

Article

When Productivity Fails to Enhance Satisfaction: Appointment Type and Research Well-Being in China's Dual-Track Academic System

Yajing Wang ¹ , Hazri Jamil ^{1,2,*}, Jing Zhao ² and Nabia Manzoor Shah Syed ¹ 

¹ School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang 11800, Malaysia; wangyajing@student.usm.my (Y.W.); nabia.m36@student.usm.my (N.M.S.S.)

² School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang 11800, Malaysia; zhaojingmagnitude@student.usm.my

* Correspondence: hazri@usm.my

Abstract

In this study, we draw on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and career stage theory to examine how faculty appointment type is linked to research satisfaction in China's dual-track academic system. Survey data from 359 faculty members at two comparable public research universities show that tenure-track faculty report higher research productivity but lower research satisfaction than their counterparts in officially budgeted posts. Research productivity partially mediates this relationship but does not fully offset the pressures associated with performance-based appointments. Career tenure also does not significantly moderate this relationship, suggesting that standardised evaluation regimes may weaken expected career-stage differences. These findings reveal a misalignment between measurable performance and academic well-being in productivity-oriented employment systems. From a faculty sustainability perspective, the results underscore the need for governance arrangements that balance research expectations with conditions that sustain long-term academic well-being.

Keywords: faculty appointment; research satisfaction; tenure track; officially budgeted posts; research productivity; faculty sustainability; career precarity

1. Introduction

In recent years, universities around the world have increasingly prioritised attracting external funding and recruiting competitive faculty and students [1]. In response, universities have increasingly restructured faculty recruitment and employment systems around performance goals. The tenure-track system was first introduced in the United States in the 1940s and was later adopted by higher education systems in Europe and Asia, including China [2], but its institutional configuration in China differs markedly from that of Western models. China has developed a dual-track faculty system that combines officially budgeted posts (bianzhi) with performance-based tenure-track positions [3,4], which reflects the coexistence of performance-oriented governance and bureaucratic control [4,5].

Faculty members holding officially budgeted posts generally enjoy stable employment until retirement, provided that they continue to meet professional and ethical standards [6]. By contrast, leading Chinese universities increasingly use a performance-based “up-or-out” system for tenure-track faculty, where contract renewal depends on measurable achievements in research, teaching, and service [3,7]. Since the launch of the “Double First-Class”



Academic Editor: Antonio P. Gutierrez de Blume

Received: 5 February 2026

Revised: 21 March 2026

Accepted: 25 March 2026

Published: 29 March 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and

conditions of the [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

[Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

initiative in 2015, competition among universities has become more intense, with greater emphasis placed on quantitative evaluation and performance-based governance [8,9].

However, this hybrid structure has raised concerns about faculty well-being, especially in highly centralised institutions. Although existing research has paid increasing attention to faculty well-being, it has focused mainly on job or career satisfaction, with far less attention to research satisfaction [10,11]. In performance-intensive systems such as China's, research satisfaction may serve as a more sensitive indicator of academic well-being than general job satisfaction because research performance is closely tied to faculty evaluation, promotion, and academic career sustainability [12–15].

At the same time, whether the job demands–resources (JD-R) model and career stage theory, both developed in Western contexts, adequately explain research satisfaction in China's dual-track academic system remains underexamined [16,17]. In highly regulated contexts, institutional resources may function not only as support mechanisms but also as channels through which performance pressure is intensified, producing a “high-resource–high-demand trap” [8].

Although prior research has examined the relationship between appointment type and research productivity or overall satisfaction [18,19], it remains unclear how these employment arrangements are shaped by governance structures in East Asian higher education systems. Such tensions are not unique to China; they have also been documented in Japan and South Korea [20,21]. This broader regional pattern makes China's highly standardised dual-track system a particularly important case for closer examination.

Against this backdrop, we focus on the relationship between faculty appointment type and research satisfaction in China's dual-track academic system. We also examine whether research productivity helps explain this relationship and whether this association varies by career tenure. To address these issues, the study is organised around three research questions:

1. How is faculty appointment type associated with research satisfaction in Chinese research universities?
2. Does research productivity mediate this relationship?
3. Does career tenure moderate the association between appointment type and research satisfaction?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Research Satisfaction in Chinese Higher Education

Research satisfaction is the overall evaluation by faculty members of multiple dimensions of the research support environment, including financial support, time release, publication opportunities, research assistance, institutional research environment, research rewards, and sabbatical provision [15]. It therefore concerns not only the provision of research-related support but also how such conditions are perceived and appraised by faculty members [12,13]. However, the factors shaping such evaluations are not uniform across contexts. In the Chinese context, compliance with administrative metrics such as grant acquisition quotas, journal ranking requirements, and bureaucratic evaluation processes exerts a direct influence on research satisfaction [3,22]. In addition, informal mechanisms such as relationship networks, administrative favouritism, and symbolic affiliations shape faculty access to research opportunities and institutional protection in China [23]. Unlike international scholarship, which often frames research satisfaction as an outcome of intrinsic motivation and scholarly autonomy, research satisfaction in China is more closely intertwined with external governance pressures embedded in institutional evaluation systems.

2.2. JD-R Model and Research Satisfaction

The JD-R model is useful for understanding research satisfaction in academic settings because it focuses on the relationship between job demands and job resources. In this framework, job demands, such as publication requirements and grant obligations, interact with job resources, including mentorship, protected time, and research funding, to shape research satisfaction [16]. Resources function as buffers that mitigate the negative effects of elevated demands.

However, in highly centralised and metric-driven systems such as China's, institutional resources are often linked to rising performance expectations rather than primarily directed toward faculty well-being. Faculty have faced increasing pressure to meet quantitative targets following the expansion of performance-driven reforms, particularly under the "Double First-Class" initiative [24]. Tenure-track faculty, while enjoying greater access to institutional resources and professional development opportunities, are also subject to intensified workloads and contract non-renewal risks [3,25].

Recent studies suggest that institutional investment in research resources does not necessarily translate into higher faculty satisfaction [25,26]. This misalignment has been conceptualised as a "high-resource-high-demand trap," where formal support is offset by rising expectations [2,8,27]. Such patterns call into question the linear buffering logic and suggest that, under performance-saturated regimes, resources may at times intensify rather than alleviate job strain.

2.3. Research Productivity as a Mediator

Research productivity is a widely used indicator of academic performance, commonly measured through publications, research grants, and citations [28]. Within the JD-R model, productivity is often positioned as a performance outcome shaped by institutional demands and resources, with potential implications for satisfaction. Empirical research shows that unequal access to funding, time, and institutional support exacerbates disparities in research output [3,29,30]. In China, evaluation frameworks heavily emphasise output-based metrics, particularly publication records and success in securing competitive research funding [6,29,31]. In practice, publication performance is commonly assessed through publications in journals indexed by the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Science Citation Index (SCI), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI), and Chinese Science Citation Database (CSCD) [6,31].

While tenure-track faculty frequently achieve higher research productivity due to stronger incentives and greater resource access, higher output does not necessarily translate into higher satisfaction [32,33]. The pressure to publish in high-impact journals, combined with limited recognition of diverse scholarly contributions, may erode intrinsic motivation and heighten burnout [32–34]. Recent research in Chinese universities suggests that increased output may even heighten stress and dissatisfaction, owing to the rigid, metric-driven nature of academic evaluation [3,8]. Accordingly, although research productivity is theoretically positioned as a mediating mechanism between institutional conditions and satisfaction, its explanatory role may be constrained in performance-intensive environments.

