Studying the Ethnocentric Bias in the Comparative Studies of Social Welfare*

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This paper has two objectives. The first is to discuss three related views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare. The second objective is to demonstrate how these views can increase our understanding of the pluralistic ways in which non-western societies organise social welfare. Two analytical tasks are carried out. The first is to discuss the studies focusing on welfare regimes, cultural sensitivity of social welfare and the double attachment strategy used by governments to organise social welfare. These studies provide theoretical foundations of the three views on the ethnocentric bias. The second analytical task is to discuss the pro-market welfare reforms in Hong Kong. These reforms provide a concrete case of showing how non-western societies organise social welfare in a pluralistic way and how this pluralistic way is related to the three views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare.

Keywords: *Ethnocentrism, Confucianism, Welfare reforms, Welfare regimes*

Introduction

There is an increasing number of studies on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative study of social welfare (Walker and Wong 2004; Hill 2006; Chau and Yu 2009; Kennett 2001; Wong 2009). This paper is intended to join these studies with two objectives. The first objective is to discuss three related views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare. The second objective is to demonstrate the importance of these three views in increasing our understanding of the pluralistic ways in which non-western societies organise social welfare. To meet these two objectives, two analytical tasks are carried out. The first is to discuss the studies focusing on welfare regimes, cultural sensitivity of social welfare and the double attachment strategy used by governments to organise social welfare. As these studies provide the theoretical foundations of the three views on the ethnocentric bias, the discussion of these studies enhances our understanding of these views. The second analytical task is to discuss the pro-market welfare reforms in Hong Kong. These reforms provide a concrete case of how non-western societies organise social welfare in pluralistic ways, and how these pluralistic ways are related to the three views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare.

The paper is organised into three major parts. The first part examines three related views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare. The second part discusses the pro-market welfare reforms in Hong Kong. The third part examines the implications of these reforms on the study of how non-western societies organise social welfare in a pluralistic way and the study of the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare.

The views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative study of social welfare

Ethnocentric bias is a tendency to interpret other cultures based on one's own culture. This bias can be mirrored in the attitude to knowledge. A person holding an ethnocentric bias is likely to assume that the cultural knowledge of his/her ethnic group is at the centre and the cultural knowledge of other ethnic groups only occupies a peripheral position (Graham 1999; Walker and Wong 2004). The construction of welfare concepts based on this

attitude to knowledge can be seen as the examples of ethnocentric construction, as these concepts reinforce the superiority of the cultural knowledge of some ethnic groups to the cultural knowledge of other ethnic groups. The discussion of the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare is highly related to the concern on the dominance of the knowledge systems of the Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon world in the field of social welfare (Walker and Wong 1996). Unsurprisingly some analysts see the 'hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge' (Graham 1999, p. 255) as the example of the ethnocentric bias. The hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge is widely recognised as a problem in the comparative studies of social welfare because it not only undermines the capacity of research in enhancing our understanding of the differences and similarities between countries in organising social welfare but also causes two kinds of academic exclusion (Walker and Wong 2004; Chau and Yu 2005). The first kind of academic exclusion takes place when the knowledge of non-western societies is excluded in the comparative studies of social welfare (Yu 2008). The second kind of academic exclusion takes place when people in non-western societies are deprived of the opportunities to make use of their cultural knowledge to interpret and understand the reality (Graham 1999). These two kinds of academic exclusion can also be seen as a kind of cultural oppression, which is defined as 'the universalism of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment of the norm' (Young 1990, p. 59). It is important to note that knowledge provides people with models of reality and helps them to understand what is possible and how they can attain it (Graham 2002). Following this logic, if the production and consumption of knowledge is dominated by the western world-views, the 'reality' of people in non-western societies will be placed within the realities of others who have constructed their own theories and models of practice as the basis for solving people's problems (Graham 1999).

