

# *The Connotation and Promotion Path of the Spirit of Rural Educators*

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**Abstract:** The rural educator ethos represents a distinct professional identity unique to rural teachers, building upon conceptualization of exemplary educators. This study defines this ethos through six constitutive dimensions: Ideals of grassroots commitment and rural revitalization; Moral integrity manifested through scholarly excellence and fostering civilized rural ethos; Pedagogical wisdom leveraging rural resources and labor empowerment; Reform-oriented diligence in hands-on cultivation; Compassionate dedication prioritizing student welfare; Noble pursuit of community advancement through knowledge dissemination. To fulfill its distinctive mission in the new era, this ethos necessitates: Inspiring teachers to embrace rural education as a lifelong vocation; Enhancing capabilities for substantive participation in rural governance; Systematically documenting and disseminating rural educators' narratives; Utilizing rural communities as living field laboratories; Implementing practice-driven educational experimentation.

## **1. The Presentation of the Problem**

In recent years, our country has attached great importance to the construction of the teaching staff. In 2023, President wrote a letter to representatives of outstanding teachers across the country, in which he mentioned: "A group of educators and outstanding teachers have emerged among the teaching force. They possess the ideals and beliefs of having the greater good in mind and being devoted to the country, the moral sentiments of being a role model through words and behavior, the educational wisdom of enlightening and nurturing hearts and teaching according to individual aptitudes, the cultivation attitude of diligent study and firm practice, the dedication and willingness to contribute, the benevolence of having a broad mind and pursuing cultural education, and the pursuit of the grand ideals of cultural education. These demonstrate the unique educationalist spirit of China." <sup>[1]</sup> This was the first time that President proposed the "unique educationalist spirit of China", and he elaborated on the unique educationalist spirit and practical requirements of China in six aspects to inspire teachers to learn and carry forward the educationalist spirit, and contribute to building an education power. Rural education influences the progress of the development of an education power, and rural teachers are the main body for achieving the revitalization of rural education. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and six other departments issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Rural Teacher Teams in the New Era", stating: "Rural teachers are the fundamental support for developing more equitable and higher-quality rural education, and they are an important force in

promoting rural revitalization, building a socialist modernized country, and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." [2]Based on this, this article, through the remarks of General Secretary on the spirit of educators and in combination with the actual situation of rural teachers, more clearly defines the basic connotation of rural educator spirit, and explores the cultivation path of rural educator spirit.

## **2. The Essence of Rural Educator's Spirit**

The proposition of "the unique educational spirit of China" sets forth the requirements and expectations for the beliefs, virtues, knowledge, attitudes, emotions and realms of teachers in the new era. Based on this, this article attempts to, by taking into account the circumstances of rural teachers, concretize the basic connotation of the rural educationalist spirit, and contribute to the formation of the educationalist spirit of rural teachers.

### **2.1 The ideal beliefs of rooting in the grassroots and revitalizing the local community**

Belief and ideals are the key factors influencing rural teachers' commitment to the local community. In comparison, the ideals and beliefs of rural educators can be understood as "rooting in the grassroots and revitalizing the local area", which requires rural educators to have positive emotions and devote their entire lives to the cause of rural education. When facing the current predicaments of their own development and rural education, they should firmly hold their ideals and beliefs, actively fulfill the sacred mission they bear, and bring vitality and energy to rural education and the local area, achieving the goal of revitalizing the countryside.

The ideal belief of revitalizing the countryside can inspire rural teachers to always keep in mind their original intentions and missions, and with concrete actions provide spiritual support for rural education to regain its vitality and promote the healthy growth of rural children; it can also prompt rural teachers to set the goal of realizing rural revitalization, integrate themselves into the overall development of rural society, and look up to the stars and guard the countryside in rural society. In history, there were a large number of rural educators who aimed to revitalize the countryside, such as Yangchu Yan, Yuanpei Cai, Xingzhi Tao, etc. Nowadays, on the path of the country's comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization, rural teachers need to take "rooting in the grassroots and revitalizing the countryside" as their ideal belief, define their roles in the countryside, and shoulder the historical responsibility of national rejuvenation and ethnic rejuvenation.

