

# Reflections on Basic Education in Rural Areas in the Context of Population Reduction

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## Abstract

**As the population shrinks, the development of rural education in China faces many challenges: balanced development of compulsory education at the county level leaves a long way to go; there is enormous room for improving the quality of basic education in rural areas; and the problems of migrant children and left-behind children are still prominent. Looking back on achievements, facing up to problems, and looking to the future, China's rural education development needs to further build up confidence in rural education, encourage bold local innovations, and vigorously promote the balanced development of urban and rural education.**

## Keywords

**Depopulation, Rural Education, Basic Education.**

## 1. Introduction

The report of the twentieth CPC National Congress points out that it is necessary to "do a good job of education to the satisfaction of the people", "accelerate the construction of a high-quality education system, develop quality education, and promote equity in education". In the new era, the reform of basic education in China should comprehensively implement the spirit of the Twentieth Party Congress, seriously summarize the experience and lessons learned from the reform of basic education since the reform and opening up, and comprehensively deepen the holistic, systematic, and innovative reform of basic education in order to cultivate talents and establish morality and nurture people as the foundation." [1] Relevant education departments and organizations have responded and continued to promote. Combined with the economic and social development and education stage development, basic education curriculum reform to accelerate and promote still face a series of deep-seated problems and challenges. Among them, the phenomenon of "small class size" under the shrinking population, as well as the decline in the student population and the plight of rural education development of the road to confusion, gradually obvious, which is related to a certain extent to the allocation of high-quality educational resources, the integrated development of compulsory education in urban and rural areas, related to the cause of the deepening of the reform of basic education, the consolidation of universalization level and the construction of a high level of basic education, it is related to the entire The coordinated development of the entire education system is a matter of urgent consideration and research for the "national implementation of the Party's education policy to make basic education better and better". In this paper, we describe the current situation of rural basic education reform in the light of relevant data on population reduction, analyze its problems and main issues, and then put forward corresponding governance proposals for rural basic education reform under population reduction.

## 2. The impact of downsizing on rural basic education is a foregone conclusion

### 2.1. Decrease in student population due to depopulation

Since the 1970s, China has been vigorously pursuing a family planning policy, and in the mid-to-late 1990s, as a result of the implementation of the family planning policy, the birth rate in rural areas has declined, and the decline in primary and secondary school enrollment has become a common phenomenon. According to our survey of Hubei Zhongxiang City, Shayang and Yingshan counties and cities have confirmed this. Such as Zhongxiang City, Hubei, by 2010 the city's rural junior high school students, elementary school students will be reduced from 117,708 people in 2005 to 74,142 people year by year 6-year cumulative reduction of 43,566 people. Shayang is an agricultural county with a population of 60.5 million 1 year old children in the highest years of 1.6-1.7 million people in 2004 fell to 1.2 million people in 2005, only 6,000 more than the educated population as a whole are declining year by year. Yingshan is a mountainous county according to the county birth department to provide material births have fallen from 3,880 people in 1993 to 2,941 people in 2003. Due to the reduction of primary and secondary school students in rural areas, many teaching centers have fewer students or even no students to teach. In some places, school buildings have been under construction for a few years, but there are no more students; in other places, a large number of "sparrow schools" have appeared. Such as Yingshan County Chenjiayan Primary School, a total of only 20 students and divided into two grades, first grade and third grade compound teaching every other year. There is only one substitute teacher for the entire school, and the two grades are taught by this substitute teacher, who sits in front of the first grade, behind the third grade, and in front of and behind the teacher's blackboard. Zhongxiang City, although more densely populated, but some elementary school are also less students, such as ShaoTai elementary school is a mountainous elementary school service area for 4 administrative villages school from preschool to grade 6 7 grades a total of 170 people were 17, 25, 31, 10, 21, 28 and 38 people; FuYu elementary school's service area is also 4 administrative villages, the furthest students 10 kilometers away from the school. School from kindergarten to grade 6 a total of 270 students were 16, 10, 15, 50, 55, 48 and 76 students below grade 3 students are less because the Fuyu Primary School in the field there are two teaching sites far from the school children in the teaching site to the fourth grade when the teaching site students to the Fuyu Primary School to study and the two teaching sites each point is only 20 or so students. The two school sites only have about 20 students each. In response to this situation, schools around the world began to carry out the layout of the adjustment. For example, according to the student population Zhongxiang City plans to September 2010 will be the city's rural junior high schools, elementary school, the number of cumulative year-on-year reduction of 119 from 283 in 2005 to 164 (including teaching points), including the establishment of nine-year school 8, junior high school, 25, 99 complete primary, junior high school, 23, 8 teaching points, a special education school. Shayang County in accordance with the "10,000 people an elementary school 30,000 people a junior high school 200,000 people a high school" principle to plan the layout of primary and secondary schools. It can be seen that the layout adjustment of rural primary and secondary schools is the objective requirement of the reduction of rural primary and secondary school students. In addition to the large-scale rural population mobility and the majority of farmers and their children on the demand for quality education resources increased dramatically also requires the rural primary and secondary school layout timely adjustment." [2]

