

China studies and urban studies, and researchers in all these fields will find the narrative and evidence fascinating and mind-opening.

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*Governing Educational Desire: Culture, Politics and Schooling in China*

ANDREW KIPNIS

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Andrew Kipnis has been visiting Zouping county in Shandong province for the past two decades. Recently he spent over three months in sixth-grade classrooms in the county. He also visited numerous students' families in villages and towns throughout Zouping. This provides the basis for his rich description of local manifestations of "educational desire," the feverish pursuit of educational glory. In one vignette, Kipnis tells his readers about a county middle school which resembles a small university campus with its sophisticated IT, gym and music equipment. In another, he outlines the daily schedule in a township boarding school where students rise at 6.15 and go to bed at 9.40, with a quarter of an hour in the afternoon for eye exercises to relieve the physical strain of intensive study. According to Kipnis, so ingrained is the obsession with study that higher-level officials' efforts to stymie the excesses, by for instance issuing regulations to limit homework loads, cause teachers, parents and students to devise counter strategies in order to secure educational advantage.

Yet while Kipnis's description of how educational desire looks on the ground makes for fascinating reading, the primary research question motivating the book is to explain its cause. The complexity of the task is recognized by Kipnis who observes that: "Viewed locally, the governing that is involved in this intensity cannot be said to have arisen through the efforts of any single governing agent" (p. 53). Instead, multiple actors exercise agency in the pursuit of educational success, though none of them has definitive sway. For instance, Kipnis shows how Zouping officials and principals contribute to fuelling education fever by using monitoring, evaluation and rewards to shape incentives. Standardized tests are administered in every subject in every grade across the county so that schools and teachers can be compared and funds can be allocated accordingly. Remarkably, in two senior high schools that Kipnis visited the principals had even installed electronic swipe cards to monitor the time teachers spent in their offices (p. 43). One reason for the intense pressure on officials, principals and teachers to produce educational success is that high-performing schools attract fee-paying students from outside the catchment area, thereby helping to alleviate fiscal deficits. Kipnis also shows how, for their part, the parents and students of Zouping see a college education as intrinsically valuable and as a marker of status even though vocational training is arguably more likely to lead to a decent-paying job.

Yet Kipnis is clear that the principle reasons for education fever do not lie within Zouping. In his search for a holistic explanation of the puzzle of education fever Kipnis consults literature from the fields of anthropology, history, development studies and comparative education. In eloquently weaving together judiciously chosen insights and situating the Zouping case in national, East Asian and global contexts he generates maximum analytical purchase for his empirical material. Using the concept of "emplacing" or "installing a cultural practice in a particular place," Kipnis

demonstrates how universal dimensions of socio-cultural organization and political practice become localized, and how local manifestations of patterns that resemble those found elsewhere may emerge either in isolation or else through social and historical connections with peoples and cultures in other places.

As one example of “emplacement,” Kipnis examines how national policies to reduce family size have caused parents to have ever higher ambitions for their children and to invest increasing amounts of energy and resources in their child-raising. Meanwhile, educational restructuring which has entailed curriculum enrichment, school consolidation and the upgrading of school facilities has also encouraged a community-wide focus on raising children of quality (*suzhi*). Owing in part to a historical legacy of schooling as well as to particular patterns of family formation in Zouping, these national dynamics have played out at the county level in ways that have produced incredibly intense education fever.

As a further example, Kipnis considers how, both in schools and in wider society, features of the East Asian “imperial governing complex” have ensured that “education is as much a way to rule as to teach” (p. 91). Specifically, by following exemplary models of behaviour, studying set curricula to pass exams, internalizing social and political hierarchies, including accepting authoritative stipulations about which knowledge is worthy of memorization, and practicing the behaviour associated with belonging to the nation such as correct deportment, pronunciation and handwriting, Zouping students learn to govern themselves in the pursuit of both local and trans-local visions of quality. Further themes explored by Kipnis include how universal phenomena such as human desire for socio-economic mobility, cultural models of literary masculinity, the logic of auditing regimes, and credentialism are all expressed in particular ways in the education fever gripping Zouping county.

Given that this book offers a wealth of fresh information and original ideas, it is perhaps asking too much to request that the author tells his readers more about family dynamics and children’s experiences outside the school gate in Zouping. This is not to suggest omission on the part of the author, only to signal that the present text whets the appetite for more. Overall this is a superbly written monograph. It will be a welcome addition to course reading lists for both undergraduates and graduates. Moreover, it is certain to influence important debates about education, inequality, governance and nation-building in China and beyond for the foreseeable future.

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*China’s Environmental Challenges*

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Over the past few decades, environmental problems in China have moved from being an issue seen in China as secondary to domestic economic growth and separate from political security to becoming a worldwide concern. Numerous books have appeared in China and the West over that time making dire predictions for China’s ecosystems, some of which have come true. Yet we have also seen some levels of improvement and predicted disasters avoided – the latter sometimes by creating ecological problems elsewhere on the planet and sometimes due to new green technologies and retrofitting. Throughout this period, the geographic scale of these problems has expanded to