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<特別寄稿論文>

Does Education Matter?

Poverty Alleviation Through Education in China

Kunfeng Pan* ; Peirong Wang**

Abstract

China has made a significant contribution to global poverty alleviation. Based on the current situation of the income gap between different regions and between urban and rural areas, China has implemented a targeted poverty alleviation strategy, integrating institutional construction, basic approaches and incentive mechanisms to ensure the realization of the goal—"ending two worries and enjoying three guarantees". Education policy plays an important role in poverty alleviation in China. This paper overviews the education poverty alleviation actions China has carried out in different dimensions, and explores the path of education poverty alleviation with Chinese characteristics. In addition, the paper indicates that the high drop-out of compulsory education in some specific poor areas, the low rate of return on education in poor areas and the difficulty in ensuring the quality of education pose challenges to China's poverty alleviation through education. Japan's practice of improving the quality of rural education provides a reference for China's poverty alleviation.

Key words: poverty alleviation in China; Poverty alleviation through education; The rural education

1. Introduction

Poverty is a worldwide problem, and anti-poverty is a common historical task in front of mankind. The UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development has set 17 goals and 169 specific sub-goals. The first goal is the eradication of poverty in all forms, which is once again the primary goal of the United Nations following the millennium goals. There are five specific sub-goals: ending extreme poverty, reducing the number of the poor by more than half, implementing social security system, ensuring the rights of the poor and strengthening their resilience to disaster risks (UN, 2014). These five goals show that all countries in the world pay close attention to poverty and point out the direction for world poverty reduction.

There is no uniform standard of poverty in the world. At present, there are two types of poverty standards generally adopted: those based on absolute poverty and those based on relative poverty. The world bank has set the absolute poverty level at \$1.90 per day (2015). China has set the poverty threshold at 2,300-yuan per capita net income (unchanged in 2010), (Wen, 2011), or about \$2.2 a day at purchasing power parity. Britain's

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poverty line, based on relative poverty, is 40 percent of median income. According to the world bank's poverty standard, 783 million people live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day. However, poverty is most serious in developing countries. As shown in figure 1, the poor population is concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, South Asia and Latin America. As the largest developing country in the world, China shoulders the burden of poverty reduction. Practice has proved that China has accumulated rich experience and made great contributions to world poverty reduction.

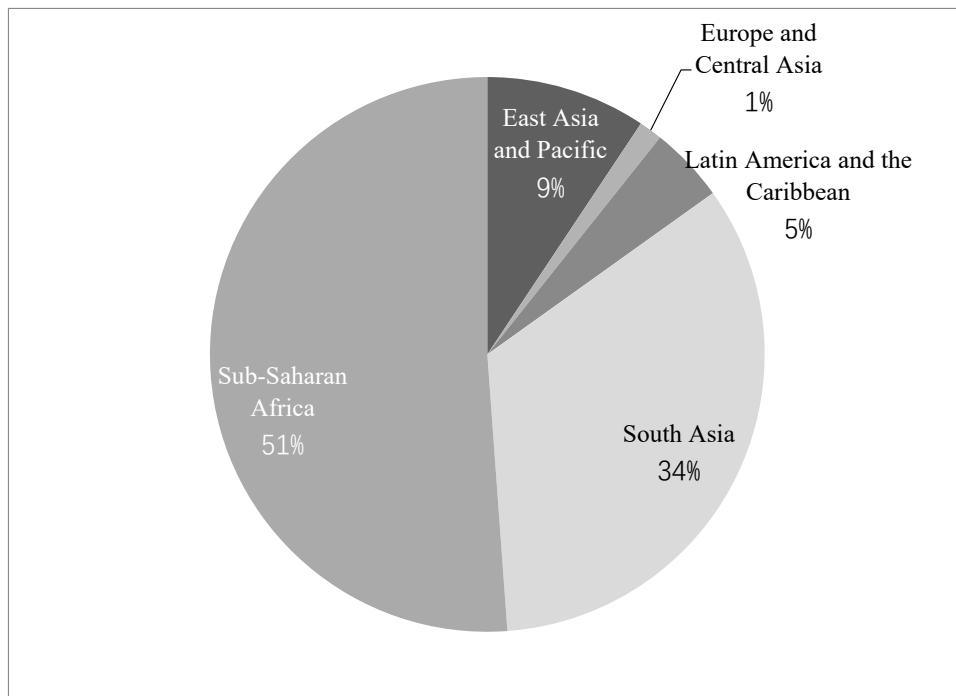


Figure 1 Distribution of the world's poor by world bank standards (2015, world bank)

