



Analysis of Socialization Predicaments and Ideological and Political Intervention Paths for University Students in the New Era

Based on Role Theory

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Abstract. The socialization of college students is a qualitative leap from "biological beings" to "social beings", and it is also the core aim of higher education to cultivate virtue and nurture talent. Faced with the severe situation where the number of college graduates in 2026 is about to reach a new historical high, as well as the increasingly common phenomena of "slow employment" and "delayed employment", college students exhibit deep-seated dilemmas in the process of socialization, such as idealized role cognition, fragmented role experience, and normalized role conflict. This paper, from the perspective of college counselors, uses social role theory and social learning theory to analyze the structural drivers leading to maladjusted socialization. The study proposes that college ideological and political education should transcend the traditional knowledge transmission paradigm and construct a four-dimensional collaborative system of "norm internalization mechanism under value guidance, role rehearsal mechanism driven by practice, interpersonal empowerment mechanism under curriculum integration, and cultural immersion mechanism under peer resonance." It aims to alleviate students' role anxiety, enhance their social adaptability and role transformation effectiveness through systematic ideological and political intervention, and provide theoretical support and practical direction for the cultivation of high-quality talents in the new era.

Keywords: Socialization of College Students, Role theory, Ideological and Political Education, Counselor Work.

1 Introduction—Socialization as an Ontological Proposition for Youth Development

Socialization is the process by which individuals, in a specific socio-cultural environment, learn and internalize the knowledge systems, skill sets, and values necessary for survival and development, thereby adapting to social structures, acquiring social identities, and ultimately making subjective contributions [1]. For college students, this stage is a critical "window period" [2] during which their worldview, outlook on life,

and values mature from turbulence. Its essence is a profound role transformation—that is, through systematic learning and practice, they acquire adult role behaviors that meet social expectations, completing a smooth transition from a single-dimensional "educatee" to multi-dimensional social roles such as "professional" and "citizen."

In "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx put forward the famous proposition: "The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations." This assertion provides the highest level of philosophical guidance for our examination of college students' socialization. From a Marxist perspective, the growth of college students is by no means a closed self-improvement, but a dialectical process in which a "natural person" actively intervenes and reconstructs the ensemble of social relations through objective activities. In this process, there is a logic of "two-way objectification": on the one hand, specific social material living conditions determine the direction and boundaries of college students' socialization, that is, the subjectification of social objects; on the other hand, college students confirm their own strength through practical activities inside and outside the campus, externalizing individual will into social behavior, that is, subject objectification.

Therefore, discussing the socialization dilemmas of college students in the new era and their solutions is not only related to students' individual career development and psychological health but also to whether Marx's "free and comprehensive development" can truly be realized. It is a contemporary issue that ideological and political education in universities must address.

2 Socialization "Squeeze Effect" under the Background of Stock Competition

Currently, as China's higher education system deepens from popularization to universalization, the scale of graduates remains high, and college students' socialization faces unprecedented external environmental pressure. According to statistical predictions, the number of national college graduates in 2026 will exceed 15.93 million, an increase of about 30% compared to 2025, reaching a historical peak. The direct consequence of this scale effect is the intensified "involution" of the job market, which in turn has produced a significant "squeeze effect" of socialization, meaning that the "tolerance rate" of the social system for individual role adaptation has significantly decreased. College students may face the dilemma of "graduation means unemployment" or "resignation upon entry" if they are not careful.

2.1 Examination from the Perspective of External Environment: Structural Tension Accompanying the Popularization of Higher Education

Currently, as China's higher education system deepens from the popularization stage to the universalization stage, the structure of talent supply has undergone profound changes, and the number of graduates continues to run at a high level, leading to unprecedented external environmental pressure on college students' socialization. According to relevant statistical predictions, the number of national college graduates in 2026

will exceed 15.93 million, an increase of about 30% compared to 2025. This will not only set a historical peak but also mark the full entry of the job market into an era of "stock competition." This huge scale effect has triggered a chain reaction in the labor market, and its direct consequence is the excessive "involution" of employment competition. This involution is not a benign survival of the fittest but a significant "squeeze effect" of socialization, meaning that the "tolerance rate" of the social system for individual role adaptation has significantly decreased. The strong demand from employers for "plug-and-play" talent is in sharp contrast to the inexperience of college students entering the workplace. In this context, college students may fall into the marginalization dilemma of "graduation means unemployment" if they are not careful, or face the turbulent situation of "resignation upon entry" if they cannot quickly adapt to high-intensity workplace rules. The stability of the socialization process is broken, and the risk significantly increases.

