

How Interest Translates into the Choice of Profession -- A Discussion Based on Self-efficacy Theory

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Abstract: In contemporary China, a significant number of university graduates pursue careers that diverge from their original fields of study, reflecting a broader trend of academic and occupational mismatch. This review examines the principal factors influencing such career decision-making processes, with particular attention to the role of self-efficacy, alongside considerations of gender, environmental context, and cultural background. Among these variables, self-efficacy emerges as a particularly influential determinant, shaping individuals' confidence in their ability to meet professional and academic challenges. Within the Chinese context, self-efficacy has been extensively applied in domains such as management performance prediction, adolescent physical training, and educational interventions aimed at fostering both academic achievement and personal development. Empirical evidence suggests that positive experiences enhance self-efficacy, whereas repeated setbacks tend to diminish it. Strategies such as the accumulation of successful performance outcomes, integration into supportive social networks, access to reliable mentoring systems, and the maintenance of physical and psychological well-being have all been identified as effective means of strengthening self-efficacy. A deeper understanding of these mechanisms offers valuable insights for both educational policy and career guidance practices, with the potential to support students in navigating the transition from academic study to professional life.

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Career Decision Making, Academic and Occupational Mismatch

1. Introduction

Nowadays, a phenomenon has attracted extraordinary attention regarding students' interests and their chosen majors. Sub-topics surrounding the relevance between chosen major and self interest has become one of the most frequently discussed issues of human resource management and related academic fields. In reviewing the existing literatures, it is worth noting that previous scholars have conducted extensive investigations into the impact imposed by this aforementioned issue on the employment problem in different societies. These studies have explored factors such as culture, gender, and the person-environment fit, shedding light on how high school students' interests influence their choices of college majors.

Recent studies have consistently found that a significant number of individuals choose majors that are not aligned with their personal interests. Few decisions influence a person's life as profoundly as the choice of a field of work or career. People typically spend more time working than engaging in almost any other activity, with the possible exception of sleep. Moreover, the selection of an occupation greatly impacts one's lifestyle, and work adjustment is closely related to both mental

health and physical well-being [1,2]. Researchers in vocational psychology have investigated career choice and work adjustment for decades, producing a number of theoretical models to explain these processes. With the increasing number of college graduates and shrinking job opportunities, job search-related stress has become a growing concern in China. Previous research has suggested that social support can alleviate stress from various sources, but its effectiveness depends on whether the recipient actually recognizes and perceives it [3]. Social media has made it easier to exchange social support information, yet it can also lead to problematic overuse and even addiction. This study seeks to investigate how job search stress contributes to social media addiction severity among graduating college students, employing a serial mediation model and testing the potential moderating effect of a sense of coherence. Based on a sample of 144 graduating students, our findings highlight a significant sequential pathway through which job search stress influences the need for social support and the perception of that support. Interestingly, this psychological need is strongly influenced by job search stress particularly when students exhibit low to moderate levels of sense of coherence [4].

The changing dynamics of the labor market have introduced substantial challenges for college students preparing to enter the workforce. In this context, enhancing career adaptability has become critical for facilitating their transition from education to employment. The primary objective of a recent study was to examine the relationship between career education skills and career adaptability among 273 Chinese undergraduate students. Furthermore, the research explored the mediating role of career decision-making self-efficacy in this relationship. Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive association between career education skills and career adaptability. The mediation model demonstrated that self-efficacy plays a crucial intermediary role in reinforcing the influence of educational training on adaptability [5]. These findings suggest that universities should strengthen career education initiatives, helping students establish clear professional goals and fostering a resilient, adaptive outlook for navigating their career journeys.

In respect with existing literatures, a theoretical framework relevant to these issues is the trait-and-factor approach, which emphasizes congruence between individual characteristics—such as interests, abilities, and personality—and job requirements in predicting job satisfaction and career choice [4][6]. Scholars applying this framework have hypothesized mechanisms by which interests, work values, and decision-making skills develop over time, influenced by instrumental, associative, and vicarious learning experiences [7]. Particularly, they argue that self-perceived abilities are often more predictive of career decision behavior than objective assessments, highlighting the importance of individual belief systems in shaping professional paths.

