

BOOK REVIEW

East Asian Welfare Regimes in Transition: From Confucianism to Globalisation, edited by Alan Walker, and Chack-kie Wong, Bristol, The Policy Press, 2005, 235 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 1-86134-552-6

With the rapid progress of globalization in the twenty-first century, the newly industrialized countries and regions in East Asia have witnessed a resurgence of economic growth after a severe financial crisis struck its currencies as well as its economy in 1997. Meanwhile, as a socialist transitional country with a huge population, China has emerged as the fourth largest economy in the world since 2005 and will continue to be integrated into the global community from other perspectives. However, compared to European welfare states, either China or other East Asian countries and regions have formed a variety of social welfare systems based on its own cultural, historical and political heritage, which obviously differ in ideological thoughts and institutional arrangement from its western counterparts. Thus, to understand the nature and recent development of social policies or welfare models in East Asian countries and regions becomes more intellectually and practically appealing in the context of globalization. This book is an up-to-date research output in interpreting and discussing the thematic issue of 'Confucian welfare states,' which I believe is valuable for further efforts of exploring the welfare regimes in the oriental societies beyond European welfare states.

The book consists of two parts. Part one provides an introduction to East Asian welfare regimes followed by an article on the relationship between market economy and inactive welfare practice in Hong Kong and mainland China. In Chapter One Alan Walker and Chack-kie Wong introduce the rationale, structure and content of the book in which different authors attempt to interpret Confucian welfare states in the East Asian context through a case study approach. According to Walker and Wong, the connotation of Confucian welfare states is not only a culturally sensitive concept, but also a politically significant dimension to illuminate the diversity of welfare practices and institutional arrangements in distinctive Asian societies. The two editors tactically link the arguments of why Confucian welfare states exist in reality with recent discussions on the re-adjustment and re-adaptation of welfare states in the process of globalization, in which they emphasize the political considerations of East Asian governments in utilizing Confucianism as a tool for implementing an economic-development-centred strategy. In Chapter Two Ruby Chau and Wai Kam Yu provide an interesting discussion on the specific welfare arrangement in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland, which helps the readers understand why a loosely-argued statement that Asian values are antithetical to expansion of social welfare is wrong. In the chapter, the authors emphasize that the capitalist market economy victimizes and erodes a Confucian social welfare system because the governments give priority to economic growth without adequate attention to the efforts of positively designing and implementing social policies to remedy the fallacies of the market.

Part two of the book includes eight chapters. In this part, authors from different societies contribute seven chapters. The authors present a collection of case

illustrations on the welfare regimes in an East Asian context, in which Greater China (the Chinese Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong), Japan, South Korea and Singapore are selected as the research subjects. In Chapter Three, Joe Leung mainly describes the recent development of Chinese social welfare and policy reforms triggered by the drastic market economy in the past two decades. Leung succinctly summarizes the impact of economic reform on social welfare provisions and outlines how the Chinese government responded to increasing social needs of social services and the escalated aspirations of reforming the social security system under the pressure of rapid social transformations in the context of globalization. According to Leung, the Confucian ideal of 'Xiaokang' as a model of social and economic development has been stressed in the policy declaration of Chinese government and the Communist Party in the new century.

In the book, two papers focus on the nature and recent changes of social welfare in Hong Kong. In Chapter Four Sammy Chiu and Victor Wong provide a relatively rich analysis on the welfare practice in post-colonial Hong Kong relating to familistic and political pragmatic ideologies adopted by the local government. According to Chiu and Wong, the main reasons that Hong Kong SAR maintains its residual-type social welfare lie in two aspects: one is its necessity of re-building a cultural identity in local society that makes new Hong Kong distinctive from its colonial era and the other is its pragmatic strategy of legitimizing conservative social policy in a subtle political environment. With the progress of building a mature democratic political system, it can be inferred that the voices from below reflected by emerging social movements and the growing amount of social needs in the city will definitely create more impact on the current situation of the absence of desirable social policy programmes in the freest market economic zone in the world. In Chapter Five, Chak Kwan Chan shares his similar ideas of emphasizing the role of family and NGOs in sustaining a local residual welfare system. In his chapter, Chan argues that Confucian values and managerialism are re-stored into the ideologies of local governance in order to maximize social stability in Hong Kong SAR after 1997. But, the author also speculates that certain changes of social policy will emerge in the near future in response to a growing pressure of the marginalized groups in Hong Kong society.

