

## Dilemma and Resolution: A Study on the “Involution” Phenomenon in College Students’ Employment

XU Lihong

Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai 201701, China

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: 3 January 2026

Accepted: 13 January 2026

Published Online: 30 March 2026

#### Keywords:

college students

employment

involution

dilemma

resolution

### ABSTRACT

In recent years, the “involution” effect in college students’ employment has spilled over, presenting dilemmas such as continuous self-replication within the employment system, diminishing marginal benefits of employment, and the interweaving of active and passive “delayed employment”. The prominent structural contradiction of supply-demand imbalance at the macro level, the evolution of employment concepts driven by the transformation of major social contradictions at the meso level, and the intensified employment competition due to scarce resource endowments at the micro level are the main reasons for the “involution” trend in college students’ employment. The high-quality development of the economy and society, the effective breakthrough of the rigid external boundaries of the employment management system by the government and universities, and college students’ positive and rational choices in the face of employment competition will all be effective paths to resolve employment “involution”.

The original meaning of “involution” is “to turn or roll up”. Originally, it referred to the phenomenon in China’s traditional agricultural society that after developing to a certain stage, in order to promote the rapid development of agriculture, the rural economy increased total output by investing a large amount of labor in limited land, resulting in an explosive population growth. However, population growth did not bring about a “qualitative” change and improvement in agricultural development; instead, it fell into repetitive labor, leading to diminishing marginal returns per unit of labor and becoming a form of “growth without development”. In recent years, the impact of external shocks on economic and social development has intensified, affecting some industries and enterprises. The characteristics of the new normal of economic development have become more prominent, the total employment pres-

sure has continued to increase, and structural employment contradictions have persisted. The employment situation for college graduates has become increasingly severe, and employment competition has grown fiercer, presenting the “involution” phenomenon similar to that in the development of traditional agricultural society. Employment is the most basic livelihood. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: “Promoting high-quality and full employment is the new positioning and mission of employment work in the new era and new journey.” The “Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development” adopted at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China regards promoting high-quality and full employment as an important part of

#### \*Corresponding Author:

Xu Lihong (1977—), female, Han nationality, born in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, Ph.D. Candidate, Associate Professor, Deputy Director of the Student Affairs (Graduate Studies) Department of Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Deputy Secretary of the Party General Branch and Vice Dean of the School of Marxism. Research interests: Educational Management.

safeguarding and improving people's livelihood, putting forward new requirements and making new arrangements. A thorough analysis of the "involution" phenomenon in college students' employment aims to address the "involution" dilemma and strive to achieve high-quality and full employment for college graduates.

## **I. Dilemmas Brought by the "Involution" of College Students' Employment**

Employment "involution" is an objective phenomenon emerging in the employment process of college students in recent years. "As a phased product of social development, its emergence cannot be suppressed in educational development"<sup>[1]</sup>. In practice, however, the "involution" of college students' employment has brought about many dilemmas.

### **1. Rigid External Boundaries Exert Inward Pressure, Leading to Self-Replication within the Employment System**

Alexander Goldenweiser, an American anthropologist who first proposed the concept of "involution", stated that "involution" is a cultural phenomenon characterized by dynamic stagnation and continuous internal refinement<sup>[2]</sup>. Domestic scholars Liu Shiding and Qiu Zeqi also pointed out that "involution" refers to the process of continuous internal refinement and complexity of a system when the conditions for external expansion are strictly restricted<sup>[3]</sup>. In recent years, the external expansion of the employment system has been limited. Constrained and squeezed by rigid external boundaries, the employment work for college students has become increasingly refined and complex internally, presenting a dilemma of internal self-replication.

Under the pressure of rigid external boundaries caused by structural supply-demand contradictions, self-replication within the employment system has intensified. The most prominent contradiction in China's employment field currently is the structural imbalance between supply and demand, and the difficulty in college students' employment is the most typical manifestation of the overall structural employment difficulty. Higher education and economic and social development maintain a loosely coupled relationship. In recent years, higher education has shown a structural contradiction between talent supply and social demand both in the vertical academic hierarchy and the horizontal professional structure. This has become the main rigid external boundary restricting college students' employment. Given that rigid external boundaries cannot be broken through in the short term, governments at all levels from the central to the local have tapped in-

ternal potential, and employment work has been promoted through a "pressure transmission" method of "top-down, layer-by-layer pressure", demonstrating the operational logic of "hierarchical governance". Education authorities have continuously pursued internal refined management, refining and decomposing employment assessment tasks, ratios, and time nodes for universities. Employment materials have become increasingly "standardized" and "regulated", and employment assessment criteria have become more simplistic and data-oriented. In fact, excessive refinement of internal details in the existing system will further strengthen the rigidity of external boundaries, as rigid external boundaries make it seem that there is infinite potential to tap within the system.

