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# Restrictions and Countermeasures of Rural Vocational Education in Urban-rural Integration

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**Abstract** Developing rural vocational education is of great significance to urban-rural integration; developing rural vocational education is helpful to cultivating new farmers for construction of new socialist countryside, favorable to improving farmers' ability of finding jobs and starting undertaking, and beneficial to transfer of rural surplus labor and acceleration of urbanization. Restrictions on development rural vocational education mainly include: low value cognition of society and social assessment of rural vocational education; out of balance of cost and expected return of rural vocational education; the quality of supply of rural vocational education failure to satisfy demand of socio-economic development; imperfect rural vocational education system. In view of these, following countermeasures and suggestions are put forward: strengthen propaganda and guidance to build environment of public opinion for rural vocational education; push forward rural vocational compulsory education system to lay social foundation for rural vocational education; reinforce policy support to assist in building rural vocational education system; improve education system to build overall framework of rural vocational education; perfect laws and regulations to establish system and norm for development of rural vocational education.

**Key words** Urban-rural integration, Rural vocational education, Restrictions, Countermeasures

At present, the issue concerning agriculture, farmers and rural areas is still a baffling problem restricting China's socio-economic development. To solve this issue, the urban-rural development shall be integrated, and urban-rural integration should be quickened. In this course of development, the essential part is improvement of farmers' quality. Since the current rural vocational education obviously lags behind the demand of socio-economic development, it is of profound significance to studying restrictions on development of rural vocational education, tackling the issue concerning agriculture, farmers and rural areas, accelerating industrialization, promoting optimization and upgrade of industrial structure, speeding up transformation of economic development, and overall construction of comparatively well-off society.

## 1 Great significance of developing rural vocational education to urban-rural integration

**1.1 Favorable to cultivating new farmers for construction of new socialist countryside** Farmers are subjects of new socialist countryside construction. To realize agricultural and rural modernization, we should cultivate a good many high quality new farmers. The average length of education attained by China's rural labor forces is short and the overall quality is not high. According to statistics, China has 480 million rural labor forces, 12.5% at high middle school level, 49.3% at junior middle school level and 38.2% at primary school level or below<sup>[1]</sup>. Energetically developing rural vocational education and

providing training of practical agricultural technology and vocational skills for farmers are helpful to actively guiding and educating farmers, making them become new farmers who are the ones with knowledge, farming technique and management, and favorable to providing intellectual support and talent guarantee for pushing forward rural industrial structural adjustment, speeding up agricultural industrialization, and increasing farmers' income.

**1.2 Favorable to improving farmers' ability of finding jobs and starting undertaking** Different from cultural theory education in general middle schools, the rural vocational education focuses on training of practical skills. Through practical skill training, it is expected to raise value of human capital in technical course of rural new human resource, and strengthen their revenue-generating ability. Both the full time academic education and short-time on-the-job training in rural vocational education are oriented towards cultivating practical skills and vocational skills of farmers in accordance with demand of socio-economic development. This is helpful to improving farmers' ability of finding jobs and starting undertaking, so as to increase farmers' income and improve farmers' living condition.

**1.3 Favorable to transfer of rural surplus labor and acceleration of urbanization** Currently, the conflict between large population and little land is still an outstanding problem faced by rural areas of China. To increase farmers' income, we must realize transfer of farmers from agricultural to non-agricultural industry and from rural areas to urban areas. With adjustment of economic structure and upgrade of industrial structure, as well as advance of new industrialization, the demand of economic development for general workers gradually decreases, while the demand for skilled talents is increasing. This situation imposes new requirement for rural surplus labor. Developing rural vocational education can improve vocational skills of rural

labor. It is not only favorable to transfer of rural surplus labor, exploiting rural human resource, and accelerating advance of urbanization.

## 2 Restrictions on development of rural vocational education in China

Currently, the rural vocational education develops slowly in China and gradually it is not adaptable to demand of constantly changeable and developing economic society. Restrictions on development of rural vocational education mainly include following aspects.

**2.1 Low value cognition of society and social assessment of rural vocational education** Most farmers believe that what changes their fate is knowledge acquisition and is still the receipt of traditional higher education. However, some farmers have to choose rural vocational education due to academic achievement. In this situation, most people believe that objects of rural vocational education and training are still those farmers who have low quality and bad academic achievement, rather than administrative staff of enterprises and institutions. The existing labor personnel management system also intensifies social cognition and judgment of rural vocational education. Some people even consider rural vocational schools as place to put children into society too early. This fails to fully realize the function of rural vocational education in cultivating talents at different demands of society and undervalues rural vocational education.

