The ethnocentric construction of the welfare state

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This chapter argues that welfare state regimes have been constructed specifically as capitalist-democratic projects and this has the effect of excluding societies which do not have either one or both of these particular economic and political systems. If a traditional social administration approach is adopted, a similar result occurs when a 'welfare state' is defined narrowly in terms of direct state provision.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increased interest in the welfare systems of East Asian societies (Aspalter, 2001; Chan, 1996; Goodman and Peng, 1996; Goodman, White and Kwon, 1998; Jacobs, 1998; Jones, 1993; Lin, 1999; McLaughlin, 1993). However, whether the welfare systems of these societies should be classified as welfare states remains a controversial issue. Some writers (McLaughlin, 1993; Goodman, White and Kwon, 1998; Jacobs, 1998) avoid the issue altogether by not directly applying the label 'welfare state' to the East Asian welfare systems under study. For example, in the comparative social policy book Comparing Welfare States: Britain in International Context, McLaughlin (1993:105) uses the term 'welfare regime' to classify Hong Kong. In another book on East Asian welfare systems, the term 'Welfare Model' is preferred to that of 'welfare state' (Goodman, White and Kwon, 1998). Nevertheless, there are exceptions where the description 'welfare state' is applied to East Asian societies (Aspalter, 2001; Chan, 1996; Rose and Shiratori, 1986).

These recent exceptions apart, in the mainstream comparative social policy literature, definitions, theories and classifications of both welfare and the welfare state have been formulated with reference to only a small number of western industrialized or capitalist countries, which are particularly associated with advanced capitalism and membership of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Hence, this dominant approach to comparative social policy has been described as 'ethnocentric Western social research' (Jones, 1993:106) and the 'anglocentric frame of reference' (Powell and Hewitt, 1997:12). This ethnocentric construction of the welfare state paradigm reflects a Western bias and has the detrimental effect of excluding from comparative analyses not only the state welfare provisions of developing societies, but also those of some highly developed countries. This exclusion is particularly ironic in the case of the affluent East Asian economies because many of their welfare institutions resemble and, in many cases were modelled on, those found in Western welfare states.

Our argument is not that the governments of East Asian societies are eager to become members of the welfare state club, far from it (Lin, 1999:37). They do not regard their welfare systems as welfare states; this is particularly the case with respect to the governments and elites in Singapore and Hong Kong. These two city-states have attained the highest economic prosperity in recent years, second only to Japan in East Asia, in terms of per capita GDP. In these two societies, not only the elites but a majority of the general public as well, perceive state welfare as a burden on the economy, a social and economic 'infection' that has to be avoided for the sake of economic success. In this regard, it is not surprising to see the prevalence of a discourse about Asian values (Berger, 1987; Clammer, 1985) to support the argument for a particular welfare system that is different from that of the West - referred to variously in the comparative social policy literature as Confucian welfare states (Jones, 1993); the Confucian welfare cluster (Lin, 1999), or the Japan-focused East Asian welfare model (Goodman and Peng, 1996, p. 216). Of course science should not be divorced from its cultural and policy context, a stricture that applies as much to eastern social scientists as to their Western counterparts. However, and this is the crux of our argument, the exclusion of East Asian welfare systems from the mainstream comparative welfare state literature, including what is widely regarded as the core text on the subject (Esping-Andersen, 1990), artificially limits the scope of comparative social policy. Moreover, in the absence of a scientific rationale for this welfare state myopia the charge of ethnocentrism is hard to refute. This negligence of East Asian welfare systems as welfare states begs the question precisely what is a welfare state? Although beyond the scope of this chapter it also reminds us that the term 'welfare state' has always been controversial not only in political but also scientific discourse (hence the fact that Titmuss always put it in quotation marks - see for example, Titmuss, 1958). This controversy is a global one.

Two seismic global events in the recent past which have, among other things, major implications for social policy and comparative research are the collapse of the former state socialist regimes of the Central and Eastern European bloc and the peaceful transition from an orthodox centrally planned economy to market socialism in China. The welfare systems of both the former state socialist countries and pre-reform China had long been excluded from comparative welfare state analysis because they were non-capitalist regimes and did not belong to the OECD club. However, the welfare systems
of these countries had managed to provide for their citizens a wide range of universal entitlements; despite critical claims that their welfare provisions were out of all proportion to their resources and the fiscal capacity of the state (Kornai, 1997). (To some extent in accordance with this critique, following the collapse of state socialism some Central and Eastern European countries experienced a crisis of social protection.) In the case of transitional China, it has managed comparatively well in re-casting welfare responsibility especially in the urban areas, from a total reliance on the state to the incorporation of individual responsibility by social insurance and forced savings (Wong, 1999). Although it must be emphasized that this applies exclusively to urban areas – in social and economic terms the rural/urban division creates two nations in China. Despite the Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989, transitional China has been a relatively stable society; its welfare provisions, especially the newly installed safety-net system, are likely to have been a decisive factor in this stability.