DATA SOURCE: WORLD BANK

China has achieved the poverty reduction goals set out in the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development 10 years ahead of schedule, and continues to take the lead in global poverty reduction (Xi, 2017). According to the UN's Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, China contributes more than 70% of global poverty reduction. As is shown in figure 2, since the reform and opening up, China's poor population and poverty rate have been falling continuously. By 2018, the number of poor people has been reduced by more than 750 million, and the poverty rate has been reduced to 1.70%, which has achieved remarkable poverty reduction. World bank President Jim Yong has said that China's effort to help 800 million people out of poverty is historic and this is one of the great stories in human history (Yong, 2017).

On the basis of analyzing the current situation of poverty in China, this paper systematically explains China's targeted poverty alleviation strategy and basic measures of poverty alleviation through education at

the present stage. It also points out the three major challenges facing China's education poverty alleviation. Finally, Japan's efforts to improve rural education offer possible experience for China.

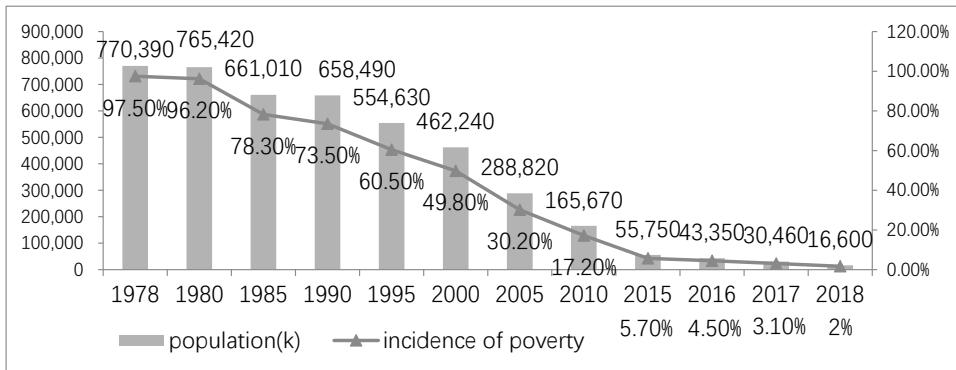


Figure 2 China's poor population in 1988-2018 (1.9USD)

Data source: Department of Poverty Alleviation in China

2. China's basic approach to poverty alleviation at the present stage

2.1 Poverty in China

The area of China can be roughly divided into east, central and west. Among them, the eastern coastal areas are economically developed and relatively rich; The central and western regions are relatively backward economically, especially the western region, which has complicated geology and are inhabited by rural population and ethnic minorities. Therefore, in China, the income gap of the residents among different regions is obvious. Table 1 shows the per capita income of each province in the first quarter of 2018. The top 10 provinces and cities in the ranking all belong to the eastern region, while the middle part of the ranking is dominated by the central region, while the bottom 7 provinces and autonomous regions belong to the western region. In addition, the income gap between urban and rural areas is also evident. From 1996 to 2015, the rural-urban residents' income ratio in China was between 2.51 and 3.33, reaching its peak in 2009. Although the ratio continued to decline since then, the rural-urban residents' income ratio in 2015 was still as high as 2.73. The disparity in income between regions and between urban and rural areas highlights the imbalance in China's development and the urgency of the country's fight against poverty.

The current poverty situation in China is characterized by large scale of poor population and wide distribution of poor areas. In 2012, there were 832 state-level poverty-stricken counties and 124,000 poverty-stricken villages, including 88 in Yunnan province, 77 in Tibet autonomous region and 66 in Guizhou province. In addition, the Outline of China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2011-2020) clearly stipulates that 14 contiguous poverty-stricken areas in the central and western regions will be the main battlefields for poverty alleviation. Thus, China's poverty problem is concentrated in the central and western regions.