2.4. Career Stage Theory and Career Tenure as a Moderator

Career stage theory suggests that faculty respond to institutional demands differently across stages of the academic lifecycle [17]. Early-career academics are typically more vulnerable to institutional pressures due to probationary contracts, reliance on external evaluation, and limited bargaining power, whereas senior faculty are often assumed to enjoy greater autonomy and role flexibility [35,36]. From this perspective, career tenure may moderate how institutional appointment structures influence research satisfaction.

However, standardised evaluation systems in China blur distinctions across career stages, challenging the assumption that seniority confers meaningful insulation from institutional pressure. Uniform performance indicators and contract-based assessments may neutralise differences in experience, status, and negotiation capacity, producing a flattened hierarchy in which faculty at different stages face similar oversight and expectations [24,37]. Empirical evidence provides mixed support for the buffering role of tenure, with studies suggesting that extended tenure does not necessarily reduce stress or dissatisfaction in performance-driven environments [38,39]. Within such standardised KPI regimes, the moderating role of career tenure remains uncertain, raising questions about the generalisability of career stage theory to highly bureaucratised academic systems [20,21].

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Building on the preceding discussion, in this study, we adopt a focused analytical strategy rather than a fully moderated mediation model. Specifically, we examine (a) a mediation pathway through research productivity and (b) a moderation effect of career tenure on the direct relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction. As illustrated in Figure 1, appointment type (tenure-track versus officially budgeted posts) is modelled as having both a direct association with research satisfaction and an indirect association via research productivity, reflecting the central role of output in performance-based academic evaluation. Career tenure is proposed as a moderator of the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction, as the institutional pressures associated with appointment structures may vary in their impact across career stages. This parsimonious modelling strategy allows for a theoretically grounded test of key mechanisms while remaining attentive to the institutional context of China's dual-track academic system.

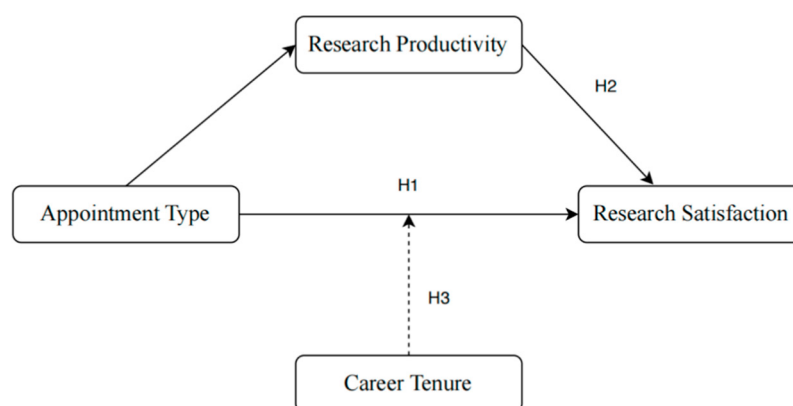


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of the study. Note. Solid arrows represent the hypothesised direct relationships, whereas the dotted arrow represents the hypothesised moderating effect of career tenure.

2.6. Hypothesis Development

Drawing on the preceding discussion, three hypotheses are advanced:

- H1.** Faculty in tenure-track positions report lower research satisfaction than their counterparts in officially budgeted posts.
- H2.** Research productivity partially mediates the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction.
- H3.** Career tenure moderates the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction, such that the strength of the association varies across career stages.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

In this study, we employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between faculty appointment type and research satisfaction, while also considering the mediating role of research productivity and the moderating role of career tenure. Two “Double First-Class” universities located in the provincial capital of S Province participated in the study. One adopted a tenure-track system, while the other implemented officially budgeted posts. Despite these administrative differences, both institutions are similarly ranked nationwide. This institutional contrast offers a comparative setting to investigate how different appointment types shape faculty experiences within the broader context of China’s elite higher education system.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

An institution-stratified questionnaire distribution strategy was employed. Because the two participating universities had comparable full-time faculty populations (approximately 2700 faculty members each), questionnaires were allocated equally across the two institutions. Within each institution, questionnaires were then distributed across colleges/schools using a near-even allocation strategy to ensure broad coverage across disciplinary areas and faculty ranks, rather than strict proportional stratification at the subunit level. Accordingly, the sampling procedure should be understood as an institution-stratified design with coverage-oriented allocation within institutions, rather than a strictly proportionate multistage stratified random sample.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed (250 per university). From the tenure-track institution, 202 questionnaires were returned (response rate: 80.8%), with 195 deemed valid (valid response rate: 78.0%), and from the institution offering budgeted posts, 168 questionnaires were returned (response rate: 67.2%), of which 164 were valid (valid response rate: 65.6%). In total, 359 questionnaires remained for analysis, yielding an overall valid response rate of 71.8% (see Figure 2).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for participant demographics for the total sample and by institution. Gender and age did not differ significantly between the two institutions, whereas years of experience and academic title did. Based on the final valid samples and the approximate faculty population size of each institution, approximate margins of error were calculated for descriptive reference only under a simple random sampling assumption at the 95% confidence level, assuming maximum variability ($p = 0.50$). On this basis, the estimated margins of error were approximately $\pm 6.8\%$ for the tenure-track university and $\pm 7.4\%$ for the university offering budgeted posts, and that for the combined sample was approximately $\pm 5.0\%$. The resulting sample size and its distribution across disciplines and ranks were considered sufficient to support partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents.

Category	Group	Total n (%)	Tenure-Track n (%)	Officially Budgeted Posts n (%)	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Gender	Male	169 (47.1%)	94 (48.2%)	75 (45.7%)	0.219	0.640
	Female	190 (52.9%)	101 (51.8%)	89 (54.3%)		
Age	30 years and below	37 (10.3%)	21 (10.8%)	16 (9.8%)	1.57	0.667
	31–35 years	178 (49.6%)	101 (51.8%)	77 (47.0%)		
	36–40 years	115 (32.0%)	57 (29.2%)	58 (35.4%)		
	Above 40 years	29 (8.1%)	16 (8.2%)	13 (7.9%)		

Table 1. Cont.

Category	Group	Total n (%)	Tenure-Track n (%)	Officially Budgeted Posts n (%)	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Years of Experience	≤3 years	116 (32.3%)	43 (22.1%)	73 (44.5%)	24.1	<0.001
	4–6 years	88 (24.5%)	48 (24.6%)	40 (24.4%)		
	>7 years	155 (43.1%)	104 (53.3%)	51 (31.1%)		
Academic Title	Assistant Professor	142 (39.5%)	46 (23.6%)	96 (58.5%)	81.3	<0.001
	Associate Professor	143 (39.8%)	119 (61.0%)	24 (14.6%)		
	Professor	74 (20.6%)	30 (15.4%)	44 (26.8%)		
Disciplinary Field	Science & Engineering	132 (36.7%)	66 (33.8%)	66 (40.2%)	1.57	0.210
	Humanities, Social Sciences & Arts	227 (63.2%)	129 (66.2%)	98 (59.8%)		

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Between-institution differences were examined using chi-square tests.

