

# ***Current Situation, Causes and Development Strategies for out-of-School Girls in Chinese Rural Areas***

## ***---Analysis Based on the Case of Huaping Girls' High School***

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the current situation, causes, and strategies for addressing the problem of out-of-school girls in rural areas of China. By analyzing and summarizing the data and causes of girls' school failure in rural China from previous literature, this paper offers suggestions for establishing girls' schools. Founded in 2008, Huaping Girls' High School is the first all-free-of-charge girls' high school in China, mainly enrolling students from remote townships and alpine mountainous areas within Lijiang City and individual poor remote townships and mountainous areas in other cities and counties in Yunnan Province and surrounding provinces and cities. The creation of the school has greatly increased access to education for girls in the mountains, and in recent years, the results of the college entrance exam have been very positive, successfully sending many girls for higher education. This paper uses Huaping Girls' High School as a specific case study to analyze the help and advantages of establishing a girls' school for out-of-school girls in rural China, and to give specific suggestions about it.

**Keywords:** education, out-of-school girls, girls' high school, rural

## **1. Introduction**

In 1974, Zhang Guimei followed her sister to Yunnan to support the border areas, and after her husband's death in 1996, Zhang Guimei applied for a transfer to teach at Huaping County Ethnic High School in Lijiang. She found that the educational environment in Huaping, a rural area, was very different from that of Dali, the city where she used to teach. Not only were there fewer girls in school, but many of them dropped out midway through their education. Zhang Guimei went into the mountains to visit their parents, only to find out that the reason why girls dropped out of school was that parents generally did not pay attention to the education of girls. Zhang Guimei was also the director of the Huaping Children's Welfare Institution at that time, and there were many healthy girls in the institution whom their parents left. These few things made her determined to start a free high school for girls. With financial support from all walks of life, Lijiang City and Huaping County each contributed 1 million yuan to support Zhang Guimei's efforts to start a high school for girls.

In August 2008, Huaping Girls' High School was completed and officially opened in September, with Zhang Guimei appointed as principal and 16 faculty members joining Zhang Guimei's school. Girls from the mountains can also go to college. Huaping Girls' High School enrolled 100 girls in its first year, and all of these children's homes were deep in the mountains. In the first semester, four girls dropped out of school. Zhang Guimei made a home visit, and one of them said that the course was too complicated, and she couldn't learn it. After Zhang Guimei did much work, she finally persuaded two students to come back.

After the spring of 2012, due to the difficult conditions and other reasons, eight teachers left at once, leaving only eight teachers. With Zhang Guimei's efforts to persuade and recruit, she could continue to maintain the school's operation.

In July 2011, 14 students from Huaping Girls' High School were admitted to second tier colleges and universities. In August 2019, among 118 graduates, the rate of being admitted to first tier universities reached 40.67%, 82.38% of the graduates met the university admission threshold, ranking first in Lijiang City. 2020 college entrance examination, despite the impact of the epidemic, the undergraduate admission rate still ranked first in Lijiang City. Many of the graduates of Huaping Girls' High School were admitted to Zhejiang University, Xiamen University, Sichuan University and other famous universities.

Although today's society has been advocating gender equality and the situation of female education has been greatly improved. However, in practice, especially in the rural areas where the economic situation is relatively backward, there are still phenomena of rural girls needing more opportunities for education or dropping out halfway through the school year. Many factors cause this phenomenon. Researchers often point to traditional backwardness and poverty as the main reasons for the lack of education for girls in rural areas [1-3], and weak self-cognitive ability is also a factor [4,5]. Researchers also point out that the government should enact policies to support girls' education in rural areas [2][6], but girls' schools are rarely mentioned. This paper tries to get new insights through the case study of Zhang Guimei and Huaping Girls' High School, and put forward suggestions for building girls' schools.

