

# *Research on the Status Quo of Educational Inequity in China*

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**Abstract:** In light of China's ongoing economic expansion, the problem of educational inequality in China is becoming more and more worrisome. Through the method of literature analysis, this paper analyzes the main existing problems and their causes from four aspects. The common problems raised by previous researchers find that the unequal development of urban and rural development seriously inhibits the development of educational equity, which further leads to regional educational inequality and the low education rate caused by backward thinking in urban and rural locations. From the four aspects, the issue with household registration is to blame for the growing divide between rural and urban development and the uneven distribution of resources has led to too many kinds of educational resources. In economically developed areas, the natural geographical environment has also restricted the development of some areas, resulting in a worrying educational environment. Rural women's rights and interests are still unable to be protected and even difficult to receive education. Therefore, in the end, this paper also puts forward the corresponding solutions to these problems and the expectations for future development.

**Keywords:** education, inequality, China

## 1. Introduction

In 2022, 12813 US dollars are now the gross national product per capita. [1]. At the same time, the junior middle school enrollment ratio has been kept at a high level of around 100%, which means that China has essentially made compulsory nine-year schooling available to everyone. Furthermore, an increasing number of people could receive secondary education and even higher education. Thus, the average years of schooling (AYS) in China has rapidly increased to 9.9 years in 2022, demonstrating the enormous progress the country has made in the area of education [1].

Although educational gaps still exist between various groups, broader concern has been given to issues with equality in education. According to a 2015 survey by China Youth Daily, 66.7% of respondents thought the main cause of the current educational inequity was the unequal distribution of social power and wealth, while another 47.3% said there weren't enough resources for high-quality education, and 40% said the obvious divide between the eastern and western regions was to blame [1]. Therefore, in fact, due to the separation of urban and rural economic structure, income inequality and other reasons, not all common people can get the same quality of education.

Additionally, as the government controls the majority of educational resources, the objectives of the government are crucial to education policy and distribution. Quality education resources in cities are more abundant than in rural areas, attracting children from rural populations to move to cities to

study. Meanwhile, in order to exert the intensive effect of educational resources in some areas, the school layout is relatively concentrated in the city. Therefore, the government should reserve the necessary land for the new school and speed up the construction. Similarly, it is necessary to improve the quality of education in rural schools, especially in necessary teaching points, so that the rural population can receive high-quality rural education, relieve the pressure of schooling, and achieve a state of coordinated development of urban and rural students.

Through the experience of scientific and technological revolution and industrial revolution, High-caliber talent has a significant influence on advancing national development, and the key to a nation's sustainable growth is its educated populace. Regional imbalance has grown to be a significant barrier to the development of high-quality higher education in China as a result of the transformation and growth of China's higher education system. People must thus be clear that every region has the ability and the potential to grow. This situation calls for more equal access to higher education throughout the provinces. Therefore, the national government should start to understand the geographical laws of higher education resources, beyond a straightforward explanation of the geographic distribution of colleges and universities to an investigation of the imbalance in the growth of high-quality higher education, and address the issue at its source.

Education is recognized as an important factor in achieving gender justice. Gender equality in education has always been an important goal for China. However, according to the 2019 China Statistical Yearbook, the proportion of illiterate women in China over the age of 15 is 3.158 times that of illiterate men, and 2,527 times more women than males who do not finish elementary school [2]. These reports also show geographical distribution data showing that many illiterate women come from rural and northwestern regions such as Gansu, Xinjiang and Tibet. According to 2017 data from the China General Social Survey (CGSS), among women aged 18 to 49, 40.59 percent have primary school education or below [2]. According to the above data, a large number of rural women in China have not received a good education and are still facing educational difficulties.

This paper will discuss the causes of inequity. The remainder of this essay is structured as follows. The next part provides a brief methodology. The literature review will be mentioned in the third part, which will explain my research purpose and theoretical support more clearly. The fourth section introduces the summary of the common problems raised by the researchers, and the fifth section analyzes the reasons behind the problems. In order to highlight the larger implications of empirical results from China for comparative research on educational inequality and to provide some recommendations for future paths in the area, the study seeks to do so in its conclusion.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Search Terms and Criteria**

The Google Scholar database was used for the search.