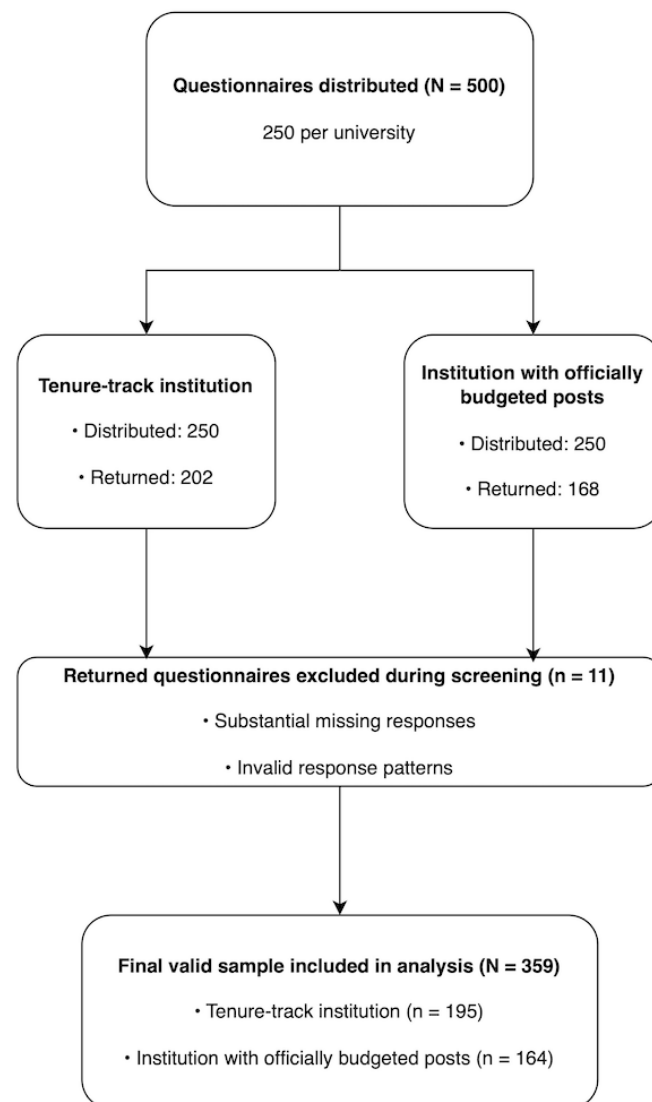


Figure 2. Flow diagram of questionnaire distribution and sample selection.

3.3. Measures

A structured questionnaire was used to assess the primary constructs of interest. Research satisfaction was measured using a 9-item scale adapted from the Faculty Satisfaction

Questionnaire [15], which covers domains such as institutional research support, publication opportunities, and sabbatical policies. The scale was translated into Chinese through a rigorous back-translation procedure and subsequently reviewed by three bilingual scholars to ensure both linguistic and conceptual equivalence. Participants rated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Research productivity was operationalised using two factual self-reported indicators: (1) the number of journal articles published in the past five years in journals indexed by SCI, SSCI, AHCI, CSSCI, or CSCD, and (2) the number of research projects funded by national or provincial-level government agencies. These metrics reflect standard benchmarks in research evaluation practices in Chinese universities.

Career tenure was measured as the number of years in academic employment and categorised into three groups: less than 3 years, 4 to 6 years, and more than 7 years. This classification was intended to approximate early, developing, and more established career stages, respectively, within the institutional context of Chinese research universities and to facilitate group-based moderation analysis.

To reduce the potential risk of common method bias, multiple procedural remedies were implemented. First, the key constructs were measured using different measurement formats, with research satisfaction assessed through self-reported perceptions and research productivity captured using factual count-based indicators of publications and funded projects. Second, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to minimise evaluation apprehension and socially desirable responses. In addition to these procedural remedies, a statistical assessment of common method bias was conducted using the full collinearity VIF approach within the PLS-SEM framework. When research satisfaction was specified as the endogenous construct, the VIF values for appointment type and research productivity were both 1.137, whereas when research productivity was specified as the endogenous construct, those for appointment type and research satisfaction were both 1.091. All values were well below the recommended threshold of 3.3, suggesting that common method bias is unlikely to be a substantial concern in this study, although it cannot be ruled out entirely.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analysed in SmartPLS 4 using PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM was chosen over CB-SEM given the moderate sample size and the non-normal distribution of key observed variables, as well as the exploratory nature of model paths, particularly the simultaneous inclusion of mediation and moderation effects. This approach is consistent with methodological recommendations for models with moderate complexity and emerging theoretical development [40].

As shown in Table 2, all continuous variables exhibited non-normal distributions, as indicated by significant results from the Cramér–von Mises normality test ($p < 0.05$). Research productivity showed substantial positive skewness (skewness = 2.022; kurtosis = 7.508), reflecting a concentration of low-output faculty alongside a minority of high performers. Appointment type was coded as a binary variable (0 = tenure-track; 1 = officially budgeted), with a mean of 0.457 reflecting sample composition. All continuous variables were standardised (mean = 0, SD = 1) before model estimation to facilitate coefficient interpretation and reduce multicollinearity. Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples was used to assess the statistical significance of model paths.

Under this coding scheme, a positive coefficient for appointment type indicates higher levels of the outcome variable among faculty in officially budgeted posts relative to those in tenure-track positions, such that positive effects should be interpreted as favouring officially budgeted posts over tenure-track positions in the present coding scheme.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics and normality diagnostics of variables (N = 359).

Variable	Mean	SD	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness	Cramér-von Mises Test Statistic	Cramér-von Mises <i>p</i> -Value
Appointment Type	0.457	0.498	−1.981	0.174	10.646	<0.001
Research Productivity	0	1	7.508	2.022	1.441	<0.001
Research Satisfaction	0	1	−0.712	−0.037	0.24	0.002

3.5. Evaluation of Measurement Model

As shown in Table 3, all outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Appointment type was modelled as a single-indicator exogenous variable, and the interaction term (Appoint_Tenure_Int) was included to test the moderating effect of career tenure. The two indicators of research productivity loaded at 0.921 and 0.906, respectively, while the nine research satisfaction items ranged from 0.728 to 0.842. Cronbach's alpha, McDonald's omega, and Composite Reliability (CR) values for the multi-item constructs were all above 0.80, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were 0.835 for research productivity and 0.635 for research satisfaction, both exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50.

Table 3. Measurement model evaluation summary.

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	CR	AVE	VIF
Appointment Type	Single-Indicator	1.000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.000
Appoint_Tenure_Int	Single-Indicator	1.000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.000
Research Productivity	Award_Research_Fund	0.921	0.802	0.802	0.910	0.835	1.813
	Award_Research_WOS	0.906					1.813
Research Satisfaction	RS_1	0.759	0.928	0.929	0.940	0.635	2.114
	RS_2	0.842					2.835
	RS_3	0.805					2.343
	RS_4	0.728					1.800
	RS_5	0.841					2.906
	RS_6	0.834					2.796
	RS_7	0.811					2.568
	RS_8	0.788					2.282
	RS_9	0.757					2.106

Note. N/A = not applicable. For single-indicator constructs, internal consistency and convergent validity indices (e.g., Cronbach's α , McDonald's ω , CR, and AVE) are not applicable. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor. For the single-indicator appointment type variable and the interaction term, internal consistency was not assessed and outer loadings were fixed at 1. Thresholds: loading > 0.7; α /CR > 0.7; AVE > 0.5; VIF < 5. McDonald's omega was computed separately in jamovi (Version 2.7.24); all other statistics were obtained from SmartPLS 4.

