

Social Quality and the Social Harmony Campaign in Hong Kong

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This paper is a response to the increasing internationalization of the concept of social quality. It is intended to examine whether research projects on social quality reduce or increase the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. To fulfill this objective, it carries out two analytical tasks. The first is to discuss the views of Walker and Wong (2004) on the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. Walker and Wong (2004) argue that over-emphasizing the differences between how social welfare is organized and assessed in Western countries and that in non-Western countries causes the bias of excluding the latter in comparative analyses. Hence to deal with this bias, it is necessary to pay attention to the similarities between the social welfare development in western countries and that in non-western countries. Secondly, to provide evidence to Walker and Wong's argument, this paper discusses the relevancy of the social harmony campaign in Hong Kong to research projects on social quality.

Keywords: Social Welfare, Ethnocentric Bias, Comparative Analysis, Welfare Research, Non-Western Countries

Introduction

Social quality was originally proposed as a standard by which to measure the extent to which people's daily lives have attained an acceptable level in the EU (Beck et al., 1997). Recently it has increasingly been applied to other non-western countries such as East Asian countries (Walker, 2008). In response to the growing international importance of social quality, it is necessary to raise such questions as whether the theory of social quality is culturally grounded and whether or not the social quality research should be conducted in non-western countries. These questions in turn reflect the needs to examine whether research projects on social quality reduce or increase the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare.

The objective of this paper is to join this examination by arguing that research projects on social quality could reduce rather than create ethnocentric bias in the study of social policy. To meet this objective, it carries out two main analytical tasks. The first is to discuss the views of Walker and Wong (2004) on the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. Secondly, to provide evidence to Walker and Wong's argument, this paper discusses the relevancy of the social harmony campaign in Hong Kong to research projects on social quality.

The Ethnocentric Bias in the Study of Social Welfare

The ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare can be manifest in the exclusion of the cultural knowledge used by people in non-western countries to organize their welfare (Yu, 2008b). As a result how they organize and assess welfare receives insufficient attention from the academic community. Some analysts attribute this problem to the wrong assumption that the Eurocentric worldviews can universally be applied to other cultural groups (Graham, 2002; Yu, 2006). To cope with this problem, they suggest that it is necessary to recognize both the ability and willingness of people in non-Western countries to use their own way of organizing social welfare (Schiele, 2000; Graham, 1999).

Walker and Wong (2004) draw our attention to a different cause of the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. They argue that over-emphasizing the differences between how social welfare is organized and assessed in Western countries and in non-Western countries cause the bias of excluding the latter in comparative analyses. Most of those analysts sharing this

argument come from the field of comparative policy studies (Chau and Yu, 2005; Walker and Wong, 2005). They discover that some non-western economies share similar pattern of welfare mix with some western countries. Moreover, as with some western governments, some non-western governments see the provision of social welfare as an important instrument to promote social stability and give people some sense of security in the global era in which the job market becomes increasingly unstable (Yu, 2007a). However, despite these similarities many non-western countries are excluded from the 'club' of welfare states in the comparative policy studies due to the fact that most of them have neither a capitalist economy nor a fully fledged Western parliamentary democracy (Walker and Wong, 1996). Commenting on this exclusion of non-western countries from studies on social welfare, Walker and Wong (2004) put forward this argument:

... the Western welfare state paradigm is an ethnocentric construction. Their exclusion is not based on the policy content or institutions of welfare in those countries, but on other institutional requirements that are not concerned with the welfare state per se but rather its cultural, economic and political context (Walker and Wong, 2004: 118).

To deal with this problem, it is thus necessary to explore different levels of commonalities between how people in western and non-western countries organize and assess welfare. Hence, it is worth finding out how some social welfare models (for example the residual welfare model and institutional welfare model) play an important role in shaping the welfare development in both western and non-western countries.¹ It is equally worthwhile finding out the factors that governments in both western and non-western countries take into consideration when providing social welfare.

