

Exploring the Causes of "Civil Servant Craze"

-A Case Study of Zhanjiang

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Abstract: The number of applicants for civil service posts has increased year by year, and the phenomenon of "Civil Servant Craze" has heated up again. Some scholars have made a quantitative analysis of the causes and effects of this phenomenon from the perspective of sociology and economics, but there are still few literatures using case studies. Therefore, this study will take Zhanjiang as an example to conduct case analysis, collect the employment information of civil servants in Zhanjiang in recent years, and understand the current academic background of the employed civil servants in the city and its changes. The "Civil Servant Craze" may be related to traditional concepts, civil servants' income, and its job stability. In addition, most of the people employed in Zhanjiang are graduates of non-key undergraduate colleges, which may be related to the city preference of high-level (Overseas, Project 985, Project 211, Key undergraduate) universities students for employment and the different employment pressures of graduates of different levels during the epidemic.

Keywords: "Civil Servant Craze", Zhanjiang, academic background

1. Introduction

For a long time, the phenomenon of "Civil Servant Craze" has attracted much attention. Civil servants, with some advantages such as "within the system", "good welfare", "stable work", and "iron rice bowl", have attracted many college students to apply for the examination after graduation. For college students, the common examination for admissions to the civil service can be divided into three categories, national examination, provincial examination and selective examination. The national examination belongs to the central examination sequence, which is recruited by the central authorities or institutions directly under the state controlling, the provincial examination and selection examination belong to the local examination sequence and are recruited by units directly under provincial and municipal administrations. In 2020, a total of 24,000 national civil servants were recruited, and in 2021, 25,000 national civil servants were recruited, that is, the number of candidates has not changed much [1]. However, in the past three or four years, the number of applicants for examination for admissions to the civil service has shown a rapid upward trend. Taking the national examination as an example, the number of applicants in 2019 was 1,271,978, but this year, the number of applicants rose to 2,023,641, an increase of 59% (Figure 1). According to the data, the "Civil Servant Craze" continues, and more and more college students have taken civil servants as one of their employment preferences.

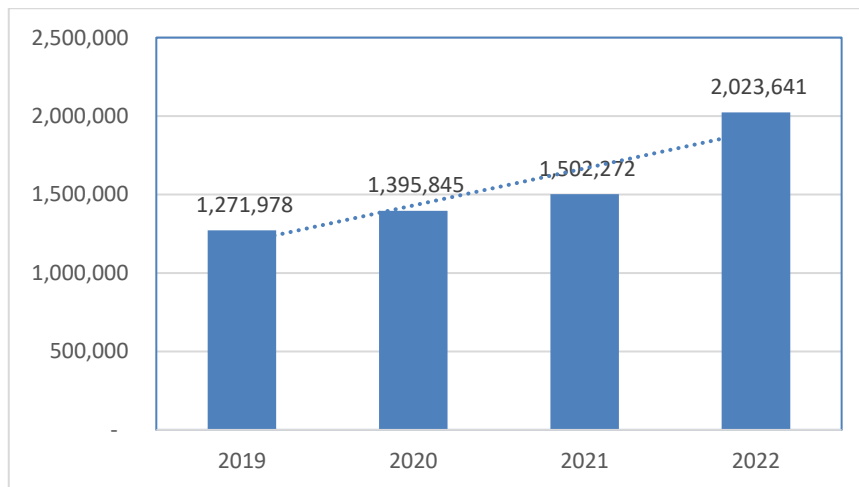


Figure 1: Number of applicants for the national examination for admissions to the civil service from 2019 to 2022 [2-5].

Analyzing the reasons behind and understanding this phenomenon in depth will help optimize the employment allocation of the society. This paper will analyze why taking the examination for admissions to the civil service is a job choice for many young people or universities' students after graduation. In addition, this paper takes the "Civil Servant Craze" in Zhanjiang as a case study and uses admission data to analyze the proportion of different types of colleges or universities. The types of colleges or universities are divided into Junior college, Non-key undergraduate, Key undergraduate, Project 211, Project 985 and Overseas, so as to further understand the "Civil Servant Craze".

In the previous literature, some scholars used qualitative analysis methods to analyze the "civil servant craze" from the perspective of economics or sociology, but there are still few literatures using case studies. This paper will use the method of case study and use data to assist analysis.