## **2.2. Increase in the migrant population and decrease in the number of children left behind**

As the migration rate approaches the retention rate, both urban and rural areas face the educational challenges of imperfect urbanization. Although the accompanying rate in 2015 was only 40.37% (42.28% in elementary school and 35.74% in junior high schools), with the continuous advancement of urbanization, the growing school-age population in towns and decreasing population in villages will bring multiple pressures on towns in terms of acquiring land, increasing funds and expanding teachers, and will bring multiple dilemmas in the rural areas in the form of low utilization rate of school buildings, insufficient investment in public funds and overstaffing of teachers, which will in turn This will lead to structural contradictions and dilemmas in the supply of educational resources. At the same time, the problems of education and care for the children of migrant workers and children left behind in rural areas require further in-depth attention. From the perspective of rural left-behind children, the extreme events that have occurred one after another in recent years have prompted people to realize the seriousness of the problem of caring for left-behind children, and from the perspective of children accompanying migrant workers in urban areas, although the integration of urban education and society has been widely noticed by all walks of life, for migrant workers in urban areas and their accompanying children, as new citizens, the new issues of receiving education in both urban and rural areas and living in urban areas are always new issues they face, and the problems of migrant workers in urban areas are not always easy to solve in different types and different policy contexts. The complexity of the issue is increased by the fact that the situation of urban education integration and social integration of children of migrant workers in different types and policy contexts is different. [3]

## **2.3. Depopulation leading to the pursuit of quality education**

As the birth rate in China's rural areas declines and urbanization advances rapidly, the demand for quality education among farmers and their children is becoming increasingly urgent. The restructuring of the layout of primary and secondary schools in rural areas has drawn more attention to the significance of this work in improving the quality of education. However, due to the long-term layout of primary and secondary schools in many rural areas of China's decentralized school conditions, school and class sizes are generally small, too many compound classes, teachers are overburdened with poor quality of teaching and learning is difficult to meet the majority of farmers and their children's demand for quality education. Therefore, the restructuring of the layout of rural primary and secondary schools should not only focus on the scale efficiency of schools and the balanced development of education, but also emphasize the significance of this work for improving the quality and efficiency of education. To this end, through vigorously adjusting the layout of rural primary and secondary schools to vigorously develop township primary and secondary schools and actively promote the village and the village to run a complete elementary school to expand the scale of operation; the planned withdrawal of those small-scale, low-quality, ineffective junior high school effectively improve the conditions of operation to promote the quality of teaching and learning significantly improved. It can be said that the pursuit of improved quality of education is the ultimate motivation for the Government to carry out rural primary and secondary school layout adjustment.

## **2.4. Optimization of resource allocation and deviations in the layout of compulsory schooling have occurred**

The 2001 State Council Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education made the layout adjustment of rural compulsory education an important element of basic education reform, proposing "rational planning and adjustment of school layouts in accordance with the

