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The Social Quality Approach: Bridging Asia and Europe*

ALAN WALKER | University of Sheffield

This paper sets out to achieve three aims. First of all it provides a basic introduction to the concept of social quality. This includes an outline of its architecture- constitutional, conditional and normative factors — and of the four key impulses that led to its development: ontological, methodological, sociological and normative. Then, secondly, it compares the East Asian and European social models. Although such summary accounts risk over-simplification, this section is critical to gain a broad understanding of the similarities and differences and prepare for the third and final part. Thus the third aim is to begin a discussion of how the European social quality approach might be applied to East Asia. The paper does so by working through the social quality architecture outlined earlier. The paper ends with a discussion of the role of political ideology in shaping stereotypes about Asia and Europe.

Keywords: *Social Quality, Europe, East Asia, Social Models, Social Policy*

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Introduction

This article introduces the concept of social quality and examines the extent of its applicability to Asian societies. This is an important issue because the concept was developed in Western Europe and the idea that it might be applied to other regions arose only subsequently. The article starts with an outline of the current state of play with regard to social quality theory: the concept is an organic one and still in development. It can, in other words, adapt in certain methodological respects, to the increasing dialogue with Asian scholars. Then, it is important for its application in an Asian context, to be clear about the key factors that lay behind the birth of social quality and the European circumstances surrounding it. Next a contrast is made between the social models of Asia (specifically China and East Asia) and Europe (specifically Western Europe) in order to understand the differing contexts of social quality application. The idea of the welfare society, as a socio-political construct, is used to emphasise the contrast. Finally the article examines the potential for social quality to contribute to social policy and social development in China and East Asia and identifies the key points for research.

The Meaning of Social Quality

The essence of the idea of social quality is the social nature of human beings. This is reflected in the definition:

> the extent to which people are able to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 1997: 6-7).

Although the definition emphasises individual well-being and potential it also indicates that these are derived from social engagement or participation (Beck et al., 2001). Thus the focus is on the extent to which the quality of social relations promotes both participation in social development and individual human growth and development. In other words, there can be no individual well-being and development without social relations. Starting from the assumption that people are essentially social beings, rather than atomized economic agents, it is argued that self-realization depends on social recognition (Honneth, 1995). In other words, a person's self-realization is derived from their interaction with

others in a world of collective identities — such as families, communities, companies, institutions. Thus there is interdependency between the processes of self-realization and those of collective identify formation (Beck et al., 2001). Of course to participate in these processes people must have the capacity for self-reflection and the collective identities they interact with must be open. It is here, in these interdependent processes, that the 'social' is located. The field in which these interdependent processes take place is that represented by the interaction of two critical tensions: the horizontal tension between the formal world of systems and the informal life-worlds of families, groups and communities (Tonnies, 2002; Weber, 1978); and the vertical tension between societal development and biographical development (Weyman and Heinz, 1996).

Three sets of factors play the key roles in the creation and evaluation of social quality (Beck et al, 1997; 2001). There are, first of all, the ***constitutional factors***, which are the outcome of processes of self-realisation, interacting with processes concerning the formation of a diversity of collective identities across the two main tensions. These result in the constitution of competent social actors: personal (human) security, concerning the institutionalisation of the rule of law; social recognition concerning interpersonal respect between members of the community; social responsiveness concerning the openness of groups, communities and systems; and personal (human) capacity, concerning the individual's physical and/or mental abilities. Each factor is mainly influenced by two aspects of the interaction between the two main tensions and is, therefore, situated in one part of the quadrangle of the constitutional factors (Beck et al., 2001) as shown in Diagram 1.

