

Exploration Journey in Vocational Education: An In-depth Dialogue with Professor Gu Jiafeng from Peking University

Interviewee Profile: Gu Jiafeng is the Director of the Development Department and a Researcher at the Chinese Social Science Survey Center of Peking University. He holds a Ph.D. from the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University and was a visiting scholar at Harvard University. With profound academic achievements in the field of spatio-temporal social sciences, he has long been committed to educational practice, teaching courses such as "Spatial Econometrics and Spatio-temporal Models" and "Understanding China: Issues, Methods, and Practices".

Interview Background

With the rapid transformation of the global economy and the ever-evolving technological landscape, vocational education faces unprecedented opportunities and challenges. To delve into the current state and future of vocational education, Li Liuyi, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the Vocational Education Exploration Journal, specially invited Professor Gu Jiafeng from Peking University for an in-depth dialogue. Professor Gu, with his cross-disciplinary research and extensive educational practice, provides us with a comprehensive and insightful perspective to envision the broad prospects of vocational education.

Interview Process:

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, hello! Thank you very much for accepting our interview. During our editorial discussions, we found that vocational education is currently facing many practical demands such as economic transformation and an increase in the demand for technical talents. Therefore, we have initiated a series of interviews with scholars both domestically and internationally, hoping to engage in in-depth discussions on these issues and propose some practical solutions. Considering your profound expertise in the field of spatio-temporal social sciences and your long-term

educational practice, we very much hope to gain a more comprehensive outlook through our discussion with you.

Gu Jiafeng: Hello! I'm delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this dialogue. China's development is indeed an internationally concerned issue. As the world's second-largest economy, China's development speed and quality have a profound impact on the development of the international economic and social landscape. In this context, we have launched the course "Understanding China: Issues, Methods, and Practices", aiming to enable undergraduates to more objectively and comprehensively understand China's development status, existing problems, and future trends.

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, how do you guide students to understand China's issues in your course? Can you introduce the characteristics and content of this course in detail?

Gu Jiafeng: Of course. This course is designed for undergraduates, and we hope that through it, students can master a relatively objective, comprehensive, and standardized approach to understanding China's development during their undergraduate studies. The course content is very rich, covering various aspects such as population issues, elderly care, family issues, religious issues, health, and environmental issues. For example, regarding population issues, we discuss changes in China's population structure, declining birth rates, and changes in young people's attitudes towards marriage and childbearing, as well as the impact of these issues on future labor supply and economic development. On the topic of elderly care, we analyze the current situation and future trends of China's aging society, as well as adjustments and improvements in elderly care policies. In addition, we use empirical research data to give students a more intuitive understanding of China's development and progress in these areas, as well as the existing problems and shortcomings.

Li Liuyi: This course sounds very relevant. Next, I would like to ask, Professor Gu, from the platform of Peking University, how do you view the current development trend of domestic vocational education? What are the opportunities and challenges?

Gu Jiafeng: This is a very important question. Vocational education is actually a very crucial field, playing an irreplaceable role in economic and social development. Looking at Germany's development, vocational education has played a key role in the manufacturing industry, providing strong talent support for Germany's economic boom. In recent years, China has also vigorously promoted the development of vocational education and issued a series of policies to encourage it. However, compared to higher education, the development of vocational education is relatively slow. I believe there are several reasons for this: firstly, social recognition of vocational education is not high enough, with many parents and students still believing that attending university is the only way out; secondly, the teaching level of vocational education needs to be improved, with many teachers in vocational colleges lacking practical experience and industry background; thirdly, the connection between vocational education and enterprises is not close enough, and the knowledge and skills students learn in school often do not align with actual enterprise needs.

Nevertheless, despite facing many challenges, vocational education is also ushering in unprecedented development opportunities. With economic transformation and technological upgrades, the demand for skilled talents in society is continuously increasing. The government is also intensifying efforts to promote the development of vocational education and has issued a series of incentive policies. At the same time, as people's understanding of vocational education improves, more and more students are choosing vocational education as their development path.

Li Liuyi: Indeed. So, in your opinion, how should we improve the social recognition of vocational education?

Gu Jiafeng: I believe that improving the social recognition of vocational education requires efforts from multiple aspects. Firstly, the government needs to increase

publicity efforts for vocational education, so that more people understand its value and significance. Secondly, vocational colleges need to improve their teaching quality and educational standards, cultivating more high-quality skilled talents. At the same time, vocational colleges also need to strengthen cooperation with enterprises, allowing students to be exposed to actual enterprise needs and work environments while in school, thereby enhancing their practical abilities and employment competitiveness. In addition, society also needs to change its traditional views on vocational education, recognizing that it is not an inferior choice but rather another important path for talent cultivation.

