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Educational Involution from the Perspective of Social Stratification Theory: Manifestations, Causes, and Breakthrough Paths

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Abstract: Educational involution has become an important issue affecting family consumption levels, parental leisure welfare, and students' physical and mental health. Therefore, this article explores the manifestations and main causes of educational involution from the perspective of social stratification theory. Specifically, basic education involution aims to acquire or consolidate a unified identity, higher education involution seeks to obtain a special identity, and involution in social tutoring and overseas education enhances capital for academic advancement. "Involutionary" education has become the most common way for residents to achieve social mobility, so the key to solving educational involution lies not within the education sector itself but outside it. Proposed solutions include: accelerating the development of multi-center metropolitan areas, continuously enhancing the inclusiveness of core cities in large metropolitan areas, reducing development gaps between metropolitan areas, strengthening the voice of lower-tier residents within metropolitan areas, and effectively balancing professional status and income levels.

Keywords: Social Stratification Theory, Educational Involution, Social Hierarchy Division, Status Group, Metropolitan Area.

1. Introduction

"Involution" has also become an important issue affecting China's economic and social development. Currently, the phenomenon of involution in China is not only present in numerous commercial fields such as healthcare, finance, law, internet, and e-commerce, but also in areas like early childhood education, compulsory education, high school education, and higher education. Educational involution not only increases family economic burdens and consumes parents' leisure time, but also worsens the educational and teaching pressures on schools and teachers, and can even have serious negative impacts on students' physical and mental health. Therefore, conducting in-depth analysis of the practical manifestations and causes of educational involution, and then scientifically exploring breakthrough paths for educational involution, has important practical significance.

The term 'involution' first appeared in the field of philosophy, proposed by German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his work 'Critique of Judgment' [1]. It was subsequently introduced by scholars such as Goldenweiser, Geertz, and Huang Zongzhi into cultural studies, economics, and used to explain the phenomenon of diminishing marginal returns in China's small-scale peasant economy [2]. In contemporary times, it has become generalized and entered multiple economic and social science research fields in China, including education. Taking the involution of college entrance exams (Gaokao) and higher education admissions as an example, according to publicly available data, from 1978 to 2024, the number of Gaokao applicants in China increased from 6.1 million to 13.42 million, while the higher education admission rate surged from 6.59% to 83.45%. During this period, the lowest number of Gaokao applicants was 1.64 million in 1984, and the highest admission rate was 92.86% in 2021. Particularly since 2021, the number of undergraduate and vocational college admissions in China has exceeded 10 million annually. However, this has triggered a series of increasingly severe socio-economic development issues, including degree devaluation, employment difficulties for college graduates, social stratificationdeformity, anddeformity talent structures. Resolving the problem of educational involution in China has become extremely urgent.

There are several different views in Chinese academic circles regarding the causes of educational involution and its mitigation methods. Some scholars believe that social and cultural transformation during the transition period has triggered educational involution, and the solution lies in improving education quality and correctly handling the relationship between education and economy, politics, culture, and society [3]. Some scholars point out that misdirected orientation, group pressure, and poor physical and mental health have trapped contemporary college students in the involution dilemma. Students should break through by broadening their horizons, stepping back when necessary, sharing resources, and cultivating their physical and mental well-being [4]. Other scholars indicate that meritocracy is the root cause of educational involution [5], whose essence is that competition and evaluation have replaced education; therefore, we should return to the essence of education itself [6]. Additionally, some scholars argue that the inertial thinking of achieving class leapfrogging through education [7] and the possibility of class mobility via education [8] are important reasons for the prominence of educational involution. The ways to break through the involution for college students include self-relief, ideological education guidance, and improvements in the education system and social environment [9].

Existing research on the causes of educational involution either attributes it to an inevitable process of economic and social transformation or points to evaluation mechanisms as the trigger. Proposed solutions range from repositioning education's role in the economy and society, advising students to achieve breakthroughs through self-help, to emphasizing persuasive ideological education for students and parents.

Consequently, none have recognized that the key to solving educational involution lies outside the education sector itself. Although a few studies have identified underlying social causes related to achieving class mobility or status transition, their arguments remain insufficiently profound and fail to provide effective methods for overcoming educational involution as the primary means of social advancement. Given this, based on the perspective of social stratification theory, this article deeply explores the manifestations of educational involution under the impact of social stratification and its main causes, then investigates potential pathways to break through China's educational involution dilemma from outside the education field.