Once competent actors are constituted, the opportunities for and

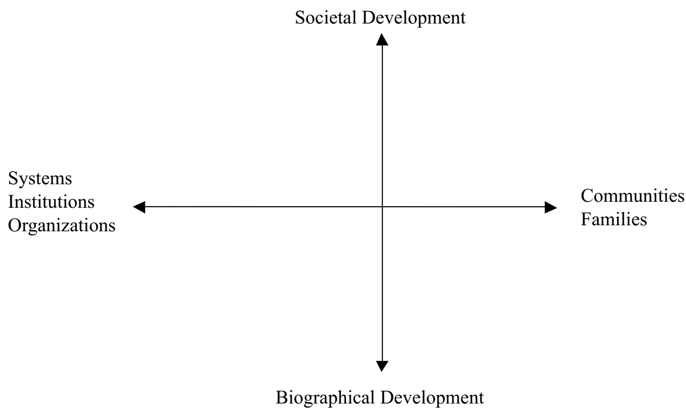

Diagram 1. Two Basic Reciprocal Tensions

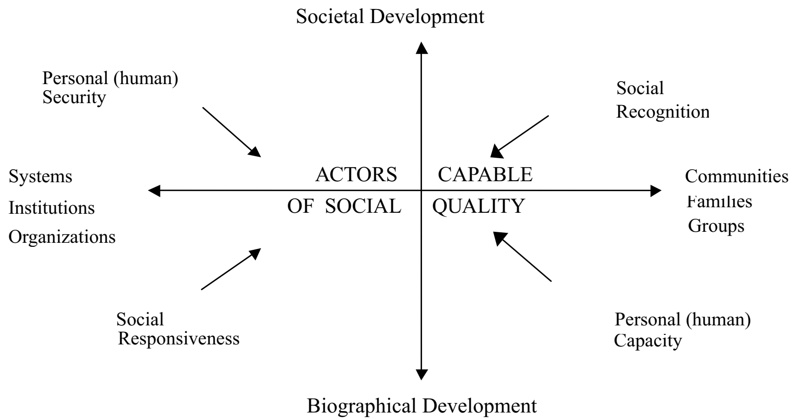

Diagram 2. The Quadrangle of the Constitutional Factors

outcomes of social quality are determined, secondly, by four ***conditional factors*** (Diagram 2). First, people have to have access to socio-economic security in order to protect them from poverty and other forms of material deprivation. In a European context socio-economic security requires good quality paid employment backed up by social protection to guarantee living standards and access to resources: income, education, health care, social services, environment, public health, personal safety and so on. It also relies on ecological security: protection from environmental hazards created, for example, by global warming. Different societies and different stages of development will witness a variety of combinations of actors — state, market, family and civil society — in the production of welfare. Second, people have to experience social inclusion in, or minimum levels of social exclusion from, key social and economic institutions such as the labour market. Social inclusion should concern citizenship. In practice, however, this may be a wide and all embracing national or European citizenship or 'exclusive' with large numbers of outcasts and quasi-citizens (denied citizenship completely or partially by means of discrimination) in which social inclusion cannot be achieved for many. Third, people should be able to live in communities and societies characterized by social cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the glue which holds together communities and societies. It is vital for both social development and individual self-realization. The contemporary discussion of cohesion often centers on the narrow popular concept of 'social capital' but its legacy stretches back, via Durkheim, to solidarity, shared norms and values. Fourth, people must be to some extent autonomous and socially empowered in order to be able to fully participate in

the face of rapid socio-economic change. Social empowerment means enabling people to control their own lives and to take advantage of opportunities. It means increasing the range of human choice. Therefore it goes far beyond participation in the political system to focus on the individual's potential capacities (knowledge, skills, experience and so on) and how far these can be realized. It is 'social' because this realization is via relationships. Each factor is an outcome of processes concerning the formation of a diversity of collective identities, strongly influenced by the interplay of processes of self-realisation across two main tensions and is, therefore also situated in one part of the quadrangle of the conditional factors (Beck et al., 2001).

Thirdly, a set of ***normative factors*** are used to make judgements about the appropriate or necessary degree of social quality, based on the linking of the constitutional and conditional factors at a specific place and a specific time. The normative factors are: social justice, linked to socio-economic security; solidarity, connected to social cohesion; equal value, as a criterion in relation to social inclusion; and human dignity, in relation to social empowerment.

The connection of biographical development and the genesis of groups, families and communities — the interplay between actions towards self-realisation and those leading to the formation of collective identities — inevitably influences the nature of both the constitutional factors and the conditional ones. Thus, methodologically, it is feasible to examine the interplay between these processes in order to explain changes in them over time in the same way that analytical dualism assumes that structures and agents are, at least temporarily, distinguishable (Archer, 1995: 66). These dynamic interactions lead to the emergence of new relationships, social structures and, therefore, new expressions of the social. Thus the two quadrangles (Diagrams 1 and 2) are not in practice separate but mutually interact to construct the dynamic nature of the social. For example, we may hypothesise a critical relationship between personal (human) capacity at the individual level and the possibilities presented by social empowerment at the social level.

An overview of the three sets of factors — the social quality architecture — shows the three dimensions and their connectivities (Diagram 3). In terms of measurement the European focus has been on the conditional factors, the hardware of social quality. This is not surprising because these represent the outcomes of the processes involved rather than measuring the processes per se. In line with welfare regime theory we hypothesise that there are different 'social quality regimes' depending on variations in the interactions between the constitutional and conditional factors, together with their normative context (an issue returned to later).

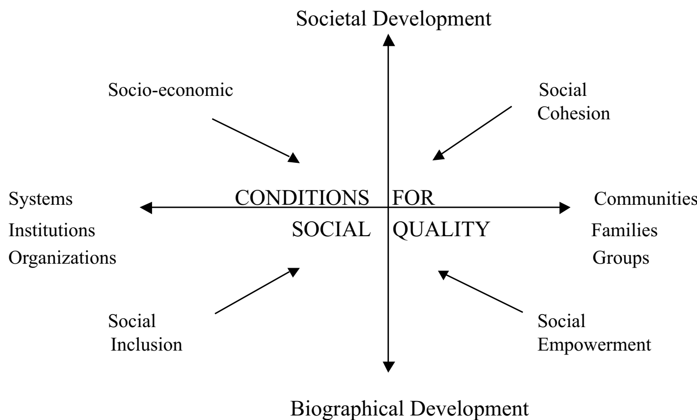

Diagram 3. The Quadrangle of the Conditional Factors

Key Drivers of the Social Quality Perspective

To appreciate the paradigmatic change represented by the social quality concept, at least in a European context, it is essential to understand the forces driving its origin. There are four main ones: ontological, methodological, sociological and political/ethical.