Both the liberal and Marxist studies of the nature of social welfare in the 1970s and 1980s reveal that both western and non-western governments are keen to tackle the contradictory relationship between social welfare and capitalism (Ginsburg, 1979; Mishra, 1984; Offe, 1984; Walker and Wong, 2004). This contradictory relationship is that the provision of social welfare serves to strengthen capitalism by reproducing labor, securing social stability and providing contracts for the private sector to earn money on the one hand, and it challenges capitalism by reducing workers' incentive to work and increasing the

¹ The residual welfare model plays an important role in shaping the social welfare development in both the USA and Hong Kong (Walker and Wong, 2004).

financial costs of production on the other hand (Gough, 1979; Walker, 1984). In response to these mixed effects of social welfare on capitalism, many capitalist governments (in both East and West) find it necessary to carry out double tasks — that is, at the same time as providing social welfare, they attempt to reduce the negative effects of social welfare on capitalism (Chau and Yu, 1999). Examples of the measures intended to cut down the adverse effects of social welfare on capitalism include residualizing social services, marketizing social services and launching welfare to work measures (Levitas, 1998; Rowlingson, 2002). It is important to note that all these measures share common effects of strengthening the subordination of social policy to economic policy, which can be manifest in three major forms (Walker, 1984):

- a. economic goals are identified as national goals which are supposed to be superior to any other goals;
- b. social services are confined to artificially constructed ‘non-economic areas’ and are restricted from challenging market relationships; and
- c. the effectiveness of social services is assessed by economic criteria, and as a result the value of social services is measured mainly in terms of their contribution to the economy; and

However, it is important to note that it is one thing that capitalist governments have the intention to make social policy subordinate to economic policy; it might be quite another whether they could do so effectively, as the effectiveness of their actions are affected by the availability of favorable economic, social and political conditions.² Moreover, how social welfare should be organized is a contested area. Certainly those who favor the market as the main mechanism for providing and allocating resources tend to support the supremacy of economic policy over social policy, and the government’s attempts to reduce the negative effects of social welfare on capitalism (George and Wilding, 1976; Yu, 2007b). In contrast, the supporters of socialist values and collective ways for meeting social needs are more likely to fight for a more equal relationship between economic policy and social policy (Rowlingson, 2000).

What is important is that the debates on the ideal relationship between economic policy and social policy, and on how this ideal relationship should be manifest in the provision of social welfare and the above mentioned double

² The examples of the economic, social and political conditions include the political systems, the performance of the economy and the tradition of solving problems through the provision of social welfare.

tasks carried out by the government take place in both western and non-western countries. Hence, it is believed that the examination of how the debates on these issues in non-western countries to that in western countries can make contribution to the examination of the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. For this reason, it is worth discussing how the research projects on social quality in western countries are related to the study of social welfare in non-western countries, because an important reason for analysts to develop the concept of social quality is to fight for a more balanced relationship between economic policy and social policy.

Social Quality

In discussing the background to the study of social quality, Walker and Maesen v.d. (2003) point out that this concept is developed to address the unequal relationship between economic and social policy.

It is important to note that against the backdrop of the rising interest in studying social quality, many western governments are keen to promote the unequal relationship between economic and social policy through promoting market values, and launch pro-market welfare reforms. For example, the 'Washington Consensus' represents many capitalist governments' shared view that only measures such as privatization of public services, deregulation, tax reform and fiscal discipline could produce vibrant, healthy economies (Ferguson, 2008). Moreover governments (for example, the UK and the US administrations) launch ideological campaigns conveying messages about individual responsibility, limited government responsibility for providing welfare and social obligations in terms of taking part in the labor market (DSS, 1998a; DSS, 1998b; Giddens, 1994; Heron and Dwyer, 1999; Rowlingson, 2002). Examples of these messages are as follows

- a. Limited government responsibility for providing welfare: We will rebuild the welfare state around the work ethic; work for those who can; security for those who cannot (DSS, 1998a).
- b. Social obligation: Duties on the part of the government are matched by duties for the individuals (DSS, 1998b).
- c. Individual responsibilities: Individuals have a responsibility to help provide for themselves when they can do so (DSS, 1998c).

In relation to these messages, the capitalist governments launch a number of

pro-market measures such as privatizing pension services, residualizing health care services, providing financial benefits to users not based on automatic entitlement of citizen but based on their willingness to take up the social obligation of improving their employability to meet the needs of the labor market (Bonoli, 2000; Heron and Dwyer, 1999).

