

Research on the Matching of Major Setting and Industrial Development of Suzhou Higher Vocational Colleges in the Context of High-quality Development

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Abstract: The major setting of higher vocational colleges and universities is a key link to promoting higher vocational colleges and universities to serve the regional economic development. This study takes 17 higher vocational colleges and universities in Suzhou China as the research object and explores in depth the fit between their major settings and the development of local industries. By systematically analyzing the characteristics of Suzhou's current industrial structure, the key developmental industrial fields, and the major layout of the higher vocational colleges, the matching status between the major structure and industrial structure of Suzhou's higher vocational colleges is revealed by using the deviation degree model. Based on the problems found in the study and the future development trend of the industry, we put forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions, aiming to promote the synergistic development of the major setting and industrial structure of higher vocational colleges and universities, to adapt to and leading the transformation and upgrading of the regional economy.

Keywords: Higher Education Development; Major Setting; Industrial Structure; Regional Economy

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th Party Congress clearly emphasized that the core task of building a modern socialist country comprehensively is to promote high-quality development. It is expected that by 2035, China will achieve the goal of becoming a strong country in various fields such as education, science and technology, talent,

culture, and sports. During the two sessions of the National People's Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping, in his important speech during the deliberation of the Jiangsu delegation, particularly put forward the expectation of Jiangsu to be at the forefront of high-quality development and scientific and technological self-reliance and self-improvement, which profoundly reflects the great importance that the state attaches to education, science and technology, talent and high-quality development strategy. As a key factor in promoting high-quality development, the training of talents must closely follow the pace of economic and social development[1]. For this reason, the "Reform Plan for Adjustment and Optimization of Discipline and Specialty Settings in General Higher Education" was jointly issued by the Ministry of Education and other five departments, which plans to optimize and adjust the distribution of about 20% of the disciplines and specialties in colleges and universities by 2025, to continuously adapt to and meet the needs of social development.

With the continuous transformation and upgrading of regional industries, the major settings of higher vocational colleges and universities also need to be dynamically adjusted accordingly to ensure that the highly skilled talents they cultivate can effectively serve the construction of the local economy. However, in the actual operation process, due to the influence of historical inertia, the limitation of teaching staff, insufficient practical training conditions, and other factors, there is a mismatch or even a disconnect between the major settings of some higher vocational

colleges and the regional industrial structure. This not only fails to meet the demand for highly skilled personnel in the transformation and upgrading of industrial structure but also reduces the quality of higher vocational colleges and universities, resulting in a waste of educational resources[2]. Ideally, students choose their majors based on the realization of their self-worth, and the development of their majors should contribute to their lifelong growth. However, in reality, students' choice of major is often driven by external factors rather than based on personal interest or talent. When students' majors do not match the market demand, it is difficult for them to find suitable jobs in their fields of study after graduation. Therefore, it is of great practical significance and social value to study the relationship between the major setting of higher vocational colleges and the transformation and upgrading of regional industries, to find out the existing problems and to propose effective solution strategies.

2. Research Related to Major Setting and Industrial Development

2.1 Relationship Between Higher Vocational Education and the Local Economy

There is a close relationship between higher vocational education and the local economy, and they promote and depend on each other. The following are several aspects of their relationship: higher vocational education provides talent support for the local economy: the main goal of higher vocational education is to cultivate talents with certain vocational skills and practical abilities, and these talents can directly serve the local economy. By improving the quality and skill level of workers, higher vocational education can help promote the industrial upgrading and transformation of the local economy. The local economy provides an employment market for higher vocational education: the talents cultivated by higher vocational education need to be digested and absorbed by the employment market. The development level and industrial structure of the local economy determine the demand and characteristics of the local employment market, which affects the major settings and teaching content of

