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*Special Section: Fields, Capitals, Habitus: What Next? A Review Symposium*

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# Legitimate culture, field of power, and domination

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## Abstract

This review critically examines the *Fields, Capitals, Habitus* (*FCH*) study and discusses its potential application to a forthcoming study in Japan. It investigates *FCH* from four perspectives. First, it compares the approach of *FCH* to the relationship between culture and inequality in Australia with Bourdieu's approach in *Distinction* and that taken in the United Kingdom by *Culture, Class, Distinction*. In doing so, it aims to define the theoretical scope of *FCH* as a sociological and Australian study. Second, it focuses on the definition of legitimate culture, that is, how does it differ from other types of culture? Third, it considers how *FCH* engages with the field of power. This concept, which is unique to Bourdieu, extends beyond politics and economics. How does it construct a field of power? Finally, the study of culture and inequality in Japan, which has just begun, is briefly introduced as research that builds on the *FCH* study.

## Keywords

class, culture, domination, inequality, Japan, social differentiation

## Introduction

To provide a context for this review commentary, I am the principal investigator of a joint sociological study on culture and inequality in contemporary Japan, topics which are considered from a theoretical and empirical sociological perspective in terms of the relationship between the role of culture in producing inequalities and the unequal distribution of cultural resources. To study these issues, we develop the concept of cultural capital as a theory of social differentiation. This will involve a postal survey and an interview survey in the Kanto region, a geographical area around Tokyo. Data collected will be analysed using a mixed

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research method that draws on the principles of multiple correspondence analysis. While probing the relationship between culture and inequality by applying the cultural capital concept, our study does not aim to find a proxy variable for cultural capital. Instead, the primary goal is to elucidate cultural capital as a component of the processes of social differentiation, and the causal relationship between culture and inequality is also within scope. Our research is inspired by *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett et al., 2009) and *Fields, Capitals, Habitus: Australian Culture, Inequalities, and Social Divisions* (*FCH*). Three members of our research group are translators of the former work, as we contribute to what comes next in Bourdiesian research from a Japanese perspective.

*Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett et al., 2009) extended Bourdieu's sociological method using relational analyses of culture and inequality to make a significant intellectual contribution to the sociology of art, culture, and class. In 2017, the present author and four other researchers published a Japanese translation of the book. In some respects, *FCH* is an Australian version of *Culture, Class, Distinction*; however, this study also introduces new theoretical and methodological approaches.

This review investigates *FCH* from four perspectives. First, it compares the approach of *FCH* to the relationship between culture and inequality in Australia with Bourdieu's approach in *Distinction* and that taken in the United Kingdom by *Culture, Class, and Distinction*. In doing so, it aims to define the theoretical scope of *FCH* as a sociological and Australian study. Second, it focuses on the definition of legitimate culture: that is, how does it differ from other types of culture? Third, it considers how *FCH* engages with the field of power. This concept, which is unique to Bourdieu, extends beyond politics and economics. How does it construct a field of power? Finally, our study of culture and inequality in Japan, which has just begun, is briefly introduced as research that builds on the *FCH* study.

## Australian characteristics and methodological issues

The authors who contributed to *FCH* discuss their pivotal engagement with Bourdieu's work in the Introduction, while acknowledging the following three limitations: Bourdieu's methodological nationalism, his lack of perspective on 'the increasingly ethnically heterogeneous population produced by transnational mobilities', and unexamined 'issues posed for the analysis of cultural fields in settler-colonial societies where Indigenous cultures have a significant presence' (Bennett, Carter et al., 2021, p. 2). One of the distinctive features of *FCH* is that it analyses cultural fields in settler-colonial societies. It explores the tastes and preferences of Indigenous Australians, as well as understanding the extent to which Indigenous cultures are engaged with by non-Indigenous Australians. Although these features focus empirically on the Australian context (i.e. Australia has a more ethnically heterogeneous population than Japan), they also raise more general theoretical issues.

Furthermore, two theoretical concepts are crystallised and addressed here: legitimate culture and the field of power. How does culture contribute to this inequality? What are cultural inequalities? How do culture and inequality relate to issues of domination? How does culture differentiate forms of domination? The concepts of legitimate culture and the

field of power are excellent analytical tools for exploring these questions in current and future cultural research. The next section uses these concepts to examine the arguments presented in this study.