Discriminant validity was supported, as all Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratios were below 0.85 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Discriminant validity results (HTMT ratio).

	Appoint_Tenure_Int	Appointment Type	Research Productivity	Research Satisfaction
Appoint_Tenure_Int				
Appointment Type	0.476			
Research Productivity	0.288	0.391		
Research Satisfaction	0.296	0.319	0.182	

In addition, inspecting the cross-loading matrix in SmartPLS showed that each indicator loaded highest on its intended construct, providing further support for indicator-level discriminant validity (see Table 5). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.000 to 2.906, suggesting no multicollinearity concerns (see Table 3).

Table 5. Cross-loading matrix for indicator-level discriminant validity.

	Appoint_Tenure_Int	Appointment Type	Research Productivity	Research Satisfaction
Appoint_Tenure_Int	1.000	0.476	0.254	0.290
Appointment Type	0.476	1.000	−0.351	0.314
Award_Research_Fund	0.153	−0.343	0.921	0.126
Award_Research_WOS	0.317	−0.297	0.906	0.157
RS_1	0.203	0.144	0.160	0.759
RS_2	0.277	0.303	0.066	0.842
RS_3	0.258	0.342	0.057	0.805
RS_4	0.283	0.218	0.214	0.728
RS_5	0.217	0.259	0.071	0.841
RS_6	0.240	0.265	0.132	0.834
RS_7	0.217	0.244	0.139	0.811
RS_8	0.205	0.171	0.149	0.788
RS_9	0.143	0.255	0.135	0.757

In addition, research satisfaction was modelled as a unidimensional reflective construct. Although the nine items refer to different aspects of institutional research support, they were theoretically conceptualised as reflecting a global evaluation of overall satisfaction by the faculty members with the research environment rather than distinct subdimensions. To further examine this specification, an auxiliary single-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, showing a generally acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 99.21$, $df = 27$, $\chi^2/df = 3.67$, CFI = 0.965, TLI = 0.953, and SRMR = 0.032), although RMSEA (0.086) was slightly above the conventional 0.08 threshold. Standardised factor loadings ranged from 0.663 to 0.834, indicating that all items loaded meaningfully on the latent construct. These results provide reasonable support for treating research satisfaction as a unidimensional construct for the present analysis. Nonetheless, the slightly elevated RMSEA suggests that future research may further examine whether a more differentiated structure emerges in other institutional or national contexts.

Research productivity was operationalised using two complementary indicators: indexed journal publications and competitively funded research projects. In the context of Chinese university evaluation, these indicators capture distinct but closely related dimensions of scholarly output and were therefore treated as jointly representing faculty research productivity. Nevertheless, the use of only two indicators should be acknowledged as a limitation of the present study, as it may constrain measurement stability and construct validity.

Overall, the measurement model demonstrated acceptable reliability and construct validity for the present analysis, although future research should use a broader set of indicators to capture research productivity more comprehensively.

4. Findings

4.1. Structural Model Evaluation

The initial structural model included control variables (gender, age, disciplinary field, and academic title), yielding an R^2 value of 21.0% for research satisfaction. Because the inclusion of these controls did not materially alter the focal path estimates or improve inter-

pretive clarity, the more parsimonious model without controls is reported as the primary model [40]. The refined model explained 17.9% of the variance in research satisfaction and 12.3% of the variance in research productivity. Although several structural paths were statistically significant, the model showed limited explanatory power, indicating that additional institutional, disciplinary, and individual factors may also contribute to variation in faculty research productivity and research satisfaction. These relatively modest R^2 values indicate that the model should be interpreted as offering a partial rather than comprehensive explanation of faculty research experience.

Table 6 shows that appointment type significantly predicted both research productivity ($\beta = -0.705$, $SE = 0.076$, $t = 9.256$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[-0.841, -0.543]$, $f^2 = 0.141$) and research satisfaction ($\beta = 0.812$, $SE = 0.139$, $t = 5.860$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.512, 1.052]$, $f^2 = 0.107$). Given that appointment type was coded as 0 = tenure-track and 1 = officially budgeted, the negative coefficient for research productivity indicates that tenure-track faculty reported higher research productivity, whereas the positive coefficient for research satisfaction indicates higher satisfaction among faculty in officially budgeted posts.

Table 6. Results of structural model: path coefficients and significance tests.

Path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	f^2
Appoint_Tenure_Int → Research Satisfaction	0.024	0.071	0.343	0.731	$[-0.112, 0.165]$	0.000
Appointment Type → Research Productivity	−0.705	0.076	9.256	<0.001	$[-0.841, -0.543]$	0.141
Appointment Type → Research Satisfaction	0.812	0.139	5.860	<0.001	$[0.512, 1.052]$	0.107
Research Productivity → Research Satisfaction	0.290	0.071	4.084	<0.001	$[0.135, 0.415]$	0.066

Note. Path coefficients (β) are standardised estimates obtained from the SmartPLS bootstrapping procedure (5000 resamples). SE = standard error; CI = bias-corrected 95% confidence interval; f^2 = effect size. A path is considered statistically significant when the 95% confidence interval does not include zero. $R^2 = 0.123$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.121$ for Research Productivity; $R^2 = 0.179$ and adjusted $R^2 = 0.172$ for Research Satisfaction.

Research productivity also had a positive and statistically significant effect on research satisfaction ($\beta = 0.290$, $SE = 0.071$, $t = 4.084$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.135, 0.415]$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.066$). By contrast, the interaction effect of appointment type and career tenure on research satisfaction was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.024$, $SE = 0.071$, $t = 0.343$, $p = 0.731$, 95% CI $[-0.112, 0.165]$, $f^2 = 0.000$), indicating that career tenure did not moderate the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction. The effect size of appointment type on research satisfaction was small ($f^2 = 0.107$), whereas the effect of appointment type on research productivity was somewhat larger ($f^2 = 0.141$).

Auxiliary OLS regressions based on latent variable scores yielded substantively similar patterns and are reported in Table 7 for transparency.

Table 7. Auxiliary regression results based on latent variable scores.

Dependent Variable	Predictor	Coefficient (B)	SE	t	p	R^2
Research Productivity	Appointment Type	−0.7050	0.0995	−7.090	<0.001	0.123
Research Satisfaction	Appointment Type	0.8118	0.1320	6.150	<0.001	0.179
Research Satisfaction	Research Productivity	0.2898	0.0598	4.848	<0.001	
Research Satisfaction	Appoint_Tenure_Int	0.0243	0.0636	0.383	0.702	

Note. The coefficients reported in this table are auxiliary OLS regression estimates based on latent variable scores exported from SmartPLS and subsequently analysed in JAMOV. They are provided for transparency and robustness checking and should be interpreted as supplementary to, rather than a substitute for, the PLS-SEM structural results reported in Table 6. Minor differences in standard errors, t-values, and p-values are expected because the two sets of results are derived from different estimation procedures.

4.2. Direct Effect and Hypothesis 1 (H1)

The direct effect of appointment type on research satisfaction was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.812$, $SE = 0.139$, $t = 5.860$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.512, 1.052]$). The positive coefficient

indicates that faculty holding officially budgeted posts report significantly higher research satisfaction than their tenure-track counterparts. These results support H1.