2.2 Analysis from the Perspective of Individual Psychology: "Defensive Retreat" and Irrational Delay of Role Adaptation

Under the catalysis of external high pressure, "slow employment" and "delayed employment" have emerged as typical manifestations of obstructed socialization among college students in the new era. It must be pointed out that this phenomenon has gone beyond the traditional categories of "laziness" or "freeloading" and evolved into a collective, subconscious "defensive social psychology." A large number of graduates do not rush to establish a professional identity after leaving school but choose to prepare for postgraduate entrance exams for a second attempt, take civil service exams, take a gap year, or simply stay at home and observe, forming a special state of existence suspended between school and society. From a deep perspective of socialization and role theory, "slow employment" is essentially an irrational prolongation of the individual's role adaptation delay. On the one hand, this is a strategic choice based on risk aversion. Faced with fierce social competition and an uncertain future, students try to build a psychological "safe harbor" by extending the duration of the relatively protected, low-responsibility "student" role to avoid the identity anxiety and frustration they may encounter after entering society. On the other hand, this exposes a structural misalignment between talent cultivation and social demand. Due to a lack of sufficient professional competence and mature social adaptability, students have to exchange the "slowness" of time for space for growth. However, this strategy has significant hidden dangers: excessive "slow employment" often leads to individuals gradually deviating from the mainstream "social clock," resulting in the degradation of social functions and alienation of interpersonal relationships, ultimately forming an "atomized" state of existence [3]. This long-term disconnection from social interaction not only fails to alleviate anxiety but also increases the difficulty of re-embedding into the social structure later, forming a vicious cycle.

2.3 Shift in Intervention Perspective: Paradigm Reconstruction and Responsibility Return of Counselor Work

Faced with the above-mentioned dilemmas, existing research perspectives urgently need to be transformed. Currently, although the focus of academic research has shifted from macro-policy discussions to micro-analyses of specific influencing factors [4], there are still obvious blind spots: research that starts from the overall perspective of university counselor work, targets socialization dilemmas, uses role theory as an entry point for attribution analysis, and constructs systematic intervention mechanisms is still relatively rare. Existing employment guidance often remains at the shallow level of information release and lacks intervention in students' deep-seated psychological motivations. Therefore, as the front-line force of ideological and political education in universities and the "significant others" in students' growth, counselors must face this structural contradiction squarely. We cannot limit our work to the transactional level of "pushing for employment," but should take the enhancement of students' "socialization ability" and "role adaptability" as the core grasp of educational work. Through systematic ideological and political intervention, we should help students reshape their role perception and rebuild bridges connecting them to society.

3 *Multidimensional Dysfunction of College Student Socialization from the Perspective of Role Theory*

The socialization dilemma of college students and the spread of the "slow employment" phenomenon are not accidental, but the result of the interaction between individual psychology and the social environment. Based on "Role Theory" in sociology, especially G.H. Mead's Role-taking theory and R.K. Merton's Role Set theory, this paper argues that the root lies in the functional maladjustment of individuals in the three dimensions of role cognition [5], role experience [6], and role adaptation [7,8].

3.1 Vague Role Cognition: Mismatch Between Idealized Expectations and Realistic Norms

Role cognition is an individual's understanding of the behavioral norms, rights, and obligations of the role they assume. The perception of many college students regarding their future professional roles remains stuck at the "labeled" and "idealized" levels for a long time, lacking a deep understanding of the responsibilities, pressures, and complexities behind the roles. During their time at school, they are accustomed to a single evaluation system centered on "GPA." This linear evaluation logic makes them mistakenly regard the workplace as a "linear extension of learning." This cognitive bias leads to significant cognitive dissonance when they first enter the workplace and encounter trivial daily work or complex interpersonal relationships [9]. To defend against the pain brought by this cognitive dissonance, some students subconsciously choose to refuse to acknowledge new role norms or even retreat back to the familiar family environment, which is the direct incentive for "slow employment" at the cognitive level.

3.2 Lack of role Experience: Practical Barriers Leading to Delayed Development of "Role-Taking" Ability

Mead believed that the core of socialization lies in role-taking, which is imagining how others would react to one's own behavior [10–12]. The acquisition of this ability is inseparable from authentic social interaction and situational immersion. However, the practical teaching links in some current universities are still weak; social practice activities either become a mere formality or lack systematic guidance [13], making it difficult for students to obtain an immersive role experience. A difficult-to-bridge gap has formed between textbook knowledge and social reality. Students cannot effectively rehearse and learn the roles of others in real situations, meaning their role-taking ability development is limited. This leads to the failure of anticipatory socialization. This learned helplessness further strengthens their fear of entering society, making "delayed employment" a helpless choice to escape their lack of ability.