Under the pressure of rigid external boundaries from employment assessments, university employment work has undergone continuous internal self-replication. Faced with the increasingly severe employment situation for graduates, to promote employment and maintain stability, education authorities have consolidated universities' responsibility for employment work and adopted the indicator of graduate employment rate to assess and evaluate universities. This not only urges universities to accelerate the employment progress of graduates but also prompts them to adjust majors and improve the quality of education, thereby alleviating the employment contradiction for college students. Under the evaluation orientation where employment is regarded as a "top leader project" of universities and an important measure of the quality of university education, universities have been caught in fierce competition in employment assessment rankings and continuously tapped internal potential to promote graduate employment. Universities have set up disciplines and majors based on the needs of the employment market, resulting in the so-called "disciplinary and professional drift"; shortened the actual education period for students, transferred time to internships and employment, and lowered teaching assessment standards to ensure students' graduation as much as possible; when the results of exploring the employment market externally are minimal, employment authorities have continuously strengthened career planning education for college students, enhanced employment guidance and services, and infinitely pursued internal refined management by refining and decomposing employment assessments for secondary colleges; secondary colleges have repeatedly surveyed students' employment intentions, talked to students individually, and conducted ideological work to urge students to find employment. When they can no longer meet the rigid requirements, they even adopt "flexible adaptation" methods to ensure that the initial employment rate meets the

standards. The infinite internal potential tapping in university employment work has led to continuous internal refinement, complexity, and self-replication.

## **2. Increased Workload Fails to Bring Qualitative Improvement, with Diminishing Marginal Returns in Employment**

The “involution” trend in college students’ employment is reflected in the fact that from the perspective of input and output, the investment in employment work has been increasing, but the effectiveness of employment work has not improved proportionally.

Universities have continuously strengthened their efforts in employment work. In recent years, to promote college students’ employment, under the influence of a pressure-based system, universities have advanced the employment work continuously. Career planning guidance for college students has been moved forward to enrollment. From the moment freshmen register, career planning education has been carried out in an “extensive irrigation” manner to lay the foundation for employment; in the subsequent study and life on campus, each college has provided “precision drip irrigation” guidance to students of different grades, helping them establish a correct employment outlook, urging them to strengthen professional knowledge learning, and assisting them in mastering diverse job-hunting skills; during the graduation season, counselors have tirelessly analyzed the employment situation for graduates, provided job opportunities, and guided them to actively seek employment, hoping that students can seize the opportunity to secure jobs as early as possible. In the increasingly fierce employment competition, universities have continuously increased their efforts in employment work, striving for limited employment resources at higher work costs.

However, the increased workload in university employment has failed to bring about a qualitative improvement in employment work. From the perspective of the employment promotion process in universities, the entire employment process is slow, the employment rhythm of graduates is delayed, and employment supporting materials basically rely on counselors to remind, request, and collect; from the perspective of employment results, the actual initial employment rate is not high—not to mention that the employment rate may have been excessively high before—but the overall employment quality and satisfaction have not improved significantly. Moreover, the proportion of “delayed employment”, “temporary non-employment”, and “flexible employment” has increased year by year, and there have been frequent reports of graduates being “forced to be employed”. Similar to the traditional

agricultural society, where investing a large amount of labor in limited land did not bring about a “qualitative” change and improvement in agricultural development but instead led to repetitive labor and diminishing marginal returns per unit of labor, the increased workload in university employment has not driven the growth of employment connotation. University employment work has fallen into repetitive labor, and some has become “growth without development”, presenting the dilemma of diminishing marginal returns.

## **3. Prominent “Delayed Employment” with the Interweaving of Active and Passive “Delayed Employment”**

“Delayed employment” of college students refers to the phenomenon where college students bid farewell to the traditional model of “employment upon graduation” and postpone employment after graduation. According to employment motivation, “delayed employment” of college students can be divided into two types: active “delayed employment” and passive “delayed employment”. This phenomenon began to emerge around 2014 and 2015 and has become increasingly obvious in recent years, with interweaving and transformation between active and passive “delayed employment”.