The newly affluent East Asian capitalist economies, the former Central and Eastern European bloc and pre-reform China all have or had welfare institutions resembling those found in the Western welfare state club but they are not counted as welfare states. Thus, the exclusion of these countries from welfare state status is not due to the nature of their welfare institutions but, presumably, because they have neither a capitalist economy nor a fully fledged Western parliamentary democracy. If this is true, it tends to confirm our argument that 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.

The main purpose of this chapter is to look closely at the ethnocentric assumptions behind the Western construction of the welfare state. It starts by examining the first assumption underpinning Western welfare states that they are a capitalist-democratic project. Then we look at the elasticity of the welfare state boundary in the Western construction.

Underlying institutional assumptions of the welfare state paradigm
The Western conception of the welfare state and descriptive studies of welfare state regimes usually neglect non-capitalist or non-democratic societies with state welfare components (Walker and Wong, 1996). Drawing on our original critique one recent analysis describes this ethnocentric bias:

Whenever people from Northern and continental Europe talk about the welfare state, they have the very popular extensive/institutional welfare systems in mind that are predominant in that region of the world … However the new usage of the term ‘welfare state’, in its broader sense that includes residual welfare state systems, has not been accepted by a great number of people in Europe and Asia. (Aspalter, 2001:1–2)

However, the ethnocentric bias means that the liberal, residual welfare states of the USA, Canada, the UK (in some accounts the UK is a conservative welfare state regime) and the Antipodes are usually regarded as welfare states despite the fact that they deliver meagre benefits, on the basis of need, as a last resort to those who are unable to support themselves through market activities. Hence, it is not the content of the state welfare components or their impact that determines inclusion but the fact that welfare states are premised on two institutional arrangements: first it is a capitalist institution and second, it is embodied in a democratic (that is parliamentary) institutional structure. So, the state welfare components themselves are not sufficient, according to the Western paradigm, to qualify as a welfare state.

Democracy and capitalism are macro-institutions with their own underlying social principles. Equality of political rights among individuals, regardless of their status and means, is the basic social principle underlying democracy, while capitalism, the economic institution, depends upon the market as the principal method of distributing social and economic resources. Admittedly, these two macro-institutions have tensions between them. However, they have long been regarded as the two underlying and driving forces which affect the development of the welfare state. T.H. Marshall (1950) was the pioneer in this field with the idea of political citizenship that enables individuals to access a range of welfare benefits and provisions on an equal basis to their fellow citizens. Accordingly modern citizens are able to attain a decent living standard despite the unequal distribution of market-based incomes (Abrahamson, 1997:148). However, of course, Marshall’s definition of citizenship has been criticized extensively, for example for failing to distinguish between the public and private spheres and, thereby, excluding many women in particular (Pascall, 1986; Williams, 1989; Lister, 1997). A more recent attempt to understand the assumptions underlying the welfare state and to distinguish its core components was made by Esping-Andersen (1990). He sees the welfare state and the different welfare state regimes in Western democracies as combining a system of stratification and strategies of de-commodification to counteract the unequal and divisive market logic of capitalism.

Some writers (Gintis and Bowles, 1982; Jordan, 1996) also highlight the tension between capitalism and democracy, the two macro-institutions which dominate the development of the welfare state. According to Gintis and Bowles (1982:341) in their reference to Western capitalist economies, the welfare state is located at the interface of two distinct sets of rules, each
contradicting the other. The first set of rules relates to the rights of citizens, which extend from the equal political status underlying democratic institutions. The second set of rules covers property rights which provide a framework for the capitalist market economy. Citizen rights are in persistent conflict with property rights. Despite this conflictual relationship between these two sets of rules, the welfare state is regarded by some writers, especially neo-Marxists (O’Connor, 1973; Offe, 1984; Gough, 1979), as fundamental to the very existence of capitalism, because it legitimizes the accumulation function of capital. In one author’s words, ‘The welfare state is [therefore] also the result of capital’s requirements for the reproduction of labour power’ (Ginsburg, 1992:3).

