Exploration on the Balanced Construction of China's Senior High School Educational Resources from the Perspective of Educational Equity

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ABSTRACT
It's well-established that China has achieved success in the compulsory educational stage. Thanks to the compulsory education law (1986), each right-age child has the right and duty to accept compulsory education, which greatly reduces the 'drop-out' phenomenon in middle and primary schools. What's more, China has made great achievements in senior high school education. In 2020, the gross enrolment rate of high school education is 91.2%, an increase of 1.7 percentage points from 2019. The enrolment rate of senior high schools has increased significantly, from which we can see the increasing popularity of high school education in China, which will contribute to the improvement of national quality. And after the reform of the college entrance examination (2017), equity in education has been basically guaranteed. However, there still exists some equity in China's senior high school educational resources. This study analyses the regional gap of senior high school educational resources, the balanced development of Chinese high school educational resources for special groups, and the diversified construction of China's high school education to reveal the problems existing in China's senior high education at the present stage. And according to these problems, this study puts forward some related suggestions.

Keywords: *senior high school education, Chinese education, educational equity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Several factors can influence the equity of distribution of educational resources in Chinese education. In particular, the unbalanced economic development is the main reason that restricts equal education. Although the Chinese enacted the nine-year compulsory education to guarantee the basic rights of every child to attend school in 1986, the quality of education in different areas is different, such as teacher's qualifications or the opportunity to access additional learning resources. In fact, senior high school education is as important as compulsory education in China. This is the only tunnel for all Chinese students to access higher education. However, although the college entrance examination (Gao Kao) can be done equally for all students from different family backgrounds, it cannot mean all students are exposed to the same educational resources for their three years' learning. Such imbalance distribution of educational resources is usually reflected in the differences between eastern and western of China (geography), the students from urban and rural areas (income), and migrant worker students (Hukou). Therefore, these three factors are the obstacles that impede the promotion of education re-balance in China. In fact, the distribution of senior high school in educational resources is more controversial than nine-year compulsory education. Compulsory education is fully supported by the government, such as students' tuition fees or educational equipment. That is to say, the educational resources can be able to equally and uniformly distributed to every student until their 15-year-old (if other factors do not be considered). In contrast, the distribution of senior high school educational resources depends not only on local educational policy and economy (macro) but also on students' original families

(micro). Therefore, choosing to analyse the Chinese senior high school stage as the target research object is full of diversity and researchable.

The three ministries of economy, group, and region are the leading factors for the imbalance of high school education resources in China. Constantly constructing diversified educational models, such as the construction of private schools, strengthening the internationalization of high schools, the development of educational technology and platform, is very important to study and improve the balance and coordination strategy of high school educational resources in China.

Analyzing the four dimensions of educational carrying capacity, backward areas of education, and special education groups, discussing the construction of educational diversification, and realizing the redistribution of balanced education has practical value for the adjustment and improvement of the imbalance of educational resources in China.

2. THE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

2.1. Current situation of unbalanced regional construction level of senior high schools in China

The Chinese central government formulated Compulsory education law（1986）to propound the implementation of nine-year compulsory education nationally and this policy means that the “drop out” problem was addressed by and large (K.W. Yuan, W.L. Wang,2018, p.65) [1]. But the policy only guarantees the equity of entering the school in the compulsory education stage. When students from different regions enter into senior high schools, they may receive different levels of education.

According to the list of Top 100 Schools of China (2021) [2], Gansu province, Yunnan province, as well as Neimenggu province has only one school, and Xinjiang province has two schools on the list, while fertile areas especially the eastern part of China possess more elite senior high schools, for example, Zhejiang have 8 schools on this list. This disparity in constructional level is also embodied in the investment in education funds. In Li& Shen’s research (2009), the proportion of education funds in senior high schools of fiscal expenditure is the highest in eastern China, while the proportion is lowest in western China (p.17) [3], which means that eastern areas in China tend to invest more educational funds in the construction of senior high schools. Hence, there’s no doubt that eastern areas can build more high-performing schools than central and western areas in China.