### **2.2 Cultivating noble moral sentiments and purifying local customs**

Moral sentiment influences rural teachers' identification with the moral customs of the countryside, and it is an important aspect in shaping the image of rural teachers. The moral sentiment of rural educators' spirit can be expressed as "having high academic qualifications and a upright character, and influencing the rural moral customs", meaning that rural teachers, in addition to improving their own moral cultivation and serving as role models, also need to undertake the responsibility of cultivating the rural moral customs. They should assume the responsibility of being "village sages", and promote the construction of rural spiritual civilization by serving the village, leading the rural moral customs, and maintaining the order of the village. "Having high academic qualifications and a upright character, and influencing the rural moral customs" is reflected in two aspects: On the one hand, under the premise of recognizing the rural society, rural teachers cultivate the thinking ability, innovative spirit and practical ability of rural students through verbal education, stimulate the learning interest of rural students, guide them to actively explore knowledge, and lay a solid foundation for the all-round development of rural students. On the other hand, as teachers of the "village", their

words and deeds directly affect the cultural atmosphere and moral customs of the rural society. This requires rural teachers to actively integrate into the village, with their profound knowledge and noble character, strive to become the key force in inheriting rural culture and shaping rural customs.

### **2.3 Educational Wisdom Based on Rural Areas and Labor Empowerment**

Primary school teachers in rural areas need to, based on the specific circumstances of the students and in combination with their physical and mental development characteristics and learning experiences, vigorously develop appropriate learning resources for rural students, design distinctive activities suitable for rural students, and promote the development and growth of students during the implementation of these activities. In addition, rural areas have their own unique local resources, which are the natural venues for practicing labor education. Rural children grow up in the countryside and are exposed to the agricultural civilization from an early age. The concept of labor creating a better life is passed down from generation to generation.<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, excellent rural teachers not only need to "teach differently for different students", "teach differently for different places", and "teach differently for different times" in their educational and teaching practices, but also need to effectively integrate teaching with local culture to empower labor education through the large platform of rural labor education, and achieve the educational vision of cultivating virtue through labor, enhancing intelligence through labor, strengthening physical fitness through labor, cultivating beauty through labor, and promoting innovation through labor.

### **2.4 The diligent and persistent, innovative and reformative attitude of hard work**

The dedication attitude of rural teachers is reflected in "being diligent in teaching and innovating". "Being diligent in teaching" means that rural teachers need to stand firm on the "three-meter podium", educate students, improve themselves, conduct in-depth research, and never give up. They should have the enterprising spirit of self-improvement, inherit and carry forward the hardworking qualities cultivated by rural working people in agricultural production practices, and be good at exploring new methods to solve educational problems, promoting the progress and development of rural schools. "Innovating and reforming" means that rural teachers should have the attitude of being pioneers, become practitioners of rural education reform, promote the development of rural schools, and promote the popularization of educational theories and experiences suitable for rural school development, facilitating the overall transformation of rural schools.

### **2.5 The benevolent heart of caring for students and devoting oneself**

The benevolent heart of "loving teaching and caring for students, willing to make contributions" embodies the educational philosophy of teachers' love for students, dedication to their jobs, self-identification, and willingness to contribute. It showcases the noble character of teachers. Most of the children in rural areas are left-behind children, and some have intellectual disabilities, poverty, or dropout problems. As the disadvantaged group in the rural context, they lack emotional care and need the protection of rural teachers. Rural children, as typical representatives of disadvantaged children, are prone to cognitive development deviations and lack in mental health growth. Rural teachers, as "proxy parents", need to pay more attention to the life growth of rural students and guide them to correctly understand the value of life, using their own actions to inspire rural children to form correct values and outlook on life.<sup>[4]</sup> Education is an act of love and is the "most glorious profession under the sun". The growth of rural children requires love for support. Rural teachers need the benevolent heart of "loving students and dedicating themselves", using their enthusiasm to warm and protect the physical and mental health of rural children.

## **2.6 The pursuit of building rural areas and enhancing the knowledge of the local community**

The pursuit of the moral promotion of rural educators is specifically manifested as "building the countryside and enhancing the knowledge of the villagers", which means that rural teachers should have grand educational ideals and lofty educational aspirations and be rooted in the countryside. Through education, training and guidance, they should enhance the cultural literacy of the villagers. Liang Shuming once proposed that "rural school teachers should not only focus on teaching, nor should they only focus on educating students within the school. They should also take the entire village's people as the educational object, and especially focus on promoting social work." <sup>[5]</sup>In the process of rural modernization, the modernization of people is the key and core. Therefore, rural teachers should consciously shoulder the mission of revitalizing rural culture, actively participate in the public affairs of rural society, and promote the improvement of the cultural literacy of rural people.

