

1 The EM/ETIC Conundrum

In his paper on 'Social security reforms in China: towards an East Asian model?', Gordon White (1998:174) asks the apparently simple question: 'To what extent can emergent patterns of social provision (in China) be described as distinctively Chinese?'

The tension implicit in this question turns on a problem for any social scientist trained to think in terms of general theories of society who becomes deeply immersed in the study – and fluent in the language – of one particular country. At its core is the search for what is universal about the society under study and what is unique about it; in anthropology, this dilemma has classically been reduced to a distinction between an emic (inside) and an etic (outside) analysis of any particular society.

As Gordon White and I discuss in our introduction to *The East Asian Welfare State*, the distinction between emic and etic perspectives is crucial for understanding how welfare regimes are constructed, perceived and legitimated. One of the themes of the book is that notions of both a general East Asian Welfare Model and more nationally bounded models such as the so-called 'Japanese-style welfare society' (*Nihongata shakai fukushi shakai*) are the constructions of elites within East Asian and Japanese society, drawing on discourses of 'tradition' and cultural determinism to justify low welfare expenditures and the maintenance of the expectation that individual welfare needs should be met primarily by the company, community or family, but not, if it can be avoided, the state. If there is anything distinctive about the role of the state in East Asian welfare regimes, we concluded, it is that it is expected to play the role more as a regulator than a provider of welfare.

When I review my own position in the discussions that Gordon White, Huck-ju Kwon and I had while putting together *The East Asian Welfare Model*, I now realise that I instinctively took the position that the state should not limit itself to a regulatory role in welfare provision and that the level of 'social inclusiveness' or 'citizenship' (to use the current jargon) in a society could be measured in terms of the extent to which the state itself actually supplied the welfare. To a degree, I think Gordon agreed with this position. Certainly a passage in our joint

The Entrepreneurial Children's Home

*Approaches to the
Study of the
Japanese Child
Welfare System*

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Table 1: Foundation dates of current Yōgoshisetsu (1998)

N = 520

1873 – 1	1915 – 1	1945 – 16	1972 – 2
1881 – 2	1916 – 3	1946 – 42	1973 – 3
1882 – 1	1918 – 1	1947 – 20	1974 – 1
1884 – 1	1919 – 1	1948 – 35	1975 – 2
1886 – 1	1921 – 1	1949 – 41	1976 – 3
1887 – 3	1923 – 6	1950 – 34	1977 – 1
1890 – 2	1924 – 1	1951 – 27	1978 – 4
1891 – 5	1925 – 4	1952 – 25	1979 – 5
1892 – 1	1926 – 2	1953 – 20	1980 – 4
1893 – 2	1927 – 1	1954 – 14	1981 – 3
1895 – 1	1928 – 3	1955 – 23	1982 – 1
1896 – 1	1929 – 4	1956 – 13	1983 – 1
1897 – 2	1930 – 2	1957 – 11	1984 – 1
1898 – 1	1931 – 2	1958 – 4	1985 – 4
1899 – 1	1932 – 2	1959 – 8	
1900 – 2	1933 – 2	1960 – 3	
1901 – 5	1934 – 7	1961 – 7	
1902 – 3	1935 – 2	1962 – 7	
1903 – 1	1936 – 2	1963 – 4	
1904 – 1	1937 – 2	1964 – 2	
1905 – 3	1938 – 2	1965 – 1	
1906 – 3	1939 – 2	1966 – 3	
1907 – 7	1940 – 1	1967 – 2	
1908 – 1	1941 – 3	1968 – 1	
1909 – 1	1942 – 2	1969 – 0	
1910 – 1	1943 – 1	1970 – 1	
1911 – 2	1944 – 3	1971 – 1	
1912 – 2			
1913 – 1			

Foundation periods: 19th century: 26 (5%); Meiji (1868–1912) 56 (10.7%); Taisho (1912–26) 22 (4.2%); pre-war 23%; 1945–55 57.1%; since 1980 13 (2.5%)

Derived from Zenkoku Yōgoshisetsu Kyōgikai (ed.), 1998

introduction which I remember him inserting would suggest this was his viewpoint (1998:18):¹

What does ‘welfare’ mean in different societies? For example, the options available to a person with disabilities in Britain or the United States, where a substantial network of state support exists, may be greater than in a welfare system where the only or main provider is the family and the state plays a residual role. The latter welfare systems may be cheaper, but are they producing less ‘welfare’, in terms of both quality and quantity?

