



Title	The Elite' s counterstrategy to the massification of education: IB
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Abstract of Thesis

Name (Shiyun Zhang)	
Title	<p>The Elite' s Counterstrategy to the Massification of Education: IB</p> <p>(教育の大衆化に対するエリートの対抗戦略: 国際バカロレア (IB))</p>
<p>Abstract of Thesis</p> <p>This study examines the International Baccalaureate (IB) program as a mechanism for elite reproduction within the global education landscape. Grounded in Bourdieu's theory of capital, the research investigates how economic, cultural, and social capital influence parental decision-making and the marketing strategies of IB schools in Japan and China. By employing a mixed-methods approach—combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews of parents and IB school directors—the study reveals that while the IB promotes global citizenship and academic excellence, its benefits are largely accessible to affluent families. The findings underscore the dual role of the IB in enhancing international educational mobility while simultaneously reinforcing entrenched social inequalities.</p>	

論文審査の結果の要旨及び担当者

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論文審査の結果の要旨

Title of the dissertation: The Elite's Counterstrategy to the Massification of Education: IB.

The background to this research is the massification of education – the rapid expansion of access to education across all societal strata – since the mid-20th century. These transformations were celebrated as a move towards meritocracy and democracy. However, paradoxically this massification did not lead to better chances for the masses but to degree inflation and more severe competition. Particularly, socio-economic elites tried to develop strategies to maintain their social and economic advantages over generations.

The aim of this research was to explore the role of the International Baccalaureate (IB) in the strategies of Japanese and Chinese elites to counteract the massification of education. By focusing on the motivations of parents to choose IB schools for their children, and on the IB school principals to market their schools, the study aimed “to uncover how global education systems like the IB contribute to social reproduction and the perpetuation of inequality.” The study objectives to realize this aim were:

“1. To analyze the motivations of Japanese and Chinese parents in selecting the IB for their children. 2. To explore the role of economic, cultural, and social capital in shaping these decisions. 3. To examine how the IB functions as a mechanism for social reproduction and status maintenance. 4. To assess the broader implications of these dynamics for global educational inequality and access.”

The main research question was: “What is the role of the International Baccalaureate in the elite's strategy to reproduce itself?”

The two sub-questions were the following:

RSQ 1: “What are the motivations of parents in Japan and China for choosing the IB Diploma Program for their children?”

RSQ 2: “How do IB schools in Japan and China market themselves to appeal to elite families?”

The research employed Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory as the theoretical framework. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 116 parents (74 from China and 42 from Japan). The survey collected data about the socio-economic background of the parents, their motivations for choosing the IB, and their career plans for their children. Interviews were conducted with 101 parents (52 from China and 49 from Japan). The recruiting of participants relied in both the survey and the interviews on a snowball sampling technique. The interviews were conducted in Chinese, Japanese, and English.

The thesis is made up of 6 chapters. Each chapter is well-structured and polished in terms of academic writing style. The first chapter outlines the background of the research problem: the inherent contradictions of both massification and the IB program. Both foster the ideas of inclusivity and meritocracy, but they fail to deliver. The massification failed, because it led to degree inflation and increased competition. The IB program failed, because access is in most cases limited to affluent families. Instead of supporting the efforts of the education system to increase inclusivity, the IB could be even seen as an instrument to counteract those efforts.