Furthermore, as for the level of compulsory education, although the whole nation carries out nine-year compulsory education, it also varies from region to region. For example, according to Zhou (2007), some provinces (e.g., Zhuhai, Guangzhou) whose levels of education and economy are relatively high, have carried out 12-year compulsory education (p.72) [4]. Senior high school students in Zhuhai don’t need to pay any tuition. But in Xizang, the per capita expenditure of senior high school students in per capita GDP is 66.2% in 2007 (Li. & Shen, 2009, p.19) [3]. The proportion of tuition fees in Xizang residents’ daily expenses was relatively high and the burden might be heavy. As a result, there is a possibility that senior high school students in poorer areas may face the risk of ‘drop-out’.

2.2. Differences in regional education carrying capacity of senior high schools in China

According to Chinese education news (2021), the gross enrollment rate of high school education in 2020 is 91.2%, an increase of 1.7 percentage points from 2019 [5]. From this, there is a significant increase in senior high school enrollment and we can see the increasing popularity of high school education in China, which will contribute to the improvement of national quality. Although overall enrolment rates have risen, gross enrolment ratios vary across regions.

The gross enrollment rate of high school education in most provinces in China has increased, while there are still some provinces that cannot reach the popularization goal. In terms of the number of colleges and universities, M. Gao, (2018) argues that in general, famous key universities are mainly located in the southern part rather than the western part (p.13) [6]. Therefore, compared with other provinces, the educational carrying capacity of individual provinces is not sufficient. The lack of educational carrying capacity will affect enrollment in universities directly.

Shi, R.M. (2011) considers that many universities use the method of enrolling quota in different provinces (p.469) [7]. For example, in 2021, Beijing University and Qinghua University enroll 553 students in Beijing, but these two schools enroll 25 students in Xizang province (Sohu,2021) [8]. In Shi’s theory (2011), there is the main reason causing this situation: funds. Many famous universities are constructed by provinces and the central educational department. Hence, some provinces will support local universities to develop their levels of education and their academic research. In return, these universities will allocate more places for provinces (p.469) [7]. The lack of senior high school students, the lack of universities, and insufficient educational carrying capacity might lead to a small number of students can enter famous schools.

2.3. The influence of regional differentiation of China's high school education strength on the distribution of China's high school education resources

After reform and opening-up, the Chinese economy increases rapidly. According to the research presented by Li. & Shen. in 2009: there has been an increase in the total input in high school education in the ten years from 1998-2008 (p.17) [3], the investment from the Chinese government in secondary education grows continuously, which contributes to the development of senior high school education in China. Although the general situation of Chinese senior high school education has improved in recent years, there still exists an imbalance in the allocation of high school educational resources.

Recent research has proved that the overall difference in the allocation of high school education resources shows an expanding trend, and the disparity among regions is the major source of overall inequality (Yu,2020, p.62) [9]. And Yu (2020) argues that the characteristics of the spatial distribution of educational resources appear that the resources of the eastern part in China are significantly more than those in the central and western regions. This phenomenon stems from the imbalance of regional economic development (p.62-64) [9]. Take teacher resources that are closely related to the quality of education as an example. Advanced areas tend to recruit teachers with higher qualifications, while in the extremely poor province, some teachers are volunteer teachers, and whose work time is limited, usually a year (K.W. Yuan, W.L. Wang, 2018, p.66) [1]. When volunteer teaching ends, these teachers may not stay here and continue working. The imbalance in teaching resources is obvious.

Therefore, the Chinese government needs to take some measures to balance the allocation of high school education resources. In recent years, China has intensified poverty alleviation efforts to help the west poor area. Therefore, the lack of educational resources in the western region has improved but compared with eastern and western areas, the allocation of resources in central China is still unbalanced (Yu,2020, p.64) [9]. To optimize the allocation of educational resources, China still has a long way to go.

3. BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION RESOURCES IN BACKWARD AREAS

3.1. Current situation of backward areas of high school education resources in China.

Since 1986, when the Chinese government enacted a nine-year compulsory education system, primary education in backward areas has been dramatically improved. After that, people began to focus on high school education. According to Zhang, Cheng, and Cui (2021) [10], educational statistics of China from 2010 to 2012 reported that the average enrolment rate of students in high school in rural regions was only 6%, compared to 63 % in urban areas. Only three out of every hundred rural children could complete high school. The reason for the considerable enrollment gap is the lack of educational resources (accessibility to schools, teachers' quality, and parents' investment) in backward regions, predominantly rural areas.