In general, though, I realise that Gordon was more open-minded than I about the potential for non-

state agencies in welfare provision, as long as the state, on behalf of its citizens, took a proper regulatory role: for him what mattered was the *quality* of care, not how it was provided. In the course of undertaking research on the child welfare system in Japan over the past twelve months, I realise that I have become increasingly influenced by this position. Indeed, I think (at the risk of inviting criticisms to which all reflexive anthropologists lay themselves open – staring at their navels on the Road to Damascus!), I can even begin to trace that influence in my writing on Japanese welfare over the past few years. This article is an exploration, therefore, of how assumptions about methods of welfare provision can affect the conclusions to be drawn from studying the welfare system of another

¹ I remember that Gordon based this passage on thinking through how he himself would be treated differently in the UK and Chinese welfare systems. This

was just a few days after he had appeared in a TV documentary discussing the changing position of those with physical handicap in Chinese society.

society, and how immersion in a welfare system of another country can lead to different conclusions about the best methods of welfare provision; or how an etic view of welfare systems needs to be balanced by an emic one.

2 Children's Homes in Japan

The particular institutions on which I wish to concentrate in this article are *jidō yōgoshisetsu* (called simply *yōgoshisetsu* in Japanese and 'children's homes' in English) which are the longest-established welfare facilities in the society and hence, since historical depth is so important in Japanese society, those with the highest status. Of the current 540 *yōgoshisetsu*, over 10 per cent can date their founding to the Meiji period (1868–1912) and a further 15 per cent to the pre-war period; very few have been founded in the past twenty years (see Table 1).²

Throughout the post-war period, the *yōgoshisetsu* have catered for around 30,000 children (the figure has changed little until recent years) whose parents cannot look after them. Some of the reasons behind their coming into care represent a social history of post-war Japan: war orphans in the late-1940s; the children of poor labourers in the 1950s and 1960s forced to move around the country looking for work (*dekasegi*); the offspring of those who borrowed too much in the 1970s and became indebted to loan sharks (*sarakin*); the result of growing rates of drug and alcohol abuse in the 1980s; the victims of the recession in the 1990s as increasingly large numbers of individuals declared themselves bankrupt (*jiko hassan*) and placed their children in the care of the state. Significantly, though, it has always been maintained that children come into care not through any fault of their own, but because of their parents' problems.

Through the post-war period, *yōgoshisetsu* themselves have changed remarkably little and have

retained a number of distinctive features which make them very different from similar institutions in North Europe³ or North America.

- Except for a brief period immediately after the war, *yōgoshisetsu* have consistently cared for over 90 per cent of the children who come into care of the state. Systems of fostering and adoption for such children, which have become the norm in many other capitalist societies, are still very undeveloped and indeed have been in decline, to the point of almost disappearing in some areas in recent years (see Tables 2 and 3).
- *Yōgoshisetsu* tend to be large, congregate-types of institutions. Even today the average capacity of a home is over 60 and many homes have capacities of over 100, though only the best homes are full to capacity.
- In the immediate post-war period, around 20 per cent of homes were state-run and indeed these homes were often better funded than private homes. In the past 30 years, however, the majority of state homes have been shut down and today over 90 per cent of homes are privately owned and run, though state funded. Of the 90 per cent, around 70 per cent are run by family concerns, which pass the running of the institution down from one generation to the next, ideally through patrilineal primogeniture, though, as always in the Japanese inheritance system, this rule will be by-passed if a better candidate is available. This system is known as the *dōzoku keiei* (same-family management) system and has had important implications for the development of the whole welfare system in post-war Japan. Since *yōgoshisetsu* have the longest history of welfare institutions in Japan, those families which have run *yōgoshisetsu* have often been allowed to establish other welfare