2. Realistic Manifestations of Social Stratification and Educational Involution

2.1. Social Stratification Theory and Social Hierarchy Division

Current social stratification theories primarily include Karl Marx's class stratification theory and Max Weber's social stratification theory. Among these, the former employs a qualitative and unidimensional stratification criterion, using 'class' as the sole standard for social stratification evaluation; the latter adopts multidimensional criteria, including wealth, power, prestige, and other social stratification standards [10]. Regarding China, from 1949 to the present, research on social stratification and mobility in China has progressed from being completely dominated by political class theory to gradually developing towards multiple theoretical orientations and multidimensional thematic perspectives [11]. Especially since the reform and opening-up, China's social stratification mechanisms have been replaced by multidimensional stratification standards centered on economy, wealth, and capital. The occupational structure has become more high-level and white-collar oriented, and new social strata and groups have begun to emerge [12]. Therefore, comparatively speaking, multidimensional social stratification standards may be more suitable for studying the realistic manifestations of current Chinese social stratification and educational involution.

Influenced by multiple factors such as economy, wealth, and capital, China has basically formed a dynamic evolution pattern of alternating influence between education and social stratification: "...social hierarchy → children's and self-education capital → education level, skills, opportunities → different resource endowments → social hierarchy...". That is, parents or grandparents achieve a certain social hierarchy status through economic, wealth, capital and other multidimensional factors. Being in different social hierarchies means families have varying access to regional educational resources, school district resources, family investment in education funds, and home education environments. More superior educational resources typically mean that children or individuals are more likely to obtain higher education degrees, better graduation institutions, and higher skill levels, as well as higher-quality employment opportunities and positions. Education level, skills, and opportunities then further influence the resource endowments of the children's generation, consequently affecting their social hierarchy position, thus creating a cyclical evolution and intergenerational transmission.

Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasize that the stratification based on multidimensional elements such as economy, wealth, and capital in China not only manifests as differences in occupational classes but also significantly reflects disparities in the resource endowments of the urban areas where families reside. This has steadily formed a six-tier social (regional) hierarchy: 'municipalities or first-tier cities, new first-tier or provincial capital cities, prefecture-level cities, counties, towns, and rural areas.' Families within a specific social tier automatically acquire the 'unified identity' of that tier, which includes identical household registration status, educational resources, social public services, and institutional safeguards. Meanwhile, relatively scarce high-quality social resources are predominantly concentrated in urban areas, making the top three social tiers the focal points of competition for this 'unified identity.' Of course, within the same social tier, different families or even different members of the same family possess a 'special identity.' This 'special identity' may stem from variations in educational background, alma mater, profession, technical titles, or even different positions within the same workplace. The acquisition of these 'special identities' typically requires individual effort from family members, with higher educational capital obtained through intense academic competition playing a critical role. Consequently, to at least maintain the family's or children's social tier and, to some extent, achieve upward social mobility, engaging in intense education competition has become an inevitable choice for Chinese society as a whole.

2.2. Characteristics and Harms of Educational Involution under the Impact of Social Stratification

Under the impact of social stratification, the educational involution in China exhibits significant characteristics such as top-down influence, passive participation, and inertial development. It also leads to harms including hierarchical discrimination based on graduate institutions and the spillover of social anxiety about education.

First, the impact of social stratification on educational involution operates from the top down, transmitting sequentially from higher education to high school education, middle school education, elementary education, and even early childhood education. Graduates from higher education institutions are more likely to secure high-quality jobs, thus possessing stronger endowments to obtain, consolidate, or even achieve upward social mobility. Particularly high-level talents with doctoral degrees, postdoctoral experience, or overseas research experience may more easily acquire 'special status' within the social hierarchy. The involutionary behaviors in higher education have also raised the threshold for accessing quality educational resources and reinforced employers' preference for higher degrees, leading to a sequential distortion where master's students engage in research competition, undergraduates compete in contests, and vocational college students strive for 'upgrading to bachelor's programs.' To attend higher education institutions with superior faculty resources, funding, academic standards, advancement opportunities, and employment prospects, involutionary behaviors have already cascaded down to the high school education stage, where the problem of involution has the broadest impact and highest social concern. Naturally, to enroll in high schools with excellent teachers, parents and students have extended competition to middle school

education, then to elementary education, and even to early childhood education. This sequential progression has already occurred and continues to worsen.

