

Research on the Approaches to Improve the Quality of Rural Education in China

--Based on the Case of Japan's Rural Education and Citizen Hall (Kominkan)

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Abstract: In the development of rural education for decades, China and Japan had similar predicaments such as the reduction in the size of the school and the decline in the number of teachers and students. Nevertheless, there were various methods had been implemented by the government in China and Japan in order to improve the quality of rural education. Therefore, through the study and comparison of China and Japan in rural education, this paper discusses the predicament that existed respectively in China and Japan. Then, it explores the core approaches to improving rural education in these two countries. Through literature analysis and case analysis, this paper finds and points out that economic development plays a greatly significant role in rural education.

Keywords: rural education, China, Japan, economic development

1. Introduction

Rural education refers to a formal or informal education aimed at rural areas. In China, rural education has been a field with great concern on all occasions [1]. Nevertheless, there is a gap in education between urban and rural areas, with urban generally having better education than rural areas. As the strategy for rural revitalization has been put forward in 2017, rural education, as an indispensable factor in the process of rural revitalization, become the core issue that needs to be solved. In post-war Japan, there are numerous factors which resulted in the above-mentioned gap. In order to make up the same gap, Japan's government has continuously introduced various policies or institutions to improve the quality of rural education since 1945. Naturally, Japan's experience is significant for China in rural education. Therefore, this paper first introduces the current situation which refers to the transfer of responsibility and the loss of rural population in China; Then it summarizes the factors cause problems of rural education in Japan (after 1945) and how Japan solved these problems. Next, based on the national condition of China and the experience of Japan, it explores the potential for referring Japan's solutions. Eventually it points out the priority which refers to the development of the economy for improving China's rural education. This paper provides some specific case references for the revitalization policy of China's rural education, and provides new research ideas for researchers who study rural education in the future.

2. The Predicaments in China's Rural Education

For the first dilemma, it is related to the transfer of the main body of operating school. With the promulgation and implementation of a series of educational reform measures by Chinese government since 1977 (including but not limited to the Compulsory Education Law), rural education began to become more formal and quality-oriented than the previous system which is based on people's communes and production brigades [2]. Meanwhile, a new concept has also been put forward, which refers to making local governments responsible for operating schools. Nevertheless, the development of rural education has also resulted in the closure of a large number of schools that cannot meet the requirements for establishment and operation due to the policies [2]. The reduction in the number of schools naturally reduced the opportunities to have access to education (starting from 1977, the number of primary and secondary schools decreased respectively by 183,000 to 112,000 during the following 9 years). Additionally, It should be pointed out that instead of the old brigade system, the new system of economy, represented by the household contract responsibility system, also made the opportunity for farmers to have access to education in the countryside less than before. This shift of main body from the state and production brigade system to local governments has led to a potential problem which is the lack of education funds [2]. In this case, governments often choose to raise taxes on farmers. This increases the economic burden of education for farmers, forcing them not to choose education in rural areas. Therefore, the situation of rural education has become relatively serious. Eventually, there is not only a reduction in the number of schools, but also the economic burdens on the farmer [2].

The second dilemma refers to the loss of rural population and the lack of ability to attract people and capital. In general, the migration or loss of population naturally makes the local economy stagnate [3]. Additionally, it also eventually results in a lack of investment in education [2]. First of all, according to the third to fifth censuses conducted in China, the number of rural migrants is increasing year by year [4]. According to the report of the fifth census, the number of rural migrants had reached 73.16 million, accounting for 58.68% of the total migrant population [4]. Next, according to the latest report which refers to the seventh census results, there is a trend for migrants which shows that they are more interested in working and living in developed regions such as the eastern and coastal cities. In addition, the ratio of rural residents to the total population has decreased from 63.91% to 36.11% (corresponding to the increase in the total urban population) [4]. In general, it is pointed out that the population of rural areas is flowing into cities. The reason is related to the decline of township enterprises. Township enterprises began to decline significantly in the 1990s [5]. This decline finally lead to the reduction of opportunities for farmers to work in local enterprises [2]. Nevertheless, the enterprise based on the coastal cities and developed regions become more competitive than township enterprises and need more labor. Therefore, most farmers chose to work in the coastal areas [3]. The loss of workers and the decline of industries naturally make rural areas lose vitality and competitiveness [6]. Therefore, the lack of people and capital or funds finally results in the predicament in rural education [1].

3. The Predicaments in Japan's Rural Education

For rural education in Japan, the first problem is related to the characteristics of rural areas. From post-war Japan (1945) to the 1980s, Japan's rural areas have several obvious characteristics such as the harsh natural environment and backward economic development [7]. First, geographical location and natural conditions are important factors for economic development. the geographical location and weather in rural areas are not as beneficial as those in cities. Second, with the deterioration of the rural economy, the investment environment and the rate of return also become more difficult to meet expectations [7].