On the one hand, the severe employment situation has led to passive “delayed employment” of college students. From the economic and social perspective, the impact of external shocks has intensified, affecting some industries and enterprises. Especially during the epidemic, a considerable number of enterprises suffered a cliff-like impact, a large number of service industries closed down, and college graduates faced a short-term reduction in employment channels and a sharp decline in job opportunities provided by employers; from the perspective of employment scale, China has entered the stage of popularization of higher education, and the number of college graduates will remain above 10 million in the next period; from the perspective of supply-demand matching, there is a certain mismatch between the talent demand side of the industry market and the talent supply side of higher education, and structural employment contradictions are still relatively prominent; from the perspective of employment capabilities, the development of new quality productive forces has spawned a number of new industries, new formats, and new models, putting forward new and higher requirements for graduates’ employment capabilities. The interweaving of various factors has led to a severe employment situation, and passive “delayed employment” of college students is an undeniable fact.

On the other hand, active “delayed employment” of

college students is the biggest “bottleneck” in promoting employment work. From the perspective of employment concepts, graduates have an obvious tendency to “seek stability”. Especially after the epidemic, more people value “certainty”, and the popularity of applying for civil service and public institution positions remains high. There is a joke among college graduates: “The end of the universe is civil service.” Civil service positions have become a “turning point in life” in the eyes of young people. In the past ten years, the number of applicants for the National Civil Service Examination has basically increased every year. From the perspective of career development planning, graduates are enthusiastic about postgraduate entrance examinations to improve their academic qualifications and gain an advantage in the next round of employment competition. Whether it is applying for civil service or postgraduate studies, most students choose to temporarily refrain from employment after failing the first attempt to prepare for the second attempt the following year, which has become a major challenge in university employment work in recent years. In addition, it is a practical problem in employment that graduates are unwilling to roll up their sleeves and engage in practical work, or to put theory into practice. The coexistence of difficulty in employment for college graduates and difficulty in recruiting workers for enterprises such as manufacturing—“some people have no work to do, and some work has no one to do”—is the actual dilemma in the employment market. Of course, some graduates, due to sufficient material and economic conditions, simply adopt a “Buddhist” attitude and temporarily refrain from employment in the face of fierce employment competition, shifting from passive “delayed employment” to active “delayed employment”. From the actual situation of university employment work in recent years, the last straw that breaks the camel’s back in university employment assessment is often the active “delayed employment” of graduates.

## II. Logical Causes of the “Involution” of College Students’ Employment

Similar to the “involution” phenomenon in the development of traditional agricultural society, the “involution” of college students’ employment is a product of economic and social development at a certain stage, resulting from the joint action of multiple factors.

### 1. Macro Level: Supply-Demand Imbalance and Prominent Structural Contradictions

The “involution” of college students’ employment is a product of structural contradictions between supply and

demand. In recent years, the supply of labor in the employment market has exceeded demand. The rising number of college graduates has coincided with the slowdown in economic growth brought about by the new normal of economic development, leading to a reduction in the total market demand for labor. In recent years, the number of college graduates has increased by hundreds of thousands annually, exceeding 10 million in 2022. Coupled with the employment of social personnel, the supply of labor in the employment market has continued to grow; at the same time, employment demand has been decreasing. Since the 1990s, the employment elasticity coefficient of economic growth has continued to decline, and rapid economic growth has not brought a significant increase in employment. During the epidemic, a considerable number of enterprises suffered a cliff-like impact, and the number of jobs provided by employers dropped sharply. In the post-epidemic era, China’s economy has continued to recover and improve while consolidating its foundation, but the external environment has become more complex and severe, with overlapping structural contradictions and cyclical factors in the domestic economy. Therefore, more serious than the supply-demand contradiction is the structural contradiction. Under the new normal, the economic growth rate has shifted from high-speed growth to medium-high speed growth, the economic structure has been continuously optimized, and the driving force of economic development has shifted from factor-driven and investment-driven to service industry development and innovation-driven<sup>[4]</sup>. The slowed economic growth rate has reduced the total market demand for labor. The old industrial economic structure remains at a relatively low level, and the corresponding economic growth mode has created mostly productive jobs, while such enterprises themselves are shrinking or transforming and upgrading. From the perspective of university development, the previous development model of expanding undergraduate and postgraduate enrollment while reducing junior college enrollment has led to a balanced structure between undergraduate and junior college students, and the vertical hierarchical structure of higher education has shown a relative surplus of graduates with higher academic qualifications. From the perspective of the horizontal professional structure, considering factors such as educational costs and their own development, many universities previously adopted a development model of enrolling more students in liberal arts and basic disciplines and fewer students in science, engineering, and applied disciplines, which is inconsistent with the demand for talents in science, engineering, and applied disciplines in the current stage of economic and social development. This is why, on the one

