Analysis on Regional Difference in the Chance of Receiving Higher Vocational Education in China

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Abstract

From the view of regional difference, comparing several indicators of the chance of receiving higher vocational education in different regions in the aspect of quantity and quality in China shows that, it is still a fact that regional difference exists in chance of receiving higher vocational education. This fact will affect the realization of educational equality, the balance of economic development and the construction of harmonious society. In order to promote harmonious development and teaching equality of higher vocational education, the suggestions are: strengthening cooperation among higher vocational colleges in different regions; increasing investment on the middle and western regions; working out special support policies for west region.

Key words

higher vocational education; chance of entering schools; regional difference; education equality

I. The Problem

As an educational ideal, educational equality is an inexorable trend of educational development, and it is also the eternal pursuit of human society. The “Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” regulate, “citizens of the P.R. China have the right and obligation to accept education. Citizens regardless of nationality, race, gender, occupation, property status, religious belief, enjoyed equal opportunity in education.” Educational equality mainly includes two aspects, the equality of educational rights and educational opportunities. For a long time, the inequality of education mainly manifested as the right to educational inequality, and after entering 20th century, mainly manifested as the inequality of educational opportunity (Ma,2002). In order to realize the equal opportunity of education the present stage of China, first of all need to explore “the equal chance of entering school” (Wu,1998).

Higher education is to train senior specialized talents, has always been the elite education. After the middle of the 20th century, with the rapid development of modern science and technology, economic and
social development needs of senior specialized talents is increasing day by day, people demand the higher education more and more. This higher education from the elite stage in most countries entered the popularization stage. To follow the international trend, China's higher education after the 1980s began to reform gradually, and the multi-level, multi-type, multi-form higher education pattern has formed, especially after 1999, higher education in China has been developing towards popularization.

During the popularization of higher education, the emergence and development of higher vocational education is concerned. Throughout the history of higher vocational education in China, since Jiangsu Province in 1980, building up the first higher vocational school ——Nanjing Vocational University, 30 years has gone. According to statistics, in 2009, the number of national independently established higher vocational colleges is 1215, grew 1.6 times than in 1999; the enrollment reached 3.134, increased 6 times more than in 1998; the number of students reached 9.648 million, increased 8.2 times more than in 1999; the number of graduates reached 2.856 million, grew 6.2 times than 1999 (MoE, 2010). As it were, the higher vocational education has accounted for half of the total of the national higher education now. The higher vocational education has cultivated thousands of high-quality talents, which is the main force of the popularization of higher education, is the backbone of the local economic development, and is also the key to build a well-off society in China.

The higher vocational education is a part of education, and the “equal starting point” problem has been concerned. In history, scholars regarded “equality” as the ideal target, and the adapted research method, is mainly to find out “unequal” facts (Chen, Tao, 2001). In the study of equal educational opportunities in western countries, compared with the class difference, racial difference and gender difference, regional difference problem basically is in the edge of being noticed. However, as far as China is concerned, regional difference is an important category of social differences, it can lead to the serious imbalance between different regions of educational opportunity (Wu, 1998).
Similarly, the reality of China’s regional differences leads to the inequality of receiving higher vocational education. According to reports, the students in the poverty-stricken areas and ethnic minority areas due to the impact of economic factors, often more expected to receive higher education which is not far away from their hometown, and a large number of vocational schools established in the prefecture-level and county-level city provide them with this opportunity. Among the 2011 session of the higher vocational school graduates, 12.7% come from poor areas, 22.2% from the western region, and 16.2% from the minority areas (Educational Academy of Shanghai, 2012).

In addition, according to a survey of 2009—2011 higher vocational college students after graduation of six months, the 2011 session of the graduates employment in colleges has 35% City, 68% in the College of the province. It is showed that, higher vocational colleges provides an important human resource and make great contribution to the regional economic development, but the unbalanced development of higher vocational education will directly affect the local economic development. The balanced development of higher vocational education can not represent the balance of higher vocational education in different regions. This paper is to analyze the education fair issue from one side, which is conducive to deepen people's understanding of educational equity, and then promote the early realization of educational equality ideal.

II. The Status of Regional Difference in the Chance of Receiving Higher Vocational Education in China

1. Regional Difference in Quantity

When talking about regional differences, it is often used in two different senses: one is the gap between the provinces, and another is regional disparity within the domain of one province (Yang, 2006). Based on this, this article intends to start from two aspects.