In addition, Chinese researchers have examined entrepreneurship-related concerns among law students, evaluating their psychological readiness for entrepreneurial activity. Through psychological analyses, they found that one's academic major does not significantly affect entrepreneurial psychology. However, students with different educational backgrounds show varying levels of entrepreneurial intention. Specifically, those with a master's degree exhibit the highest entrepreneurial drive, while doctoral students show the lowest. The study also found significant gender differences: male students demonstrated higher self-efficacy in entrepreneurial psychological capital compared to females, although gender differences in the four broader dimensions of entrepreneurial psychology were less pronounced [8].

It has been reported that a great portion of teenage population in top-tier Chinese cities are raised with deeply rooted traditional beliefs and are influenced by stereotypical thinking passed down from teachers and elders. They are often told that majoring in science or engineering ensures better future development and higher-paying jobs. Consequently, many students abandon their genuine interests to pursue majors perceived as more lucrative. According to Johnson and Muse [5], self-efficacy is shaped by personality traits, which themselves are influenced by sociocultural expectations. Applying Holland's personality-based career development theory [9], they demonstrated that in China, it is

commonly believed that boys are naturally better at science and engineering than girls. As a result, many female students refrain from choosing these fields, while male students dominate such majors and related career sectors. This gendered perception is further reinforced by employers, who often prefer male candidates for technical positions and offer them higher salaries than their female counterparts.

Entrepreneurial success is influenced by both internal dispositions and external support systems, though the outcomes are often uncertain, leading to cognitive or perceptual tension. A growing area of research in this domain is the concept of person-entrepreneurship (P-E) fit. A recent study examined the antecedents (entrepreneurial self-efficacy) and consequences (entrepreneurial intentions) of P-E fit, while also evaluating the moderating role of family support [10]. Self-efficacy is found as a significant predictor for perceptions of P-E fit, which in turn partially mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, family support emerged as a critical boundary condition, enhancing the positive effects of self-efficacy on both P-E fit and intention [10,11].

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified career decision-making difficulties for Chinese college students, with record-breaking graduation numbers coinciding with economic downturns and increased employment pressure. This environment has led to widespread employment anxiety and psychological obstacles to career decision-making. Using a purposive sampling approach, a recent qualitative study selected 20 undergraduates experiencing delayed employment and conducted semi-structured interviews grounded in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework. The results showed that four main factors—individual characteristics, parental influence, peer relationships, and the broader social environment—interact to shape these students' career decision-making struggles. Based on these findings, the researchers proposed a multi-variable, single-subject generation mechanism to explain the observed difficulties and applied the mind sponge theory to understand the psychological transformation processes of delayed employment students during the pandemic [12,13]. This integrated framework offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges and internal responses triggered by uncertain employment conditions.

2. China's incumbent employment problem

China's employment data from 2022 to 2024 show a gradual improvement trend, especially in 2023, the overall employment rate fell steadily, accumulating positive factors for stable employment in 2024. Due to the COVID-19 from 2020 to 2023, a lot of people lost their job because everyone stayed at home and didn't go out. So lot people couldn't find jobs, and then a lot of shops closed down. However, by 2024, the epidemic is basically over and the economy has recovered and lots of jobs are starting to need people again, so they start hiring. Some people start businesses too, so the employment rate increase. The gradual improvement shown in statistical result by the year of 2024 actually resulted from the inert yield China has seen by the end of Covid-19. The gradual improvement shown in statistical result by the year of 2024 actually resulted from the inert yield China has seen by the end of Covid-19. After consulting the data, I found that China's employment rate in 2022 to 2024 is very unsatisfactory. From 2020 to 2023, there was another epidemic, which led to a contraction in overall social demand and a decrease in employment opportunities. The epidemic will end in 2024, but the decline in employment opportunities has not improved because the real estate industry, which used to play a major role in stretching, has been greatly weakened. Some places will also implement policies to restrict it. For example, the policy of not speculating on housing has directly led to the accelerated shrinkage of the real estate industry. As one of the industries that has the greatest stretching effect on the Chinese economy, we have also been affected by the shrinkage of employment opportunities. But after China's accession to the WTO, employment opportunities also increased, which is unprecedented in the past 20 years of reached development.