Li Liuyi: I noticed that the family education and quantitative finance courses you host are very popular. If we view vocational education as an investment, how should students from families with limited economic conditions plan to improve the return on their educational investment?

Gu Jiafeng: This is a good question. Vocational education is actually a form of education with high investment value. For students from families with limited economic conditions, choosing vocational education may be a wiser choice. Because vocational education places greater emphasis on practice and application, students can quickly master a practical skill and enter the workplace to receive returns.

At the same time, vocational education is closely related to continuing education. After mastering a skill in the vocational education stage, students can further enhance their abilities and qualities through continuing education. For example, the non-degree continuing education courses we offer at Peking University provide an excellent learning platform for students. These courses not only cover various practical skills and knowledge but also allow students to stay informed about the latest industry trends and development trends. This is very helpful for improving students' workplace competitiveness and future career development.

Li Liuyi: Now, with the expansion of enrollment, there are more and more vocational college students, and they face significant employment pressure. For these students, how should they plan their careers and improve their workplace competitiveness?

Gu Jiafeng: I believe that for vocational college students, planning their careers and improving their workplace competitiveness requires efforts from multiple aspects. Firstly, students need to clarify their career goals and positioning, understanding their major and the direction of future career development. Secondly, students need to focus on cultivating and improving their practical abilities, accumulating work experience and skills through internships and practical training. In addition, students also need to pay attention to enhancing their overall qualities, including communication skills, team collaboration skills, and innovation abilities. These qualities are very important in the future workplace.

Furthermore, I believe that data analysis and mining skills are very important general skills. We are now in an era of big data and digitization, with various industries undergoing digital transformation. Mastering data analysis and mining skills can make students more competitive in the workplace. Therefore, I suggest that students can learn more relevant courses and knowledge to improve their data analysis and mining abilities.

Li Liuyi: In terms of major selection, we have also noticed some majors becoming overly popular or unpopular. For example, in recent years, majors like railway engineering, veterinary medicine, and funeral services have been in high demand, while some traditional majors may be less popular. What is your view on this issue? Is there a way to regulate this through resource allocation or other means?

Gu Jiafeng: The popularity or unpopularity of majors is a normal phenomenon. As society continues to develop and change, the economic and industrial structures are also constantly being adjusted and optimized. Therefore, some emerging industries and fields may experience a shortage of talents, while some traditional industries and fields may have an oversupply of talents.

Regarding this issue, I believe that students need to maintain a rational and objective attitude. They should not blindly pursue popular majors while neglecting their own interests and strengths. At the same time, students also need to pay attention to industry development trends and employment prospects, making wiser choices.

From the perspective of resource allocation, the government and educational departments can optimize the talent structure by adjusting enrollment plans and major settings. For example, for industries and fields with a shortage of talents, enrollment plans and major settings can be appropriately increased; for industries and fields with an oversupply of talents, enrollment plans and major settings can be appropriately reduced. In addition, the government and educational departments can also strengthen their investment and support for vocational education, improving its quality and level, thereby attracting more students to choose vocational education.

Li Liuyi: In terms of industry-education integration, we have also identified some issues. For example, there is a noticeable disconnect between education and disciplines and the distribution of industries. How do you think we should

Li Liuyi: In terms of industry-education integration, we have also identified some issues. For example, there is a noticeable gap between education/disciplines and industrial distribution. What are your thoughts on how to promote the development of industry-education integration?

Gu Jiafeng: Industry-education integration is indeed a very important issue. Vocational education is closely linked to industry, and only through deep integration of industry and education can we better cultivate high-quality skilled talents who meet market demands.

I believe that promoting the development of industry-education integration requires a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, vocational colleges need to strengthen cooperation and exchange with enterprises to understand their actual needs and employment standards. At the same time, vocational colleges can invite industry experts to participate in curriculum design and teaching reforms to ensure that teaching content

aligns with market demands. Secondly, the government can introduce a series of incentive policies to support the development of industry-education integration. For example, providing certain tax incentives or financial subsidies to enterprises that participate in industry-education integration. Additionally, the government can establish an information-sharing platform to facilitate communication and cooperation between vocational colleges and enterprises.

Furthermore, I believe that vocational colleges also need to focus on the design and implementation of practical teaching sessions. Through practical teaching, students can better understand the actual operational processes and job requirements of enterprises, thereby enhancing their practical abilities and employment competitiveness. At the same time, practical teaching sessions can also help students better adapt to future workplace environments and job requirements.