First, in ontological terms, the birth of social quality was a response to the dominance of individualism in both society and social science. In scientific terms a major impulse behind the development of the social quality theory is the realisation that a clear understanding of the social had vanished from social sciences with the transition from modernity to post or late modernity (Bauman, 1999). Gradually the scientific distinction between the social and the individual has become entrenched. In recent decades the latter have taken strong analytical precedence over the former. As a consequence of the societal and cultural shift to late modernity, individuals are located increasingly at the forefront of popular discourses. Contemporary Western social sciences are preoccupied with individual life styles, individual happiness, preferences, consumption, well-being and quality of life of people as autonomous individuals, rather than as individuals in groups, communities and other social relations (Bauman, 2008). According to Ferge (2001), in Central Europe this cultural and political shift has caused the individualization of the social and leads to legitimation of the decline in solidarity

The necessity to rethink the idea of the social follows from the assumption

that people are social being's. What meanings should be accorded to this adjective, and how should they be translated into concrete policy templates such as 'social justice', 'social protection', 'social security', 'social inclusion', or 'social cohesion'? Social quality analysts argue that 'the social does not exist as such but it is the expression of the constantly changing processes by which individuals realize themselves as interacting social beings' (Beck et al., 2001: 310). The entrenched distinction between the social and the individual is based on a false premise. In the words of Elias, individual and society are not in contradistinction:

> to understand the obstruction which the predominant modes of thinking and feeling pose to the investigation of longer-term changes of social structure and personality structure (…) it is not enough to trace the development of the image of people as society, the image of society. It is also necessary to keep in mind the development of the image of people as individuals, the image of personality. As has been mentioned, one of the peculiarities of the traditional human self-image is that people often speak and think of individuals and societies as if these were two phenomena existing separately — of which, moreover, one is often considered 'real' and the other 'unreal' — instead of two different aspects of the same human being (Elias, 2000: 468).

The social quality approach follows Elias' rejection of the separation of individuals and society but it does not completely conflate the two. Thus, in social quality theory, the social is realised in the interplay between processes of self-realization by individuals acting as social beings and processes leading to the formation of collective identities. The duality between agency and structure is overcome by stressing dialectical relationality, as in the work of Bhaskar (1993). This position is congruent with Archer's idea of analytical dualism which refuses to separate as well as to conflate agency and structure (Archer, 1995: 66).

Second, in methodological terms, there was (and remains) the inadequacy of existing conceptual tools to provide a broad and coherent framework with which to interpret and make sense of the massive transformations taking place globally and, in particular, how they impact on people's lives. This need is felt in many spheres yet, everywhere, there is fragmentation: in policy making between policy domains, policy makers and NGOs, policy makers and citizens; in welfare between managers, professionals, provider organisations, users and carers; and in science between myriad different disciplines. Thus there is a lack of coherent methodological tools to analyse social change and its impact on daily life.

Recent years have seen a huge expansion in the statistical data available to

policy makers and the general public in Europe, including statistical digests from Eurostat, DG Employment's Social Situation Reports and the Quality of Life in Europe series from the European Foundation on Living and Working conditions (EFLWC, 2006). Such information is part of the life-blood of democracy, but its explosive growth has a paradoxical aspect. It tends to reinforce policy fragmentation, making it hard for policy makers to tackle problems in a holistic way and for citizens to comprehend what is happening to society. This is where the social quality approach may contribute. One of its aims is to overcome the present fragmentation of policy, for example at the EU level, between economic, educational, employment, urban and other domains. By creating a coherent, theoretically grounded, concept that embraces all policies and all stages of the policy process it is intended to furnish policy makers and the general public with an analytical tool with which to understand society and to change it (Walker and Maesen v.d., 2004). In other words, the outcomes of education policies or health care policies may be analysed with help of the same conceptual framework by asking to what extent they influence the socio-economic situation of citizens, their social cohesion, social inclusion, socio-economic security and social empowerment. These are overarching questions with which to connect the outcomes of the different policy arenas with each other as combined expressions of the social. In order to understand these expressions the approach also demands a transcendence of the existing fragmentation between fields of knowledge.

Third, there was a sociological driver behind social quality. In particular, the major stimulus was the dysfunctional asymmetrical relationship between economic policy and 'social policy'. Social policy at the national level has, traditionally, been subordinated to economic policy and dominant economic values. In the European context social policy is commonly treated as being equivalent to social administration by national states and regional and local authorities concerning income transfers for maintaining the socio-economic security of, originally, employees and later of all citizens. It concerns in fact just one aspect of the whole range of what are social policies emanating from national states, non-profit organisations, NGOs, companies and groups of citizens, oriented to the domains of socio-economic security: financial resources, housing, health and social care, work and education. The asymmetrical relationship between economic policy and this whole range of social policies has severely constrained the development of a comprehensive approach (Walker, 1984). Related to this, the separation between economics and other social sciences, following the break-up of political economy, led to the conscious development of economics in isolation from an understanding of

social relations (Gough, 1979). Furthermore, not only did the dominant Western economics unilaterally determine the sphere of its own competence, it defined the boundaries of the subject matter of its binary opposite: the 'non-economic' sphere (Donzelot, 1979). Problems that arose in the operation of the economic system were conveniently defined as 'social problems' and consigned to the domain of 'externalities'. A critique of the subordination of social policy and (by implication) the 'social' to the overarching objective of economic growth was one of the key factors behind the initiation of work on social quality.

The subordinate relationship of social policy to economic policy was reinforced by the ascent of neo-liberalism to a commanding position in Europe by the 1990s (Harvey, 2005). The neo-liberal Transatlantic Consensus holds that rising inequality is the inevitable result of technological change which drives the liberalization of international trade and increased competition, or a combination of these factors. From this perspective the nation-state is powerless in the face of rising market inequality and can only intervene to offset its worst effects. In this discourse the state must not go 'too far' in such redistribution because that will endanger competitiveness. In other words, 'social problems' or 'externalities' should be addressed in such a way that the outcomes will stimulate competitiveness and economic growth, thus subjugating the social and its rich texture to a narrow conception of the economy as equated with growth. This argument paved the way for the Lisbon objective to make the EU the most competitive part of the world economy (European Commission 2000; Walker, 2005).