principles of proximity to elementary school, relative concentration of junior high schools, and optimization of the allocation of educational resources". Local governments, in response to and driven by the implementation of national policies and the promotion of local education development goals, have actively promoted the layout adjustment of primary and secondary schools in conjunction with various urban development plans and education development plans, and many places have even introduced rapid, large-scale layout adjustment plans for primary and secondary schools and enforced their implementation, which has provided a sufficiently strong driving force for the aggregation of educational resources and the expansion of the size of schools. Data and information show that from 2000 to 2010 alone, the number of elementary school in rural areas nationwide was reduced from 550,000 to 260,000 schools. At the same time, the sharp decline in the number of schools further exacerbated the massive influx of school-age population from rural areas into urban schools within a short period of time. This has also directly contributed to a general increase in the size of primary and secondary schools in towns and cities. A study shows that from 2001 to 2009, the average number of students in county and town elementary school expanded from 463 in 2001 to 876 in 2009, an increase of 89.2%. The implementation of scientific and orderly school layout adjustments at the national level based on demographic differences in different periods is necessary and conducive to the healthy and sustainable development of basic education as a whole. However, due to deviations in the understanding and implementation of the national policy in many areas, the mandatory "elimination of points and merging of schools" has been carried out in a "one-size-fits-all" manner, evolving into the simplistic practice of "elementary school moving into towns and secondary schools moving into cities," which has resulted in a wide range of "elementary school moving into towns and secondary schools moving into cities". "This has evolved into the simplistic practice of moving primary schools into towns and secondary schools into cities on a wide scale, resulting in the phenomena of "giant schools" and "oversized class sizes", which are very common in many areas, especially in towns and cities in the central and western regions. For example, in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, schools in the southern mountainous areas have been abolished, and several secondary schools with nearly 10,000 students have been built in the cities, and students in the mountainous areas are concentrated in these schools; in Gansu Province, there are secondary schools with more than 5,000 students in the Longdong and Heshi areas; and in an elementary school in a certain county of Gansu Province, the number of first-grade pupils in a class has reached a maximum of 90, and an elementary school has a student population of more than 5,000 people.

### **3. Recommendations for the reform of basic education in rural areas in the context of population reduction**

#### **3.1. Strengthening the conceptual change of the relevant decision-making departments and deepening the reform and innovation of basic education management and school operation**

The basic concepts and perceptions of governments at all levels regarding the reform and development of basic education are important factors in their scientific and effective governance. Under the top-level design and decision-making deployment of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, local governments need to ensure a correct understanding of policies, program refinement, strong implementation, and corrective measures, and need to continue to update and change their concepts in a timely manner, so as to scientifically respond to the problem of the "massification" of primary and secondary schools, and to lead reforms and innovations in the management of schools in the field of basic education. First, fully understand that the shortage of quality education resources in basic education is a specific manifestation of the main social contradictions in the field of education, is a developmental

problem. To implement the spirit of the 20th CPC National Congress, give priority to the development of education, accelerate the modernization of education, and build a strong educational country, it is necessary to deepen the reform of basic education with the times. Secondly, we should deepen our understanding of the regularity of basic education and continuously enrich and develop new concepts, ideas and concepts of education in practice. Although the "massification" of primary and secondary schools is a direct product of the reform of the education management system and school-running system, and is a practical choice based on the weighing of advantages and disadvantages to solve the problems of education development in a specific historical period, it is necessary to adapt to the requirements of the modernization of basic education in the new era, and to reverse the situation of the alienated development of the "massification" of basic education. However, to meet the requirements of the modernization of basic education in the new era, and to reverse the situation of "massification" and "alienated development", it is necessary to explore new ways of initiatives through the reform of institutions and mechanisms. Third, strengthening the understanding and implementation of integrated management at the provincial and municipal levels of government. Standardize and constrain the scale of construction and development of primary and secondary schools run by local education departments at all levels, and play a leading role in the appropriate scale standard. The appropriate scale should be incorporated into the national standard system for the quality of compulsory education and the quality of school operation in the county, so as to reverse, through evaluation and assessment, the local "big is beautiful" view of school construction and development performance and education development, as well as the corresponding behavior of governance, and to constrain the impulse to expand the scale of schools driven by per-pupil funding.

