

Chinese Rural Female Students' Situation in Accessing to Education Resources

A Literature Review on Chinese Urban-rural Differences

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews and examines rural education's financial and family planning policies in China to explore the influencing factors of gender differences in education in China and the differences in access to educational resources between urban-rural female students. Below are three main arguments that this review show from three factors:

(1) Finance: there are differences in the economic development level of each region in China, and insufficient educational investment issued by local governments restricts the development of rural schools. Meanwhile, elementary education resources and funds in China are allocated according to household registration, which also leads to the unfair developing opportunity for students; (2) Schools: due to unsafe risks caused by disadvantageous school locations, teachers' and textbooks' unbalanced care to boys' leadership, incomplete courses to support girls' art interests, these could cause negative impacts on cultivating characters and access to the educational resource for rural female students; (3) Family: under the influence of family planning disparity and boy preference, family is a significant factor in female students' education, especially for rural girls, who are facing more intense sibling competition than urban girls. Rural households are more willing to invest in boys' education, resulting in unequal educational resources due to gender inequality at the family level. This review also indicates the consequences of this phenomenon on rural female students in China: due to the lack of education, it is hard for them to realize their self-cognition and ideology, leading to early pregnancy, an unwanted marriage, and even mental illness. Therefore, it is important to further improve the female student's education, and it is worthy of our in-depth thinking.

Keywords: Chinese Rural Female Students, Chinese Urban-rural Difference, Finance Factor, School Factor, Family Factor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has a significant influence on individual development and social development. People's attention to education is increasing in recent years. More importantly, there is a heated debate on the uneven distribution of educational resources as an issue. Especially in China, China has a large population, and as a developing country, it faces a huge challenge in education development. China's education issues are probably diversified, including the uneven distribution of educational resources in rural areas and cities (finance

factor), Chinese rural parents' cultural concepts about female's education (family factor), and the defects of schools' natural environment, teachers' behaviour, school textbooks, and deficient course offered (school factor), etc. Therefore, this essay will focus on three main factors, reviewing and analysing Chinese rural female students' situation in accessing education resources by extensive research in academic articles. The paper will explore the potential influences caused by the current Chinese rural females' education situation, which probably can offer some advice for the Chinese government in improving the education in rural areas, especially for rural females.

2. FINANCE FACTOR

2.1. *The differences between urban and rural areas in finance*

As one of the rural economic and social development subsystems, rural education is bound to be restricted by the environment and development level [1]. With the establishment and improvement of the market economy system, especially the implementation of the new rural construction strategy, the distribution of urban and rural areas has gradually broken. It is a long-term process to eliminate the urban-rural gap and change the urban-rural duality. The dual model of urban and rural antagonism is divided into a gap in the household registration system. The household registration is divided into agricultural and non-agricultural household registration [2]. With the dual social structure of urban and rural areas, the original household registration system has tightly bound people to where they are. In this way, the civil society status and development space are artificially unfair. As Local governments mainly bear china's basic education funds at all levels, basic education resources are allocated according to household registration, making the distribution of high-quality education resources between urban and rural areas unfair [2]. Rural children have to go to school in the countryside and receive a poor quality education. In addition, the acceleration of social urbanization has attracted a large number of funds and talents to the cities, and rural education is in a very unfavourable competitive position. Most of the talents cultivated in rural schools flow into the cities, and the outstanding teachers who grow up in rural schools flow into the cities. Therefore, the huge economic gap is the basic reason for the difference between urban and rural areas [1].

2.2. *Politics and investment*

In 2005, China introduced a county-based management system for compulsory education [3]. In other words, for rural compulsory education in the future, the central government will mainly carry out policy guidance. The responsibility of provincial and prefecture-level governments will also be mainly to organize financial resources for transfer payments. County-level governments will bear the regular expenditures for compulsory education. The most important measure of the county-based policy is to cancel township educational institutions and increase teacher salaries to be uniformly distributed by county-level finance. However, it does not fundamentally solve the main contradictions in the current rural compulsory education. It is still a partial adjustment within the framework of levelled schools and hierarchical management. China's counties are the weakest first-level finance, and the level of local economic development varies greatly [3]. The emergence of the education gap between urban and rural areas is

inevitable. This is the direct consequence of the education gap caused by the local responsibility for basic education policy. The nominal separation of powers has resulted in a further expansion of the urban-rural gap in compulsory education. The "county-based" approach has enabled the educational performance to have a closer relationship with the local education bureau. Overemphasizing some rigid indicators, it seems that as long as the standards are met, the education and teaching tasks will be completed, and education has become a form and tool to reflect political achievements. It can be seen that the dominant ideology of compulsory education is still levelled education, which is ultimately subject to the long-term urban-rural dual structure of Chinese society [4].