² There is an interestingly constructed 'official history' of child welfare institutions as a whole in Japan which seeks to trace their origins back to Prince Shōtoku Taishi in the sixth century and even to the activities of various emperors a couple of centuries earlier before written records were available (Tsuji 1934; Tatara 1975; Nomoto 1998). These 'histories', which appear for example in all official accounts of child welfare institutions in Japan, have played an important role in securing continuing imperial patronage for child welfare institutions and 'demonstrating' their long 'roots' though their historical accuracy is extremely dubious (see Hastings 1995).

³ There are major differences in the child welfare systems between North and South Europe (see Aarre 1998; Madge 1994). Indeed, in many ways, the system in Southern European societies such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, which also rely mainly on residential over foster care, resembles the Japanese system; Esping-Andersen (1990) points out the structural similarities between South Europe and Japanese welfare systems in his magisterial, if flawed, work, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

Table 2: Figures for *Futsū* (normal), *Tokubetsu* (special) and *Kokusai* (international) *Yōshi* adoptions of children 1985–1996

YEAR	Futsū Yōshi * = under 20 ** = under 18	Tokubetsu Yōshi all under 6	Total of Futsū and Tokubetsu adoptions	Kokusai (international) adoptions
1985	3245*	–	3245	
1986	3296*	–	3296	
1987	2876*	–	2876	
1988	2421*	1814	4235	
1989	2151*	1933	4084	
1990	2037*	1178	3213	
1991	1529**	619	2148	381
1992	1310**	509	1819	359
1993	1258**	520	1778	337
1994	1205**	491	1696	339
1995	1111**	521	1632	299
1996	971**	426	1397	

Notes: The *tokubetsu yōshi* system only came into effect in 1988.

Sources: Iwasaki (1992: 56); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1996: 54); Kikuchi, 1998, 81

institutions, such as old people's homes; today most *yōgoshisetsu* are part of, often the flagship institution in, large welfare corporations (*shakai fukushi hōjin*) which may have as many as twenty welfare institutions, many of which will be run by members of the same family.

- Staffing levels in Japanese *yōgoshisetsu* have remained virtually unchanged since 1976, at six children over the age of six per member of staff. Since staff work eight-hour shifts this means, on average, around 14–16 children at any one time under the care of each member of staff. Staff in homes tend to be non-unionised, young and often short-term, except for those who are members of home-owning families who tend to remain in the institutions throughout their working lives.
- These families, over the years, have generally built up long-term relationships with the local community in which they operate, which are often crucial for the running of the homes. One means through which homes have been able to provide some level of extra care has been through the use of local volunteers; in the case of one *yōgoshisetsu* with less than 70 children where I undertook research, it was estimated that around 500 members of the local community gave up at least one day a year in the form of volunteer activity at the home.

3 Analysing Japanese Child Welfare: Towards an Etic Critique

My early attempts at analysing *yōgoshisetsu* (Goodman 1993, 1996) were generally very negative of the way in which they were run and were highly influenced, I now realise, by the 'welfarists' in Japan who believe (a) that the state should be responsible for welfare provision and (b) that the agents of the state in Japan are generally primarily interested in saving money and social control rather than providing quality control. I was critical of the child welfare system in general and of *yōgoshisetsu* in particular on a number of points: the over-reliance of institutionalisation; the lack of concern about normalisation; the virtual absence of professionalisation; the dearth of investment; and the non-existence of debates about children's rights. The system was run more in the interests of the homes themselves and the bureaucrats who placed children in those homes, than it was for the children who came into the care of the state. All placements were made by untrained (in social work terms) local government officers (*jido-fukushishi*) who were transferred often to short-term positions in the local government child guidance centres (*jidosodanjo*) where they took advice from locally appointed, high-status, often elderly (average age over 60) volunteers (*jidoiin-minseiin*) in the community, and placed children in decrepit and almost Dickensian welfare institutions