First, the number of high schools in less developed areas is less, and students have lower accessibility to schools. Because there are no schools near their home, students in backward areas spent more time going to schools, or some of them chose to live on campus directly. As Yang (2014) [11] mentioned, 33.02% of rural students went to boarding schools, while only 8.88% of urban peers went to these schools (p. 122). Second, the quality of teachers in less developed regions is usually inferior to that in developed areas. Due to the limited financial support of backward schools, the teachers are typically hired by fixed contracts. Compared with regular teachers, fixed-contract teachers often received lower salaries. Therefore, most people who go to these places to become teachers are graduated from a lower-tier academic institution or have been knocked out by the developed regions' schools. Third, parents in developed areas, especially cities, are more willing to invest in their children's education. For example, Yang (2014) [11] reported that urban parents generally did better than rural parents in all three areas: taking care of children's life, academic support, and emotional support (p. 130-133).

In conclusion, the Chinese government's education system has achieved great success in ensuring basic education for all citizens. However, when it comes to higher education (e.g., high schools), rural areas and some marginalized regions still receive unequal treatment in the distribution of educational resources.

3.2. A study on the causes of problems in areas with backward high school educational resources in China

Initially, the economic level determines the local educational resources to a certain extent. Economically developed areas can attract more well-trained teachers and build better physical facilities. In addition, families living in these areas also have higher incomes, leading to more children taking the high school entrance examination and more chances of applying to universities later (Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011, p. 33-34) [12]. However, economic development and citizens' income are not balanced in China. Based on the Gao, Liu, Chen and Cai's research (2019) [13], we can conclude that in contrast to the eastern coastal counterparts, which represent regions with generally lower-income disparity,

the less developed provinces in the west are confirmed as hotspots of income inequality. By 2015, this disparity concentrated in central China like Chongqing and Sichuan. Despite the same rural background, children living in coastal areas will have more opportunities to receive a better high school education than those living in inland cities. So, what accounts for the economic differences?

One of the most vital factors in determining the local economy is its geographical location. For example, why do coastal cities generally have higher incomes than inland cities? Their locations give them natural and convenient transportation. Some coastal regions can trade with other countries by sea and transport goods inland by rivers. Compared with land transport, traveling by sea or rivers has cost and efficiency advantages. Thus, promoting the economic development of these places, such as Shenzhen and Shanghai.

In conclusion, educational resources are primarily determined by local economic development, which depends on geographical location. When considering the educational resources of backward areas, people can start from geographical location and economy to find the reasons for the lack of high schools' resources.

3.3. Exploration on improving the balance of educational resources in areas with backward high school educational resources in China

The lack of high-quality teacher resources should be the primary problem to be solved in backward areas. First of all, teachers in backward areas are not well paid. The government needs to raise the overall wage level of the career or provide subsidies, such as housing subsidies. Secondly, the government should increase investment in backward region teacher training in the future. On the one hand, teachers can organize school visits to the more developed region and learn more advanced teaching methods. For example, one local policymaker in the western part described an 8-day training session in his area that included 14 expert teachers from another province who came to work on a new curriculum for all counties' high school teachers to enhance teacher skills (Peng et al., 2014, p.8) [14]. However, financial constraints, as well as challenges with workload and covering for absences due to training attendance, were viewed as limitations; If there were more finances available, backward regions' schools would be able to take advantage of additional opportunities to learn outside of the schools (Peng et al., 2014, p.8) [14]. Therefore, governments can provide funding to give these teachers more opportunities to learn and improve. On the other hand, the government should encourage teachers in less developed areas to enhance their educational qualifications during their tenure and reduce the requirement of the title assessment. In this way, the overall remuneration and welfare to teachers in underdeveloped areas will be improved so that young graduates or high-quality teachers are more willing to work in these regions, and local students can also receive better educational resources.

Finally, the development of the Internet makes people find a better way to share and transmit educational resources. Current classrooms are no longer limited by location and space, and students can communicate and study with teachers face to face through the Internet. According to Chen and Fan's (2018) research, the growth of the Internet has a tremendously positive effect on China's higher education quality, and the influences are the most significant in central and western areas; These regional differences show that the Internet is more effective in increasing the quality of higher education in economically underdeveloped places and narrowing educational disparities (p.8) [15]. Therefore, the new online teaching mode provides higher quality resources for the children in backward areas while gradually improving the teaching level of local teachers.

