

Difficulties and Countermeasures: Career Development of Young Teachers in Chinese Universities under the Current Professional Titles Promotion Policies

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Received 2026-01-26; Revised 2026-05-20; Accepted 2026-06-03;

Published online: 2026-06-05

Abstract

This study investigates the career development dilemmas faced by young teachers in Chinese universities under the current professional title promotion system and explores how Hehe (和合) culture can provide a localized theoretical framework for addressing these challenges. The study adopts literature review, policy analysis, and thematic content analysis methods. Relevant literature was collected from CNKI, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, while promotion policy documents from selected Chinese universities and Ministry of Education regulations issued between 2018 and 2024 were analyzed. The findings reveal that young teachers face multiple pressures, including heavy teaching workloads, intense research competition, limited opportunities for professional title promotion, institutional anxiety, and work–life imbalance. Existing policies emphasize quantitative evaluation standards and often fail to sufficiently support the long-term development of young teachers. By applying the five principles of Hehe culture—Hesheng, Hechu, Heli, Heda, and He'ai—the study demonstrates how harmonious coexistence, collaboration, mutual achievement, and shared development can help young teachers strengthen adaptability, improve professional competitiveness, and reduce institutional pressure. The study further suggests that universities and policymakers should optimize promotion systems, strengthen humanistic support, and establish more balanced evaluation mechanisms. This research enriches the practical application of Hehe culture in higher education studies and provides implications for both university management and young teachers' career development.

Keywords: Young teachers, Chinese universities, Hehe culture, profession dilemma, higher education policy

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Higher education is playing an increasingly important role in improving the quality of the population and enhancing the overall national strength. As a developing country, China is also paying more and more attention to the high-quality development of higher education by increasing investment in terms of manpower, material resources, and financial resources. Since entering the 21st century, higher education in China has shifted from scale development to `quality development. In 2015, the State Council of China issued the "Overall Plan for Building World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines"(short for

“Double First-Class Initiative”) (State Council, 2015, No.64).

Higher education in China now focuses more on the scientific nature of disciplines, the practicality of professions, the adaptability of students' competence, and the enthusiasm of teachers in participating in reforms. Competitions among universities seeking survival and development through quality has begun. Teachers matter most whether it is the construction of disciplines and majors, the improvement of teaching quality, or the size of a school's academic influence. The core of high-quality development in schools lies in cultivating a team of teachers with high academic level, broad knowledge, professional teaching ability, and professional ethics, while young teachers are considered as the backbone and the “core power” of knowledge production in universities, even though they are still in the primary stage of their career development (Lian et al., 2020). Therefore, competition among universities ultimately points to competition for talents.

At present, quantitative measures such as the number of various titles, national-level projects, monographs, high-quality papers, and national patent applications are still the major evaluation criteria for talents, all of which are difficult for young teachers. As a result, more attention from scholars has been paid to the career development of young teachers in Chinese universities. Through literature review, research on young teachers in universities includes the career development dilemmas and countermeasures (Chen, 2013; Li, 2022; Huang, 2018; Zhu, 2015), teacher development and job satisfaction (Chen, 2022; Wei, 2015), psychological stress issues for young teachers (Wang, 2004; Shi, 2006; Fu & Zhu, 2009; Zhou, 2023), time anxiety for young teachers in universities (Li, 2021), research teams comprehensively outline the current situation of young teachers in Chinese universities through interviews, questionnaires, and other forms (Lian, 2012; Zhou, 2015), and scholars discuss the development issues of young teachers in the context of China's “Double First-Class Initiative” (Li, 2020; Tang, 2020).

To sum up, the difficulties encountered in the development of young teachers in Chinese universities involve in teaching, scientific research, education-related management, family maintenance, income status, interpersonal relationships, and other aspects. Most solutions point to institutional design, suggesting that administrative departments adjust, improve or reform the assessment system for teachers to create a relaxed environment for the development of young teachers. However, there are few suggestions on how young teachers themselves can tap into their potential and strengths, actively adapt to the current institutional regulations, choose appropriate “strategies” for their career development, and actively overcome difficulties faced presently.

He (Harmony) is a core concept in ancient Chinese philosophy (Fan & Ding, 2009, p.106) and an essential idea in traditional Chinese culture. Common idioms such as “valuing harmony”, “harmony in diversity”, “harmony among nations”, “harmony brings wealth”, “coexistence in harmony”, “harmony between nature and humanity”, “harmony with amiable disposition”, “harmony of musical instruments”, and “gentle spring breeze”, all illustrate or indicate the cultural connotations of “harmony”, suggesting integration and coordination. The *Analytical Dictionary of Characters*, also *Shuowen Jiezi*, authored by Xu Shen from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-206 CE), which is a Chinese old book for explaining the construction of Chinese characters. It explains *He* (harmony) as “mutual understanding”. Zhou & Huang (2014, p.182) explores the historical origins and characteristics of the Chinese character “*He*”, suggesting that it originally referred to the

harmonious sound produced by ancient musical instruments and gradually extended to encompass all harmonious relationships in the world. Shang (2020, p.21) believes that the traditional “*He* culture” in China advocates benevolence and peace, as well as the ideological source of the Chinese nation’s inclusiveness and moral integrity. However, more research combines “*He* (和)” with “*He* (合)”, forming the concept of “*Hehe* culture”.