## **2. Current Situation**

### **2.1. Out-of-school Phenomenon**

In rural areas, especially in remote, poor and economically backward areas, the situation of school-age girls dropping out of school is more serious. According to survey data [7], in 2010, the school attendance rate of girls aged 7-15 in key counties for national poverty alleviation was 97.6%, slightly lower than that of boys by 0.2 percentage points. This shows that the education situation of rural school-age girls still needs improvement. Moreover, the low education level of girls leads to illiteracy, which in turn leads to poverty, and poverty in turn leads to lower efficiency of the next generation of girls, which is like a vicious circle. According to the China Rural Poverty Monitoring Report 2011, in 2010, the incidence of poverty among the rural absolute poor in the national key counties was 9.8% for women, 0.4 percentage points higher than that of men. The problem of female poverty is not only serious and difficult to solve, but also has a strong genetic effect, and it is not easy to make a difference.

### **2.2. The Education Situation of Older Girls**

Due to a combination of natural, economic and traditional factors, as well as the problems of education itself, some girls are deprived of the opportunity to study at school age. According to a survey conducted by Bazhong Women's Federation of Sichuan Province in 2006 in Pingchang County, the enrollment rate of junior high school students was 94%, of which 82% were girls; the

dropout rate of junior high school students was 23%, of which 29% were girls; the dropout rate of junior high school students was 27%, of which 32.1% were girls; the dropout rate of girls increased with age, and the total number of girls aged 15 and above who dropped out of school in the city reached The total number of girls aged 15 and above who dropped out of school in the city reached more than 4000. After dropping out of school, older girls often find it difficult to escape the fate of early marriage and early childbearing, which inevitably exacerbates some social problems.

### **3. Analysis of the Problem**

#### **3.1. Gender Discrimination in Families**

In some economically backward areas of China, parents inherit traditional backwardness, traditional customs and labor methods. Their awareness of education is often weak, and they do not understand the importance of girls' education. Many parents believe that it is not beneficial to send girls to school, and under difficult economic conditions, these parents tend to allocate the limited educational resources to the boys in the family. According to the conventional wisdom, "Sending girls to school is futile as they will get married and leave home," approximately one in five of the moms who were surveyed agreed. Girls were subject to somewhat lower (but still extremely high) maternal educational expectations than boys, and they were more likely to be asked to help with home tasks. according to fieldwork, parents occasionally believed that boys had better aptitude, but they frequently believed that girls had greater devotion, which they believed to be essential for academic success [8]. Such gender discrimination has gradually formed a vicious circle in poor areas, making girls forever vulnerable in such poor areas in terms of education and family life.

#### **3.2. Low Education Level of Parents**

Parents' literacy level affects their awareness of their children's education. Families with high literacy level have high awareness of their children's education and high enrollment rate of girls; families with low literacy level have low awareness of their children's education and low enrollment rate of girls and high attrition rate. According to a survey of eight poor villages in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the non-enrollment situation was seen from the father's education level. The proportion of unenrolled girls whose fathers have education level of high school graduation or above is 1.4%; the proportion of unenrolled girls whose fathers have education level of junior high school is 7.1%; the proportion of unenrolled girls whose fathers have education level of elementary school is 29.2%; the proportion of unenrolled girls whose fathers are illiterate is 54.5%; the proportion of unenrolled girls whose fathers are illiterate is 7.8%. The situation of non-enrollment from the mother's education level. The proportion of girls whose mothers have education level of high school graduation or above is 0.1%; the proportion of girls whose mothers have education level of junior high school is 1.2%; the proportion of girls whose mothers are illiterate is 7.7% [9].

#### **3.3. The Lack of Female Teachers in Rural Areas**

The number of female teachers is directly linked to the enrollment of girls in school. However, due to the natural environment and economic factors, the number of female teachers in rural areas is not optimistic. According to the data, the proportion of female teachers in rural primary and secondary schools is only 42%, which is far lower than the proportion of female teachers in primary and secondary schools, and the proportion of female teachers in primary and secondary schools in China is 49%, and the proportion of female teachers in rural secondary schools in some less developed areas is below 25% [10].