higher vocational education[3]. Therefore, higher vocational education needs to cooperate closely with the local economy, understand the market demand, adjust the major settings, and improve the employment competitiveness of graduates. Higher vocational education promotes the innovative development of the local economy: higher vocational education not only cultivates talents needed in traditional industries but also focuses on cultivating innovative talents and promoting the innovative development of the local economy. Through the introduction of new technologies, new processes, and new ideas, higher vocational education helps to improve the competitiveness and innovation ability of local enterprises and promote the sustainable development of the local economy. Local economy supports the development of higher vocational education: the development level of the local economy determines the input and support of the local government for higher vocational education. Economically developed areas usually have more educational resources and funds, which can support the development of higher vocational education. At the same time, local enterprises can also participate in higher vocational education through school-enterprise cooperation and other ways, provide internship training opportunities and teaching resources, and promote the deep integration of higher vocational education and the local economy. To sum up, there is a close relationship between higher vocational education and the local economy, and they promote and depend on each other. Higher vocational education provides talent support and promotes innovation and development for the local economy, while the local economy provides an employment market for higher vocational education and supports its development. Therefore, strengthening the cooperation and communication between higher vocational education and the local economy is of great significance for promoting the development of both sides.

2.2 Major Construction and Industrial Structure Development

Industrial structure refers to the composition and interrelationships between and within each

industrial sector in a country or region. With the development of the economy and technological progress, the industrial structure will constantly change. Such changes will lead to changes in the demand for talent in the employment market, which in turn affects the major construction of higher vocational education. Therefore, higher vocational colleges and universities need to adjust their major settings and teaching contents according to the development trend of industrial structure to meet the social demand for talent. The major construction of higher vocational education should not only meet the current needs of society but also be forward-looking and innovative[4]. Through the introduction of new technologies, new processes, and new ideas, higher vocational education can cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents with innovative abilities, and promote the upgrading and transformation of industrial structure. These talents will inject new vitality into the local economy and promote industrial innovation and development. Higher vocational education needs to work closely with enterprises to understand their needs and employment standards and to jointly develop talent training programs and teaching plans. Through school-enterprise cooperation, higher vocational colleges and universities can more accurately grasp the development trend of industrial structure and market demand, and adjust the direction of major construction in time. At the same time, enterprises can also make use of the teaching resources and scientific research strength of higher vocational colleges and universities to improve their own technical level and innovation ability and promote the optimization and upgrading of industrial structure. The government plays an important role in guiding and supporting the development of higher vocational education and industry. The government can promote the deep integration and development of higher vocational education and the local economy by formulating relevant policies. For example, the government can introduce relevant policies to encourage enterprises to participate in the talent cultivation process of higher vocational education, to improve the employment quality and competitiveness of higher vocational graduates; at the same time, the government can also increase the investment in higher vocational education and improve the running

level and teaching quality of higher vocational institutions.

To sum up, there is a close connection between major construction and industrial structure development. Higher vocational colleges and universities need to adjust the direction of major construction according to the development trend of industrial structure and promote the synergistic development of major construction and industrial structure through school-enterprise cooperation and other ways. At the same time, the government also needs to play a guiding role in promoting the deep integration of higher vocational education and the local economy.

2.3 Matching the Major Setting with Industrial Structure

Matching the major setting with an industrial structure is the key to ensuring that the quality of talent training in higher vocational education is compatible with social demand. If the major setting is not matched with the industrial structure, it may lead to the problem of difficult employment for students and difficult recruitment for enterprises[5]. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the development trend and market demand of local industries, and major settings and curriculum arrangement according to industrial demand are crucial for improving the quality of talent training and employment competitiveness. Higher vocational colleges and universities should set up and adjust their majors reasonably according to the industrial development plans and trends of their regions to ensure that the talents they cultivate meet the needs of regional industrial development. For example, in regions with developed manufacturing industries, higher vocational colleges and universities can focus on setting up specializations related to manufacturing industries, such as mechanical engineering and automation. With the continuous progress of science and technology and the rise of emerging industries, higher vocational colleges and universities need to pay close attention to the development trend of emerging industries and set up majors related to them promptly. For example, in the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence, big data, and other fields, higher vocational colleges and universities can set up related majors to cultivate talents with relevant skills and

knowledge. Industrial upgrading is an inevitable trend of economic development, and higher vocational colleges and universities need to adjust their major settings and teaching content according to the needs of industrial upgrading. For example, in the process of upgrading traditional industries, higher vocational colleges and universities can strengthen the teaching and training of new technologies and new techniques to improve the comprehensive quality and adaptability of students.

