

Idle hands:

The growing ranks of unemployed graduates worry China's government

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A job fair

- Throngs of young people roam around the makeshift booths in an exhibition hall in northern Beijing. They are at a job fair.
- The most popular booth at the fair belongs to China Railway, a state-owned behemoth. The firm's recruiter says it pays new graduates around 4,000 yuan (\$580) a month.

A record 8.3m graduates

- Chinese universities produced a record 8.3m graduates this summer.
- Tougher visa policies in much of the West mean that China will also receive nearly half a million returning graduates from foreign institutions this year.
- China's economy, buffeted by the trade war with America, is growing at its slowest pace in nearly 30 years.

Prospective employers

- A recent graduate from Peking University: “Prospective employers ... have extended the probation period from two or three months to six.”
- “During the probation period employers are legally entitled to pay only 80% of the normal salary;”
- “More and more companies are exploiting this power.”

Assigned graduates to jobs

- As recently as the early 1990s the government simply assigned graduates to jobs.
- It no longer dictates people's lives so crudely, but it is clearly worried about what will happen if they do not find work.

- Last month the government announced measures aimed at getting more graduates into work.
- Small firms that hire unemployed graduates can apply for a tax rebate.

Average monthly salary

- The average monthly salary for new graduates fell from a peak of 4,800 yuan in 2015 to 4,000 yuan in 2017.
- The trade war with America seems to have tempered hiring, especially in export industries.

Unrealistic expectations

- The number of universities has increased from just over 1,000 in 2000 to around 2,700 today.
- Many graduates have unrealistic expectations, says Yao Yuqun of Renmin University: “Everybody wants to be a manager right away.”
- The government counsels humility. Anyone blessed with a job offer, it said recently, should “promptly sign the contract”.