2.3. *The Influences on females*

The most distinctive influence on females is mainly reflected in the difference between engaging in agriculture and engaging in non-agriculture [5]. With the same education level, the proportion of rural women working in agriculture is higher than that of men. This further confirms the research conclusions about the feminization of agricultural labour and shows that education does not provide equal opportunities for rural women to enter non-agricultural transfers. Regardless of their educational level, women account for the majority in the low-skilled occupations. This kind of industry gender distribution will affect a person's educational expectations and affect the investment of men and women in education [5]. After graduating from school, a considerable number of women's jobs are still concentrated in certain "female" positions with service nature. Access to education does not mean that women can obtain development opportunities and be liberated. It seems that there are broader and deeper factors at work [6]. In short, the equality of educational opportunity does not necessarily bring about the educational result, that is, the equality of development opportunity.

Meanwhile, influence on females could also be manifested in relatively narrow women's employment choices and expectations [7]. These considerations for future careers make men and women have different motives and expectations for education. The gender distinction in the occupational field is mapped to the education field, which makes gender positioning more deeply ingrained [7]. These processes and results have made women systematically marginalized in schools. When some of the characteristics that women should have in education are positioned, their way out for employment is fixed. A small number of women who cross this positioning may be labelled as masculine. Equal educational experience cannot be equated with equal development opportunities.

3. SCHOOL FACTOR

In the previous part, we analysed that economy is an important factor that causes the inequality of educational resources between urban and rural girls. In addition, the school's natural environment, teacher's behaviour, school textbooks, and deficient courses offered are also important factors that restrict the development of girls' education. The following sections will be illustrated from these aspects.

3.1 School's natural environment

Many female students do not have opportunities for the nine-year compulsory education in rural deprived areas, and the dropout rates are higher for girls than for boys, about 80% of the total dropout rates [8]. Firstly, many rural schools are located in the plateau, desert, and rocky mountain areas, where the natural environment is poor and transportation is inconvenient [9]. Therefore, schools need to be repaired and resisted due to the impact of mountain torrents and debris flows caused by the natural environment. Taking the example of rural schools in Guizhou Province in China, they use an average annual repair fee of 60% to 80% to resist these natural disasters [10]. In other words, this directly increases the investment cost of education. In addition, the school's location is a serious obstacle for young girls to go to school. Due to the lack of transport equipment, students always go to school on foot, but schools are generally far from home, and there are also many unsafe factors on the road, such as rugged mountain roads and rivers blocked in their routines [11]. Hence, for safety reasons, many girls must stay at home and work instead of going to school [12, 13]. However, the female students in urban areas do not have to worry about it as the effect of well-developed transportation facilities.

3.2 Teacher's behaviour

The lack of teachers' professionalism may not receive systematic teacher training before they start teaching. Due to the lack of funds in rural schools, many teachers are substitute teachers, which means it is more difficult to assess their teaching quality and whether they can bring positive influences on students [14, 15]. It is well documented in the literature that there are gender differences in students' performance in the classroom, and there are gender differences in Teachers' feedback to students [16]. Teachers usually pay more attention to boys in the classroom and let them take more important positions in the class, such as monitoring or vice-monitoring [16]. This treatment bias may lead female students to be mentally self-abased, which seriously affects their interest in learning.

3.3 Sex differences in teaching textbook

Feminist scholars believe that the existing teaching materials and curriculum system are based on men's knowledge and experience. On this basis, it ignores women's knowledge and experience. For example, there was a significant gender difference in the ancient Chinese textbook, the Four books, and the Five classics, which states that men had obvious higher social status than women. Also, The male profession was more diverse and recognized by society. Data collected from a Chinese textbook showed that the male employment rate was 75.7%, and the female employment rate was 11.1% [17]. Schools seem to pay more attention to developing male leaders and talents. Some scholars conducted a gender analysis on Chinese textbooks in primary and secondary schools and found that there were more male images in textbooks and that males generally appeared in the image of leaders, creators, and explorers. Still, female characters rarely appeared in such positive images and mostly appeared in the image of assistants for men [18]. This stereotyped impression of gender will more imperceptibly affect female students' understanding of their own values through textbooks. But female students in the city were also faced with gender inequalities in textbooks.

3.4 Deficient course offered

In the end, the less course offered means there is less chance for girls in rural areas to express their talents, because some girls find themselves gifted and interested in arts, such as dance, music, and fine arts, at an earlier step than boys. But due to the fact of Chinese education, further education and examination are of primary importance to students. Therefore, for a long time, courses on the art of rural schools were gradually ignored.

4. FAMILY FACTOR

Apart from the disparity of finance and schooling resources, family is another driving force that widens the urban-rural gap and pushes rural girls at a disadvantaged stage in particular. It is well documented that family structure has been a continuing, constant, and embedded part of children's educational opportunities in rural areas [19-21]. In other words, a child's education may be affected by the size and composition of his or her sibships if the family faces borrowing constraints. When sibling composition leads to competition, girls are facing a predicament in education. To be specific, girls are forced to compete with and often stand in line behind their brothers for education. In terms of the context in mainland China, siblings-composition and competition can be much more complicated, as it is deeply influenced by the policy of family planning and the ideology of son preference.