As far as the comparative studies of social welfare are concerned, three views on this ethnocentric bias can be identified—the first view is based on the studies of cultural sensitivity (Graham 1999, 2002), the second view is based on the studies of welfare regimes (Walker and Wong 2004; Ku and Jones Finer 2007) and the third view is based on the studies of double-attachment strategy used by governments to organise social welfare (Yu 2008; Chau and Yu 2005). As shown in the later parts of this section, the first view attributes the bias to the over-emphasis on the universalism of western knowledge and the neglect of the abilities of non-western countries in producing knowledge. To deal with this bias, Yu (2008) suggests paying

attention to the fact that non-western countries may organise social welfare effectively based on their cultural knowledge. The second view attributes the bias to the over-emphasis on the differences between the western and non-western societies in organising social welfare and thus the under-estimate of the relevance of the experience of non-western countries in organising social welfare to the western knowledge. To deal with this bias, Walker and Wong (2004) suggest paying heed to the similarities between the western societies and non-western societies in organising social welfare. The third view stresses that some non-western societies may attempt to organise social welfare based both on their cultural knowledge and on the experience of western societies. Hence it is necessary to avoid over-estimating the universal applicability of the western ideas and neglecting the relevancy of the welfare provision experience in non-western societies to the development of welfare in western societies (Chau and Yu 2005). The failure to appreciate the possibility that non-western societies may use double-attachment strategy to organise social welfare results in ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare.

The studies on cultural sensitivity, on which the first view on the ethnocentric bias is based, are intended to challenge two related assumptions on western ideas (Schiele 2000; Payne 2005). The first of these two assumptions is that western ideas can be universally applied to other cultural groups. The second is that 'one theory, worldview or paradigm can be used to explain human behavior among all people and in every culture' (Graham 1999, p. 254). Obviously these two assumptions provide justifications to the suppression of many cultural groups' experiences, value, ideas and interpretations about the causes of social problems, and the role of social welfare in tackling social problems (Schiele 2000; Graham 1999; Chau and Yu 2009). Moreover, if people support these two assumptions, it is likely that they will ignore the importance of non-western societies' attempts to organise social welfare.

However, studies show that the significance of western ideas in shaping the development of social welfare in societies across the world is over-exaggerated (Graham 2002; Chau and Yu 2005; Chau 2007). Firstly analysts (for example, Midgley 1981; Gray 2010) point out the inadequacies of western ideas in guiding the countries commonly seen as non-western in organizing social welfare. Midgley (1981) argues that the western ideas (such as the individualism, liberalism and work ethic) replicated in the developing countries serve the interests of developed countries and establish a new colonialism. In discussing the indigenization of social work, Gray (2010)

points out that the innate origins and value base of the profession gives preference to a western worldview and related values (western or Euro-American) and as a result it may not effectively be applied to other cultural groups.

Secondly, analysts stress the importance of recognizing non-western cultures as effective producers of knowledge in their own right and the fact that different cultural groups may have their shared cultural experience of organizing social welfare and cultural heritage (Lee 1994; Dei 1999). They justify this point by pointing out that a number of non-western cultural ideas such as the Taoist ideas of *Banish Sageliness*, *Discard Wisdom* and Confucian ideas of *Li* (following the wisdom) have important influence in the development of social welfare in different societies (Naito and Gielen 1992; Schiele 2000; Ho et al. 2001; Chau and Yu 2009). In discussing the ideas of path-dependency, Cox (2004) draws our attention that people may prefer to attach their life to their shared ideas. The failure to see this preference may make one over-estimate the universal applicability of western ideas.