Table 3: Number of registered foster families, families fostering children and children in foster care (1949–95)

	Registered foster families (A)	Active foster families (B)	Children in foster placements	% of Registered families fostering (B)/(A)
1949	4153	2909	3278	70.1
1953	13288	7271	8041	54.7
1955	16827	8370	9169	49.7
1960	19022	7751	8737	40.7
1965	18230	6090	6909	33.4
1970	13621	4075	4729	34.5
1975	10230	3225	3851	31.5
1980	8933	2646	3188	29.6
1985	8658	2627	3322	30.3
1991	8163	2183	2671	26.7
1993	8090	2083	2561	25.7
1995	8059	1940	2377	24.1

Sources: Nihon Sôgô Aiku Kenkyûjo (ed.), 1988: 236; Kôseitôkeikyôkai (ed.), 1992: 116; KH, 1998: 113

from which often they could not leave until they were sixteen or even eighteen and then were forced to make their own way in the outside world, unprepared and unsupported. Small wonder, therefore, that many of those who came into care were the children of parents who had themselves been in care and even less wonder that no one was prepared to find out exactly how many such children there were in care and what happened to others as they left the care system.⁴

Although my view of the child welfare system in Japan was extremely negative, I was far from alone in holding to it. After 40 years of virtual silence about the whole system in Japanese society, the 1990s saw a sudden explosion of debate. The driving force behind this was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which was signed by Japan in September 1990, ratified by the government in May 1994 and reviewed by the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child in July 1998. While the Japanese government argued that ratifying the con-

vention necessitated only minor changes to Japanese practice and law (the Child Welfare Law was revised for the first time for 40 years in 1998), critics within Japan argued that it meant radically overhauling the whole child welfare system.⁵ Chief among these critics was the national association of lawyers in Japan (Nichibenren) which argued very much along the lines I had myself taken in my work⁶ and submitted a counter-report to that of the government to the UN committee in the summer of 1998 (Nichibenren 1997).

The UN committee in its final report dabbled faint praise on those reforms the Japanese government had made and largely followed and repeated the criticisms of the Nichibenren report; indeed, it castigated the government representatives for working in opposition instead of together with Nichibenren, when it was clear that the latter only had the best interests of children (the key to the convention) at heart, implying that the interests of the government representatives perhaps lay elsewhere. Even more

⁴ There has been virtually no work undertaken on what happens to care leavers, an even bigger gap in Japan than it would be in many other societies, where meticulous statistics are generally kept on all issues to do with those who come into contact with the state.

⁵ The intensity of the argument was exacerbated by the fact that Japanese is not a UN language and hence much of the meaning of the convention was open to interpretation. Even in translating the title of the Convention, the government insisted on using the

bureaucratic term for child, 'jido', while organisations like Nichibenren (see below) used the more child-focused term, 'kodomo'.

⁶ I was indeed in contact with some members of this organisation from early in my research and I have little doubt that I was influenced by their approach, which tended to be implicitly comparative between best practice in certain Western societies (particularly the UK and Scandinavia) and what they took as worst practice in Japan (see Nichibenren, 1993, 1995).

Table 4: Aggregate social welfare expenditures in some OECD countries^a (% GDP, 1993)

Japan ^b	France	Germany	Sweden	United Kingdom	United States	
Education	3.70	5.60	4.70 ^c	6.70	5.20	5.20
Health care	5.27	7.28	6.43	6.22	5.75	5.85
Old age, surv. pensions	5.70	11.69	11.24	10.30	7.15 ^d	6.19
Unemployment ^e	0.36	3.33	4.34	5.84	1.78	0.79
Family benefits	0.20	2.12	1.37	2.78	1.81	0.35
Other social security ^f	0.57	2.05	3.03	4.44	2.34	1.60
Personal soc. services	0.42	1.11	1.01	6.39	1.05	0.35
Housing benefits		0.92	0.24	1.17	1.84	..
Others	0.12	0.22	0.59	0.91	1.7	0.55
Total	16.14	34.33	32.97	44.73	28.62	20.84

Notes: a. Consolidated, general government expenditures, current plus capital accounts. b. 1992 (except education: 1993). c. 1994. d. This figure significantly overstates national data. e. Includes benefits plus active labour market policies. f. Includes disability, occupational illness and injury and sickness
Source: Jacobs 1998:47

interesting, however, was the response to the government line that there was no widespread desire among the Japanese public to see the child welfare system changed: the UN committee retorted that it was the duty of the government to educate and lead rather than to follow public opinion.

