

Employment Difficulties and Countermeasures for Art Students in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: Employment is the principal source of income. The employment of graduates is associated with the satisfaction and sense of gain experienced by thousands of families. In recent years, the number of art students in colleges and universities has grown steadily. However, influenced by various factors, the employment situation of art graduates has become increasingly severe. In this paper, the employment situation and difficulties faced by art graduates are analyzed, and countermeasures for high-quality and full employment are put forward in view of the situation and employment problem faced by art graduates.

Keywords: Colleges and universities; Art graduates; Employment

Online publication: June 26, 2023

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly states that it is necessary to strengthen the policy of employment priority, improve the mechanism of promoting employment, promote high-quality and full employment, as well as make strategic arrangements for the path toward promoting high-quality and full employment. This report provides a fundamental basis for China to consolidate the foundation of Chinese-style modernization by promoting the realization of high-quality and full employment as well as continuously enrich the connotation of the Chinese-style modernization era, so as to guarantee the current and future employment of college and university graduates. The number of college and university graduates nationwide is expected to reach 11.58 million in 2023, and the number of art graduates is also increasing. Their job-seeking efforts and employment status have garnered widespread attention. Giving full play to the characteristics and strengths of art students in colleges and universities, establishing roots in the cultural fertile soil of newcomers of the era, integrating education with social practice, and combining artistic pursuits with the development requirements of the times are inevitable requirements to promote high-quality and full employment of art graduates.

2. Main factors affecting the employment of art graduates

2.1. Development level and development trend of the art industry

The development of the art industry is closely related to the state of economic development, the level of technological development, the management and operation model, and the soundness of the market mechanism. With the advancement of technology and the strengthening of the digital trend, the domestic art industry is developing rapidly in a more digital and global direction, and its demand and market value are increasing on a global scale. The development level of the art industry defines its capacity to absorb

college and university graduates through employment, more concisely, the higher the demand for human resource in the industry, the higher the employment opportunities and the greater the options are for art graduates.

According to international practice, for a country's gross national product (GDP) to be around 12,000 USD, it would have already met the conditions for development. Only when the GDP reaches more than 8,000 USD, the public will become more interested in art collections, and the development of the art market will have certain prerequisites. If China's GDP can exceed 10,000 USD, China's cultural industry will no doubt embark on a road to rapid development ^[1]. In 2022, China's per capita GDP reached 12,741 USD and remained above 12,000 USD for two consecutive years. Although the art industry is facing some risks and challenges as a result of the pandemic and the unstable global economic situation, it still has a strong momentum for development. Take the recovery of the performance market in the spring of 2023 as an example. According to the data of the ticketing platform Damai, the platform sold 47,000 performances in February and March this year, three times that of the same period in 2019, with a year-on-year growth of 127% and 87%, respectively. The prosperity of the art market will inevitably drive the development of the art industry and the demand for talents in this industry.

2.2. Employment market in the art industry and the supply-demand relationship

The gradual maturity of the art industry as a result of industrialization would heighten its own potential social value, create more job opportunities, and cultivate artistic talents. The maturity of the art industry not only reflects the degree of its industrialization, but also promotes the development of industrialization and the talent connection between art students in colleges and universities. At the same time, we also see that, on the one hand, with the transformation of colleges and universities from elite education to mass education, the number of people enrolled in colleges and universities has increased exponentially, thus producing more art talents for the society. On the other hand, as the uncertainty of economic development has taken precedence in recent years, both risks and challenges exist in the art industry. Many companies have made efforts to reduce personnel costs and recruitment scales; in addition, the job market is relatively saturated, with short-term demand surges being unlikely.

At the same time, the geographical and industry biases of art graduate employment are evident. Economically developed coastal economic belts and large and medium-sized cities are prosperous and have strong accumulation of art markets, large development space for students, and many opportunities for learning and improvement; there are few large and medium-sized cultural and art companies in economically underdeveloped areas. Due to the characteristics of art disciplines, the employment adaptability is average, and the employment path is relatively one-way, which affects the supply and demand of graduates to a certain extent. The oversupply in areas where artistic talents are concentrated and the undersupply in those where art talents are scarce may appear to varying degrees. This structural imbalance in the job market caused by gaps in regional development will persist for a long time. This phenomenon, especially in recent years, has become more prominent. According to incomplete statistics, more than 70% of art graduates prefer to be employed in more economically developed areas, thus saturating the job market and increasing the competition in these areas.