RANK	PROVINCE	PER CAPITA DISPOSABLE INCOME (RMB)	RANK	PROVINCE	PER CAPITA DISPOSABLE INCOME (RMB)
1	SHANGHAI	64,183	17	HEBEI	23,446
2	BEIJING	62,361	18	JILIN	22,798
3	ZHEJIANG	45,840	19	HEILONGJIANG	22,726
4	TIANJIN	39,506	20	SHAANXI	22,528
5	JIANGSU	38,096	21	SICHUAN	22,461
6	GUANGDONG	35,810	22	NINGXIA	22,400
7	FUJIAN	32,644	23	SHANXI	21,990
8	LIAONING	29,701	24	HENAN	21,964
9	SHANDONG	29,205	25	XINJIANG	21,500
10	INNER MONGOLIA	28,376	26	GUANGXI	21,485
11	CHONGQING	26,386	27	QINGHAI	20,757
12	HUBEI	25,815	28	YUNNAN	20,084
13	HUNAN	25,241	29	GUIZHOU	18,430
14	HAINAN	24,579	30	GANSU	17,488
15	JIANGXI	24,080	31	TIBET	17,286
16	ANHUI	23,984			

Table 1 per capita annual disposable income of 2018 (source: National Bureau of statistics of China)

2.2 Targeted poverty alleviation strategy

In November 2013, President Xi made it clear that poverty alleviation work should be planned scientifically, take measures in accordance with local conditions, focus on key areas, and constantly improve the precision, effectiveness and sustainability of the work. He first proposed the concept of "targeted poverty alleviation". The targeted poverty reduction strategy aims to lift all rural poor out of poverty by 2020, meeting one income standard, ending two worries, namely worries about food and clothing, and enjoying Three guarantees, namely compulsory education, basic housing and basic medical care. In practice, China has explored a path of poverty alleviation with Chinese characteristics by combining institutional construction, basic approaches and incentive mechanisms in light of its national conditions.

2.2.1 Institutional construction is the solid foundation of the targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

First, establish Household Registration System for the poor. The first step of targeted poverty alleviation is accurate identification. Household registration for the poor has been carried out since 2014, covering 82.94

million people. All poor families have been identified precisely and this system has connected network. Then, following the principle of differentiated poverty alleviation, China has made targeted efforts to document the poor and targeted the weakest areas and the poorest groups. This changed the previous practice of "flood irrigation" for poverty alleviation, which not only saved limited resources, but also improved the supporting effect.

Second, send cadres to villages. The mechanism of stationing cadres in villages has been defined as one of the six mechanisms for China to innovate poverty alleviation and development at present and in the future. More than 1 million cadres have been sent to the village for long-term work, taking charge of poverty alleviation work, and 662 people have sacrificed their lives for this work. Organizationally, special "village offices" have been set up to take charge of the daily management of village affairs. This kind of fine and institutionalized management enables village cadres to "embed" themselves in poor rural areas and become institutionalized "special forces" in the fight against poverty.

Finally, combine fixed-point poverty alleviation with west-east ties. The fixed-point poverty alleviation is an innovative way of targeted poverty alleviation in China. It is carried out by party, government and military organs, enterprises and public institutions. There are 288 central government units, each responsible for poverty alleviation in a number of counties. These include: China's central government system (e.g., Ministry of Education, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Finance, etc.), national enterprises and national universities (PetroChina, bank of China, Peking University, etc.). In addition, eastern provinces and cities are paired with poor areas in the west. For example, Beijing is paired with Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and Tianjin is paired with Gansu province. In view of the unbalanced development between the east and the west, we should use resources from the east to bridge the gap, so that poor people in urban and rural areas can share the fruits of reform and opening up.

2.2.2 The basic approach is an important path to the targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

The basic approach of the targeted poverty alleviation strategy is to alleviate poverty through developing production, migration, education, ecological compensation, and social security. To sum up, China has targeted the current 70 million poor rural population, set up Household Registration System, implement policies by category, and leave nothing behind (Liu, 2015).

The development of production is a poverty alleviation method based on the natural conditions, factor endowments and economic level of the poor areas. Society injects poverty alleviation funds to help the poor develop industries and lift the poor people out of poverty through industrial development. In 2015, China lifted industrial poverty alleviation to a new high, with the explicit goal of "developing characteristic industries to get rid of poverty" and "accelerating the integrated development of primary, secondary and tertiary industries, so that poor households can benefit more from the whole agricultural industry chain and value chain." Migration is to move poor people with poor living conditions to suitable places for survival. And through improving the production and living conditions in the resettlement areas, adjusting the economic structure and expanding the channels of increasing income, China will help the relocated people gradually get rid of poverty and become rich. Ecological compensation is an institutional arrangement of rules, incentives and coordination, aimed at protecting and making sustainable use of ecosystem services, mainly through economic means to

regulate the interests of stakeholders, promote compensation activities and arouse the enthusiasm for ecological protection. In addition, more than 20 million people who have lost all or part of their ability to work will be covered by the rural subsistence allowance system (Fan, 2015).