These measures and their underlying ideological messages in turn provide support to an 'ideal set of pro-market strategies' for shaping people's economic and social life according to the subordination of social policies to economic policies. Based on a number of studies (for example, by Esping-Andersen, 1999; Ring, 2005; Heron and Dwyer, 1999; Levitas, 1998; Rowlington, 2002) this 'ideal set of pro-market strategies' has the following four key features:³

- a. Socio-Economic Security: The government only wants to provide a minimum amount of financial protection for those who fail to take part in the market, and assists people to take part in the labor market through the welfare to work measures. It tries to avoid providing welfare based on the institutional welfare model.
- b. Social cohesion: The government emphasizes promoting social cohesion based on social obligations rather than social rights. On the one hand, society is assumed to have an obligation to meet the needs of individuals — particularly in helping them cope with poverty — via a promotion of individual participation in the labor market. On the other hand, individuals, especially users of state benefits, have a social obligation to work and achieve economic independence.
- c. Social inclusion: The definition of this concept is narrowed to participation in paid work. As a result to help people to seek social inclusion, the government only concentrates on increasing their ability and willingness to work in society.
- d. Empowerment: Empowerment is seen as making choices in the market. Hence, the government focuses on helping people to improve their employability through the provision of retraining program so that they may be able to have more choices in the job market.

Certainly these descriptions of the four features of 'the ideal set of strategies' are simplified forms. They may not be able to reflect comprehensively the real situations. However, highlighting this ideal set of strategies serves to

³ These four features are identified according to the framework provided by research on social quality.

make us more aware of the fact that how social welfare is organized is a contested area, and how research on social quality provides an important part in this debate.

In developing the concept of social quality with the aim of challenging the unequal relationship between social policy and economic policy, analysts demand that the government should make greater commitments to the provision of economic and social conditions for people to organize their life (Walker, 2008). They argue that an acceptable level of social quality will be achieved only if a collective strategy for achieving socio-economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion and empowerment are secured. The main features of this collective strategy have been discussed by Walker and Maesen v.d. (2003) and are highlighted as follows:

- a. **Socio-Economic Security:** Socio-economic security requires good quality paid employment and social protection to guarantee living standards and access to resources: income, education, health care, social services, environment, public health, personal safety. Hence the government is required to make much more commitment to the provision of social welfare than the provision of residual social services and welfare-to-work measures.
- b. **Social Cohesion:** Social cohesion refers to the glue which holds communities and societies together. It requires recognition of the changing social structures and the need to renew those that continue to underpin social cohesion, such as intergenerational solidarity, and to find new forms to take the place of those that are weakening. Certainly it requires the government to support people to take up much more obligation than improving their employability or stop using the social services.
- c. **Social Inclusion:** Social exclusion is seen as a denial of social rights. Hence, social inclusion concerns citizenship. To secure social inclusion, the government is required to promote citizen rights rather than only help people to participate actively in the labor market.
- d. **Empowerment:** Empowerment means enabling citizens to control their own lives and to take advantage of opportunities. It means more than making choices in the market. In fact, it means how to facilitate people to exercise their choices as a human being, with the emphasis on human rights.

It is obvious that the collective strategy for strengthening these four

conditions for the realization of social quality not only provides challenges to the ideological messages about individualism, limited government responsibilities for provision of welfare and social obligations in terms of taking part in the labor market, they also throw doubts on the desirability of the pro-market welfare reforms. Obviously, this strategy gives more support to a collective way of providing social welfare, with emphasis on human rights, citizenship and collective interests.

While the studies about social quality in non-western countries started much later than those in the western countries, there have long been debates on whether the governments in non-western countries should make social policy subordinate to economic policy, and on the desirability of pro-market welfare reforms (Chau and Yu, 1999; Yu, 2007a). If we attempt to reduce the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare, it is worthwhile having a look at how these debates are related to research projects on social quality. To provide a concrete example of the relevancy of the study of pro-market reforms in non-western countries to the studies of social quality, we shall discuss the social harmony campaign in Hong Kong in the next section.

The Social Harmony Campaign in Hong Kong

In 1997 Hong Kong was reintegrated into China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), and a new administration (the SAR government) was set up to administer Hong Kong under the Basic Law. In order to distinguish the new administration from the colonial administration, senior officials of the SAR government are keen to associate themselves with Chinese tradition. Hence unsurprisingly they are enthusiastic in launching a social harmony campaign.

Social harmony was seen as an important social goal in traditional China. It stresses the importance of achieving a state of equilibrium through an effective coordination between different elements in society. For example, Confucian scholars in traditional China were keen to promote social harmony through raising people's awareness of their close relationship with each other, and guiding them to meet their role expectations in basic relationships such as between husband and wife; brothers; and father and son. Moreover, Chinese medicines practitioners encourage the public to keep themselves healthy by balancing the Yin and Yang forces inside their body (Yu, 2006).