4.3. Mediation Analysis and Hypothesis 2 (H2)

To examine whether research productivity mediates the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction, a mediation model with both direct and indirect paths was estimated (Figure 3). The structural equations are specified as

$$M = aX + \varepsilon_1$$

$$Y = bM + c'X + \varepsilon_2$$

where

X = appointment type;

M = research productivity;

Y = research satisfaction;

a: effect of X on M;

b: effect of M on Y;

c': direct effect of X on Y, controlling for M;

$\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2$: residual errors.

Bootstrapping results confirmed that this indirect effect was statistically significant and negative ($\beta = -0.204$, 95% CI $[-0.315, -0.092]$). Given the coding of appointment type (0 = tenure-track; 1 = officially budgeted posts), this negative sign indicates that tenure-track appointments are associated with higher research productivity, which, in turn, is positively associated with research satisfaction. Thus, productivity partially offset, but did not eliminate, the lower research satisfaction associated with tenure-track appointments. However, the direct effect of appointment type on research satisfaction remained statistically significant after accounting for research productivity ($c' = 0.812$, SE = 0.139, $t = 5.860$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.512, 1.052]$), indicating partial mediation. Therefore, H2 is supported.

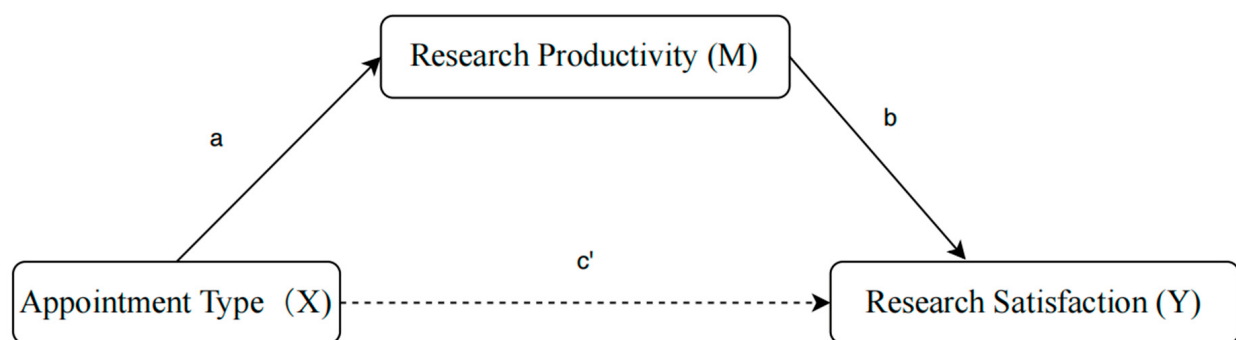


Figure 3. Mediation analysis. Note: Solid arrows represent the indirect paths (a and b), whereas the dotted arrow represents the direct effect (c').

4.4. Moderation Analysis and Hypothesis 3 (H3)

Career tenure was operationalised as an ordinal variable (1 = ≤ 3 years; 2 = 4–6 years; 3 = > 7 years) and included in the model to test its moderating effect on the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction (Figure 4). An interaction term was constructed as the product of appointment type (X) and career tenure (Z). The moderation model is specified as

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X + \beta_2Z + \beta_3XZ + \varepsilon$$

where:

X = appointment type;
 Z = career tenure;
 XZ = interaction term (Appoint_Tenure_Int);
 Y = research satisfaction;
 β_1 : direct effect of X on Y;
 β_2 : direct effect of Z on Y;
 β_3 : moderation effect (interaction).

The interaction effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.024$, $SE = 0.071$, $t = 0.343$, $p = 0.731$, 95% CI $[-0.112, 0.165]$), which indicates that the association between appointment type and research satisfaction does not vary significantly across different levels of career tenure. Accordingly, H3 is not supported.

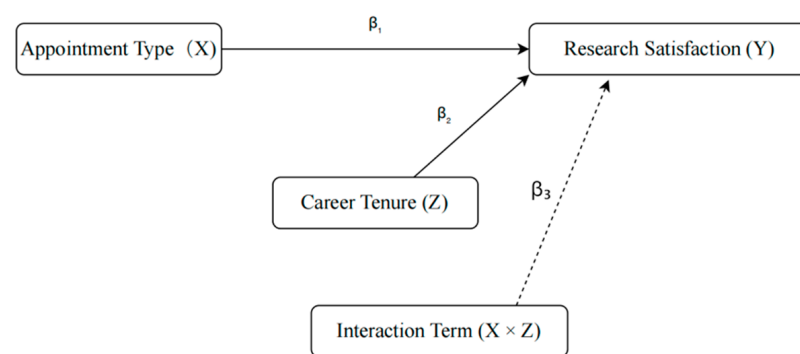


Figure 4. Moderation analysis. Note: Solid arrows represent the main-effect paths, whereas the dotted arrow represents the moderating effect of the interaction term ($X \times Z$).

Overall, the results support H1 and H2 but not H3. Faculties in tenure-track positions report lower research satisfaction despite higher research productivity, and research productivity partially mediates the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction. However, career tenure does not significantly moderate this association.

5. Discussion

5.1. Revisiting the Link Between Appointment Type and Research Satisfaction

The finding that tenure-track faculty report lower research satisfaction despite higher research productivity highlights a central tension in China's dual-track academic system. While designed to promote academic excellence, tenure-track appointments may intensify evaluation pressure and employment uncertainty, particularly among early-career academics [41,42]. This pattern is consistent with evidence from both China and other national contexts showing that tenure-track arrangements may heighten pressure, institutional uncertainty, and turnover risk in competitive academic environments [30,43,44]. It also aligns with research suggesting that institutional support, employment stability, and perceived autonomy play a more central role in faculty satisfaction than output levels alone [10,18,45]. In contrast, officially budgeted posts provide greater job security and reduced performance pressure [46], which appears to be associated with higher levels of research satisfaction.

These findings are consistent with a “high-resource–high-demand trap” [8], in which increased institutional investment in research is accompanied by intensified performance expectations. From the JD-R perspective, this pattern suggests that the demands associated with tenure-track appointments may outweigh the supportive value of available resources, thereby reducing research satisfaction. This interpretation may also be situated within a broader discussion of academic precarity. Rather than fully eliminating precarity, tenure-track arrangements may reconfigure it by combining more structured career pathways with continued insecurity linked to performance-dependent renewal, evaluation, and

advancement [47–49]. This concern has also been recognised in recent European policy, where the Council of the European Union [50] identifies precarity and insecure fixed-term employment as barriers to attractive and sustainable research careers.

5.2. Research Productivity as a Double-Edged Mediator

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, research productivity partially mediated the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction. Tenure-track faculty achieved higher research output, which may reflect stronger performance incentives and greater access to institutional resources [2,51–53]. However, higher productivity did not correspond to proportionate gains in research satisfaction. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that performance pressures can raise measurable output while simultaneously intensifying academic strain and insecurity [54,55].

While increased output may support recognition and career advancement, it may also be associated with heightened stress and reduced intrinsic motivation under rigid and metric-oriented evaluation regimes [8,33]. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory [56], research activity that is closely tied to contract renewal and evaluation outcomes may undermine autonomy and weaken research satisfaction. In this sense, productivity may improve observable performance without necessarily leading to comparable gains in how faculty experience their research work [57–60].