Secondly, educational involution under the impact of social stratification is typically characterized by passive participation and inertial development. Once social stratification takes shape, it tends to move toward relative stability. On one hand, the distribution of social resources-influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional factors-gradually forms a fixed pattern that is difficult to fundamentally change in the short term, leading to an inertial development trend. On the other hand, social groups within the same stratum often develop a sense of identity and stratum-specific culture. To maintain, consolidate, and promote this identity and culture, these groups tend to leverage their discursive power-for instance, by influencing, intervening in, or revising institutional provisions-to continuously raise the threshold for upward mobility, artificially increasing the difficulty and obstacles to advancing across social strata. The interplay of these two aspects makes education an increasingly crucial channel for social mobility, compelling parents, students, and even schools at various educational stages to engage in involutionary competition. Moreover, the more education involution intensifies, the higher the 'advancement threshold' becomes, resulting in a spiral of escalating social stratification pressures and inertial educational involution.

Furthermore, social stratification impacts create a hierarchy of discrimination based on graduation institutions. In the fiercely competitive atmosphere that prioritizes higher academic qualifications and quality higher education, vocational education options such as secondary specialized schools, vocational high schools, technical schools, and even higher vocational colleges are often neglected by society and families. This results in obtaining at least a bachelor's degree becoming a universal pursuit for parents, students, and society as a whole. On one hand, the higher education environment that emphasizes academic credentials over practical skills-particularly in liberal arts institutions that often struggle to provide high-quality practical education due to their own limitations-makes it increasingly difficult for graduates to meet society's growing demand for skilled professionals. The innovative thinking, creative abilities, and curiosity for new knowledge, skills, and technologies among college students are often eroded in the overwhelming tide of theoretical knowledge acquisition. On the other hand, the cold reception toward enrolling in secondary specialized schools, vocational high schools, technical schools, and even some higher vocational colleges not only leads to weak government financial investment and teacher training but also commonly faces issues such as low student quality, poor academic atmosphere, and high dropout rates. This situation even negatively impacts the cultivation of frontline technical workers and the inheritance and development of professional skills in China.

Moreover, the class disparities and sense of insecurity resulting from social stratification can lead to the contagion, accelerated spread, and continuous spillover of societal anxiety. On one hand, under the impact of social stratification, parental anxiety is transmitted to their children. The excessive attention and intervention in education by parents and schools not only distort educational values but also increase the financial burden on families for their children's education, as well as the psychological burden on children and basic education teachers. This even exacerbates the damage caused by refined self-interested behaviors to societal 'public order and good customs.' On the other hand, with the spread of involution anxiety among parents, teachers, and students, the effects of educational involution spill over into the tutoring industry, significantly undermining families' pursuit of a better life. The intertwined development of involution in education and tutoring not only increases family economic burdens and time costs but also continues to spread and spill over-for example, from involution in K-12 subject tutoring to areas of quality education such as music, dance, sports, calligraphy, and eloquence. This not only intensifies societal anxiety about educational involution but also adds to students' academic and mental pressures.

Finally, the educational involution under the impact of social stratification has also intensified phenomena such as middle school entrance exam migration, college entrance exam migration, the overseas study craze, and educational migration, along with a series of social problems. Due to regional disparities in educational levels across different provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions in China, there are often significant differences in the difficulty of middle school and college entrance exam questions and admission score thresholds. To capitalize on the 'double-low' advantage of easier exam questions and lower admission scores, middle school and college entrance exam migration have become key strategies for navigating China's competitive education system. Some families with stronger economic resources and other capital endowments even opt to send their children abroad for studies or undertake entire family educational migration, effectively 'voting with their feet' to avoid domestic educational involution. This has led to the harmful consequences of excessive competition in overseas education and the continuous brain drain of talented individuals from China.

3. Causes and Breakthrough Paths of Educational Involution from the Perspective of Social Stratification Theory

3.1. Causes of Educational Involution from the Perspective of Social Stratification Theory

Since the reform and opening up, the standards for social stratification have shifted towards economic, wealth-based, and capital-oriented directions. That is, residents with better economic conditions, more wealth, and greater capital endowments-including education, social networks, prestige, and status-are more likely to live in urban areas and have easier access to high-quality jobs and "special statuses." To acquire these high-quality resources, receiving education, especially higher education, is the most important shortcut. As a result, intense competition in basic education, higher education, private tutoring, and even overseas education has become an inevitable choice.