Zhang Liwen, a professor at Renmin University of China, proposed a philosophical theory with Chinese characteristics called “*Hehe* Culture”, defining it as “various elements and factors in nature, society, interpersonal communication, spirituality and civilization conflict and integrate, and during the dynamic process diverse elements and factors integrate into new structures, new entities, and new life.”(Zhang, 1996, p.71) Based on the definition, Professor Zhang put forward the five principles of harmony, Hesheng (和生 harmony in equal production), Hechu (和处 harmony in coexistence), Heli (和立 harmony in diversity), Heda (和达 harmony in common achievement), and He’ai (和爱 harmony in mutual love), as well as the logical system of “three worlds, six layers”, “eight dimensions, four pairs” etc., to address relationships between humans and nature, society, interpersonal relationships, spirituality, and civilization. The theory of *Hehe* is a harmonious integration through conflicts that allows for different voices, forms, and behaviors, seeking common ground in diversity, continuously striving for balance in conflicts, and ultimately achieving a state of harmony. The theory covers various forms of relationships in the entire social domain and solves the difficulties faced by humanity with a macroscopic “*Hehe*” perspective. The localized theory can be used to guide young teachers in Chinese universities on how to cope with “micro” relationships with their universities, colleagues, job responsibilities, and career development. Through searching on CNKI and Google Scholar, there is no literature combining the concept of *Hehe* theory with young teachers in Chinese universities as well as their professional development. So employing localized theory to solve the current problems in Chinese context makes this research somewhat innovative.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1.2.1 Identify the major dilemmas faced by young teachers in Chinese universities under the current professional title promotion policies.

1.2.2 Analyze how existing university policies and evaluation systems influence young teachers’ career development.

1.2.3 Examine how the five principles of *Hehe* culture can provide practical strategies for resolving career development dilemmas and improving professional adaptability among young teachers.

1.3 Research Significance

1.3.1 Theoretical Significance

Taking the five principles of *Hehe* culture as the theoretical framework, this study integrates traditional *Hehe* philosophy with the research on the career development of young university teachers, thereby expanding the theoretical boundary and application scope of *Hehe* culture. Existing studies on *Hehe* philosophy are mostly concentrated in sociology, management and traditional culture fields, with insufficient theoretical

exploration and application in the construction of university young teacher teams and the solution of their career dilemmas. This study deeply explores the contemporary connotation and empowering value of *Hehe* culture, and analyzes its theoretical mechanism for resolving career development problems and stimulating the subjective initiative of young university teachers.

Furthermore, this study breaks the single research perspective of pedagogy and management in the research of young university teachers' development, and constructs an interdisciplinary research system combining traditional philosophical culture with university teacher team construction. It compensates for the research deficiencies in the soft cultural support for young teachers' career growth, enriches the theoretical system of university talent team construction, and broadens the theoretical research space and practical application dimension of *Hehe* philosophy. It also provides a new theoretical reference and research perspective for subsequent studies on university teacher training and talent development.

1.3.2. Practical Significance

As the core backbone of improving university teaching quality and academic influence, young teachers are a potential yet vulnerable group that is easily overlooked in university management. Focusing on the actual development status and growth demands of young teachers, this study applies *Hehe* cultural concepts to build a harmonious campus development atmosphere. It effectively helps young teachers break through career development bottlenecks, fully stimulates their work initiative and creativity, and promotes their healthy and sustainable career development.

In terms of university high-quality development, the growth of young teachers lays a solid foundation for university teaching and scientific research. Optimizing the teacher training ecology based on *Hehe* culture can continuously improve universities' teaching quality and core academic competitiveness, and boost the long-term high-quality development of universities. In addition, this study provides feasible practical paths and operational guidance for university human resource management, youth teacher training and humanistic care, facilitating the establishment of a scientific, humanized and sustainable training and management system for young university teachers.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Scope

This paper mainly focuses on the young teachers in Chinese universities. According to some domestic scholars (Li, 2013; Zhou,2015; Li,2021), they define young teachers as those at or under the age of 40 who are engaged in teaching, research, and related management work, based on the age restrictions for young project applicants in major Chinese research funding projects such as the National Social Science Fund of China, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, and the National Education Science Planning Project of Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. On this basis, the author chose ten local universities in southwest China as research objects, with focus on exploring their policies on professional title promotion.

2.2 Research Method

This study adopts literature review, policy analysis, and thematic content analysis as its major research methods. Relevant literature was collected from CNKI, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using keywords such as “young university teachers”, “professional title promotion”, “career development”, “institutional anxiety”, “Double First-Class universities”, and “*Hehe* culture”. The study mainly included peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and official statistical reports published between 2000 and 2024.

In addition, the study analyzed promotion policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and selected “Double First-Class” universities and local universities between 2018 and 2024. The collected materials were screened according to relevance, authority, and research value.

The study further employed thematic analysis and content analysis to categorize the major dilemmas faced by young teachers. The difficulties were interpreted through Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, and habitus, while the proposed solutions were mapped onto the five principles of *Hehe* culture, namely Hesheng, Hechu, Heli, Heda, and He’ai. Through this analytical framework, the study explored how localized Chinese philosophical thought can contribute to the career development of young university teachers.

2.3 Research Questions

The key issues of the paper aims to address two questions: 1) From their own perspective, what measures should contemporary young teachers in Chinese universities take to deal with the challenges in their career development? 2) How can the five principles of *Hehe* culture be used to help young teachers find opportunities instead of problems and guide their career development towards a healthy and positive direction.

3. Literature Review

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, higher education in China has demonstrated strong momentum with the development of China. Over 70 years, China has gradually become a major participant in world education and is becoming an education powerhouse. Since the 1990s, with the rapid growth of China’s economy, the demand for talents in various fields has been increasingly expanding, resulting in huge school sizes and sharp increase in students numbers. In order to address the issue of the teacher-student ratio (generally number is 18:1, that means 18 students should distribute 1 teacher) resulting from the expansion of enrollment, universities have started to recruit a large number of new teachers. As of 2022, there are 3,013 higher education institutions in mainland China, with 2,870,866 staff members and 1,977,839 full-time teachers. Within the big population, there is a conspicuous group, namely young teachers, also known as “green peppers” . They have always been a significant part of the entire teaching staff, generally young (at or under 40 years old), some just graduated with a master’s or doctoral degree, full of vigor, engaging in teaching, research, and student-related management work; they are highly adaptable, and their professional technical titles are generally low.