Fourth, there was a political stimulus behind the origins of social quality. It was the prevailing neo-liberal tendency to exclude the social and downgrade social policy which, in turn, threatened severe consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable in Europe. Not only were Europe's welfare states being reinterpreted as 'handmaidens' of the economy but there were real dangers of substantial cuts in their benefits and services in response to neo-liberal ideological pressure. The core values of social justice and solidarity, which had led to the creation of the European welfare states, were under threat from utilitarianist policy makers fed by neo-liberal International Governmental Organisations. Thus, social quality was created as a way of both defending the ethical basis of the welfare state and promoting the development of policies for all citizens. As a committee of eminent Europeans put it:

> Europe will be a Europe for everyone, for all its citizens, or it will be nothing. It will not tackle the challenges now facing it — competitiveness, the demographic situation, enlargement and globalization — if it does not

> strengthen its social dimension and demonstrate its ability to ensure that fundamental social rights are respected and applied (Comité de Sages, 1996).

In its origins, therefore, social quality was purely a European concept and there was no thought to its possible wider relevance. In fact this consideration is due mainly to the prompting of Asian scholars, led initially by Professor Ogawa, who saw potential in the concept for application in their region. Of course the architects of social quality were designing a holistic approach but they did so with only a European application in mind, and it has been applied at various levels in a practical way in the EU, including by the European Commission (2000). Although it was not built as a global or trans-regional concept is it possible that it might be adapted to Asian circumstances? To begin to answer this question this article will now compare the social models of Europe and China and East Asia.

Asian and European Social Models Compared

The European Social Model

Any attempt to summarise complex ideas and systems is bound to lack sophistication and neglect important sources of variation. Indeed, the very idea of a European social model is highly contested. Indisputable is the fact that clustered in Western Europe, mainly in the EU, are the majority of the world's most advanced welfare state systems both in terms of their longevity and their levels of expenditure. Thus, it is not surprising that a great deal of welfare regime research has originated there, although this is not to excuse its ethno-centrism (Walker and Wong, 1996). Further cautions are required with regard to EU classification. First, the notion of a European social model is mainly a political construction rather than a scientific one. Specifically it was generated as part of the European Commission's responsibility for social policy (a relatively minor part of its portfolio). Second, it is a gross over-generalisation that applies invariably to Western Europe and, therefore, excludes central and Eastern Europe, an anomaly that is particularly invidious following the enlargement of the EU on 1 May 2004 which included several of the previously Soviet bloc countries. Third, if the term is used at all it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of regime types, institutions and objective living standards between countries especially on the north-south and east-west axes.

Nonetheless, if we focus only on Western Europe, there are sufficient

similarities between these countries to suggest a superficially common social model: one that mirrors the East Asia one and is often compared with it negatively in anti-occidentalist rhetoric (White and Goodman, 1998) or positively from a pro-European standpoint (Schulte, 1998). Comparisons with the US are also made (Vobruba, 2001). In both cases the European social model is characterised, in terms of social protection, by relatively high levels of payments, citizen expectations of and proportion of GDP devoted to social protection (Gough, 1997).

Another key feature of the Western European social model, which contrasts sharply with East Asia, is the general political acceptance of the primacy of the state in the welfare of citizens. This has been demonstrated in countless surveys and, although there are variations between countries in the strength of belief in the role of the state and some signs of a weakening of commitment over the past two decades (Taylor-Gooby, 1998; 2004), there are still significant sections of the European general public saying that welfare should be a government responsibility and, especially, with regard to health care and the provision of income in old age. This European institutional and value context and its structural and historical determinants are essential to understand the emergence of 'social quality', which mixed elements of pride in achievement with a desire to see a continuation of the dominant welfare path in the face of threats to undermine it.

An Asian Social Model?

With regard to Asia the difficulty of identifying a single social model is even more controversial than with regard to Europe. Even if we narrow the focus to East Asia it is clear that the countries in this sub-region are not homogeneous in terms of their political, social and economic systems and states of economic and social development (Table 1). Western analysts have invariably focused on Confucianism as the common cultural heritage behind the East Asian approach to welfare (Jones, 1990; 2003; Rozman, 1991) but this influence has been over-emphasized (Goodman et al., 1998; Walker and Wong, 2005) and, even if it was once powerful, its potency has waned considerably in recent decades.

Despite this common cultural heritage on closer examination the countries of East Asia are seen to be characterized by diversity, for example with regard to living standards, industrial structure and social spending (Tables 1 and 2). Even when countries appear to have similar institutions, such as Japan and Korea where, for example the formers' Bismarckian social security system was used as a model by the latter (Ahn and Lee, 2005), this similarity does not stem from a

Table 1. Selected Socio-Economic Indicators for Six East Asian Societies (2002)

	China	Hong Kong	Japan	Singapore	South Korea	Taiwan
Population (million)	1,294.9	7.0	127.5	4.2	47.4	22.6
Human Development Rank	94	23	9	25	28	/
GDP per capita (US$, Purchasing Power Parity)	4,580	26,910	26,940	24,040	16,950	23,400
Distribution of industries	Agri.:14.5 Industries: 51.7 Service:33.8	Agri.:0.1 Industries: 12.9 Service:87.1	Agri.:1.4 Industries: 30.9 Service:67.7 (2001)	Agri.: negligible Industries: 30.0 Service:70.0 (2001)	Agri.:4.4 Industries: 37.6 Service:58 (2003)	Agri.:1.8 Industries: 30.4 Service:67.8
Percentage aged 65 and over	7.1	11.0	18.2	7.6	7.8	9.4 (2004 estimate)

Sources: United Nations Human Development Programme, 2004; The World Bank, 2004; Central Intelligence Agency, 2008.

common economic, social and political system or historical path of development (Takegawa, 2005). In the absence of detailed examinations of the socio-economic and socio-political structures and history of the countries involved the common features of East Asian societies identified here must be regarded as superficial.