3.1.1. Intense Competition in Basic Education to Acquire Or Consolidate Unified Identity

With the continuous development of China's economy and society and the advancement of county urbanization, the income and wealth of rural and township residents have significantly increased. Additionally, the carrying capacity of county towns has become stronger, collectively making it easier for rural families to advance to townships and county

areas. Typically, rural or township residents can access county public resources by purchasing property in county towns, without needing to engage in intense competition in basic education. Conversely, acquiring county public basic education resources for their children through property purchase—that is, making county towns the main arena for competing in basic education—has become a prevalent social phenomenon. Moreover, compared to cities, county towns often have fewer students, lighter language, lifestyle, and cultural barriers, and can offer educational quality no less than or even higher than that of key high schools in affiliated cities. Coupled with easier livelihoods and lower living costs in county areas, the main driver of intense competition in basic education is to obtain or consolidate a 'upper-tier' unified identity. That is, to secure the right to enjoy public resource endowments in any tier of urban areas: 'municipalities directly under the central government or first-tier cities, new first-tier or provincial capital cities, or prefecture-level cities.'

Currently, there are typically three ways to obtain urban resident status: either by being born into an urban family and acquiring it automatically, or by purchasing urban property to correspondingly obtain it, or by first obtaining educational qualifications such as a bachelor's degree, associate degree, vocational school diploma, or even high school diploma, and then successfully securing employment in enterprises or institutions in urban areas, with the employer facilitating the acquisition. However, obtaining or consolidating a "upper three-tier" unified status is not merely about having an urban household registration; it also requires having a fixed residence within the urban area and the skills to make a living in the city, meaning having a job in an urban area and a salary sufficient to support urban life. To achieve this, receiving basic education up to the high school level becomes crucial to ensure the ability to enter higher vocational colleges or universities and obtain the minimum or higher educational qualifications required for formal urban employment. Therefore, an important purpose of the intense competition in basic education is the expectation that oneself or one's children will possess the educational qualifications, skills, or other capital needed to leap into the "upper three-tier" social hierarchy. Even families already living in urban areas engage in this competition in basic education, hoping their children will have the educational capital required to consolidate their unified status or even leap from prefecture-level cities to new first-tier or provincial capital cities, municipalities directly under the central government, or first-tier cities.

3.1.2. Internal Competition in Higher Education for Special Status

Successfully obtaining a unified identity within a certain social stratum does not necessarily equate to enjoying all the resource endowments of that stratum. For the high-quality resource endowments within a particular social stratum, there is often intense competition and artificially imposed institutional barriers, which subsequently spill over into involution behaviors in higher education. Particularly in the "upper three tiers" of the social hierarchy, resource endowments such as high-quality job positions, greater social prestige, broader social networks, and even access to better school districts are severely scarce and fiercely competitive. In some first-tier cities, purchasing property even requires high academic qualifications as a prerequisite. In recent years, many domestic cities have offered substantial settlement and living subsidies, housing allowances, research funding, and even promises of access to the city's highest-quality public resources to attract highly educated and high-level talents from home and abroad to work and settle locally. This has further exacerbated the issue of involution in Chinese higher education.

Currently, by engaging in behaviors such as competing for master's degrees, PhDs, postdoctoral positions, and even competing for prestigious universities, renowned supervisors, and overseas educational exchange experiences, individuals can more efficiently acquire the educational qualifications needed to obtain "special status" for promotion. This not only serves as a crucial means to directly ascend to the "upper three tiers" of the social hierarchy but also acts as a key channel to access more high-quality resources within these tiers. Taking the housing purchase subsidies, rental subsidies, talent apartments, position subsidies, and other related support measures available to high-level talents in Hefei, the capital of Anhui Province, in 2024 as an example, the subsidies and high-quality public resource service commitments vary significantly depending on the requirements for different categories (A, B, C, D, E) of high-level talents. For housing purchase subsidies alone, the maximum amount can reach 2 million yuan, while the minimum is only 120,000 yuan. Moreover, the recognition standard for the lowest-level E-category talent in Hefei is "professional and technical talents with senior professional titles," which undoubtedly represents capital endowments that can only be achieved after enduring the intense competition in higher education.