Evidence shows that the senior officials of the SAR government are keen to associate themselves with the mission of building a harmonious society. In the 1997 Policy Address, Tung Chee Wah, the first Chief Executive, stressed social

harmony as an important moral value that the community at large should treasure (Tung, 1997).

In the 2000 Policy Address, Tung Chee Wah continued to stress the importance of social harmony in Hong Kong:

Nevertheless I have noticed in recent times a change in community attitudes. People are more inclined to adopt a mood skepticism, and criticism — even belittling the capabilities of our own people. I am also aware that many of our citizens are tired of this. Most want a society with greater harmony, less hostility, less unnecessary quarrelling, but more rational discussion We should cast off our old baggage and work harmoniously together (Tung, 2000: 127-128).

It is important to note that the government's view on social harmony is well in line with the above mentioned 'ideal set of pro-market strategies' for shaping people's economic and social life. Its view is reflected by the normative and operational elements of its strategy for strengthening social harmony.

The normative element refers to an ideological message that a harmonious society should be achieved based on the concept of 'helping people to help themselves'. More details of this concept are discussed in the Donald Tsang's 2007 Policy Address:

Promoting social harmony under the concept of helping people to help themselves: while globalization spurs development, some people are not yet able to share the fruits of prosperity. In my view, the Government should not attempt to narrow the wealth gap by redistributing wealth through high levels of tax and welfare. The role of the Government should be confined to creating the social conditions that help improve the livelihood of people with low income using a multi-pronged policy approach. This includes promoting infrastructure development to achieve higher wages; developing soft infrastructure on all fronts including expanding retraining programmes to help the middle class and the grassroots upgrade their skills (Tsang, 2007: 4).

On other occasions, the government officials further elaborate the ideas of helping people to help themselves. These ideas include enabling the public to participate in the market as the main way for tackling poverty, helping citizens to shoulder their own responsibilities, avoiding turning Hong Kong into a high tax regime or a welfare state (Tsang, 2008, 2009).

The operational element of the government's strategy for promoting social

harmony refers to its pro-market welfare reform measures intended to translate the concept of helping people to help themselves into practice. Examples of these reform measures include residualization and market-led reform measures.

The residualization measure is intended to keep the way of providing social welfare as close to the residual welfare model as possible (Forrest and Murie, 1988). An important way to residualize social welfare is to make users feel that they are inferior to those who purchase services in the market. This can be done by requiring users to be means-tested for benefits or to lower the benefits provided by social services. As a result, a message is conveyed that if people want to enjoy a decent standard of living they should sell their labor in the private market rather than rely on social services. The Hong Kong SAR government carries out residualization measures mainly in the reforms of health finance. Since 2002 it has imposed charges for Accident and Emergency services and increased the fees for hospital out-patient and in-patient services. Those who apply for fee-reduction or exemption are required to go through mean-testings.

Market-led measures are founded on the assumption that the private market and the government can co-operate with each other in promoting their mutual benefits. In order to motivate people to take part in the private market, the government can apply the market-led measure by actively playing the role of subsidizers and regulators (Abrahamson, Boje, and Greve, 2005; Johnson, 1990). Thus a market-led measure is designed to ensure that even if people enjoy a socially acceptable standard of living through the use of social services, they are not totally devoid of participation in the private market. The Hong Kong SAR government has implemented market-led measure in the pension system. For example, it introduced the Mandatory Provident Fund in 2000. This Fund is a compulsory retirement saving scheme which requires almost all full-time employees aged between eighteen and sixty-five and their employers to each contribute a five percent of the employee's earnings to a recognized private provident fund each month.