Education poverty alleviation means shifting from "blood donation" to "blood creation" to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty. This requires government funds for education be allocated to poor areas, to basic education, and to vocational education, to help poor areas improve the conditions for running schools, and to give special care to children from poor rural families, especially left-behind children.

2.2.3 Incentive mechanism is a strong guarantee for targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

The incentive mechanism combines rigorous assessment with incentive recognition. Every year, the Chinese government conducts a strict assessment on poverty alleviation units and local governments. The assessment includes the income of the poor, the implementation of "ending two worries and enjoying three guarantees" and the satisfaction of the poor. China's poverty alleviation work in the new period, has undergone a transformation from poor assessment of income to accurate assessment of poverty alleviation based on "ending two worries and enjoying three guarantees". The assessment criteria of party members and cadres turns from GDP to multi-dimensional anti-poverty performance appraisal including education, medical treatment, health service and so on. This feedback mechanism of targeted poverty alleviation assessment is a strong support for the realization of true poverty alleviation. At the same time, social forces are an important part of targeted poverty alleviation. Through incentives and commendations, the Chinese government encourages universities, research institutes, enterprises, NGOs and international organizations to participate in targeted poverty alleviation, and constantly improves the mechanism for social forces to participate in it.

3. Education policies for poverty alleviation

3.1 The ideas of poverty alleviation through education

President Xi's education poverty alleviation strategy fully explains China's ideas of education poverty alleviation. As early as the 1980s, President Xi wrote the book *Up and Out of Poverty* while working in Fujian province, stressing that "The poorer the place, the more difficult it is to develop education. But the poorer, the more education is needed. The poorer education is, the poorer it is". In December 2013, President Xi pointed out, "To address poverty first, we must do a good job in educating the next generation, especially in the poor mountainous areas. Bringing up children in poor areas is the fundamental way to help the poor". In September 2015, President Xi pointed out in a letter to teachers from Guizhou teachers' training class of Beijing Normal University that "Poverty alleviation requires wisdom cultivation, and enabling children in poor areas to receive good education is an important task of poverty alleviation and development, as well as an important way to block the inter-generational transmission of poverty". In November 2015, President Xi stressed at the central conference on poverty alleviation and development that "Education is the basic strategies to block the intergenerational transmission of poverty. The actions of education in poor areas are long-term and problems

must be tackled with great efforts. Poverty alleviation requires rich pockets as well as rich minds." (Zhu, 2016) Rather than to give people fish, it is better to teach people how to fish. President Xi's strategic thought on poverty alleviation through education clarifies the guiding and fundamental role that education plays in the targeted poverty alleviation system.

3.2 Education policies for poverty alleviation

3.2.1 Pre-school Plan

The penetration rate of preschool education in rural areas is low. In order to speed up the development of preschool education and alleviate the problem of "difficulty in entering kindergartens", the State Council has explicitly required all provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) to compile and implement Pre-school Plan for preschool education at the county level. The program has been implemented three phases since 2011 to support the development of preschool education in poor areas. The main goal is to basically establish an educational public service system for preschool that covers all areas and ensures basic and high-quality services by 2020. The gross enrollment rate of preschool has reached 85%, and the coverage rate of inclusive kindergartens has reached about 80% (the proportion of children in public kindergartens and inclusive private universal kindergartens accounts for the total number of children in the kindergartens), striving to achieve "one village, one public pre-school".

3.2.2 Rural School Condition Improvement Project

In 2013, China began to improve the basic conditions of poor schools providing compulsory education in poor areas. The main contents include the construction of school buildings, and the purchase of teaching and living facilities for those schools in poor areas, to meet the basic needs, and the eliminate "large class size".

3.2.3 Nutrition Improving Plan

Nutrition Improving Plan refers to subsidized meals for rural students receiving compulsory education at the standard of 3 yuan per person (4 yuan per person after November 2014). In November 2011, China implemented Nutrition Improving Plan, launching national trials in contiguous areas with special difficulties. By the end of February 2014, a total of 699 counties in 22 provinces had implemented the program, allocating a total of 42.1 billion yuan in subsidies for nutritious meals and 30 billion yuan for canteen construction. In addition, pilot projects were launched in 529 counties in 21 provinces, with a total of 9.3 billion yuan allocated by local governments (Chen, 2015). Although the plan needs to be improved in practice, it provides food and nutrition guarantee for students in the stage of rural compulsory education.