## **3. The Promotion Paths of the Spirit of Rural Educators**

### **3.1 Encourage rural teachers to view rural education as a lifelong career aspiration**

The spirit of rural educators is distinct from that of educators in general. It is based on and implemented in the specific practices of rural teachers within the context of the countryside. This requires rural teachers to view this profession as a vocation, where the characteristic of the vocation lies in understanding education through moral practice. The vocation is above the profession, and its purpose is to pursue goodness and beauty. To take education as a vocation, one needs to view education as a virtuous career for the realization of one's lifetime value, requiring the support of personal excellent and noble qualities, pure enthusiasm and sincerity. <sup>[6]</sup>Therefore, we should firmly establish the teaching belief of rural teachers, stimulate their internal motivation, consolidate and strengthen their spiritual foundation, meet their material needs, and focus on the development difficulties and obstacles of rural teachers, through professional training to enhance their Professional competence.

### **3.2 Enhance the ability of rural teachers to participate in rural public affairs**

The new concept of teaching emphasizes that teachers should become "community-oriented teachers". This is more evident in rural education. Rural teachers have dual identities - professional and public - in rural areas. They not only need to educate and inspire students, but also need to participate in rural public affairs, such as hosting rural activities and offering advice on rural matters. Rural teachers have always played such a role since ancient times. The differences in the rural education field and the uniqueness of the rural education mission determine that the professional development of rural teachers should combine both professionalism and publicness. <sup>[7]</sup>In response to the current phenomenon where rural teachers' public identities are weakening and they pay less attention to rural public affairs, we need to recognize the role of rural teachers and their position in the process of rural revitalization, and help and guide them to re-establish the role of "new village elders" and regain the public spirit.

### **3.3 Tell the stories of rural educators**

The stories of rural educators, as an important part of Chinese stories, telling the stories of rural educators well and understanding their spirit is essentially telling Chinese stories. Telling the stories of rural educators well serves as an incentive and is also a path for cultivating the spirit of rural educators. First, it is necessary to enhance the publicity of the deeds of existing outstanding rural

educators, collect vivid and lively cases, and tell the stories of outstanding rural teachers through various channels. Secondly, provide opportunities and platforms for rural teachers, allowing existing outstanding rural teachers to summarize and generalize their teaching experiences and make their educational ideals more concrete, in order to help, attract and inspire more rural teachers to engage in the conception of rural education and rural revitalization.

### 3.4 Taking the countryside as the research field

In addition to teaching and nurturing students, as well as revitalizing the countryside, rural educators are even more important for using the countryside as a research ground and background to construct an educational knowledge system unique to the countryside. This is to solve rural education problems, guide the direction of rural education development, and promote the quality of rural education development. Therefore, the spirit of rural educators also requires rural teachers to become research-oriented teachers, to lead their own and their peers' professional development, and to promote the continuous deepening of rural education reform. In fact, rural educators have research capabilities, but in the teaching field of the countryside, due to the low requirements for their research capabilities, this skill has gradually been neglected. The spirit of rural educators' research capabilities precisely help rural teachers regain their research literacy, solidly write research content on the countryside, and fully grasp rural students, rural teachers and rural education, becoming rural educators.

### 3.5 Engage in rural education experiments through practical actions

In the 1920s and 1930s, a series of rural teachers emerged in China who devoted themselves to rural education experiments. In order to change the backward education in rural areas, they developed the spirit of rural educators during their rural education practice and became recognized rural educators by the people. Facing the present era, rural teachers should not ignore the valuable experiences left by predecessors, and they also need to have the awareness of participating in the reform of educational practice. They should conduct educational experiments in their own environment and drive the modernization of rural education. <sup>[8]</sup>

## 4. Conclusions

This article starts from the six aspects of the spirit of educators, and specifically defines the spirit of rural educators. It proposes to promote the spirit of rural educators from the following five aspects: encouraging rural teachers to view rural education as a lifelong career, enhancing rural teachers' ability to participate in rural public affairs, telling the stories of rural educators, using the countryside as a research ground, and engaging in rural education experiments through practice.

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