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The Current Status, Causes and Optimization Pathway of Urban-Rural Educational Opportunity Disparity in China

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the significant differences between urban and rural higher education opportunities in China. The background reveals that the gap of higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas has a direct impact on educational equity and social progress, especially in the context of the significant unequal distribution of urban and rural economic and educational resources, which urgently needs to be properly addressed. The research reveals that there are significant differences in higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas. From 2005 to 2013, the admission rate of college entrance examination in urban areas was higher than that in rural areas, and the gap showed a fluctuating trend. From 2011 to 2013, the proportion of rural students in Peking University and Tsinghua University was low and the stability was poor. In terms of resource distribution, from 2000 to 2010, the proportion of agricultural registered high school students declined continuously. The root causes of differences involve three aspects: economy, educational resources and social culture. These differences limit personal development and affect career choice, income and social status. It negatively impacts social equity, exacerbates discontent, divides society, and impedes social mobility. It poses a challenge to the national talent pool and limits innovation and development. In order to solve this problem, the following optimization strategies should be adopted: to improve the rural education level, attract excellent teachers and increase the investment in education resources; Promote educational innovation, realize the fair distribution of educational resources and optimize the college entrance examination system; Strengthen family education guidance, enhance parents' awareness and improve education effectiveness.

Keywords: urban and rural higher education, urban and rural development, differences, optimization measures

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The impact of urban and rural higher education opportunity difference on educational equity and social development has become an important research issue. In today's society, educational equity is an important cornerstone for the realization of social equity. As an important part of cultivating high-quality talents and promoting social progress, the fairness of higher education has attracted wide attention. However, the huge difference in the level of economic development and the allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas directly results in the uneven opportunities of higher education between urban and rural areas.

Urban areas often have stronger economies and can make greater investments in education. Therefore, urban schools have obvious advantages both in terms of teaching facilities and teachers. While urban schools may be equipped with advanced multimedia classrooms and LABS, rural schools may still worry about the basics of instruction. At the same time, middle-income and education-conscious urban families can give their children

more after-school tutoring and learning resources. In stark contrast, rural families may not be able to give their children the same support due to limited economic conditions. In addition, the cultural atmosphere in urban and rural areas is also different. There are plenty of cultural activities in the city, giving students more opportunities to get in touch with advanced knowledge and ideas. In addition, rural areas are relatively isolated, and students' vision will be limited. This cultural difference also affects students' understanding and pursuit of higher education.

The difference of higher education opportunities in urban and rural areas is a complex social problem, which affects not only individual development, but also the fairness and harmony of the whole society. Therefore, it is of practical significance to conduct in-depth research on this problem and find out effective solutions.

1.2. Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze in detail the difference of higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas in China and the reasons for its formation, and to seek improvement strategies to promote education equity. The move is of great significance to promoting social harmony and stability and is expected to lay a solid foundation for achieving this goal.

There are many reasons for the difference between urban and rural higher education opportunities. From the perspective of economic factors, the level of urban and rural economic development is unbalanced, and the rural economy is relatively lagging behind. Data show that by the end of 2023, the urbanization rate of China's permanent residents will reach 66.16%, but the level of rural economic development still lags behind that of cities. Rural families generally have greater financial pressure, which affects their ability to invest in their children's higher education. For example, the investment of educational resources in rural areas is insufficient, including educational funds, teaching facilities, teachers and so on. According to statistics, from 2009 to 2011, the proportion of rural junior high school education expenditure in the national junior high school education expenditure has been hovering between 34.3% and 35.6%, and the proportion of rural primary school education expenditure in the national primary school education expenditure has been hovering between 63.16% and 64.57%, indicating that China's urban and rural education expenditure is unequal. Rural education accounts for a small proportion of the total social education expenditure.

The uneven distribution of educational resources is an important factor. Urban concentration of high-quality higher education resources, rural areas are relatively insufficient. Some universities show discrimination between urban and rural areas in enrollment, setting higher thresholds for rural students and limiting their access to education. Socially and culturally, rural areas often have the concept of "reading is useless", which weakens students' cognition and pursuit of higher education. There are significant cultural differences between urban and rural areas, and rural students face greater challenges when adapting to urban culture and integrating into university life.

In order to narrow the gap between urban and rural higher education, it is necessary to take measures from various angles: to increase the investment in rural education, improve the quality of education, and promote the balanced development of education; Attract more excellent teachers to teach in rural areas, and improve the teaching quality of rural schools through preferential policies and salary increases; To deepen the reform of education system, eliminate regional barriers and realize equitable distribution of educational resources; Strengthen family guidance and support, enhance rural family education awareness and ability; We will promote modern educational technologies so that rural students can have access to quality educational resources. Only in this way can we ensure the equality and justice of education, so that every child has an equal opportunity to receive higher education.

1.3. Research Status

1.3.1. Domestic Research Status

The difference between urban and rural higher education opportunities in China has always been an important issue in the field of education, which has been deeply discussed by many scholars from multiple perspectives.