(i) Regional differences between provinces

The number of higher vocational colleges is 1288 in 2012, the eastern region accounted for 30%, the central region accounted for 41.5%, and the west region accounted for 24.6%.

Comparing the layout of colleges and universities in China, we can see that the number of higher vocational colleges is the most in east region, followed by the central region, and the western region has the least higher vocational colleges. Higher vocational colleges in developed eastern region accounted for half of all the higher vocational colleges, while the number of higher vocational colleges in western region is more than in the central region, respectively, 16.9% and 9.3%. It is visible that regional higher vocational education development is not balanced in China, and the number of higher vocational colleges in under-developed western areas need to increase.

If we consider the relationship between the number of population and the number of higher vocational colleges in the eastern, central the western region, and the conclusions are as follows: the number of higher vocational colleges in per million population in the eastern, western and central region is 3.5, 3.6, 2.7 in 1999 respectively, and 9.4, 9.2 and 8.0 in 2008 respectively (Zhang, Ma, 2010). It is visible that in ten years from 1999 to 2008, the number of higher vocational colleges in per million population in China eastern region, middle region and western region has increased significantly. However, comparing the increase, the eastern region increased 5.9, the central region increased 5.6, while the western region increased 5.3; the eastern region have increased the most, while the less developed western regions have increased the least.
Therefore, both the absolute number of higher vocational colleges in different regions or the relationship between different regions of the population and the number of higher vocational colleges, the eastern region is dominant, less developed western regions are relative disadvantaged, which will have a profound impact on the balanced development of higher vocational education in different areas.

(ii) The differences within provinces

In addition to the analysis of the distribution of higher vocational colleges between different provinces, it also can not ignore the unbalanced distribution of higher vocational colleges within one province. The following takes Guangdong Province and Shaanxi Province as the examples.

There are total 21 prefecture level cities in Guangdong Province, and the economically developed Pearl River Delta region has 9 prefecture level cities, and those are Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Huizhou, Jiangmen and Zhaoping, and the remaining economically underdeveloped area includes 12 cities. A total of 81 higher vocational colleges are in Guangdong Province in 2012, as the provincial capital of Guangzhou city has 47 higher vocational colleges, accounting for 58% of the total; the economically developed Pearl River Delta area (excluding Guangzhou) has 22 higher vocational colleges, accounting for 27.2% of the total; the remaining 12 underdeveloped areas have a total of 12 higher vocational colleges, which accounted for 14.8% of the total. The number of higher vocational colleges in Guangzhou have accounted for more than half of the total, more than 2 times of the Pearl River Delta region, and almost 4 times of the prefecture level cities. It is visible that, in Guangdong Province, the distribution of higher vocational colleges is very uneven.

Shaanxi Province has 11 prefecture-level cities such as Baoji, Xianyang, Xi’an, Tongchuan, Weinan, Yan’an, Yulin, Hanzhong, Ankang, Shangluo, Yangling and so on. Higher vocational colleges of Shaanxi province in 2012 is 39, Xi’an city as the capital city has 23, accounting for 59% of the total; there are 28 higher vocational colleges in Xi’an city and Xianyang, accounting for 71.8% higher vocational colleges in total; while the underdeveloped area have only 11 higher vocational colleges, only accounting for 28.2%. It is visible that the distribution of higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi province is not balanced.

Through the comparison of distribution of higher vocational colleges within and between provinces, we can found that, although in recent years the higher vocational education in China developed rapidly, but in general, looking from the number, the regional difference still exist in higher vocational colleges in China. Higher vocational colleges in eastern provinces show absolute superiority; the distribution of higher vocational colleges within one province is extremely uneven, higher vocational colleges in developed areas is the most, but the economically less developed areas have less number of higher vocational colleges, which will lead to unbalanced enrollment opportunities of higher vocational education in different areas. In addition, the regional difference of higher vocational colleges will affect the local economic development, resulting in “Matthew effect”, and ultimately affect the construction of harmonious society. Therefore, the suggestion is to develop higher vocational colleges in different areas in balance, and increase the opportunity of higher vocational education for underdeveloped area students. This suggest will realize the education intergenerational upward mobility, promote fairness in education, and develop the local economy.

2. Regional Differences in Quality

Quality problems about higher vocational education has been the focus issue in theory and practice of higher education. The quality difference in different regions of higher vocational education will be directly related to the quality of higher vocational education opportunity between regions, and has a great influence on the employment of graduates of higher vocational colleges.