This interpretation is consistent with the PLS-SEM results, which suggest that the productivity pathway provided a meaningful but limited explanation of how appointment type was associated with research satisfaction. Although the indirect effect through productivity was significant, the direct effect of appointment type on research satisfaction remained significant, indicating that the productivity pathway was not strong enough to offset the lower research satisfaction reported by tenure-track faculty. This pathway should not be understood as exhaustive, as other institutional, disciplinary, and personal conditions are also likely to shape how faculty translate research performance into satisfaction.

5.3. Challenging the Moderating Role of Career Tenure

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, career tenure did not significantly moderate the relationship between appointment type and research satisfaction. This suggests that career tenure may have limited explanatory value in highly standardised and centralised governance regimes. Career stage theory assumes that professional seniority enhances coping capacity and buffers institutional stressors [17], but this assumption appears less applicable in the Chinese context. Empirical evidence indicates that even senior or formally tenured faculty may continue to experience performance expectations shaped during probationary periods [61] and that voluntary resignation among tenure-track faculty can occur despite meeting formal evaluation criteria [31]. Under increasingly managerial and standardised university governance, institutional pressures may cut across career stages rather than being substantially offset by seniority alone [54,55]. When faculty are evaluated against similar performance indicators regardless of seniority, the developmental benefits typically associated with career progression may be reduced [24,58,62].

This finding reflects broader structural dynamics within China's higher education system. Performance-based reforms, including the tenure-track system, have been introduced within existing bureaucratic frameworks without fundamentally altering centralised control mechanisms [63]. As a result, faculty agency may remain constrained across ranks, and career tenure alone may do little to differentiate experiences of institutional pressure. More broadly, this finding suggests that the explanatory value of career stage theory may be context-dependent and highlights the need for more context-sensitive approaches to understanding faculty experience under bureaucratic governance structures.

5.4. Recalibrating Theoretical Models in Context

By examining the JD-R model and career stage theory within China's highly standardised academic environment, in this study, we show the limits of applying Western-derived frameworks without close attention to governance context. Although universities in many national systems are increasingly shaped by rankings, funding competition, measurable research outputs, and policy expectations [55,64,65], in China, these pressures are more directly embedded in state-led governance, policy-driven evaluation, and employment arrangements [66–68]. Under these conditions, resources may not function as straightforward forms of support, and career-stage differences may not operate in the expected way.

From a JD-R perspective, the findings suggest that resources should not be treated as inherently protective [16]. Research support, funding, and development opportunities may be tied to heightened expectations for measurable output, making their buffering role conditional rather than automatic. In this sense, faculty may experience support not simply through formal resource provision, but through the broader institutional conditions under which performance, evaluation, and employment are organised [23]. This helps explain why greater institutional investment does not necessarily translate into stronger research satisfaction.

At a broader level, this pattern points to a sustainability dilemma in performance-oriented systems: institutional gains in output do not necessarily translate into stronger faculty satisfaction or psychological well-being. Viewed through the lens of faculty sustainability, output-based incentives alone are unlikely to sustain the academic workforce over time. Sustainable academic systems require not only productivity but also employment security, procedural fairness, and meaningful scholarly autonomy [69,70]. Without such conditions, stronger performance expectations may undermine the very human capacity on which academic productivity depends. Similar concerns have also appeared in recent European policy discussions on precarity and insecure research careers [50]. Faculty satisfaction, in this sense, is shaped not simply by the availability of resources but by how academic systems organise pressure, evaluation, and employment security.

5.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. Because the data are cross-sectional, the findings should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. Longitudinal research would be useful for examining how research satisfaction and productivity change across career stages and policy cycles. The sample was drawn from two elite “Double First-Class” universities, which means the results may not extend to other parts of China's highly differentiated higher education system. A further limitation is that the comparison involved two separate universities. The observed differences may therefore reflect not only appointment type but also broader institutional features such as governance arrangements, resource distribution, and organisational culture. Future research could address this issue by including a wider range of institutions or by following faculty through appointment-system reforms within the same university.

An additional limitation concerns measurement. Research productivity was modelled as a reflective construct with two indicators on conceptual grounds, but constructs measured with only two indicators may be less stable and may offer more limited evidence of construct validity than those represented by a broader set of indicators. Accordingly, the use of only two indicators should be acknowledged as a limitation of the present study, as it provides a relatively narrow representation of the construct. Future research could strengthen the measurement of research productivity by incorporating a wider range of publication-, project-, or performance-related indicators.

In addition, demographic and disciplinary controls were examined in preliminary models but were not retained in the final model, because they were consistently non-significant and did not alter the main pattern of results. Although this improved model parsimony, it may also have reduced sensitivity to subgroup variation, including possible differences by gender, age, or discipline. Relatedly, the relatively modest explanatory power of the final model suggests that important predictors were not captured in the present framework. Future studies should consider additional factors, such as organisational climate, leadership support, disciplinary norms, perceived fairness, workload structure, and individual career motivations. Qualitative research could help clarify how faculty interpret and respond to institutional pressures in everyday academic practice, while multi-site designs could further strengthen understanding of how these dynamics vary across institutional contexts.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we examined how appointment type relates to research satisfaction within China's dual-track academic employment system. The findings show that tenure-track faculty, despite higher research productivity, reported lower research satisfaction than those in officially budgeted posts. Research productivity partially mediated this relationship but did not offset the satisfaction gap associated with tenure-track appointments. Career tenure also did not significantly moderate this relationship. Taken together, these findings suggest that structural conditions shape academic well-being more strongly than output or seniority alone. They also indicate that frameworks such as the JD-R model and career stage theory may require contextual refinement in highly standardised and metric-driven governance settings. From a faculty sustainability perspective, improving academic well-being requires more than stronger performance; it also depends on evaluation and governance arrangements that support employment stability, role clarity, and meaningful scholarly autonomy. These conclusions should nevertheless be interpreted in light of the study's measurement limitations and modest explanatory power.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.W.; Methodology, Y.W.; Software, J.Z.; Validation, J.Z.; Formal analysis, Y.W. and N.M.S.S.; Investigation, Y.W.; Resources, Y.W.; Data curation, Y.W. and N.M.S.S.; Writing—original draft, Y.W.; Writing—review and editing, H.J.; Visualisation, N.M.S.S.; Supervision, H.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Funan Agriculture and Forestry Science and Technology School (2025071001) on 10 July 2025.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy restrictions associated with survey data collected from human participants.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Bleiklie, I. Norwegian Higher Education Futures. *High. Educ.* **2023**, *89*, 311–330. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Huang, W.; Liu, Q.; Xing, J.; Zheng, S. *The Tenure-Track System and Academic Research Productivity: Evidence from Reforms in Chinese Universities*; SSRN: Rochester, NY, USA, 2021. [[CrossRef](#)]
3. Yang, X.; Cai, X.L.; Li, T.S. Does the Tenure Track Influence Academic Research? An Empirical Study of Faculty Members in China. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2023**, *49*, 476–492. [[CrossRef](#)]