2.3. Employment concept and skills of art students

Art students in colleges and universities have relatively distinct personalities. They are open-minded, advocating freedom, and full of innovative spirit. However, in the job-hunting and employment process, issues such as backward employment concept, idle employment mentality, and immature employment psychology have become the key factors affecting their employment. In addition, some are confident but lack basic career planning and job market awareness of the art industry. The problems and blows

encountered at the beginning of job hunting are likely to cause psychological pressure, resulting in idle or negative job-hunting mentality. “Popular” majors are no longer popular, and the direction of talent training is relatively one-way. When graduates apply for jobs, the employment environment may be different from what is expected, which creates negative employment mentality, as evidenced by being slow and lazy.

In addition to education, teaching, and personnel training, practical education and professional skills have always been the focus in art education. Art students generally have good artistic expression and hands-on skills, but they are lacking in aspects of humanities and general knowledge. Compared with traditional liberal arts and science graduates, art graduates are at a disadvantage in terms of general skills and literacy for employment. There is a need to improve their overall quality in order to narrow the gap between them and the requirements set by employers.

3. Problems existing in the employment of art graduates

3.1. Mediocre campus recruitment activities by art industry employers

In recent years, due to the impact of the pandemic, the downward pressure on the economy has intensified, leaving a huge impact on various consumer service industries, including the art industry. The demand side has been suppressed, while the supply side has been sluggish. Most enterprises have made efforts to reduce their operational risks by reducing their investment scale, dismantling uneconomical business modules, and reducing personnel expenditures. Compared with other industries, the art industry has been severely affected due to its unique characteristics, with a dramatic decrease in the overall recruitment of art talents.

The employment of art talents has traditionally been reliant on employment experience and graduation design exhibition. During the pandemic, it was difficult for enterprises to gain access to schools; thus, the docking of recruitment information posed a challenge. In addition, design exhibitions, as an important link for employment, could not be carried out, and the recruitment information docking lacked intuitive experience. The narrow scope of market job supply also renders the employment situation of art graduates more critical.

3.2. Prominent structural contradiction between the supply and demand of art talents

In terms of the number of students, art majors in art colleges as well as general colleges and universities account for a relatively small proportion; in terms of job-seeking expectations, these graduates have strong demand for counterpart employment and higher salary; in terms of job-seeking channels and direction, the professional talent market is clearly reflected. The above situation has made it challenging to address and satisfy the job demands of art graduates. The job market has limited information, a high level of personalization, a low level of social awareness, and poor transmission of supply and demand information.

At the same time, the uneven regional distribution of the art industry (concentrated in large and medium-sized cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou), the difference in the dissemination and consumption of art products between urban and rural areas, and the unbalanced development of the internal sectors of the art industry (film, television, painting, *etc.*, have developed rapidly, but folk art is still at a disadvantage) reflect the structural imbalance of China’s art industry. In economically developed areas, the art market is more active, and thus more jobs are available. Moreover, most art graduates, out of consideration for personal development and salary, prefer to work in big cities, resulting in a large influx of talents into economically developed areas, while talent shortage is becoming more evident in economically backward areas, thus aggravating the disparity in employment ^[2].

3.3. Relatively high proportion of flexible employment and poor job stability

Job flexibility and unwillingness to be constrained by systems and rules and regulations are common perceptions among art graduates when seeking for employment opportunities. As a special group in the job

market, they often overlook the idea of job stability when choosing a job and rarely pay attention to legal compliance procedures, such as when signing labor contracts. Instead, they are more interested in the consistency of work and their majors as well as the rate of return on human capital formed by investing in their own learning and development over the years. At the same time, due to their lack of willingness to learn and poor general knowledge, they do not have much advantage for further education and policy-based employment in relatively stable channels, such as postgraduate entrance examination, public examination, compilation examination, and teaching qualification examination. These have led to a high rate of flexible employment and poor job stability among art graduates.