(See Table 1 and Table 2)

Table 1 : Young Teachers in Chinese Higher Education institutions from 1997 to 2001
 (Unit: person)

Year	Institution	Full-time teacher	At or under 40	Professor	Associate professor	Lecturer	Below lecturer
1997	1020	404471	259130	2542	31644	129143	95801
1998	1022	407253	266398	3093	36656	128083	98566
1999	1071	425682	283880	3889	45940	131608	102443
2000	1041	462772	313494	5250	55804	140674	111766
2001	1225	531910	363723	6964	68881	157492	130386

Table 2 :Young Teachers in Chinese Higher Education institutions from 2003 to 2021
 (Unit: person)

Year	Institution	Full-time teacher	At or under 40	Professor	Associate professor	Lecturer	Below lecturer
2003	3934	724658	492642	10090	91055	197799	193689
2008	4325	1237451	792907	8736	109852	352834	321485
2013	4420	1496865	866880	9597	122225	463969	271089
2018	4541	1672753	871550	12903	130685	454416	273546
2021	3176	1885214	915102	15111	129134	433494	337363

(Note: ① Higher education institutions in the table include: regular undergraduate universities or colleges (including independent colleges), undergraduate-level vocational schools, higher vocational (specialized) colleges, and adult higher education institutions; ② The above data are all from the website of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China.(MOE, 2021)

The reason of selecting data from 1997 to 2001 in Table 1 is mainly that in 1999 Chinese universities began to expand enrollment, so there will be significant changes in the number of teachers before and after 1999. There are several conspicuous features in Table 1 worth special attention: 1) Over the 5 years, the number of Chinese universities remained relatively stable, while the number of full-time teachers increased year by year, especially in the year of 2000 and 2001. Comparison shows that the number of full-time teachers increased by 2782, 18429, 37090, and 69138 in each respective year, while the number of young teachers increased by 7268, 17482, 29614, and 50299. Over the 5 years from 1997 to 2001, the number of full-time teachers increased by 127,439, and the number of young teachers increased by 104,593, accounting for 82.1% of the total numbers, which clearly indicates that they are the major force in universities. 2) Comparing the total number of full-time teachers nationwide with the number of teachers at or under 40 years old, it is obvious that young teachers occupy a significant proportion. 3) Teachers at or under 40 own fewer senior professional titles, with a concentration of intermediate and lower-level titles, forming a typical pyramid layout.

The data in Table 2 is selected from 2003 to 2021, with every 5 years as an observation period. The reason is that since the beginning of the 21st century, China’s higher education has entered a period of rapid development, with a significant increase in the number of universities. Then the trend has gradually stabilized, suggesting the shift of China’s higher education from quantity development to quality development.

Several characteristics can be concluded from the table: 1) From 2003 to 2021, China's higher education has experienced significant changes in both scale and size. Compared to the previous 5 years, the number of full-time teachers increased by 512793, 259414, 175888, and 212461 respectively; while the changes in young teachers at or under 40 were 300265, 73973, 4670 and 43552 respectively. 2) The situation where young teachers at or under 40 account for the majority of full-time teachers remains unchanged. 3) The issue of obtaining higher professional titles remains a bottleneck for young teachers. Taking 2021 as an example, the proportion of young teachers at or under the age of 40 with senior professional titles is 1.7%, with associate senior titles 14.1%, with intermediate titles 47.4%, and with titles below intermediate 36.8%. In total, only 15.8% of young teachers have senior professional titles, while 84.2% have intermediate and below titles. The bottleneck of professional titles for young teachers has become a major challenge in their course of career development.

As of December 29, 2023, the total number of full-time teachers in Chinese higher education institutions in 2022 was 1,977,839, with 949,363 young teachers at or under the age of 40. Among them, there were 15,359 young teachers with senior professional titles, 128,462 with associate senior professional titles, 42,9593 with intermediate titles, and 37,5949 with titles below intermediate. (See Table 3 and 4)

Table 3 : The proportion of young teachers at or under 40 in the full-time teachers

Age	Number	Ratio
Young teacher above 40	1,028,476	52%
Young teacher at or under 40	949,363	48%
Total	1,977,839	

Table 4 : The Profile of Professional titles among young teachers at or under 40

Title	Number	Ratio
Professor	15,359	1.62%
Associate professor	128,462	13.53%
Lecture	429,593	45.25%
Below lecture	375,949	39.6%
Total	949,363	

As can be seen from the Table 3 and Table 4, young teachers are still the main force in universities, accounting for 48% of full-time teachers. However, the proportion of young teachers with high professional titles is still low, and a large number of teachers are still congested in the intermediate title to associate senior title.

The uniqueness of this group has attracted many scholars' attention to their living conditions and career development, hoping that they can overcome various difficulties and shoulder the due responsibility of high-quality development of Chinese higher education. Lian (2012) compared the group of young university teachers to "working bees" (工蜂 gongfeng). "Working bees are not drones, they are hardworking female bees. In a bee colony, the majority are working bees, with numbers exceeding drones many times, and they bear the entire labor of the colony. The world's buildings with the least material and the largest volume are completed in the dance of those working bees (2012, p.XIII)." The author and members of the project team conducted a survey of the living conditions of 5400 young university teachers among 135 universities in China by distributing questionnaires,

conducting in-depth interviews, group discussions, and participant observations. Even though the book provides a basic overview of young teachers in Chinese universities in the early 21st century, the survey mainly focused on those with doctoral degrees (89.8%), while young teachers in most local undergraduate universities in China are mainly master's degree, with fewer holding doctoral degrees, so the phenomena did not reveal the true situation for those with master degrees. Taking a local university in Yunnan province as an example, we name it school A temporarily, as of June 30, 2023, there were a total of 638 full-time teachers, with only 74 holding doctoral degrees, accounting for 11.6% of the full-time teachers, and even fewer were under 40 years old.