Li Ying and Wang Qi (2023) studied the difference of higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas under the background of enrollment expansion. The enrollment expansion policy aims to increase the popularization of higher education, but its research reveals that there is still an imbalance in the access to higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas. Specifically, urban students are more likely to seize opportunities in the enrollment expansion process because of their environmental advantages, such as richer educational resources and better learning atmosphere. (Li and Wang, 2023, P.77-84) Feng Xin and Ma Jian (2021) made an in-depth analysis of the current situation of urban-rural education disparity. In terms of educational resources, urban universities are equipped with advanced teaching equipment and rich books, while rural schools are relatively scarce. At the level of teachers, urban teachers have a higher level as a whole, with stronger professional teaching ability and knowledge, while rural teachers are faced with the challenges of shortage of numbers and limited professional growth. (Feng and Ma, 2021, P.82) In her master's thesis, Zheng Mengyao (2021) made an in-depth analysis of the current situation and influencing factors of the urban-rural difference in China's higher education. From the economic perspective, the level of economic development in urban areas is significantly higher than that in rural areas, which enables urban families to provide more financial support and resources for their children's education. In stark contrast, rural families often find it difficult to provide adequate financial security for their children's education due to economic constraints. (Zheng, 2021 P.5) Shi Daqian et al. (2021) focused on the impact of family background on rural-urban disparities in the quantity and quality of higher education opportunities. Urban students with good family economic status have more opportunities to participate in various extracurricular tutoring classes and training activities to improve their academic ability and comprehensive quality, so as to occupy an advantage in the competition for higher education opportunities. (Shi et al., 2021, P.91-101) Through empirical research, Wang Zhifeng and Tan Min (2016) provided strong evidence for the regional analysis of the difference of urban and rural higher education enrollment opportunities. It is found that the higher education enrollment opportunities of urban students in Fujian Province are significantly better than those of rural students, which is closely related to local economic development level, educational resource allocation and family cultural concepts. (Wang and Tan, 2016, P.66-71)

These studies reveal the differences between urban and rural higher education opportunities in enrollment opportunities, educational resources, family background and other aspects, and provide theoretical basis and practical reference for further research and solution of urban and rural higher education opportunities.

1.3.2. Foreign Research Status

In the process of global education development, the difference between urban and rural higher education opportunities is not limited to individual countries, but a universal issue of educational equity, which has been widely concerned by scholars around the world. There are abundant research results in foreign countries, which provide important reference for in-depth understanding of the nature, causes and potential impact of the difference of urban and rural higher education opportunities. The differences in social, economic, cultural and political backgrounds of different countries lead to the diversity of urban and rural higher education opportunities. In both developed and developing countries, the phenomenon of uneven distribution of educational resources, family background and social environment factors affect the higher education opportunities of urban

and rural students, but to different degrees. Combing and analyzing the current situation of relevant foreign studies will help us to comprehensively examine the disparity of higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas in China, and provide inspiration for formulating reasonable education policies and promoting education equity.

In recent years, the scale of national higher education has continued to expand, and the number of college enrollment of rural students has increased significantly, but the admission rate of famous universities is much lower than that of urban students. Taking Tsinghua University as an example, since the implementation of preferential education policies for rural students in 2010, although the gap between the two opportunities is still large, it has been significantly narrowed. (Wen , Zhou, Zhang & Hu, 2023, P145-150.) Fu Weiping & Bin Mohamed Hashim Abdul Talib (2024) deeply explored the impact of urban-rural education differences on student achievement. This study uses quantitative methods to systematically collect and analyze the academic performance, learning resources and social resources of urban and rural students.(Fu & Talib , 2024) The research reveals that the uneven distribution of educational resources is the core cause of the difference in academic achievement. Richard Mussa (2013) indicates whether there are urban and rural differences in the factors that affect the probability of families spending or not spending on their children's education; If a family decides to spend money, are there any urban-rural differences in the factors that influence education spending? The elasticity of the calculation shows that the education spending of rural households is more sensitive to changes in income than that of urban households, indicating that education spending in rural areas is a luxury.(Mussa ,2013,P.789-811)

2. Analysis of the Current Situation of the Difference of Higher Education Opportunities between Urban and Rural Areas in China

2.1. Development Status of China's Higher Education

Education is the cornerstone of national development, and the input of financial education funds is directly related to the quality and level of the development of education. In the course of education development in our country, the dynamic change of financial education funds has attracted much attention. The analysis of its development from 2014 to 2020 is helpful to understand the strength and development trend of China's support for education in this stage, which is not only of great significance to the reform and improvement of the education field itself, but also has a far-reaching impact on the sustainable development of the entire social economy. As shown in Figure 2-1, from 2014 to 2020, China's financial education funds show an overall growth trend. The amount of funding in 2014 was about 2,642 billion yuan, and it has increased year by year since then. By 2017, the funding will be about 3,420.7 billion yuan, about 3,699.5 billion yuan in 2018, about 4,004.6 billion yuan in 2019, and about 4,290.8 billion yuan in 2020. Among them, there was a significant increase in 2017 compared with 2016, and the growth trend continued in 2018, and the growth rate was relatively stable in 2019 and 2020. This growing trend reflects the importance and continuous investment of our country to the cause of education, which provides a strong fund guarantee for the development of education, and helps to improve the conditions of education and teaching, improve the level of teachers and promote the development of educational equity. At the same time, the continuous growth of funds also reflects the continuous efforts of our country in the field of education to promote reform and development, in order to meet the needs of social and economic development for personnel training.