## 4. Discussion and Suggestions

For girls' education, especially in poor areas, there are many problems that cannot be solved by individuals alone, such as insufficient government implementation and lack of financial security. Therefore, the government is an essential part in improving girls' education and promoting sustainable gender development, and that girls' education needs government policies to allocate resources and financial support from the macro level. In order to better focus on the future of girls' education in poor areas of China, this paper proposes that the Chinese government should establish a certain number of girls' schools in poor areas, so that more girls in poor areas can receive appropriate education under the leadership of the government, improve their personal development, and contribute to social and national development. In this way, it will contribute to the sustainable development of gender equality and women's empowerment. This policy proposal is inspired by the Huaping Girls' Senior High School founded by Principal Zhang Guimei, and this paper believes that it is highly feasible and relevant.

### 4.1. The Practical Effects of Establishing Girls' Schools

Huaping Girls' High School was founded by Zhang Guimei, the first girls' high school in China, which is completely free of charge, including tuition and accommodation fees, and has helped more than 1,800 girls from the mountains to get out of the mountains and enter university since its establishment 15 years ago.

The success of Huaping Girls' High School cannot be built without the care and financial support of the government at all levels, but also without educators like Principal Zhang Guimei, who visited and persuaded every household before starting the school, went around to raise funds, and did everything personally after starting the school, with a sincere and simple philosophy, not aiming at profit, and maintaining the purity and ideal of education even in a difficult environment. This is a quality that all educators should learn, and a spirit that those who devote themselves to the education of girls in poor areas should have.

The educational achievements of Huaping Girls' High School are impressive. In 2020, a total of 159 students from Huaping Girls' High School took the college entrance examination, of whom 150 were enrolled in the undergraduate program, with 17 students scoring over 600 points, 70 above the first grade, with the highest score of 651 in science and 619 in arts. This data proves that girls from poor areas can be upgraded academically and have a good knowledge base through education. Among the graduates, there are students such as Zhou Yunli who have worked hard to pursue their studies and returned to their hometowns after receiving higher education, returning to Huaping Girls' High School as teachers to dedicate themselves to the education of the motherland, especially in the poor areas. In the long run, with the gradual expansion of the scale of the girls' school, the education level of girls in poor areas will be effectively improved, and more talents will be delivered to the society, and gender equality will become an approaching dream.

### 4.2. Reasons for Establishing Girls' Schools by the Government

This paper believes that girls' schools should be built on the principle of adapting to women's characteristics, providing girls in poor areas with a solid education in basic subjects while offering special courses tailored to women's characteristics, so that girls can acquire knowledge and skills in a relatively equal campus environment, awaken gender consciousness belonging to women, deepen their thoughts, and improve their quality of life.

At the individual level, knowledge and skills are powerful forces to change women's destiny. They enable women not only to make their personal lives more outstanding, but also to participate more in social governance by relying on knowledge and skills, and to improve women's voice and

status, as mentioned by Liang Qichao in his article “The Creation of Women’s Academies”, “Nearby, it is good for the family, and far away, it is good for the seed. “This will contribute to the sustainable development of gender equality.

More importantly, the project team believes that a project to establish girls’ schools in poor areas should be established by the national government, firstly, out of consideration for resource allocation, with such advanced information technology, the Chinese government has a strong ability to integrate social resources and can use readily available data for macro analysis to obtain areas where women’s education levels are seriously lagging behind, and then set up girls’ schools by formulating policies and establishing specific programs, and send a matching amount of high-quality teachers and material resources to these areas. Secondly, school building funds depend on government deployment, which is the basic guarantee for education in poor areas and provides opportunities for out-of-school girls to receive a long-term stable, sustainable and complete education. In addition, since girls’ schools exist but are not common in China, having the government build the schools provides a degree of assurance that the schools will be reputable and that more families will feel comfortable sending their girls to the newly established girls’ schools.