3.4. Insufficient publicity and guidance for art students to assume grassroots employment positions

In recent years, the state has been advocating college and university graduates to “go to the west,” “go to the grassroots,” and “go to the countryside” for employment, so as to contribute to areas and industries that need economic and social development the most. There are some jobs and development opportunities that are suitable for art graduates. A small number of art graduates have achieved exceptional growth after joining the grassroots. However, the publicity and educational guidance to encourage art students to venture into grassroots employment are still far from enough, especially the lack of breadth and depth of education on career planning and the failure of students to combine personal development with career development. It would be difficult to appreciate the advantages and characteristics of different employment paths from a higher level if the current development and future trends are not considered together. In fact, with the rapid development of science and technology and the information industry, the art industry has been able to overcome the limitations of geographical space, implement differential development for different cultural and economic regions, address the uneven cultural development, and make better use of internet media, television, film media, *etc.*, to realize the sharing of cultural and artistic resources as well as the mutual learning of artistic behaviors. Colleges and universities should strengthen their publicity and guidance, so that more art students can appreciate the new pattern and outlook of the development of the art industry.

4. Countermeasures for the problems existing in the employment of art graduates

4.1. Rectify concepts and establish a correct outlook on employment and career choice

Complying with the development needs of the new era, establishing a correct outlook on employment and career choice is a feasible way to solve the employment issue among art graduates. As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the main dilemma in our society has shifted to people’s ever-growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development^[3]. To some extent, the art industry plays a role in meeting people’s needs for a better life, improving people’s level of artistic aesthetics, enriching the connotation of cultural self-confidence, and building harmonious social relationships. It heightens people’s experience and satisfaction under the grand narrative background of the new era that reflects these two entities. The current society is undergoing unprecedented changes, and various industries are undergoing continuous changes, with new working methods emerging. Only by guiding students to change their employment concepts and expand their career choice can they better adapt to the development of the new era. Art students should have the courage to overcome the inherent employment barriers in the art industry, establish an open outlook on employment and career options, enhance career planning with innovative thinking and a broader vision, defying convention and disregarding the idea of what is superior and inferior, maintain a grounded mind, compare their personal needs with social needs objectively, and choose careers based on reality. As long as there is ambition, there will be career, and as long as there is ability, there will be opportunities. No profession will bury talents or stifle one’s creativity. The key lies in one’s attitude toward the profession^[2].

4.2. Develop market-oriented employment channels in the art industry and strengthen communication between universities and employers

In November 2022, the Ministry of Education issued the “Notice on Doing a Good Job in the Employment and Entrepreneurship of the 2023 National College Graduates” (hereinafter referred to as the “Notice”) and urged all colleges and universities to implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. The “2023 National College Graduate Employment and Entrepreneurship Promotion Action” focuses on promoting multi-channel employment and entrepreneurship for college and university graduates, and the “Notice” points out that more efforts should be made to develop market-oriented and socialized employment channels.

Art colleges and universities should effectively strengthen the development of the art industry and the employment market in relevant key areas, organize and carry out special campaigns to promote employment by “visiting enterprises and expanding jobs,” establish practice bases between schools and enterprises, bring in corporate human resource departments, and promote industry-university-research cooperation, joint training, and other employment education projects. School leaders should lead the team in charge, while functional departments, colleges, and universities should participate together. Using both online and offline methods, key recruiting units in various regions and industries of different natures that best fit the disciplines and majors of a particular school should be contacted. Art colleges and universities should also play a role in gathering art talents, take initiative to serve the local government, promote school-government cooperation, provide talent support for regional economic development, and set up practice bases for art students to enrich the market-oriented employment resources in different industries.

Art colleges and universities should also make full use of internet information means to build a multimedia information service platform for art talents and the form of media that is widely used by art students for interaction and information exchange. In particular, it is necessary to make good use of the convenience and flexibility of information transmission in this we-media era, master the language of we-media, consider the actual needs of art students in practice and employment, and help art students comprehend the development trends of different industries and the demand for art talents.