Li Liuyi: In terms of international cooperation, we have also encountered some challenges. For example, vocational college students often have a fixed idea about pursuing undergraduate degrees, leading international cooperation projects to deviate from their original intentions. What are your suggestions for solving this problem?

Gu Jiafeng: This issue indeed exists. Many vocational college students may believe that obtaining an undergraduate degree is the only way to secure better employment and development. However, in reality, vocational education also has its unique advantages and value. To address this issue, I believe we can start from the following aspects:

Firstly, we need to strengthen the promotion and publicity of vocational education to make more people aware of its value and significance. At the same time, we need to strengthen cooperation and exchange with foreign vocational colleges and institutions, drawing on their successful experiences and practices to promote the development of our international cooperation projects. Secondly, when designing international cooperation projects, we need to clarify the training objectives, pathways, and future development directions, and close any channels that may lead students to transfer to

higher education. Additionally, we can use international cooperation projects to broaden students' international perspectives, allow them to learn advanced technology and management experience, and thereby enhance their overall quality and workplace competitiveness.

Li Liuyi: Finally, I would like to ask, Professor Gu, does Peking University's Chinese Social Science Survey Center or the continuing education sector have plans to further develop skill training courses for vocational college students?

Gu Jiafeng: Our center has been committed to promoting research and teaching in fields related to data analysis and quantitative skills enhancement. In the future, we will continue to develop skill training courses for vocational college students to meet their needs for practical skills and knowledge. For example, we can offer courses in data analysis, quantitative finance, and marketing to help students improve their practical abilities and employment competitiveness. At the same time, we will invite industry experts and scholars to teach and share their experiences, allowing students to better understand industry dynamics and development trends. Furthermore, we will strengthen cooperation and exchange with vocational colleges and enterprises to jointly promote the development and innovation of vocational education.

In-depth Interview:

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, you have profound academic achievements in the field of spatio-temporal social sciences. Could you share your insights on the role and impact of spatio-temporal factors in the development of vocational education, based on your research experience?

Gu Jiafeng: Of course. Spatio-temporal factors indeed play a very important role in the development of vocational education. Firstly, from the temporal dimension, with economic development and technological progress, the demands and models of vocational education are constantly changing. For example, during the industrialization period, vocational education focused more on skills training in machinery manufacturing and engineering technology; whereas in today's information

and digital age, vocational education places greater emphasis on skills training in data analysis and artificial intelligence. Therefore, vocational colleges need to keep pace with the times, constantly adjusting and optimizing their curricula and teaching models to adapt to changes in market demands.

From the spatial dimension, there are differences in economic development levels, industrial structures, and talent demands among different regions. Therefore, vocational colleges need to formulate corresponding talent training plans and programs based on the local economic and social development situation. For example, in some economically developed regions, there may be greater emphasis on skills training in high-end services and technological innovation; whereas in some economically underdeveloped regions, there may be greater emphasis on skills training in manufacturing and agriculture. Additionally, vocational colleges need to strengthen cooperation and exchange with local enterprises to understand their actual needs and employment standards, thereby better serving local economic and social development.

Li Liuyi: Very interesting perspectives. In your opinion, with the acceleration of globalization and the development of information technology, what new challenges and opportunities will vocational education face?

Gu Jiafeng: The acceleration of globalization and the development of information technology indeed present new challenges and opportunities for vocational education. On the one hand, globalization intensifies international competition, with countries vying for high-quality skilled talents. Therefore, vocational colleges need to place greater emphasis on cultivating students' international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities to adapt to market demands in a globalized context. On the other hand, the development of information technology provides new teaching methods and models for vocational education. For example, online education and virtual reality technology can offer more convenient and efficient teaching methods for vocational education. At the same time, information technology can help

vocational colleges better understand market demands and industry dynamics, thereby adjusting and optimizing their curricula and teaching models.

However, challenges also exist. For example, with the popularization and application of information technology, some traditional industries may gradually disappear or be replaced, leading to a decrease in demand for related skilled talents. Furthermore, with the deepening of globalization, some multinational companies may recruit talents globally, intensifying competition pressure on domestic vocational education. Therefore, vocational colleges need to closely monitor market trends and technological development trends, timely adjusting their talent training plans and programs to adapt to changes in market demands.

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, your viewpoints are very forward-looking. In your opinion, how can we construct a more open and inclusive vocational education system? Does this require joint efforts from the government, schools, enterprises, and all sectors of society?