**2.2 Out of balance of cost and expected return of rural vocational education** Farmers' cost for receiving education include tuition fee, incidental expenses, book charges, lodging expense and cost of living, and also include potential income possibly lost due to loss of employment opportunity. The former is actual cost of farmers, while the latter is opportunity cost in the context of economic analysis. At present, farmers' cost for receiving vocational education is relatively high. Take the case of Zhangjiakou City, the tuition for three-year technical secondary school education generally costs 2 500 yuan. In addition to lodging expense, cost of living, book charges, and incidental expenses, the minimum cost for one year is up to 12 000 to 15 000 yuan. However, the net income of rural residents per capita in this city was only 4 119 yuan in 2011. Calculated at three persons in one family, the annual income is about 12 000 yuan, so the actual cost of rural students receiving vocational education is equivalent to entire income of a rural family. Considering opportunity cost, calculated at the minimum monthly income of 500 yuan, the opportunity cost of three years will be 18 000 yuan. In addition to actual cost, the education cost of three years will be 54 000 to 63 000 yuan at least. What's worse, with constant rise of price level, the education cost will constantly rise. From the point of view of prospective return, according to human capital theory of Schultz, the prospective return includes monetary profit and status benefit. The present employment rate is not low in rural vocational school graduates, but the employment quality is not high, so there is no big difference in monetary profit between persons who receive vocational

education and who have not received vocational education. Before the 1990s, rural vocational school graduates can obtain status benefit through making themselves become urban residents. However, with flow of rural population and reform of education system, such status benefit is gone. This situation of high education cost and low prospective return is one of the important reasons for weak attraction of rural vocational education to farmers and low willingness of farmers to accept vocational education.

### 2.3 The quality of supply of rural vocational education failure to satisfy demand of socio-economic development

Survey results show that 70% farmers are indifferent to vocational education, 9% farmers' agricultural technology is obtained from vocational education, 10% parents and 22% students admit great role of rural vocational education in production, and over 50% students are unsatisfied with teachers of specialized courses and their teaching methods<sup>[2]</sup>. Low supply quality of rural vocational education fails to satisfy the market demand. This is because software and hardware construction of rural vocational schools fails to satisfy demand of rural vocational education development. The rural vocational education is different from general high school education. The most distinctive features of rural vocational education include practicability and operability, which renders the rural vocational schools different from general high schools in teachers, experimental bases, experimental facilities and school size, *etc.* Firstly, this is mainly reflected in construction of teaching teams. Teachers of vocational schools should grasp both theoretical knowledge and practical skills. However, for most rural vocational schools, many teachers only have certain theoretical foundation but lack practical experience. Secondly, to accomplish the objective of cultivating skilled talents, rural vocational schools should be provided with practice bases and experimental facilities. In reality, there are few practice bases in rural vocational schools and experimental facilities are backward and some facilities are obsolete, so they can not meet needs of improving practical skills of students. Thirdly, the improper arrangement of departments is not consistent with market demand. Fourthly, the school-running model is inflexible and not oriented towards market. It is required to actively explore ways of cooperation between schools and enterprises, such as "running schools in factories", "enterprises running schools", "post practice", "part work, part study", and "apprentice training", *etc.*

**2.4 Imperfect rural vocational education system** Currently, the overall development level of China's rural vocational education is relatively low and the form is single. The slow pace of its development is not adaptable to rural human resource development in market economic condition, acceleration of urban-rural integration, and promotion of rural labor transfer. Firstly, the existing rural vocational education is mainly oriented towards high school students, and there is little short-term training for farmers and little technical training for migrant workers. Every year, the newly increased middle school graduates who do not receive job training exceed 10 million. Such situation indicates that there is a great space for development of rural vo-

cational education. Secondly, most vocational schools are invested and founded by the state and local government, while few are invested by individuals. In less developed areas, nearly no private rural vocational schools. Thirdly, resources of rural vocational education and training are scattered. For example, agricultural department has agricultural broadcasting and television schools, labor department has skilled worker training schools, and education department has vocational education schools. Scattered distribution of training resources in different management departments results in serious shortage and waste of training resources. Fourthly, the channel for rural vocational schools entering higher schools is single and difficult. Therefore, the development space for rural vocational school graduates is limited, which influences willingness of farmers to accept vocational education.

### 3 Countermeasures for improving rural vocational education

#### 3.1 Strengthening propaganda and guidance to build environment of public opinion for rural vocational education

We should take full advantage of various forms of media, including radio, television, newspaper, magazine, and Internet, to strengthen public opinion guidance of rural vocational education. For successful students who have received rural vocational education, we should conduct extensive propaganda. Besides, it is required to advocate talent values and professional values adaptable to demand of social development, and create favorable social environment where ability of each one is brought into full play, to make farmers realize roles and functions of rural vocational education and social demand of various talents. In addition, it is proposed to deepen the reform of labor and personnel system, and cancel bounds of worker status and cadre status. No matter what kind of academic credentials, as long as having outstanding performance and certain leading ability, the person should be able to take post of management, consequently realize maximum social value.

