

# On Women's Basic Education in Remote Areas of China from the Perspective of the Development of Woman's Educational View

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## ABSTRACT

The problem of education inequality appears in China and female education faces huge challenges, especially in rural areas. More and more people there started to realize the importance of education. The lack of economic developments and social discrimination show up. Gender prejudice in family and society hinders the development of rural female education. In the next few years, the national education will balance urban and rural educational resources to provide high-level educational opportunities for children of different ages. How to achieve the goal of development is a practical process of great social significance. Since nowadays most of Chinese universities are built in many big cities and that is the reason why a balance between rural and urban education matters a lot for all students. There are some solutions to deal with the problem like developing the level of comprehensive economic strength, modernizing the concept of women's education and carrying out in-depth reform of the education system, which aims to promote the balance of women's education. Although the condition has changed better than before, it is still a challenge to keep going on. It is well known that the risk of female education will influence the national development of one nation, showing that it is the crucial task to improve the current situation in the rural areas of China.

**Keywords:** *Female Education, Gender Equality, Economic Strength.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Lutz and Kc (2011) [1], almost universally, women with higher levels of education have fewer children and better education can indirectly reduce mortality, improve health and even change migration patterns. Consequently, the advancement of education, especially for young women, will greatly affect the future global population. Education is closely related to the development of a country. However, the uneven distribution of educational resources occurs in different regions, classes and even genders. The current situation of China's rural women's education needs to be improved urgently and needs to be consistent with the future development trend of society. There are many factors affecting the development of rural women's education. Only by cracking them one by one can we realize educational equity, thinking from multiple angles and all

directions to realize the countermeasures to improve rural women's education, practice can realize the key and influential role of women in social economy and development in the process of women's education and gender equality, realize benign operation, and solve the problem of inequality in rural education.

## 2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN REMOTE AREAS OF CHINA

### 2.1. Overall status of women's education in remote areas

Female education in rural areas in China has long been a very debatable and interesting topic. Many researchers have pointed out that females in rural areas in China are receiving fewer educational opportunities while they are also facing huge education inequalities.

Although some have argued that there have been improvements made, there are still severe problems in education for female students in rural areas in China. The lack of economic developments and social discrimination against female participants in education had contributed together to the female education deficiencies. The problem of education inequality appears in many different countries. In China, this problem has been prominent. Resulting from the traditional ideas of for example son preference, female education faces huge challenges in China, especially in rural areas.

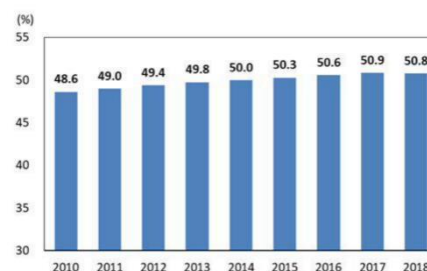
## 2.2. Comparison of women's education status between remote areas and developed areas

Researchers had pointed out that female illiteracy rates are highest in rural areas (The Borgan Project, 2018) [2]. While in the public view “girls are the first to be left out of educational opportunities when resources are sparse” (Murphy, 2018) [3]. These statements help us to gain an insight into the current situation of education for rural female students. As their education can be sacrificed due to many factors. For students in rural areas, this problem becomes more severe. Data reflected on female education level received in the rural area had pointed out that there were only 52% of the female which have obtained primary school qualifications. While when the education level rise, the percentage of females obtaining certain qualifications decreased sharply. For individuals attaining higher education qualifications, there were only 2% (Yuan, 2009) [4]. This also reflects on the statement that “gender parity in postsecondary education in China only applies to urban students, and rural female students’ underrepresentation in Chinese universities, particularly elite ones, is serious” (Ma & Wang, 2016) [5].