For more comprehensive search results, the author developed one set of keyword searches. The following Boolean search actions were conducted:

China AND “education inequality” (“hukou system” OR “education resources” OR “Rural female education” OR “geographical impacts”)

To choose the research that was most pertinent, a variety of criteria were established. Articles have to meet the four requirements listed below in order to be included:

- a. Published after 2019.
- b. The language is English.
- c. The full article can be read on Google Scholar.
- d. The type of Literature is a journal article.
- e. The study focuses on education inequality in China.

## 2.2. Study Selection

The selection was taken in three stages. First, the titles of all retrieved articles were checked for eligibility based on the inclusion criteria listed above. Second, using standard criteria, the abstracts of all originally relevant papers were assessed for eligibility. Finally, all remaining publications' complete text was examined.

Given all the criteria, 168 articles were discovered from the databases. After screening the titles and abstracts, 32 papers were read in full text, 10 of which matched both inclusion criteria.

In order to ensure clarity and transparency when reporting systematic literature reviews, the PRISMA checklist was used to report the search results [3].

## 3. Results of Current Problems

### 3.1. Hukou Problem

In the 1950s, China's hukou system came into being in metropolitan areas and extended to rural areas to facilitate the redistribution of resources and life opportunities among Chinese citizens [4]. All Chinese households are required to register their addresses and identify their status as agricultural or non-agricultural (also known as rural or urban) under the hukou system. China was split into two societies by the system, with the majority of the population confined to the countryside and enjoying few rights and benefits compared to city residents, thus creating two different Chinese citizen classifications [5].

Moreover, hukou was more important in the social stratification process, and after taking into account the place of residence, the study found that rural hukou birth significantly reduced a person's educational attainment. Even today, rural and urban hukou holders still have a significant educational and financial difference. While hukou status, given at birth, can be considered a primary attribute of belonging, those of rural ancestry have few options for achieving urban status, such as joining the military, participating in politics, or pursuing higher education. However, family history, especially hukou origin, has an impact on who has access to these services. As a result, people with rural hukou are usually more disadvantaged in society and have fewer opportunities than those with urban hukou. Hukou households have more financial resources and more opportunity limits than urban families when they go from the rural to the city. For example, public schools in some cities do not allow children with rural hukou to enroll in school, which results in educational inequity.

### 3.2. Educational Resources

In terms of educational resources, rural education facilities lag behind. Especially in some remote rural areas, the policy of educational hardware facilities and teacher software facilities is difficult to implement. Due to the lack of funds, the school's teaching environment and teaching equipment cannot meet the needs of modern teaching, the school land area is small, and students do not have enough space for activities. Some poor mountain areas lack financial support and are unable to provide any good hardware facilities, such as projectors, laboratory equipment, etc [6]. On the software side, teachers are highly mobile due to development space and salary issues. As a result, the quality of education these children receive is difficult to guarantee. In poor areas of Yunnan, for example, skilled teachers are an extremely scarce resource. Due to the living conditions and income gap between poor areas and cities, teachers with rich teaching experience are reluctant to work in poor areas. This factor also leads to the long-term concentration of educational resources in developed cities.

With the continuous advancement of urbanization, the increasing urban population has led to the continuous growth of urban education demand. However, the unbalanced distribution and irrational

utilization of urban educational resources have become the main bottleneck restricting the development of urban education. On the one hand, the centralized distribution of educational resources leads to the surplus of educational resources in first-tier cities, while the supply of educational resources in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas is insufficient. On the other hand, the sharing of instructional materials is also facing the contradiction of fairness and efficiency. First-tier cities have become a gathering place for various high-level educational resources. This centralized distribution model has led to an excess of educational resources in first-tier big cities, while the supply of educational resources in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas is insufficient. The main reasons for this phenomenon include unbalanced urban development and population flow.