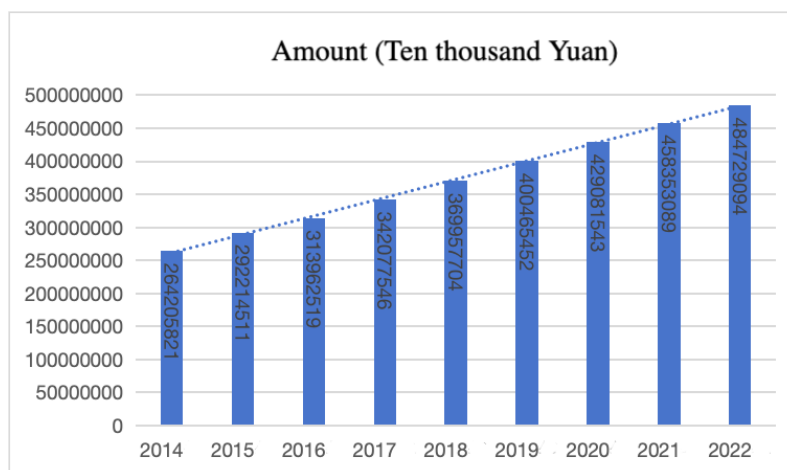


Figure 2-1. Details of China's Fiscal Education Expenditure.

With the increase of financial education funds in our country, the number of colleges and universities in our country from 2014 to 2020 is also changing. As shown in Table 2-1, from 2014 to 2020, the number of graduate training institutions shows a fluctuating upward trend. It was 788 in 2014, then grew to 792 in 2015 and 793 in 2016, remained at 815 in 2017 and 2018, 828 in 2019, and reached 827 in 2020. On the whole, the number has increased, reflecting the importance of our country to graduate education and the gradual expansion of graduate education scale. The number of general undergraduate institutions has continued to grow during this period. In 2014, there were 1,202, growing to 1,219 in 2015, 1,237 in 2016, 1,243 in 2017 and 1,245 in 2018, 1,265 in 2019, and 1,270 in 2020. This growing trend indicates that our country is expanding undergraduate education resources to meet the society's demand for talents in higher education. The number of general colleges and universities also showed an increasing trend. In 2014, there were 1,327, which grew to 1,341 in 2015, 1,359 in 2016, 1,388 in 2017, 1,418 in 2018 and 1,423 in 2019, and 1,468 in 2020. The increase in the number of colleges and universities reflects the importance and development of vocational education in China to meet the needs of society for skilled talents.

Table 2-1. Shows the Trend of the Number of Colleges and Universities.

Institution (school) \ year	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Number of graduate training institutions	827	828	815	815	793	792	788
Number of general undergraduate institutions	1270	1265	1245	1243	1237	1219	1202
Number of colleges and universities	1468	1423	1418	1388	1359	1341	1327

The observation of the number of higher education institutions in China from 2014 to 2020 shows that there is a clear growth trend in the three important levels of graduate training institutions, general undergraduate colleges and general specialized colleges. This kind of growth trend is the strong manifestation of the continuous investment and the high importance attached to higher education in our country. In the distribution of educational resources, the state has continuously tilted towards the field of higher education, giving strong support to the investment of funds, the training of teachers, and the construction of teaching facilities. This all-round investment aims to continuously expand the scale of higher education to meet the growing demand for talents at different levels of social and economic development.

2.2. *The difference in the Number of Higher Education Opportunities between Urban and Rural China*

With the increase of the number of colleges and universities and the continuous expansion of the scale, the number of college entrance examination is also changing. As shown in Table 2-2, from 2005 to 2013, the number of college entrance examination admissions showed an overall fluctuating upward trend. Enrollment grew from 5.04 million in 2005 to 6.94 million in 2013, reflecting the gradual expansion of higher education. The overall admission rate is on the rise, rising gradually from 57.47% in 2005 to 76.10% in 2013, indicating that the accessibility of higher education is constantly improving. The admission rate of urban college entrance examination is higher than that of rural college entrance examination in each year, but the gap between the two shows fluctuating changes. In 2007, there was a large gap between the urban admission rate (72.64%) and the rural admission rate (63.65%), but by 2013, the gap had narrowed (74.52% in urban and 69.98% in rural).

Table 2-2. Statistics of the number of students admitted.

Year	Number of college entrance examination admissions (10,000)	Number of applicants (10,000)	Acceptance rate (%)	City entrance examination admission rate (%)	Rural college Entrance Examination admission rate (%)
2005	877	504	57.47	68.37	62.91
2006	950	546	57.47	69.32	64.44
2007	1010	566	56.04	72.64	63.65
2008	1050	599	57.05	74.31	67.89
2009	1020	629	61.67	71.15	70.10
2010	946	657	69.45	75.54	68.45
2012	933	675	72.35	72.73	66.38
2012	915	685	74.86	73.30	67.59
2013	912	694	76.10	74.52	69.98

Despite the development in recent years, the admission rate of rural college entrance examination has been constantly improving, but it can not be ignored that there is always a certain degree of gap compared with the city. The higher admission rate of urban students in the college entrance examination clearly shows that urban students have more advantages in obtaining higher education opportunities. This significant gap profoundly reflects the serious imbalance between urban and rural areas in many key aspects such as educational resources and teaching quality. From the perspective of educational resources, cities tend to gather more high-quality schools, advanced teaching facilities and rich books and materials. Schools in cities can provide students with modern laboratories, multimedia classrooms and spacious libraries, which can greatly expand students' learning horizons, stimulate their learning interests and creativity. In rural areas, schools are relatively short of educational resources, simple teaching facilities, old and limited books and materials, which to a great extent limits the learning and development of rural students. In terms of teaching quality, urban schools have a team of high-quality teachers, most of whom have higher academic qualifications and rich teaching experience, and can adopt advanced teaching methods and teaching concepts to provide high-quality teaching services for students. In contrast, teachers in rural schools are relatively weak, and some teachers may lack professional training and teaching experience to meet the growing learning needs of students.