## 2.3. Present situation and future development trend of women's education in remote areas

In recent decades, with the education reform and massification of higher education, many individuals have been benefited from the rise in both quality and quantity of educational resources provided. There has also been a sharp rise in the general education level and enrollment rates in education. It has been suggested that investment in education has been “seen by the government as an integral part of the overall effort to reduce poverty” (Wei, Tsang, Xu, & Chen, 1999) [6]. This huge value put on education led to the government encouraging more and more students to attend schools. It has also been argued that investment in female education has been viewed as “a key policy for social and economic development” (Song, Appleton, & Knight, 2006) [7]. Combining these ideas together, we can get a glimpse of the changes in female education in rural areas. With policies and government interventions in society, there have been more opportunities for female students in rural areas in China. This had also led to the improvement of previous

situations where their education has been hugely limited and disadvantaged.



**Figure 1**, percentage of female enrollment in regular senior secondary education, from 2010 to 2018

“2018 Statistical Monitoring Report on the Implementation of China National Program for Women’s Development (2011–2020),” n.d. [8]

From the diagram above, we can see that in the year 2018, the female enrollment rate in secondary education is 50.8%. While there had been a steady rise in the data from 2010. While this is the overall situation for female education, the data about rural female education did construct a similar positive pattern for us. Access to education varies between female students from rural areas and urban areas. It has been a recognized fact that students in urban areas can enjoy better education both in terms of education qualities, and education opportunities. It has been suggested that most Chinese universities are based in big cities. This then led to unequal distribution of educational resources between different areas. While students in big cities are also more likely to study abroad than students from rural areas. This then widened the gap of choices between students from rural and urban areas which then led to more inequalities. This has all proved the suggestion that huge education inequalities appear between rural and urban areas. linking this to the previous idea us female from rural areas being underrepresented in the higher education, we can infer that the education inequalities between rural and urban female students are also serious. When considering this in the context of female education, this inequality remains and is even being magnified.

This situation had been improved in recent decades, due to the establishment of policies and improvements of the local economy. Development of technology and the economy leading to more and more resources being provided in the rural areas in China. Meanwhile, more and more people in rural areas started to realize the importance of education. This also leads to the rise in female education enrollment rates in rural areas. As they have been more supported by their family while their own ideology also changed. Studies have provided us the idea that the “returns to rural education have risen substantially”, it has nearly been risen by three times in the period of 1988 to 2003 (Zeng, Pang, Zhang, Medina, & Rozelle, 2013) [9]. This has also inspired the increase in education enrollment for female students in rural areas.

Due to the previous situation of ignorance in the importance of girls' education, the rise in female education enrollment in rural areas tend to be larger than for the other groups of students.

### **3. FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS**

#### ***3.1. The level of economic development is closely related to rural female education.***

Firstly, the level of economic development is closely related to rural female education. In the early stage of reform and opening up (1980-2000), the economic development strategy was to give priority to the development of urban construction. This has led to large-scale population migration: rural adults have migrated to cities to work, leaving the elderly and children in rural area (Ge & An, 2010) [10]. In most rural areas of China, agricultural production is dominated by manual labor, the level of agricultural productivity is quite backward, and the intellectual factor in agricultural production activities is still in a secondary position (Yuan, 2009) [4]. Meanwhile, government funds were concentrated in the development of the cities, resulting rural economy and education being severely backward. Therefore, rural education not only lags behind urban education, but also lags behind the needs of rural economic and social development.

#### ***3.2. Backward educational ideas hinder the development of women's education in remote areas***

On the other hand, gender prejudice in family and society also greatly hinders the development of rural female education. In many rural areas, girls are considered to have no need for education, and the role of women is defined as the attachment of their husband. Li and Tsang's research (2003) shows that even in modern times Chinese rural families generally have higher educational expectations of men than women [11]. According to Yuan's research (2009), in rural China, there are 52% of women have not received junior high school or higher education, female illiteracy accounts for 61.2% of the total number of illiterates, and among the children who have dropped out of school, girls account for more than 60% [4]. The more children there are in a family, the greater the difference between boys and girls in the education ratio (Zheng & Jing, 2004). This means that when family resources are limited, boys tend to have more opportunities.

