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*Research Article*

## Origin, Problems and Countermeasures of “Super High School” \*

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### Abstract

In recent years, that phenomenon of “super high school” has become more and more prominent, which destroys the ecological balance of regional education, affects the implementation of quality-oriented education, impairs educational equality, as well as has hidden dangers. We should remodel the concept of school education, adopt the policy of restricting the expansion of “super high school”, reasonably split “super high school” and change the traditional evaluation system of school.

### Keywords

Super High School • Educational Equality

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The admission of the college entrance examination has been a hot issue concerned by the whole society. However, in recent years, that phenomenon of “super high school” in each province has become more and more prominent. Its remarkable characteristic is that the number of teachers and students in school has increased constantly and some schools have accumulated the first-class resources of teachers and students in local and surrounding areas so that these schools divide up the number of university’s autonomous enrollment and students are admitted to first-class colleges and universities in large proportion. The rise and expansion of “super high school” has led to the decline of the proportion of rural registered students in colleges and universities, the difference of entrance opportunities between provinces and regions, and the phenomenon of monopoly of domestic first-class college students in college entrance examination. This not only destroys the ecological balance of education, impairs educational equality, increases the potential safety hazard, but also contributes to the exam-oriented education and the evaluation of the enrollment rate.

### **Origin of “Super High School”**

#### **Social needs and expectation— external factors for the rise of “super high school”**

Along with the social development and progress in China, people attach more and more importance to education. Parents place great hopes on their children who are taken as suitors to change their family’s fate, and the college entrance examination is the only way for them to realize their hope. There is an urgent need for students and parents to have a school with high enrollment rate that will ensure their admission to prestigious universities. And the “super high school” with good educational resources provides them with a good platform to enter the universities. At present, the choice of schools in China is in a spontaneous state, and this behavior has contributed to the formation of “super high school”. With the rapid development of social economy, the material standard of living has been greatly changed and the consumption has also changed from material to culture. Therefore, the educational demand has been increasing, and more and more parents pay great attention to the differences between schools and try their best to send their children to a good school so as to provide a better education platform for their children.

#### **College entrance examination system—root of the rising of “super high school”**

Nowadays, examination system has become a means and mechanism to select talents in society. The reason for choosing such a system lies in that a better and more objective and just system than it hasn’t been designed instead of it is perfect. After more than 40 years of development, China’s college entrance examination system has been deeply rooted in people’s heart. Although there are certain drawbacks, such as the serious exam-oriented education in primary and secondary schools, and unique importance of scores in the selection of talents, the unified college entrance examination system is objective, just and efficient, which has played an active role in selecting excellent students, advocating and encouraging fair competition, and maintaining social stability in China. Compared with other systems, the college entrance examination has realized educational equality to the greatest extent, and has provided opportunity and platform of fair competition for students.

### **Policy factor—the breeding soil of “super high school”**

In the process of educational development, the government has formulated several policies for promoting the expansion of the scale of high school in order to meet the rapid development of social economy and people’s increasing demand for education. For example, in 1999, the “Decision of CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening the Reform of Education and Promoting Quality-oriented Education in an All-round Way” was put forward, requiring to further adjust the existing educational system structure and expand the scale of high school education. In 2001, the “Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic Education” put forward that the goal of China’s high school enrollment rate reaching 60% during the Tenth Five-Year Plan period. To this end, the State Council decided to “support the development of high school education in rural areas of the central and western regions where nine-year compulsory education has been popularized” and required that “step-by-step popularization of high school education should be carried out in large cities and economically developed areas. The potential of existing schools should be excavated and qualified areas are encouraged to implement the separation of high and junior high schools in full secondary schools and to expand the scale of senior high schools”. The “Work Points of the Ministry of Education in 2003” put forward “speeding up the development of high school education, expanding the scale of high school running, encouraging qualified areas to popularize high school education, supporting the development of private high schools and strengthening the construction of demonstrative high schools in county towns” (Wang, 2016). The state policies provide a direct basis for the educational administrative departments to expand the scale of schools. In recent years, local governments and educational administrative departments have also made it an important achievement to make schools bigger and stronger. For example, during the period of 2003-2005, Yichun City in Jiangxi Province spent more than 200 million in building “super high school” which was independent in 2012, fully exposing the problems behind the phenomenon of “super high school”.

