Using Social Quality as a Framework for Analyzing Social Development in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study applies social quality framework to analyze the current social development of Taiwan by utilizing governmental database as secondary dataset and using meta-analysis as further check in data collection. This study found that the social development of current Taiwan society basically keeps progressing along with requirements and indicators of social quality. Among them, Taiwan’s performance of social development in dimension of social economic security goes best. And in social inclusion and social empowerment dimensions, the indicators obviously show much progressive. However, the biggest room for further improvement and development is in social cohesion.

Keywords: Social Development, Social Development Framework, Social Empowerment, Social Quality, Taiwan

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the Amsterdam Declaration, supported by over 1,000 social scientists from throughout Europe, urged the nations of the European Union to develop their individual societies with the concept of social quality (SQ). The main purpose was to denounce a purely economic development model and to promote a comprehensive model that encompasses not only economic development, but social justice, equity and solidarity. Societies should allow each citizen full opportunities to ‘participate in the social and economic life of their communities and to do so under conditions which enhance their well-being, their individual potential and the welfare of their communities.’ (Amsterdam Declaration, 1997) Though this important document primarily addressed the European countries at that time, it caught the attention of Asian scholars as well (Ku, 2001). Later on, the European Foundation on Social Quality further developed the social quality approach from a ‘vision for Europe’ to a more global vision. Asian social scientists and researchers became new partners of social quality research.

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In March 2007, the 2nd Asia Social Quality Conference was held in Taipei, Taiwan, as initiated by the Social Policy Research Center, National Taiwan University. Since the conference’s conclusion, a social quality team in Taiwan has been working on social quality development. In addition, other Asia Social Quality teams working in cooperation with European Social Quality Teams include those in Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Taiwan’s participation in the development of Social Quality Indicators was motivated by the hope to fill the gap between social quality as evidenced by existing data and social policies. Through applying the social quality framework, scholars from Taiwan intended to find deeper theoretical underpinnings for social welfare policy and practice.

Throughout Taiwan’s recent history, the development of social welfare has been secondary to economic and political development. From inauguration of the Constitution in 1947 until the present time, social welfare in Taiwan has been used to counterbalance the effects of capitalist market economy commodification, and to answer calls for more democracy and social rights (Ku, 2001; Lin, 2006). Democratic politics has improved, marked by the abolition of the Military Curfew Law in 1987 and the victory of the oppositional Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Under both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the DPP governance the rationale for social welfare has remained to stabilize political power and economic prosperity by way of basic social security and minimal social assistance. Levels of social provision have been quite low, compared to many developed countries. For example, the total tax revenues, as a percentage of GDP (not including social security contribution) in 2009, were only 12.3% in Taiwan, but 22.9% in Germany, 25.7% in France, and 27.6% in Great Britain (Ministry of Finance, 2012).

Ancient Chinese doctrines have clearly laid out a hierarchical life path for ordinary men. That is, to first focus on personal development, and then if any capacity left, to use it to manage his family, and then if any capacity left, to use it to benefit his country, and finally, then if still any capacity left, to use it to benefit the world. That is, the social comes after the affirmation of the individual and the family. The more intimate social systems or communities always come before the more remote ones. A famous Chinese philosopher, Hsio-Tung Fei, had presented the theory of particularistic ties in 1947. Fei (1947) pointed out that in a Chinese society, people need particularistic ties to relate to each other. More discussions on the welfare of the family and the community are needed in order to help the Taiwanese individuals find their particularistic ties to relate to the society. We found that while applying social quality as a framework for analyzing social development, the European social quality indicators may require some modification in order to incorporate the hierarchical values embedded in Chinese culture.

**USING THE SOCIAL QUALITY AS A FRAMEWORK OF CONCEPTUALIZATION**

**Basic Concern of Social Quality**

The concept of social quality was developed in the mid-1990s in Europe. Social quality was defined as a comprehensive conception of the quality of people’s daily lives; it is a function of the constant tension between individual self-realization and participation in the various collective identities that constitute everyday life within a social context. In addition, social quality was proposed as a goal, not only of social policy, but also of economic, environmental and other relevant policies for ensuring human well being and happiness (European Foundation of Social Quality, 2006; Ogawa, 2006). Beck et al. (1997) characterized social quality into ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ tensions and produced a quadrant cell with four conditional factors: socio-economic security, social cohe-
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