3.3 Intensified role Conflict: Psychological Defense and Behavioral Withdrawal Under the Tearing of Multiple Expectations

During the threshold period of transitioning from campus to society, college students are in a state of "marginal people" for a long time, facing multiple and often contradictory role expectations from schools, families, employers, and themselves. This intense role conflict is the deep-seated root cause of psychological anxiety and behavioral withdrawal. First is the conflict of cultural logic. Educational work in schools emphasizes humanistic care and process orientation; some counselors even develop "nanny-style" management in implementation, leading to students' emotional dependence. However, workplace operations follow a "performance logic" oriented toward efficiency and results, emphasizing execution, compromise, and result orientation. When students are suddenly thrown from a warm campus into an extremely quantified workplace, two completely different value logics collide violently within the individual. Second is the conflict of expectation values. The mismatch between family and social expectations also exacerbates this conflict. Out of a desire to protect their children, many parents excessively instill a career choice view that jobs are hard to find, people get laid off when they get old, and stability within the system is paramount. This single evaluation standard stands in sharp contrast to the "diverse development" and "innovation and entrepreneurship" advocated by society. Students are caught in the middle, neither wanting to disappoint their family's expectations nor fearing the fierce competition in the job market.

When individuals cannot effectively reconcile these conflicting norms and expectations, a sense of anxiety arises. To alleviate the psychological tension brought by role conflict, many students subconsciously adopt a "defensive withdrawal" strategy—that is, through "slow employment," they temporarily freeze the process of social role transition and shield themselves from intense role conflicts. This behavior is essentially not simple laziness, but a stress response to seek psychological balance under multiple high pressures.

4 Intervention Paths for College Student Socialization from the Perspective of Ideological and Political Education

In response to the above dilemmas, counselors should play a leading role in ideological and political education, break traditional work boundaries, and build a multi-dimensional, all-round, and integrated collaborative path for socialization education.

4.1 Guided by Value Leadership, Promote the Deep Internalization of Social Norms and Professional Ethics

The fundamental goal of ideological and political education is to guide students to establish correct values, which is highly consistent with the "norm internalization" required by socialization in terms of logic. To fundamentally resolve the cognitive biases behind "slow employment," counselors need to collaborate with ideological and political course teachers to extend ideological and political education to the real social field, achieving a transformation from abstract preaching to concrete guidance [14]. In educational practice, it is not only necessary to teach the macro spirit of the rule of law but also to guide students to deeply understand legal norms such as the "Labor Contract Law" from the perspective of "social contract," transforming objective legal provisions into "role obligations" that individuals can perceive, so that students realize that participating in the social division of labor and abiding by professional norms are not only means of livelihood but also necessary paths for individuals to realize social value and confirm their subjective strength. In addition, ideological and political educators need to work together to build a cross-departmental collaborative education community, breaking down administrative barriers between student affairs, academic affairs, the Youth League Committee, and various administrative agencies. Through theme class meetings, current affairs and policy courses, and other channels, they should help students complete the recognition and acceptance of mainstream social values at a deep ideological level, thereby laying a solid value foundation for a smooth role transition at the psychological level.

4.2 Centered on Role Rehearsal, Build a Systematic "Full-Simulation" Practice Platform

The core function of social practice is to help college students complete role socialization and is a key link connecting campus and society [2]. In response to the current lack of students' role experience, institutions of higher learning should elevate social practice from a marginal "elective" to a core "required course" and build a systematic role rehearsal field. Counselors should guide students to closely integrate their professional knowledge with social needs, and use "second classroom" activities to carry out highly simulated workplace activities, such as campus mock job fairs, entrepreneurial project roadshows, and workplace situational dramas. This "immersive" rehearsal can guide students to actively adjust their expectations under simulated competitive pressure, and proactively expose and resolve potential role conflicts. More importantly, students

should be encouraged to conduct short-term career "trial and error" during winter and summer vacations, accumulating direct experience in handling unstructured problems through real job experiences, and eliminating fear of the unknown. At the same time, in employment guidance services, practical modules such as "five insurances and one housing fund" and "individual income tax declaration" should be systematically embedded, playing a "scaffolding" teaching function to fill the knowledge blind spots of students in the early stages of their transition from campus to workplace, and providing solid cognitive scaffolding for their smooth social landing.