### **Benefit—the driving force of “super high school”**

The vigorous expansion of school reflects the profit-seeking nature. Driven by benefits, “super high school” relies on its own scale advantage to obtain greater social and economic benefits, satisfying the government’s demand for educational achievements and the society’s demand for high-quality educational resources. Some educational administrative departments don’t comply with the law of education and teaching, blindly pursue the economic benefits brought by the industrialization of education, and even issue hard index of the enrollment rate to the principals, resulting in the vicious competition between high schools. If a school fails to meet its index, the principal will face the risk of a one-vote veto. The drive of benefits, together with the guidance of local government policies, has promoted the transformation of “super high school” into “super enterprise”, which continuously expands the enrollment scale and charges high fees by means of establishing branch schools, chain schools, international departments and nominal schools to achieve the pursuit of super benefits. Taking Maotanchang Middle School in Anhui Province as an example, the number of students in the school reached 25,000 as of June 2017. In 2018, the number of undergraduates exceeded 10,000 for 4 consecutive years. The rate of reaching line of key universities is 52.12% and the rate of reaching line of colleges is 92.5%. It is known as “Asian biggest college entrance examination machine”, “college entrance examination factory” and “college student processing factory”.

### **Market choice—promotion of the production of “super high school”**

Along with the construction of socialist market economy in China, the educational development has been greatly influenced and impacted by the development of market economy. The development mode of education has changed to some extent, which is the result of free choice of market. In a certain aspect, the “super high school” on the basis of high-quality schools is also a brand precipitated by time wash, thus mapping out the good word-of-mouth enjoyed by the schools in the society. It is the result of fierce market competition and free choice of the masses. Many years ago, there was a phenomenon of “first school in county” in each province—most of the places in the key universities were occupied by “first school in county”. However, in recent years, the “super high school” of “top priority” has pushed the “first school in county” phenomenon to a higher level (Xiong, 2013). Many of these “super high schools” come from local “key high schools” and “provincial demonstrative high schools”.

## **Problems Existing in “Super High School”**

### **Formation of educational monopoly and destruction of regional educational ecological balance**

Through monopolizing excellent students and gathering high-quality educational resources, “super high school” has become a “jumbo”, “education aircraft carrier” and “giant school”. In order to meet the needs of its own development, “super high school” formulates various preferential policies with its own advantages to attract teachers at the grass-roots level, trying to enroll local excellent students, enroll a large number of non-registered students, and charge high fees. In this case, the scale of weak schools increasingly shrinks, leading to poorer student resources and the loss of outstanding teachers. The “super high school” forms a monopoly on the educational resources in the region and destroys the balance of regional education ecology at the expense of the interests of most schools and the coordinated development of regional education. Among them, Hengshui High School is the representative of monopoly and Fengshan Middle School in Xifeng County, Guangxi is the representative of being monopolized.

### **Damage to educational equity**

“Super high schools” are mostly concentrated in the cities or provincial capital cities and far from the countryside, which will inevitably reduce the opportunity for rural students to study in them (Wang, 2016). At the same time, Tsinghua University, Peking University and other famous universities give priority of admission in some super high schools. According to public data, in 2017, the number of students enrolled by Tsinghua University and Peking University in Hengshui High School, Hebei reached 176, of which 97 were enrolled at Tsinghua University and 79 were enrolled at Peking University. In addition to Hengshui High School, Hebei, 415 students from six “super high schools” in Beijing—The High School Attached to Renmin University of China, Beijing National Day School, The Experimental High School Attached To Beijing Normal University, Beijing No. 4 High School, Tsinghua University High School, and The Second High School Attached To Beijing Normal University were admitted to Tsinghua University and Peking University. In addition, the “super high school” also occupies a great advantage in the aspects of independent recruitment and student

recommended for admission. This inevitably produces the crowding-out effect. First of all, the opportunities for students of different schools to enter the first-class universities are unequal, and the students of “super high school” have much more opportunities to enter the first-class universities than those in the general schools. Besides, the children of families with different social capital stock have different educational opportunities, and the children of families with high social capital are far more likely to enter the super high schools than those of families with low social capital (Yang, 2017). The “super high school” runs counter to the principle of “equal opportunity for education” stipulated in the educational laws and regulations. At the same time, too big class size in most “super high schools” also inevitably causes imbalanced educational resource allocation and leads to unfairness of students to receive education, which is unfavorable to students’ physical and mental health development (Liang and Zhang, 2016).