Teacher's occupational identity refers to the emotional experience and satisfaction level that teachers have about their profession in the process of engaging in educational work (Li, 2015, p. 107). A high level of occupational identity is conducive to stimulating teachers' enthusiasm for work and forming a healthy professional psychology. Wei (2015) analyzed the current status of occupational identity among young university teachers using sample surveys, as well as the direct related mechanism with core self-evaluation, psychological empowerment, and job satisfaction. The study suggested that there are differences in occupational identity based on gender, marital status, and different professional titles, and that increasing teachers' psychological empowerment can enhance their occupational identity and job satisfaction. Based on occupational identity, teachers will believe that their work is useful, and will be willing to spend more time and energy on improving their teaching skills and promoting research abilities, thereby gaining a sense of work happiness and achievement, and strengthening professional development. This is a significant mission for the construction of the team of young university teachers.

Zhou (2015) focused on the research of the development of young university teachers, especially their teaching ability and academic writing. It is believed that such research can make great contribution to the development of young teachers in universities in the new era from a diverse perspective so as to emphasize the cultivation of young teachers, enrich teachers' development theories, and thus enhance the understanding of the laws of the development of young university teachers. Chen (2013) mainly focuses on the academic career development of young teachers. He pointed out that obstacles such as academic field, academic career ranks, and academic career mobility hinder the academic growth of young teachers. So joint efforts from the government, schools, and individuals should be made to change such situation. Chen (2022) used a quantitative method to conduct a sampling survey of some young teachers and found that they lack a sense of career happiness. Huang (2018) summarized the dilemmas faced by young university teachers in China from five aspects: heavy teaching and research workload, congestion of professional titles promotion, low income leading to life pressure, and sub-health problems. She also proposed some solutions to these problems, such as improving the assessment system, professional promotion mechanism, increasing teachers' income, and building communication platforms among teachers. Li (2021) used social acceleration critique theory and social time typology to study the problem of time anxiety among young university teachers so as to propose four ways to alleviate the time anxiety of young teachers: weaken the acceleration publicity, focus on connotations guidance, change management concepts, dilute the competition color, optimize the community context, improve interaction conditions, deepen self-recognition, and make rational career plan. Li & Li (2022) employs concepts such as "field, capital, and habits" in Bourdieu's sociology theory to consider the university as the field object, so young teachers use social capital,

economic capital, cultural capital, and semiotic capital in the specific field to change habits and achieve added self-value. Zhou (2023, p.88) reviewed the research on young university teachers, pointing out that early research mainly involved teachers' teaching ability, job satisfaction, and psychological health, and then shifted to the issue of occupational stress and its mechanism of young university teachers, and proposed the concept of institutional anxiety, namely health anxiety and sense of deprivation of social status. The main solution depends on changing the governance concept of universities and strengthening collaboration among different departments.

In summary, there are many literature on young teachers career development in Chinese universities, both qualitative and quantitative. The research covers a wide range of aspects related to the problems faced by young university teachers, including teaching, academic research, administrative management, academic background, professional titles, housing, marriage, income, gender, psychology, and so on. However, when it comes to problem-solving, the focus is mainly on improving the humanistic care, changing the work methods of administrative personnel, promoting assessment methods in teaching, research, and management, and optimizing the criteria for professional title promotion. There are few discussions on exploring the individual potential from the perspective of young teachers themselves to solve the challenges they face.

The concept of *He* (harmony) has a long history in China. The characters for he (和) and he (合) were first seen in oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions. During the Yin and Zhou dynasties (1600 BC-256 BC), the two words were independent concept and not yet used together. By the Spring and Autumn period (770 BC-476 BC), the two words were used together to form the category of *Hehe* culture (Cai, 1997; Zhang, 2001). Descriptions about the alternative use of he (和), he (合) and *Hehe* (和合) are not unusual in ancient literature. For example, in the book *Zhengyu*, a part of *Guoyu*, there are some sentences about *He* culture: "Harmony begets new things; while uniformity does not lead to continuation.", "Harmony brings mutual benefit, while conflict harms both parties", "Shang-qi can harmonize and unite the five ethics (of father's justice, mother's benevolence, elder brother's friendship, younger brother's respectfulness and son's obedience) to protect their people". In the book of *Yu Shu • Yao Dian in The Book of History*, it is mentioned "When the good and evil of the officials were distinguished, and the tribes were reconciled, then the whole world will be in harmony". In the *Zhuangzi*, it is said, "Harmony is precious, and harmony in diversity is the constant state of the Dao (Way)". In the *Book of Music* (Yue-ji), it says music is the symbol of harmony between heaven and earth; ritual is the symbol of order between heaven and earth. So harmony makes things develop based on their nature, while order makes things distinguishable because of their nature. In the *Analects of Confucius*, it says a man of virtue pursues harmony but doesn't seek uniformity, a mean man seeks uniformity but does not pursue harmony. In *Xunzi*, it says the harmony of heaven and earth gives birth to all things. In *Lv's Almanac* (Lüshi Chunqiu), it says the harmony of heaven and earth is the principle of life production. In the *Mozi* it also says if conflicts exists among father, sons and brothers, they all have thoughts of separation, then their relationship can not be harmonized. In *Guanzi*, it says harmonious community is shaped by the combination of common ideal, belief and high virtue. From above-mentioned Chinese classics, it can be seen that *He* (和) means harmony, peace, and kindness; and *He* (合) means collaboration, friendship, and integration.