As one stands back from these often rather heated debates, however, it is clear that the position of the UN, Nichibenren and indeed my own position are based on a number of common assumptions which need to be made more explicit:

1. As we have just seen, the idea that main concern of government welfare bureaucrats is to save money (and have an easy life) rather than the welfare of children in the care of the state.
2. Those who have professional qualifications will necessarily provide higher quality care.
3. Fostering and/or adoption are better ways to care for children than in large institutions.
4. The experience of children who are in institutions should be made as similar as possible to that of children in 'normal' families (Bowly's classic notion of 'normalisation').
5. Children who come into the care of the state through no fault of their own are entitled (as 'citizens'

of a society) to a decent standard of life and should not be dependent on the arbitrary nature of charitable giving and voluntary help.

6. As mentioned earlier, the state should lead rather than be pushed into the development of better welfare provision.

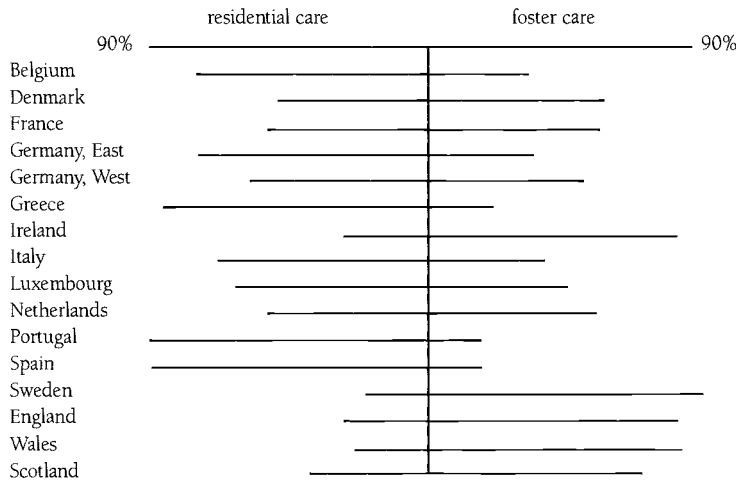
The Japanese child welfare system measured up very poorly against these criteria; hence it deserved to be criticised.

4 Towards an Emic Understanding

While the account that the above assumptions generate is logically consistent and coherent and also, judging from the reaction of the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child, compelling, it is problematic for an anthropologist in that it is hypothesis-led rather than empirically deprived. Even more seriously, for an anthropologist, it cannot account for all the ethnographic evidence which is available; not all *yogoshisetsu* today can be understood within the above model, since they are far from homogeneous in the way they operate. It is necessary, therefore, to take these assumptions above in turn and see how they can be modified in the light of the evidence from the particular context of contemporary Japan.

(1) There is no doubt that politicians and bureaucrats in Japan are under heavy pressure to control welfare

Figure 1: Approximate relative proportions of children and young people in residential and foster care in 16 European countries, 1992



Source: Adapted from Madge, 1994

expenditure. As Table 4 suggests, welfare expenditure in Japan may still be low in comparison with North European societies, but this will be increasingly hard to contain as Japan's population continues to age faster than that of any other large-scale society; by 2015, one in four Japanese will be over the age of 64; by 2050, one in three (*Nikkei Weekly*, 27 January 1997). While Japan's personal tax burden (see Ka 1999:120) is also low in comparison with North European and North American competitors, raising taxes has always been highly problematic in post-war Japan;⁷ as Japan struggles to climb out of its 1990s recession, raising taxes has become a virtually taboo subject. Tokyo and Osaka in particular are currently running enormous budget deficits and are committed to major welfare expenditure on the elderly through their participation in the Gold Plan of 1990 and the New Gold Plan of 1994.

