

Between state and family: Biopolitics of elderly care and a case of emerging communality in Northern Thailand

Hayami Yoko, author

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Abstrak

In Thailand, from the beginning of this century, policies on aging, health promotion reform toward enlightening the public, and administrative decentralization have been taking place, leading to the reinforcement of biopolitics in elderly care. “Community” became a useful locus and tool to carry out governance of health and elderly care. At the same time, within state-initiated programs there is local agency at work, which mobilizes existing social networks while allowing the formation of new connections based on the old. Drawing upon observations from fieldwork in a suburban district in Chiang Mai Province, I argue that biosocial communality emerges from the interaction between the administration and local agents, and demonstrate how this operates by acting on the interface of the family and the community. I first look into how policies of health and elderly care have made use of the community or the discourse thereof. Then I introduce the case of a specific subdistrict to see how such top-down governance actually operates on the ground, how local networks can be reactivated, and, ultimately, how we find, among the participating elderly and caregivers, emerging biosocial communality at the interface of the family and community.