At the end of the 20th century, Zhang Liwen, professor of Renmin University of China, systematically constructed the theoretical system of *Hehe Studies* (和合学 *Hehe xue*) in China. He pointed out that Chinese culture faces three challenges: the challenge from five major conflicts common to humanity (humans and nature, humans and society, humans and humans, human hearts, and different civilizations); the challenge from Western culture; and the challenge from modernization (Zhang, 1996, p.2). Zhang (1996) also stated that the most optimal cultural choice to respond to these three challenges is *Hehe Studies*. Based on this, he proposed the five principles of *Hehe Studies* (hesheng, hechu, heli, heda and he'ai); the three realms and six layers (the world of existence, the world of meaning, the world of possibility; context, reason, nature, destiny, Dao, and harmony); the eight dimensions forming four pairs (the metaphysical dimension of harmony, the moral dimension of harmony, the humanistic dimension of harmony, the instrumental dimension of harmony, the sub-physical dimension of harmony, the artistic dimension of harmony, the social dimension of harmony), and other core concepts, leading to the conclusion of the unity of heaven and earth, the harmonization of all creatures, the great circulation and the endless generation of life. Since then, scholars have employed the concept of *Hehe* to study the contemporary social issues. Zhang (1997, p.55) reviewed the origin of *Hehe* (harmony) and pointed out that *Hehe* is the law of the generation of new things, the mutual complement of different viewpoints. He believes that it is the ideal of *Hehe* (harmony) that all things nurture each other without conflicts, and the Dao functions well without contradiction. Yang (2005, p.4) discussed China's peaceful foreign diplomacy from the perspective of *Hehe* culture. She believes that the Chinese nation has formed a cultural tradition of using the concepts of *Hehe* culture to study the generation of the natural world, the laws of development of things, the relationship between humans and nature, the relationship between humans and society, and the way of keeping healthy. Chen (2012) used the concept of *Hehe* to study the cultural integration and social harmony in Xinjiang, China. Zeng (2019, p.79) believes that the concept of a community of shared future for mankind is actually an innovative development of *Hehe* culture. Other scholars have also used the concept of *Hehe Studies* to discuss the construction of a community of shared future for mankind (Zhang, 2019; Wang, 2020; Chen, 2020; Liu, 2021).

Through literature review, the discussion of *Hehe Studies* mainly falls into two aspects: one is the research and contemporary interpretation of the ontology of *Hehe* culture; the other is how the idea of *Hehe* offer solutions to various conflicts among different countries, societies, races, humans and nature, ect. There is no literature discussing the professional development of young teachers in universities with the idea of *Hehe* theory, which makes the paper unique in content.

Therefore, this paper applies the five principles of *Hehe* culture to help young teachers overcome difficulties and grow healthily in teaching, academic research, student management, and professional titles promotion.

4. Research Results

Entering the 21st century, China's higher education reform is in full implementation. Those vocational colleges are actively preparing to upgrade to universities, regular undergraduate colleges are actively preparing to establish comprehensive universities (transforming from colleges to universities), many local universities are striving to apply for master degree program, and universities with master's

degree are striving for doctoral degree program, and even post-doctoral program. In response to the pace of education reform, teachers in universities need to be recognized in teaching, academic research, students' management, social services, etc., and have their professional titles promoted. Teaching assistants need to be promoted to lecturers, lecturers to associate professors, associate professors to professors (See Table 5). Even the professors are striving to become master's or doctoral supervisors, or obtain corresponding national, provincial (taking YN province as an example) talent titles through their own teaching or academic contributions (See Table 6).

Table 5 : Qualifications for Professional Titles Promotion in Chinese University

Professional titles	Qualification (meet at least one of them)
Teaching Assistant	Owning a Master degree; Owning a bachelor degree, completing a one-year internship, and passing the assessment.
Lecturer	Owning a Master degree; Owning a bachelor degree, completing a one-year internship, and passing the assessment.
Associate professor	Owning a doctor degree, and serving as lecturer for at least 2 years; Owning a bachelor degree, and serving as lecturer for at least 5 years.
Professor	Owning a bachelor degree or higher, and serving as an associate professor for at least 5 years.

In Table 5, the qualification requirements for teachers in universities from teaching assistant to professor are clearly specified. However, it is important to note that they are only the requirements for educational background and years of teaching service, which are the basic conditions for title application, rather than the evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria include shouldering various tasks as teaching task (class numbers, classroom evaluation), academic research (projects, papers, publications, patents, social service, etc.), management work (class management, class counselor, head of teaching and research office, branch party secretary for teachers or students, administrative office, teaching office, academic research office, student affairs office, etc.), obtaining various individual awards, offering social services, owning academic influence, and other comprehensive projects.

Table 6 : High-level talent titles

Name	Title
National High-level talents	Academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering
	The Yangtze River Scholar
	Nation-level "Millions of Talents Project"
	National Outstanding Youth
	Persons Enjoying Special Allowances of The State Council
	Culture Talent
	Youth Cultural Talent
	Representative Inheritors of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects
	National Natural Science Award Winner
	National Technological Invention Award winner
Provincial High-level talents	National Science and Technology Progress Award winner
	Winner of "Talent Award for Revitalizing YN Province"
	Winner of the Outstanding Contribution Award to Science and Technology
	Leading Talent of Science and Technology

Name	Title
	Outstanding Scholar of YN province
	High-end Foreign Expert
	Industrial Innovative Talent
	Chief Skilled Technician
	Excellent Teacher
	Outstanding Doctor
	Cultural Master
	Entrepreneurial Talents
	Youth Talent
	Intellectual Property Talent
	Top-notch Local Talent

The promotion of professional titles is the most direct acceptance for teachers in the fields of teaching, scientific research, management, and then they have the opportunity to pursue other talent titles. As the largest group in universities, young teachers are also pushed forward in this competitive context. They have to meet the corresponding assessment requirements and obtain the qualifications for senior professional titles within a certain period of time. At present, young teachers generally shoulder heavy teaching and management tasks, and they are still in its early stage (Lian et al., 2020), when it comes to scientific research, as well as insufficient time investment, leading to considerable difficulties for young teachers in terms of professional title's promotion. However, facing relatively fixed institutional policies which symbolize the authority and enforceability, and can not be changed in a short time, such as required teaching workload and assessment conditions at various levels, quantified requirements for scientific research task and assessment, professional title evaluation criteria, and the proportion of senior professional title (Taking YN province as an example, See Table 7), young teachers should not only complain about the deficiencies of the school's institutional policies, but should actively adapt to the current institutional requirements, study relevant guiding policies and related assessment conditions, consciously accumulate their own capital in their work, and try to minimize loss caused by misunderstandings of policies. At the same time, universities also try their best to adjust or revise some of the terms, and further optimize the relative policies to be more beneficial to young teachers.

