

Chinese Special University Admission Policy towards the Poor Rural Areas Students: Equal Education Rights Protection or not?

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Abstract

From 2012, Chinese government began to carry out the special university admission policy towards the poor rural students. The purpose of this policy is protecting the equal education rights and achieving the fair and justice of the education. Because of the low economic development, the high school education or elementary school education in the poor rural areas are not as good as the urban cities'. The students in these poor rural areas have little chance to be admitted into the university. Therefore, Chinese government made the special policy to protect their equal educational rights. The policy required the public key universities should reserve certain quota every year for the poor rural students. This paper will review the development of this special policy and its current situation. After that, the paper will discuss the disputes about this special policy and try to make some proposal for the future of this special policy in China.

Key words: University Admission; Equal Education Rights; Affirmative Action

I: Introduction

In China, most of the poor people live in the rural areas. How to help the poor people in the rural areas to overcome the poverty is one of important challenges faced by the Chinese government. Chinese government think that the best way to overcome the poverty is to offer the good education in the poor rural areas. The National outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) pointed out “promote the education justice is the basic national education policy and the educational resources should be allocated more to the poor rural areas”. Therefore, the related Chinese government agencies made the special admission policy towards the students from the poor rural areas.

II: The development of the Special University Admission Policy towards the Poor Rural Areas Students

In March 19, 2012, Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China, the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance of People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of People’s Republic of China and The State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development issued jointly the Notice on the Special Admission Policy towards the Special Poor Areas Students. The main contents of this special plan are: From 2012, the government began to carry out the special plan: the public key universities should reserve certain quota for the students from certain poor areas and encourage the students to work in the poor rural areas when they graduate from the university. According to this notice, about 10,000 students from the 680 poor counties decided by the State Council will be admitted into the university every year. The purpose of this plan is to promote the justice of the education.

In 2013, the State Council repeated that “Overcoming the poverty should place the education in priority and the basic way to reduce the poverty is education. The government should allocate more education resources to the middle and western parts of China and the rural areas. The public key universities should increase the percentage of rural students”. The poor rural areas was expanded from 680 to 832 counties. The quota was increased to 32100. The universities that should carried out the special plan was expanded from 222 to 263.¹

In 2014, Chinese government report addressed again that “the percentage of poor rural students admitted into the key top universities should be increased by 10% more”. From 2015-2017, the government go on carrying out the special admission policy and increase the quota of the students from the poor rural areas admitted into the key universities.

¹ See the State Council, “Increasing the percentage of rural students in key universities”, [EB/OL], [2013-05-16], <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0516/e1027-21500973.html>

III: The Main Contents of the Special University Admission Policy towards the Poor Rural Area Students

In order to understand clearly about the qualifications and the selection process of the special plan, we choose ten public key universities in different parts in China: Peking University (Beijing), Tsing University (Beijing), China's People's University (Beijing), Shanghai Jiao Tong University (shanghai), Fudan University (shanghai), Nanjing University (Jiangsu Province), Sichuan University (Sichuan Province), Lanzhou University (Gasu Province), Jilin University (Jilin Province)and Wuhan University (Hubei Province). We studied the 2018 special plan admission brochures of the ten universities

1. The Qualifications of the Special Plan

The students who are qualified for this special plan should come from the remote, poor county and have to meet the following requirements:

- 1.1 The student should meet the qualifications of 2018 national unified university entrance examination;
- 1.2 The student's and his or her father or mother or legal guardian's household registration should register in the rural areas covered by this plan, the student should have the local household registration for at least 3 years;
- 1.3 The student have studied in the high school located in the county he owns the household registration for at least 3 years;
- 1.4 Most of the universities require that the students should have a good performance in the high school. Most of the requirements are general, such as hard study, excellent grades. There are two universities which have specific requirements. China People's university requires that the candidates should be ranked as top 5% 。 Nanjing University requires that the candidates should be in the top 3% in the grade 3 of high school.

2. The selection process

2.1 Reviewing the application document

After receiving the applications from the candidates, all of the ten universities have the similar reviewing process. The review will be based on the GPA, the prize, the social practice, personal statement and family backgrounds. After the reviewing, the universities will decide the list of the qualified students for the special plan.

2.2 the written and oral examinations

Not all universities require the students who have the qualifications to take part in the independent test. 3 of the ten universities have the special tests. They are Peking University, Tsing University and Nanjing University.

2.3 The publicity of the final list

The final list of the students who have the qualifications will be in public in the university websites as well as the education department website.

3. the supporting program

Most of the universities offer the supporting program for the poor rural area students. The universities provide the economic supports such as the interest-free or low-interest loan, the part-time job for the students. The universities also provide the special directions on their studies and life, such as arranging the excellent alumni and professors to help them with their study and development.

4. the Preferential Policy

Normally, the preferential policy is reducing the required marks for the students who have the qualifications. Most of the universities declare that they can reduce the marks to the local first level university admission standard marks. Some universities have more specific preferential policies. For example, Tsing University states that the poor rural students qualified have 30-60 marks reduction. For the students who are excellent in the physical test have another 5 marks reduction. Shanghai Jiao Tong University put the preference in another way. It does not state clearly how many marks reduction. It requires that the science students should be 70 marks above the local first level university admission marks while the humanity students should be 60 marks above the local first level university admission marks.

