

WOMEN, FAMILY, AND SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

The status and well being of Taiwanese women are directly related to the structure of the family as a social institution and to the structure of the social welfare system. By tracing the relationships between women, the family and the social welfare policy during Taiwan's economic development, this thesis shows that the Taiwanese family has always been explicitly considered to be the appropriate provider of social welfare needs, such as child care. This thesis argues that this view is rooted in traditional Taiwanese family values, and has been reinforced by Taiwan's family laws and social welfare policies and by the critical role the family has played in Taiwan's rapid economic development. On the other hand, because of the social change along with the economic development, this private welfare system based on family, and on women in particular, can not function well anymore. For women, the double burden of being the family caretaker as mother, wife and daughter-in-law and being a critical family provider as an employee in the workplace are not only unbearable but also unjust. In order to ease this double burden, I argue for reforming current family laws and social welfare policy, including creating childcare programs designed to meet the needs of families and of women who need or would like to work. I argue further that such reform should be based on an appreciation for the "needs" rather than the "rights" of women, in order to ease women's double burden and restructure gender relationships within the family without losing those aspects of our traditional family values that are worth retaining.

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