Although the gap between urban and rural college entrance examination admission rates is narrowing, it is undeniable that there are still some problems that need to be solved. The advantages of urban education resources, family environment, education concept and other aspects are still very obvious, which is very likely to lead to rural students in the fierce competition is always at a relative disadvantage.

2.3. Differences in the Quality of Higher Education Opportunities between Urban and Rural Areas in China

Educational equity is an important manifestation of social equity, and the fair distribution of higher education opportunities is of vital significance to the development of the country and the growth of individuals. In China, the existence of urban-rural dual structure makes the quality of higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas have a certain difference. Based on the analysis of the data of the proportion of rural students in Peking University and Tsinghua University from 2011 to 2019, this chapter will explore the status quo, causes and effects of the difference in the quality of urban and rural higher education opportunities in China.

As shown in Table 2-3, from 2011 to 2019, the enrollment scale of the two top Chinese universities, Peking University and Tsinghua University, fluctuated to a certain extent. Peking University's enrollment fluctuates between 2,761 and 3,175 students. Specifically, in some years, enrollment may increase as a result of changes in national education policies, school development strategies, and changes in society's demand for higher education. On the contrary, in other years, the enrollment size may be reduced due to the reasonable control of the size of the school to ensure teaching quality and resource allocation efficiency. Similarly, Tsinghua University's enrollment has remained relatively stable but has fluctuated slightly between 3,365 and 3,400 students. The fluctuation of enrollment scale reflects the adjustment of talent cultivation strategy and the adaptation to the trend of economic and social development in different periods of time.

Table 2-3. The proportion of rural students in Tsinghua University and Peking University.

Years	Peking University			Tsinghua University		
	Enrollment	Rural Students	Proportion (%)	Enrollment	Rural Students	Proportion (%)
2011	2815	538	19.11	3365	619	18.41
2012	2842	534	18.79	3372	604	17.93
2013	2761	525	19.02	3372	580	17.22
2014	2809	520	18.50	3372	627	18.65
2015	3175	608	19.14	3375	604	17.92
2016	2936	533	18.14	3368	633	18.80
2017	2819	487	17.28	3389	668	19.74
2018	3047	457	15.00	3396	625	18.41
2019	2972	484	16.30	3400	656	19.34

In terms of the proportion of rural students, the overall proportion of rural students in these two universities is relatively low and presents an unstable state during the nine years. The proportion of rural students in Peking University fluctuates between 15.00% and 19.14%. In this interval, the change of the proportion of rural students in different years does not show obvious regularity. For example, in some years, the proportion of rural students may increase due to the strengthening of the state's support policies for rural education, or the adoption of some preferential enrollment measures for rural students by universities themselves. However, in other years, perhaps due to various complex factors, the proportion of rural students will decline again. In 2018, the proportion of rural students at Peking University dropped to 15.00%, a new low in nearly nine years. This phenomenon may be due to multiple factors such as the change of examinee group structure, the continuous concentration of urban education resources, and the relative disadvantage of rural students in the college entrance examination competition. The proportion of rural students at Tsinghua University fluctuated between 17.22% and 19.74%, compared with 17.22% in 2013, which is also a low level. This situation may be closely related

to factors such as the increase in the difficulty of college entrance examination, the adjustment of enrollment policies, and the increasingly significant difference between urban and rural education.

Although the total enrollment of Peking University and Tsinghua University fluctuates from year to year, the absolute number of rural students is relatively small, which significantly reveals that rural students have significantly lower chances of entering top universities than urban students. From the perspective of enrollment scale, urban students usually have a greater advantage in the competition of college entrance examination, because they enjoy more educational resources and better educational environment. Urban schools usually have a better team of teachers, more advanced teaching facilities, and a variety of extra-curricular tutoring resources, which together provide strong support for urban students' learning and development. In contrast, schools in rural areas are relatively weak in terms of teachers, teaching equipment and teaching methods, and rural students face more difficulties and challenges in the learning process. Therefore, in terms of enrollment scale, relatively few rural students enter top universities, which further exacerbates the gap in higher education opportunities between urban and rural areas.

The proportion of rural students has remained low for a long time, highlighting the obvious advantages of urban students in obtaining high-quality higher education resources. Even if the proportion of rural students increases slightly in some years, the overall urban-rural gap is still significant. During the growth of urban students, they enjoy quality school education resources and a variety of extracurricular activities and competitions, which help to broaden their horizons and improve their comprehensive abilities, and enhance their competitiveness. Rural students are limited by geographical, economic and other conditions, it is difficult to get the same opportunity. At the same time, urban families generally attach more importance to education, and parents can provide more learning support and guidance to promote urban students' excellent performance in the college entrance examination. Therefore, the advantages of urban students in obtaining high-quality higher education resources make rural students at a comparative disadvantage in competition, and the differences in the opportunities and quality of urban and rural higher education also appear.