4. THE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN OF SPECIAL GROUPS

4.1. Actual situation of educational resources for children of special groups

In China, although every child has nine years of compulsory education, hukou issues of migrant children and the underdeveloped economic areas in which left-behind children are located directly influence the resources available for their high schools. China's left-behind children are primarily from rural areas, and most live-in remote areas. These areas' economies are not as established as cities', and they are still in growth phases. A lack of revenue in rural areas leads to increased educational fees, so many schools charge fees directly to students to cover costs (Lu, 2012) [16]. Consequently, education is relatively costly, and educational resources are scarce. The Chinese government introduced the 'Two Exemptions and One Subsidy Plan' in 2006 to waive incidental fees, offer free textbooks, and provide living subsidies to minimize the gap between rural and urban education and balance the allocation of educational resources (Han, 2017, p.95) [17]. However, the shortage of teachers has resulted in poor quality education in rural areas. Thus, left-behind children need to work harder to attend a university like children in the city.

Since the compulsory education system implemented in China does not improve the enrollment of migrant children who have left their household registration areas, their compulsory education and subsequent high school education have been affected. According to Li et.al (2010) [18], migrants have experienced various forms of

stigmatization at urban destinations, including unequal schooling opportunities for their children. As a result, their parents were forced to pay higher tuition fees to avoid delays in enrollment. In addition, their college entrance examinations were affected by their permanent hukou. Han (2017, p.96) [17] pointed out that most provinces only allow students with local hukou to take the exam and participate in college admission in their province. Therefore, most cross-province migrant children have to take the test in their home province. As migrant children return to household registration places to study, they face an additional year of study because of each province's different textbooks and test difficulties.

In summary, although the Chinese government is constantly improving its education system through policies, hoping to balance the educational resources for children of special groups, the quality of teachers in rural areas and the hukou of migrants limit their opportunities to seek more educational resources.

4.2. Reasons for the imbalance of high school education resources for children of special groups

The starting point of education for migrant and left-behind children is different from that of ordinary students, affecting their high school education resources imbalance. According to Goodburn (2009) [19], Chinese farmers are generally regarded as the lowest among these "low-quality" groups. Therefore, teachers are often biased against farmers' children and believe that children raised by low-quality parents are also low-quality. This kind of thought concerns that accepting such children will affect the overall "quality" of education in the cities (Goodburn, 2009) [19]. Since most migrant children and left-behind children come from rural areas in China, their caregivers are considered by the teachers in the school that they do not have sufficient cultural capital, that is, lack of quality.

In addition, the investment of urban and rural parents in children's education is different. Some children of special groups do not live with their parents, and the education level of their caregivers will also affect the starting point of their education. Take Guangdong Province as an example; well-educated households place more value on children's education. They tend to have more resources, so they may want migrant children in their households to be educated and are more likely to pay the high amounts for migrant children's tuition fees (Liang & Chen, 2007) [20]. Moreover, school tuition is just one of the parts of urban parents' investments in children's education. They will also invest in their children's artistic skills and academic level to improve children's overall development. Due to the relatively high educational level of urban parents and the relatively long time accompanying their children, most of them will carry out early education for their children and accompany children studying in their spare time. Compared with urban parents, the caregivers of children of special groups are usually busy with work and return home late, which limits their time to help their kids with their studies (Han, 2017, p.102) [17]. Both foresters of migrant and stay-at-home children have a low level of education, and lack of time cannot satisfy their children's early education and companionship.