4.3 Aiming at Interpersonal Empowerment, Deepen the Accumulation of Social Capital through Course and Activity Collaboration

Modern society is highly dependent on interpersonal collaboration, and communication and collaboration skills are one of the core literacies of socialization [15]. In view of some students' tendencies towards "social phobia" and interpersonal alienation, the education system in universities should consciously strengthen the cultivation of students' social interaction abilities. Counselors can rely on "one-stop" student communities to transform fragmented social activities into structured ability training, such as regularly holding "workplace afternoon teas" or "corporate mentor exchange meetings," providing students with a low-pressure social experimental field. In curriculum design and youth league activities, the concept of project-based learning (PBL) should be vigorously introduced. By setting complex tasks across majors and grades, students are forcibly guided to acquire the abilities of listening, compromise, persuasion, and empathy in teamwork, overcoming egocentrism. In addition, labor education is also an important carrier of interpersonal empowerment. By organizing collective labor, students can experience the necessity of division of labor and cooperation in their sweat, understand that the underlying logic of social operation is mutual assistance and exchange, thereby repairing the real interpersonal relationships torn apart by the atomized survival of the network, and making full psychological and skill preparations for entering the complex workplace interpersonal network.

4.4 Catalyzed by Peer Influence, Innovate Education Models Based on Social Learning Theory

Psychologist Bandura's social learning theory points out that observational learning is an important way of acquiring behavior, and the influence of peer groups is often more pervasive. For the confusion and anxiety generally existing in the "slow employment" group, simple preaching is often ineffective, while the demonstration of peer role models can produce a significant "vicarious reinforcement" effect [16]. Counselors should be good at discovering and establishing diverse student models, not limited to successful candidates for postgraduate entrance examinations or civil servants, but also widely publicizing outstanding representatives in grassroots employment, small and medium-sized enterprises, and independent entrepreneurship. Through sharing sessions and reports on deeds, peer-to-peer instruction and personal examples can transform abstract social norms into specific, tangible behavioral demonstrations, breaking the shackles

of a single path to success and alleviating students' peer pressure. At the same time, drawing on social support theory, vocational development communities should be encouraged to be established longitudinally, guiding outstanding senior alumni to pair up with current students, forming a close online and offline social support network. This decentralized peer-to-peer assistance mechanism can create a cultural atmosphere of "seeing the wise and emulating them," allowing students to correct behavioral deviations subtly and complete the transformation of socialization in a warm collective support.

5 Conclusion

The socialization dilemma of contemporary college students reflects a structural "squeeze effect" within the universalization of higher education, rather than mere psychological friction. By integrating Marxist social theory with sociological Role Theory, this paper proposes a systematic empowerment framework to bridge the gap between academic identity and professional reality (see Fig. 1). This model moves beyond fragmented assistance to create a cohesive intervention loop. It coordinates value guidance, role rehearsal, and interpersonal empowerment to transform students from passive job-seekers into proactive social subjects, effectively mitigating the "slow employment" crisis.

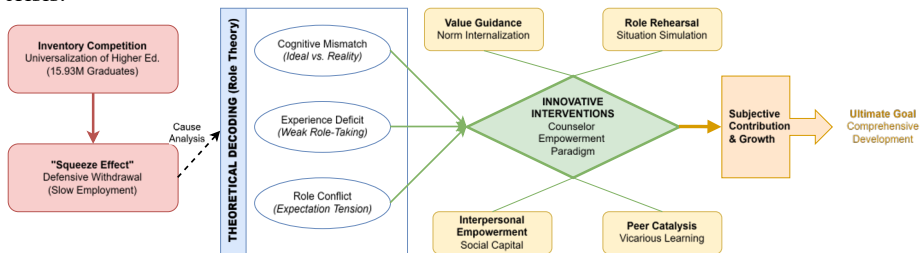


Fig. 1. The Empowerment and Transformation Model of College Student Socialization

This transformation requires university counselors to evolve from transactional administrators into "Socialization Architects." By implementing the proposed integrated paths, higher education can foster a resilient labor force capable of navigating the complexities of the new era. Ultimately, the successful socialization of college students serves not only individual career longevity but also the broader goal of free and comprehensive human development, ensuring a stable transition from campus to the social collective.

Disclosure of Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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