However, people have found that many industries have a bottleneck period where surplus of manufactured goods cannot be easily digested due to shortage created with decrease in marginal demand. Naturally, these industries cannot recover previous investments in the operation process, leading to plummet in supply of employment opportunities. Due to China's accession to the World Trade Organization, the revenue yielded from net export has significantly increased. The net earnings from the import/export sector has propelled the continuous GDP growth since the start of this new epoch. Chinese government, with the earnings of great amount generated over the years, has been continuously pouring investment into infrastructure construction under the hope of promoting domestic demand.

However, the over-concentration of investment in real estate and infrastructure, driven by years of policy-induced expansion, has created a structural surplus — many of these facilities are oversupplied and no longer align with real market demand, leaving them underutilized and in some cases entirely vacant. The government's subsequent policy measures aimed at curbing speculative behavior in the housing market. By the year of 2019, the central government announced its policy in controlling the overheating housing market under the famous slogan: "housing is for living, not for speculation" initiative which has at latter stage been proved as further intensifying this effect. These policies, although designed to stabilize housing prices and prevent financial risks, have indirectly triggered a sharp contraction in real estate-related industries, which previously served as key engines for both economic expansion and employment absorption. As the housing market cooled, this cascading effect not only reduced demand for construction and property-related services but also dampened broader consumption and investment confidence, ultimately contributing to the stagnation and even decline of employment opportunities across multiple sectors. Therefore, despite the apparent statistical recovery of the post-pandemic labor market, structural challenges rooted in both policy adjustments and the economic transition away from real estate dependency continue to restrict the availability of stable employment in China.

3. The dilemma generated by oversupply

As is mentioned above, China's rapid economic expansion has generated oversupply from its large-scale industrial production across a wide range of sectors. While this development once created abundant employment opportunities, the excessive growth in production capacity — often driven by local government incentives and policy-driven industrial planning — has gradually exposed structural imbalances in the labor market. Oversupply of manufactured goods has outpaced actual demand both domestically and internationally, leading to reduced profits, business closures, and ultimately a decline in stable employment options for young graduates. This section explores how policy-guided industrial overproduction has contributed to the growing employment dilemma for China's younger generations, while highlighting the cyclical relationship between economic expansion, market saturation, and labor market contraction. China introduced its inaugural industrial policy for the automotive industry in 1994, prioritizing the rise of three large and three smaller manufacturers as national leaders in the sector [13]. In the 1980s, local administrations favored locally managed state-owned enterprises (SOEs), partly due to an underdeveloped taxation system. Without modern fiscal structures, local governments relied heavily on the profits and taxes generated by SOEs. Their ownership stake in these enterprises encouraged tight coordination between officials and managers to reroute funds into off-budget accounts, effectively bypassing revenue sharing with the central government [14]. Two key conditions underpinned this wave of local developmentalism [15]. On the demand side, the decades-long shortfall in consumer goods created an urgent need for production, virtually ensuring profitability for new ventures. On the supply side, strong ties between local officials and banking branches meant easier access to credit, often secured by implicit guarantees or direct pressure on financial institutions.