So, in what ways does the East Asian social model (or models) differs from the European one? White and Goodman (1998) have highlighted three points of divergence: low spending on welfare; an emphasis on the societal role in welfare (family, community and employers) rather than the state as a provider of social rights associated with citizenship; and a preference for selectivity and funded social insurance over universalism and tax-financed pay-as-you-go. While this provides a basic summary of the key features of most, if not all, East Asian welfare regimes, to understand the socio-political construction of this particular pattern of welfare production (i.e. why it exists in the first place) it is also necessary to take account of the varying influence of six main factors. These are social and economic development, political ideology, authoritarianism,

Table 2. Public and Social Expenditure as Percentage of GDP in China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan 1980, 1990 and 2000

Year	China			Japan				Korea		Hong Kong			Singapore					Taiwan
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	1998	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
Public expendit. % of GDP1	26.8	15.3	17.8	17.8	15.7	16.3	17.4	16.2	24.5	15.6	16.3	20.6	20.0	21.4	18.9	14.2	21.4	32.9
Social expendit. % of GDP2	3.7	4.3	3.3	10.12	10.80	14.66	4.5	5.2	9.0	7.7	9.0	13.7	5.8	7.0	7.7	3.8	6.8	13.1

Sources: United Nations, 2005; World Bank, 2002; OECD, 2001; Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, 2003.

colonialism, ethnicity and the gender division of labour. In sum, while there is no unified East Asian welfare model there are similarities in both the nature of social policy, especially its residualism and familism, and the causal factors underpinning its welfare regimes. The social costs of maintaining residual welfare systems are born overwhelmingly at the personal level (Chau and Yu, 2005). Cultural explanations are not helpful when compared with the many structural and historical factors that drive diversity and similarity between East Asian welfare regimes such as development, migration and ethnicity. Most important of all is state ideology, mainly neo-liberalism, and in some countries the exercise of authoritarian state power to force rapid economic development. This has meant that it is possible for social policy in China and other parts of East Asia to be subverted to the economy to a much greater extent that in the EU (Yang, 2003). This has enabled them to be much more productionist in their orientation than most EU countries. Of course liberal welfare regimes are not peculiar to East Asia, they are found in Australia and the US as well, however, the cultural heritage and power of the state is unique to some countries in this region.

A summary of the main differences between the two social models of East Asia and the Western part of Europe might, in grossly simplified terms, look something like this:

Comparison of East Asian and EU Social Models

Role of:	East Asia	Western EU
Family	medium-high	low-medium
Market	medium-high	low-medium
State	low-medium	medium-high
Social Expenditure as % GDP	5-15	17-34
Dominant models of welfare:	individual family civil society corporations	individual state corporations
Dominant locus of solidarity:	family	state
Degree of Decommodifiaction	low	medium-high
Levels of poverty/inequality	medium-high	low-medium

Source: partly adapted from Esping-Andersen, 2000: 85.

Welfare State or Welfare Society?

A key issue that crystallizes the differences between Asia and the EU is the role of state in welfare, although again, care must be taken not to over-simplify reality. The East Asian social model is characterized, on the one hand, by relatively low state involvement in welfare provision, in comparison with the EU, and, on the other, relatively high involvement of non-state providers: the family, civil society (NGOs, associations), employers and so on. (Of course China must be treated as a special case in that, at present, it represents an unstable mixture of state socialism and neo-liberalism.) This is why the label 'welfare society' has been adopted so ubiquitously in this region. This does not mean either that the state is inactive in East Asia or that welfare is un-Asian (Chau and Yu, 2005). In practice, even if it is not a direct provider of welfare services to the same level as in the EU, the state is active to a greater or lesser extent between countries as a financer and regulator of other providers. In economic terms development in the region has been state-led (at least, that is, up to the late 1980s).

The existence of a European social model has been claimed by some as an empirical fact (European Commission, 2000; Gough, 1997; Shulte, 1997) but remains hotly disputed (Herrmann, 2006). Even if it was purely an aspirational vessel under construction it was sunk on 1 May 2004 by the enlargement of the EU (Ferge, 2002; Juhász, 2006). Nonetheless, as far as western Europe is concerned, although it embraces both Beveridge's and Bismarck's institutional legacies, the term 'welfare state' has come to represent the post Second World War socio-political settlement between state and people. This entails a restricted form of social citizenship which is underpinned, in most countries, by paid labour. The state guarantees limited (conditional) rights of citizenship in return for contributions. Thus, in general, in Western Europe, the state's fundamental role in welfare is not controversial, except that is from a neo-liberal perspective and, as we shall see, it is this that has been the main driver of recent welfare debates in Europe. (Of course in central and eastern Europe the experience of state socialism has, to some extent, undermined state legitimacy in some countries.)

It is also this ideological stance that has dominated the discourse on welfare in several East Asian countries. The European welfare state is often characterized as an anathema, a form of socialist disease that afflicts the EU but which must not be allowed to endanger the entrepreneurial spirit of East Asia. It is easy to over-estimate the rhetorical flourishes of autocrats such as Lee Kuan Yew

(Wijeysingha, 2005) but the association between the welfare state and the 'free lunch' is deeply ingrained in parts of East Asia. As usual such ideological rhetoric is impervious to empirical evidence, such as, in the east, the active role played by the state in most East Asian countries including formative welfare states in Korea and Taiwan and, in the west, the highly successful combination of human welfare and economic competitiveness by big welfare states, especially, Finland, Norway and Sweden (Therborn and Therborn, 2005). Even prior to the recent wave of globalization, led by American 'turbo-capitalism', many states in East Asia preferred to aspire to the US style of market dominated liberal welfare regime.