Recently the Hong Kong SAR government has been actively reforming the social security measures for the unemployed. These reforms indicate that it carries out both the residualization and market-led measures together. The financial assistance to the unemployed is provided mainly through a means-tested safety-net measure, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme (CSSA). To residualize the CSSA, the Hong Kong SAR government has not only reduced the welfare payment but also extended the residency requirements for applying for the CSSA from one year to seven years. At the same time, with the intention of encouraging and assisting employable CSSA users to enter the labor market and achieve self-reliance, it introduced a welfare-to-work measure, the

Support for Self-reliance scheme (Legco Panel on Welfare Services, 2001). This scheme consists of three components — the Active Employment Assistance program, the Community Work program and the Disregarded Earnings. Under the Active Employment Assistance program, CSSA users under the age of 60 are required to apply for at least two jobs per fortnight and undertake that they will not decline any job offered that he/she is capable of doing (Social Welfare Department, 2007). For those recipients who succeed in getting full-time gainful employment, their income can be disregarded up to a maximum of HK\$2,500 per month. Moreover, their first month's income will be totally disregarded on the condition that the benefit will be allowed not more than once during a two-year period (Social Welfare Department, 2007). Those who fail to get a job within a short time are required to participate in community work such as cleaning country parks and gardening up to a maximum of three days or 24 hours a week (Social Welfare Department, 2007).

The normative and operational elements of the social harmony campaign provides evidence that the Hong Kong SAR government supports the above mentioned 'ideal set of pro-market strategies' for shaping people's economic and social life.

- a. Socio-Economic Security: As mentioned above, the Hong Kong SAR government is reforming social welfare through the residualization measures and refuses narrowing the wealth gap by redistributing wealth through high level tax and welfare. This implies that it sees the private market as the most important mechanism for creating and allocating wealth, and it mainly wants to play a residual role in meeting people's needs. It is not surprising to see that its CSSA benefits are only sufficient for the unemployed to maintain a very basic standard of living.
- b. Social Cohesion: Through the provision of Support for Self-reliance scheme, the Hong Kong SAR government requires the CSSA users to accept the social obligation of increasing their employability, and preparing themselves to take part in the job market.
- c. Social Inclusion: The Hong Kong SAR government is focusing on helping unemployed groups to cope with social exclusion through increasing their employability. There is little discussion about the inequalities created by the job market, or the needs to deal with these inequalities through the redistribution of resources based on citizen rights.
- d. Empowerment: The market-led measures in general and the Mandatory Provident Fund in specific show that the Hong Kong SAR government

confines its empowerment work to helping people to take part in the market. It does so by actively playing the role of subsidizers and regulators.

The Criticisms Against the Social Harmony Campaign

The social harmony campaign is not uncontroversial. A number of analysts and pressure groups argue that the social harmony campaign is an unsuccessful campaign (Hong Kong Policy Viewers, 2009; Lee, 2007). To justify their views, they point out a number of inharmonious elements in Hong Kong. For example, there were a number of protests against the government's decisions to increase the fees and charges of health services and cut the CSSA benefits (SCMP, 2003; 2004; 2006; Yu, 2007a). In July 2003, half a million people took to the streets in protest against a proposed anti-subversion amendment to the Basic Law. The discontent of the people was so great that the Chief Executive and the three senior officials stepped down.

Moreover, analysts and politicians criticized both the normative and operational elements of the social harmony campaign. Firstly some argued that the Hong Kong SAR government did not pay sufficient attention to the structural defects of society. Lee Cheuk Yan (2007: 2), the Legislative Councilor, expressed this view succinctly: 'A polarized society is less harmonious and stable than one with a large and strong middle. Extreme inequalities and poverty also make collective decisions more difficult'. Lee's analysis is supported by the Gini Coefficient score that increased from 0.476 in 1991 to 0.525 in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2001). It is also supported by an Oxfam's survey that over 1.2 million people (out of the total population of 6.9 million) in Hong Kong fell into the category of poor people in 2006 (Wong, 2007).

Secondly some analysts argued that the Hong Kong SAR government should take concrete actions to tackle the structural defects of society and thus achieve social harmony. Their suggestions provide evidence that they support a collective strategy for creating favorable social and economic conditions for the achievement of social quality.

1. Socio-Economic Security

Pressure groups point out that the CSSA does not provide sufficient financial protection for the unemployed (Concerning CSSA Review Alliance, 2005). To deal with this problem, they suggest provision of aid to these groups

of people based on the concept of relative poverty. Firstly, the Hong Kong SAR government should develop the poverty line according to a certain proportion of the median income in society. Such a way for setting the poverty line can make the public aware of how poverty is caused by the wealth gap. Secondly, the Hong Kong SAR government should improve the quality of life of poor people through the redistribution of wealth.