As mentioned above, the second view on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative social welfare mainly comes from the studies on welfare regimes. At the same time as challenging the universal applicability of western ideas, Walker and Wong (1996, 2004) argue that the ethnocentric bias can also be caused by the over-emphasis on the differences between western and non-western societies in organising social welfare. This argument is founded on their observation that many studies on classification of welfare regimes are mainly drawn on the experiences of advanced capitalist parliamentary democracies which are members of the OECD countries. Examples include the work done by Esping-Andersen (1990); Pitruzzello (1999); Korpi (2000) and Bambra (2005). While these analysts classify welfare regimes by different criteria (such as the labour market decommodification, defamilisation and health decommodification), all of them focus on the 18 OECD countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK, the USA, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway). Walker and Wong (2004) argue that these projects convey a message that welfare states are a capitalist-democratic project. Such a message in turn justifies giving little attention to those societies without either one or both of the supposed core institutions—a capitalist economy and a western parliamentary democracy—in the comparative studies on social welfare. To illustrate their argument, Walker and Wong (2004) discuss the exclusion of some East Asian welfare systems (such as that in Hong Kong and mainland China) from the mainstream comparative welfare state

literature as an example. Before 1979, the Chinese government had managed to provide sufficient social protection for decades to its urban population via the work units (Philion 1998; Huang 2003; Walker and Wong 2009; Zhang 2009). In spite of its enthusiasm in promoting the private market as an important mechanism for creating and allocating wealth in the reform era, it is keen to reconstruct social insurance schemes so as to promote social stability (Yu 2007; Wong 2009). Although the Hong Kong government identifies itself as the defender of capitalism, it provides universal health services, free basic education, extensive public housing programmes and an institutionalized social assistance scheme for its inhabitants (Chan 2003; Chau and Yu 2003; Wong 2008). However, despite their governments' commitment to social welfare programmes, China and Hong Kong are usually not regarded as a member of the 'welfare state club' in the studies of welfare regimes. The main reason for this exclusion, according to Walker and Wong (1996), is that both Hong Kong and China cannot meet one or both of the two essential institutional criteria—a capitalist economy and a fully fledged Western parliamentary democracy. They argue this:

> … the Western welfare state paradigm is an ethnocentric construction. Their (Countries') 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, p. 118).

Walker and Wong's analysis of the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare receive support from other analysts. In examining the indigenization in social work, Huang and Zhang (2008) stress the importance of avoiding overemphasizing the differences between western culture and indigenous cultures without considering the commonalities between them. Studies indicate that the pension reforms launched by some commonly seen as western economies (such as the UK) and by non-western economies (such as China and Hong Kong) share important similarities— such as attaching increasing significance to the multi-pillar system and the funded schemes at the expense of those schemes based on the pay-as-you-go principles (Bonoli 2000; Saunders and Shang 2001; Yu 2007).

The studies on the double attachment strategy, on which the third view on ethnocentric bias is based, focus on studying how non-western governments attempt to organise social welfare with reference to both their cultural knowledge and the experiences of western countries. For example, a

number of East Asian governments (such as those in Taiwan and Hong Kong) develop their welfare programmes with reference to the experiences of the OECD countries such as the UK and the USA (Jones 1993; Walker and Wong 2005). At the same time they also explore the possibility of developing social welfare on the philosophical foundation of the Asian values (Chiu and Wong 1999; Chau and Yu 2005). This implies that they have no intention of totally relying on western ideas in guiding them to organise social welfare.

Studies (Chau and Yu 2005; Yu 2008) show that some types of countries are more likely than the others to adopt this strategy. The first type is those countries which have been the colonies of western countries. An example is Singapore. Being in line with the Asian values such as the emphasis on citizens' individual responsibility to look after their needs, the Singapore government set up the Medisave (a compulsory saving scheme) in 1984. Despite this, analysts point out that since Singapore is a former British colony, its health-care services especially in the government's responsibility for providing hospital beds are indebted to the National Health Service in the UK (Ramesh 2004; Yu, forthcoming). The second type of countries refers to those with rich history of actively borrowing foreign ideas to strengthen the rule. One example is China which launched the Self-Strengthening movement intended to make use of western countries to strengthen the Confucian order (Yu 2006). Another example is Japan which was keen to borrow western ideas in the Meiji Restoration (Hsü 2000).