2.4. Difference of Higher Education Opportunity Resources Reserve between Urban and Rural Areas in China

The difference of urban and rural higher education opportunities not only appears in the university admission stage, but also in the high school education stage, which has highlighted the significant unequal distribution of resources. The data analysis of the proportion of agricultural registered high school students from 2000 to 2010 reveals the gap between urban and rural China in the reserve of higher education opportunities and resources, which is crucial to promoting education equity.

Table 2-4. Proportion of high school students with agricultural household registration from 2000 to 2010.

Year	Agricultural household registration (%)	Non-agricultural household registration (%)
2000	13.14	86.86
2004	11.49	88.51
2010	6.71	93.28

As shown in Table 2-4, from 2000 to 2010, the proportion of high school students with agricultural hukou showed a trend of continuous decline. In 2000, the proportion was 13.14 percent, by 2004, it had fallen to 11.49 per cent, and by 2010, it had dropped further to 6.71 percent. In stark contrast, the proportion of non-agricultural registered high school students rose from 86.86% in 2000 to 93.28% in 2010.

The above data changes show the impact of urban-rural economic development differences on the allocation of educational resources. The economic prosperity of urban areas has allowed for substantial investment in education, enabling schools to significantly surpass rural areas in terms of teaching facilities and teachers. This ensures broader access to high-quality secondary education for non-agricultural registered students, crucial for future higher education. Rural schools are scarce and unevenly spread, posing significant challenges for remote area students who must travel long distances to attend, thereby complicating their educational pursuit. Urban school layouts are more balanced, enabling easier access to educational resources for students.

The transformation from 2000 to 2010 in high school students' agricultural household registration proportion vividly illustrates China's urban-rural disparity in higher education allocation and resources. This imbalance significantly hinders rural students' development and poses a societal challenge to fairness and harmony. To narrow the gap between urban and rural areas in higher education opportunities, multi-faceted cooperation is needed: the government should increase the investment in rural education and optimize the allocation of educational resources; Society should pay more attention to and support rural education. Families should pay more attention to education and create a favorable learning environment for their children. Through these efforts, the aim is to provide more equal development opportunities for rural students and ultimately achieve the goal of educational equity.

3. Differential Impact of Urban and Rural Higher Education Opportunities

3.1. Impact on Personal Development

3.1.1. Limit Career Choices

Under the current social background, the lack of higher education resources has constituted a significant restriction on the career choice of rural students. Many professional fields, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., generally require a bachelor's degree or above to be qualified. However, for rural students, limited by the lack of educational resources, it is difficult to get involved in those well-paid, high social status occupation category.

The data shows that people with university degrees have a wider range of career choices and can be involved in finance, technology, education and other industries and hold key positions. In contrast, rural students without higher education are mostly confined to manual or low-skilled jobs, such as construction workers, waiters, and factory operators. These underpaid, challenging jobs offer scarce prospects for advancement.

In addition, the dearth of advanced educational opportunities significantly impedes rural students' career progression, particularly in today's corporate landscape where academic credentials frequently dictate promotion prospects. Employees with higher education tend to have more promotion opportunities compared to those without such qualifications, placing rural students at a notable disadvantage in achieving substantial career advancement. This not only limits their alternative career paths, but also Narrows their possibilities.

3.1.2. Reduce the Level of Income

The lack of educational opportunities has had a significant negative impact on the income levels of students in rural areas. Higher education is often seen as a factor closely associated with higher earnings, as those who receive such education usually acquire professional skills and knowledge that can lead to higher pay in the job market.

According to statistics, the average salary of college graduates is more than double that of those with a high school degree or less. However, due to the lack of educational resources, many rural students are difficult to enter the stage of higher education, and most of them are engaged in low-skilled jobs, resulting in generally low income. In some

rural areas, for example, the monthly income of rural migrant workers is only a few thousand yuan, in contrast to the tens of thousands of yuan earned by white-collar workers with college degrees in urban areas.

The lack of educational opportunities significantly weakens the competitiveness of rural students in the job market, making it difficult for them to obtain high-paying positions. In the current society, enterprises pay more and more attention to the comprehensive quality and professional skills of employees, which often need to be cultivated by higher education. Due to the limitation of higher education resources, rural students have a gap with their urban peers in knowledge accumulation, skill level and innovative thinking, which puts them in a disadvantageous position in the job market and further affects the improvement of their income level.

3.1.3. Influence of Social Status

The disparity in educational access significantly influences rural students' societal standing. In contemporary society, advanced education is seen as pivotal for elevating one's social position. Individuals with higher education often encounter easier acquisition of social acknowledgment and esteem, consequently experiencing elevated social status.

Due to unequal educational access, rural students struggle to achieve higher education, constraining their social standing. In certain rural regions, lack of education is frequently associated with "ineptitude," making individuals susceptible to social prejudice. Conversely, urban students, benefiting from higher education, tend to assimilate into society's elite, reaping rich social assets and opportunities.

