

Biopolitics in China, as seen through the Promotion and Relaxation of Family Planning Campaigns

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With a declining birthrate, an aging population, and a labor shortage all becoming increasingly serious, China gradually relaxed its “one-child policy” in the 2010s and, in 2016, a “two-child policy” was put in place. Since May 31, 2021, all couples have been allowed to have a third child. Intervention in an individual’s reproduction and control over their own body can be considered an embodiment of Foucault’s concept of “biopolitics”, and China shows an extreme example of this as it has been practicing a long-term birth control and family planning campaign, prescribed by law. Previous studies have examined the concept of biopolitics, but there has been insufficient discussion of how biopolitics is represented in Chinese society. This paper elucidates the characteristics of biopolitics and its transformation in China, comparing family planning in China with other East Asian countries, especially Japan.

In Japan, the nationalization of family planning and the legalization of abortion in the 1950s brought about a decline in the overall fertility rate as women were given increased access to family planning and birth control and voluntarily reduced the number of children they had. In the early days of family planning, the state was directly involved but reproduction gradually became a private matter for most people. In other words, the prevalent form of “biopolitics” involved simply acknowledging and accommodating the desires of the majority of people. In addition, the abolition of restrictions regarding reproduction expanded the scope of biopolitics.

In China, however, these characteristics of biopolitics only came to the fore after the relaxation of family planning. During the “one-child policy” period, “biopolitics” was characterized less by “at will” desire than by the “disciplinary power” that strongly regulated the reproduction of individuals. The state monitored and controlled the bodies and reproduction of women not only through state centralized policies, but also through the promotion of policies passed down to the grassroots level by local cadres. In this case, individuals were expected to be “submissive subjects” who simply accepted the state policies as they were and regulated their own reproduction accordingly.

However, during the “two-child policy” period, policy promotion in local communities shifted from coercive indoctrination by cadres to encouraging residents to comply voluntarily by providing services, information, and organizing games and events that were easy to participate in. Individuals became actors with the freedom to choose whether or not to participate. Also, during this period, there was increased emphasis on influencing people’s reproductive choices indirectly by intervening in the environment around them, such as by constructing public representations of the “happy 4-person family”. In other words, emphasis on the disciplinary power of “biopolitics” is decreasing, with people now being increasingly left to make their own reproductive decisions.

Immigrant Background and Bullying Victimization: Empirical Analysis using TIMSS

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This article examines the bullying victimization which students with an immigrant background have sometimes experienced in Japan contributing to serious incidents like suicide and often becoming a key reason why some students do not wish to go to school. Using TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), this article examines how the incidence of victimization varies between Japanese students and students with an immigrant background, and analyzes the relationship between linguistic differences, cultural differences and the frequency of victimization. The result shows that students with an immigrant background have experienced bullying victimization more frequently than Japanese students. Of course, linguistic and cultural differences can explain some of this difference but, even after controlling for these differences and other individual factors, immigrant background can still be identified as a clear risk factor for victimization.

The Effect of Cultural Capital on the Use of Recommendation and Admissions Office Examinations for Higher Education

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Cultural capital needs to be considered in relation to fields where it works, such as school education and selection systems. In Japan, although the use of a standardized written entrance examination for higher education was prevalent until the 1980s, since then the use of “non-written” examinations has been increasing and many students can now choose to take either type. In admission processes involving an admissions office (AO) and based on recommendations by high school teachers, high school grades, essays, and interviews, cultural capital could be expected to have more impact than in written examinations. This paper examined the impact of cultural capital on the use of these non-written examinations. Using data obtained from a 2012 survey of high school students and their mothers, the author analyzed the relationship between cultural capital in childhood and the educational aspirations of students and the type of entrance examination they prefer. The results showed that (1) cultural capital in the arts and reading was not significantly related to any preference for non-written examinations, (2) these examinations were more likely to be used by those with lower levels of academic ability, and (3) there was no difference in the amount of cultural capital between students who wanted to enter higher education and those who did not. This suggests that cultural capital plays relatively little role in the educational choices of high school students in Japan’s institutional context, and that the widespread use of examinations that are not based on academic ability could be a way for lower-achieving students to enter higher education.