### 3.3. Geographic Position

In China, the uneven distribution of educational resources has become a deep-seated problem. There are huge gaps between urban and rural areas, different classes, and regions. In particular, the imbalance of educational resources, that is, the lack of high-quality educational resources, high-quality teachers, high-quality schools, and the average value of compulsory education enrollment rate, the average number of hours of teachers, school construction area and other basic educational conditions are similar. It is particularly prominent in central and western China. For a long time, the western region has been short of educational resources, and many children lack the necessary educational conditions and protection, resulting in a generally low level of education. Although the central region itself is relatively well developed, the quality of education overall remains below average [7]. If this distribution phenomenon is not improved, it will continue to lead to problems of insufficient learning ability, insufficient employment competitiveness, and uncertain development prospects for young people.

These aspects are particularly prominent in the unbalanced development of regional education. The first is educational facilities. In today's society, educational facilities as a key part of educational resources, and their construction directly affects the quality of education development. However, the uneven development of educational facilities is very common between the eastern coastal areas and the mountainous rural areas in the interior of China. Compared with the superior conditions of the city, the educational facilities in the mountain area are relatively scarce, and the number of primary schools in some places is insufficient, and there is only one school, which makes it difficult to go to school. Then there is the quality of teaching, urban schools have more resources in high-tech and other aspects than county cities, so the quality of teaching is higher. In the face of the differences in digital development and social openness among cities and county-level cities, differentiated and stratified educational resources exacerbate the educational learning inequality among students. The last is the difference of students, the phenomenon of domestic education uniformity leads to the existence of educational differences. This may lead to differences in the degree of knowledge acquisition among students based on factors such as social status and cultural wealth, and differences may be further amplified in the process of entering the next stage of education.

### 3.4. Gender Discrimination

Gender stereotypes have always been a problem in society. It is defined as a general perception or prejudice about the personality traits, appearance, behavior, and role of a particular sex. Stereotypes can be positive or negative. For example, positive stereotypes teach men to be "strong" and women to be "gentle." Negative stereotypes, such as traditional hegemonic masculinity and sexualized femininity identity [8]. However, both positive and negative stereotypes are similar in most ways, which can restrict gender diversity, opportunity, and skill development. For example, parents have

different expectations and attitudes towards children of different genders in the educational environment, which will be consciously or unconsciously manifested in the daily contact between parents and children. This can have a big impact on child's academic and career development.

However, with the improvement of social conditions, the proportion of women receiving higher education has declined. Indeed, among the more educated, there are far fewer women than men, with significant differences between men and women. There are clear class, regional and rural-urban differences in women's access to higher learning. In addition, according to the Yearbook of Higher Education Statistics, in 2010, male students accounted for 66.6 percent of the total number of students in Chinese universities at all levels, while female students accounted for only 33.4 percent [5]. In 2018, there were 1.2 times more male college students than female college students in China [5].

## **4. Analysis of Causes**

### **4.1. Gap Between Urban and Rural**

Since the 1950s saw the creation of the hukou system, it has created invisible administrative barriers so that residents in rural places have fewer political rights and possibilities to participate in or influence legislation. Although controls and restrictions on the flow of rural labor into cities have been loosened since the reform and opening up, it is still extremely difficult for rural individuals or families to obtain urban hukou. As a result, the hukou system splits the population into two distinct categories, resulting in various degrees of urban and rural development and severely restricting the number of rural people who may move to cities in search of better jobs and lifestyles.

School-age children and adolescents who reside outside of their place of residence with their parents or other legal guardians and attend school during the obligatory education stage are referred to as members of the floating population. These children do not have the same educational opportunities and safety as nearby youngsters because of the limitations of the household registration system. They deal with issues including challenging transfer and enrollment processes, an unstable learning environment, and a lack of psychological support. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2019 show that there are 240 million people living abroad, including roughly 20 million children [4].