4.3. Thoughts on the strategy of realizing the balanced development of high school educational resources for children of special groups

Firstly, the government needs to pay more attention to children of particular groups (migrant and left-behind children). Most of the education funds for high schools come from the central government. However, to cultivate more talents, the local government usually invests most of the funds and resources in crucial schools or demonstration schools, thus ignoring ordinary public schools to a certain extent. The earlier years' ambiguity of education policy for migrant children allowed local public schools to charge high "education endorsement fees" to enroll migrant children (Liang, Yue, Li, Li& Zhou, 2020) [21]. Therefore, the admission fee for children of special groups has become one of the funding sources of public schools. If the government strengthens its responsibilities and reduces part of resource allocation to key schools and demonstration schools, it can reduce admission fees for migrant children. Lu (2012) [16] reported that although the Chinese government has ordered local governments to enforce the free nine years of compulsory education to improve the education in rural areas since 2000, this goal has yet to be fully achieved due to the quality of schools in rural areas, and the preference for sons. Thus, the policy can help improve part of education resources for left-behind children. Nonetheless, improving people's inherent thinking and increasing financial support will help improve the allocation of high school education resources of left-behind children.

Secondly, improving people's inherent perceptions of special populations can help t develop balanced educational resources. Whether it is the parents of migrant children or the caregivers of left-behind children, their social capital is relatively low. Thus, this situation cannot provide their children with better educational resources. According to Liang, Yue, Li, Li& Zhou (2020) [21], social capital refers to migrants' social connections with residents in destination cities, which is akin to the Chinese term "guanxi" (relationship). When some parents try to use social capital to give their children excellent educational resources, the phenomenon of social boundaries prevents children from special groups from obtaining these resources. Li et al. (2010) [18] pointed out that some public teachers found, parents do

not want to send their children to public schools because their children may suffer from depression, face discrimination, be looked down upon, feel lonely, and have no other students talk to them. Thus, it can be seen that social boundary formation creates unequal access to educational opportunities between rural migrants and urban groups (Yiu & Yun, 2017) [22].

To summary, the balanced development of educational resources is to incline educational resources to backward areas and weak schools through more decisive measures to improve the quality of education instead of just restricting or weakening the resources of developed areas and intensive schools. The distance between urban and rural regions will be narrowed by assisting regional education growth, and more peaceful society will emerge.

5. STRENGTHENING THE DIVERSIFIED CONSTRUCTION OF CHINA'S HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION AND IMPROVING THE BALANCE OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

5.1. Harmonious development of public and private high schools

The co-construction of public and private high schools is the new way to increase educational diversity in recent China. Undoubtedly, public schools have made a significant contribution to getting rid of illiteracy rates and promoting basic education. In particular, the new construction of mixed schools (public plus private schools) also provides the opportunity to supplement further the fields not covered by public schools, such as the construction of the private international high schools and the art high school (Smith & Joshi, 2016) [23]. However, the distribution of educational resources between public and private schools is not always equal. Huang & Lei (2011) [24] pointed out that the quality of in-service teachers, the educational investment, and the number of students and other resources is not exactly the same between public and private in the vocational high schools. Overall educational investment in public high schools is more than in private high schools. Unlikely public high school, which is mainly funded by the government, privately organization funded high schools have not always been complete and sufficient in terms of the educational investment and basic educational resources provided, due to schools being financially and administratively autonomous (Kwong, 1997) [25]. Therefore, the private high school requires students to pay high tuition fees to obtain and maintain such better educational resources due to this instability. In fact, the higher tuition fee from private high schools increases the burden of parents on education expenditure to a certain degree.

Moreover, compared with public high school educational resources, the importance of the demand for quality educational resources in private high schools indeed has been neglected. In particular, the distribution of high-quality teachers is not balanced. High- quality teachers often tend to choose public school with strong stability. Although marketization in education has already changed the traditional view for teachers only to choose to teach in public schools, the subsequent guarantee that private schools can provide for teachers is inadequate (MOK & WAT, 1998) [26]. Therefore, it is necessary to re-balance the resources of public and private schools. In fact, whether public or private high schools, the ultimate goal is to cultivate useful people into society. The balance of distribution of educational resources between public and private high schools is fundamental to this goal.

5.2. The internationalization trend of China's high school education realizes the enrichment of high school education resources

From 1978 until now, Chinese higher education and its above fields have already fully entered into educational internationalization. In fact, the internationalization of higher education development in China is not only concerned with the internal change of education (for example, constructing the project of 211, 985 and educational expansion attract more high-quality international students), but also focuses on external development, such as the expansion of the cooperation with foreign educational institutions (the number of Chinese students' oversea studies increased) (Ma & Zhao, 2018) [27]. Such internationalization trends actively accelerate Chinese educational resources developing towards higher quality. Therefore, the benefits of internationalization of Chinese higher education not only introduce new resources (such as the flow of talented people), but also enrich educational resources simultaneously.