The idea of the 'welfare society' has never achieved wide currency in the EU. Even in a country such as Germany, which has a long tradition of subvented NGO provision of welfare, it has not surplanted 'welfare state'. In fact neither of these terms are in common usage and, in scientific language, 'welfare regime' has largely replaced 'welfare state'. As a political/ideological construction 'welfare society' has been a popular idea and could prove to be so again. Thus, when the first wave of neo-liberalism swept across Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s the political rhetoric was often of the 'welfare society' form and, in that, redolent of discourses in Hong Kong and Singapore. The UK was in the vanguard of this ideological revolution and the welfare state was seen as a major cause of its economic problems. This led to a reconstruction of the state's role in welfare and major cuts in benefits and services but not, incidentally, to the end of the welfare state. One example of this policy change was the recasting of local municipal social services departments as 'enablers' (funders and regulators) rather than direct providers of care. In the Thatcherite rhetoric of the time it was expected that the reigning back of the state would lead to an upsurge in voluntary and private effort (McCarthy, 1989; Walker, 1982; 1985) with a particular emphasis on the potential of the meso-level institutions of civil society (Green, 1993; Marsland, 1996).

It took the second wave of neo-liberalism, during the 1990s, to bring on-board the other non-liberal welfare regimes of the EU (see below) and, if the focus moves forward to the present day, it will be seen that, on the one hand, the state's role in welfare is remarkably resilient (Pierson, 2000) but, on the other, the basis of the welfare contract is changing. The central axis of this change is activation: first and by far the most important, a renewed emphasis on employment and labour force participation (instead of 'passive' benefit receipt) and, secondly, social activation or the removal of social exclusion and a reintegration in society. Elements of neo-liberal policy prescriptions can be discerned clearly in this reformulation of the European social model: activation

means commodification and combating social exclusion contains echoes of liberal 'trickle-down' policies. It may be that this present policy transformation will lead on to welfare society rhetoric in the EU but, so far, it is not a major feature of welfare reform debates. Thus, at the moment, the term 'welfare society' is associated with the liberal ideological preference for a residual state role in welfare with great reliance being placed on the family, civil society and the market.

In view of the considerable contrasts between the social models of East Asia and Europe and, in particular, their divergence on the role of the state, it might be concluded that a concept created in the context of the European social model has little relevance to an Asian one. In tune with Asian scholars who have begun to apply the concept four reasons may be advanced to demonstrate why that conclusion is premature.

First of all concepts such as 'welfare state' and 'welfare society' must be treated with great caution because they are socio-political constructions that reflect a particular political economy of welfare and the role of the state. Because of the slippery nature of the former term, Titmuss (1958) always put it in quotation marks. There are no pure forms of either construct and both have been manipulated politically to serve different ends. For example, in Chinese societies the ideas of Confucius have been invoked periodically over many years to legitimize low welfare spending. Moral appeals are routinely made to the family and wider society to provide for those in need:

> Hong Kong is a predominantly Chinese community with the family as its core value. The Government should strengthen the family by formulating social policy and providing welfare services relating to the family that meet the needs of women, children, youngsters and the elderly. (Hong Kong Policy Address 2007-8, para 84).

In practice both concepts, welfare state and welfare society, may be either oppressive or liberating. Secondly the social models in both continents are changing in response to neo-liberal globalization and socio-demographic developments. In East Asia the social models of China, South Korea and Taiwan are in transition, as in Europe are those of the central and eastern countries. The welfare state reforms in several European countries in the 1990s were designed to make them more 'productionist' and, therefore, more like their East Asian counterparts. Thirdly social quality does not privilege any particular welfare provider. Thus, although it originated to some extent out of the crisis in the European welfare state created by neo-liberalism, it is not a defender of the

welfare state form per se. As will be seen the outcomes expected from a social quality approach may stem from many different combinations of actors: family, friends, NGOs, local community, employers and the state. It is impossible to understand welfare in either Asia or Europe without reference to these multiple sources but the baby should not be lost with the bath water:

> At the same time it must always be emphasized that, regardless of the particular patterns of plurality in welfare provision in different countries the state is still the guarantor of the institutions that modify or frame the operation of the market to ensure the public good. The state, in other words, is essential for self-development (Ekins, 1992: 208).

Fourthly, in comparative research and policy terms, it is important to know about differences in both institutional arrangements and their causative features, as well as differences in the relationship between these regimes and the individual motivations behind welfare support (Wong, Wong and Mok, 2006).

Social Quality as a Bridge between Asia and Europe

Continuing in this relatively optimistic mode this final section will consider the extent to which the concept of social quality may be applied in Asia, particularly China and East Asia, and the potential facilitators and sticking points. This may help to clear the ground for further research in Asia and comparative projects with Europe. It must be emphasized that there is no presumption of a single ideal state of development or developmental goal. In short what social quality aims to do is to put in the hands of policy makers and people a holistic tool with which to measure social and economic progress. The normative dimensions will determine the acceptable level of social quality in each country/region.

Also, with regard to institutional variations and processes, as noted above social quality does not privilege any particular mode of delivery. Indeed what is interesting in research and policy terms, is the likelihood of different social quality regimes varying according to the particular configuration of actors producing the same or different, broad outcomes. In Europe this may mean a larger direct role for the state and smaller roles for the NGOs than in Asia. The only potential problems are in the normative realm, which will be discussed later. It is an empirical question as to whether the welfare state or the welfare society is a superior social policy regime for social quality.