4. Scott, T.; Guan, W.; Han, H.; Zou, X.; Chen, Y. The Impact of Academic Optimism, Institutional Policy and Support, and Self-Efficacy on University Instructors' Continuous Professional Development in Mainland China. *SAGE Open* **2023**, *13*, 21582440231153339. [CrossRef]
5. Gu, J.; Levin, J.S. Tournament in Academia: A Comparative Analysis of Faculty Evaluation Systems in Research Universities in China and the USA. *High. Educ.* **2021**, *81*, 897–915. [CrossRef]
6. Wang, L.; Li, S. "Non-Rise or Go" and Its Governance from the Multidisciplinary Perspective. *J. Heilongjiang Inst. Teach. Dev.* **2021**, *40*, 1–5.
7. Peng, H.; Hu, Z. The "Pre-Employment—Long-Term Employment" System in Colleges and Universities: A Jurisprudential Perspective. *Educ. Res.* **2023**, *8*, 102–112.
8. Luo, Y.; Wang, J. Up or Out: The Ruthless Tenure Race for Young Chinese Scholars. Available online: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1015445> (accessed on 30 October 2025).
9. Qin, D.; Huang, G. An Analysis of the Two-Factor Theory in the "up-or-out" System for Faculty Employment in Chinese Higher Education. *Beijing Educ.* **2022**, *9*, 26–29.
10. Bentley, P.J.; Kyvik, S. Individual Differences in Faculty Research Time Allocations Across 13 Countries. *Res. High. Educ.* **2013**, *54*, 329–348. [CrossRef]
11. Li, L.; Kanchanapoom, K.; Deeprasert, J.; Duan, N.; Qi, Z. Unveiling the Factors Shaping Teacher Job Performance: Exploring the Interplay of Personality Traits, Perceived Organizational Support, Self-Efficacy, and Job Satisfaction. *BMC Psychol.* **2025**, *13*, 14. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
12. Shin, J.C.; Jung, J. Academics Job Satisfaction and Job Stress across Countries in the Changing Academic Environments. *High. Educ.* **2014**, *67*, 603–620. [CrossRef]
13. Bentley, P.J.; Coates, H.; Dobson, I.R.; Goedegebuure, L.; Meek, V.L. *Job Satisfaction Around the Academic World*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2012. [CrossRef]
14. Wang, C.; Li, S. The Contemporary Picture of the Tenure Track System in Colleges and Universities and the Regulation of Public Law. *J. China Three Gorges Univ. (Humanit. Soc. Sci.)* **2023**, *45*, 101–108+116. [CrossRef]
15. Gil, A. *Faculty Satisfaction Questionnaire: Development, Validity, and Reliability*; ED333816; ERIC: Washington, DC, USA, 1991.
16. Bakker, A.B.; Demerouti, E. Multiple Levels in Job Demands-Resources Theory: Implications for Employee Well-Being and Performance. In *Handbook of Well-Being*; Diener, E., Oishi, S., Tay, L., Eds.; DEF Publishers: Salt Lake City, UT, USA, 2018. Available online: https://www.isonderhouden.nl/doc/pdf/arnoldbakker/articles/articles_arnold_bakker_460.pdf (accessed on 30 October 2025).
17. Blackmore, P.; Kandiko, C.B. Motivation in Academic Life: A Prestige Economy. *Res. Post-Compuls. Educ.* **2011**, *16*, 399–411. [CrossRef]
18. O'Meara, K. Enabling Possibility: Reform of Faculty Appointments and Evaluation. *TIAA Inst. Res. Pap. Ser.* **2022**, *1*, 1–23. [CrossRef]
19. Phillips, L. The Predictability of Selected Academic, Demographic, and Job-Related Factors on the Job Satisfaction of Faculty Members Employed at a Historically Black University. Ph.D. Thesis, Texas Southern University, Houston, TX, USA, 2024.
20. Hazelkorn, E. World-Class Universities or World-Class Systems? Rankings and Higher Education Policy Choices. In *Rankings and Accountability in Higher Education: Uses and Misuses*; UNESCO: Paris, France, 2013; pp. 71–94.
21. Mok, K.H.; Jiang, J. Massification of Higher Education and Challenges for Graduate Employment and Social Mobility: East Asian Experiences and Sociological Reflections. *Int. J. Educ. Dev.* **2018**, *63*, 44–51. [CrossRef]
22. Wang, C.; Shi, L. The Experience and Enlightenment of "Pre-Tenure" Promotion and Evaluation in American Universities. *High. Educ. Rev.* **2021**, *9*, 217–228.
23. Wang, T.; Wang, W.; Dai, K. What Organizational Supports Matter in Scholar Development? An Investigation of Early Career Academics' Experiences in China. *Asia Pac. Educ. Rev.* **2025**. [CrossRef]
24. Xiang, H.; Liang, J.; Liu, J.; Zhao, J. Empirical Study on the Applicability of the Pre-Employment and Long-Term Employment System for College and University Teachers—Taking Art Colleges and University. *Chin. Pers. Sci.* **2023**, *11*, 1–7.
25. Liu, J. Integrity and Innovation in the System Reform of Tenure-Track Systems in Colleges and Universities. *Beijing Educ.* **2022**, *9*, 30–34.
26. Zhang, D.; Wang, C. The Strategic Selection of the Tenure-Track of Chinese Universities and Its System Risks. *J. High. Educ.* **2020**, *41*, 36–43.
27. Huang, Y.; Wang, C. Surviving and Thriving in "Accelerating" Academia: Toward a Job Demands-Resources Model of Faculty Well-Being. *Asia Pac. Educ. Rev.* **2022**, *27*, 19–29. [CrossRef]
28. Jameel, A.S.; Ahmad, A.R. Factors Impacting Research Productivity of Academic Staff at the Iraqi Higher Education System. *Int. Bus. Educ. J.* **2020**, *13*, 108–126. [CrossRef]
29. Yu, N.; Dong, Y.; de Jong, M. A Helping Hand from the Government? How Public Research Funding Affects Academic Output in Less-Prestigious Universities in China. *Res. Policy* **2022**, *51*, 104591. [CrossRef]