Table 7 : Composition of Academic Titles of University Teachers in YN Province

Institution type	High professional rank										Middle rank				Primary rank			
	Total	Total	1	2	3	4	Total	5	6	7	Total	8	9	10	Total	11	12	13
	≤ %	≤ %			≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	≤ %	
A	60	20			7	13	40	8	16	16	30	9	12	9	10	5	5	
B	56	16			5	11	40	8	16	16	30	9	12	9	12	6	6	
C	45	12			4	8	33	7	13	13	40	12	16	12	15	8	7	
D	39	6			2	4	33	7	13	13	40	12	16	12	21	11	10	

Note: Type A is teaching and research-oriented universities, entering the key construction universities of the National 211 Project; Type B is teaching and research-oriented universities with the authority to confer master's degrees; Type C is teaching-oriented universities with the authority to confer bachelor's degrees; Type D refers to various higher vocational colleges, such as technical

colleges, vocational colleges, etc.(Department of Human Resources and Social Security of Yunnan Province, 2010).

The growth of young teachers in universities is full of competitions, with various teaching competitions, academic research project application and creation, and professional title promotion being referred to as three major dilemmas faced by young teachers. To stand out from these three major dilemmas, they have to face the conflicts from various aspects which are generally unavoidable and common to all young teachers. As mentioned earlier, some policies about teaching, academic research, management, and professional title promotion assessment have been long established, which are relatively mature and stable and cannot be changed overnight. Young teachers need to explore their initiative, accumulate their professional knowledge, improve their abilities in teaching, academic research, and management, actively understand the current assessment system, and use *Hehe* theory to resolve conflicts so as to achieve coexistence.

As Cui (2008, p.88) said the *Hehe* (harmony) culture does not deny contradictions, differences, and necessary struggles but dialectically treats the existing differences. Differences in things are objective in reality, and the main task for human is to seek unity in diversity, seek the path of integration against confrontation. It is also necessary to find the convergence point and make them coexist harmoniously. Only by limiting conflicts, differences, and struggles within the interdependent *Hehe* entity can different things coexist and develop smoothly. Therefore, the conflicts and differences experienced by young teachers are only superficial characteristics, ultimately pointing to *Hehe* (harmony), that is, enhancing their own abilities, serving the high-quality development of the school, achieving dual development and promotion between themselves and the schools, which is the practical application of the principle of *Hehe* (harmony).

In response to the difficulties faced by young teachers in their career development, the five principles of *Hehe* (harmony) culture can help young teachers overcome difficulties and seek development opportunities in terms of interpersonal relationships, teaching ability improvement, research ability enhancement, and so on.

4.1 Coexistence in work environment

Bourdieu's practice sociology believes field is "a system in which various objective forces are adjusted and shaped, a unity of various possibilities and uncertainties, a relationship structure with a specific gravity imposed on all objects and actors entering the field, and its functional mode is similar to a magnetic field." (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1998, p.17) The university is a field where the cohesion and centripetal force of teachers is shaped. Due to the uneven distribution of capital in this field, teachers will face various competitions after entering the field. At this point, young teachers should actively integrate into the work context, seek appropriate strategies to create a healthy field space for their own growth, and accumulate more capital. Harmonious interpersonal relationships are the foundation for interaction among colleagues from office of teaching and research to different faculties, even to the whole university. Young teachers in the field need to learn to use the principles of *Hehe* culture to handle interpersonal relationships because "even people may live in the same context, but due to differences in values, ways of thinking, customs, and cultural recognition, conflicts and competitions will emerge definitely." (Zhang, 1996, p.586)

Therefore, young teachers should co-work harmoniously with colleagues with a humble, peaceful, tolerant, and respectful attitude. Only a harmonious environment can cultivate harmonious interpersonal relationships and generate stronger cohesion and centripetal force. When feeling a sense of belonging to the work environment, young teachers are more willing to actively involve in it, devote themselves to work wholeheartedly, and thus produce greater productivity. Just as Chen (2010) described in his book *The Story of Tongzilou*, a group of young teachers joined Peking University and never gave up their enthusiasm for teaching there. They often went to look for the leaders of the housing management department in order to improve housing conditions, only to receive replies like “just go wherever the conditions are good”. Although they felt being treated unfairly, because of their sincere love for Peking University, the tremendous magnetic force released by Peking University, the teachers did not leave Peking University because of poor accommodation conditions. On the contrary, everyone got along with each other harmoniously in the crowded, dark, and messy *Tongzilou*. Many of them produced influential papers and books, and became famous educators, linguists, engineers, mathematicians, scientists, physicists, philosophers, ect. in that condition. The high-quality development of universities requires a great number of young teachers who are dedicated. If they cannot even maintain the most basic interpersonal relationships, the ultimate result will only be, unfortunately, leaving the field or shifting fields. (Li & Li, 2022, p.68)

4.2 Enthusiasm for improving teaching

The principle Heli (mutual achievement) in *Hehe* culture emphasizes accepting differences between things, advocating the spirit of “You yourself desire standing, then help others to get standing,” and embracing things in an open and tolerant manner based on their own reality.(Zhang, 1996, p.587). Therefore, the principle of Heli here means actively integrating into the teaching environment, continuously learning from others, engaging in teaching practices, developing good teaching habits, and forming unique teaching philosophies. Some young teachers have just graduated from school, and lack of teaching experience. So their understanding of teaching work still remains at the way they received at postgraduate or doctoral studies. They lack a comprehensive understanding of the new work environment they are in. Often, they spend a lot of time and effort preparing lessons, explaining and answering questions seriously, but the students’ outcomes are not satisfactory, far from their expectations, which can lead to professional burnout for young teachers. It is no doubt that young teachers have solid basic professional skills, systematic knowledge in their subject, rich professional knowledge, a keen focus on the forefront of the subject, and a broad research perspective.