### **Influence on the effective promotion of quality-oriented education**

To enjoy high-quality education of elite universities, students must have a good exam performance, and exam performance (whether the student is recommended or attend college entrance examination) mainly depends on the quality of high school education and teaching. The reality is that high-quality educational resources are concentrated in “super high schools” and key high schools (Kim, 2018).

All “super high schools” attach great importance to the exam-oriented education, take a high enrollment rate as the goal, focus on the “enrollment rate in Tsinghua University and Peking University” and make high-profile publicity of “top scorer of gaokao (college entrance examination). As a result, they emphasize one-sidedly the exam-oriented skills in education and teaching instead of the overall development of students. Some “super high schools” have even formed a strict “training” system combining discipline and punishment, which severely restricts the cultivation of talents and the free development of students. In addition, a “super high school” has a large scale and big size in class of over 100 students. Facing the big size class and under the exam-oriented education background, teachers often adopt the cramming teaching form, making it difficult to take care of the development of each student in the course of teaching. Thus, teaching according to student’s aptitude becomes empty talk (Xi, 2014).

### **Existence of potential safety hazard**

The scale of “super high school” and the size of the class are too large. Firstly, all the students in the school have insufficient occupation area and limited activity space, which is unfavorable to the students’ healthy exercise. Secondly, the small space and poor air quality in the classroom seriously endangers students’ health. Thirdly, due to the large number of students and the large amount of homework, the work burden of teachers is too heavy, so teachers have no more time for emotional communication with students. Students’ mental health is difficult to get concern when they are under pressure of study. The heavy burden also makes that teachers’ physical and mental health is not guaranteed. In addition, the scale and class size of the “super high school” has brought new challenges to the management of the school. The reasonable scale of the school is more beneficial to the equipment of teachers, the growth of students and the management of the school, as well as to the improvement of the level of education and teaching.

## Countermeasures of Managing “Super High School”

### Re-understanding the role of school education from concept

As early as 1948, General Assembly of the United Nations passed the resolution 217A (III) and promulgated the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” holds that “everyone has the right to receive education”, “Education aims at fully developing human personality and strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. The school is the specialized organization that trains people and the main task and function of the school is “cultivating people”, which is the biggest difference between the school and other organizations. In school, students not only study knowledge in books, but also learn to experience the meaning of life and realize their own value. The role of schools and teachers is not only to answer questions, but to teach students to behave themselves and to be physically and mentally healthy. However, in “super high schools”, the number of students is so large that teachers can’t pay attention to each student. It is difficult for teachers to really understand students’ personality characteristics and teach students according to their aptitude. At the same time, the evaluation standard is mainly based on students’ scores while neglecting the education of students’ outlook on life, world outlook and values, which deviates from the idea of national quality-oriented education, making it difficult to achieve the goal of “cultivating people” in schools. Therefore, we should re-understand the role of school education from the perspective of concept, and the educational administrative departments should also change the evaluation mode of school with the enrollment rate as the important index, strengthen quality-oriented education as the strength of school assessment, and ensure that quality education is implemented so as to strengthen the cultivating people function of schools (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

### Introducing relevant policies to restrict the expansion of “super high school” on the policy level

**Increasing educational investment and establishing a scientific distribution mechanism.** Ensuring the fair allocation of educational resources is an important factor in educational development. The insufficient investment in educational funds in China affects the development of education (Anderson, 1976). Although the investment in educational funds in China increased from 3.93% of GDP in 2011 to 4.22% in 2016, there is little investment in education as a whole, so it is necessary to increase the investment in education and increase the funds for education.

The foundation of educational equality is the equality of the allocation of educational resources. It is necessary to adjust the internal allocation of national educational resources, the allocation in urban and rural areas and the allocation pattern in regions, change the investment pattern and increase the investment in weak schools. We should strengthen the support and construction of weak schools, improve their educational quality, and make education develop in a direction conducive to balance and coordination.

