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Chan, C.K. & Kinglun Ngok (Eds). *Welfare reform in East Asia: Towards workfare?* New York: Routledge, 2011.

This edited volume by Chak Kwan Chan and Kinglun Ngok is about the adoption of workfare in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis in seven East Asian polities, including China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. This book has nine chapters. In chapter one, Chan introduces the major theme and concept of workfare, which, in the literature, is regarded as the attaching of work requirements to welfare benefits; Chan then justifies the research question of what factors contributed to East Asian countries' adoption of workfare, particularly under conditions so different from those found in the West, including minimal welfare spending in East Asian countries and a corresponding culture of self-reliance and family support. In chapters two through eight, experts analyze the adoption of workfare in each of the seven Asian polities. Chan, in chapter nine, which is also the conclusion, summarizes that economic restructuring and the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis were the major factors underlying East Asia's adoption of workfare. He concludes that workfare, in its current incarnation, has not turned out to be a good policy for East Asia.

In chapter two, "Workfare in mainland China: a reaction to welfare dependency?" Kinglun Ngok, Wing Kit Chan, and Zhaiwen Peng say that unemployment caused by the privatization of state enterprises in the 1990s pressed the government to adopt measures to combat unemployment, such as instituting unemployment insurance, opening reemployment centers, and implementing the 1997 Minimum Living Standard Scheme (MLSS). In 2001, when increasing numbers of unemployed individuals applied for MLSS assistance, the government began to add workfare measures to the MLSS (p. 24). As a result, claimants were required to provide evidence of job-seeking, take training courses, and participate in community service. The authors use Guangzhou as a case study, arguing that the workfare measures failed to have a meaningful impact on the targeted group, due to both technical flaws in the design of the MLSS and the fact that recipients of MLSS assistance were poorly informed. The authors ultimately argue that China's adoption of workfare was the result of the false perception that social assistance (such as that provided by the MLSS) was precipitating welfare dependency.

In chapter three, "Workfare in Hong Kong," Joe Leung explains that Hong Kong began to view unemployment as a serious issue by the early 2000s. By that time, rising unemployment had led to cases of able-bodied individuals applying for and receiving assistance from Hong Kong's Comprehensive Social Assistance Scheme (CSSA), Hong Kong's major social security system. Thus, Hong Kong issued a series of employment service and workfare programs to push the able-bodied recipients of the CSSA back into the labor market. The effectiveness of these programs, however, remained uncertain (p. 43). Leung argues that as unemployment rates and the number of recipients of CSSA assistance have both dropped, the workfare programs should no longer have remained the focus of government initiatives; rather, employment services should have been intensified in order to enhance the self-reliance of low-income populations (pp. 55-57).

In chapter four, "From workfare to cash for all: the politics of welfare reform in Macau," Alex Choi and Eva Hung argue that the adoption of workfare in Macau between 2004 and 2006, along with the adoption of a Social Security Fund in 1990, was a response to the issue of importing migrant workers from China. The workfare provided employment training and allowance and also promised to provide jobs for those who had completed the training. But these programs were short-lived and were replaced by a series of cash schemes for all individuals in 2007, when the government felt its legitimacy was being threatened by labor unrest (pp. 70-71).

This shift indicated that the government viewed cash as more powerful than workfare in pacifying its people. Thus, the Choi and Hung conclude that workfare was not necessary in Macau and that measures should have been taken to deal with the underlying structural causes of unemployment.

In chapter five, “Workfare in Taiwan: from social assistance to unemployment absorber,” Chin-fen Chang claims that it was during the 1990s, when unemployment became a pressing issue due to globalization and democratization, that Taiwan issued a series of workfare programs for the unemployed. Emergency workfare programs were also issued for disaster victims. Chang argues, however, that these programs were not very effective, as most of the recipients could not find jobs. The programs were thus more like an absorber of the unemployed than a buffer between unemployment and re-employment. Nevertheless, the author concludes that workfare should continue in Taiwan, as it proved effective to certain degree.

In chapter six, “Workfare in Japan,” Shogo Takegawa addresses Japan’s adoption of workfare, which, he says, followed the global trend of implementing neoliberal policies, beginning in Britain in 1979 and the US in 1981. By the 1980s, Japan had privatized its state enterprises but not its social policy. By the time the influence of neoliberalism had reached its peak in Japan in early 2003, however, the government implemented a basic reform platform (which Takegawa calls “large-boned” policy) involving privatization in health care, public education, agriculture, and social welfare. As part of such a reform program, the government issued a series of workfare programs targeted at single mothers, the homeless, unemployed youth, the disabled, and public assistance recipients. Shortly thereafter, in the latter part of the 2000s, neoliberalism declined in Japan, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis and the change of government in Japan in 2009. Since then, the new government, under the Democratic Party of Japan, has reversed all neoliberal measures. Hence, Takegawa concludes that the workfare measures in Japan basically all failed (except for those for the disabled) because they did not fit in Japan’s particular situation: Japan’s welfare has been a workfare system in nature.