IV: the Disputes about the Special University Admission Policy towards the Poor Rural Areas Students

1. the Arguments Supporting the plan

1.1 Necessary Measures to balance the unequal development of Education

In China, big differences exist in economic development in different areas, such as between eastern and western parts, between city and rural areas. The difference in economic development leads to the unequal development in education. Some reports pointed out the decrease of the students from the rural areas in china's key universities from 1990s. In Peking University, the number of the students from the rural areas dropped from 30% to 10%; In Tsinghua University, the percentage of the students from the rural areas is only 17%.² The students from the rural areas mostly study in the common local universities instead of top national universities. Take the Hubei province for example, the percentage of rural students in junior colleges increased from 39% to 62% during 2002-2007; while in the key top national university, the percentage of rural students dropped year

² See "No Spring for Poor Children—Why the students from the poor are far away from the key university", "Southern Weekend", August 5, 2011.

by year.³ The research concludes that the lower in the society, the less chance to be admitted into the key university. In order to change the unequal situation in the higher education, it is necessary to carry out the plan and offer more chances for the students from the rural areas.

1.2 Necessary Measures to Realize Social Stratum Flow

China's scholars think that the Chinese university entrance examination is one of the way to realize social stratum flow. For the children who are born in the rural areas, to be admitted into the university is one of the basic important ways to change their own even their family's poverty. From 1990s, with the enrollment expansion in the university, the discussion began to focus on the opportunities to be admitted into the top universities. According to research conducted by Yun-san Liu, professor of school of education of Peking University, Take the Peking university as example, from 1978 to 1998, the percentage of the students from the rural areas is 20%-40%. From the middle of 1990s, the rural students' percentage began to decrease. From 2000-2005, the percentage of the students from the rural areas decreased to 10%-15%. In 2013, Peking University published officially the percentage of rural students. The data shows that the percentage of rural students is about 10%.⁴ In 2012 Tsinghua University carried out an investigation about the percentage of rural students in all the national universities. The investigation shows that: at that time the percentage of the rural students in all China's universities is 52.8%, compared with that 64% percent of Chinese people lived in the rural areas at that time. The research further shows that 0.8% percent of the rural people have the chance to study in the university. By contrast, 1.3% percent of the urban people can be admitted into the university. Therefore, it can be concluded that the rural students are in the disadvantage in the higher education.⁵ In China, one import way for the poor rural children to change their life is to be admitted into the university. After graduation, they have more chance to find good job. Good education for the poor rural children means good job opportunities for them. This is the way for the poor to realize the social stratum flow.

According to the data published by Peking University, in 2013, the percentage of the rural students in Peking University is 14.2%, increased 1.7% compared with 2012. Tsing University began to the independent admission examination towards the poor rural students. The students enrolled based on this special plan are: in 2011, 8 students; in 2012, 30 students and in 2013 76 students.⁶ This data shows that the percentage of the poor rural students increased in the top key universities because the special plan.

³ Ibid

⁴ See the development of the poverty students 's college enrollment in the 40 years, Yun Nan Education, 2017.10

⁵ See the development of the poverty students 's college enrollment in the 40 years, Yun Nan Education, 2017.10

⁶ See the development of the poverty students 's college enrollment in the 40 years, Yun Nan Education, 2017.10

1.3 the Compensation to the Vulnerable Groups in Education in China

The compensation education theory holds that because of the influence of the family, the children who were born in the vulnerable family normally do not very well in the studies. They have learning difficulties in reading, communication and language because social environment and cultural background they live have great differences with the dominant society. These differences lead to the disadvantages in the education for these children and the vicious circle existed. If the vicious circle wants to be broken, the government should make the compensation to these children. These children are mostly minorities or from the poor families. The education compensation principle plays an important role in protection of these children.

Husen is the famous educationist. According to his theory, the education equality means not only the equal educational opportunity but also mean the equality in process and outcome. The equal educational opportunity refers to every children have the same rights to be admitted into the school. The equal process means that during their studies in the school, they should not be discriminated based on gender, nationality, religious belief etc. What's more, the equal outcome of education should be protected. Husen think that in order to protect the equal outcome, the government and the public school should make compensation to the students who are in disadvantages.⁷

Rawls's compensation theory holds that in order to treat everyone equally and provide the real equal opportunity, the society should pay more attention to the people who are in the disadvantages when they are born.

Many scholars think that the special plan in China meet the above-mentioned compensation principle. The special plan is the compensation to the vulnerable group in education in China. In poor rural area in China, the school's condition is bad and the teachers are lack of skills and experiences. Furthermore, the current educational policy are unfair for the poor rural students. For example, the quota based on provinces of key universities, the preferences towards the students who have special skills. Because of the unprivileged status in current educational systems, the compensation to the students from the poor areas are justified. The purpose is to promote the justice of the education and bridge the gap between the city and the rural areas and meet the requirement of equal protection provided by Chinese constitution.⁸

⁷ Chu yan, Zhao Jing: the Comments on Husen's Educational Thoughts, Journal Of Xuzhou Normal University (Social Science), (2007) 4.