3.1.3. Leverage Social Education and Overseas Education to Enhance Academic Advancement Capital

Access to high-quality domestic junior high school education, high school education, and even higher education resources generally requires participation in regional or national unified entrance examinations. Even if such unified entrance exams are not taken, students must participate in more stringent selective admissions processes like independent enrollment. To achieve excellent results in various entrance examinations, participating in diverse forms of educational training has become a necessary measure. According to the "2024-2028 China Education and Training Industry Panoramic Survey and Development Strategy Research Consulting Report" released by China Research Puhua Industry Research Institute, China's education and training industry market size reached approximately 2 trillion yuan in 2024, an increase of about 10% compared to last year, accounting for about 20% of the global market share, making it the world's largest education and training market. In recent years, not only have markets such as quality education, personalized education, customized education, vocational training education, and online education further developed, but other segmented markets like language training and art training have also gained popularity. Meanwhile, affected by the "double reduction" policy, although large-scale K-9 subject education services have exited the market, large-scale subject education services at the high school level remain popular, and small-scale, concealed K-9 subject education training continues to persist despite repeated bans.

Studying abroad to obtain foreign higher education degrees, thereby becoming highly reputable "returnees," was once an important means for Chinese students and parents to enhance their academic advancement credentials. According to the "2024 China Study Abroad White Paper" released by the EIC International Education Exhibition (Guangzhou Station), from the reform and opening-up policy to the end of 2022, the

cumulative number of Chinese overseas students exceeded 8 million, with over 6 million having returned after completing their studies. Meanwhile, in 2023, the number of Chinese mainland students ranked first in the proportion of international students in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, and Italy. Consequently, various study abroad exam preparations like IELTS, TOEFL, and GRE, as well as "customized" study abroad agency services, remain highly popular to this day.

3.2. Breakthrough Paths for Educational Involution from the Perspective of Social Stratification Theory

"Intense competition" in education is currently the most effective way for Chinese residents to achieve upward social mobility. Therefore, the key to solving educational involution does not lie within education itself, but outside the educational field. That is, by narrowing the development gaps between different social strata, professions, metropolitan areas, and urban regions, as well as reducing disparities in social prestige and status among different occupations and positions, we must continuously diminish the differences in income, opportunities, status, and access to public resources among various social strata. At the same time, we should accelerate the process of achieving common prosperity in both material and spiritual wealth for all people, thereby fundamentally resolving the problem of educational involution in China.

3.2.1. Accelerate the Formation of a Multi-center Metropolitan Development Model

Since the reform and opening up, China has formed several urban and metropolitan areas centered around "municipalities directly under the central government, first-tier cities, and new first-tier or provincial capital cities". Within these metropolitan areas, based on social stratification theory and the actual characteristics of Chinese social stratification, they can be further divided into six social levels or six regional levels. The core cities of metropolitan areas are at the top of the social hierarchy, often enjoying higher wages, more opportunities, better educational resources, and more comprehensive urban living services. However, the number, capacity, and carrying capacity of these core cities are limited, which inevitably intensifies competition for social hierarchy acquisition and further spills over into serious educational involution problems. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the cultivation of multiple secondary central cities within China's urban and metropolitan areas to share the pressure of core cities' advancement, continuously narrow the gap between secondary centers and core cities, form a multi-center metropolitan area socio-economic development model, and fundamentally weaken the root causes of educational involution caused by vicious competition for social mobility.

3.2.2. Continuously Enhance the Inclusiveness of Core Cities in Metropolitan Areas

Currently, China mainly has eight major metropolitan areas centered around Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and Chongqing. However, the registered population in the core cities of these metropolitan areas is significantly smaller than the resident population, indicating that many residents living in these core cities cannot enjoy the same public welfare benefits as registered residents. This has led to the unfortunate choice of pursuing intense self-education or children's education to obtain an 'equal status' as urban residents. To address this, it is essential to continuously enhance the inclusiveness of core cities in metropolitan areas, particularly by fully granting non-registered permanent residents the same rights to basic public services as registered residents. This will increase the likelihood of non-registered populations obtaining an 'equal status' in core metropolitan cities. Specific measures include expanding the supply and service scope of low-rent housing in core cities, adapting urban management approaches and methods, and lowering the thresholds for compulsory education enrollment for children of non-registered permanent residents. These steps can effectively alleviate the anxiety and pressure faced by non-registered permanent residents living in core metropolitan cities.