Human society has been in a patriarchal system for a long time, so the whole society's oppression and exploitation of women are even more severe when materials are scarce. Therefore, it is difficult for girls in

rural China to obtain education opportunities. In the social environment of backward areas, women lack the ability of economic self-reliance, which forces them to become reproductive tools and cheap labor, and contribute their lives to the people who create the main source of economy.

#### ***3.3. The overall lagging education system in remote areas limits women's access to educational resources***

Hannum (2019) pointed out that in China, the inequality of college attendance by socioeconomic background is still increasing (Jiang & Tam 2015a, Yeung 2013), and the education in rural areas is still lagging behind [12]. Although China's secondary and tertiary education have massively expanded, the inequality of educational opportunity for both men and women is still increasing (Hannum, 2019) [12]. The underdeveloped rural education system makes it difficult for rural girls to obtain high-quality education.

Women with higher levels of education have fewer children (Lutz & Kc, 2011) [1]. Oppositely, the low level of education of rural women can lead to a high birth rate. An excessive population number combined with a shortage of resources can lead to a scarcity of the per capita necessary resources for subsistence, thus exacerbating poverty and obstructing rural development. In order to control the rapid growth of China's population, in that special period (1980-2016), the government has implemented the one-child policy. Meanwhile, due to the one-child policy and the ingrained gender discrimination created by the patriarchal society, the birth rate of female babies is relatively low but the death rate is very high. The slow development of the rural economy has made it difficult for the rural population to get rid of poverty, so that the gap between urban and rural areas has continued to widen.

### **4. SOLUTIONS TO DEVELOP FEMALE EDUCATION IN RURAL CHINA**

#### ***4.1. Vigorously develop the level of comprehensive economic strength in remote areas of China***

We are supposed to pay attention to vigorously develop the level of comprehensive economic strength in remote areas of China. As we all know that poverty is measured by a variety of characteristics, including per capita income, asset and income distribution, government quality, policies, and institutions, as well as education, health, and other aspects of human development (Hakan & Zar & Ze, 2015) [14]. That means it is our responsibility to help the rural areas become better in economic if we are eager to provide better opportunities of the education for females in rural China. Besides, it is

a fact that the poor people in rural areas have limited access to education or even health care. As a result, it is hard for the poor to get good jobs due to the lack of higher education. For example, in 2018, according to the data collected from eight large-scale surveys of 24931 rural middle school students from four provinces and in-depth interviews with rural students in 52 sample areas, it was found that the cumulative drop out rate of secondary schools (including junior high school, senior high school and secondary vocational schools) in rural areas reached 63%, indicating that this is indeed an issue that needs priority attention. Improving the level of comprehensive economic strength in rural China is an important problem to be solved urgently.

There are two very basic reasons for examining a link between education and economic growth. At a more specific level, a wide range of econometric studies indicates that the income levels that individuals can command depend on their level of education (Hakan & Zar & Ze, 2015) [14]. Education is a social activity to cultivate people, which is not only a typical symbol of the progress of human civilization, but also an important driving force for both financial and social development. Education and the economy have an inseparable relationship, for one thing, economic development restricts the development of education and it must adapt to economic development. For another thing, education is able to promote economic development, and economic development must depend on education. For instance, education plays an important role in economic growth, and recently social competition is becoming more and more fierce, and the requirements of social positions for academic qualifications and talent quality are also getting higher and higher.

The reason why there is a need to develop the level of comprehensive economic strength is that female education has a positive impact on the economic growth of societies, especially in developing countries. For instance, Becker and Thomas indicated that different wages among workers was in line with the difference in their education level, training, and work experience (Hakan & Zar & Ze, 2015) [14]. As it can be seen, education is the cornerstone of fundamental rights and development enjoyed equally by all women and girls. It means no matter which kind of gender you are, mostly everyone has a right and chance to have access to the education in the current society we live in.

#### ***4.2. Modernize the concept of women's education in remote areas of China***

Modernizing the concept of women's education in remote areas of China matters. According to Yang (2000) [15], it is noted that "deep-rooted negative and bias views exist in the depths of people's hearts", aiming to help women overcome existing mental obstacles. Better female education can also change traditional attitudes

toward women's roles in the labor market.