3.2.4 Student Funding System

China has established a Student Funding System that covers all poor students, from preschool to post-graduate education to protect students from dropping out of school due to financial difficulties. In preschool education, the state provides financial assistance to children from poor families, orphans and disabled children; at the stage of compulsory education, students are exempted from the tuition fees and given subsidies for boarding fees. In ordinary senior high schools, students from poor families can be exempted from tuition and

miscellaneous fees and subsidized 2000 yuan per student per year. At vocational high schools, tuition fees are waived for all rural students; In the higher education stage, to support students with economic difficulties, a series of policy has been put into practice, such as national scholarships, student loans, free normal students education, education funding for retired soldiers, work-study, and so on.

3.2.5 Special Plan for Rural Teachers

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance jointly launched the special plan for rural compulsory education teachers. Supported by the central government, the program openly recruits college graduates to teach in rural schools, with the aim of exploring and innovating the supplementation mechanism of rural teachers, and improving the quality of teachers in rural schools. Since its implementation, the program has achieved remarkable results and solved the shortage problem of rural teachers to some extent.

3.2.6 Affirmative Action in China

China has implemented a special program by national key universities for students from poor areas, with a total enrollment of 100,000 students per year, increasing the proportion of students from poor areas in key universities. At present, it mainly develops into three types: national special projects, local special projects and school special projects. Many students from poor areas have been admitted to key universities through this special program. For instance, Lan yi, a Qiang ethnic minority examinee, became the first local Peking University student from Aba county.

3.2.7 Poverty Alleviation Project by Universities

Since 2011, in accordance with the unified arrangements of the central government, the Ministry of Education has organized 44 national universities directly under the Ministry of Education and over 200 public provincial universities to undertake the task of targeted poverty alleviation. Universities are the "fresh force" of poverty alleviation through education. Universities give full play to their advantages in joint support of disciplines, talents and scientific research, cooperate closely with poor areas, and help poor counties get rid of poverty through various forms of assistance such as education, science and technology, industry and culture. Universities have accumulated rich experience in the process of poverty alleviation, explored diversified and personalized ways of poverty alleviation, and emerged distinctive cases of targeted poverty alleviation in universities. For example, the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China has built a smart pig breeding platform for a poor county, and the China Pharmaceutical University has set up a production line for the processing of traditional Chinese medicine for a poor county.

University of Electronic Science and Technology of China is a multi-disciplinary national key university with electronic information science and technology as the core. In the process of targeted poverty alleviation in Cengong county, it further defined the construction goal of "smart Cengong" by giving full play to its own advantages, and helped build "smart urban-rural construction model county in underdeveloped areas" by "electronic information + targeted poverty alleviation". The university has built a big data visualization system for poverty alleviation, promoted the visualization of geographical information in Cengong county, and invested nearly one million yuan to promote smart breeding. It completed the smart upgrading of pig breeding, and became the "locomotive" to get rid of poverty and become rich.

China Pharmaceutical University is a multi-disciplinary key university directly under the administration of the Ministry of Education. During the process of targeted poverty alleviation, it paired with Zhenping county. In view of the advantages of Zhenping with a large number of Chinese medicinal materials suitable for cultivation, the university has helped to establish the scientific research support platform for the development of Zhenping medicinal materials industry and the brand system of Zhenping Chinese medicinal materials. It has strengthened traditional Chinese medicine food, health care products and other related industries such as organic chemical industry to build a circular industrial chain.

3.3 The function mechanism of poverty alleviation through education

As one of the important approaches to targeted poverty alleviation, education contributes to it through indirect impact on poor households, poor villages and poor counties. Figure 3 shows the function mechanism and realization path of education in targeted poverty alleviation. First of all, the main body of education, like education departments, schools, other organizations and individuals, provides various types of education for the poor groups, including preschool education, compulsory education and vocational education. It has established a crisscrossing educational space-time system for the poor. After receiving education, the poor acquire knowledge and skills, and act on the "one standard" and "two worries, three guarantees" in the way of family labor compensation mechanism, migration and human capital, so as to realize the poverty alleviation of poor households. In addition, with the economic function of education, regional economic development can be boosted to upgrade basic public services and finally remove the poverty cap of poor villages and counties.