In November 2006, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance formally launched the “National Demonstration Higher Vocational Colleges Construction Plan”, this plan is called the “211 engineering construction high level of higher vocational colleges in China”. Countries in the “11th five-year” period by the central finance stage invested about 2500 million yuan of special funds, promote local financial input 60 hundred million yuan, and the enterprises invested nearly 1500 million yuan, support 100 model colleges, to deepen the reform, to improve the the quality as the core, and strive to build with Chinese characteristics, the world standard of higher vocational education.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance jointly issued the “Further Advancing the National Demonstration Higher Vocational Colleges and Universities Construction Plan”
Plan”, decided to continue to promote the “National Demonstration Higher Vocational Colleges and Universities Construction Plan”. The key point is to enhance the ability of higher vocational college to serve the regional economy and society and the harmonious development of higher vocational education.

It is visible that as the focus of national support, the investment of construction funds, the quality of national demonstration higher vocational colleges and higher vocational college will be significantly higher than the normal colleges. Therefore, the analysis of regional distribution of national demonstrative higher vocational college can reflect the quality differences between different regions of higher vocational education opportunity from one side.

(i) Regional distribution of National Demonstrative Higher Vocational Colleges

We can see from Table 1, the demonstration higher vocational colleges in developed eastern regions accounted for 46% of the national total, nearly half, the number is 1.77 times of the central region, is 1.64 times of the western region; while the number of demonstration higher vocational colleges in central and western regions accounted for only 54%. It is visible that in the distribution of national demonstration higher vocational colleges, the eastern region has the absolute advantage, while the central and western regions are at a disadvantage.

(ii) Regional distribution of national backbone higher vocational college

Table 2 shows the regional distribution of the 100 national backbone higher vocational colleges in China and the 100 national demonstrative higher vocational colleges. It is visible that the economically developed eastern area has absolute advantage in national backbone higher vocational college share, while the central and western regions are at a disadvantage.

The analysis on the regional distribution of the national demonstration higher vocational colleges and the national backbone higher vocational college indicate that, regional distribution found in eastern developed areas, both at the national demonstration higher vocational colleges or in the national backbone higher vocational colleges are in the possession of absolute advantage, while the central and western underdeveloped area is in the inferior position. Therefore, the coordinated development of economic culture, for different regions of higher vocational education talents among regions will have a great negative impact.

III. Conclusions and Suggestions

1. Conclusions

The difference of entrance opportunity of higher vocational education in China exists, mainly for:

First of all, look from the number, both within the province or between provinces, higher vocational colleges in the economically developed eastern provinces (area) are more than in economically less developed western provinces (regions). For the vulnerable groups and the poor families, many higher vocational colleges in prefecture level or county-level cities are “affordable” universities at home. Therefore, the number of higher vocational colleges, the eastern, central and western settings will greatly affect the opportunity of higher vocational education to local students, this is particularly important for vulnerable groups and poor families.

Secondly, from the quality point of view, the country launched the “National Demonstration Higher Vocational Colleges and National Backbone Higher Vocational College Plans”, investing large amounts of
funds to support the higher vocational colleges, which aims to improve the quality of talent training and the level of school-running. But through analysis, we think that the regional differences still exist. Uneven regional distribution of high-quality higher vocational education resources is bound to result in uneven distribution of senior specialized talents of different areas, the unbalanced economic development between regions, will impact the building of a harmonious society ultimately.

2. Recommendations

First, strengthen cooperation between higher vocational colleges in developed and underdeveloped areas. There are many specific modes of cooperation, for example, strengthening communication and training between teachers; sharing education resources among schools, such as the library, teaching courseware, employment channels and so on, improve the level of education of colleges and universities.

Second, increase investment to the central and western underdeveloped regions. To promote the development of higher vocational colleges, the government should adjust the distribution proportion of public education expenditure, appropriately increasing funds, encouraging large education group’s investment, and giving preferential policies to balance the development of higher vocational colleges in different regions.

Third, formulate policies to assist higher vocational education in western underdeveloped region. Higher vocational education belongs to public welfare, the development of public welfare is mainly the responsibility of the government. Therefore, the government should introduce relevant policies to promote the development of higher vocational education. For example, the government can give preferential policies in the education and scientific research; given full support in tax, credit and other aspects to the business and enterprises participating in higher vocational education.

References