#### 3.2 Pushing forward rural vocational compulsory education system to lay social foundation for rural vocational education

The compulsory education is basic education stipulated by the State for school-age children. Compulsory education is free and mandatory. In other words, students do not need to pay fees for this education, and parents must let their children go to school. China has popularized nine-year compulsory education. Since 2009, the vocational education started free system for agriculture-related students and those students from rural poor families. Considering special features of rural vocational education and China's actual conditions and rural development, it is required to gradually implement compulsory vocational education in rural areas. Namely, rural children can receive free education if they are admitted to rural or urban vocational schools. Reasons for this are as follows. In the first place, rural vocational education is quasi-public goods, so the government is obligated to provide fund support. In the second place, the key to building a moderately prosperous society in all respects lies in rural areas, while the subjects of new socialist

countryside construction are farmers. Therefore, improving farmers' quality and cultivating new farmers concern the overall situation of socio-economic development. Implementation of vocational education inclined towards rural areas is an energetic and effective strategy for pushing forward urban-rural integration and cities nurturing countryside. In addition, the rural development falls behind the urban development, the distribution of compulsory education resources is unbalanced, and few rural students receive high school education and higher education, so implementation of free vocational education system in rural areas is favorable to improving rural students' ability and quality of adaptation to social development. Finally, in recent years, China's financial revenue increases at high speed. By the October of 2011, it had exceeded 10 trillion yuan, so China has financial ability to implement compulsory vocational education free of charge in rural areas.

#### 3.3 Reinforcing policy support to assist in building rural vocational education system

To improve service efficiency and achieve sustainable development, rural vocational education must be provided with more generous policy support. In the course of pushing forward urban-rural integration, we should reinforce policy innovation, adhere to the principle of integrating urban and rural education resources, and strengthen the concept of urban supporting rural areas. Firstly, in teacher allocation, we should incline towards rural vocational schools and preferentially satisfy their demand. At the same time, it is proposed to encourage teachers of urban vocational schools to serve rural areas through incentive policies, such as post promotion, evaluation of professional titles, and selection of advanced ones. Secondly, the fund support should stress the public goods feature of rural vocational education. On one hand, we should increase fund input into rural vocational education, to achieve 30% of extra charges of education funds being used in vocational education. It is required to set up and increase special fund to incorporate training of farmers into public fiscal budget. It is proposed to establish special funds for construction of vocational teaching center at county level, training of rural labor transfer and technical training of farmers<sup>[3]</sup>. On the other hand, we should raise the level of fund overall planning, and change the financial support from county and township level to provincial level, to ensure timely and adequate appropriation of funds. Thirdly, we should implement joint school running system for urban and rural vocational schools, and encourage urban education resources to flow to rural areas, to solve problems of demand of professional teachers, teaching facilities, student practice, and employment, etc.

#### 3.4 Improving education system to build overall framework of rural vocational education

To develop rural vocational education, we should start from actual conditions of current socio-economic development and improve rural vocational education system. Specifically, we should establish a modern rural vocational education system that has features of rural vocational education. On the basis of developing academic education, it is required to actively develop various types and forms of short-term on-the-job training, and incorporate short-term

training into performance examination of local government. Besides, we should energetically develop non-governmental vocational education and encourage individuals and social organizations to participate in running vocational schools. This not only solves problems of state-run vocational education due to shortage of funds, but also forms competition mechanism of vocational education, as well as promotes improvement of overall quality of vocational schools. In addition, it is required to integrate training resources of rural vocational education, to improve utilization efficiency of rural vocational education resources. It is recommended to implement reform of existing rural vocational education system, build school entrance examination system for vocational education that is different from general education, improve direct entrance system for rural vocational school graduates, and expand proportion and scale of school entrance<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 3.5 Perfecting laws and regulations to establish system and norm for development of rural vocational education

To realize sound and sustainable development of rural vocational education, we should perfect laws and regulations. With perfect laws and regulations, fund input, organization system and management responsibility of rural vocational education can be really implemented. Therefore, it is required to improve existing laws and regulations on the basis of original *Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China*. Regulations on development of rural vocational education should be more clear and definite and strict. It is required to make clear that central and local government should be major investors of funds for rural vocational education and make definite the proportion of

funds for rural vocational education into vocational education funds, to ensure stable funds for rural vocational education. In the course of urban-rural integration, the demand of new socialist countryside construction for energetic development of rural vocational education is gradually increasing. Therefore, it is necessary to issue special *Rural Vocational Education Law*, to promote and normalize rural vocational education. In the mean time, we should be strict in enforcing the laws. Those who fail to perform obligations of rural vocational education or violate provisions of rural vocational education laws must assume corresponding legal responsibilities or take the corresponding consequence. This is to make social parties to fully realize the severity of breach of law, raise consciousness of abiding by laws, and use laws to guarantee sustainable development of rural vocational education.

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