2. Social Cohesion

Analysts attribute a lack of social harmony to some structural defects of society such as the unequal distribution of power and the wealth gap (Lee, 2007). This reflects their belief that social inequality is the cause of social division. In order to reduce this division, and strengthen solidarity in society, it is thus necessary to reduce the wealth gap through tax and welfare reforms. The examples of these reforms include making corporate tax progressive and introducing pension schemes based on the universalist principle (Chiu et al., 1997).

3. Social Inclusion

The critics of the social harmony campaign study social exclusion with reference to the redistributionist discourse (Yu, 2008a). According to Levitas (1998: 14), this discourse emphasizes poverty as a prime cause of social exclusion and stresses a radical reduction of inequalities, and a redistribution of resources and power. Based on this discourse, the critics of the social harmony campaign argue that the most effective ways to secure the social inclusion of unemployed people is to help them to tackle poverty rather than encouraging them by 'sticks' and 'carrots' to take part in the job market. Examples of the more effective measures for securing social inclusion include provision of permanent jobs for the unemployed, introduction of unemployment benefits and helping the unemployed to have access to the basic welfare services such as public housing units and free medical services (Choi, 2006; Grassroot Women Poverty Concern Group, 2005).

4. Empowerment

Analysts argue that in order to help people have more control over their life independently of participation in the job market, workers should have more options in choosing between welfare and work (Concerning CSSA Review

Alliance and Justice & Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese, 2007). Hence, the government should not only focus on providing welfare to work measures. It should also consider providing welfare and no work measures. Following this logic, it is necessary to give unemployed groups and poor people options about handling their possible roles as carers in the family and workers in job markets (Yu, 2008b). The related concrete methods include giving subsidies to carers, subsidizing poor people to receive life-long training according to their potentials, and giving them opportunities to take part in the management of the social services provided for them.

Implications

Having discussed the relationship between the social harmony campaign and social quality, this section focuses on examining the implications of this relationship on the analysis of ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare.

As mentioned above, to avoid the potential bias of excluding social welfare in non-western societies from comparative analyses, it is necessary not to over-emphasize the differences between the ways in which social welfare is organized in western societies and non-western societies. This suggestion obviously garners support from the study of the social harmony campaign in Hong Kong.

As shown in the previous parts, the Hong Kong SAR government, through the implementation of its social harmony campaign, is trying not only to associate its rule with traditional Chinese values but also to subordinate social policy to economic policy. Its intention to achieve this policy objective not only provides a good observation ground for us to find out the international significance of the 'Washington Consensus' and its related policy practices but also to see how the ideas of social quality can provide better alternatives to the pro-market welfare reforms. Hence it is not surprising to see that the ideas suggested by the critics of the social harmony campaign to a certain extent give support to the ideas of social quality.

It is important to note that if we held an ethnocentric view on the study of social welfare and thus overlooked the relevance of the social harmony campaign to the research on social quality, we would not only overlook the international significance of the concept of social quality but also miss the importance of Hong Kong as an observation ground for finding out whether the ideas of social quality can provide alternatives to the existing policy practices in non-western countries.

However, it is important to avoid over-estimating the applicability of the

western welfare views and welfare practices in non-western societies. So far there is a lack of systematic studies on how far the critics of the social harmony campaign shares the ideas of social quality. Moreover, in justifying its attempts to make social policy subordinate to economic policy, the Hong Kong SAR government is keen to demonstrate the related actions are indebted to the ideas of social harmony rather than the 'Washington Consensus'. This shows that it is aware that the acceptability of its policy practices will be increased if it can demonstrate that these programs are underpinned by Chinese traditional values. This implies that the traditional Chinese values, even if they only serve as a kind of rhetoric, still play an important role in the policy debate in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

So far we have demonstrated how the research projects on social quality can reduce the ethnocentric bias in the study of social welfare. The analytical tasks that we has carried out in this paper provide not only legitimacy to the research projects on social quality in non-western countries but also raise our awareness of the importance of finding out how to make use of these research projects to respond to the pro-market practices. As shown above, governments in both western and non-western countries play an active role in strengthening the supremacy of economic policy over social policy, through launching pro-market ideological campaigns and pro-market welfare reforms. Compared to the spread of these ideological projects and related welfare reforms across countries, studies of social quality, as a kind of counter-culture, lag far behind. Hence, for tackling the ethnocentric bias in the examination of social welfare, and for challenging the supremacy of economic policy over social policy, it is worth studying alternatives to the social harmony campaign in Hong Kong based on the ideas of social quality.

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