2. Reasons

2.1. Influenced by Traditional Ideas

Since the ancient dynasties, China has had the traditional idea of obtaining official status, which is the most effective way for poor people to change their destiny. Such a idea has a profound impact on the Chinese. Many parents hope their sons and daughters can become civil servants. Due to the unequal distribution of welfare in real life, civil servants still have certain privileges. Thus, under the thought of utilitarianism, parents want their sons and daughters apply for the examination [6]. In addition to their parents, a lot of young people still adhere to this traditional idea. They regard the examination as a way to improve their status, enjoying the highest honor [7].

2.2. Civil Servants Have Considerable Income

From the perspective of income level, civil servants are high-yield occupations. Civil servants not only have legal income such as wages and subsidies, but also have certain hidden income, which is more attractive than most jobs in society.

In terms of legal income, the wage of civil servants has been increasing continuously, and it has basically exceeded the average of the society. Civil servants also enjoy housing benefits, they not only have housing subsidies, but are also eligible to live in some privileged rooms, such as price-limited rooms [8]. In addition, civil servants have a series of expected benefits such as medical

insurance, social security, pension and so on. When the civil servants' cash payment for general outpatient clinics has accumulated to 1,000 yuan, the medical subsidy is 80%, while some urban workers need to accumulate up to 2,000 yuan, the subsidy ratio is only 50%, and the total subsidy cannot exceed 20,000 yuan within a year. For pensions, the standard of civil servants is higher than that of employees of enterprises, and the general gap is between 3 and 5 times [9].

More importantly, civil servants have certain hidden income. They can use their power to carry out a certain "rent-seeking behavior", and through economic intervention, benefit individuals and some private companies or enterprises, so as to complete the transaction of power and money. This kind of power-money transaction can often bring huge benefits to civil servants, even far greater than the normal and legal income [8].

On the other hand, the total cost of civil servants before their entry, including written examination, interview registration fees and training fees, is less than 10000 yuan, and the time cost is three months. Many units have their own restaurants, and the price of food is far lower than the normal level of restaurants outside, even a meal only costs a few yuan [8].

It can be seen that the benefits of civil servants are far greater than their costs, and more importantly, their income is higher than that of many enterprise employees. Therefore, civil servants are a good choice for colleges and universities' students after graduation.

2.3. Affected by Employment Stability

During the epidemic period, China introduced a series of prevention and control measures for the health of the people, such as home quarantine, business closure, etc. These measures effectively prevented the spread of the virus. But almost all industries have been affected due to the strict methods, especially the catering industry and entertainment industry. In 2020, the number of college and university graduates in China reached more than 8.7 million, and many companies reduce the number of recruitment due to the epidemic, resulting in increased employment pressure on graduates. The number of unemployed people caused by the epidemic in 2020 was at least 20 million [10]. According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics (Figure 2), from 2019 to 2020, the number of urban unemployed people increased from 9.45 million to 11.6 million, and the unemployment rate increased from 3.6% to 4.2%. Although the number of urban unemployed people had decreased in 2021, it still was 10% higher than that in 2019 [11]. There are some differences between employment stability within and outside the system.

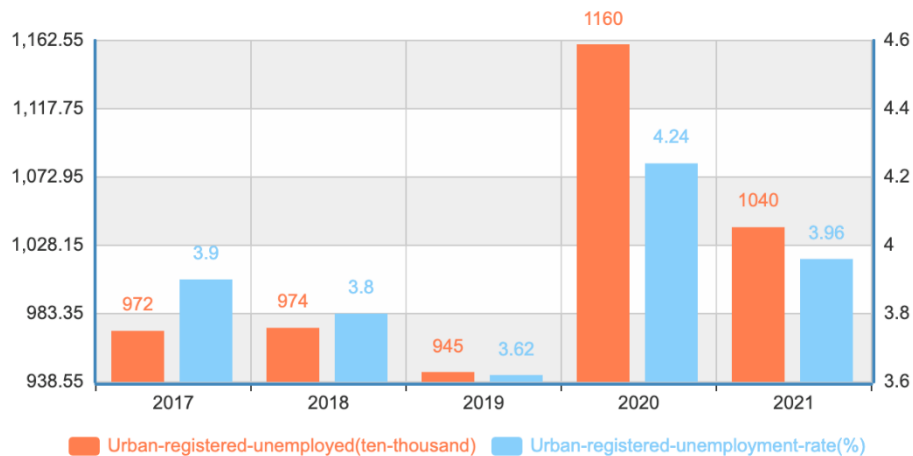


Figure 2: Urban registered unemployed persons and unemployment rate from 2017 to 2021 [11].