To sum up, matching the major settings with the industrial structure is the key to ensuring that the quality of talent training in higher vocational education is compatible with the social demand. Higher vocational colleges and universities need to pay close attention to the market demand and industrial development trend, reasonably set up and adjust majors, strengthen school-enterprise cooperation and integration of industry and education, and improve the relevance and practicality of talent training.

3. Current Situation and Development Trend of Suzhou's Industrial Structure

3.1 Overall Industrial Structure of Suzhou

In 2023, the overall industrial structure of Suzhou continued to be optimized, and the construction of the modern industrial system was accelerated. In terms of the added value of industries, the primary industry achieved an added value of 19.52 billion yuan, an increase of 3.1%; the secondary industry achieved an added value of 1154.14 billion yuan, an increase of 3.6%; and the tertiary industry achieved an added value of 1,291.68 billion yuan, an increase of 5.5%. This shows that the tertiary industry in Suzhou has the largest contribution to economic growth, followed by the secondary industry, and the primary industry has a relatively small contribution. From the perspective of specific industries, the output value of advanced manufacturing industries such as the automobile manufacturing industry, electrical machinery and equipment manufacturing industry, and special-purpose equipment manufacturing industry increased by 6.3%, 3.2%, and 3.4% respectively compared with that of the previous year, indicating that the manufacturing industry of Suzhou still

maintains the growth trend. At the same time, the output value of strategic emerging industries accounted for 47.6% of the total industrial output value above the scale, an increase of 2.7 percentage points over the previous year, indicating that emerging industries occupy an important position in the industrial development of Suzhou.

In addition, the modern service industry also shows a trend of quality improvement and upgrading. The added value of the productive service industry accounted for 58.0% of the added value of the service industry, up 1.7 percentage points from the previous year. The operating income of the high-tech service industry above scale increased by 6.0% over the previous year, indicating that Suzhou's service industry is developing in the direction of high technology and high value-addedness. In terms of digital transformation, Suzhou has also made positive progress. The added value of the city's core digital economy industries accounted for 16.2% of GDP, an increase of 0.4 percentage points over the previous year. Two new global "lighthouse factories" have been added, with a total of seven. The intelligent transformation and digital transformation of the manufacturing industry covered 3,936 new enterprises on a regular basis, achieving full coverage of enterprises on a regular basis, and completing the assessment of the digital capacity of 12,000 small and medium-sized enterprises. 2023 Suzhou's overall industrial structure continues to be optimized, with the rapid development of advanced manufacturing industries, modern service industries, and new industries such as the digital economy, which have injected a new impetus for economic growth.

3.2 Development Trend of Suzhou Industries

Suzhou will focus on the development of ten major industrial chains during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period, including biomedicine and high-end medical devices, new displays, optical communications, software and integrated circuits, high-end manufacturing, automobiles, and parts, new energy, new materials, high-end textiles, and energy conservation and environmental protection. Suzhou will adhere to the five development principles of innovation, integration, green, openness and synergy, and safety, aiming to

comprehensively improve the core competitiveness of the manufacturing industry and build a global high-end manufacturing base. Specific objectives include maintaining the proportion of manufacturing added value to regional GDP at over 40%, breaking through more than 50 key core technologies (equipment) of the industrial chain, adding a certain number of high-value invention patents, the output value of high-tech industries accounting for about 55% of the total value of industrial output on the statute book, and the output value of emerging industries accounting for 60% of the total value of industrial output on the statute book. These goals aim to promote the optimization and upgrading of industrial structures in Suzhou and improve industrial competitiveness and sustainable development. By strengthening technological innovation, optimizing industrial layout, promoting green development, and other measures, Suzhou will continue to enhance the added value and competitiveness of these industrial chains, injecting new momentum into economic growth.