Unequal access to education perpetuates social stratification, especially impacting rural students who struggle to transform their lives through personal efforts, highlighting education's pivotal role in contemporary society for social mobility. Higher education typically correlates with better job opportunities and increased income, facilitating social status elevation. Yet, rural students' limited access to quality education exacerbates class disparities, hindering their potential for upward social movement.

3.2. Impact on Social Equity

Inequality in education often sparks social discontent, notably among rural communities, sparking questions about societal fairness and education equity. Disparities in higher education access between urban and rural areas set rural students back, fueling a growing societal sense of injustice. For instance, despite rural families' significant efforts to educate their children, these students face barriers due to limited resources and enrollment policies, hindering equal opportunities compared to urban counterparts. This imbalance can lead rural families to doubt the fairness of the education system, while rural students might feel discouraged by an unequal learning environment, questioning societal justice. Persistent discontent may escalate into social conflicts, jeopardizing societal stability and harmony.

The inequality in educational access exacerbates urban-rural social disparities. Higher education opportunities benefit urban students, securing superior careers and incomes that elevate their social standing. Conversely, rural students' limited educational prospects often lead to low-skilled employment and low incomes, maintaining a lower social status. Over time, this gap widens, intensifying urban-rural divides. In certain regions, the lifestyle and education levels of urban dwellers surpass those of rural inhabitants, establishing significant wealth and education disparities. Such societal splits impact individual development and societal fairness, stability.

The disparity in educational opportunities impedes social mobility, disproportionately disadvantaging rural populations in resource allocation. Higher education significantly boosts social mobility, enabling those educated to secure superior careers and incomes, thus elevating social status. Yet, unequal access to higher education between urban and rural areas frustrates rural students' ability to leverage education for upward mobility.

Consequently, they remain tethered to rural locales, facing limited avenues for advancement. This not only stifles individual rural student growth but also dampens societal dynamism. For instance, gifted rural students may lack access to city's high-end vocational sectors due to educational disparities, settling for low-skilled rural jobs instead. This impedes equitable resource distribution and hampers society's comprehensive development.

3.3. Impact on National Talent Training

The difference of urban and rural higher education opportunities has a profound impact on national talent training, which is not only related to the national talent reserve, but also related to the national innovation ability.

3.3.1. Reduce the Talent Pool

The lack of educational opportunities significantly restricts the country's talent pool. Limited by the lack of higher education resources, rural students are difficult to maximize their potential and become high-quality talents required by the country. Statistics reveal that in some rural areas, the proportion of students receiving higher education is much lower than in urban areas. In one county, for example, the proportion of rural students admitted to undergraduate colleges is only about one-third that of their urban counterparts. This situation has led to a large number of potential rural students being excluded from the higher education system and unable to play their due role in national construction and development.

The development of a country depends on diverse professionals, and education is its core cultivation mechanism. If the education resources of rural students are insufficient, the national talent pool will face a major gap. Especially in key areas such as science and technology, engineering and healthcare, talent shortages can hinder the pace of national progress. Taking scientific and technological innovation as an example, a large number of talents with both creative thinking and professional skills are needed. However, limited by the lack of educational opportunities in rural areas, it may be difficult to cultivate enough scientific and technological talents, which will affect the national innovation ability and international competitiveness.

3.3.2. Affect Innovation Ability

The significant effect of uneven educational resources on a nation's innovation capability should not be overlooked. Higher education, serving as a pivotal node in nurturing innovative minds, might constrain the collective innovation prowess due to its imbalanced growth.

In urban areas, students gain access to advanced educational resources, innovative environments, and numerous opportunities for research projects and practical activities, fostering a fertile ground for nurturing creativity and practical skills. Conversely, rural students face significant challenges due to resource scarcity, limiting their engagement in innovative endeavors and hindering the development of critical thinking and hands-on abilities. Urban schools, equipped with comprehensive innovation platforms like technology labs and startup incubators, offer students unparalleled opportunities for growth, whereas rural counterparts often lag behind, lacking essential facilities that could effectively enhance students' innovation capabilities.

The dearth of innovation capability significantly hampers national economic expansion and competitive edge. Within today's interconnected globe, innovation serves as the pivotal driver of national prosperity. Should a nation's innovation prowess be insufficient, securing a dominant position on the international stage becomes exceedingly challenging. Furthermore, the skewed or uneven allocation of educational assets might precipitate a brain drain phenomenon. Specifically, talented rural students might opt for overseas studies due to a lack of premium educational resources, thereby exacerbating the nation's innovation deficit.

Urban-rural educational disparities hinder national talent cultivation & innovation. To foster continuous national growth, implement measures to minimize urban-rural education gaps, guaranteeing equal educational access for all, nurturing top-tier talent, and boosting the nation's innovation capacity and global competitiveness.

4. Urban and Rural Higher Education Opportunities Optimization Path

4.1. Improve the Level of Rural Education

Educational equity underpins social justice, with enhancing rural education quality serving as pivotal in narrowing the disparity between urban and rural higher education access.

4.1.1. Introduction of Outstanding Educators

Provide housing subsidies and family allowances, offer higher salary benefits, establish special funds for children's education and medical security, prioritize promotion and career advancement opportunities, encourage and support teachers to engage in rural community development initiatives to foster a stronger sense of belonging and career fulfillment. Through these measures, we can effectively attract and retain excellent teachers to teach in rural areas for a long time, so as to improve the quality of rural education.