However, after transiting from a student to a teacher, it is a kind of art on how to impart knowledge to students, which needs many years practice except professional knowledge. Firstly, learning from others with humbleness. Currently, many universities in China provide young teachers with academic supervisors with senior professional titles. Young teachers should make good use of this opportunity and actively contact their supervisors. Strengthening the connection with them through conversations, attending classes, teaching reflection, discussions, and other ways, rather than waiting for “learning tasks” assigned.

Secondly, focusing on teaching and academic research. It is the basic requirement for teachers to analyzing the curriculum, textbooks, and students. Based on this, young teachers should also make good teaching design, strengthen interaction with students during class, and timely reflect on their teaching after class. Only by repeated practice can they become proficient in teaching. At the same time, they should actively participate in teaching contests or high-quality class, continuously improve their teaching skills, and gradually develop their unique teaching philosophy.

Thirdly, being enthusiastic for teaching. Currently, there is a widespread saying: teaching is a matter of conscience. This to some extent indicates that some teachers are irresponsible in teaching, with a lack of dedication and involvement. Young teachers are shouldering the responsibility for the high-quality development of their universities, only by genuinely loving teaching from the heart will they seriously study teaching and not consider the heavy teaching tasks as a burden. Therefore, the spirit of *Heli* in teaching means establishing a love for teaching and promoting the teaching ability, becoming excellent teachers in teaching.

4.3 Competitiveness in producing academic fruits

Continuous academic research output is the intrinsic driving force for the growth of young university teachers. Actually, the research work in universities is often based on teaching but goes beyond teaching, and ultimately returns to teaching to achieve a virtuous cycle between teaching and research. Therefore, the academic research is not simply driven by interest but a combination of interest, discipline expertise, and teaching strategy.

In universities, scientific research is inseparable from teaching, especially in those teaching-oriented universities. Even in research-oriented universities, teachers are still required to shoulder a certain amount of teaching task and undergo teaching quality assessments. Currently, in Chinese universities the research work of teachers mainly includes writing research papers, applying for research projects at various levels, personal work publications, national patent applications, and guiding undergraduate research projects. Writing papers, monographs, and applying for patents can be independently completed by individual capabilities, but applying for research projects cannot be accomplished by single one with passion alone.

Firstly, there are restrictions on the research project application for the project holders. The projects application for the Chinese National Social Science Fund and Natural Science Fund requires the applicant to hold at least a senior professional title or a doctoral degree, and the age of the applicant for youth projects should be generally no more than 35 years old.

Secondly, there requires teamwork in research project application. A university-level research project must have at least 2 members, and higher-level projects require more members to collaborate each other. The number of team members generally ranges from 3 to 10, depending on the level of the project and the disciplines involved.

Thirdly, there are deadlines for project completion. Basic theoretical research in the National Social Science Fund projects need generally finish within 3-5 years, while applied research generally 2-3 years.

Fourthly, emphasis is placed on the foundation of preliminary research. If the research team lacks a foundation or previous research fruits, such as participation in or leading related projects or publishing papers or works related to the project, it is generally difficult to get the projects approved only by considering the research project “useful”.

From the four conditions mentioned above, it can be seen that young university teachers face various “conflicts” in research work. Although they can leverage their own strengths to complete some teaching and management work, when it comes to higher-level projects application, they must seek warmth in team and explore the team powers to destruct the conflicts and then reconstruct the confidence in research work. The principle of *Hesheng* (competitiveness in harmony) places the research in the entire human world, with “global village consciousness and spaceship consciousness” as the starting point and foundation. (Zhang, 1996, p.586). It emphasizes that various relationships in this broad context should be harmonized and then coexisted through integration over confrontation. In brief, the research environment in universities is also a context full of contradictions. Young teachers should cultivate themselves good research habits and rigorous research attitudes, leverage their disciplinary strengths and research interests, take proactive steps to seek interdisciplinary cooperation. It is also necessary to apply the principle of *Hesheng* to create an environment conducive to promoting research competitiveness, and accumulate their academic capital.

4.4.Common achievement through assessment

Most assessment systems in universities are institutionalized, with a characteristics of stability, incentive, and enforceability. Young teachers need to actively learn various regulations, understand the school’s policies, leverage their strengths, and address weaknesses in order to meet the corresponding assessment requirements. The principle of *Heda* advocates “common achievement” (Zhang, 1996, p.588). Young teachers in Chinese universities are forced to engage in competitions with colleagues in the same subject in teaching during their career development, such as teaching workload, innovations in teaching methods and concepts, interaction effects in teaching, diversified students performance assessment, students comments on quality of course teaching, teaching contests, experts and students recognition on high-quality classes, etc. In terms of scientific research, they need to compete with colleagues with same discipline, including the quantity and level of published papers, teaching-based textbook compilation, scientific research works, national patent inventions, research transformation capabilities, etc.