4. Current Situation of the Major Structure of Suzhou Regional Higher Vocational Colleges And Universities

4.1 Overall Coverage of Majors

There are 26 colleges and universities in Suzhou, of which 17 are higher vocational colleges and universities, accounting for 65.4% of the total number of colleges and universities. During the past "13th Five-Year Plan" period, i.e. from 2016 to 2020, the enrollment and the number of students in Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and universities have increased by 11,812 and 22,909 respectively, which shows the gradual expansion of the scale of education. These higher vocational colleges and universities have delivered a large number of technical and skilled talents to Suzhou City, which has played a positive role in promoting the development of the local economy. Among the 17 higher vocational colleges and universities in Suzhou, there are 11 publicly-run colleges and universities and 6 privately-run colleges and universities, including 1 Chinese-foreign cooperative institution. The proportion of schools run by social forces (i.e., privately run) is 35.3%, showing a diversified pattern of school running.

In terms of school types, there are the most polytechnic higher vocational colleges and universities, with a total of 10, accounting for 58.82 percent; followed by comprehensive higher vocational colleges and universities, with two, accounting for 11.76 percent; and teacher training, agriculture and forestry, finance and economics, medicine and art higher vocational colleges and universities, with one each, accounting for 5.88 percent respectively. This type of distribution of higher vocational colleges and universities dominated by science and technology is in line with the industrial development pattern of Suzhou, which is dominated by the manufacturing industry.

In response to the call of the National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan, to strengthen the construction of the national teaching standard system for vocational education, and to implement the dynamic updating requirements for vocational education majors, the Ministry of Education conducted a comprehensive revision of the catalog of vocational education majors and released the new Catalogue of Vocational Education Majors in 2021. The catalog divides the majors of higher vocational education in China into 19 major categories of majors, 97 major categories, and 744 majors. The 17 higher vocational colleges and universities in Suzhou cover 17 major categories, 55 major classes, and 164 majors, with coverage rates of 89.47%, 56.70%, and 22.04% respectively. Although Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and universities are generally more complete in the setting of major categories, they still do not cover the major categories of energy power and materials and water conservancy. Specifically, finance and trade, electronics and information, and equipment manufacturing are the major categories in which Suzhou higher vocational colleges and universities have set up a larger number of majors. The majors under these categories, such as e-commerce, computer network technology, and numerical control technology, are closely connected with the industrial development needs of Suzhou, providing strong talent support for the sustainable development of the local economy. With the continuous progress of science and technology and the transformation and upgrading of Suzhou's industrial structure, emerging industries such as the advanced

equipment manufacturing industry have an increasingly strong demand for technical and skilled composite talents. Therefore, the relevant higher vocational colleges and universities need to further expand the scale of operation and improve the quality of teaching to meet the demand for talent in the industrial development of Suzhou City.

4.2 Concentration of Major Settings

The major settings of Suzhou regional higher vocational colleges and universities are relatively concentrated, mainly in the major categories of finance and trade, electronics and information, equipment manufacturing, culture and art, and civil construction. These categories are closely related to the industrial structure and development needs of the Suzhou region. Specifically, finance and trade majors such as e-commerce, international economics and trade, etc., are in line with Suzhou's status as a nationally important commerce and trade city; electronics and information majors such as computer network technology, software technology, etc., are in line with Suzhou's demand as a nationally renowned electronics and information industry base; and equipment manufacturing majors such as numerical control technology, mechatronics technology, etc., are designed to satisfy the demand of the manufacturing industry in Suzhou for demand for highly skilled personnel.

In addition, some higher vocational colleges and universities have also formed a more concentrated major setting in certain major categories according to their own schooling characteristics and positioning. For example, Suzhou Arts and Crafts Vocational and Technical College has set up more majors in the culture and arts category, while Suzhou Health Vocational and Technical College has set up more majors in the medicine and health category. This concentration of major settings reflects the keen grasp of Suzhou regional higher vocational colleges and universities of the development trend of local industries and the demand for talent, as well as the purpose of higher vocational colleges and universities to serve the local economic and social development. At the same time, it also provides students in the Suzhou region with more opportunities to choose majors that are closely related to the development of local industries.