This environment spurred a surge in the creation of small enterprises across numerous consumer sectors, including bricks, household appliances, bicycles, garments, and more. Although consumer demand was vast, it was tempered by low household incomes and widespread overinvestment driven by local government ambitions. Markets soon became saturated, leading to an oversupply of unsold goods. In response, local authorities imposed protectionist barriers, restricting goods from outside their jurisdictions [16,17]. These actions shrank markets further and pushed many businesses into financial distress. The early 1990s brought institutional reforms that curbed local government enthusiasm for enterprise ownership. The introduction of Value-Added Tax (VAT) and independent tax agencies reduced opportunities for local governments to retain revenues through creative accounting [18]. Financial sector reforms in 1993 also reinforced regulatory oversight and constrained local interference in lending decisions. Consequently, many SOEs and township-village enterprises (TVEs) shifted from assets to liabilities in the eyes of local authorities [19,20]. Encouraged by a growing national acceptance of market reforms following Deng Xiaoping's policy speeches, regional leaders began quietly divesting small SOEs even before central approval of large-scale privatization in 1998. In some provinces, over 70% of small SOEs had already been sold off or dissolved before that year. By the early 2000s, most SOEs and TVEs had undergone restructuring or privatization [4]. As a result, local governments transitioned from enterprise proprietors to revenue collectors. This shift significantly altered their administrative behavior. Whereas they once supported local firms as quasi-parents, they now had to accommodate a wider range of economic actors to expand the tax base. This transition also gave rise to diverse regional growth models, including those seen in Sunan, Wenzhou, and the Pearl River Delta [6]. In parallel, the late 1990s witnessed a major influx of foreign businesses. These firms, agile and highly responsive to local policy climates, would frequently relocate to jurisdictions offering superior tax incentives or infrastructure. Local governments thus entered intense competition to attract and retain such investment.

4. Real estate, policy intervention, and the employment market

In January 2020, the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) began in Wuhan and quickly escalated nationwide. The timing coincided with the Spring Festival, a peak travel season marked by extensive interprovincial and intercity movement, which accelerated the virus's transmission from Wuhan to other economically vibrant regions. Areas with strong economic links to Wuhan, particularly the Yangtze River Delta, experienced the most severe initial impacts. These cities emerged as early epicenters of the pandemic. As a major public health emergency, COVID-19 severely disrupted the standard economic operations of society, altering the expectations of producers, consumers, and investors alike. This disruption extended to sectors such as real estate, where price trends were significantly influenced. Beyond its direct threat to human health, the pandemic posed considerable challenges to the long-term economic resilience of urban areas.

From a demand perspective, public safety measures—including stay-at-home advisories and travel restrictions—were implemented to curb the spread of the virus. These interventions had a substantial dampening effect on consumption and investment activity, particularly within the property market. As a result, real estate transactions plummeted during what is typically a high-activity period around the Spring Festival. However, by late 2023 and early 2024, with the pandemic largely contained, economic conditions began to stabilize. Property prices started to decline from their inflated levels, gradually returning to values observed prior to the outbreak.

The main factors affecting the trend of high housing prices are national policies, national economic conditions and market supply and demand. Real estate is a capital intensive industry, and the trend of housing prices is closely related to the economic trend. According to existing literatures, the decline in housing prices was due to the impact of the global economic crisis on the Chinese economy at that time [7]. With the economic downturn, housing prices are bound to enter a flat or declining channel.

Real estate is a capital intensive industry, and the trend of housing prices is closely related to the economic trend. In general, the central housing prices are higher than those in the suburbs, and the central business district prices are higher than those in the surrounding areas. In special circumstances, the policies of the national or local government also have a significant impact on housing prices. Government planning and investment, such as investment in new areas, CBDs, redevelopment, subways, etc., may drive up housing prices. A large proportion of people buy houses with educational resource advantages, partly for their children's education and partly for investment. Within a high-quality school district, housing prices are higher than those of ordinary school districts under the same conditions. Transportation also has a significant impact on housing prices, with the subway having a significant and phased effect on housing prices. At different stages of subway development, the prices of nearby subway houses have been on the rise. From the perspective of a district, the price of subway houses within the district is one floor higher than that of non subway houses. The layout of a house affects the comfort level of living. Good layouts have advantages such as good ventilation, natural lighting, dynamic and static zoning, and orderly and waste free living. Naturally, they are sought after, and the price of houses also skyrockets. The advantageous unit types in the same community will have relatively higher prices. Well decorated houses sell well, and for homebuyers in need of high-end decoration, exquisite decoration is also a major advantage. It can save costs and allow immediate entry into the house, even if the price is slightly higher, homebuyers will consider it. The level of taxes and fees affects the price of a house in terms of purchasing costs. According to the transaction habits of second-hand houses, transaction taxes and fees are generally borne by the buyer. Therefore, the level of housing taxes and fees determines the level of purchasing costs. Low taxes and fees result in lower costs, naturally leading to higher housing prices; On the contrary, with high taxes and high costs, housing prices will also be lowered.