Gu Jiafeng: Yes, constructing a more open and inclusive vocational education system indeed requires joint efforts from the government, schools, enterprises, and all sectors of society. Firstly, the government needs to increase investment and support for vocational education, formulating more comprehensive policies and regulations to ensure the healthy development of vocational education. At the same time, the government also needs to strengthen the promotion and publicity of vocational education, enhancing society's recognition and acceptance of it. Secondly, schools need to focus on improving teaching quality and educational standards, strengthening cooperation and exchange with enterprises to ensure that teaching content aligns with market demands. Additionally, schools need to focus on cultivating students' comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities to adapt to future workplace demands and challenges.

For enterprises, they need to actively participate in the development and support of vocational education, strengthening cooperation and exchange with vocational

colleges to jointly promote the development of industry-education integration. At the same time, enterprises can provide internship and training bases, as well as employment opportunities, for vocational colleges, helping students better understand workplace environments and job requirements, thereby enhancing their practical abilities and employment competitiveness.

Finally, all sectors of society also need to strengthen their attention and support for vocational education, jointly creating a favorable environment for the development of vocational education. For example, the media can strengthen the promotion and publicity of vocational education, enhancing society's awareness and acceptance of it; social organizations can actively participate in public welfare activities and services related to vocational education, contributing their own strength to the development of vocational education.

Li Liuyi: Thank you very much for your insightful sharing, Professor Gu! In your opinion, what will be the future development trends of vocational education? How should we grasp these trends to promote the innovative development of vocational education?

Gu Jiafeng: The future development trends of vocational education will be more diversified, personalized, and intelligent. On the one hand, with economic development and technological progress, vocational education will cover more fields and industries, cultivating more high-quality skilled talents. On the other hand, as people's demand for personalization increases, vocational education will also place greater emphasis on individualized teaching tailored to meet the needs and characteristics of different students. Furthermore, with the popularization and application of information technology, vocational education will leverage advanced technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to achieve more precise and efficient teaching and management.

To grasp these trends and promote the innovative development of vocational education, we need to start from the following aspects: firstly, we need to strengthen

research and exploration in vocational education, constantly summarizing lessons learned to improve the quality and level of vocational education; secondly, we need to strengthen the integration and innovation of vocational education with other fields, such as industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation, to jointly promote the development and innovation of vocational education; finally, we also need to strengthen the international connection and exchange of vocational education, drawing on international advanced experiences and practices to enhance the international competitiveness and influence of China's vocational education.

Interview Expansion:

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, you mentioned the integration of industry and education earlier. Could you elaborate on how vocational colleges can better collaborate with enterprises to achieve mutual benefits?

Gu Jiafeng: The integration of industry and education is one of the important directions for the development of vocational education. Collaboration between vocational colleges and enterprises can facilitate resource sharing, complementary advantages, and win-win development. Specifically, vocational colleges can collaborate with enterprises in the following ways:

Firstly, vocational colleges can jointly develop talent training plans and programs with enterprises to ensure that teaching content aligns with market demands. For example, vocational colleges can invite industry experts to participate in curriculum design and teaching reforms, jointly formulating talent training programs that meet market demands. At the same time, vocational colleges can also offer customized courses or training programs based on the actual needs of enterprises to satisfy their personnel requirements.

Secondly, vocational colleges can establish internship and training bases as well as employment cooperation relationships with enterprises, providing students with more practical opportunities and employment prospects. For instance, vocational colleges can establish partnerships with local enterprises, allowing students to gain exposure to

the actual operational processes and job requirements of enterprises during their internships and training, thereby enhancing their practical abilities and employment competitiveness. Additionally, vocational colleges can sign employment cooperation agreements with enterprises to provide graduates with more job opportunities and career development spaces.

Furthermore, vocational colleges can collaborate with enterprises to carry out scientific research innovation and technology research and development, promoting industrial upgrading and transformation. For example, vocational colleges can cooperate with enterprises to undertake some scientific research projects or technology research and development work, jointly solving technical problems and bottlenecks within the industry. At the same time, vocational colleges can leverage the financial and resource support of enterprises to promote the conversion and application of research results, thereby achieving close integration and win-win development among industry, academia, research, and application.

Li Liuyi: Very practical suggestions! In your opinion, how should vocational colleges strengthen their faculty construction to better adapt to the development needs of vocational education?