## **Legitimate culture**

Bourdieu repeatedly uses the concept of ‘legitimate culture’ in *Distinction* and many other works. During the 1960s, Bourdieu argued that the cultural behaviour of anyone placed in a rule system’s field of application could be qualified and hierarchised (Bourdieu, 1966, p. 889). Theoretically, legitimate culture forms the basis of a cultural hierarchy. Without this concept, cultural inequalities cannot be explained. This is another postulate in Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, although he uses the concept of legitimate culture without defining it. In his review of *Le Savant et le populaire: Misérabilisme et populisme en sociologie et en littérature* by Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1989), Pierre-Michel Menger reminds us that the ‘theory of cultural legitimacy’ breaks with relativism and its autonomisation of cultures by relating the cultural meaning of practices to the conditions and social positions in which they take place in a hierarchical social space (Menger, 1991: 646–7). Furthermore, Menger points out that this theory ‘leads the theorist to nullify the meaning of popular cultures at the very moment when they allow him to objectify the arbitrariness of the culture of the dominant classes’ (Menger, 1991, p. 647).

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu links legitimate culture to the dominant class. As Duval points out, Bourdieu’s concept of legitimization, derived from Max Weber, is a component of the sociology of domination (Duval, 2020, p. 502). For Bourdieu, however, legitimate culture is not the culture of the dominant class: ‘The conflicts between artists and intellectuals over the definition of legitimate<sup>1</sup> culture are only one aspect of the interminable struggles among the different fractions of the dominant class to impose the definition of the legitimate stakes and weapons of social struggles’ (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 251). Within the dominant class, struggles and conflicts exist over the issue of legitimate culture.

In FCH, ‘legitimate’ culture is mostly interpreted as a high rather than a popular culture. This usage highlights the relationship between cultural hierarchy and class. In this work and *Culture, Class, Distinction*, however, legitimate culture is disconnected from the question of domination. This disconnection is largely due to the limitation of the field of power to the political and economic fields in the Australian study (Bennett, Carter et al., 2021, p. 2), whereas the British study does not mention the field of power (Bennett et al., 2009). Both studies thus focus on issues of social differentiation rather than domination, and therefore do not adequately register how these two issues can be productively related to one another through the operations of the field of power. Thus, it is worth examining how Bourdieu approached these questions.

## **The field of power**

The field of power develops through the process of state formation and is also linked to educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 109). ‘Power’ is often considered in political

terms. In Bourdieu's work, the relationship between politics and power formed a key part of the theory of the state that he began to develop in the late 1980s (Bourdieu, 1989, 2012). However, if Bourdieu's interpretation of the field of power formed part of a theory of the state, it was one in which power was perceived relatively broadly, extending beyond the political field. As Wacquant argues, the field of power is a 'meta-field', situated on a different level from other fields, which it partially encompasses (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu explains the concept of the field of power as follows:

The field of power is the space of power relations between agents or institutions that have in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy dominant positions in the different fields (economic or cultural in particular). It is the place of struggles between holders of different powers (or species of capital) which, like the symbolic struggles between the artists and the 'bourgeois' of the nineteenth century, have at stake the transformation or the conservation of the relative value of the different species of capital, which itself determines, at each moment, the forces likely to be engaged in these struggles. (Bourdieu, 1998 [1992], p. 353)

The elements perceived here as economic and cultural capital constitute an *a posteriori* typology of the capital possessed by actors who enter the field of power; they can be considered either economic or cultural. To enter the field of power, one must occupy a dominant position in various fields. The field of power differs from the political and economic fields because it is not limited to politics or the economy.

Part 1 of *FCH* provides quantitative and qualitative analyses of the six cultural fields selected for study: the art, literary, sport, television, heritage, and music fields. No assumptions were made about the meta-field of power, which encompasses all six fields. A discussion of the Australian space of lifestyles in Chapter 7 clusters practices, tastes, and social positions, presenting six different clusters. While Cluster 1 is described as '*Established High Cultural Orientations* as evidenced by strong engagement with the more traditional forms of canonised culture', Cluster 2 is characterised as '*Alternative High Cultural Orientations* as evidenced by strong engagement with later cultural forms which have a secured and widely recognised position of engagement with emerging cultural practices also in evidence' (Bennett, Gayo, & Pertierra, 2021, p. 144). These two clusters appear to constitute the principal agents struggling within the Australian field of power. If this concept had been used and developed to analyse the relationships between cultural, economic, and political capital more fully, the characteristics of symbolic domination in Australia would have become more apparent.