2.3.1. Working Within the System

The employment stability within the system is relatively high. According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (Figure 3), during the epidemic period, compared with the over-all increase in the unemployed, the employment of state-owned units not only did not decrease but instead increased, from 54.73 million in 2019 to 2020. 55.63 million people in the year.

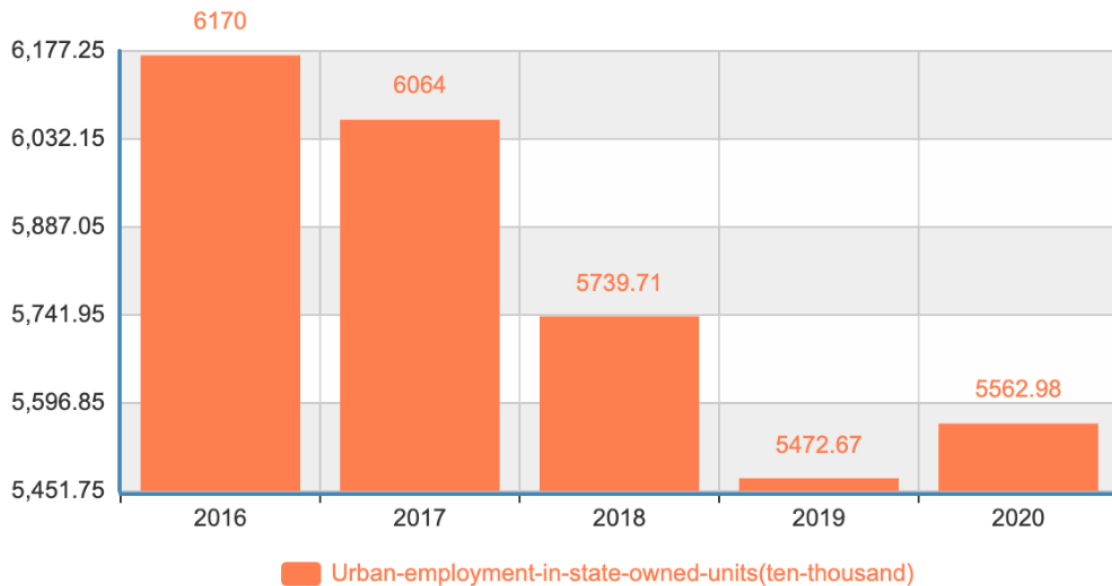


Figure 3: Urban employment in state-owned units (ten thousand) [11].

For civil servants, the occupation appears to be more stable. Some scholars pointed out that in a survey conducted by Hebei Youth Daily, 67% of the civil servant candidates interviewed said that they applied for the exam based on the stable characteristic of this job [12]. Although the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security issued the "Regulations on Dismissal of Civil Servants (Trial)" in 2019 to dismiss some civil servants who failed the assessment or had low work efficiency, scholars believed that the conditions for dismissing civil servants were vague and difficult to follow. Most grassroots units put the emphasis of annual assessment on the allocation of outstanding civil servants, rather than the assessment of unqualified civil servants. In addition, the current regulations do not have clear penalties for some bad behaviors of civil servants, such as entering entertainment places, which makes the work of civil servants more stable [13]. In addition, during the epidemic period, the demand for civil servants has risen. In addition to abiding by epidemic prevention regulations, civil servants have more important responsibilities as the vanguard of epidemic prevention. Civil servants are responsible for publicizing epidemic prevention and control policies, organizing and mobilizing the masses, implementing prevention and control measures and other important responsibilities. During this period, civil servants are busy and arduous in their work. In order to enhance the sense of responsibility and mission of the civil servants, the government realizes effective incentives measures [14]. Therefore, during the epidemic, the stability of the employment of civil servants is relatively high.

2.3.2. Working Outside the System

Compared with those within the system, the employment stability of people outside the system during the epidemic is much lower. According to a report by Xinhuanet, from January to November 2020, over 3 million self-employed individual businesses and enterprises have been deregistered in China.