While the three different views on ethnocentric bias stress different causes of this bias, all of them acknowledge and support pluralistic ways of organising social welfare. As mentioned above, they make us aware that western ideas are not the only set of ideas for guiding the organisation of social welfare; some non-western ideas (such as Taoist and Confucian ideas) also play an important role in guiding people to organise social welfare. Moreover, they raise our awareness that different governments may adopt different strategies to organise social welfare—some may borrow the experiences of other countries; some may organise social welfare based on their cultural knowledge; and some may adopt ideas from different sources at the same time.

Acknowledging pluralism and tackling ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies on social welfare are easier said than done. Being influenced by their own cultural background and their different understanding of different kinds of cultural knowledge, it is not unusual for analysts to make either an over-emphasis or an under-emphasis or both on the differences between the western knowledge and the cultural knowledge of

non-western societies. Hence alongside relying on analysts to make individual efforts (such as by enhancing their understanding of different types of cultural knowledge) to avoid having the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare, some social scientists suggest tackling the bias by some research approaches. One of these approaches is to expand the scope of the comparative studies in general and studies of welfare regimes in particular. Recently a number of studies criticise that the classification of welfare regimes should not be based only on the experiences of the 18 OECD countries (Ku and Jones Finer 2007; Lee and Ku 2007). In response to these criticisms, more comparative studies attempt to include more welfare regimes. For example, Karim et al. (2010) have compared the health status of the East Asian welfare states (formed by Japan, Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan) with that of five other welfare groups (Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon, Bismarckian, Southern European). Yu (forthcoming) reclassifies the 18 OECD countries studied by Esping-Andersen (1990) and East Asian countries with the emphasis on health care status. To facilitate the development of new typologies, they use such data analysis techniques as cluster analysis, ANOVA and ANCOVA techniques. Another research approach is to raise analysts' awareness of the possibility that individual non-western countries may adopt double attachment strategy to organise social welfare, and the case study is used to identify this possibility (Yu 2008). This research approach will be discussed in more detail with reference to the pro-market welfare reforms in Hong Kong.

Pro-market Welfare Reforms in Hong Kong

Before going into the details of these reforms, it is worth discussing why Hong Kong provides a good observation ground. Like other capitalist governments, the Hong Kong government finds it necessary to promote both capital accumulation and political legitimacy of its rule. These two factors are important policy drives in Hong Kong. On the one hand, in order to increase the acceptability of its rule, the Hong Kong government devotes a lot of resources to developing social security system, health care system and education programme (Chau 1995; Wong 2009). On the other hand in order to reduce the pressure on low tax policy and provide a low cost investment environment, the government has recently been keen to reconstruct social welfare in favour of the market principles through implementation of the pro-market reform measures. To lower people's discontents on this reform

and thus lessen challenges to the legitimacy of its rule, the government also launches an ideological campaign intended to secure social consensus on this reform. Hence it can be said that the pro-market reforms are composed of two elements—the operational and the ideological (Yu 2008; Chau and Yu 2005). The operational element refers to the measures designed to reconstruct social welfare with the intention of increasing the importance of the private market in the creation and allocation of wealth. The ideological element of the pro-market welfare reform refers to the ideological campaign launched by the government to provide support to the pro-market reform measures. The important point is that the operational element has important similarities with some welfare reforms in western countries and the ideological element is related to the cultural knowledge in Chinese society. In other words, Hong Kong provides a laboratory for the experiment of a pluralistic way of organising social welfare. It also offers an observation ground for us to study how the three views on the ethnocentric bias are related to this kind of pluralism. We shall come back to this point after discussing the operational and ideological elements of the pro-market reform in more detail.