By hiring teachers at a salary level not lower than that of local civil servants, preferential treatment can attract excellent teachers. For example, rural teachers' salaries should be substantially increased to ensure that they are not lower than those of civil servants, so as to eliminate teachers' worries and encourage them to devote themselves to rural education.

Incentive mechanism, all teachers who are willing to carry out education and teaching in the village, stay for three years, in the evaluation of professional titles, give special concessions, directly assessed as second-level teachers. Stay for five years, in addition to the above review of professional title concessions, you can also get an additional 50,000 yuan reward. Stay at least six years, and excellent work performance, in addition to the above incentives, you can also freely choose the local favorite primary school to teach.

Colleges and universities should strengthen publicity and make young teachers realize the value of rural education by analogy with the Western Plan. The aim is to ensure a stable retention of talent even when teaching in rural areas. The government should provide specific policy incentives to rural educators and create more promotion channels, similar to the existing job rotation mechanism, in order to motivate young teachers, eliminate their misunderstanding about teaching in rural areas for life, and ensure that they can rest assured in their education career.

4.1.2. Improving Education Supply

It is very important to increase the investment in rural education resources and improve teaching facilities. To increase capital investment, the government should significantly increase the allocation of funds for rural education and increase the proportion of education funds for rural schools. According to the data, from 2009 to 2011, the proportion of rural junior middle school education funds in the national family education funds remained at 34.3% to 35.6% for a long time, while the proportion of rural primary school education funds in the national primary school education funds was stable at 63.16% to 64.57%, which reflects the unequal distribution of urban and rural education funds. The share of rural education in the whole social education expenditure is relatively small. Increasing capital investment can optimize the teaching conditions of rural schools, introduce advanced multimedia classrooms, laboratories, libraries and other facilities, and create a high-quality academic environment for students.

Optimize the allocation of resources, allocate educational resources scientifically according to the specific conditions of different places, and ensure that the focus of resources goes to rural weak schools, so as to reduce the gap between urban and rural education.

For example, the "future village" development plan can be integrated to establish centralized and interactive family education guidance service centers such as rural parents' schools that combine rural characteristics and meet the needs of farmers. With the help of wechat group and other new media social platforms, an external support team composed of villagers, volunteers and village pairing experts has been established. Innovative teaching media, adopting the "traditional + network" teaching strategy, integrating traditional methods such as intensive teaching, special lectures, editing and printing parents' school tabloid with Internet tools such as video connection, school news, wechat, wechat public account, etc., to enhance interaction and communication among parents. The use of online tools is aimed at overcoming the problem of parents in rural areas who find it difficult to concentrate on participation because of migrant work. In addition, modern educational technologies such as multimedia teaching and distance education should be actively promoted to improve the teaching efficiency and quality of rural schools. With the help of modern educational technology, teaching methods and contents can be enriched, and students' learning interest and enthusiasm can be stimulated.

4.2. Strengthen and Promote Educational Innovation

Education reform is the key means to narrow the gap between urban and rural higher education opportunities. Strategies such as breaking regional barriers and reforming the household registration system of college entrance examination can effectively promote the fair distribution of educational resources and create more development opportunities for rural students.

4.2.1. Fair Allocation of Resources

To realize the fair distribution of educational resources requires various strategies. The government should increase its investment in education, especially in rural areas. Increase the proportion of education funds allocated to rural schools to ensure that they have access to advanced teaching facilities and attract quality teachers. According to the data, from 2009 to 2011, the percentage of rural junior high school education funds in the national junior high school education funds continued to fluctuate within the range of 34.3% to 35.6%, while the percentage of rural primary school education funds in the national primary school education funds fluctuated within the range of 63.16% to 64.57%, revealing the unequal distribution of urban and rural education funds in China. The proportion of rural education expenditure in the whole social education expenditure is relatively small. Increasing funding will help optimize the teaching environment of rural schools and create a better academic atmosphere for students.

Optimize the allocation of educational resources. In light of the actual conditions of various localities, education resources should be rationally distributed, with emphasis on giving resources to weak rural schools. The sharing of high-quality education resources can be realized through the construction of urban and rural school communities and the implementation of teacher exchange rotation plan. Specific measures include promoting the construction of "school union" between towns and rural areas, adopting regular exchanges, cross-school competition, central school integration management, school alliances, matching support, teachers in town and township central schools to teach and other methods, especially encouraging excellent principals and backbone teachers to flow to rural schools.

We will strengthen the informationization of education. With the help of Internet technology, we can eliminate regional barriers and promote long-distance communication and sharing of high-quality educational resources. The use of distance education platforms, online courses and other means to ensure that rural students have access to high-quality urban education resources.

4.2.2. Advancing the Reform of College Entrance examination

The reform of the household registration system of college entrance examination plays an important role in reducing the difference between urban and rural areas. Abolishing the household registration restrictions in the entrance examination and allowing non-household population to take the entrance examination in their place of residence can effectively break the regional barriers and promote the fair distribution of educational resources. To this end, essential steps include crafting detailed guidelines for remote college entrance exam execution, outlining clear registration criteria and admission procedures, and enhancing remote exam management and support services to ensure seamless implementation and tangible outcomes.