In order to address applicability let us consider the social quality architecture, starting with the constitutional factors: personal (human) security, social recognition, social responsiveness and personal (human) capacity. There is not likely to be much controversy about the significance of social recognition and the openness or responsiveness of social relations in the constitution of competent social actors, nor indeed about the need for a minimum physical but especially cognitive capacity to engage in human relations. In the latter case there may be fears concerning the state definition of incapacity but, in the social quality approach, this is a matter for the individuals themselves and would apply only in the most extreme cases in which advocacy would be required. The difficult issue in some parts of Asia would concern personal (human) security and the Western assumption that this is a matter of the rule of law and human rights. This is obviously a controversial issue in China. As far as Asia-Europe comparative research is concerned the key research questions are what personal (human) security means in different national/regional contexts, what factors constitute it and how effective are they?

With regard to the conditional factors — socio-economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion and social empowerment — it is clear that there is a high level of synergy with at least parts of Asia. This is because, so far, the main empirical questions have focused on the applicability of specific indicators generated in Europe. Context, however, will lead to variations in the nature of the conditional factors and their prospects for development. For example, in many European countries, socio-economic security is a function of employment and social security. So too in parts of Asia but, in other parts, the family is the key guarantor of security. This difference is partly a function of development, of course. In Europe socio-demographic changes have reduced the capacity of the family to provide care and support. In Asia, for example in China and Japan, there are similar developments but in the context of rapid population ageing. Social inclusion is of considerable importance to policy makers in both Asia and Europe. So too is social cohesion, especially in China where the concept of the harmonious society is highly valued. The application of social empowerment in Asia is a matter of identifying supportive social structures and relations that promote and sustain empowerment. Thus, in practice the key research questions concern the precise meaning of these concepts in Asia, the specific indicators used to measure them and the different configurations of policy actors and instruments that promote them in different countries — the social quality regimes.

Finally they are the normative factors: social justice, solidarity, equal value and human dignity. This is the most problematic area with respect to the

translation of the concept to an Asian context. But, on the other hand, the social quality project has not embarked upon a culture-bound exercise in academic imperialism. Therefore the main European questions to Asian researchers are what is the most appropriate set of values for the application of social quality? And, secondly, how will they link to the conditional factors? An important point for Asian researchers to realize is that these factors are not universal in Europe: they are the prescriptive ones of the social quality project. There may be others that are more appropriate for Asia. Before discussing this point further it is necessary to address two common misconceptions that underpin the frequently applied stereotypes held in Asia about Europe and vice versa.

Misconceptions in Comparative Research

First of all, in the east, there is the mistaken belief that Europe is individualistic. It is true that society has undergone a 'cultural turn' under the influence of late modernity or post-modernism and science has reflected this change (Lyotard, 1984). Although the depth of this transformation is the subject of debate there is no doubting the rise of individualism and hedonistic interests. None the less there are still significant variations in the impact of this change in Europe, for example between the anglo-saxon (e.g. UK) and continental countries (e.g. France). More importantly, despite it, there remains a strong adherence to social democratic values such as solidarity. As will be explained shortly the key issue here is what it that is driving policy is. In Europe neo-liberal globalization is a powerful force and the Transatlantic Consensus is spreading from its British and Eastern Europe base camps. Despite this, solidaristic values remain strong and as noted above, were fundamental to the birth of the social quality project. There is, in other words, a significant tension between social democratic and humanist values and neo-liberalism.

The second misconception, in the West, is that Confucianism defines Chinese societies. Commentators, such as Fukijama have contributed to this harmfully simplistic view. It would be foolish to deny the historical and contemporary influence of Confucian philosophy although, the idea of 'Confucian welfare regimes' is contested (White and Goodman, 1998; Walker and Wong, 2005). In practice, however, there is no single interpretation of Confucianism in Chinese society but, rather, contrasting ones. On the one hand Confucianism may be interpreted as individualism with a predominant focus on the inner self. This approach means that there is no need to consider the socio-economic or political dimensions of life: the factors that explain the daily circumstances in which people live. On the other hand there are more political

interpretations of Confucian thinking which range from statist Confucianism (combined with legalism), which emphasizes allegiance and obedience to leaders, to a form of social democratic Confucianism, which asserts the obligations of the state to provide for the material well-being of the people (Bell, 2008). This latter strand of Confucian thinking pre-dates the state orthodox version.

Social Values and Political Ideology

These two misconceptions emphasize the need to distinguish between social values and political ideology, so that we can avoid being misled by them, and also the risk of false interpretations of the prospects of social quality in either east or west. In terms of values the social quality project began in Europe precisely because some of the traditional social values such as justice, fairness and solidarity. Not surprisingly it reflects these values and arose partly because they were perceived to be threatened by neo-liberal attacks on European welfare states in which they were, to some extent, embedded. Even in the UK, which in the 1980s was in the vanguard if the first wave of neo-liberalism (under a government that eagerly imported it from the US), there was still a strong popular adherence to collective values (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). That is, anglo-saxon individualism was coupled, however uneasily, with social democratic collectivism. In other words neo-liberal ideology and policy were superimposed upon this rich warp and weft of, sometimes conflicting, social values, such as authoritarianism and social justice. However, to regard the UK or Europe as a whole as merely neo-liberal vehicles would be wrong. Thus, for example, the EU balanced its neo-liberal policy turn in the late 1990s with more familiar social democratic commitments to social protection and the quality of employment (more ILO than World Bank). At the same time key figures in the European Commission recognized publicly the importance of social quality in shaping European social policy. This emphasizes that globalization is chiefly neo-liberal economic globalization rather than social globalization (Walker and Deacon, 2003). The depth of the commitment to solidarity in Europe was signaled by the 2003 Eurobarometer study in which 3 out of 4 Europeans agreed with maintaining existing pension levels even at the cost of a further rise in contribution rates (Galasso and Profeta, 2004).