As far as the operational element is concerned, the Hong Kong government uses two measures to meet the pro-market reform goals—the residualisation and market-led. The residualisation measure is intended to keep the way of providing social welfare as close to the residual welfare model as possible (Forrest and Murie 1988). As discussed by Titmuss (1953), the residual welfare model stresses that the family and the market are the primary welfare providers and the government only plays a secondary role. An important way to residualise social welfare is to make users believe that the services provided by the government are inferior to those sold in the market. This can be done by requiring users to be means-tested for benefits or to keep the benefits provided by social services lower than those offered by the private sector. As a result, a message is conveyed that if users of social services want to improve their living they should sell their labour in the private market rather than rely on the government. The government implements residualisation measures mainly in the field of social security and health care services. For example, 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-testing. In 2003, the government cut welfare payments by 11.1 per cent for the Comprehensive Social Security

Assistance scheme (CSSA) users.[1] In 2004, it extended the residency requirement for applying to the CSSA from one year to seven years.

Market-led measures are founded on the assumption that the private market and the government can strengthen each other. 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/or regulators (Johnson 1990; Abrahamson et al. 2005). Thus it could be said that the 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 government has implemented market-led measures mainly in the field of social security. In 2000, it introduced the Mandatory Provident Fund. 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 contribute a respective five percent of the employees' earnings to a retirement fund managed by private companies. In 2002 the government introduced the Active Employment Assistance programme. The objective of this programme is to encourage able-bodied unemployed CSSA applicants to develop a work habit and re-enter the job market. Under this programme, CSSA applicants are required to apply for at least two jobs per fortnight, attend fortnightly progress interviews, and update their individual plans to find work (Yu 2007). In 2010, the government suggests more services from the private health sector and private insurance companies (Food and Health Bureau, 2010). Moreover it considers expanding the elderly healthcare voucher pilot scheme intended to subsidise elderly aged 70 or above to use private primary care services (Tsang 2010).

It is important to note that the residualisation and market-led reform measures are not unique in Hong Kong. Instead they reinforce the liberal welfare regime, which is widely discussed in western literature. For example, Esping-Andersen (1997) argues that in order to strengthen the market as a preferable provider of welfare for most citizens, the government in the liberal welfare state regime encourages market performance via regulatory policies or tax concessions, and develops social policy with the stress on the basic features of the residual welfare model—the examples of these features include favouring selectivity, low benefits and weak social rights. In 1999 Esping-Andersen (1999) adds that the regime has three core elements: it is residual in

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[1] The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) is a non-contributory means-tested financial assistance measure targeted for the poorest.

the sense that social guarantees are typically restricted to 'bad risk'; it is residual in the sense that it adheres to a narrow conception of what risks should be considered 'social'; and it encourages people to take part in the market. Obviously the Hong Kong government's residualisation measure is associated with the first and second elements while the market-led measure is related to the third element.

The ideological element of the pro-market welfare reforms mainly refers to the ideological campaign launched by the Hong Kong government (Chau and Yu 2009; Chiu 2007). In this campaign (commonly known as the social harmony campaign), the government stresses that social harmony will be strengthened if the public uphold two types of social obligation. The first is to support an individualistic view on the ideal division of responsibility between individuals and the government in the provision of welfare. This division is that individuals are required to bear the responsibility for meeting their needs through improving their ability to take part in the private market (for example, through strengthening their employability) rather than relying on social welfare; and the government focuses on helping people adjust to the requirements of the private market rather than challenging the private market by initiating high tax and costly welfare policies. The link between the promotion of social harmony and this division of responsibility between individuals and the government is discussed in the 2007 Policy Address made by the Chief Executive, Donald Tsang:

> 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, p. 4).