Chapter Six is an analysis of the Japanese welfare system. In the chapter, Makoto Kono examines the features of the Japanese welfare regime based on the roles of the families and enterprises. Meanwhile, Kono argues that Confucian culture has been more explicit in people's practice of building a mutual relationship, but rather ambiguous as a principle of state policies in the political sphere. In addition, it is recognized that the Japanese government has also utilized Confucianism in its political ideologies during the process of industrialization and globalization. According to Kono, population ageing and economic changes in recent years will probably shift the existing structure of social welfare provision by reinforcing the role of market activities in the future. Chapter Seven is a case study on the welfare regime in Taiwan. In the chapter Michael Hill and Yuan-Shie Hwang are suspicious about the classification of East Asian countries as Confucian welfare systems. According to Hill and Hwang, Taiwan's welfare regime was built on a German-type social insurance system and the role of the state in social policy is rather limited. Chapter Eight discusses the nature of the welfare regime in South Korea. In the chapter Sang-hoon Ahn and So-chung Lee clearly state that it is meaningless to take

the concept of Confucianism for granted in interpreting the contemporary South Korean welfare regime. Like other scholars mentioned in earlier chapters, they consider Confucianism as one element contributing to the formation of social policy in South Korea rather than the overwhelming one. Chapter Nine focuses on the discussion of the welfare regime in Singapore. In the chapter, Vincent Wijesingha analyzes social policy in Singapore from a political economy perspective. The specific welfare regime in this city-state was rooted in its historical, political and cultural origin and re-shaped by capitalist ethos and authoritarian ruling ideologies. According to the authors, globalization and economic recession in the earlier years of the new century have obviously influenced the direction of social policy development in Singapore.

Part two ends with a concluding chapter written by the two editors. In Chapter Ten, Walker and Wong present a summary of the book by re-examining Confucianism and East Asian welfare regimes under the new circumstance of globalization. Noticeably, the authors re-emphasize their statements that Confucianism cannot be understood as a unified percept but rather a diverse connotation of cultural practice in different societies of East Asia.

This book presents a lucid discussion on welfare regimes in East Asia, and relates this well to the previous debates on the typologies of welfare states in the west. The Confucian welfare states in East Asia do not represent a singular concept and the in-depth studies on the welfare system in this region will show a diverse scenario of social policy experience. This is a major strand of the argument in the book. To summarize, this book provides the policy researchers, governmental staff and students a good opportunity to grasp fresh knowledge of social policy and welfare systems in East Asia. However, careful readers will notice that neither the editors nor the chapter contributors have attempted to develop a fundamental conceptual framework of analyzing the East Asian welfare regimes. In addition, it would be more rewarding if a comparative analysis on welfare regimes within East Asia was developed in the book, because a comparison will allow East Asian scholars not only to understand their own case studies but also understand the differences and similarities of these cases. More importantly, the East Asian scholars still have to ponder the basic conception of the welfare state before they utilize it as an analytical tool. It is a widely shared opinion that the welfare states are mainly characterized by two strikingly significant elements: both universal and residual welfare provisions are provided by the state with a co-existence of capitalist market economy and democratic political systems. In other words, European welfare states fundamentally set up examples of how social provisions were allocated and distributed by the government. Therefore, while we discuss the connotation of 'welfare state' or 'welfare states,' we are prone to confine our interpretations to a more preferred concept that carries a recognized and a widely reached consensus on the assumed roles and functions of the state in delivering social welfare provisions for the citizens. But, when we look at the cases of oriental societies, especially at the welfare models or social welfare arrangement in East Asia, few people can instinctively portray them as the welfare states. To East Asian social policy researchers, there is a disturbing but penetrating question that deserves more efforts towards launching deep, sound and solid studies: If East Asian welfare regimes can be analyzed from the theoretical perspective of the welfare state, then what kind of distinctive features do the East Asian countries have and how can the researchers interpret them? If not, then what

and how can oriental researchers develop a unique conceptual tool to analyse the popular so-called 'East Asian Welfare Regime'? This question sounds paradoxical, but will sustain itself.

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