Despite the assumption with regard to democracy which underpins the welfare state paradigm, the most mature democratic capitalist countries were not the first to develop state welfare services (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Flora and Heidenheimer, 1982; Digby, 1989; de Swaan, 1988). For instance, Flora and Heidenheimer (1982:70) suggested that the first batch of countries which initiated the core welfare state programmes, the social insurance schemes, were non-parliamentary regimes in Western Europe such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and Sweden. In line with the neo-Marxist argument about the need to legitimize the accumulation function of capital, these governments used state welfare to consolidate the loyalty of the working class and compete with a growing and hostile labour movement. Thus the historical evidence does not support the idea that a democratic political institutional structure is the prerequisite for the development of state welfare programmes. This is exactly the case in today’s East Asian countries and yesterday’s Central and Eastern European Soviet bloc countries where, as argued earlier, similar state welfare institutions are and were established in the absence of Western-style parliamentary democracy.

In terms of inter-institutional relationships, welfare state programmes are usually regarded, in spite of being indispensable, as essentially in an adjunct position to the market economy (Titmuss, 1974:30-31; Martin, 1990:39). Despite its subordinate position, the welfare state is complementary to the market economy. The key is the fine-tuning of state intervention by the welfare state: it has to rectify market failures but stop well short of eradicating the market system (Walker, 1983). The essential feature of this sort of state welfare intervention is to enable any rules of the market system to remain intact; at the same time, it has also to limit the extent of accumulation on the part of capital by redistributing some to the less well-off. In other words, the welfare state and the market system have competing aims, but they also have complementary functions.

In this paradigm, the ideal type of a welfare state is one which can have the benefits of both macro-institutions: economic growth attained by the market system (the economic institution) with social interests being pursued by state welfare (the state institution). The contradictory nature of these two macro-institutions does not discourage theorists of the welfare state and comparative analysts to look for good examples of the ideal type. That is to say that the state can assume an extensive and strong role whilst it is complementary to the economy. In the literature of comparative welfare state analysis Sweden has long provided a model of a ‘strong’ welfare state without detriment to the economy (Therborn, 1986:18; Therborn and Roebroek, 1986:327). However, recent accounts by welfare state writers and theorists seem to be more cautious about the complementary relation between the two macro-institutions; they acknowledge the trade-off between economic growth and social interest (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Palme, 1999). For example, Esping-Andersen (2001, p. 358) asks the question ‘why would the Nordic social democracies, so dedicated to decummodification, sponsor much weaker employment rights than do the Mediterranean polities, which are not exactly the prototypes of an advanced welfare state?’ By asking this question, Esping-Andersen sees the contradictory nature of the welfare state regime as more prevalent than the complementary function between the welfare state and the capitalist economic system. Similarly in China, the state occupied an extensive role in the economy in its pre-reform era; now it believes that the state needs to be separated from the economy so that its accumulation function can be activated.

In contrast to the ideal type of the Swedish or Nordic model of the welfare state, the ‘liberal’ welfare states are usually the ideal type at the opposite end of the spectrum, in which the contradictory relationship between the state and the economy is more exaggerated. In this construction, the state and the economy should be operated as separately as possible from each other. In these liberal welfare states the residual public role of the state is assumed to be the public preference. Not only do we find the preference for a residual public role for the state among Western welfare states, such as the Anglo-Saxon English-speaking societies, the United States in particular, a similarly high regard for state residualism is also witnessed in the world’s freest economy – Hong Kong. Nevertheless, it is necessary to differentiate the rhetoric of such a preference from the reality of welfare systems in which empirical evidence may prove the contrary. For instance, in Hong Kong the state has long occupied a major role with regard to housing, education and health care despite the fact that it is a non-welfare state East Asian economy (Wong, Chau and Wong, 2002).

The ideal postulate of welfare state regimes on the basis of the relation between the state and the economy seems to confirm the Western ethnocentric bias; it is the advent of Western parliamentary democracy that counts in deciding what is a welfare state. The dominant conceptualization of the welfare state as an adjunct to the market economy, despite the range of
differences between the ideal types, looks more like the straightforward rationalization of an existing phenomenon than a scientific judgement based on empirical evidence of the political economy of state welfare. Because it is evident, as illustrated previously, that state welfare could be found in non-parliamentary and non-capitalist societies, so it follows that state welfare programmes are not exclusive to Western-style political democracies.