hand, employers complain about talent shortages, “difficulty in recruitment”, and “labor shortages”, while on the other hand, college students face the “curse” and “vicious circle” of employment difficulty.

## **2. Meso Level: Transformation of Major Social Contradictions and Evolution of Employment Concepts**

The “involution” of college students’ employment is a product of the transformation of major social contradictions. The Report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed: “Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has evolved into the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life.” On the one hand, the transformation of major social contradictions has made college students expect higher-quality employment. The improvement of economic conditions has raised college students’ employment expectations. At one time, employment was the main way to obtain labor remuneration, maintain livelihood, and even make a living. With the rapid economic development, college students’ families generally have adequate material life and favorable economic conditions, and employment is no longer the main means of making a living, but has become the main way and approach for college students to pursue their life ideals and make contributions. Therefore, college students expect higher-quality employment. When their employment expectations are not met, they “do not compromise” or “make do”, and would rather choose to temporarily refrain from employment, which is fully supported by their family’s economic conditions. This ideal perception of occupations affects the time and space of college students’ employment choices and behaviors<sup>[5]</sup>. The choice of “delayed employment” by college students to a certain extent “reflects the beautiful expectations of contemporary college students for higher-quality employment, reflects their higher expectations for their own knowledge, ability, and quality, and includes beautiful expectations for more high-quality and efficient employment services”<sup>[5]</sup>. On the other hand, the transformation of major social contradictions has put forward newer and higher requirements for employment management. To resolve the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life, it is necessary to meet the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life through more balanced and adequate development. In order to promote employment and maintain stability through more balanced and adequate development, governments and universities have

continuously increased pressure on employment management systems and mechanisms. In recent years, facing the severe employment situation of college students, the government has responded at the highest level, carried out cross-border coordination to promote college students’ employment and maintain social stability; universities have given full play to their advantages in education and management, adopted classified policies, advanced with the times, taken actions according to circumstances, and innovated in promoting college students’ employment in response to needs, striving to meet college students’ demand for high-quality employment. However, the infinite internal potential tapping in employment work has led to continuous internal refinement, complexity, and self-replication.

## **3. Micro Level: Scarce Resource Endowments and Intensified Employment Competition**

The “involution” of college students’ employment is the result of intensified employment competition due to scarce employment resource endowments. As Durkheim proposed regarding the relationship between social volume and social density, when the growth rate of social volume cannot keep up with the expansion of social density, involution arises as the times require<sup>[6]</sup>. With the advancement of economic and social development and the popularization of higher education, the structural contradictions between employment supply and demand have become prominent, and employment resources compatible with college students have become scarcer, leading to “white-hot” employment competition. On the one hand, universities have been actively or passively involved in the competition of employment work, and employment management has shown an “involution” trend. Under the baton of employment assessment, universities have continuously increased investment in human, material, and financial resources for employment work, striving to secure limited employment opportunities for graduates from the employment market; strengthened employment guidance and services, tailored comprehensive support for graduates to enhance their employment competitiveness; and increased efforts to promote employment work, consolidated responsibilities, and promoted all-staff and all-round employment promotion in secondary colleges. On the other hand, high-quality employment resources are particularly scarce, and graduates hope to occupy high-quality resources at the start of their employment. The institutional segmentation of China’s labor market endows the primary labor market with incomparable advantages compared with the secondary labor market. Therefore, institutions within the system have always been the first choice

for many graduates, and have become more favored for their stability after the epidemic. At the same time, in the past ten years, a considerable number of graduates have regarded postgraduate studies as an employment pool, temporarily reconciling the contradiction between the severe employment situation and their own career development, hoping to increase their competitive weight in the future employment market by improving their academic qualifications. In addition, employment competition has also generated a “Buddhist” employment attitude. Many college students are anxious about whether they can find their desired jobs and win in the “involutionary” competition, and at the same time, they are anxious that even if they win temporarily, they will still face the cruel competition of the “next round”. Under this paradoxical logic, the new generation group with sufficient family material conditions and no need to take employment as a means of survival has shown a “Buddhist” employment attitude: if they can live well without special efforts, they might as well live a peaceful life<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, some college students have made the choice of “delayed employment” either actively or passively with a “Buddhist” attitude.