Family planning in mainland China has generally gone through four stages: in 1980, the one-child policy was designed as a temporary measure to put a brake on China's population growth [21]. The policy was implemented for nearly 35 years until November 2013, when the Chinese government allowed couples to have two children if one parent is an only child [21]. Starting on January 1, 2016, all Chinese couples are allowed to have two children, and on May 31, 2021, three children [22]. Although China has announced a partial policy relaxation on family planning in recent years, the one-child policy has greatly changed Chinese family structure and siblings composition by having created tens of millions, perhaps as many as 100 million, of China's one-child families today [23]. However, it does not mean that there is no siblings-competition for the "one-child generations" who were born during the first stage of family planning. Chinese parents, especially those from rural families with only one girl, strongly resisted the policy.

The resistance to the one-child policy results from the ideology of parental preference for sons over daughters. Chinese parents, especially those in a rural area, tended to retain a greater reliance on children, and sons in particular, for both labour and old-age security [23]. This is because Chinese society is characterized by the paternal principle that the main productive assets are passed on through the male line while females are seen as a way to continue their lineages [24]. Therefore, it is more advantaged for families to have sons rather than daughters to ensure the property remains and the blood is maintained. In Chinese rural areas, which are deeply influenced by patrilineal culture, many couples exhibit a strong preference for having at least one son, and some couples show a desire to have at least two sons [25]. In contrast, son preference is lower in Chinese developed cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. In addition, the modified family planning policy in late 1980 has widened this urban-rural gap even more. Given the practical difficulties, the central government relaxed the policy to make it more feasible in rural areas. In rural areas of many provinces, couples can have two children if their first child is a girl [19].

Therefore, the rural girls cannot be free from fiercer siblings-competition under the pressure of family planning disparity and son preference. Fong points out that urban daughters have benefited from the demographic pattern produced by China's one-child policy [20]. Compared with singleton daughters who enjoy unprecedented parental support, rural girls have to compete with brothers for parental investment.

5. THE INFLUENCES ON RURAL FEMALE STUDENTS

From what has been discussed above, it is obvious that the striking discrepancies between urban and rural

education resources in China have certain adverse impacts on those from the countryside, especially for female students. As a prominent sociologist, Wang puts it, "education, as an important aspect of human capital, not affects the economic returns of an individual, but also affects non-economic returns [26]."

At the micro level, inadequate education resources firstly lead to teenager's pregnancy. The majority of teenage pregnancies are married, and it is their entourage who insists females should have at least one child [27]. The rural girls have no option in this matter. They also believe that this pregnancy may be too early and unwanted because they are uneducated [27]. Other reasons for adolescent pregnancy, such as the girls' marginalization, family economic status, religions, and regional customs in rural China, also connect with inadequate education resources. For instance, Clothey examined the higher education access among one Chinese ethnic group, the Uyghur, with an intersectionality approach [28]. Cooper holds the view that this problem of intersectionality should be solved [29]. According to WHO (World Health Organization), almost 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 years and some 1 million young people aged under 15 give birth to children each year [30]. Most of them live in poor, low education and rural areas [31].

When it comes to marriage, even sufficient education resources in rural China fail to set women free. Obendiek's point is that in rural China, especially the northeast region, "feelings of indebtedness for financial and other support received from parents and family members during years of higher education entangle graduates from economically deprived rural family backgrounds in webs of social relations that oblige them to also consider the interests of others when deciding on whom to marry" [32]. The so-called "hukou", also known as registered permanent residence is another problem for rural girls. Liu finds that for Chinese peasants, "hukou" is the real standard to measure their actual status, benefits, etc. [33]. The easiest way to obtain an urban "hukou", however, is to marry a city man to follow their hukou. Therefore, Obendiek puts forward those rural women normally face dilemmas between material versus emotional interests and collective versus individual ones in their marriage decisions. While higher education empowers them to reject others' interference, they still have to handle their supporters' disappointments [32].

Secondly, inadequate educational resources provided by rural areas in China are closely associated with health issues [33]. Wang observes that education can improve the self-reported health status and reduce the possibility of depression in rural residents [34]. In other words, it is generating a low level of mental health in rural China, which is a point that needs emphasizing since many Chinese people ignore it. His claim compared with the high-income group, education improved the health of the

lowest income group more significantly rests upon the questionable assumption that the disadvantaged are disadvantaged in all aspects [33]. In brief, the essence of his argument is that the more education, the healthier, both mentally and physically.

6. CONCLUSION

The article mainly reviews education policies on Chinese rural girls, including three factors: finance, school, and family. Limited policies and investments, inadequate equal opportunities to immigrants to urban areas, teachers' discriminations towards rural girls being the first one, while disadvantageous school locations, incomplete courses, and the lack of positive images for women in textbooks serve as the second. On top of that, there are the influences of family planning and the ideology of son preference. All those factors jointly lead to early pregnancy, an unwanted marriage, and health issues. This article aims to arouse people's attention to Chinese rural female students' situation and arouse their reflections on these phenomena. Through this review, the authors wish that more families, schools, and educators can be inspired. Therefore, female students in rural China can get a better education level and understandings of society.

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