30. Luo, M.; Ceng, Y.; Yin, W.; Jin, L.; Wu, J. Influence of Tenure Track System Reform on Academic Research Output of Young Teachers in Colleges and Universities: Case Effect Analysis Based on Natural Experiment Method. *Fudan Educ. Forum* **2022**, *20*, 68–75. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
31. Yin, M. The Formation Mechanism of “Passers-by” and “transition” Incolleges and Universities under Logic Conflicts of Multiple Systems. *Heilongjiang Res. High. Educ.* **2022**, *3*, 56–63. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. Rawls, M.M. Assessing Research Productivity from an Institutional Effectiveness Perspective: How Universities Influence Faculty Research Productivity. Ph.D. Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA, 2018. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Pham, H.T.; Nguyen, C.H. Academic Staff Quality and the Role of Quality Assurance Mechanisms: The Vietnamese Case. *Qual. High. Educ.* **2020**, *26*, 262–283. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Han, S.; Xie, J. The Local Construction of the Institutional Meanings of the Up or Out System at China’s Research Universities. *J. High. Educ.* **2023**, *44*, 77–84.
35. Brew, A.; Boud, D.; Crawford, K.; Lucas, L. Navigating the Demands of Academic Work to Shape an Academic Job. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2018**, *43*, 2294–2304. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
36. Spinrad, M.L.; Relles, S.R. Losing Our Faculties: Contingent Faculty in the Corporate Academy. *Innov. High. Educ.* **2022**, *47*, 837–854. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
37. Lees, A.B.; Walters, S.; Godbold, R. Illuminating the Role of Reflexivity within Qualitative Pilot Studies: Experiences from a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Project. *Int. J. Qual. Methods* **2022**, *21*, 16094069221076933. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
38. Mohammad, R.; Fakhri, I.; Sudiro, A.; Suryadi, N. The Effect of Job Stress and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) on Employee Turnover Intention with the Mediation of Employee Engagement. *Int. J. Latest Res. Humanit. Soc. Sci. IJLRHSS* **2021**, *4*, 133–137.
39. Sia, S.P.; Bahari, M.I.; Said, H.S.R.B.H.M. The Role of Tenure as a Moderator to Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement. *Educ. Sci. Psychol.* **2021**, *3*, 18–29.
40. Hair, J.F.; Risher, J.J.; Sarstedt, M.; Ringle, C.M. When to Use and How to Report the Results of PLS-SEM. *Eur. Bus. Rev.* **2019**, *31*, 2–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
41. Li, B.; Shen, Y. Publication or Pregnancy? Employment Contracts and Childbearing of Women Academics in China. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2022**, *47*, 875–887. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
42. Wen, T.Y.; Ong, T.S.; Daud, Z.B.M.; Muhamad, H.B. Environmental Uncertainty and Performance of Chinese Public Universities. *Int. J. Acad. Res. Bus. Soc. Sci.* **2023**, *13*, 671–682. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
43. Muhayimana, T. How Am I Doing? Using Self-Mentoring Practices to Improve a Tenure-Track Faculty’s Online Instructional Strategies. *Mentor. Tutoring Partnersh. Learn.* **2023**, *31*, 312–334. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Simmons, C.A.; Weiss, E.L.; Schwartz, S.L. Job Satisfaction Indicators for Tenure and Non-Tenure Track Social Work Faculty: Similar but Not Equal. *Soc. Work Educ.* **2022**, *41*, 175–194. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
45. Wang, X.; Wang, W.L. The Tenure Track Employment System in Colleges and Universities in China: A Scoping Review of the Chinese Literature. *Front. Psychol.* **2023**, *14*, 1271110. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
46. Hashmi, W.M.; Idrees, R.N.; Shakil, M.H.; Nadeem, R.; Haider, S.Z. Exploring the Tenure Track System and Basic Pay Scale System of Academic Professionals Working in Public Universities: A Qualitative Approach. *Qual. Quant.* **2024**, *59*, 739–759. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
47. Alvarado, C.; Derbinsky, N.; Heckman, S.; Pérez-Quñones, M.A.; Ramaprasad, H.; Sherriff, M. Addressing Challenges in Teaching-Track Faculty Promotion. In Proceedings of the SIGCSE TS 2025: The 56th ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 26 February–1 March 2025; Volume 2, pp. 1685–1686. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
48. Mallon, W.T.; Cox, N. Promotion and Tenure Policies and Practices at U.S. Medical Schools: Is Tenure Irrelevant or More Relevant Than Ever? *Acad. Med.* **2024**, *99*, 724–732. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
49. Wang, P. The Comparison and Reference of Performance Evaluation Systems for Faculty at High-Level Research Universities in China and the United States: A Case Study of Peking University and Harvard University. *Educ. Rev. USA* **2023**, *7*, 1624–1628. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
50. Council of the European Union. *Council Recommendation on a European Framework to Attract and Retain Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurial Talents in Europe*; Council of the European Union: Brussels, Belgium, 2023.
51. Xu, J.; Chen, M.; Lv, C. An Empirical Study on the Impact of the “Tenure-Track” System on Faculty Research Productivity: An Analysis of the Impact Effects in Seven Universities in Province S. *Chin. Univ. Technol. Transf.* **2022**, *8*, 45–50. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
52. Zhang, S.; Wapman, K.H.; Larremore, D.B.; Clauset, A. Labor Advantages Drive the Greater Productivity of Faculty at Elite Universities. *Sci. Adv.* **2022**, *7056*, eabq7056. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
53. Kwiek, M.; Roszka, W. Once Highly Productive, Forever Highly Productive? Full Professors’ Research Productivity from a Longitudinal Perspective. *High. Educ.* **2024**, *87*, 519–549. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
54. Pineda, P.; Salazar Morales, D. Managerialism, Accreditation and Insecure Academic Employment across Different Higher Education Traditions. *Stud. High. Educ.* **2024**, *49*, 2080–2103. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

55. Kallio, T.J.; Lehtivuori, A.; Kallio, K.M.; Tienari, J.; Funck, E. Academic Systems, Career Models, and Experienced Performance Pressure—A Comparative Study of Sweden and Finland. *High. Educ.* **2025**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
56. Ryan, R.M.; Deci, E.L. Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. *Am. Psychol.* **2000**, *55*, 68–78. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
57. Crutchley, J.; Nahaboo, Z.; Rao, N. Precarious Academic Citizens: Early Career Teachers’ Experiences Implications for the Academy. *Teach. High. Educ.* **2024**, *29*, 789–809. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
58. Civera, A.; Lehmann, E.; Meoli, M.; Paleari, S.; Brioschi, M.S. How to Protect the Taste for Science? Working Conditions in European Higher Education Systems. *High. Educ. Q.* **2025**, *79*, e12591. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
59. Gu, J.; Nyland, C.; Fan, X.; Wu, D. Returnee Status, Academic Staff Rewards and Psychological Contract Fulfilment in China’s Higher Education Sector. *Pers. Rev.* **2022**, *51*, 1298–1313. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
60. Huang, Q. From Ivory Towers to Corporate Ladders: The Impact of Managerialism on Academic Profession. *Adult High. Educ.* **2024**, *6*, 159–165. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
61. Zhang, Z. Current Situation and Problems of the Reform of Pre-Employment Long Appointment System in “Double First-Class”. *J. High. Educ. Res.* **2021**, *44*, 77–82+120.
62. Stratford, E.; Watson, P.; Paull, B. What Impedes and Enables Flourishing among Early Career Academics? *High. Educ.* **2023**, *88*, 259–277. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
63. Xu, B. From Massification towards Post-Massification: Policy and Governance of Higher Education in China. *Int. J. Chin. Educ.* **2021**, *10*, 22125868211046032. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
64. Gebreiter, F. A Profession in Peril? University Corporatization, Performance Measurement and the Sustainability of Accounting Academia. *Crit. Perspect. Account.* **2022**, *87*, 102292. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
65. Becker, A.; Lukka, K. Instrumentalism and the Publish-or-Perish Regime. *Crit. Perspect. Account.* **2023**, *94*, 102436. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
66. Zhao, K.; Li, J.; Liang, H. Reconfiguring Power: A Field Analysis of China’s Research Evaluation Reform. *High. Educ.* **2025**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
67. Sabagh, Z.; Moshtari, M. The Unintended Consequences of a Quantitative, Centralized Faculty Promotion System: Empirical Evidence from a Developing Country. *High. Educ.* **2025**, *90*, 1547–1569. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
68. Jiang, C.; Li, S.; Shen, Q. Science and Technology Evaluation Reform and Universities’ Innovation Performance. *Technol. Soc.* **2024**, *78*, 102614. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
69. Murangi, A.; Rothmann, S.; Nel, M. Capabilities and Work Functionings of Special Education Teachers in Namibia. *SA J. Ind. Psychol.* **2022**, *48*, a2046. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
70. Zhang, X.; Yoon, M. The Impact of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction on University Teachers’ Work Engagement in the Context of Education for Sustainable Development: A Chain Mediation Model. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 1140. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.