### **III. Resolution Paths of the “Involution” of College Students’ Employment**

The “involution” of college students’ employment accurately describes the current employment dilemma of college students. China’s development practice has repeatedly proved that problems arising in development will surely be solved in development. Faced with the phenomenon of “involution” in college students’ employment and the resulting dilemmas, the country’s promotion of high-quality economic and social development, the government and universities’ efforts to break through the rigid external boundaries of employment management systems and mechanisms, and college students’ positive and rational response to employment competition will all be effective paths to resolve employment “involution”.

#### **1. Resolving Employment “Involution” through High-Quality Development**

The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China points out that high-quality development is the primary task of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way. The problem of “involution” in college students’ employment, which has emerged with economic and social development, will surely be solved in the process of high-quality economic and social development.

Resolving the “involution” of college students’ em-

ployment through high-quality economic and social development. As an active choice to adapt to the new normal of economic development, high-quality development will surely promote the economy to achieve effective qualitative improvement and reasonable quantitative growth in the process of adapting to the new normal of economic development. Emerging industries and new formats supported by digital technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence have rapidly “filled the gap” and developed rapidly, bringing tremendous changes to the industrial structure and production methods, and continuously fostering new employment growth points[8]. The government should actively develop new formats and models, transform and upgrade traditional industries, accelerate the development of the service industry, cultivate new driving forces, and increase effective employment supply. It is believed that the high-quality development of the economy and society will not only bring about an increase in the quantity of employment supply but also resolve the structural contradictions of employment, achieve effective qualitative improvement in the context of substantial quantitative growth, and ultimately realize high-quality employment and high-satisfaction employment.

Resolving the “involution” of college students’ employment through high-quality development of higher education. The implementation of hierarchical and classified development of higher education to achieve differentiated development is a fundamental measure to adjust the talent supply structure and resolve the structural contradictions of employment. With universities establishing a classification system, implementing classified management, promoting the construction of world-class universities and first-class disciplines in a coordinated manner, and guiding some local universities to transform into application-oriented universities, the supply-side structural reform of higher education has begun to make a breakthrough. The reasonable positioning and classified development of higher education institutions emphasize the type differentiation rather than hierarchical differentiation of educational streaming, and construct a higher education system with a reasonable structure and optimized functions. If the national launch of postgraduate enrollment expansion, college enrollment expansion, and the resumption of “second bachelor’s degree” enrollment are expedient measures to offset the impact of the epidemic on employment, then the national launch of the vocational college enrollment expansion plan is a strategic measure to promote the high-quality development of vocational education, a strategic arrangement to correct the imbalance between the vertical academic hierarchical structure of talents cultivated by universities and the needs of economic and social

development, adjust the higher education structure, and implement the supply-side structural reform of higher education.

## **2. Resolving Employment “Involution” by Breaking Rigid Boundaries**

With the overall catch-up and partial gap-filling at the national level, it is believed that the rigid external boundaries of college students' employment will surely be broken, and the employment space will still be broad.

The government's efforts to break the rigid external boundaries of structural supply-demand contradictions to resolve the “involution” of college students' employment. Faced with the rigid external boundaries imposed on college students' employment by the structural contradictions between employment supply and demand, the government should implement cross-border collaborative governance through “joint efforts”, “coordination”, “synergy”, and “cooperation”. In recent years, from the central to local governments, and from the government to various departments in various regions, they have collaborated and linked up, issued “policy packages”, launched “combined punches”, carried out special actions to promote the employment and entrepreneurship of college graduates, and launched initiatives such as the “Internship Program”, “Hundred-Day Sprint Action”, and “National Recruitment Action”, striving to expand capacity to “escort” college students' employment, demonstrating the effectiveness of government governance. For the rigid external boundaries formed by employment assessment on university employment work, the government should innovate the employment management model, strive to break the “veto points” in policy formulation, pay attention to the real employment intentions of college students as the main body of employment while focusing on the role of employment as a “social stabilizer”, scientifically formulate employment policies and employment assessment mechanisms, and promote university employment work through a combination of legitimate mobilization and material resource incentives, avoiding the style of “promoting work through layer-by-layer escalation”, so that university employment work can break away from “involution” and return to its proper state.