The household registration system's educational and financial systems are the primary contributors to the problem of schooling for children living in floating populations. China has a system in place for managing education that is overseen by local governments and is accountable for the quality of education. According to its own economic and social development level and educational resources, each area develops unique educational plans, standards, and policies, resulting in regional disparities in education. Regarding the financial system, China has a tax-sharing structure that is hierarchical in nature. Governments at all levels divide education funding in accordance with a specific ratio, yet the imbalanced financial resources of local governments cause local education investment to be out of balance. Due to these institutional arrangements, it is challenging for migrant children to access the same educational resources and services as locally enrolled children in the locations where they attend school as well as to enjoy the same educational protection and rights as locally enrolled students in those locations.

### **4.2. Unequal Distribution of Resources**

Due to the huge gap between urban and rural economic development level, fiscal income, social welfare and other aspects, it leads to the imbalance of urban and rural education input, teachers, teaching facilities, curriculum and other aspects. According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, the number of urban students in compulsory education was 110 million, accounting for 54.5 percent of the nation's overall student population [9]. The number of rural students in

compulsory education is 90 million, accounting for 45.5 percent of the total number of students in the country [9]. However, the average annual expenditure on compulsory education in urban areas is 14,000 yuan per student, 2.3 times that of 60,000 yuan per student in rural areas [9]. The typical number of pupils in urban compulsory education is 36.8, while the average number of students per class in rural areas is 28.7[9]. The number of full-time teachers per 100 students in urban compulsory education is 10.8, while in rural areas it is 9.6. The number of computers per 100 students in urban compulsory education is 41, compared with 18 in rural areas [9].

On the one hand, the disparity between urban and rural schooling resources makes it more difficult for rural populations to meet their fundamental needs, on the other hand, it lowers the standard of instruction in rural regions and lessens the chances for rural kids to enroll in universities and become registered members of urban households. According to statistics, in 2019, 10.31 million people applied to take the national college entrance test, of which about 40% were from rural areas [6]; In 2019, 7.9 million students were enrolled in colleges and universities nationwide, of which about 30% were rural students [10]. This shows that in the higher education stage, the admission rate of rural candidates is significantly lower than that of urban candidates.

### 4.3. Natural Resources

In northwest China, due to the influence of climate and weather, large-scale farming cannot be carried out, and the natural conditions of the living area are poor. The Mongols, for example, live in the desert Gobi; Most Tibetans live in mountainous areas, forest areas, and even plateaus with perennial snow. Hui, Sala, Tu, Dongxiang, etc. mainly live in remote mountain villages; The Uyghurs live north and south of the vast Tianshan Mountains. Some of these areas have deep mountains and deep gullies, and people find it difficult to get out, and some are sparsely populated and dispersed, without anybody for miles, particularly in some pastoral areas. For a long time, relying on the natural economy and poor environmental conditions, they believed in the fate of the arrangement, they are very accustomed to the mode of production and lifestyle inherited from generation to generation, coupled with the inadequate infrastructure for transportation and information, people are content with their food and clothing, restricted to a limited world of life, affecting the development of all aspects. Similarly, in order to overcome the harsh natural environment, people are forced to do more labor and herding to obtain food and clothing, which makes them have to take on more food in the family earlier, and thus lose the opportunity to receive education. The early development of children in these locations is constrained and impacted, particularly their educational status and socialization process, by this isolated, confined, and backward natural environment.

### 4.4. The Rights of Women

The preference for boys over girls has a history of thousands of years in China, although equality between men and women is now advocated in society. However, the phenomenon of son preference still exists widely in rural areas. The sex ratio at birth was 108.5 in 1982, 111.3 in 1990, and 116.9 in 2000. The comparison between urban and rural areas shows that the rural area is higher than the urban area. In 2000, the urban area is 112.8, the town is 116.5, and the rural area is 118.1. Rural girls have always held such a concept that girls are domesticated for others, sooner or later will be married, giving birth to girls to get less return. Influenced by this concept, the proportion of family investment in girls' education is less, or even no, girls are involved in family work earlier. In the countryside, it is common for girls to look after their younger brothers at home and run the house.

