

Becoming New Elites:

Japanese Affluent Mothers' Construction of an Elite Status Culture through Children's International Schooling in Tokyo



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Although studies on elite schools have examined how children enrolled in these schools acquire a sense of entitlement and/or privilege, how the parents of these children come to construct an elite status culture through their everyday interactions around the school setting is less clear. This aspect should not be neglected because children are often used to establish their families' position in the class/status hierarchy. As a case study, I observed the kindergarten section of an 'international school' in Tokyo, a new type of new elite school in Asian countries, which has been actively sought out by local privileged families to help prepare their children to achieve upward social mobility in the global stratification hierarchy. I examine the processes in which local Japanese elite families, particularly the mothers as status makers of the households, construct an elite status culture through their children's elite, international schooling. I argue that these local families are lured into mobile, free, cosmopolitan and extravagant styles of bonding while fulfilling the institutional expectations and responsibilities of global meritocracy, motherhood and international schools. These group bonds and the elite tracking structure provide cultural resources for the families to distinguish themselves as new elites from the established elite families. In conclusion, I discuss the implications for scholarship on elites, culture, education and social stratification.