Some similar points about the relationship between values and political ideology can be made about East Asia where the political traditions in several countries have been authoritarian/paternalistic and liberal-conservative. Here more progressive social values have co-existed with these liberal-conservative

political systems, most notably in the case of China there is the coexistence of authoritarianism with socialism. The liberal-conservative tradition in this region meant that neo-liberal globalization was accepted more readily than in the parts of the west and it sits more easily with the longstanding institutions and policies of some states. After all, places such as Hong Kong and Singapore were 'global' before the term globalization was coined. Moreover, in some countries, authoritarianism prevented the adoption of neo-liberalism from being opposed. This is not to say that it was welcomed by all governments and certainly not by their people. For example, in South Korea, this economic regime was a condition of the massive IMF loan in 1988 and it was also subjected to prescriptions far beyond economic management, including the reform of its pension system (Chang and Walker, 2009). In fact the liberal government of Korea, that gained power in the economic crisis, was more welfare friendly that the previous right-wing authoritarian one and, while it transformed its economic regime, it resisted neo-liberal social reforms (at least in the short term). This illustrates the scope for national autonomy in the face of neo-liberal globalization. The case of China, again, is important because there neo-liberalism co-exists with communism: the paradox of market socialism.

It is necessary to recognize too that political ideology adopts and moulds traditional values to serve its own ends. This is as true and common in the west as in the east. For example, in the UK in the 1980s, there were frequent eulogies to the 'caring capacity of the community', community care and the centrality of 'family values'. Mrs. Thatcher said famously 'there is no such thing as society'. In East Asia the Confucian tradition has been manipulated in several countries to emphasize certain aspects rather than others (the family not the state). The malleability of social values according to political ideology means that great care must be taken in the interpretation of such values independent of their socio-political context. A clear example is the relationship between attitudes to welfare and the welfare institutions, policies and philosophies with which they can co-exist. This has been demonstrated in comparative research by CK Wong and colleagues (2006) which looked at individual motivations behind welfare support between the EU and East Asia, which used the Netherlands and Hong Kong as points of reference in each region. Overall there are similar levels of perceived self-interest, moral obligation and empathy in support for welfare in the two places but, the proportion selecting perceived self-interest as the only one of these three motivations, was seven times higher in the Netherlands than Hong Kong (20 per cent compared with 2.9 per cent) (Wong, Wong and Mok, 2006; Clasen and van Oorshot, 2002). The Hong Kong Chinese are more strongly motivated by empathy and moral obligation than their Dutch

counterparts. Thus emotional support for welfare appears to be a product of institutional welfare contexts, including welfare ideologies, and how the public perceives a particular regime. Not surprisingly the residual, selective and neo-liberal welfare regime in Hong Kong is not perceived in terms of self-interest, compared with the more universal welfare system of the Netherlands.

Conclusion

In sum, the translation of social quality to an Asian context cannot mean the imposition of so-called 'western values' such as democracy, solidarity, human rights and the rule of law. Whatever happens on that front is a matter for the Asian region and the countries within it. Take China as a case in point: it is inconceivable that western values will be simply imported and applied. More likely there will be a dialectic between China and the west in which the values of both sides are respected and, if imported, they will be adapted to national circumstances. In this process the west has much to learn from China and other Asian countries and their traditions may add value to western ones. For example Confucianism could enrich and soften some western values such as materialism. Also, in many Asian countries, not only in China, human relations are critical and contrast with western preoccupations, both politically and scientifically, with social status and material well-being. This is also the essence of the social quality project and this helps to explain why Asian scholars have seen its potential to integrate with the relationality of their societies. This point is well made by Bell (2008: 16):

> In the Western mind, those deprived of the opportunity to choose their political leaders are also disadvantaged. In the Confucian mind, it is not necessarily the case. A more serious harm is being deprived of family members and friends that make up the good life. Hence, when Mencius says the government should first give consideration to 'old men without wives, old women without husbands, old people without children and young children without fathers', he doesn't mean that those people are materially poor. Nor does he mean that they are disadvantaged because they lack democratic rights. For Mencius, they are disadvantaged (partly, if not mainly) because they are deprived of key human relations.

Thus there is much for Europe to learn from Asia as well as there being rich opportunities for comparative social quality research which, in turn, can inform

the social policy debates taking place in both regions. It might also provide a comparative framework within which to situate different levels of development (Gough, 1999). The social quality approach, therefore, appears to provide a potentially productive basis upon which to develop scientific research comparing the quality of societies in the east and the west and, at the same time, to prompt policy dialogues about welfare arrangements in the two regions. The starting point must be sound comparative research.

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ALAN WALKER is Professor of Social Policy and Social Gerontology at the University of Sheffield, UK and Director of the New Dynamics of Ageing Research Program. He was a co-recipient of Queen's Prize for Higher and Further Education for research on ageing in 2002. His research interests are social analysis, social policy and social planning. He published more than 20 books, over 200 reports and more than 300 papers in scholarly journals and edited volumes.

Address: Dept. of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road Sheffield S10 2TU, UK [*Email*: A.C.Walker@sheffield.ac.uk]