### **4.3. Benefits of Establishing Girls’ Schools**

In terms of both short-term and individual benefits, the establishment of girls’ schools in poor areas meets the aspirations and needs of many girls who want to go to school; the education girls receive under the age of 18 provides them with the most basic knowledge of life and helps them better understand their objective environment, including a region, society, the country and the world; at the same time, qualified educators sent by the state will establish a correct outlook on life and values for the girls, so that they can be educated with knowledge and correct values, so that they can lead a happier life with knowledge as the base and morality and law as the standard. Even if some girls choose to stay in their hometowns after graduating from girls’ schools and make their families the main focus of their lives, they will have a higher quality of life because of the freedom, spirituality, and humanism given to them by the targeted education in girls’ schools.

In the long term and in the interest of society, girls’ schools benefit the entire educational enterprise and society as a whole by enabling more and more women in society to enjoy equal rights and promoting gender equality. As Principal Zhang Guimei says, “Raising one girl can influence at least three generations. If we can raise educated and responsible mothers, children in the mountains will not drop out of school, much less become orphans.” In poor mountainous areas, women do not need to be educated, staying at home to look after their children is the most traditional backward belief, but if the mother is not well educated, the development prospects of her offspring will also be limited, and the generations will be held back, forming a vicious development, which is not conducive to improving the quality of all citizens, and may even lead to various social problems such as domestic violence and abandonment of female babies due to low education level. On the contrary, the establishment of girls’ schools will enable more women to realize their value in life through education and form a role model for future generations of the same background, thus forming a virtuous circle and contributing to gender equality.

### **4.4. Implementation Methods for the Establishment of Girls’ Schools**

The gender of students enrolled in girls’ schools must be female, and where funds are limited, priority should be given to girls who wish to receive an education. And a consistent junior and senior high school system may be used.



#### 4.4.1. Pre-schooling

Due to the inherent problem of perception in poor areas, in order to attract more girls to education, special personnel should be sent to go to each family to understand the actual situation. If it is simply due to historical and cultural reasons of backward thinking and preference for sons, proper exhortation should be given that girls can also change their own fate as well as that of their families by receiving education, and families should try to avoid being tempted by short-term interests to let girls drop out of school too early to marry and have children [11]. To address this issue, investigators with a high sense of responsibility and dedication should be assigned and that training bases be established to build a culture in girls' schools. If girls are unwilling to go to school because they have elders or juniors at home to take care of, some financial support such as tuition waivers should be provided for these girls to study.

#### 4.4.2. Post-schooling

In terms of curriculum, the project team believes that girls' schools should offer educational programs specifically for girls in addition to the basic subject courses (different courses can be offered at the junior and senior high school levels) to increase women's self-awareness. The program is as follows.

Required courses could be set up in Women's Studies to help girls better understand themselves, the gender, the group as a whole, and to raise existing issues and bring them to the attention of society through the channels provided by various organizations.

The teaching mode can adopt the indoctrination teaching method, because the input knowledge is more valuable for girls in poor areas, if the government funds the establishment of girls' schools, these girls still need to go out of the mountains to a better platform through the existing system of secondary and high school examinations to obtain further educational resources and access to different platforms and opportunities. Once they have established a basic knowledge system through basic girls' school education, they will naturally be able to experience a relatively free teaching atmosphere and find more possibilities for their own development in future education, such as at the university level.

### 5. Conclusions

Although the educational attainment of girls in rural China has greatly improved, girls are still significantly disadvantaged compared to boys in terms of rural educational resources and educational attainment. Backward traditional attitudes, a vicious cycle caused by parents' low educational attainment, and the lack of rural female teachers all contribute to this phenomenon. By analyzing the case of Huaping Girls' High School, this paper finds that the establishment of girls' schools has many benefits for girls' education in rural China and is a good starting point for the Chinese government's efforts to popularize girls' education in rural areas. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the establishment of more girls' schools and that girls in rural China will receive a wider range and higher level of education in the future.

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