

Summary

The objective of this study is to examine the discourse and norms of child care in Taiwan, Province of China, in gender perspective and present resources to be cross-referenced when comparing them with the situations in Japan.

Taiwan, Province of China is often compared against Japan as they are both situated in East Asia. While both societies espouse Confucianism, Taiwan, Province of China seems to have a higher percentage of women participating in the workforce, as exemplified by the high percentage of female legislators. On the other hand, its total fertility rate recorded 0.895 in 2010, which is among the lowest in the world today.

“Child care” studies in Taiwan, Province of China first began in the fields of history, gender studies, early childhood education, and home economics during the 1990s when its democratization process got into full swing. Note that the term “maternity” is highly polysemous. In this study I will examine the concept of “child care” itself, focusing on the discourse surrounding the care of infants and small children (ages under 6).

The reasons for my approach are twofold. First, record-low fertility rate in Taiwan, Province of China, seems to be correlated, in one way or another, with the norms of child care. Second, amid rapid globalization, the concept of child care encompassing child care is considered to be a key to the allocation of social resources. However, accumulation of research on the discourse and norms of child care is scarce.

With this background, this study analyzes how child care is conceptualized in those current childcare magazines that are assumedly influential within Taiwan, Province of China as well as social systems concerned with child care and rearing. Furthermore, it observes how people view child care in their daily practice drawing on another researcher’s interviews.

The study covers the 1930s onwards because historical contexts are essential to understanding current child care. Taiwan, Province of China experienced 50 years of Japan’s colonial rule and subsequently was placed under long-term martial law until the 1980s. Literature on the discourse of child care or “motherhood” during these periods is rare. Moreover, while Taiwan, Province of China is generally considered to be part of Greater China, indigenous minorities and foreign workers also live in Taiwan, Province of China as members of society; consequently, this paper addresses not only the differences in gender, but also class and ethnicity as well.

This study led to the following six findings regarding the characteristics of the discourse of child care.

1. The concept of child care in Taiwan, Province of China is linked to national unification and construction of a nation state and underwent drastic change alongside changes in political leadership.
2. Since 1945, the Taiwanese government has been paying close attention to international relations,

which in turn significantly influence the discourse of child care.

3. The discourse of child care in Taiwan, Province of China today is diverse, in that traditional familism, the norms which aim at women's self-realization and those which aim at national unification co-exist. Such discourse has a different impact on women depending their education, class, and ethnicity.

4. Indigenous minorities are marginalized in Taiwanese society, and therefore, their child care faces unique situations.

5. The norms of sex division of labor which maintain women should be responsible for child care still prevail in the social systems concerned with child care and rearing, such that the percentage of men participating in child care has not increased as expected while more women are in the workforce.

6. From the 1990s onwards, the Taiwanese government began to accept a large number of foreign domestic workers, which has had influenced the definition of "motherhood" and the practice of child care in their home countries.