3.2.3. Focus on Reducing Development Gaps between Metropolitan Areas

There is a huge gap in economic and social development between China's major metropolitan areas and some metropolitan areas formed around provincial capital cities. Taking total economic output as an example, in 2023, the GDP of Hefei City in Anhui Province was about 1.27 trillion yuan, while Nanjing City in Jiangsu Province, which had the smallest GDP among the core cities of China's eight major metropolitan areas in 2023, reached about 1.74 trillion yuan. The absolute difference was 0.47 trillion yuan, which exactly equals the 2023 GDP of Wuhu City, the second-ranked city in Anhui Province. Even within the eight major metropolitan areas, Shanghai, which ranked first in GDP in 2023 with 4.72 trillion yuan, exceeded Nanjing's GDP by as much as 2.98 trillion yuan. This gap is even larger than that between Hefei and Nanjing. The economic strength of core cities reflects the level of economic and social development of their metropolitan areas. Therefore, efforts should be made to reduce the economic and social development gaps between metropolitan areas, especially by increasing investment in the construction of core cities in some metropolitan areas in central and western regions. At the same time, it is necessary to promote coordinated development among cities within metropolitan areas and balance development between cities inside and outside these areas, thereby effectively reversing the trend of intensified social competition for advancement and worsening educational pressure caused by widening gaps between metropolitan areas.

3.2.4. Continuously Enhance the Discourse Power of Low-level Residents in Metropolitan Areas

Within the same metropolitan area, a social hierarchy often forms where the top tier holds the most decision-making power, while residents at lower levels frequently struggle to express their legitimate demands appropriately. This manifests in institutional designs related to social mobility, career advancement, and the distribution of public resources and benefits, which tend to disproportionately reflect the interests of top-tier residents. Although lower-tier residents are often the primary targets of various assessment systems, their inability to voice their needs leads to increasingly stringent and multi-layered evaluation criteria for social advancement. This ultimately perpetuates the inertia of educational involution and exacerbates the problem. Therefore, efforts should be made to enhance the voice of lower-tier residents in metropolitan areas, continuously improve the environment for social, occupational, and professional technical title advancement, and better demonstrate the superiority and balance of harmonious and

prosperous society construction.

3.2.5. Effectively Balance Professional Status and Income Level

All professions are equally noble, but prestige and salaries vary. Generally speaking, the nature of a profession and its income level influence the occupational status and social prestige of its practitioners. For example, there is a significant gap in occupational status and income level between university professors and university security guards. The former enjoy high income, respectable work, and high social prestige, while the latter often face neglect and lack a sense of pride. In recent years, the inspirational example of young graduates first working as university security guards, then pursuing postgraduate studies, and eventually striving to become university professors vividly reflects the phenomenon of educational involution. Therefore, efforts should be made to strengthen the promotion of professional honor, especially for workers in urban sanitation, security guards, construction laborers, and other labor-intensive industries. This includes enhancing publicity of advanced deeds, implementing award and recognition incentives, establishing seniority-based wage increase guarantees, and ensuring job stability protection systems. These measures should practically safeguard the job stability of workers in low-skilled positions and continuously improve their wage levels. A multi-pronged approach should be adopted to narrow the multidimensional gaps between different occupations, effectively demonstrating the socialist labor values that 'all professions are equally noble, labor knows no hierarchy, and labor is most glorious.'

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Social stratification theory and the current situation of social and regional stratification in China provide an important interpretive perspective for the increasingly severe problem of educational involution. Therefore, focusing on seeking feasible pathways to resolve the issue of educational involution outside the educational field has become crucial. Research findings indicate that efforts to eliminate various barriers to upward mobility, as well as continuously reducing the gaps and disparities between occupational status prestige and income levels, will help fundamentally alleviate the problem of educational involution in China. Based on the above research, the following three main insights can be drawn:

Firstly, while moderate education competition is beneficial for economic and social development, excessive competition across all education stages and among the entire population will hinder sustainable and healthy economic and social growth. Although appropriate educational competition helps select talents and stimulate innovation and creativity, excessive or pathological competition only leads to low-level equilibrium, which in turn hampers the selection, cultivation, and free development of exceptional talents, as well as dampens enthusiasm for creative and innovative endeavors.

Second, educational involution and the inertial development of involution issues are byproducts of social stratification. Expecting to solve China's educational involution problem solely within the education sector remains difficult to achieve significant results. Measures such as banning subject-based tutoring during compulsory education and regulating homework assignments can only alleviate educational involution to some extent, but cannot fundamentally resolve China's educational involution problem.

Third, with the steady progress of China's socialist construction and the continuous effective advancement of major national strategies such as common prosperity, comprehensive rural revitalization, and coordinated regional development, the gaps and barriers between social strata or regional layers will ultimately disappear. Therefore, the phenomenon and issue of educational involution are merely a temporary phase that China's socialist construction will experience in the short term, and they will certainly be thoroughly eliminated and properly resolved in the long run.

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