In terms of management, it mainly focuses on the understanding and execution of school policies, management skills and methods, such as standardized office work, responsibility for class management, appropriate skills in students performance evaluations and distribution of awards, scholarships, and subsidies, etc. These all, on the surface, are mutual competition, but rather than zero-sum games or so-called involution. In essence, young teachers not only improve their comprehensive abilities during the competition process but also enhance their comprehensive competitiveness in teaching, scientific research, management, and society services, ultimately cultivating a group of high-quality young teacher teams and achieving a win-win situation for both themselves and their universities.

4.5 Mutual love to shared love

The philosophy of *Hehe* (harmony) culture believes that the foundation and core of hesheng, hechu, heli, and heda is he'ai (shared love), and a consciousness of universal love. Learning to love is the priority of human life survival. (Zhang, 1996, p.589) Since young university teachers have already entered the field, they should consider themselves the master of the university, and demonstrate a sense of ownership.

In the school, firstly, they should love their students, treat the teacher-student relationship correctly, play the role of imparting knowledge and solving doubts, and set an example for the students' growth. Secondly, they should love the cause of education, connect their own growth with the development of education, continuously improve their teaching skills, and strive to become great masters. Thirdly, they also should love their colleagues and promote the quality of universal love, because colleagues are good teachers and friends in the growth process of young teachers. They can continuously learn from others' strengths in daily competition, make up for their own shortcomings, and make great progress together. Fourthly, they should love themselves. It is necessary to be able to "examine oneself three times a day" at work, be good at facing one's strengths and weaknesses, neither aim too high nor give up on oneself, and pay attention to one's physical and mental health.

Young teachers should learn to achieve mutual success and progress in a common field. Only when the university achieves good development can individuals have a better space to develop themselves. The growth of each teacher in turn promotes the continuous advancement of the university. As the late Mr. Fei Xiaotong (1910.11-2005.4) said, "achieving one's own goal yields gratification, lending a hand to consummate other's goal doubles satisfaction, goals of self and others can be unified, thus the world can be harmonized."

5. Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Consistent with prior empirical findings, this study confirms that restrictive quantitative-oriented title promotion rules, heavy teaching workloads and fierce academic competition jointly cause institutional anxiety and career stagnation among Chinese university young teachers, echoing existing research concerning their time anxiety and low occupational well-being. Different from previous studies predominantly focusing on institutional reform as solutions, this research innovatively introduces localized theory of *Hehe* studies with five-principle framework to supplement individual adaptive paths for young teachers, filling the research gap of lacking self-driven developmental strategies in relevant literature.

The application of Hesheng, Hechu, Heli, Heda and He'ai manifests practical compatibility with university academic field characteristics summarized by Bourdieu's field-capital theory. Harmonious coexistence and cooperative development guided by *Hehe* philosophy can effectively transform zero-sum competitive involution into win-win progress between individuals and universities, alleviating the title promotion bottleneck stemming from rigid senior title quota limits in regional higher education institutions such

as Yunnan's tertiary colleges.

Nevertheless, discrepancies exist between theoretical deduction and real-site practice. While *Hehe* culture provides soft cultural guidance for individual growth, its efficacy is inevitably constrained by rigid institutional assessment frameworks and fixed senior professional title proportion policies in the short time. Therefore, the optimization of promotion mechanism cannot solely rely on teachers' self-adjustment via *Hehe* philosophy; top-down policy revision and humanistic management improvement from university administrators remain indispensable complements for easing young teachers' developmental predicaments.

5.2. Conclusion

Young teachers are the largest group in Chinese universities and play an essentially foundational role in the high-quality development of universities. For Chinese universities to achieve high-quality development and strive for the goal of "Double First-Class", a high-quality team of young teachers is indispensable. Therefore, it is essential for the universities long-term development to care for, pay attention to, and create favourable growth environment of young teachers. It is also important to incorporate the growth of young teachers into the school's development planning. However, currently, young teachers in universities are generally faced with heavy teaching tasks, weak academic research production but high assessment requirements, and various pressure from promotion, income, family, children's education, personal psychological, and health issues, leading to a decrease in the occupational happiness of some young teachers in universities. Chen (2022, p.10) conducted a survey on the occupational happiness of young teachers in a Chinese Double First-Class university and found that more than half of the young teachers in universities do not have a high level of occupational happiness. The overall happiness level demonstrates the characteristic of "small numbers at both ends and large in the middle", with only a small number of young teachers feeling extremely happy in their careers, the largest proportion being teachers with average happiness, and those who feel unhappy in their career has a large proportion with obvious group features. Hu & Ren (2022, p.8) also pointed out that severe involution has accelerated the professional burnout of young teachers in universities. Therefore, this article applies the five principles of the *Hehe* studies to propose solutions to the three major dilemmas faced by young teachers in universities, hoping that they can take initiative to improve self quality construction and stay away from the involution or "lying flat" caused by excessive competition. The young teachers should try to foster harmonious interpersonal relationships, continuously improve teaching abilities, enhance scientific competitiveness, promote management skills, and balance the relationships between teaching, research, management, and life. Most importantly, they need gradually accumulate their capital according to the regulations and actively apply for the professional titles promotion. The final goal is coexistence in diversity, diversity with equal production, equal production with common achievement, and ultimately achieving coexistence with love.

5.3 Implications and Limitations

This study provides practical implications for policymakers, universities, and young teachers. For policymakers and university administrators, excessive reliance on quantitative evaluation indicators may intensify institutional anxiety and reduce

occupational identity among young teachers. Universities should therefore optimize professional title evaluation systems, establish mentoring mechanisms, and strengthen humanistic support. For young teachers, the study highlights the importance of improving professional adaptability, cultivating collaborative awareness, and balancing teaching, research, and personal development.

This study mainly relies on literature review, policy analysis, and secondary statistical data, which limits the empirical depth of the findings. The research does not include large-scale interviews or questionnaire surveys among young teachers from different universities and regions. Future studies may combine quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to further examine the effectiveness of *Hehe* culture in improving occupational well-being and career development among young university teachers.

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