The influence of the original ideas on the current educational thinking in the fallen areas is not small. Only ladies and young children, according to Confucius, are difficult to raise, and women are more virtuous without education. He also claims that a male is admired for his strength, whereas a woman is attractive because of her softness. Confucianism emphasizes patriarchy's consolidation by placing women at the bottom of society. As a result, Chinese women were virtually barred from the public sphere for thousands of years, save to learn how to be excellent wives and virtuous women who could serve men well. According to Li (2005) [16], when Confucius put women in the same class as slaves, Kristeva (1997) argues that Confucianism provides a solid foundation for the building of a rationalist morality with a strong paternal authority and a complex hierarchy. Women, henceforth, become silenced and invisible subalterns in the Confucian paradigm [16]. Despite the fact that examining the Confucian gaze on women has resulted in significant shifts, traditional expectations of women remain prevalent in China today. Mao claimed that times have changed and that men and women are no longer different. Women can do anything their male counterparts can. Women, like men, deserve the same access to education and job opportunities, which is the normal conception of women's education we should develop in the modern society

#### ***4.3. Carry out in-depth reform of the education system in remote areas of China to promote the balance of women's education***

Carrying out in-depth reform of the education system in remote areas of China in order to promote the balance of women's education is also a good solution. As Tidball argues, women in academe still stay in a male-dominated world and institutional environment, where access may have indeed improved. However, the quality of that access remains a critical issue.

Chinese girls were admitted to universities for the first time in 1919. And the first girls' school was established in 1998 (Bailey, 2007) [17]. According to Liu and Carpenter (2005), due to Confucian ideology, women did not enter the mainstream education system until the last sixty years, and women's education will be fully realized only when the entire population becomes aware of gender discrimination and willing to share wealth, power, and opportunity. Education policies should employ existing theories, such as the Human Capital Theory of Higher Education Cost Share, to reach out to underprivileged students who are unable to finance higher education (Yu, 2005). In light of this, we need to promote the long-term growth of female college students by developing awareness of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-dependence, and self-reliance in universities (Liu, 2013).

Female educations become a big reason of the nation's growth, with a noticeable difference between female education in the late Qing Dynasty and early republican periods. However, it will be promising while a new trend of female education occurs.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the problem of education inequality for female students in rural areas in china has been discussed. Female students in rural areas in China have been disadvantaged due to the lack of education opportunities. While education quality in rural areas has also been problematic. Limitations of female education stems from not only the society's ignorance of their needs, and lack of government intervention, but also the overall education system. Due to lack of economic development, education system in rural areas faced the problem of resource deficiency. Therefore, low levels of education have been provided. Backward ideas on education and female's positions in the society also result in the education inequalities. The society's expectations on female result in the general view of female education being less important.

Education can be considered as investment, where people expect returns from. Female has been generally viewed as having less paid work in rural areas, which therefore lead to the returns to their education being lower than males. Girl's education has then been sacrificed. The situation has been improved in recent decades. Due to the change in general public's view on female education. While the expansion of higher education, and government's education policies which helps encouraging students to attend education.

In recent decades, more and more female students have been able to be enrolled in schools and receiving the same opportunities as male students. This has been huge improvements. Education reform and more policies are needed in order to help achieve better education qualities and opportunities for female students in rural areas. Government interventions could help build up the foundation of education equality between different gender and students from different areas.

In this paper, recommendations of the further steps have also been mentioned. This research has been limited due to some of the resources as being outdated. The situation for education changes rapidly and more updated resource would be helpful for analyzing. While current studies also ignored certain groups of students in different situations. In the future, the society should attach more attention to female education in rural areas and helps guiding the general public to stop discriminating female students. Reflecting on female's experience in all aspects in the society, women's rights have been affected a lot. The society needs to have general shift in traditional ideas and work together to protect women's rights in not only

education, but also elsewhere.

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