Similarly, the internationalization trend has expanded towards the middle educational stage, namely high school education. However, compared with the internationalization of higher education, the internationalization of high school education seems to be more conservative and single. Ma & Zhao (2018) [27] mentioned that public high schools mainly focus on the preparation of entering into domestic universities, which offers few bridges to foreign universities and less provides opportunities for international students to prepare for Chinese universities. Therefore, the setting of educational resources is mainly aimed at exam-oriented tests. In contrast, the increased number of Chinese students studying abroad in upper secondary education aims to better adapt to foreign universities (Zha et al., 2019) [28].

In fact, Chinese high school education also needs to construct the same mechanism followed the example of internationalized universities. First, the construction of the internationalized high schools requires more flexible educational resources distribution. Namely, the school should cultivate external studying talents as well as attract foreign teachers, which can enrich the single teaching mode. Second, the construction of high-quality high schools in China is needed. In other words, building an influential high school ranking system scoring committee (such as QS) to make an evaluation for these high schools once a year.

5.3. The development of educational technology and the construction of educational media platforms achieve the social sharing of high school educational resources

Like most developing countries, the educational technology development of China is related to the electronic technology development in those developed countries, especially the United States (Liu et al., 2010) [29]. However, it is very difficult for most developing countries to keep the same technical quality in education as those developed countries (Nye, 2015) [30]. The research from Alamin et al. (2015) [31] showed that the educational technology infrastructure between China and the United States had a gap from 1996 to 2012 (computer available ratio and internet connection rate). In other words, the relatively low per capita ratio in using basic hardware will restrict the development of educational technology and sharing of quality educational resources in Chinese society. Similarly, Bao (2020) [32] mentioned that the setting of the online courses is not the mainstream choice than face-to-face classes for many schools.

Due to the influence of the widespread pandemic (Covid-19), the importance of developing educational technology has once again been mentioned by Chinese high school teachers. However, there still exist challenges when using E-technology at school mentioned by scholars. For example, Nye (2015) [30] and Alamin et al (2005) [31] mentioned high school teachers lack technology training practices (they cannot control internet-related applications, such as Zoom), or high schools simply introduce those foreign educational platforms without even thinking about designing their educational platforms. Besides, the distribution of educational technology resources' setting in Chinese high schools is different from urban and rural areas.

Therefore, powerful economic support is the primary requirement of developing educational technology. While to achieve the social sharing of high school resources needs to build public free media platforms to avoid the monopoly of platform resources for high school students. Encouraging more high school students to attend online classes makes their class mode becoming more flexible.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has presented the distribution of China's senior high school educational resources from the perspective of educational equity, whether there is an unbalanced development, its reasons, and future construction strategies. We identified that with China's development and the introduction of compulsory education system policies, more and more children have gained equity in compulsory education. However, the geographical location of various regions in China affects the development of the local economy, thus affecting the distribution of educational resources under rigid conditions. The quality of high school education and teachers in eastern China are significantly higher than those in other regions, especially in coastal cities. In contrast, high schools in north-western China not only lack resource allocation due to the underdevelopment of the economy but also affect children's educational attainment due to lower teacher welfare and teacher quality. In addition, with the development of cities, more and more people in rural areas choose to work in cities. The gap between urban and rural areas and the problems of their household registration for children of special groups such as left-behind children and migrant children have seriously affected their high school education resources. In order to reduce such situations and strengthen the diversification of high school education in China, we find that better sharing, transmission, and internationalization of educational resources can be achieved through Internet-related electronic technologies and applications, which is more conducive to the co-construction of public schools and private schools, thus accelerates the development of a harmonious and international society. In the future, the central focus of the government's work should be on studying how to balance the regional differences by efficiently inclining more educational resources to backward areas and disadvantaged groups and improving the popularity of internet technology in education. The whole essay provides a general direction and reference for how to balance and enhance the educational resources in Chinese high schools. However, specific policies need to be formulated based on the current situation through more statistical data and models in the future.

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