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Book Reviews

Allan Cochrane and John Clarke, *Comparing Welfare States: Britain in International Context*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993. \$21.95 papercover.

This collection of articles sets out to shed light on two issues: (1) to show the value of cross-national comparison in social policy; (2) to develop "understanding of welfare systems in a range of countries, both to see whether broad international trends can be identified and to use the experiences of others to inform domestic (British) debates." (p. xi) Based on a very loose definition of welfare state ("the involvement of the state in social security and social services"), five "welfare states" are examined: Britain, Hong Kong, Germany, Sweden, and Ireland. The book's framework of analysis and subsequent choice of countries draws on Esping-Andersen's regime analysis: liberal, conservative and social-democratic. In addition to state welfare, it examines the conditions of women and minorities in these regimes.

Most readers would welcome comparative welfare development which aims at deciphering complex social reality on an international plane. Three different strands of inquiry are commonly seen in this field: descriptive/analytic account of welfare programs across nations; theoretical discussion of the determinants of welfare development; and evaluative work on the impact of the welfare state. This book focuses mostly on the first strand. While it presents a current view of different welfare systems and adds to the growing pool of knowledge on comparative welfare development with particular reference to women's roles and minorities' rights, the discussion fails to advance existing knowledge of the determinants for welfare development. No new variable or credible generalization is made. On the debate of welfare convergence versus divergence, the authors obviously favor the latter and do not see a clear pattern of development in these countries. Their attempt to apply Esping-Andersen's regime analysis is not successful, remaining cursory at best and adding little to his explanation other than intellectual cachet.

Methodologically, the study is historical and qualitative in character, But many publications in this field are quantitative,

the leading example being Esping-Andersen's Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism on whose framework the authors rely. Yet, the editors only make passing reference to comparative quantitative research of welfare states. Obviously, they see many weaknesses with this strand of statistical analysis. But no attempt at comparative study can afford to dismiss or oversimplify the conflicting results of quantitative analyses without weakening the conclusions at which one arrives.

As the title of the book suggests, Britain receives extended treatment and serves as the focus of study. The editors justify the inclusion of the four other countries on their relationship to the United Kingdom, and whether there is a degree of convergence between welfare states within Europe. However, the choice of these countries is not well justified if one is to examine Britain in international context. A case in point is the omission of the United States whose liberal regime is deemed by many to become internationally dominant. Instead Hong Kong is selected to be illustrative of the liberal regime. The juxtaposition of Hong Kong with other European countries is not natural, since welfare development there lacks behind all the major advanced industrial countries and certainly both government and local scholars would dispute the ascription of the label "welfare state." The concluding chapter by Allan Cochrane almost excludes Hong Kong in his analysis as it is mainly devoted to a discussion of the European welfare states. As it stands, a more appropriate title would be: "Comparing welfare states: Britain in the European context."

In fact, Eugene McLaughlin (ch. 5) defends well her study of Hong Kong when she observes that it is important to analyze the welfare framework of the powerhouse economies of the advanced Asian Pacific Rim, Hong Kong being the prime example of such development. This would entail a reinterpretation of welfare development of Hong Kong in the context of high-income developing countries which are all bound by socioeconomic, cultural and political environments but all manage to develop their style of social policy to meet social needs, with probable lessons for the international community. Instead of attaching the liberal regime to Hong Kong, she should go beyond the confines of regime analysis. The inclusion of comparative welfare policy research into the developing countries would have enriched the analysis.

Unfortunately, Hong Kong is being reduced to just another example of residual regime and its significance as a developing country is not brought out in the end. Further, her study contains two obvious omissions. It is wrong to say that poverty research in Hong Kong is scarce, considering that a major study on relative poverty was first undertaken in 1980s. Secondly, a noticeable gap in this chapter is the lack of discussion of the situation of the women in Hong Kong, an area which is growing in importance as evidenced by various studies undertaken by the Association for the Advancement of Feminism in Hong Kong in the late 1980s.

Those who are familiar with comparative social policy will find that the studies on Britain (chs 2 & 3) and Sweden (ch. 7) yield few new insights, except for Norman Ginsburg's discussion of women and family policies in Sweden. Fiona Williams' study (ch. 4) of gender, race and class in British welfare policy is interesting, bringing out the international dimension of the issue. But it fails to relate its findings to wider research. An interesting discussion is provided by Michael Wilson on Germany (ch. 6). The German unification and its financial strain on the social security shows the impact of historical events (i.e. political changes) on social policy and how this might propel the country toward residualization of welfare. Eugene McLaughlin's discussion of the Irish welfare state (ch. 8) rightly draws our attention to the pivotal role of Catholic social teaching and the principles of subsidiarity and social consensus in shaping social policy. One would have liked more elaboration of the process on how the Church has modified its position against welfare expansion since the 1960s.

All in all, this book is commended for its incorporation of minorities and women in comparative study. Although it is certainly not ground-breaking, it is a text suitable for students who need to have a quick grasp of the British social policy in the context of European welfare development.

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