**Taking measures to restrict the expansion of “super high school”.** First of all, the proportion of teachers and students, the number of students in the school, the area of “super high school” should be restricted. The Ministry of Education has strict requirements on the scale of schools, the average floor area per student, the proportion of teachers and students. The state should introduce policies to strictly restrict from the aspects, and take certain measures to punish schools that violate. At the same time, that “super high school” expands

recruitment in disguised form to accumulate wealth through establishment of branch schools, chain schools, nominal schools should be prohibited.

Secondly, the demonstrative high schools, key high schools and other “super high schools” are prohibited to conduct trans-regional enrollment. Many “super high schools” have high performance because the government gives them the privilege of trans-regional enrollment to admit excellent students. It is the key measure to ensure the normal order of high schools to break the monopoly of “super high school” to excellent students and to cancel their special policy of trans-regional enrollment of excellent students. According to the provisions of the “National Outline of Education Planning”, the exchange system between teachers and principals shall be implemented. “The method of rational allocation of school enrollment places to junior middle schools in the region” shall be adopted to promote the balanced development of compulsory education. In 2008, Jinzhong City began to implement the teacher mobility system, implementing the exchange system of principals and teachers in the city’s primary and secondary schools and “system that non-registered students don’t enjoy high-quality high school indicators”. The strict implementation of this policy ensures the healthy development of each county, stabilizes the excellent students and teachers in junior high schools of each county, and creates a batch of high-quality high schools.

Thirdly, it is necessary to change the enrollment policy of famous universities. For example, enrollment quota of Tsinghua University and Peking University and other famous-brand universities in famous high schools ahead of time should be cancelled, and the enrollment quota of Tsinghua University and Peking University in each famous high school should be limited by determining an appropriate upper limit. The balanced distribution of high-quality students will enable more high schools to show their levels, which is conducive to the healthy development of regional education as a whole.

Finally, we should increase supervision and ensure that the state’s restrictions on “super high schools” are put into practice. Education in high school doesn’t belong to compulsory education and lacks legislation. The key to manage “super high school” is the government’s supervision on management of huge school fees and sponsorship fees, fundamentally curbing the blind expansion of “super high school”.

**Improving the mechanism of teacher allocation and promoting the general balance of regional high school development.** First of all, regular rotation exchange system of teachers should be conducted. On the one hand, teachers with strong teaching ability, advanced teaching concept and rich experience from “super high schools” and “key high schools” are selected to teach in ordinary high schools. On the other hand, the teacher exchange is linked with the title evaluation, the salary and treatment. The voluntariness of teachers and dispatch by the organization are combined, and the regular exchange system of teachers is gradually formed so as to promote the improvement of the education and teaching level of teachers in high schools in an all-round way. At present, some areas in China have already started the trial of regular rotation system of teachers. In his two proposals on “the implementation of the regular rotation system of teachers” and on “the implementation of the three projects of ‘one million teachers’ and strengthening the construction of rural teachers and improving the quality of rural education”, Zhou Hongyu, representative of the National People’s Congress, summarized the pilot situation in a number of areas. In Shenyang, Liaoning Province, the policy stipulates that 30% of teachers in every school in the city must take part in the inter-school rotation. Wuchang District of Wuhan City began to

implement the “principal tenure system” in 2010, and tried out the “teacher flowing system” in order to promote the balanced development of compulsory education.

Secondly, the unified system of teacher establishment shall be implemented in urban and rural areas. For a long time, China has implemented the standard of primary and secondary school teachers’ establishment as stipulated in “Opinions on Standards for Establishment of Primary and Secondary School Teachers” issued by the State Council in 2001. The ratio of teachers and students in urban, county and rural primary schools is 1:19, 1:21 and 1:23 respectively and the ratio of teachers and students in junior high school is 1:13.5, 1:16 and 1:18. This establishment standard takes the compression establishment and the efficiency priority, the city priority as the guidance, which shows outstanding flaw that the establishment standard is tight and biased to city. On November 13, 2014, State Commission Office of Public Sectors Reform, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued the “Notice on the Unification of Standards for the Establishment of Teachers and Staff in Primary and Secondary Schools in Urban and Rural Areas”. The Notice is mainly to standardize the establishment standard, promote the balanced allocation of primary and secondary education resources in urban and rural areas, adhere to strict management, strictly control the total amount of establishment, strengthen departmental coordination, do a good job of dynamic adjustment and overall use, and consider actual needs and appropriately bias for rural remote areas. In addition, the Notice stipulates detailed requirements and regulations on deepening logistics reform, increasing government procurement of services, strengthening supervision, and strictly regulating the establishment and management of primary and secondary school teachers and staff. After the notice was issued, many places began to implement it. On the premise of the unified establishment system of urban and rural teachers, rural primary and secondary schools are appropriately biased according to the differences between urban and rural primary and secondary schools and the teacher’s establishment becomes scientific and suitable based on the actual situation so that the teacher’s establishment management system can realize the combination of urban and rural education needs in a real sense.

