positions for university graduates are only 4.800.000 a year, so the employment gap is about 2.000.000<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, solutions to solve the excess of supply of college graduates are based on two points: one is to speed up economic development in order to increase employment opportunities; the second is to reduce the scale of enrollment in universities in order to reduce the supply of College graduates. As far as the Ministry of education is concerned, it should reduce the scale of enrollment of universities and improve the quality of higher education.

**2. Guidance of the reform in curriculums——solve the structural contradiction of employment**



**Figure 2:** Curriculum Concept by James Anthony Whitson - Own work

A structural contradiction exists between the supply of College graduates and actual social demand. It is necessary for the Government to bring out new policy timely to guide and upgrade this situation. The Ministry of education’s compulsory administrative interference is not desirable, because this is not only against the autonomy of universities, but also against the rules in the development of education. Education, including higher education, has the characteristics of long period, lack of benefits in the short term, which leads to changes of the need of profession. Therefore, we should not determine the professional training goal of the future in terms of three years of professional demand. The Ministry of education, responsible for coordination of the

<sup>4</sup> “The 4 one stone arouses 1000 billow enrollment and employment rate linked hot lead” [EB/OL]. [2012-06-19]. From website: <http://edu.people.com.cn/h/2011/1209/c227696-1417397299.html>.

development of education, needs to deal with three kinds relationship: 1. between the present and the future demand; 2. long-term and short-term professions; 3. elite and mass education. These three aspects represent the rules of development of the college education.

### 1. The need for the present and future

The Ministry of education needs to coordinate closely with the strategy of the national development, invite experts in the preparation of personnel training mode matching with the cultural and national development strategy. Encourage colleges to apply for special talents learning and training mode (with its own characteristics and advantages of discipline culture experiment project), setting up special funds and appropriate incentives. Integration of existing high school education resources should promote the adjustment of professional background conditions for talent training, avoiding the situation where teachers and teaching resources remain in the traditional professional scheme, and guiding the university resources to respond to the current and future needs.

### 2. The long-term and short-term professions

Then Ministry of education needs to adjust the present policies and introduce an event limited to support. In general, long-term profession is related to the premise and the foundation of short-term profession's development, so it cannot be forbidden. The excess kind of long-term profession and the waste of resources should be adjusted; the long-term profession with inferior discipline power should be conducted with recruitment limitation, need long-term professional control to limit the supply, and solve the structural contradictions in talent supply and demand. For the specialties which were originally scarce but now in excess of the demand, the Ministry of education should apply a policy of enrollment restriction, trying to guide the integration of resources, to set up a fan of major options, to cultivate new talents, leading development into the social labour environment.

### 3. The treatment of elite education and mass education

The Ministry of education can set the "985 Project" of first-class universities, as elite educational institutions, focusing on training quality and scientific research level power to protect and supervise personnel training mode and reducing the commitment to support the "inflationary" higher education trends. Instead of making efforts in basic science, the focus would be oriented on applied, a innovative research and basic disciplinary theories, to training promising talents, who have both ability and real attitudes. At the same time, there is the need to expand the scale of training and pay attention to the growing knowledge of talents. Mass education institutions should be based on specialized knowledge and on the teaching for occupation knowledge skills, cultivating application-oriented and practical technical talents. Different universities should be in different locations coordinating their developments through appropriate choices. All these policies imply different standard strategies by the Ministry of education, through the evaluation of personnel training quality reflecting, advantages and characteristics, kind and levels of training, guiding the different talents, caring of the social division of labor required, reducing the present too deep homogeneity of the Graduate Education and supply and demand and the implication of the structural contradictions.