### **3.2. Building confidence in rural education**

Although the development of rural education has faced a series of difficulties and challenges, a large number of successful experiences and examples have been developed. We have found that under similar conditions of external support and resource allocation, rural education or rural schools in some regions are significantly better than those in other regions and schools. The common feature of these successful models is that they can develop rural education with true feelings, explore rural advantages with true hearts, have confidence in rural education, and fully demonstrate the subjectivity and openness of rural educators [4]. Therefore, the development of rural education requires rural educators to constantly discover and summarize the practice of regional educational decision-making, school leadership practice, teacher micro-education practice, read the practice wisdom behind the practice of regional educational decision-making, school leadership practice, teacher micro-education practice, and feed the practice of regional educational decision-making, school leadership practice, teacher micro-education practice with this wisdom, so that the practice of rural education will become a practice filled with wisdom, confidence, more subjectivity and openness. confidence, more subjectivity and openness of educational practice, so that rural educational practice becomes the practice of rural educators, and rural educators become educators who make rural educational practice a success, so that rural educators, in the virtuous circle of discovering rural education, developing rural education, presenting rural education, reflecting on rural education, and improving rural education, will continue to enhance their confidence in rural education, and run a better quality and more vibrant rural education. The rural educators will be able to discover rural education, develop rural education, show rural education, reflect on rural education and improve rural education in a virtuous circle, so that they can continuously enhance their confidence in rural education and run a more quality and more vigorous rural education.

### 3.3. Encouraging bold local innovation

Innovation drives equity, innovation promotes development and innovation shapes the future. The next two decades will be a period of rapid change in rural education. In the face of new changes, rural educators need to actively engage in change with an innovative attitude and spirit, and promote fairness with innovation. The development of rural education needs resource support, and even more innovation, especially through low-cost innovation and institutional innovation, to find out the potential advantages of rural education, to discover the inherent characteristics of rural education, and to improve the quality of rural education and promote the quality of rural education through innovations that embody the characteristics and stimulate the advantages of rural education. Educational equity. To promote development with innovation, rural educators should be brave enough to explore the laws of rural education development, correct those educational concepts that have long been considered correct but are actually wrong, discover and adhere to those educational knowledge that has long been ignored but is actually correct, and be brave enough to break through cognitive limitations to release the development dividends of innovative and scientific development. Innovation to shape the future, on the one hand, the development of rural education has its own regularity; on the other hand, the future development of rural education is not simply "there", it is shaped by our concept of educational development. In the sense that "it is shaped by our concept of educational development", what kind of development concept we have affects the future pattern of rural educational development. We need to choose an equitable, qualitative and sustainable view of rural education development, and this view of development should shape rural education, release the dividends of rural education development, and allow innovations to benefit the majority of rural students, rural families and rural society.

### 3.4. Vigorously promoting urban-rural balance

The balanced development of urban and rural education will go through three stages. At the first stage, from unequal per capita educational resources to equal per capita educational resources, the main feature of this stage is that urban per capita educational resources are higher than those in rural areas, and the main task is to pursue equal per capita educational resources in urban and rural areas, and to pursue the equalization of urban and rural resource allocation in a static sense. At the second stage, from the equality of educational resources per student in urban and rural areas to the equality of educational service opportunities in urban and rural areas, the main feature of this stage is that the per capita educational resources in urban and rural areas are the same or are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, and the main task is to pursue the equality of educational service opportunities in the process of education, and to pursue the positive differentiation of urban and rural educational resource allocation in a dynamic sense. At the third stage, from equal opportunities for education services to equal quality of education services, the main feature of this stage is that the opportunities for education services in urban and rural areas are basically equalized but the quality of services still differs to some extent, and the main task at this stage is to pursue the equalization of the quality of education services with the equalization of the quality of teachers in urban and rural areas as the main content, and to realize the basic quality of education services in urban and rural areas through the secondary allocation of regular teachers and the equalization of the allocation of opportunities for the professional development of teachers. Equalization.

At present, rural education is in the second stage of the balanced development of urban and rural education or in the transition from the second to the third stage, and the balanced development of urban and rural education has entered a deep-water zone and a period of attack. The balanced development of urban and rural education that has entered the deep-water zone and the period of attack should not be overly idealized, but it should have the courage to break

through some of the inherent limitations of understanding and the long-standing structure of distributing benefits that is both commonplace and not entirely reasonable. The strategic choice for the balanced development of urban and rural education in the current and longer-term future is a "new non-equilibrium" strategy that integrates urban and rural areas, emphasizes rural areas, and reflects positive differences. On the one hand, it is necessary to take the concept of equitable development as a development philosophy and break out of the habit of emphasizing urban areas over rural areas; on the other hand, it is necessary to formulate practical, positive and sound policies for the balanced development of urban and rural education, so as to provide institutional guarantees for promoting equity in urban and rural education and manifesting social justice.

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