

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine
The University of Hong Kong

Convergence and Collisions: Disease, Religion, and Healing in Asia

Birth Control Technologies among Tibetan Women in China — Social and Religious Implications

Mona Schrempf

Since 1980, family planning has been reinforced in Tibetan areas of China and has developed from a centralized into a regional policy. Based upon qualitative field research conducted in rural Qinghai Province (2005-2007), I will argue that the application of invasive birth control technologies, including IUD (Intra Uterine Device), abortion and sterilization, is particularly challenging to rural Tibetan women. Such challenges not only arise from well-know problems inherent in state medical service delivery in Tibetan areas of China (e.g. use of Chinese language, accessibility issues, etc.). They are also intimately linked with aspects of local religious life, cultural conceptions of body and person, as well as social identity (e.g. gender definitions and roles in connection with social status) within Tibetan communities. These latter issues are not at all accounted for in state policy and practice. The case studies I will present demonstrate not only the variety of personal experiences of Tibetan women, but also underlying conflicts of socio-cultural and religious values and norms that birth control technologies confront them with.