



Analysis of Motivations Causing Post-epidemic Postgraduate Entrance Examinations Fever in China

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Abstract. China has entered the “post-epidemic era”, with frequent epidemics altering the economy, society, education, and a variety of other spheres of life. These entwined fields had an impact on the evolution of education. Among them, postgraduate entrance examinations (PGEE) fever has emerged as the primary source of concern for a large number of college students and social groups. This paper mostly discusses the reasons for the rapid expansion of candidates for postgraduate entrance examinations from the macro, meso, and micro perspectives. Findings from the study show that this group is motivated by changes in national policies, the backgrounds of target colleges and their surrounding peers, and employment-related factors. COVID-19 has influenced the current situation, and this paper examines PGEE motivations among groups in order to better understand how modern education and society are linked. Furthermore, social workers can use the current situation to formulate a positive talent introduction management mechanism or come up with new ideas to alleviate the phenomenon of postgraduate entrance examination fever.

Keywords: post-epidemic era · postgraduate entrance examination fever · macro analysis · meso analysis · micro analysis · motivations

1 Introduction

In parallel with the advancement of China’s reform and opening-up policy and the establishment of a socialist market economy, postgraduate entrance examinations have always been popular and have seen an increase in popularity in recent years. Many academics are now paying more attention to the rise in popularity of postgraduate entrance exams, which have become increasingly popular in recent years. An increasing number of sociological studies have looked at data on the prevalence of postgraduate entrance examinations and compared the growth rate of postgraduate entrance examinations over the last few years in order to investigate the motivation for examinations from the perspectives of social reform and economic development. The epidemic and the subsequent re-creation of postgraduate entrance examinations have resulted in little research into why they were created, or why they have become more popular than they were before the

Table 1. The number comparison between candidates and matriculates of postgraduate [2].
Source: Cingta, 400 points is difficult to enter the re-examination! At least 3 million people fell in this year's postgraduate entrance examination, March 2, 2022. <https://www.cingta.com/detail/22054>.

Year	Candidates(million)	Matriculates(million)
2012	1.66	0.52
2013	1.76	0.54
2014	1.72	0.57
2015	1.65	0.49
2016	1.77	0.52
2017	2.01	0.81
2018	2.38	0.76
2019	2.90	0.81
2020	3.41	0.99
2021	3.77	1.05
2022	4.57	1.15

epidemic. We can obtain the most accurate results from this study, which is based on the most up-to-date information on the motivation of postgraduate entrance examinations from three different perspectives (macro, meso, and micro) [1].

To better understand the situation, recognize the purpose of postgraduate entrance exams, and understand candidates' thoughts, it is critical for this paper to analyze the motivations and reasons for postgraduate entrance exams as a college student. This will allow them to make future plans that are appropriate for their own circumstances and those of others. Analyzing the motivations and reasons for postgraduate entrance examinations can help college students clearly understand the situation of postgraduate entrance examinations, recognize the purpose of postgraduate entrance examinations, and understand themselves, so as to make future paths that suit their own conditions.

2 Three Perspectives on Motivation for PG Entrance Exams

The average enrollment of postgraduates (PG) has risen by 9.4% during the last four years. It's worth noting that the number has risen in the post-epidemic period. In 2021, 3.77 million people registered for postgraduate entrance exams, but only 1.05 million of them enrolled; in 2022, 4.57 million people registered for the exam, with the Chinese Ministry of Education estimating that 1.15 millions of them will have the opportunity to become masters (see Table 1).

The seriousness of the postgraduate entrance examination scenario is progressively worsening, with some people opting for a second or even third attempt. Even though the postgraduate entrance examination battlefield is getting increasingly "terrifying," young people continue to pursue this road with zeal and courage. As a result, it is vital to investigate the factors that influence this group's decision to pursue PG education.

2.1 Macro Analysis of the Motivations

From a macro perspective, national policy has a big influence on people's motivation for PG admission exams. Our country has always emphasized the importance of talents in universities, and the report of the Communist Party of China's 19th National Congress stated that it is critical to implement the country's rejuvenation strategy through science and education and to promote high-quality economic development. This policy aims to raise talent awareness and speed talent cultivation while maintaining competitiveness. Development is the top priority, according to General Secretary Xi Jinping, and talents are the primary resource, followed by innovation as the first driving force. As a result, advanced education, such as a master's or doctoral degree, is becoming increasingly popular.