The 'elastic' welfare state boundary
The scientific construction of the welfare state as a democratic-capitalist project has suffered from the bias of excluding non-democratic and non-capitalist societies in comparative analyses. Moreover, the Western ethnocentric construction also has a narrow focus on one single institution, the state, and its role in social policy (Walker, 1984b). The ideal is seen as the institutional-redistributive welfare state, in Tilly's (1974) terms, while at the other end is the residual role of alleviating poverty. The former indicates a strong role played by the state and represents the welfare state to aspire to; while the residual end consists of a weak or minimal role for the state and regards the welfare society as the primary provider of welfare. The supposed continuum between these two roles of the state and, indeed, also the dichotomy between welfare state and welfare society is not necessarily a realistic portrayal of empirical reality. In practice, the welfare state coexists with the economy and many other social institutions such as the family and a range of private and quasi-private institutions, to form a welfare system. In fact, the co-existence of the welfare state and the welfare society has been referred to as the 'mixed economy of welfare' and this concept has been important in social policy analysis for many years (Johnson, 1987; Rose and Shiratori, 1986; Walker, 1984a).

The practical co-existence of the welfare state and the welfare society has not stopped the portrayal of the utilitarian or functional role-of-state continuum (or dichotomy) as forming the main theoretical paradigm for classifying Western welfare states. The social administration tradition is a case in point. The classic welfare state is portrayed as having the responsibility ‘for securing some basic modicum of welfare for its citizens’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990:18–19). This functional social administration tradition dates back to the work of Briggs (1961) and Marshall (1965). For example, Briggs (2000:18) suggested that,

A welfare state is a state in which organized power is deliberately used in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three directions – first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain 'social contingencies' ... which lead otherwise to individual and family crises; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services.

This is a typical illustration of the social administration tradition and emphasizes the social democratic roots of this perspective by defining the responsibility of the welfare state in terms of the provision of a range of universal state welfare services. Nevertheless, the social administration tradition has several severe limitations. As noted by Walker (1981; 1983), the tradition's lack of a theoretical framework and especially its optimistic view of the functions of social policy and its narrow focus on state intervention have limited its comparative usefulness. There have been various attempts to define the welfare state from a more rigorous theoretical perspective. Tilly's (1974) was the forerunner and, in his welfare state framework, the residual, industrial achievement-performance, and institutional-redistributive approaches to welfare were formulated to illustrate the range of welfare state possibilities from selective to universal provision. The more recent account by Esping-Andersen (1990) is a sophisticated theorization based on de-commodification as the strategy to counteract the extent to which life chances are dependent on market principles and operations. On that basis, three clusters of welfare states are identified: the Anglo-Saxon English-speaking 'liberal', the continental 'corporatist' and the Nordic 'social democratic' welfare states.

Despite the more rigorous than hitherto attempts of the utilitarian or functional approach to theorize welfare state regimes, it still encounters similar problems to those associated with the institutional approach. First of all, what exactly constitutes a welfare state or a welfare regime is still not precisely defined. It seems that if a society has institutionalized a range of social services and benefits to its citizens, it could qualify as a welfare state or welfare regime. However, the issue of precision in decisions about eligibility for inclusion as a welfare state is raised when some societies which have a substantial range of institutionalized social services and benefits are not classified as welfare states; the threshold question comes to the fore.

For instance, Japan is the only non-Western society that is often referred to as a welfare state (Lee, 1987; Rose and Shiratori, 1986; Esping-Andersen, 1990). It is certainly one of the most successful capitalist economies and also has a democratic polity. More importantly, perhaps, it is a member of the club of the rich countries, the OECD, and therefore has a kind of honorary Western status (it has had close links with the US since the Second World War). The case of South Korea is potentially interesting. It was excluded previously from scientific consideration as a welfare state along with the other three 'little dragons' – Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. But now it has joined the OECD and has recently installed a Western-style democracy and, perhaps, it will be accorded welfare state status like Japan. Meanwhile the other
‘little dragons’ in East Asia, with a range of institutionalized social services and benefits (Jacobs, 1998), are usually not counted as welfare states. For example, Hong Kong has universal health services, universal and free basic education, extensive public housing programmes and an institutionalized social assistance scheme for its inhabitants; all these reflect the ‘basic modicum’ of welfare found in liberal welfare states. However, it is usually excluded from the ‘club’ of welfare states because it does not have one of the two essential institutional criteria – a Western-style political democracy – despite the fact that it is the freest economy on earth (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2002).