In order to make individuals associate the promotion of social harmony with their participation in the private market, the government also stresses that working is more than a means to improve their material standard of living but to help people to develop different types of harmonious social

relationship—such as with their children and other members in society. This point is justified by this quote:

> Working is the best way for employable persons to move towards self-reliance. Through paid employment, one would be able to improve their living, raise their self-esteem and sense of worthiness, build up a social network and set up a good model for their children' (Social Welfare Department 2006, p. 1);

The second type of social obligation is to learn how to settle their disagreements with the government through consultation and discussion rather than confrontation. Tung Chee Wah, the former Chief Executive, stresses this:

> I believe we all desire a society of greater harmony, in which everybody respects and treats others well. We should carry forward our traditional virtues, such as filial piety, humanity... We favour consultation, not confrontation. We seek protection of the rights of the individual, yet we should also fulfill our social responsibilities and obligations... (Tung 1999, p. 167)

> ... I have noticed in recent times a change in community attitudes. People are more inclined to adopt a mood of scepticism, 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, pp. 127-28).

It is important to note that market-led and residualisation measures are not without costs. With a focus on cutting benefits and tightening eligibility requirements, residualisation measures make many benefit recipients receive less welfare benefits. By legally requiring people to join a compulsory saving scheme (such as the Mandatory Provident Fund), market-led measures reduce people's freedom to use their disposable income. If people feel that they have a social obligation of solving disagreement with the government through consultation rather than confrontation, they may avoid airing their grievances against pro-market welfare reforms in a confrontational way.

There is an argument that these pro-market welfare reforms are

positively associated with Confucianism (Chau and Yu 2005; Chiu and Wong 1999). There are three reasons for supporting this argument. The first reason is that the government openly asks people to build a harmonious society by learning traditional values. Examples of this can be found in the policy address presented by Tung Chee Wah:

> In the last 1,000 years, the human race has undergone remarkable changes….But some fundamental values, like filial piety, mutual respect and the quest for knowledge will endure and will last…. It is my earnest hope that all of us will continue to cherish these values to build a more united, coherent and harmonious community, so that Hong Kong can scale new heights… (quote from Chan et al. 2001, p. 29).

As Confucianism occupies an important part of Chinese tradition, it is reasonable to believe that the government's view on social harmony is indebted to this philosophy. In fact, Tung Chee Wah explicitly treasures the value of Confucianism. In the manifesto prepared for his 1997 election campaign, he suggested that traditional Chinese values developed from the core of Confucianism could—and should—be upheld (Chiu and Wong 1999).

The second reason is that Confucius, the key figure of Confucianism, was also concerned about building a harmonious society. Around the time he was alive, China suffered from a lack of social harmony and was under threat of disintegration as nobles refused to follow the emperor's orders and fought each other for power and land (Schwartz 1985). Confucius attributed this problem to a moral deficit. To cope with this problem, he tried hard to persuade people to practise the moral concept of Ren. Translated variously as goodness, benevolence, humanity or human-heartedness, Confucius saw Ren as the manifestation of genuine human nature based on caring for others and concern over others' well-being (Ching 1986). When asked the meaning of Ren, he replied that it was to love your fellow men. Moreover, he argued:

> As for *Ren*, if you want to make a stand, help others to make a stand, and if you want to reach your goal, help others reach their goal. Consider yourself and treat others accordingly: this is the method of realizing *Ren* (quote from the *Analects*, Confucius, translated by Hinton [1998], p. 62).

This quote about *Ren* shows that Confucius believed that a harmonious society could be established if people were willing to take care of each other. To encourage people to establish a caring relationship between each other,

together with his followers he traveled to different states to convince political leaders to formulate policies based on *Ren* and uphold the ideas of mass education (Fung 1952). The eagerness of Confucius to promote *Ren* indicates that he was keen to achieve social harmony.

The third reason is that *Li*, an important Confucian concept, is seen by analysts to have the function of providing support to the pro-market reforms launched by the government (Chiu and Wong 1999; Chau and Yu 2009). The importance of *Li* to *Ren* is shown in the quotes in the Analects:

> When Yen Yuan asked the meaning of *Ren*, Confucius replied: '*Ren* is the denial of self and response to *Li* (quote from Fung 1952, p. 70).