Next, there is a lack of conditions for communication with developed regions or cities which is disadvantageous for the introduction and spread of advanced technology and cutting-edge ideas and information. Additionally, the inconvenience of communication with the outside world makes it difficult for modern educational ideas to enter rural areas [7]. Local farmers have less awareness of learning than urban residents. They are more likely to reject outside ideas and focus on agriculture and nature due to the social nature based on consanguinity [7]. As a result, the enrollment level in remote and rural areas of Japan is relatively low. Furthermore, as cities develop rapidly, in addition to the better investment environment in cities, they are more attractive to groups of younger teachers than rural areas. Therefore, the education level in rural remote areas is not high. The number of young talents is far less than that in cities as well. Finally, these factors result in the decline of rural education [7].

4. Attempts for Japan to Solve the Predicaments in Rural Education

First, it is related to legislation. Legislation is one of the most effective approaches to solve the problems existing in rural education. In 1954, the Japanese government promulgated the Law on the Promotion of Education in Remote Areas. The law aims to improve the quality of rural education such as the unification of the standards of teaching facilities in urban and rural areas and preferential treatment to teachers. It also is pointed out that the Japanese government also emphasizes economic benefits, which include but not a limit to the merger and abolition of schools, reducing the size of schools, encouraging rural schools to provide curricula that have local features such as agriculture and nature. This is attractive and beneficial for students and teachers. In general, through the policies, the disadvantageous points for rural education have been made up and improved [8].

Then, it exemplifies the benefit of Citizens Public Hall [9]. There is a similarity between Japan citizen public hall and the China community activity center. Nevertheless, compared with the latter, the former, as a public cultural facility, not only emphasizes the community, but also undertakes the responsibility of extra education. Citizen public halls were established in early post-war Japan and developed from rural areas[9]. This typical center for community activities is supported by national policy and operated by the local government. They not only provide fitness, cooking and entertainment programs, but also books and other things for learning. Moreover, the Citizens public hall also allows students and others to gather to study. As Japan's economy has developed, cities have been able to offer an increasing variety of informal education [8]. In this case, after the reform of rural education, rural citizen public halls also provide students with informal education to bridge the gap between urban and rural informal education [9].

This series of measures are advantageous for the innovation of rural education. Furthermore, it also gradually made rural areas obtain benefits such as political advantages which finally improve rural education.

5. Comparative Analysis of Rural Education Measures between China and Japan

Based on the analysis and discussion, it is pointed out that the predicaments faced by China and Japan in rural education are similar [8]. For example, the reduction of school scale, the shortage of teachers and educated population are all existing in rural education in both countries [7]. Nevertheless, the causes have some differences, which also shows that China and Japan have respective national conditions. In this case, it still can be referred to Japan's reform measures for rural education to compare the measures taken by China to explore the potential for the use and reference of Japan's approaches and transform them into a plan in line with China's national conditions.

According to the first solution that it refers to the legislation, based on China's Compulsory Education Law, China's rural education currently focuses on the construction of small-scale boarding schools, the optimization of teaching conditions, the reform of teacher recruitment and salary systems, and the provision of special services for dropouts and enrollment [8]. It is pointed out that China is more focused on the system. Japan is similar to China [1]. However, the aspect that is worth learning from Japan is the construction of welfare and related industries, which can attract more students, teachers and investments to improve the quality of rural education [7].

As for the solution of the citizen public hall, it should be pointed out that it is a public welfare learning institution with Japan characteristics. In order to refer to this solution, it needs to analyze the reason for its history and attraction for people to receive education outside the school. As early as the Meiji period, in order to promote synchronous development between urban and rural areas, the citizen public hall began to take shape. Since then, the government constantly urged and supported the reform of the Citizen Public Hall, which enabled it to take increasing responsibilities and become more beneficial to rural education [9]. Furthermore, some features of contemporary Japanese society should also be taken into account. Affected by the declining birthrate and development of economy, the decrease in population and the deepening of urban-rural exchanges have resulted in the disintegration of the above-mentioned close consanguineous society in rural areas. This has led to a gap in the informal education of villagers' children. However, citizen public hall can provide informal education to make up for this vacancy. In China, currently, there is no condition for the formation of a citizen pavilion [1]. Nevertheless, another factor affecting the Citizens public hall is economic development. As the people's income increases, they will naturally have a stronger interest in informal education. Therefore, economic development is still the first priority in order to solve the predicaments in rural education [1].

If economic development is the priority, China has indeed improved the rural economy through various policies and practical actions. By poverty alleviation, investment in infrastructure, rural revitalization and investment attraction, the rural economy is improving. When the economy develops to a certain extent, the situation of education will also improve [1]. Therefore, it is the special requirement of rural education in China at this stage which improve the teaching environment and industry in order to attract teachers and students and provide excellent education through economic development.

6. Conclusion

Rural education is a significant part of education. This paper explores the similarities between China and Japan by analyzing the predicaments in rural education. It also compares and finds out the potential for reference. In summary, economic development remains paramount. It can be seen in many strategies implemented by Japan in the past and China currently. Through the above analysis, this paper is helpful to explore what are the key approaches to improving the quality of rural education. In short, economic development and its effect will be significant for the future of rural education in China. Due to the constraints of objective conditions, this study did not involve comprehensive and specific rural education data. Considering the different economic levels of rural development in different regions of China, future research can be done based on the different dimensions of rural economy and education in different provinces of China.

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