5. Matching Degree of Regional Higher Vocational Colleges' Major Setting and Industrial Development

5.1 Analysis of Deviation Degree of Regional Industrial Structure

This study adopts the calculation method of industry-employment structure deviation to analyze the relationship between the symmetry of Suzhou's industrial structure and employment structure. The formula for calculating the degree of deviation of industry-employment structure is Degree of deviation of industry-employment structure = industry structure/industry employment structure - 1. When the industry-employment structure deviation degree is equal to zero, the industrial structure and employment structure of the industry are in a balanced state; the closer the structural deviation degree is to zero, the more the industrial structure and employment structure tend to be coordinated and adapted; if the deviation degree is greater than zero, the proportion of the industry's output is greater than the proportion of the employment, which indicates that the existing employment structure fails to satisfy the development needs of the industry, and the practitioners are relatively short of labor, and there is still a large space for labor absorption. There is still more room for labor absorption. If the degree of structural deviation is less than zero, and the proportion of output value of the industry is smaller than the proportion of employment, it indicates that there is a large amount of surplus labor in the industry, and there is hidden unemployment. The smaller the absolute value of the deviation, the more harmonious the relationship between the two structures and the better the economic development of the industry. Detailed data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Deviation between the Structure of Three Major Industries and Employment Structure

Industry category	Industry share (%)	Industry employment share (%)	Deviation degree
Primary Industry	0.8	2.4	-0.67
Secondary Industry	48.1	51.9	-0.07
Tertiary	51.1	45.7	0.12

From the perspective of the structure of the

three major industries and the structural deviation of employment in Suzhou, it can be clearly observed that the structural deviation of the primary industry shows a large negative value. This indicates that there is a significant mismatch between the industrial structure of this industry and the demand for labor, leading to a large surplus of labor. Comparatively speaking, the degree of deviation of the industrial structure of the secondary industry tends to be almost close to zero, showing a relative equilibrium between the industry and employment, and its ability to absorb new labor has basically reached saturation. Although the industrial structure and employment structure of the tertiary industry are currently in a state of approximate equilibrium, it is expected that more labor from the primary and secondary industries will flow to the tertiary industry as technological advancement takes place. Therefore, it can be foreseen that the tertiary industry in Suzhou will continue to play a major role in absorbing labor for some time to come.

5.2 Analysis of the Deviation between the Major Structure and Industrial Structure of Regional Higher Vocational Colleges and Universities

This study adopts the degree of deviation between major structure and industrial structure to analyze the matching status between major settings of Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and the development of Suzhou's local industries. The formula for calculating the degree of deviation of major-industrial structure is Major-industry structure deviation = major structure/industry structure - 1. When the degree of deviation of the major-industrial structure is equal to zero, it indicates that the industrial structure and major structure of the industry are in a state of dynamic equilibrium; the closer the degree of structural deviation is to zero, it indicates that the fitness of the industrial structure and major structure is more coordinated; if the degree of structural deviation is greater than zero, it indicates that the number of major settings corresponding to the industry or the number of major sites is too many, and the supply of major corresponding to the relevant industry is too much; if the degree of deviation is less than zero, it indicates that the proportion of major structure corresponding to the industry is less than the proportion of major structure corresponding to

the relevant industry. If the deviation degree is less than zero, it indicates that the proportion of the corresponding major structure of the industry is smaller than the proportion of the industrial structure, and there is a talent gap in the industry. The lower the absolute value of deviation, the better the matching degree.

From the overall situation analysis, we can see that the degree of deviation between the major structure of the secondary industry and the industrial structure is negative and the absolute value of the degree of deviation is large, indicating that the proportion of the major structure of the secondary industry is much smaller than the proportion of the industrial structure, and the major structure of the secondary industry is not able to develop in coordination with the industrial structure, and the major setup corresponding to the secondary industry can hardly meet the demand of the secondary industry in Suzhou. The number of major distribution points and the number of major settings are on the low side, indicating that the number of secondary industry-related major settings in Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and universities is small, and the adaptability of the two is poor, resulting in a serious lack of high-quality technical and skilled talents in the secondary industry. The output value of the secondary industry still occupies half of the GDP of Suzhou, and the total number of relevant majors corresponding to the secondary industry in Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and universities is seriously insufficient. The deviation of the major structure of the primary industry and tertiary industry from the industrial structure is positive, indicating that the major structure of primary and tertiary industry is larger than the industrial structure in Suzhou, and the higher deviation of the major structure of primary industry from the industrial structure indicates that the number of professions set up in the primary industry and the number of major sites are too large, and the supply of related professions is larger than the demand, which means that there is a waste of resources, and the supply of labor force is in the state of supplying more than the demand.