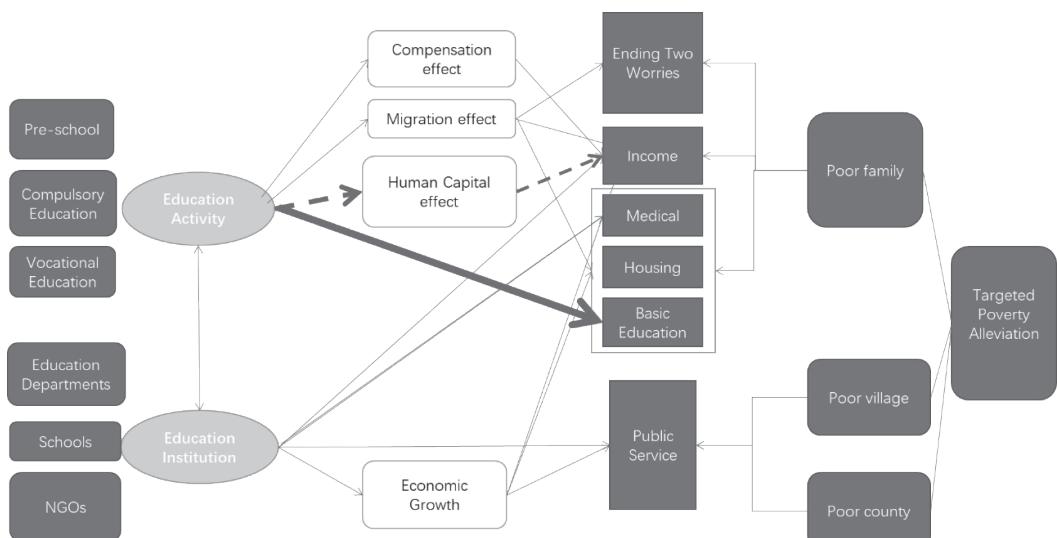


Figure 3 function mechanism of poverty alleviation through education in China

4. Challenges facing poverty alleviation through education in China

While China has made remarkable achievements in poverty alleviation through education, it is also faced with challenges in various aspects, which are highlighted in three aspects: the drop-out in compulsory education, the rate of return on education in poor areas and the guarantee of education quality.

4.1 Dropout in Compulsory education

Although China has basically popularized compulsory education in most rural areas, the problem of students dropping out of compulsory education in rural areas is serious. A national survey in 2018 showed that 2 percent of registered poor have dropped out in compulsory education stage. The dropout rate is high in some deep poverty-stricken areas. Main reasons are learning difficulty and religious reason. There are some cases of government suing families for failing to fulfill their compulsory education responsibilities. Data in 2017 shows that in the compulsory education stage, the dropout rate is high in the graduation grades, among which the dropout rate is 36.27% in the sixth grade and 60.66% in the ninth grade. Therefore, reducing the dropout rate of compulsory education in rural areas is an urgent problem to be solved.

4.2 Low education return rate in poor area

The education return rate in poor areas reflects the impact of education on income. The empirical study shows that the education return rate in poor areas is low, and the effect of education on the deep poor families is limited, as the education return rate is only about 1% (Qing & Pan, 2018). Table 2 is the calculation of education return rate of registered households in poor areas. By comparison, it can be seen that the return rate of school education is only 1.35%, far lower than that of migrant workers. Therefore, the low education return rate in poor areas is a major challenge facing the current poverty alleviation through education.

	marginal income return rate
migrating to other provinces to work	18.8%
migrating to other counties to work	15.8%
migrating to other villages to work	11.6%
schooling	1.35%

Table 2 Calculation of education return rate of registered households in poor areas (Qing & Pan, 2018)

4.3 Poor education quality assurance in poor areas

It is difficult to guarantee the quality of education in poor areas. There are many reasons for this problem. Among them, insufficient teachers and backward teaching methods have seriously affected the quality of

education in poor areas. Poor areas lack competent teachers who can get in, do well and stay firm, and they cannot play the role of pioneers in poverty alleviation through education (Zeng, 2016). Moreover, there is an expanding educational achievement gap between poor areas and developed ones. Figure 4 shows that the admission rate of students from poverty-stricken counties in key universities is lower than that of non-poverty-stricken counties and cities. Moreover, the admission rate of students from poverty-stricken counties remains unchanged from 2009 to 2015, and the gap with that of urban students continues to widen.