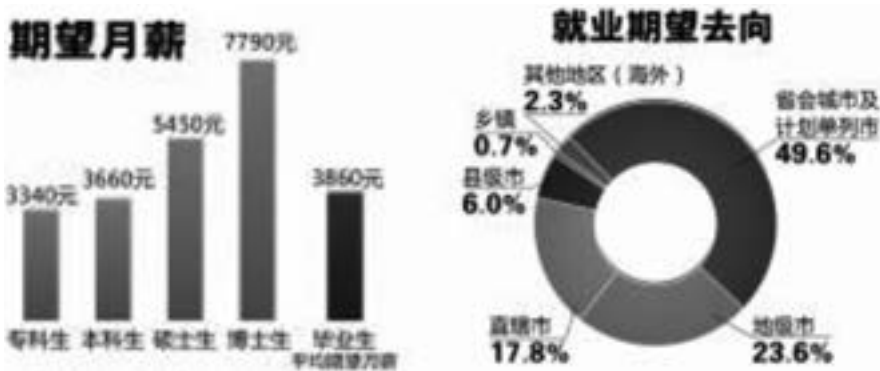
### 3. Improvement of the employment policy——strengthen the positive employment intention of graduates

The graduates who would rather stay unemployed instead of accepting a job which does not met their expectations is an important factor to influence the employment market. The vice director of Chinese talent market in the south canal appointment Wang Shihua pointed out: “not for the wages that are not high enough, not for the places far away from their home, not for the post which don’t have files, not for the unpleasant name of posts.”<sup>5</sup>These “four refusess” is a reflection of the college graduates employment expectations.

There is a time when the employment post is helpless to social mobility. Graduates who are full of high expectations do not choose their jobs at random, but continue to seek the posts which can change their social status.

However, the popularization of high education makes a large part of learning result in the situation where children of upper middle class families who have low scores can also enter the university and obtain a high education diploma too. What’s more, they will use their social capital from the family to get salary and good jobs. Despite the high quality of lower middle class children having the same high education diploma, it is difficult for them to find work even in the industry and sector due to the lack of strong social capital support. The effects of the economic phenomenon that bad money drives out the good<sup>6</sup> happens also in high education with regard to the employment market. This not only lets down the students who were born in poor areas, but also spreads quickly to the family with the same class, let the parents and the children of poor families develop negative thoughts of education as useless. Education is not helpful – in itself – to change students future and their family’s fate; even traditional universities might lead to more poor students condition and overall social poverty. This shows how the higher education mechanism to promote changes in the social pyramid may turn out to have failed, with the consolidation of social status phenomena becoming more and more obvious. This will be harmful for the sustainable development of the Chinese harmonious society construction and of both economy and society.

Expected salary and expected employment location of Beijing’s graduates in 2014 (figures)



**Figure 3:** Expected salary and expected employment location of Beijing’s graduates in 2014. From *Jinghua electronic newspaper* (2014-05-28)

<sup>5</sup> [America] Pete Blau inequality and heterogeneity of [M]. Chinese Social Science Publishing House, 1977

<sup>6</sup> Gresham’s law is an economic principle that states: “When a government overvalues one type of money and undervalues another, the undervalued money will leave the country or disappear from circulation into hoards, while the overvalued money will flood into circulation.”It is commonly stated as: “Bad money drives out good”.

“For a society that wants to progress, we must have some way to humble origin and intellect people to replace those of noble rich birth but having poor talent and even less learning capabilities”. The competition mechanism of survival of the fittest can<sup>7</sup> make the society more prosperous, but the competition is not to rely on congenital factors but self induced factors. At present, the higher education and social mobility dysfunction leads to full of dreams and expectations of school graduates reluctant to employment. To solve it, the Ministry of education should publish relevant policy, to improve the recruitment system, steering capability standard recruitment system from diploma, leading to employment paradigm, to eliminate the interference of paradigm by social capital on employment outcomes, to let the graduates with the knowledge and expertise results such as self induced factors become an important basis for employment and the recovery of social mobility.

In short, the great employment pressure on graduates facing today result from the contradiction of enrollment, training and employment in China. In order to fundamentally solve the employment problems of graduates, the key lies in the policy innovation with comprehensive systems thinking of government and universities. It should not only from one aspect, making overall plan for a fundamental transformation.

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