Uniform admission scores aid in reducing regional disparities, fostering educational equity. Under a unified score system, tailored policies consider regional educational variations, crafting more scientifically sound admission guidelines. By 2025, the college entrance exam's household registration reform aims to establish a single national score, ensuring equal competition across regions. Moreover, offering special policies to underprivileged areas and rural students enhances higher education access. This reform boosts talent mobility, particularly benefiting rural students, by expanding their testing options. It improves their chances of admission by enabling selection based on available educational resources. Additionally, it attracts top teachers to rural areas, enhancing local education quality.

Deepening education reform, especially the reform of college entrance examination household registration system, is the key strategy to narrow the gap between urban and rural higher education opportunities. By realizing the fair distribution of educational resources and promoting the reform of the household registration system of college entrance examination, the development opportunities of rural students can be significantly improved, thus promoting educational equity. This measure is of great significance to support the harmonious and stable development of society.

4.3. *Improve the Effectiveness of Family Education Guidance*

Family education plays an important role in the growth of students, especially for rural students, strengthening family education guidance can significantly increase their possibility of receiving higher education.

4.3.1. Strengthen Educational Understanding

Improving rural family education consciousness can be started from the following aspects. The government should play a leading role in setting up parents' training institutions to provide parents with regular ideological education. Rural parents have low cultural quality and backward educational concepts. The government, as the organization of training, should give full play to its functional role, carry out ideological education to parents in the village on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of family education, and set up demonstration sites for parents' education and learning. By propagating the concept of family education in the new era to parents, changing the concept of family education, making them truly aware of the important significance and influence of family education on the growth of children, and striving to improve their own quality. For example, we can praise the successful parents of family education, exchange the experience of educating children, so that parents can understand the needs of children's psychological and physical development.

Schools need to build lasting partnerships with families to focus on the physical and mental development of children. Children's environment continues to change, so schools and families should maintain long-term cooperation, accurately grasp the situation of children at all levels, develop strengths and avoid weaknesses, and help students cultivate high quality and sound personality. Schools can emphasize the value of family education to parents and enhance their attention to education by organizing parent meetings and

home visits. We will strengthen social support for family education. Through newspapers, short videos, the Internet and other channels to disseminate scientific family education concepts, take the initiative to answer common problems and coping strategies in rural family education, help rural parents establish a correct educational outlook, learn to use scientific educational means, and promote the all-round development of children through practice.

4.3.2. Improving Educational Effectiveness

Strengthening the rural family education ability can set up a model of family education, select teachers from local model families, young model soldiers, and other advanced groups, tell their personal education concepts and growth stories, set an example with fresh examples around, and enlighten farmer parents to enhance their awareness of education. Make good use of the existing high quality primary and secondary school teacher resources, pay attention to the selection of excellent rural primary and secondary school teachers, give play to their role in the rural parents committee, through their advanced education concepts to influence parents' family education concepts, build a bridge for home-school co-education, and form a home-school co-education mechanism. Build a family education platform, and establish organizations such as "Parents wisdom lecture hall", "parents information group" and "Parents reading salon" in rural parents' schools to encourage parents to share experience, strengthen peer learning, and enhance rural parents' family education awareness and skills. Focus on the training of family education teachers, strengthen the training of teachers in rural parent schools, make full use of the advantages of human resources in local normal colleges and universities, and do a good job in the training of teachers in rural parent schools through the combination of introducing and going out, not only to give play to the infectivity and grounding advantages of part-time teachers' rich perceptual experience, but also to follow the basic laws of modern family education.

In addition, creating a good learning environment for students can also enhance the ability of family education. After the optimization of the family environment, parents can devote more time to the growth and education of their children, and pay more attention to the importance of family education. For example, in the holidays with children to visit the museum, travel and other activities, such as family-centered actions, not only let the children feel the warmth and love of the family, but also teach them how to care for others, and greatly expand their knowledge and vision, help them establish the right concept of learning and goals. Moreover, if the family environment is good, with the conditions of setting up an information technology learning environment, it can cultivate children's information literacy in advance, and lay a solid foundation for the study of cultural courses.

5. Conclusion

Urban-rural disparities in higher education access profoundly shape individual, societal, and national outcomes. Chinese research highlights significant discrepancies in quantity, quality, and resource allocation between urban and rural areas. Quantity-wise, urban areas boast higher college admission rates, though narrowing gaps persist. Quality-wise, top-tier universities disproportionately enroll urban students, with insufficient stability. Resource-wise, agricultural high school enrollees' share declines. These disparities stem from economic, resource, and cultural factors. Economically, uneven urban-rural economies and family finances influence education investment and opportunities. Educationally, high-quality resources cluster in cities, while some colleges adopt enrollment policies disadvantageous to rural students. Culturally, the "reading is futile" notion and urban-rural cultural divides challenge rural students. These disparities constrain personal growth, erode social equity, exacerbate inequality, hinder mobility, impede national talent cultivation, limit talent reserves, and stifle innovation.

In the future, efforts should intensify to narrow the urban-rural education gap, fostering equity & harmony. Boost rural education investment, optimizing resource allocation, ensuring equal access for rural students. Deepen education reform, enhance exam systems, dismantle barriers like household registration, providing fair opportunities. Strengthen rural family education guidance, boosting parental education awareness. Society must prioritize rural education, encouraging broad participation. This strategy aims to reduce disparities, nurture top talents, advancing a fair, harmonious society.

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