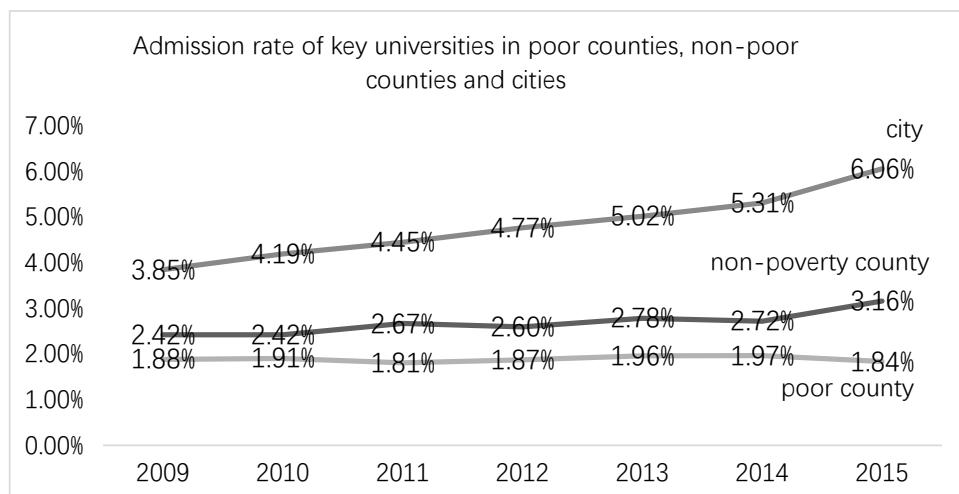


Figure 4 Admission rate of key universities in X province

5. Japan's enlightenment on improving the quality of rural education in China

After world war ii, rural education in Japan also faced the problem of rural teachers' shortage and low quality. The study of Japan's practice of promoting rural education is of referential significance to the improvement of China's poverty alleviation in education.

5.1 Individual guidance in rural small-scale school

Rural small-scale schools are the shortcoming of China's compulsory education, while those in Japan are also facing severe survival and development problems. Therefore, Japan's experience of small rural schools can provide important reference for China. In order to improve the quality of teachers in rural small-scale schools, Japan has taken measures to guide teachers individually in rural small-scale schools. In view of the shrinking scale of the schools, it has carried out the joint research and study activities of multiple schools, which not only ensures the training and further study of teachers, but also promotes the inter-school communication of teachers (Ren & Zuo, 2019). At the same time, the Japanese government provides financial support for teachers' further study in remote schools and encourages teachers to participate in training and further study.

5.2 Extracurricular activities and clubs

Extracurricular activities and clubs are an important supplement to Japan's classroom education. With rich content and diverse forms, clubs and extracurricular activities play an important role in ensuring the physical and mental health of young people. Take the school sports activities in Japan as an example. School sports activities are the main form of extracurricular sports activities for Japanese middle school students. At the same time, they do not stay at the activity level, because they pay attention to the construction of youth sports organization, so the youth in the organization form a network, which makes the Japanese sports education policy stable and full of vitality (Li & Zhou, 2012). The unity of organization and system construction brings experience to the improvement of extracurricular activities in China.

5.3 Rural and Regional Characteristic Courses

In Japan, rural education is not only traditional book education, but also agricultural education and cultural education with regional characteristics. Rural education is permeated with regional culture. Many areas integrate agricultural practice and regional characteristics into teaching plans and curriculum activities, giving full play to the school's function of cultivating regional comprehensive talents. Rural and regional courses not only stimulate students' initiative, but also promote the development of regional economy. As a large agricultural country, China has a large rural population, but China's monotonous rural education is divorced from the reality of production, and lack of characteristics. Therefore, exploring and establishing the curriculum with rural and regional characteristics are what China will do in the future.

5.4 Special concern of the disadvantaged children

For a long time, China has paid insufficient attention to special education. However, after the second world war, Japan's special education has become compulsory education after a half century's development, forming a relatively complete system of special education. Now Japan has appropriate laws and regulations, standardized management system and high-quality teacher training and these are important factors for the success of special education in Japan. In contrast, China still needs to set up a large number of special education institutions to meet the needs of special children and provide sufficient special education teachers. Only by paying enough attention to the educational needs of special groups in the process of poverty alleviation through education can a more complete poverty alleviation system be established.

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