Especially in the backward development of the northwest, there are some minority women in the countryside, and most of these minority women believe in religion. For this reason, the influence of religion always exists in the development process of women in the Northwest. At the same time,

because of the vast and sparsely populated natural environment, people live in relatively remote, closed and scattered areas for a long time, so there are different degrees of exclusion and closure psychology to the outside people or things. This closed mentality restricts their way of thinking. People always look at things according to a single pattern of habit, and it is often difficult to accept new and complex things. For the women living in it, its external closure and self-closure psychology is more prominent.

Early marriage, lack of education and lack of professional skills make women in a subordinate position in society and family, and to some extent, they are discriminated by society and family, resulting in a strong sense of inferiority when women are young. The imprint of traditional culture and customs deeply affects and restricts the development of women themselves, and they themselves lack a certain internal motivation and enthusiasm for learning and education, and they always treat their own education and development with a negative attitude. In a word: women themselves have also given up themselves psychologically, and even learn from men to discriminate against and oppress women.

## 5. Conclusion

Education is the foundation of national development, and the uneven development of education has always been a major problem in the process of China's development. Through the research, it is found that the unbalanced development of urban and rural education is the most important factor. We have studied the causes and results of the problems from four aspects. It is obvious that the hukou system is one of the important institutions on which China's planned economy and society depend. In retrospect, despite all the reforms, the basic elements of the household registration system still exist and will not change overnight. The hukou system continues to restrict the free movement of individuals and promote social segregation. Therefore, it leads to an imbalance of social development and educational development.

As for the uneven distribution of educational resources, it will cause many bad consequences. The most important one is that it affects the equity of education, the low penetration rate of education for vulnerable groups, and the development of education is lagging behind. Besides, it will affect economic and social development, which will lead to social instability. Therefore, the institutions must first boost financial input in order to address the unequal distribution of educational resources in China. The government should increase funding, invest more in rural education, build more rural schools, upgrade the facilities and instructional technology, hire outstanding educators, raise teacher standards, and foster a positive learning environment. Second, the reform of education needs to be intensified. In order to improve the learning ability and quality of rural students, the government should support universal education, reform the curriculum system for urban and rural education, lower the learning threshold for rural students, expand the range of educational services, implement employment-oriented education reform, improve the mode of personnel training, and pique their interest in learning.

Higher education in China often ignores gender differences in teaching and resources. It takes the traditional gender view of "men are strong and women are weak" as the basis for resource allocation, resulting in a lack of demand from the perspective of women. According to the current data collected from Chinese residents, rural women are the most discriminated group in education, and the government should provide subsidies for those women who want and have the ability to attend school but cannot afford the tuition. In earlier studies, girls' desire to learn was largely influenced by their mothers' gender attitudes. It is difficult to change a person's traditional gender values in a short time. However, schools can offer gender-related lessons to students and build the ideal of gender equality for people from an early age. Therefore, the government should pay great attention to the differences

between men and women, seek changes in the unity of social status resources, and create a more equal environment for higher education.

Social fairness is strongly supported by the educational system. The equitable distribution of educational resources and the educational disparity brought on by differences in socioeconomic standing can both be reduced by a strong educational system. Urban high-quality education resources cannot be used equally overnight, and long-term efforts on the part of the government, education agencies, and academics are required to achieve educational equity. The next phase of research on resource allocation for urban education should concentrate on how to adopt workable policy measures and implementation strategies to support the improvement and innovation of the urban school district system, continuously reduce the gaps in educational quality between regions and schools, and maximize the spatial balance of educational equity and quality. In order to encourage the full development of urban and rural education, government should actively investigate measures like the inter-school mobility of excellent teachers and the inclining of education funds to rural schools, so that the objective of social equity and spatial justice can be realized in the future.

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