Universities' reasonable efforts to break the rigid external boundaries of employment assessment to resolve the “involution” of college students' employment. Employment is not only related to the vital interests of students and social stability but also to social and economic development. Faced with the rigid external boundaries of employment assessment, universities should clarify their main responsibilities for employment and define their

core tasks. Regarding the employment of graduates, the responsibility scope of universities should be to provide students with high-quality educational opportunities, cultivate students with correct employment values and strong employment competence, comprehensively promote the development of their human capital as production factors, and enable them to adapt to the needs of economic and social development as much as possible after graduation. Relevant departments of university employment work should perform their duties diligently, cooperate sincerely, and provide refined services, and provide accurate employment guidance and services for graduates through the high-quality development of employment work, helping them find employment. Only in this way can universities better play their role in promoting college students' employment while fulfilling their core responsibilities of talent training, scientific research, social service, and cultural inheritance, and resolve the “involution” of college students' employment.

## **3. Resolving Employment “Involution” through Effective Competition**

“Involution” vividly describes the group's living conditions and conveys the group's social anxiety, and the Internet, like a magnifying glass, has amplified the anxiety of “involution”. However, “involution” does not mean completely irrational internal competition. If “delayed employment” after rational thinking and decision-making has its rationality, then the “inaction” in career planning, the “slow action” in employment practice, and the unreasonable “retreat” in the face of pressure are by no means the choices that contemporary college students should make. College students should respond to employment “involution” through effective competition.

College students should “plan early” and keenly capture changes in the employment market to resolve employment “involution”. In recent years, the situation in university employment work is that before the employment of graduates of the previous session is concluded, the employment work of graduates of the next session has quietly begun. Under the influence of complex domestic and international situations, enterprises have been impacted to varying degrees, and the state has introduced various regulatory policies, which have also profoundly affected the development trends of industries and enterprises, and the instability of the employment market has increased. For example, the Internet and real estate industries, once known as traditional employment “reservoirs” and major absorbers of graduates, have been shrinking in recent years. For example, education and training, once a “top-tier” industry, gradually declined within six months after

the implementation of the “double reduction” policy, while online education has become a rapidly developing new format since the epidemic. In addition, the impact of the development of artificial intelligence on employment presents a dual characteristic of coexisting substitution effect and creation effect. While giving priority to replacing low-skilled jobs that are repetitive and have clear rules, it has also spawned a large number of new occupations and new employment forms. In short, the employment form is undergoing profound changes, and the traditional employment model is transforming towards diversification, digitization, and flexibility. Therefore, in the fierce employment competition, college students should not only “seek employment early” but also strive to capture changes in the employment market, adjust their employment direction in a timely manner, so as to turn passivity into initiative in the competition and grasp the initiative in their careers.

College students should actively respond to competition and make rational choices to resolve employment “involution”. In the post-epidemic era, the continuous upsurge in the national civil service examination and the expanding scale of central grass-roots employment programs such as the “Special Post Plan”, “College Student Village Official Program”, “Three Supports and One Assistance Program”, and “Western Program” fully prove the trend of college students’ employment returning to institutions within the system. The number of applicants for the 2022 National Civil Service Examination exceeded 2 million for the first time. It has continued to rise in the past three years, reaching a record high of 3.5 million in 2025. In addition, to temporarily reconcile the contradiction between the severe employment situation and their own career development, the rising postgraduate entrance examination fever has begun to cool down since 2024. Perhaps graduates have seen phenomena such as “academic qualification inversion”, diplomas being “not rare”, and even “over-education and under-employment”, and graduates’ postgraduate entrance examination choices have become more rational. In the changing and fiercely competitive employment situation, college students should rationally view the systematic connection between various employment choices: those who intend to pursue further studies should rationally view the relationship between further studies and employment; those who intend to find employment should objectively analyze the advantages and disadvantages of employment within and outside the system. In the context of increased uncertainty in the employment market, it is a rational employment choice for college students to prioritize “stability” in their employment choices. However,

when most graduates want to rush to employment within the system or squeeze onto the “single-plank bridge” of postgraduate entrance examinations, individual graduates need to re-examine their choices and not follow the trend of peers, so as not to be involved in the massive tide of postgraduate entrance examinations and civil service applications as “accompanying runners”. “It takes a good blacksmith to make good steel.” For college students, good personal cultivation, excellent professional competence, and strong practical abilities remain the core competitiveness in the job market and the ultimate solution to breaking free from the “involution” of employment.