Gu Jiafeng: Faculty construction is one of the important guarantees for the development of vocational education. To better adapt to the development needs of vocational education, vocational colleges need to strengthen faculty construction from the following aspects:

Firstly, vocational colleges should focus on introducing and cultivating high-quality, professional teaching staff. For example, vocational colleges can attract more teachers with rich practical experience and industry backgrounds to join the cause of vocational education through recruitment and introduction. At the same time, vocational colleges can strengthen the training and improvement of existing teachers, enhancing their teaching and research capabilities.

Secondly, vocational colleges should pay attention to improving teachers' practical abilities and industry backgrounds. For instance, vocational colleges can encourage teachers to take up temporary positions in enterprises or participate in enterprise scientific research projects and technology research and development work, enhancing their practical abilities and industry backgrounds. At the same time, vocational colleges can invite industry experts to give lectures or conduct seminars on campus, allowing teachers to better understand industry trends and technological development trends.

Additionally, vocational colleges need to focus on the construction of teacher incentive mechanisms and evaluation systems. For example, vocational colleges can establish scientific and reasonable teacher incentive mechanisms and evaluation systems to stimulate teachers' work enthusiasm and creativity. At the same time, vocational colleges can strengthen the assessment and supervision of teachers to ensure that their teaching quality and research level meet the school's requirements and standards.

Li Liuyi: Professor Gu, you mentioned the importance of data analysis and mining capabilities earlier. How should we cultivate this ability in students in the field of vocational education?

Gu Jiafeng: Data analysis and mining capabilities are essential general skills in today's era. In the field of vocational education, we can cultivate this ability in students through the following methods:

Firstly, vocational colleges can add courses and content related to data analysis and mining to their curricula. For example, vocational colleges can offer courses on the basics of data analysis and data mining techniques, allowing students to master fundamental data analysis and mining skills. At the same time, vocational colleges can integrate data analysis and mining skills into other professional courses, enabling students to improve their data analysis and mining abilities while learning professional knowledge.

Secondly, vocational colleges can strengthen the design and implementation of practical teaching links to enhance students' data analysis and mining capabilities. For instance, vocational colleges can organize data analysis competitions or project practice activities, allowing students to master data analysis and mining skills through practical operation. At the same time, vocational colleges can collaborate with enterprises to carry out data analysis projects or case studies, enabling students to better understand the application and value of data analysis and mining in actual work.

Furthermore, vocational colleges can strengthen the guidance and cultivation of students, helping them establish correct data awareness and thinking patterns. For example, vocational colleges can popularize knowledge and skills related to data analysis and mining through lectures and seminars. At the same time, vocational colleges can strengthen the assessment and supervision of students to ensure that they have mastered necessary data analysis and mining skills and can flexibly apply them in actual work.

Li Liuyi: Very comprehensive suggestions! In your view, what role does vocational education play in promoting employment and social equity? How should we leverage the role of vocational education?

Gu Jiafeng: Vocational education plays a very important role in promoting employment and social equity. On the one hand, vocational education can provide students with more employment opportunities and career development spaces, helping them realize their self-worth and social value. On the other hand, vocational education can also promote social equity and stability, reducing the occurrence of social conflicts and confrontations.

To leverage the role of vocational education, we need to start from the following aspects: Firstly, we need to strengthen the promotion and publicity of vocational education, improving society's recognition and acceptance of it. Secondly, we need to focus on improving the quality and level of vocational education, ensuring that

students can master necessary skills and knowledge and possess good comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities. Furthermore, we need to strengthen the integration and innovation of vocational education with other fields, such as the integration of industry and education, and school-enterprise cooperation, jointly promoting the development and innovation of vocational education. Finally, we need to strengthen the research and formulation of vocational education policies, providing strong policy guarantees and support for the development of vocational education.

Interview Conclusion:

Through this in-depth dialogue, we have gained a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the development trends, opportunities, and challenges of vocational education. Professor Gu Jiafeng has provided valuable references and insights with his cross-disciplinary research and rich educational practice. Not only has he conducted an in-depth analysis of the current state of vocational education, but he has also looked ahead to future development trends and made predictions. At the same time, he has put forward practical suggestions on how to build a more open and inclusive vocational education system, how to strengthen faculty construction, and how to cultivate students' data analysis and mining capabilities.

Looking forward, with the increasing demand for skilled talents in society and the acceleration of globalization, vocational education will face broader development prospects. We believe that under the guidance of experts like Professor Gu Jiafeng, vocational education can continuously innovate and develop, cultivating more high-quality skilled talents for socio-economic development. At the same time, we also look forward to more individuals dedicated to the cause of vocational education joining this ranks to jointly promote the prosperity and development of vocational education! Once again, thank you to Professor Gu Jiafeng for his wonderful sharing!