After deducting some mobile vendors and online stores, there are still more than 1 million shops closed. According to the data of the fourth national economic census in 2019, a self-employed individual employs 2.37 persons [15]. Under the epidemic, the closure of more than 3 million self-employed individual businesses could lead to the unemployment of a large number of people outside the system.

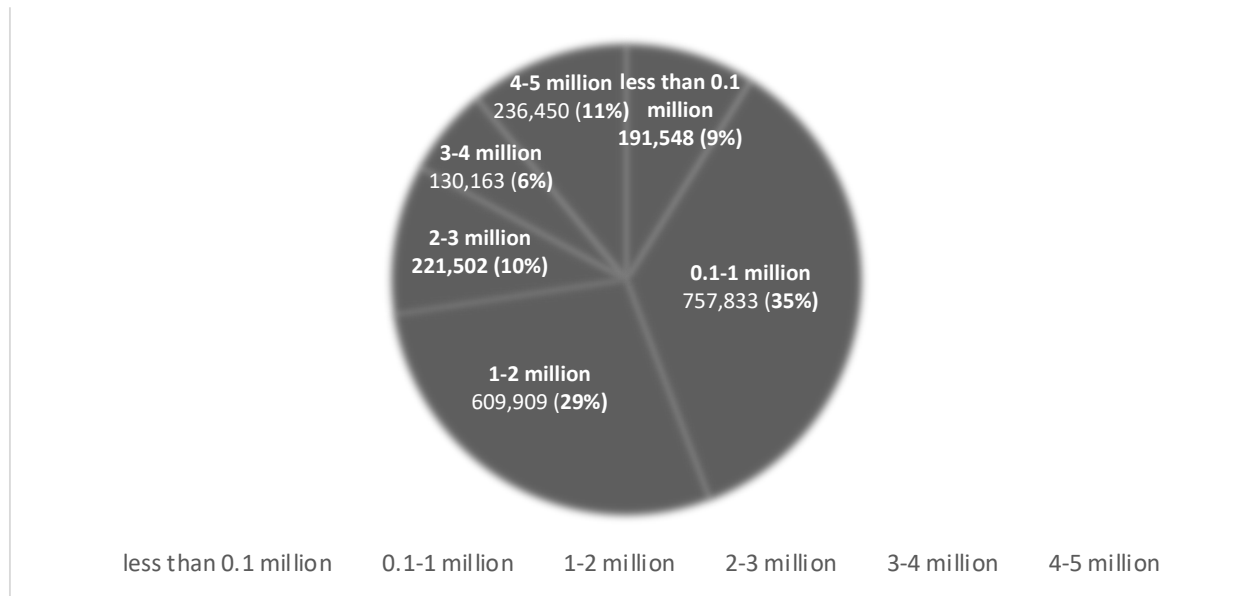


Figure 4: Registered capital distribution of "small stores" enterprises cancelled from January to November 2020 [15].

The epidemic situation has a greater impact on the floating population. During the epidemic, the labor-intensive factories need to stop production according to the epidemic prevention regulations, and most of the workers recruited by these factories belong to the floating population. Zang (2022) believes that most of the floating population is not covered by the urban social security. During the epidemic, this particular population faces greater uncertainty and be more likely to lose their jobs compared with urban registered residents under the discrimination [16].

There is a huge difference between the stability within and outside the system. Under such a big difference, colleges and universities' graduates more prefer to work within the system, and the civil service is the most respectable profession within the system, so the "Civil Servant Crazy" continues to rise during the epidemic.

3. Case Study

3.1. Case Description

Zhanjiang is one of the 14 cities in the early days of the reform and opening up. It is also a typical coastal city in the southeast. Zhanjiang has five county-level cities (Wuchuan, Lianjiang, Leizhou, Suixi, Xuwen) and five municipal districts (Chikan, Xiashan, Potou, Mazhang, and Jingkai).

In 2019, 25,157 people signed up for the civil service examination; in 2020, 32,963 people signed up for the civil service examination; in 2021, 4,750 people signed up for the civil service examination; and in 2022, 5,886 people signed up for the civil service examination.