The government scrapped the free PG tuition program in the autumn of 2014, and instead implemented a fee-charging approach for each student. The new guideline stipulates that master's degree tuition rates should not exceed 8000 Yuan, making PG education still more expensive than it was previously [3]. As a result, between 2014 and 2015, the number of people taking postgraduate entrance exams dropped dramatically. The rapid development of postgraduate enrollment from domestic first-class universities, on the other hand, piqued students' interest in higher education. From 177 in 2016 to 341 in 2020, the figure for PG has nearly doubled. At the same time, China was in the midst of its Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, which aimed to transition the country's economy from high-speed to high-quality, low growth, but this policy shift narrowed the employment gap. Furthermore, increased undergraduate recruitment will result in an increase in the number of graduates. In the post-pandemic era (2020–2022), the massive unemployed caused by COVID-19 will face stiff competition from an increasing number of graduates in the context of a narrowing employment gap [4]. Graduates with uncertain job prospects or who make the decision to study for a master's degree do so in order to strengthen specialization, improve education level, and guide practical ability. Furthermore, in light of the current situation of COVID-19, the expansion of PG enrollment is also oriented toward those fields that can follow national strategies and serve people's livelihoods, such as clinical medicine, public health, and artificial intelligence.

2.2 Meso Analysis of the Motivations

From a mesoscopic perspective, the reputation of a university and its geographic location have an impact on postgraduate entrance examination groups. In recent years, the China Education Online website has published a ratio of exam participants to admissions that shows this phenomenon. Figure 1 selects four regions (Shanghai, Jiangsu Province, Shandong Province, and Northeast China) and then selects one project 985 and one non-project 985 from each region and researches the rate of the same major "finance" from each region. For this year's competition, the colleges that were chosen include Shandong University and China's China University of Petroleum in Shandong Province, as well as Southeast University and the Nanjing Agricultural University in Jiangsu Province, as well as Northeastern University and Northeast Normal University in Northeast China. By comparing and analyzing the ratios of Project 985 and ordinary colleges in the same province, Fig. 1 shows that this group prefers Project 985 to non-project 985. When

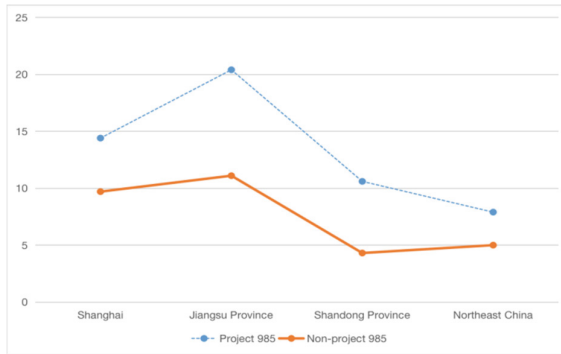


Fig. 1. The ratio between the numbers of exam participants and the numbers of admissions of financial major in 985 universities and non-985 universities in four provinces in 2020 [5]. Source: Comparison and query of postgraduate entrance examination reports over the years, China Education Online, https://www.eol.cn/e_ky/zt/common/blb/.

comparing Project 985 with other regions, it appears that people are more inclined to study physical education in economically developed areas like Shanghai, Jiangsu Province.

For starters, participants choose Project 985 for postgraduate education because it provides them with a wealth of information and educational resources. “Project 985” is oriented toward national core fields and urgent needs that can promote the country’s and industry’s development. These universities train postgraduates to be innovative thinkers with the ability to analyze problems thoroughly. As a result, postgraduates from “Project 985” may have an easier time finding high-quality jobs than those from traditional universities. China, which has been hit hard by the epidemic, is in desperate need of high-level applied talent. Job seekers with the label “Project 985” can clearly demonstrate their abilities. Furthermore, there are some students whose undergraduate degree is not particularly strong, but they strive to be a “Project 985” postgraduate. An excellent PG degree can be a powerful tool for breaking down university discrimination when people apply for jobs [6] and can help them get a good job and a good social life.