## Fund Project

Shanghai Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Project “Research on the Evaluation System of Employment Work in Shanghai Universities Oriented towards High-Quality and Full Employment” (2023FZX016).

## References

- [1] Wang, Y. B., & Zhang, L. (2022). The phenomenon, causes, and resolution paths of the involution of college students’ employment. *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education*, 30(3).
- [2] Zhu, W. H. (2020). The involution of academic governance: Connotative representation, generative mechanism, and solution approaches. *Research in Higher Education*, 41(6).
- [3] Liu, S. D., & Qiu, Z. Q. (2004). A conceptual analysis of “involution”. *Sociological Studies*, 19(5).
- [4] Cao, X. M., & Zeng, L. (2020). The generative logic and guiding strategies of college graduates’ “Buddha-like employment”. *Journal of Contemporary Youth Research*, 18(2).
- [5] Jiang, L. P. (2020). Interpretation and governance of college students’ “delayed employment” from the perspective of the transformation of major social contradictions. *Journal of Contemporary Youth Research*, 18(6).
- [6] Durkheim, É. (2000). *The division of labor in society* (J. D. Liang, Trans.). Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- [7] Zeng, Y. B. (2018). “Buddha-like” or striving: A survey on young people’s occupational values. *Journal of Contemporary Youth Research*, 16(6).
- [8] Zou, X. (2020, May 7). “Shortage occupations” reflect economic transformation and upgrading. *People’s Daily*, p. 05.

# AI-Augmented Intercultural Pedagogy: A Technological Empowerment Model for English Teacher Development in China

Jing Xu<sup>1,2</sup> M.N. Md Zabit<sup>2</sup> Yijia Li<sup>2</sup>

1. Lanzhou Vocational Technology College, Lanzhou, China 730070

2. Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Malaysia 35900

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: 7 January 2026

Accepted: 17 January 2026

Published Online: 30 March 2026

### Keywords:

Artificial intelligence

intercultural teaching competence

English language educators

professional development

China

technological empowerment

## ABSTRACT

As globalization accelerates and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies advance, intercultural teaching competence has become increasingly vital for English educators' professional growth. Drawing on Bourdieu's cultural capital framework and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, this research examines how AI-enhanced tools can expand teachers' capabilities in multicultural educational environments while creating novel professional development trajectories.

Utilizing a mixed-methods design that integrates systematic literature review with cross-institutional case studies from 12 educational settings, this investigation presents a three-dimensional "AI-Enhanced Intercultural Teaching Model" focusing on: (1) cognitive development through customized generation of culturally relevant pedagogical materials, (2) practical skill-building via immersive platforms for contextual intercultural practice, and (3) affective awareness employing biofeedback-informed reflection techniques to identify unconscious biases.

Structural equation modeling analysis of data collected from 356 educators revealed substantial direct effects of AI implementation on intercultural teaching capacity ( $\beta = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and mediated enhancements in student learning outcomes through improved instructional effectiveness (indirect  $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study proposes the INTERCULTURAL CONNECTOR framework (Integrated Network for Teaching Enhanced by Responsive Cultural Understanding Through AI Resources), presenting practical approaches for harmonizing AI-supported pedagogy with contemporary global competencies, ethical guidelines for culturally sensitive AI deployment, and adaptable solutions for international virtual collaboration training.

These outcomes reconceptualize teacher autonomy within technology-infused education, equipping educational institutions with empirically grounded methods for nurturing culturally proficient global educators.

\*Corresponding Author:

Mohd Nazir Bin Md Zabit

Email: [mohd.nazir@fpm.upsi.edu.my](mailto:mohd.nazir@fpm.upsi.edu.my)

Author:

Jing Xu (1983.09-), female, from Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, holds a Master's degree and currently serves as a Lecturer. Her research focuses on language teaching within the context of technology-mediated learning.