Critics might argue that Hong Kong is now part of China again but its exclusion from the welfare state category long pre-dates reunification. A similar case applies to transitional China itself, which lacks a western-style political democracy and is not a fully capitalist economy. In spite of these two institutional ‘anomalies’ from the perspective of the Western construction, it has managed and is still able to provide sufficient social protection to its urban population, albeit with enormous difficulties at the present moment. Back in the pre-reform era, comprehensive welfare was provided through the ‘work-units’ (that is, state-owned enterprises, government bureaux and so on) which could mirror the central idea of ‘from cradle to grave’ welfare of the classic perception of the idealized Western welfare state (Walker and Wong, 1996). Even in its reform era, the Chinese Government has made tremendous efforts to institutionalize social protection for its urban population. For example, a poverty line, with its accompanying benefit provisions, was first promulgated in 1993 in Shanghai and now covers all urban areas. Despite these advances China was and is not currently perceived as crossing the threshold of the welfare state group.

Second, if we take Briggs’s first criterion – the guarantee of a basic minimum income – to examine the threshold question of the club of the welfare states, we may find that some well-established Western welfare states do not even cross this basic threshold. It is well acknowledged that the ‘liberal’ welfare states or welfare state regimes deliver meagre benefits, on the basis of need, as the last resort for those who are unable to support themselves through market activities. It is appropriate that this should be the lowest threshold that a welfare system has to cross to be classified as a welfare state. However, Greece, Spain, France and Italy, four European Union Member States, do not have formal universal rights to minimum income support (Ferrazzi, 1995). It is worth while to highlight that France and Italy are usually classified as the continental ‘conservative’ welfare states, a status with a higher level of de-commodification than the ‘liberal’ ones (Esping-Anderson, 1990). If the ‘conservative’ welfare states do not provide a universal social right to social protection to its citizens, it is not surprising to see that the largest ‘liberal’ welfare state, the USA, fares even worse. When the US reformed its social welfare system and capped the entitlement to social assistance benefits to two years within a lifelong five-year period in its 1996 Clinton welfare reform package, the basic guarantee criterion, as typically defined by Briggs (1961), was abandoned. Besides, the United States is the only major industrialized nation whose government does not guarantee the right of access to health care in time of need by providing universal and comprehensive health benefit coverage to its people. According to one source, 18 per cent of the population lack any form of health service coverage (Navarro, 1992). In contrast, Hong Kong is not a welfare state by the Western construction but it has guaranteed social assistance and universal health care. Again this begs the question of ‘what constitutes a welfare state’?

Third, if we apply the most stringent criterion of Briggs (1961) – the provision of a range of universal state welfare services without regard to class or status – then perhaps the retreat of the state from welfare provision in many Western societies in the last two decades should deprive many of them of their status as welfare states (Pierson, 2001). The case is more obvious with regard to the application of workfare as the condition for state welfare. The introduction of ‘workfare’ is not confined to ‘liberal’ welfare states, even social democratic ones also apply it to promote active citizenship. Once state welfare is conditional, however, the basic guarantee criterion becomes obsolete. But neither the retreat of the state’s role in welfare over the past decades nor the dire predictions of future austerity seem to have any implication for the status of the Western welfare states as welfare states (Pierson, 2001). Thus, in Western comparative analysis, the rule seems to be: once a welfare state, always a welfare state. In this regard, the elastic nature of the definition suggests that it cannot offer a precise threshold for comparative analysis because apparently it can be stretched to include all reformulations. The main problem of such a definition, therefore, is that it depends on the purposes of the authority using the concept.

Evidently, the welfare state definition is too elastic. A similar view is also voiced by British social policy analysts such as Glennerster (1995) and Powell and Hewitt (1997) on the British welfare state. They see the elasticity of the welfare state threshold as indicating the ‘myth of the classic welfare state’ and ask, for example by Powell and Hewitt (1997:22) ‘at what point does the increase in means-testing or charging signal the end of classic welfare state?’

So, the myth, as it has been referred to, indicates the imperfection of the current welfare state definition at a very fundamental level. In our analysis it also indicates a flaw in terms of the unscientific and unfair exclusion of societies with state welfare programmes from being classified as ‘welfare states’. The foregoing examples of Hong Kong and China in East Asia are
cases in point. Also mentioned earlier were the former state socialist regimes of the Central and Eastern European bloc. They managed to provide comprehensive welfare to their citizens, in one authority’s verdict, out of all proportion to their resources and the fiscal capacity of the state. Nevertheless, they had the essential state welfare programmes, and even in terms of the level of public expenditure, one of them, the former Yugoslavia, spent 19.75 per cent of its GNP on social spending in 1981 (Pusic, 1987). This was a proportion of national wealth devoted to social spending that was higher than many members of the welfare state club—the OECD countries. Thus, on theoretical as well as empirical grounds, the elasticity of welfare state definitions makes the Western ethnocratic construction of the welfare state open to challenge. On a more fundamental level, this implies that the terms ‘welfare state’ or ‘welfare regime’ lack the rigour that is usually required of a scientific tool for measuring empirical reality.