Second, the city where the majority of participants choose to attend PG education is also the city where they intend to stay and work after graduation. It is very convenient for them to use the local resources provided by their universities and classmates. Furthermore, because students are relatively new participants in the labor market with no prior work experience, some colleges in major cities may provide a link between school-based training and on-the-job programs in large corporations. As a result, postgraduates who took part in this program were able to say whether or not the knowledge they learned in their first job was relevant. This helps them realize their own weaknesses and position their own abilities, and then gives them a skill-matching signal to change their career plans. As a result of the epidemic, many businesses have had to reduce recruitment or layoffs, and competition for jobs is becoming increasingly intense. There will be more job opportunities and better job prospects for students who pursue a PG education in major cities. Furthermore, students with higher education are more likely to become permanent urban residents, as is the case with the settlement of external talents in Shanghai

and Shenzhen [7]. The current COVID-19 wave brings both crises and opportunities. China is paying more attention to promoting greening projects and bio-pharmacy, implying that the stock market in these fields will have a promising future. Students studying in cities have a better chance of getting first-hand information, which can help them understand the changes and opportunities in these industries. Finally, they will be able to make precise investments and adjust their career plans on time.

2.3 Motivations from Micro Analysis

From a micro perspective, postgraduate entrance examination groups can be motivated by their immediate surroundings and the possibility of changing majors. According to some studies, fewer than half of the PG group sit for postgraduate entrance exams for master's degrees due to their lack of enthusiasm for academic study. However, a significant number of students choose to pursue a PG degree in order to avoid employment pressures caused by a lack of professional skills and an inability to find a suitable job. Numerous college students frequently make choices based on the prospect of future development, benefits, and losses. If they are currently experiencing employment difficulties, they may delay or evade the negative situation by choosing another path (PG education). At the same time, the "herd effect" is a hidden factor that encourages members of the group to sit for postgraduate entrance examinations. This means that some students are more susceptible to being influenced by the information and people in their immediate environment. For example, some students will create the illusion that a roommate or classmate is preparing for a postgraduate entrance examination, and then they will be encouraged to take the exam as well by their roommates' diligence. If students share the majority of people's beliefs, it strengthens their resolve to act. Some of them are also very interested in low-probability events, so they join the postgraduate group with the goal of giving it a try.

On the one hand, undergraduate students are disinterested in their majors. They are unconcerned with the learning content and knowledge system of their major and may also be concerned about the future career opportunities associated with this major. In general, students should have a specific target major in mind if they wish to change their major during the postgraduate entrance examination. This is referred to as "Kua Kao". On the other hand, employment status has historically been a critical criterion for students when deciding on a major, and it is also one of the primary reasons for students having "Kua Kao" on postgraduate entrance examinations [8]. As China's higher education system progresses from popularization to universalization, the pressure on college graduates to find work has grown year after year. Many students, in this competitive environment, focus on their future employment prospects, hoping to be admitted to postgraduate programs with a better employment outlook. Accounting, finance, and computer science are frequently more appealing to students transferring majors, whereas, some majors with more difficult employment, lower average salaries, or difficult working conditions, such as culture, history, philosophy, agriculture, forestry, and mining, which are frequently unpopular. Indeed, some students are entirely employment-oriented [9] when changing majors, which means they view professional value solely in terms of employment prospects.

3 Conclusions

By evaluating from the macro, micro, and meso perspectives, the reasons why so many people opt to take postgraduate admission test have been discovered. For starters, fluctuations in applicant numbers were caused by national policies such as increasing the number of postgraduate students and charging fees for postgraduate education. Second, many candidates choose to pursue their master's degrees at colleges because their target universities have a good reputation and are located in a convenient location. Furthermore, it is possible for students to change majors in order to better prepare themselves for the future, particularly in the "post-epidemic era." Finally, individuals' immediate surroundings (such as roommates) can influence them, and they are more likely to adopt their habits as a result.

Authors' Contributions

This paper is independently completed by Junye Cai.

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