> May I beg for the main features (of *Ren*)? Asked Yen Yuan. The Master (Confucius) answered: 'If not *Li*, do not look, if not *Li*, do not listen; if not *Li*, do not speak; if not *Li*, do not move (quote from Fung 1952, p. 70).

The meaning of *Li* in ancient China was very wide, representing not only the present-day definition of 'politeness' or 'courtesy' but also the entire body of usages and customs, political and social institutions (Fung 1952). Hence in order to follow *Li*, then and now, people were required to live their life in adherence to all rules set by the social institutions of the Zhou dynasty. Moreover, for the purpose of building a harmonious society, Confucian scholars encouraged the public to follow a set of social rules to handle five key relationships in society: between the sovereign and minister of the state; father and son; husband and wife; elder and young brothers; and friends (Chau and Yu 1997). This set of social rules refers to: father/kindness; son/ filial piety; elder brother/goodness; younger brother/respect; husband/ righteousness; wife/compliance; the sovereign/benevolence; and ministers/ loyalty (Tai 1989).

Given that *Li* represents all the rules set by the social institutions, those people who concur with the importance of upholding *Li* are likely to support all the existing policies carried out by the government, including its measures for realizing the aforementioned individualistic views on the division of responsibilities between individuals and the government in the provision of social welfare.

The implications of the pro-market welfare reforms

The study of the ideological and operational elements of the pro-market reforms provides evidence showing how non-western societies organize social welfare in a pluralistic way and how this experience is related to the above mentioned views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative study of social welfare

Firstly, it is necessary to point out the importance of not attaching too much emphasis on the differences between the ways in which social welfare is organized in Western and non-Western societies. This point obviously garners support via the fact that the residualisaton and market-led reform measures are not unique to Hong Kong. As mentioned above, the residualisation measures serve to reinforce the ideological message that social guarantees should be restricted to 'bad' risk; whereas the market-led measures reinforce the ideological message that people should take part in the market. It is important to note that both of these messages are the part and parcel of the liberal welfare regime debated and practiced in the western countries. This implies that the pro-market reform in Hong Kong has relevancy to the studies of welfare regimes in the West.

Secondly, to seek moral support for residualisation and pro-market measures, the Hong Kong government openly encourages people to learn from Confucian ideas. In this sense, we should not lose sight of the importance of cultural heritage in shaping the development of social welfare. However, it is necessary to point out that whether the government over-emphasizes Confucianism is subject to debate. Some critics warn that we should not over-estimate the Hong Kong government's keenness to promote Confucianism as the government officials mainly use the Confucian ideas as a propaganda instrument to legitimize its pro-market welfare reform (Chiu and Wong 1999). There is evidence that backs up their argument. Confucius had a deep concern about the well-being of care-receivers. In discussing his vision of ideal society (the *Grand Union*), he suggested that care should be given to a number of groups: the old age, children, widows, orphans and handicapped (Chau and Yu 2005). In securing the provision of welfare for these groups, he saw collective action as an important method. That is why in discussing the *Grand Union*, he stressed the wealth of natural resources should effectively be used not only for people's own profit but also for realizing social goals, and that people should take care of not only their own parents and children but also those of others (Chung and Haynes 1993).

Obviously the expectations of Confucius on collective action are quite out of line with the ideas of the pro-market reform launched by the Hong Kong government. If the Hong Kong government sincerely believes in Confucianism, it should modify its pro-market reform in favour of collective provision of welfare. The unwillingness of the Hong Kong government to do so raises doubts on its sincerity in putting all Confucian ideas into practice. It is quite evident that the Hong Kong government is keen to promote only the liberal Confucianism but not all Confucian ideas. Liberal Confucianism refers to those Confucian ideas that can strengthen liberalism. An example of the liberal Confucianism is those interpretations of *Li* that make people feel that selling their labour in the job market is a kind of social obligation. An alternative to the liberal Confucianism is the collective Confucianism. Examples of the collective Confucianism are ideas derived from the *Grand Union* that support collective provision of social welfare.