Culture causes inequalities and social divisions, which in turn creates different cultural practices and tastes. Among these social processes, some dominate others. In *FCH*, Bennett, Carter et al. (2021) show the potential for culture to become a sociology of domination; however, this potential has not been fully realised. This issue is particularly relevant to Indigenous cultures. A relatively autonomous Indigenous cultural field occupies a distinctive position within the national field in Australia (Bennett, Dibley & Kelly, 2021, p. 245). However, the relationship between the Indigenous cultural field and the field of power remains ambiguous, primarily because politics and economics are assumed to constitute the field of power. How would it change the positioning of the Indigenous cultural

field if the field-of-power concept were redefined to conform to Bourdieu's definition? Such a re-examination would also raise questions about whether Indigenous culture is, in any sense, part of the legitimate culture of Australia. These are questions that concern how Indigenous cultural fields should be analysed not only in Australia but also in other countries with Indigenous people, including Japan.

## Culture and inequality in Japan

The above two concepts are the subject of the aforementioned joint research project. When studying inequality from a sociological perspective in Japan, the most important data are from the nationwide survey on Social Stratification and Social Mobility, also known as the SSM Survey. This survey has been conducted every 10 years since 1955, with the latest edition being in 2015. The survey includes questions about the frequency of participation in cultural activities (e.g. frequency of going to classical music concerts or visiting museums) and ownership of cultural assets (e.g. antiques and complete works of literature). The 1995 survey was the richest in terms of questions on culture, but these questions were too limited to capture individual fields, such as the visual arts or music. SSM data from different periods alone cannot adequately capture issues concerning power and legitimate cultures.

The extent to which SSM data can be used to study culture and inequality has already been discussed. My article (Iso, 2020) questions the relevance of an approach in terms of a 'legitimate culture' in the Japanese case, which would be the basis of social distinction. It begins with Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation intending to break with the relativism and principle of cultural autonomy, emphasising the relationships between social classes and upper-class domination. However, it also shows why applying the model turns out to be rather delicate in Japan, owing to the tension between the extent to which it is the cultural practices of the dominant classes that are essentially 'traditional' codes (such as the Japanese tea ceremony and *kadō*) or those that relate to imported practices (originally Western classical music concerts), which structure distinction. Covering surveys carried out in 1995 and 2015 involving stratification, social mobility, and class identity, the article concludes that there are indeed dominant codes but that they are relatively contradictory, rendering any analysis in terms of legitimate culture in need of extensive research work to clarify its composition.

As previously mentioned, SSM data cannot capture individual fields. Our ongoing study of culture and inequality focuses on five fields: reading, visual arts, music, media, and sports. The research, which is yet to be conducted, is similar in design to *FCH*, and its survey is based on taste, knowledge, participation, and interviews. From the perspective of 'culture and inequality', it deals mainly with culture-driven inequality and the unequal distribution of cultural resources. In reconsidering the concept of cultural capital, this research uses a theoretical framework similar to *FCH* but departs from it in various respects.

In our ongoing study of culture and inequality, we consider Japanese culture to be distinct from other Asian cultures. Although *FCH* considers the presence of Asian cultures in Australia, it appears to assume a single category of Asian culture. For example, Ai

Weiwei is listed as a representative Asian artist and Haruki Murakami as a representative Asian writer by being ‘named items’ in the survey questions. In our study, we distinguished between Korean, Chinese, and Japanese cultures in the survey items. Furthermore, we are aware of the cultural differences between the United States, the United Kingdom, and continental Europe when presenting the named items. Of course, our research focuses on differentiation within Japanese culture in particular, but it will help us understand how some Asians differentiate themselves from other Asians, and how Asian cultures are simultaneously internally differentiated and intertwined.

Our forthcoming research study has limitations in terms of analysing the field of power, which cannot be adequately captured in a survey. The relationship between different cultural fields and capitals and the field of power needs to be considered by other means to complement the survey findings. To deal comprehensively with the field of power, the state also needs to be addressed, although there are now limitations on state-centric conceptions of power. Some fields transcend national boundaries and can be global, as Buchholz (2016) argues, by focusing on the global art field. The case of the Japanese art world, for instance, since the end of the 19th century, is of great interest in considering the relationship between the national, transnational, and global. As I have argued, therefore, when considering ‘what next?’ in Bourdieu-influenced research, there are multiple avenues and sites still to be explored, not least with regard to national and pan-Asian cultures.

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## Note

1. In the original French edition of *Distinction*, Bourdieu refers to ‘culture légitime’ (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 284); the English translation says ‘culture’, which should be translated as ‘legitimate culture’ (Bourdieu 2010 [1984], p. 251). The English translator, Richard Nice, probably translated it this way because he did not emphasise the difference between the two, as I do here.

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