In the past, there was a traditional impression that the north paid more attention to civil servants and the south paid more attention to business. Why did the number of applicants for the civil service examination in Zhanjiang rise increase during the epidemic? What is the academic background of the

employed people? An in-depth understanding of the topic of civil servants in Zhanjiang is conducive to optimizing the allocation of employment in this city.

3.2. Case Analysis

3.2.1. The Number of Applicants is on the Rise

The wage of civil servants in the southeast coast are relatively high, and the "civil servant craze" in Zhanjiang may be related to the salaries of civil servants. There are regional differences in the "civil servant craze", and the regional differences are consistent with the regional economic development differences in China, the proportion of applicants and admissions in the eastern region is higher than that in the central and western regions [17]. Relying on favorable geographical advantages and preferential policies at the beginning of reform and opening up, the south-east coastal provinces have developed rapidly in the past 40 years. Guangdong's annual GDP is ahead of most provinces in China. There is a positive relationship between wages and average monthly GDP, which means that compared with most provinces, people in Guangdong have higher wages [18]. As for the salary of civil servants, some scholars found that the salary of civil servants in Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai, Sichuan, municipalities directly under the Central Government, eastern and southern coastal areas is at a high level [19]. As a city in Guangdong Province and a coastal city in the southeast, and one of the 14 cities in the early days of the reform and opening up, Zhanjiang has certain attraction for candidates.

3.2.2. The Academic Background of the Admitted Population

This study is based on the epidemic period as a specific period, so the selected samples are all in 2019~2022. There were 208 data samples in 2019, 884 samples in 2020, 742 samples in 2021, and 863 samples in 2022. A total of 2,697 samples were collected. All samples are from the official websites of all counties and districts in Zhanjiang. The main purpose of this analysis is to explore the proportion and change of various types of colleges and universities in each year through data. Colleges and universities are divided into junior colleges, non-key universities, key universities, Project 211 universities, Project 985 universities and overseas universities, so as to deeply understand the background of civil servants in third tier cities.

The analysis results are as shown in Figure 5. Compared with the pre-epidemic situation, the proportion of background population in key universities has decreased rather than increased. In 2020, the proportion of people with backgrounds in all colleges and universities will change greatly, the proportion of people with backgrounds in non-key undergraduate colleges and universities increased from 38.94% to 53.51%, the proportion of people with backgrounds in junior colleges increased from 4.33% to 6.67%, while the proportion of people with backgrounds in high-level undergraduate universities (key universities, Project 211 universities, Project 985 universities) decreased. For example, the proportion of people with backgrounds in Project 985 universities decreased from 6.73% to 3.17%, and the proportion of people with backgrounds in key universities decreased from 37.02% to 28.96%. In addition, from 2020 to 2022, the proportion of the number of people with backgrounds in various colleges and universities were relatively stable. The employed civil servants are mainly those with backgrounds in non-key undergraduate colleges and universities, accounting for more than 50%.

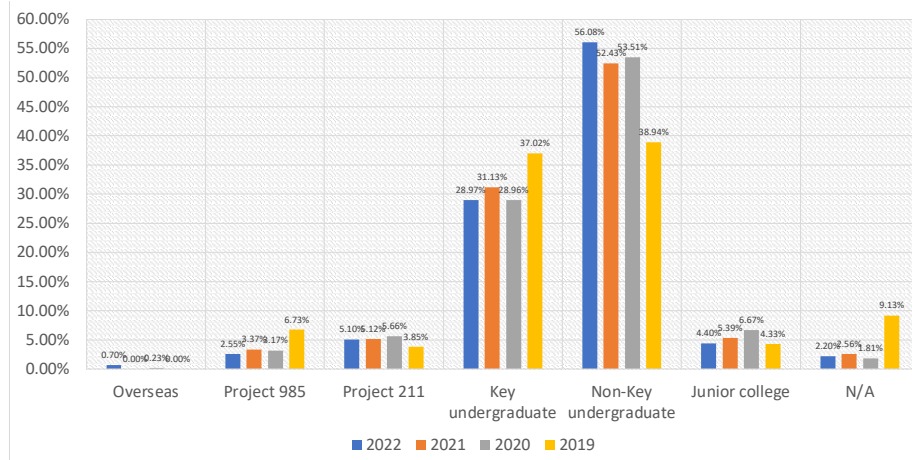


Figure 5: College/University background of civil servants employed from 2019 to 2022, based on the employment lists of each county-level and district-level government in Zhanjiang.