The second chapter covers a range of issues including an overview of the literature on the historical development of mass education from the establishment of compulsory education in 1763 in Prussia to the 1918 Smith-Hughes Act in the United States and 1944 Butler Act in the United Kingdom. The massive post-WWII expansion is covered as well as the rise of education as a global priority from the second half of the 20th century. A description of the uneven impact of mass education follows. Particularly interesting is the discussion of the credential dilemma. The increasing opportunity to access education by more and more social groups, decreased the value of the education. Finally, the response of the elites to this major transformation is discussed. Both classical elite schools like Eton and Harrow as well as the IB as a new path for global elite families are introduced. Especially the literature on the latter was described in depth. The last part of this chapter covers Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Overall, this literature review chapter follows a logical line of analysis and demonstrates a solid level of engagement with the existing literature on the topic. It reveals the author's depth of knowledge in the area as well as her academic writing skills.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical application of Bourdieu's theory to the IB program, the research design, sampling and data collection method, analytical method and ethical considerations. The coverage has a high level and covers all the main items needed for such a chapter. For example, the comparison of the concept of social capital in the works of James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu is excellent. My only criticism is that we are never told when the data was collected.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. 4.2. provides insights into the range of parental motivations to choose the IB program based on the survey and interview results, which addresses RSQ 1. Japanese parents preferred the IB, because they thought that it would be a strategic pathway for academic success in Japan, and because of its focus on a holistic education and global competencies. Contrary, Chinese parents saw the IB as pathway to academic success in the world (Ivy League and Oxbridge), and they thought that the IB would provide a global prestige and opportunities for networking. Despite the more international focus, Chinese parents also believed that the IB would help their children to be successful in China. One interesting aspect is the emerging trend to relocate for the IB. A parent in this study was willing to relocate to a country (in this particular case Thailand), where IB schools are cheaper, in order to give her child a better chance for his future. This phenomenon appeared only on the Chinese side. Contrary, Japanese who were working abroad saw the IB as an opportunity for a smoother reintegration process after returning to Japan. Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed that some parents feel anxiety about the compatibility with the national education systems, because in the end IB graduates do have to compete with their peers based on the local and not global rules in Japan and China.

4.3. responds to RSQ 2. The interviews with the IB school principals revealed that they see the IB as an investment of parents into a successful future of their children. The principals presented the IB as a superior academic pathway in comparison to the public-school education. The latter aspect is more strongly emphasized and combined with the ideas of elitism and global opportunities on the Chinese side. The principals in Japan, however, focused more on the dual nature of the IB program, which would allow not only an international career but also a career in Japan. This section is particularly interesting, because the role of principals and their understanding of IB programs is often overlooked. This chapter could have been organized better in order to reduce repetitions.

Chapter 5 is the discussion chapter. The first part (5.1.) of this chapter engages with the literature, and shows that several results replicated the findings of other studies. The IB's financial barriers are well documented. Interesting is here that this discussion is connected to the specific cultural and educational norms in Japan and China. 5.2. addresses the research sub-questions. On the one hand, the parents in both Japan and China see the choice for the IB as an economic sacrifice in the hope that the capital conversion will fulfil their long-term aspirations. The aim is to convert resources into opportunities. On the other hand, the IB school principals believe that the exclusivity of the IB creates prestige and a gateway to elite opportunities. They also emphasized the importance of social capital in the form of global networks.

Finally, 5.3. answered the main research question. Several parents pointed out and one principal openly admitted that it is not enough to pay the tuition fees for a successful path through the IB. Several participants said that in order to excel and stand out in the IB, it would be necessary to cover additional costs (e.g., attending Model United Nation simulations or paying tutors), which less-wealthy families could not afford. Interesting is that this also

created a hierarchy among the “elites.” However, despite (or because of) this exclusivity, some middle-class families saw the IB as a chance to change the habitus of their children, and were willing to go to their financial limits, and one mother moved with her son to Thailand in order to have access to a less expensive IB school. In this sense, the IB program fails to provide equal opportunities. The myth of meritocracy legitimizes the status quo. The final part of the discussion chapter provides some ideas of how the IB program could be reformed in order to make it more inclusive. The proposals are: to incorporate diverse (non-Western) epistemologies, to allow localized implementations, to invest in public education in order to reduce inequalities, to use the IB as a model for public education, and to provide targeted subsidies. Although those ideas are interesting, it is not clear why anybody would be interested in reforming the IB program, because it counters the massification of education so well. As one IB school principal pointed out, the emphasis on exclusivity and superiority in the marketing strategy is consciously chosen. If the IB would not be exclusive and superior, the elites would not be motivated to pay for this program. The final chapter is the conclusion and offers a summary of main findings, policy recommendations, and recommendations for future research. Through this study we can understand the role of the IB in the elite’s strategy to reproduce itself.

The overall conclusion of the Committee was that there are some important, original findings in the study. The thesis is interesting, polished in writing style and provides a wealth of information about the motivation of parents in Japan and China to choose an IB school, the marketing strategies of IB school principals, and the role of the IB in the elite’s strategy to counteract the massification of education. We were unanimous that the research and the thesis meet the standards for the award of a PhD in Human Sciences.