Finally, we should improve the training mechanism (Tett, 1993; Ito, Koyama & Otsuka, 2015). To improve the professional level of teachers, the training and continuing education of teachers is indispensable. First, according to the requirements of curriculum reform, we should establish a scientific and feasible teacher training system that matches with the reform of basic education, explore a training model suitable for teachers of different disciplines, as well as constantly improve the quality of training. Second, we should increase the input of teacher training to ensure the smooth development of teacher training. Third, we should formulate a training plan, do a good job of communication with the school, and scientifically design a training curriculum system so that the teachers participating in the training can learn something and use it. Fourth, teacher training and learning should be carried out in various forms. At the same time, in the training mode, we can combine research and training, network training and school-based training. Fifth, more attention shall be paid to the weak schools and rural schools in training so as to improve teachers’ education and teaching ability.

### **Reasonably splitting up “super high school”**

Excellent schools are characterized by small classes (Johnstone, 1981; Zhang & Lin, 2015). Under the situation of decreasing school-age population and increasing educational input in China, implementing small classes and small-scale schools should also be the basic pursuit of educational modernization. The Ministry of

Education also stipulates that the number of students in a class in secondary schools should not exceed 50. The “super high school” obviously violates the state’s explicit stipulation on the scale of running a school. The key measure of governance is to split up the “super high school”. According to the documents such as “Building Standard of Urban Ordinary Primary and Secondary Schools” and “Building Standard of Rural Ordinary Primary and Secondary Schools” formulated by the State successively, the upper limit of ideal scale of running schools is: the largest scale of secondary schools and senior high schools is 36 classes and 1800 people. The “Opinions on Strengthening the Basic Construction Planning during the 12th Five-Year Plan” issued by the Ministry of Education in 2012 requires rational planning of the service radius and scale of the school. In principle, the number of people in an ordinary high school doesn’t exceed 3,000. In 2011, Shandong Provincial Education Department issued “Opinions on Strictly Controlling the Scale and Class Size of Ordinary Primary and Secondary Schools”, holding that the appropriate size of a high school is 24 to 48 classes and each class doesn’t exceed 50 students. Governments and competent departments should introduce policies to restrict the scale of schools, formulate a reasonable timetable and implementation measure to split up “super high schools” and strictly implement them, as well as adopt a yearly reduction of enrollment and separation of schools to prevent the spilt “super high schools” becoming “super high schools” again and make schools and class return to the appropriate scale step by step.

#### **Reforming the traditional school evaluation system**

In 2010, “National Program for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)” issued by Ministry of Education pointed out that it is necessary to promote the diversified development of ordinary high schools, promote the diversification of school-running systems, and encourage ordinary high schools to develop their characteristics. “Classified examination, comprehensive evaluation and multiple enrollment” have become the three key points of the reform of college entrance examination. The “Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Important Issues of Comprehensive Deepening Reform” proposed in the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee in November 2013, attached important to the operation mechanism of the separation of enrollment and examination, multiple choices of student examinations, the independent enrollment of students according to law, the organization and implementation of professional institutions, and the supervision of social participation, fundamentally solving the drawback of an examination determining the whole life . The educational competent departments should also change the way of education evaluation, abandon the way of school evaluation which takes enrollment rate as the important index, and weaken the government’s push for “super high school” fundamentally. At the same time, attention should be paid to the needs of the common people for high-quality educational resources. The coverage of high-quality educational resources shall be expanded to achieve the opening and sharing of high-quality educational resources (Coleman, 1990). On the one hand, we should scientifically plan the scale layout of ordinary high schools, expand or build a batch of ordinary high schools in some areas that are obviously insufficient in schools. On the other hand, we should actively explore various ways of expanding high-quality educational resources.

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