



華人家庭研究中心

Centre for Chinese Family Studies

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Institutionalized Negative Selection and Structural Teacher Favoritism: Signs, Mechanisms, and Heterogeneity of the Effects of Cultural Capital on Educational Achievement in China

About the Webinar

Prior research in East Asia often finds negative effects of cultural capital on educational achievement, which contradicts the mainstream literature. However, no research has addressed this contradiction. This study aims to demystify the myth of cultural capital's negative effects on educational achievement in East Asia, using China as a case study to analyze its signs, mechanisms, and heterogeneity. Analysis of the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) reveals four major findings. First, after accounting for negative selection, the supposed negative effects of cultural capital dissipate. Second, the analysis substantiates a new concept – institutionalized negative selection – which elucidates low-achieving students' propensity to engage in extracurricular activities not as a means of pursuing better academic performance, but as a means of pursuing superior educational credentials. This phenomenon is exclusive to extracurricular activities, as highbrow cultural participation does not pave formal educational pathways within the existing education system. However, the latter is related to increased structural teacher favoritism (i.e., praising and cold-calling on students in class), which leads to greater educational achievement. Third, no evidence supports the notions that cultural capital reduces study time or improves learning skills (either cognitive or non-cognitive), challenging the conventional understanding of how cultural capital operates within standardized education systems. Fourth, institutionalized negative selection is significant solely among low-SES students, endorsing the cultural mobility model. In contrast, structural teacher favoritism is more pronounced among high-SES students and in high-SES schools, supporting the cultural reproduction model. This study uncovers the institutional conditions under which the cultural mobility and the cultural reproduction models coexist. This reveals how cultural capital can both promote educational mobility and perpetuate educational inequality, depending on the varying valuations of cultural capital by educational institutions.

About the Speaker



Wensong Shen is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research mainly focuses on education and child development in China. His work has been published in mainstream sociology journals such as *Social Science Research*, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, and *Chinese Sociological Review*, as well as in many other interdisciplinary journals.



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