Every new policy introduced by the government in the real estate sector will bring fluctuations to the entire industry, including purchase restrictions, loans, etc. Simply put, a very important factor affecting housing prices is central policies. There are also some policies that affected the changes in China's housing prices, such as Deepen the reform of the land system, optimize financial credit policies, adjust the lower limit of housing credit policies, and accelerate the construction of a new model for real estate development. By reforming the land system and building a unified construction land market between urban and rural areas, the aim is to solve the problem of dependence on land transfer under the previous binary system, optimize land resource allocation, reduce local government debt, narrow the income gap between urban and rural residents, and promote more reasonable allocation and use of land resources. By adjusting the minimum down payment ratio policy for personal housing loans and the interest rate policy for commercial personal housing loans, the burden and cost of down payments for residents can be reduced, and the ability and willingness to purchase houses can be enhanced. For example, the minimum down payment ratio for commercial personal housing loans for first homes will be adjusted to no less than 15%, and for commercial personal housing loans for second homes, it will be adjusted to no less than 25%. At the same time, the lower limit of interest rate policies for commercial personal housing loans for first and second homes at the national level will be cancelled to stimulate market demand. By adjusting the interest rate of personal housing provident fund loans, the cost of housing loans for residents can be reduced, and their ability to purchase houses can be improved. For example, starting from May 18, 2024, the personal housing provident fund loan interest rate will be lowered by 0.25 percentage points to alleviate the repayment pressure on residents. By accelerating the establishment of a housing system that combines renting and purchasing, reforming real estate financing methods and pre-sale systems for commercial housing, and improving the real estate tax system, the aim is to build a healthier and more stable real estate market. These measures aim to optimize the supply-demand relationship in the real estate market and promote its long-term healthy development.

5. Conclusion

There are several reasons why students' chosen majors do not align with their future career trajectories. They are culture environment, gender, self-efficacy. Among them, self-efficacy is the most influential factor. The following will explain the differences in self-efficacy between the United States and China. The application of self-efficacy in the United States is mainly reflected in the fields of education and physical education teaching. In the field of education, self-efficacy theory is used to enhance students' confidence and motivation in learning. By accumulating achievement events, entering good social experience groups, finding support systems, and regulating their physical and mental health, students can gradually improve their self-efficacy. This improvement not only affects students' choices of tasks, but also their level of effort and emotional experience. For example, students with high self-efficacy are more inclined to choose challenging tasks, while students with low self-efficacy are the opposite. The application of self-efficacy theory is equally important in physical education teaching. It can help students improve their sports skills and competitive level. By having confidence in their abilities, students can demonstrate higher levels of motivation and effort in training and competitions, thereby achieving better grades. The application of self-efficacy in China is mainly reflected in fields such as education, mental health, and vocational training. In the field of education, self-efficacy theory is widely applied in school education and vocational education. Research has shown that improving students' self-efficacy can effectively enhance their learning motivation and academic performance. For example, in nursing education, the application of self-efficacy theory helps nursing students better cope with professional challenges, enhance their professional confidence and skill level. In addition, in terms of mental health education for primary and secondary school students, enhancing self-efficacy can help strengthen their ability to resist stress and cope, thereby reducing the occurrence of psychological problems. The theory of self-efficacy is also widely applied in mental health and vocational training.

By enhancing individuals' self-efficacy, it can help them better cope with challenges and pressures in life, increase confidence and motivation. For example, by accumulating achievement events, entering excellent social groups, and finding support systems, individuals' self-efficacy can be effectively improved. In short, the application of self-efficacy theory in China not only enriches educational theory and mental health practice, but also provides important theoretical support and practical guidance for individual development and growth. Self-efficacy is related to public perception and the evaluation of others' opinions. Some scientists have also reflected on these research findings. They found that the research process has limitations, so it is not very rigorous. The most important point is the lack of actual data, so this still needs to be further investigated.

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