⁸ See Minli Ji, An Analysis of the Necessity and Legitimacy of the Enrollment Policy of "Poor Students Special Project", Journal of Gangsu Radio& TV University, Vol 23 No 2

2. the argument against the special plan

2.1 Reverse discrimination

There are also many other people think that the special plan seems justice on the surface, but it infringes some other students' educational rights. The resources of higher quality education is limited. The special quota for the poor rural students means some other students have to "give up" their rights. Some students should have been admitted into the university without the special plan. The special plan is the discrimination against them.

There is another discrimination because of this special plan. Not all of the poor rural students can be included in this plan. Only some very excellent students whose grades of university entrance examination reach the minimum requirement of the first level have the qualifications. Before the special plan, these students only can be admitted into the common university, but because of the special plan, they have the opportunity to be admitted into the top key universities. In some sense, this kind privilege is "adding their examination score". As for the students who are also in the poor rural areas but their grades of university entrance examination does not reach the minimum requirement of the first level, there is no any such kind of privilege of "adding their examination score". Obviously, this special plan is unfair for them. A few excellent poor rural students have more opportunities to study in the top key universities, however most of the common poor rural students have no any enrolment privileges. The special plan leads to the different treatment among the poor rural students.

2.2 Weaken Function of Selection of Excellent Talent in Higher Education

Suppose the total quota for the students to be admitted into the higher education is the unchangeable, the special plan reserve the quota for the rural students by lowering the admission standard. City students who are more excellent than the rural students will lose the opportunity to be admitted into the university. As for the university, it also lose the opportunities to enroll more qualified students. This special plan leads to the decreasing of students more qualified in the key university, thus the function of selection of excellent talent in higher education weaken.

2.3 Wasting the Education Resources

Some scholars think that the family background is one of important educational resources. The government should recognize the education difference based on the family background. If the government lowers the enrolment standard just because their family background, in fact, the family who pay more attention to educate their children are punished. This will unfair for these families.

This special plan allows the poor rural students to be admitted into the university by lowing the enrolment standard. When they begin to study in the university, these students maybe can't keep up with the study even give up their study. According to the investigation on the performance of the special plan students when they began to study in the top university, conducted by Lu Yi, the

researcher of Fudan Higher Education Research Institute, the special plan students really have many difficulties in learning. The research proposed that the university should provide special learning and development help.

2.4 Lack of Improvement of Basic Education in poor rural area

The special plan's main purpose is increasing the poor rural students' percentage in the key universities. The poor rural students only can have the privileges after the university entrance examination. Before the university entrance examination, the plan has no any help for the poor rural students. Based on one investigation on the low percentage of rural students in the university, the low qualification of rural school teacher is the main reason that the low percentage of rural students in the university.⁹ The other factors includes the low investment in education, the bad teaching environment and the concept of education in the rural families. The education investment includes the monetary investment and the personnel investment. The teaching condition is bad and the salary is very low in the poor rural areas. Many high quality teachers choose to leave the village. The special plan does not change the worse education in the village and can not improve the education in the poor rural areas, so it is impossible to achieve the education justice in the poor rural areas.

V: Conclusion

China's special university admission plan based on the educational compensation theory. The educational compensation theory think that the government should compensate the vulnerable groups in education when they were born. Such children can't get the equal education because of the congenital condition.

There are two key questions in the compensation theory: who are qualified to compensation and how to compensate

In China, the unbalanced development between the urban and rural areas is obvious. The special plan can balance the difference in education effectively. It guarantees that more excellent poor rural students have more chances to study in the key universities. The plan does not constitute the discrimination against the urban students. These two concepts have different condition. The special plan based on the different education resources. The urban students have better study environment when they are born. The special plan is the compensation to the rural students because of the worse education condition. The reverse discrimination based on the difference in the admission instead of the education condition when they were born. Therefore, the poor rural students qualified for the compensation.

⁹ See Nana Zhao, Doudou Tian, less and less rural students in the key universities, *People's Daily*, 2009.11.1

The dispute is the second question: how to compensate the poor rural students. The current plan has two big problems. One problem is the defects in the enforcement. Because of the privilege, some parents change their children's household registration from the city to the village. This is so-called "university entrance examination immigration". The immigration makes it very difficult to verify the qualification of the students. Another problem is the lack of effective subsequent training system. The education compensation provided by the special plan is the compensation to the university entrance admission. After the poor rural students begin to study in the university, most of the universities have no specific plan to provide the subsequent privilege. Because of the differences in the live and study environment, the poor rural students have difficulties in integrating into the new education environment. They are lack of confidence and are lonely in the university. There is no effective way to resolve their problems. Many of these students began to doubt their ability in learning and living, which lead to bad performance in their study even in their employment after their graduation.

In conclusion, the special plan can achieve the education justice in short term, but in the long run, this plan can't change the worse education environment in the poor area fundamentally.