In chapter seven, “Workfare in South Korea: delivering unemployment benefits in the developmental welfare state,” Huck-ju Kwon and Jooha Lee assert that in the late 1990s, facing rising unemployment, Korea began to extend its existing social security schemes to those who had formerly not been eligible for social security benefits. As such, the employment insurance originally introduced in 1995 to protect only “workers in workplaces with more than thirty employees” (p. 122) was extended to all workplaces in 1998, when job skill development and active labor market measures were also greatly expanded. However, these workfare programs were not effectively implemented, the authors argue, due to the local government’s inability to implement them. The authors conclude that the programs failed to achieve their stated goals of inclusion and equal access, as self-employed individuals and unpaid domestic laborers were not legally covered, and many of the non-permanent workers who were legally covered did not participate in the program. The authors further conclude that as long as Korea continues to address these shortcomings, its developmental welfare state is “highly likely to become more inclusive” (p. 129).

In chapter eight, “Workfare in Singapore,” Irene Y. H. Ng argues that Singapore began to introduce workfare measures in 2006 as a response to the devastating effects of globalization on low-wage workers. The workfare implemented there included self-reliance programs for the unemployed and low-income families, the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) program, skills upgrading, and job creation. The WIS program is the biggest of its kind in Singapore and has

become the fourth pillar of Singapore's social safety net (the other three being housing, education, and medical service). Under this initiative, low-income earners who are over 35 years old are eligible to receive both cash and payments into their accounts of Central Provident Fund (CPF) in the ratio of 1:2.5. The author cites one major weakness of the WIS, namely that informal workers could not benefit much from it, as they did not have CPF accounts. Overall, Ng argues that workfare programs in Singapore have been successful in preventing further income inequality and wage stagnation and thus have become an important part of the social safety net.

In chapter nine, Chan first summarizes the factors contributing to the adoption of workfare in East Asia: primarily economic restructuring and the 1998 Asian financial crisis. He then continues to discuss "whether workfare is a good approach for East Asian societies" (p.151). After careful reading of Chan's discussion, readers will draw the conclusion that workfare as implemented in East Asia is not a good policy. As Chan put it, "The key concern here is that the governments have manipulated it to suppress the demand for welfare without providing the necessary conditions for unemployed people to find new jobs and achieve self-reliance..." (p. 164). Chan thus concludes his analysis by urging governments to invest more resources to provide the unemployed with "well-organized vocational courses" and "social and psychological support to overcome employment barriers" (ibid.).

This book offers an excellent example of nation-based comparative study in social policy. It is well argued, with each of the seven cases being supported by solid materials, both primary and secondary as well as qualitative and quantitative. More importantly, the editors' chapters of introduction and conclusion weave the entire book into a coherent whole: the introduction provides a context which allows the comparison of workfare in the West and East; while the conclusion summarizes the book's findings and compares the similarities and differences between the workfare programs within East Asia.

If we put the topic of workfare in a historical context, however, this book shows its limitations. It is true that in recent history workfare was first adopted in the West to curb rising welfare spending and decrease welfare dependency. Workfare policies, however, can and do exist on their own as unemployment-combating policies to be used by any government. In a broad sense, combining work requirements with welfare benefits have been frequently practiced in human history. This is reflected in the contributing authors' attitudes towards workfare. The authors of Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore all explicitly argued that workfare should be continued in their respective cases. The author of Macau was the only one who argued that workfare was not necessary, while none of the authors of Hong Kong, Japan, and China claimed that workfare should be discontinued. Instead, they either argued as in Hong Kong's case or implied as in Japan and China's cases that their workfare programs should be improved. For instance, although workfare was reversed in Japan, the author did mention that employment promotion measures without any welfare would not work (p.112).

Also, this book's focus on domestic social, political and economic factors ignores an important global process: the spread of workfare programs, as adopted in the West beginning in the late 1970s, to other parts of the world, such as the European Union in the 1990s and East Asia in the twenty-first century. Without this awareness, the book lacks the contextualization that would strengthen the analyses provided in each chapter. The only chapter that paid attention to the spread of workfare is the one on Japan. The chapter on Macau touched this point, as the author pointed out that the study of workfare should "look into local and global factors that brought workfare into the welfare system" (p.61), but the author did not implement this

perspective in his analysis. Despite my critiques, this well-argued book will be a valuable contribution to the fields of social welfare and East Asia, and will be an informative read for students and scholars in those fields.

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