Table 2 Analysis of the Deviation of the Major Structure from the Industrial Structure

Industry category	Major structure (%)	Industrial structure (%)	Deviation degree
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Primary Industry	1.51	0.8	0.89
Secondary Industry	27.53	48.1	-0.43
Tertiary	70.96	51.1	0.39

In addition, the major settings of Suzhou's higher vocational colleges and universities are poorly adapted to the emerging industries in Suzhou, the number of major sites is small, and there are no relevant majors in the new energy and new materials industry. Among the emerging industries, the high-end equipment manufacturing industry-related majors are most favored by Suzhou higher vocational colleges and universities, with a total of 11 higher vocational colleges and universities offering relevant majors, but only 6 relevant majors are docked to this industry, and the corresponding majors of aerospace and rail transportation equipment industry in high-end equipment manufacturing, which is technology-intensive and has a higher value chain, are not available, and the docking majors of the rest of the industries are not more than 3. In 2022, the total industrial output value of strategic emerging industries in Suzhou has exceeded 2 trillion yuan, but the ability of higher vocational education in Suzhou to supply the strategic emerging industries in Suzhou is low, and the fit between the two is poor.

6. Countermeasures of Regional Higher Vocational Colleges and Universities Major Setting Against the Development of Local Industries

The coordinated development of higher vocational education and the regional economy is not only a prerequisite for the healthy development of the regional economy and society but also an inevitable choice for higher vocational colleges and universities to improve their own quality of education. During the "13th Five-Year Plan" period, the industrial structure of Suzhou has undergone significant transformation and upgrading, and the tertiary industry has become the economic pillar of the city. This change has led to a corresponding adjustment in the demand for various types of talents. As an important base for cultivating high-quality and high-skilled talents, higher vocational colleges and universities should pay close attention to the development trend of Suzhou's leading and emerging industries, and

adjust their major structure in time to better serve the transformation and upgrading of regional industries. Therefore, based on the above research on the matching degree between the major structure and industrial structure of higher vocational education in Suzhou, the following countermeasures are proposed for the major setting of regional higher vocational colleges and universities to match the development of local industries.

6.1 Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education and Improving Teaching Quality

Encourage higher vocational colleges and universities to actively cooperate with local enterprises to jointly build major teaching practice bases, to ensure that students can be exposed to the real working environment and skill requirements during school, and to improve the quality of major teaching. This mode of cooperation helps schools better understand the employment needs of enterprises, so as to adjust the major settings and teaching content to make it more in line with market demand.

6.2 Optimize the Layout of Majors by Combining with Social Demand

Strengthen the research on social demand, deepen the understanding of industrial development trends, and optimize the major settings. Higher vocational colleges and universities should increase the major settings of the modern service industry, information technology, cultural creativity, and other emerging fields so that the major layout is more in line with the market demand. At the same time, for traditional professions, timely adjustments and optimization should be made according to market changes.

6.3 Strengthen the Construction of Faculty and Enhance the Teaching Level

Establish a sound teacher training system, improve the teaching level and practical ability of teachers, and stimulate the enthusiasm and innovative spirit of teachers. Higher vocational colleges and universities can improve the overall quality of their faculty by introducing outstanding talents, strengthening in-service teacher training, and building teacher training bases with enterprises.

6.4 Establish a Sound Employment Service System to Promote Student Employment

Strengthen the contact with employers and establish a sound employment service system to provide graduates with more and better employment opportunities. Higher vocational colleges and universities can build bridges for students to communicate with employers and promote students' smooth employment by carrying out school-enterprise cooperation projects, organizing campus job fairs, and establishing employment information platforms.

6.5 Strengthening the Construction of Specialty Professions and Cultivating Advantageous Professions

Aim at the industrial layout and cultivate characteristic and advantageous majors of vocational education. Higher vocational colleges and universities should select majors with development potential for key construction according to their own conditions of operation and regional industrial characteristics, so as to form major clusters with distinctive features and outstanding advantages. At the same time, advantageous majors are encouraged to achieve cross-regional enrolment, so as to share resources and complement each other's advantages.

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