Schools should also make good use of new media technology and build information service platforms, such as employment service official websites, WeChat public accounts, Douyin accounts, *etc.*, to provide timely information on the arrangement of art talent recruitment activities, recruitment positions and requirements, employment and entrepreneurship guidance and policies, career planning guidance, *etc.*

4.3. Focus on innovation and entrepreneurship in art students and use entrepreneurship to drive employment

Art colleges and universities are working toward nurturing innovative and entrepreneurial talents that can adapt to this era wherein culture, art, and creative industries are vigorously developing. Art students are active thinkers, risk-takers, innovative, and have relatively more opportunities to engage in social practice. Art colleges and universities should integrate innovation and entrepreneurship education into employment and education practice. Moreover, establishing campus innovation and entrepreneurship incubation bases provide certain guarantees and services, such as registration, investment and financing, finance and taxation, law, manpower, and venues, creating “mass entrepreneurship” on campus. The soft environment of “Innovation by All” allows students with distinctive personalities and unique ideas to cultivate their own seeds of innovation and entrepreneurship in the soil of the Entrepreneurship Park and experience the hardships and gains of innovation and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, colleges and universities should encourage their students to participate in various innovation and entrepreneurship competitions organized by the country, provinces, cities, or schools, move toward double-creation education, and effectively improve students’ innovative spirit, entrepreneurial

awareness, and innovation and entrepreneurial skills ^[4]. Mentors with entrepreneurial experience and innovative skills can also be invited to guide students in their practice and thinking through simulated entrepreneurship competitions as well as help in establishing an innovation and entrepreneurship education and training system.

4.4. Strengthen career planning education and personnel training for art students

Career planning overlaps and integrates with pedagogy, human resource management, ideological and political education, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines. It is necessary to explore and direct the content and rules of individual career development activities to help art students establish professional values and a scientific outlook on life. Art colleges and universities should be aware of the high-employment ratio of art talents in the industry; objectively analyze the problems faced by art students, including cognition closure, conservative thinking, and unclear career planning; and continuously optimize employment guidance and services through various activities, such as career planning courses, personalized guidance and consulting services, internship projects, enterprise visits and exchanges, and sharing of workplace experiences, to improve the skills of art students in career planning.

The rapid development of economy and society has brought wider employment and development space for art graduates as well as put forward ever-changing requirements for the personnel training work in colleges and universities. According to statistics on Baidu Encyclopedia, 46% of graduates felt that what they learned in school could not be applied in their work, thus revealing a contradiction between personnel training and the needs of social and economic development. Therefore, colleges and universities must consider the needs of employers and the market and form suitable talent training models, professional settings, and teaching plans. They should also visit enterprises and work toward school-enterprise cooperations for in-depth exchanges and investigations, so as to truly grasp the actual needs of employers. The personnel training plan, curriculum setting, teaching practice, and other links should be integrated based on social needs ^[4].

4.5. Strengthen the cultivation of general education ability and enhance the employment adaptability of art graduates

An important part of the training goal of art talents is cultivating their general knowledge ability. This ability, as an important means to improving the employment competitiveness of art graduates, allows the effective integration of subject knowledge into overall education and teaching. As proposed in the “National Medium- and Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010–2020),” we should cultivate and form a large-scale, high-quality talent team, with optimized structure and reasonable layout; create comparative advantage through national talent competitions; and enter the world’s talent power ranking ^[5]. For art colleges and universities that predominantly focus on the cultivation of professional skills in education and teaching, general education will enhance the breadth and depth of knowledge of art students, broaden their horizons, and increase their humanistic and scientific literacy. Art students in colleges and universities should develop good logical reasoning skills, thinking skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, judgment skills, and other general skills, in addition to imagination and innovation skills, so as to ensure social adaptation and a sense of responsibility to the society in the future. By synchronizing professionalism with the development of general skills and literacy, these talents would be well-rounded and socially adept.

Moreover, general education is indispensable for students to improve their professional academic skills and become high-level compound talents in the future. With the rapid development of information technology and the wide application of the “Internet + Industry” model, the art industry requires cross-field and multi-disciplinary cooperations. A good general education can provide diverse perspectives and implementable space for art students.

5. Conclusion

In this age and time, art graduates are faced with employment difficulties and challenges. In order to address the employment problem, we must rectify the concepts of employment, give full play to the characteristics and strengths of art talents, broaden the market-oriented employment channels for art students, as well as develop more and better jobs in different industries and fields. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the cultivation of innovation awareness and skills among art students, promote the integration of general education with professional education, and advocate employment and entrepreneurship training to promote high-quality and full employment of art graduates.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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