Fourth, the use of the effects of state welfare as the main criterion in defining the welfare state or welfare regime would encounter practical problems generated by the complexities of the actual programmes. Taking Esping-Andersen’s de-commodification effects as a case in point, a state programme could have both positive and negative effects. For example, work-based pension schemes also have the effect of commodification as they require a job (that is, commodified labour) and the contributions of the worker (that is, market exchange operation and underlying principle) to the pension fund during their working life. Hence, there will inevitably be a subjective judgement about awarding a particular society the status of inclusion as a welfare state or welfare regime.

Likewise, in the comparative welfare state literature, there has been so much attention focused on the effect of income maintenance schemes in terms of de-commodification that the developmental aspect of state welfare has been overlooked. Perhaps this is the underlying reason for the exclusion of East Asian welfare systems from the group of welfare states: they are less generous than their western counterparts about social protection programmes against poverty and pay less attention to the elimination of social inequalities.

Fifth, the construction of the welfare state on the basis of the state’s social policy effects is vulnerable to the criticism that it is based on too narrow a conception of welfare (Walker, 1981:225–50). The state sector is only one among the ‘mixed economy of welfare’ providers. Evidently, the state, the private market, the family and the voluntary sector have provided social services and benefits since the welfare state was created; and they will continue to do so. The state has to work closely with other non-statutory sectors in order to satisfy the needs of citizens. There can be a symbiotic relationship between the state sector and other non-statutory ones. The narrow focus on the functions and effects of the state sector tends to neglect the contributions of other non-statutory providers. The current discourses concerning ‘welfare society’, ‘active social policy’ or ‘active society’ (Burchell, 1995; Dean, 1995; Rodger, 2000) indicates a shift in the political and scientific consensus towards a ‘mixed economy of welfare’ (Wong, Chau and Wong, 2002); by doing so, it may help to rectify the longstanding statist bias. In the same vein, the use of the term ‘welfare regime’ instead of ‘welfare state regime’ in Esping-Andersen’s recent book (1999) also signifies acknowledgement of the contribution of the ‘welfare society’ to welfare. Likewise, the feminist emphasis on the contribution of domestic labour to welfare, the relationship between unpaid work and paid work and welfare (Dominielli, 1991; Langan and Ostner, 1991; Lewis, 1992), and Titmuss’s (1958) concept of the social division of welfare should also be welcomed.

Conclusion
This chapter has argued that the keystone of the foundations of comparative social policy, the concept of the welfare state, is a Western ethnocratic construction that has seriously hindered scientific inquiry in this field. The description ‘welfare regimes’ overcomes the narrow emphasis of social administration on the activities of the state but this too suffers from the same ethnocratic deficiency. We use the examples of East Asian societies, pre-reform China and the former state socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A case could be made equally with regard to the welfare systems of many developing societies, although there will always be a threshold question with regard to some comparative analyses.

In view of the evidence presented here it is tempting to conclude that the term ‘welfare state’ should be abolished from the comparative literature. That is unrealistic because Titmuss’s (1958) early cautions were ignored and now the term is everywhere. In any case it is not clear how helpful that course would be to the comparative endeavour. A more potentially productive line would be to begin to define precisely what is meant by a welfare state, welfare system or welfare regime for the purposes of comparative analysis. Tentatively we suggest that the scientific construction of the welfare system or regime should fulfil the following criteria:

- a global perspective, to ensure that non-Western-style democracies and non-capitalist societies are included;
- inclusiveness with regard to modes of distribution and redistribution, to ensure that the full range of possibilities, from selective to universal, are counted;
- pluralism, to acknowledge the different range and combination of welfare providers in different countries and their distributional and other implications;
a developmental perspective, to globalize the comparative analysis of welfare systems and recognize that, as well as de-commodifying effects, state welfare has a developmental role.

With regard to the 'welfare state', this term should be employed exclusively to refer to the various roles of the state in welfare (Titmuss's concept of the social division of welfare is particularly relevant to comparative analysis in this respect). Definitions of the welfare state should be clear about the threshold issue and, we suggest, the bottom line should be the guarantee of basic income protection to those resident in the society.

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