4. Discussion

There may be two reasons for the majority of employed civil servants with backgrounds from non-key undergraduate colleges. On the one hand, there are differences in the choice of cities for graduates of different types of colleges and universities, and on the other hand, the employment pressures faced by graduates from different types of colleges and universities are different.

4.1. Differences in the Choice of Cities for Graduates

Graduates from high-level universities are more likely to find employment in high-level cities. In the first and second tier cities, they can enjoy better social resources, have more employment opportunities, and their income level is significantly higher than that of the third-tier cities. Their willingness to work in the third-tier cities is generally not high. Some scholars believed that the level of colleges and universities will affect graduates' choice of employment cities. The higher the level of colleges and universities, the more likely the graduates are to be in big cities with more opportunities and greater benefits, because they can find more jobs that can match their knowledge [20]. Therefore, the number of graduates from key universities preferring to work in third tier cities is small, making the number of graduates from non-key universities working in third tier cities relatively high.

4.2. Different Employment Pressures Faced by Graduates

Another reason may be related to the stability of employment outside the system mentioned above. HR generally prefers to recruit graduates from high-level universities. In addition, the employment instability during the epidemic has increased, a large number of campus recruitment activities have been cancelled. Therefore, graduates from non-key undergraduate universities are under much greater pressure to obtain employment outside the system than graduates from high-level universities. They more prefer to obtain employment within the system. Some scholars found that the distribution of university resources is uneven, high-level universities not only have more resources, but also have higher enrollment scores, leading to a wider gap between the comprehensive quality of graduates from those universities and non-key colleges and universities. At the same time, generally, students from high-level universities are more proactive than those from non-key universities, so the recognition of high-level universities in the society is generally higher [21]. In March 2020, 46.9% of fresh graduates from Project 985 universities had found a job, while only 17.7% of fresh graduates

from ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities had found a job. In addition, 70% of fresh graduates from Project 985 universities are confident of finding satisfactory jobs, but only 56.6% of fresh graduates from ordinary undergraduate colleges and universities are confident of finding jobs [22]. It can be seen that graduates of high-level undergraduate graduates of non-key undergraduate colleges and universities face different situations and pressures in employment outside the system, which causes non-key undergraduate graduates to more prefer to be a civil servant.

The limitation of this study is that the research data comes from the information published on the official website of the local government, and there may be missing sample data. This research data also has the problem of incomplete household registration information of many employees, which makes it impossible to classify and analyze the household registration of the employed civil servants, and to judge whether the candidates are from other provinces. In addition, there is also a lack of information on the academic qualifications and degrees of many personnel, which makes it impossible to conduct research and analysis on the academic qualifications and degrees of the employed civil servants.

5. Conclusion

Through the studies, it is found that the "Civil Servant Craze" is related to people's traditional ideas, civil servants' income and job stability. In addition to the legal income higher than the average level of society, civil servants also have the possibility of huge hidden income. Civil servants can achieve power-money trade in some illegal ways, which has a great temptation for graduates. In addition, during the epidemic period, compared with the work outside the system, the civil servants have higher stability, and people do not need to worry about being dismissed. Civil servants in Zhanjiang have a good salary, which has certain attraction for graduates. And through data analysis, it is found that most of the civil servants employed in Zhanjiang graduated from non-key universities, which may be related to two reasons. First of all, the graduates of high-level universities tend to develop in the first and second-tier cities with more resources, opportunities and income, while the third-tier cities are not attractive to high-level talents. Therefore, the civil servants employed in Zhanjiang is mainly graduates from non-key undergraduate universities. Secondly, during the epidemic, graduates from non-key universities faced more difficulties than those from high-level universities, and they were more vulnerable to the negative impact of epidemic. Therefore, they preferred the work within the system, especially the civil servant occupation.

This paper analyzes the causes and reality of the "Civil Servant Craze" during the epidemic by case analysis, which can help people further understand the phenomenon and facilitate the follow-up investigation of the phenomenon by scholars. In addition, this paper takes Zhanjiang as a case study example, it is a third-tier city. Future research can take some first-tier and second-tier cities as study samples and then make a comparative analysis. At the same time, it can also analyze the qualifications and degrees of the employed civil servants after classification of qualifications and degrees.

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