If the government is the only agent that promotes Confucianism in Hong Kong, the significance of Confucianism in shaping the development of social welfare will depend exclusively on its attitude to this traditional idea. However, it is important to note that the development of Confucianism in Hong Kong is not totally under the government's control. As with the Hong Kong government, the western governments also attempt to launch the pro-market welfare reforms. To justify their reforms, they use several normative ideas such as Macmurray's Interconnected Communities, Etzioni's moral community and Hutton's Stakeholding (Heron and Dwyer 1999). In theory the Hong Kong government could borrow these ideas to legitimize its pro-market reform. However it does not do so. Instead it relies heavily on Confucian ideas to give supports to its reform measures. This indicates that Confucian ideas occupy a special position in Chinese societies like Hong Kong. As mentioned in the previous parts of the paper, the concept of the path dependency of the ideas shows that people favour policy options which are related to their shared ideas (Hall 1993; Cox 2004). Certainly the influence of Confucianism in guiding people to organise their life in Hong Kong is far less than that in the traditional Chinese society. Nonetheless, some analysts (such as Chiu and Wong 1999; Chau and Yu 2005) still believe that many people in Hong Kong still see Confucianism as important shared ideas and organise their life with reference to their own interpretation of Confucianism. Some scholars even rely on Confucian ideas to justify collective provision of welfare. For example, a study of social harmony by scholars at the Hong Kong Baptist University stress that the government should increase rather than reduce its commitment to the provision of social

welfare in order to promote social harmony (Chiu 2007).

Obviously Confucianism in Hong Kong is more than the government's propaganda's instrument. Hence, despite the debate on the extent to which Confucianism actually shapes the development of social welfare, we should not neglect its importance. In studying the social welfare in Hong Kong, it is necessary to pay attention to this point. By doing so, we can avoid taking for granted the liberal ideas are the only set of important ideas that shape the development of social welfare in Hong Kong, and thus under-emphasizing the importance of Confucianism in guiding people to organise social welfare.

Thirdly, as the operational element of the pro-market welfare reform is associated with the liberal welfare regime and the ideological element is associated with Confucian ideas, it is safe to say that the Hong Kong government practises the double-attachment strategy to organise social welfare. In one sense the Hong Kong government's attempt to make this double connection means that it enjoys more policy choices, as it can develop policies based not only on the experiences of other governments or on their cultural heritage but also on different combinations of these two elements. However, this attempt may be a sign that it faces a double set of constraints on its rule, as it may be required to demonstrate to the public that it has the ability both to keep their policies abreast with global changes and safeguard some traditional principles.

Conclusion

So far this paper has discussed the three related views on the ethnocentric bias in the comparative studies of social welfare and how the discussion of these views can enhance our understanding of the pluralistic ways in which non-western societies may organise social welfare. Moreover it has also discussed the pro-market reforms in Hong Kong. The study of these reforms provides a case showing how non-western societies organise social welfare in a pluralistic way and how this way is related to the three related view on the ethnocentric bias.

As the last part of this paper, it is necessary to stress again that we do not have the intention of negating the value of the comparative studies of social welfare or the studies of welfare regime even though some of them are undermined by the ethnocentric bias. Instead the paper stresses the importance of identifying the ethnocentric bias and using more different research approaches to reduce the bias. In the previous part of this paper, we

have suggested two research approaches. The first approach is to study whether and how individual country uses pluralistic ways of organizing social welfare—such as organizing social welfare based heavily on foreign knowledge, organizing social welfare based heavily on the cultural heritage or using double-attachment strategy to organise social welfare. The second approach is to include more different countries in the study of welfare regimes instead of focusing only on the 18 OECD countries studied by Esping-Andersen (1990). Through examining the welfare reform in Hong Kong as a case, we have demonstrated how the first approach has been conducted. In the future, it is worth conducing project demonstrating how the second approach is implemented.

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