As well as supporting a growing elderly population, there have also been demands on local government for a variety of child welfare measures under the so-called Angel Plan of 1995, which aims to support childrearing and stem the rapidly declining fertility

rate in Japan (currently around 1.38 against a replacement rate of 2.1). The Angel Plan calls for a massive increase over the next ten years of extended day-care centres and after-school clubs, so that women can combine careers with bringing up families.

All this suggests, therefore, that even if welfare officials in Japan are interested in providing better care for children in care, the political agenda has forced them to focus on better provision for the elderly and working mothers; on those who have votes and who are productive members of society, rather than those who are too young to vote and are unproductive. As the economy actually contracts, their room for manoeuvre is increasingly limited.

(2) The debate about professionalisation is a long one, though perhaps in the case of social workers best known through Ivan Illich's book on *Disabling Professions* (1977). If Illich pushes the argument to extreme lengths – that social workers and other caring professions ultimately serve their own interests rather than those of their clients – more moderate versions can be found in Ezra Vogel's *Japan as*

⁷ The taboo about raising taxes in Japan currently is largely related to a lack of confidence in how the government spends public taxes; there is no public budget system in Japan and hence people have little sense of knowing what happens to their tax payments.

Number One (1980). The workers in the child guidance centres may not be qualified, but they are drawn from the top educational echelons in Japan;⁸ similarly, few workers in residential institutions have formal social work credentials, but almost all of them have been through university. As elsewhere in Japanese recruitment practices, there is a preference for generalists over specialists and for training to be on-the-job as much as possible. As some writers on the social work system in Japan have suggested (see, for example, Matsubara, 1996), it may be the overall level of educational background, rather than the specific qualifications in social work, which ultimately affect the quality of care provided to children in homes.

(3) There are a number of different aspects of the debate about fostering versus institutional care that need examination. First, as Figure 1 shows, even within Western Europe, there is a clear distinction between north European countries which favour fostering and south European societies which support still high rates of institutionalisation. This division maps, of course, quite neatly onto Esping-Andersen-type distinctions between Mediterranean, Anglo-Saxon, Continental Europe and Scandinavian welfare regimes in terms of state mechanisms of welfare provision. While it goes unrecognised in the UN or Nichibenren reports, Japan is not as out-of-line in its reliance on institutional care as most critics have suggested. Perhaps more significant, though, is the concern in many north European societies that an ideological commitment to fostering over institutional care has not always been in the best interests of some children, as placements have continually broken down and children have needed to be moved from home to home (see Berridge and Cleaver 1987). The average stay in *yōgoshisetsu*, which at almost five years has been criticised as being too long, might be argued to offer a level of continuity and stability for some children not available in other forms; certainly this idea is gradually being accepted in the UK in recent years, as more child welfare institutions are being opened for certain categories of children in care (Berridge and Brodie 1998).

(4) Such child welfare institutions in the UK, however, are established on the basis of being as small and as invisible as possible. Ideally, no-one should know they are there and ideally children should pass through them and back into society without being stigmatised by the experience.

Yōgoshisetsu in general, as we have seen, take a very different line: the homes are clearly marked, the children drive around in buses with its name emblazoned on the side and wear sweat shirts with it on their chests. They are told that they should not be ashamed to be members of the home – it is not their fault that they are in care – and not to do anything that will bring shame on its name. Indeed, the home should provide them with a sense of group identity – without which no one can operate in Japan – and a point of reference in an otherwise uncertain future. Homes build up long-term relationships with their local communities: they develop a relationship with the teachers in the local schools who understand the particular needs of children who often come from very troubled backgrounds; they build up relationships with local employers who in the past often took children on as apprentices and provided them lodging when they left school and the home. Moreover, since the families who run the homes are committed to them for life, its senior members will still be there for former residents to talk to when they return in later life and indeed many do just that: the heads of homes regularly act in *loco parentis* at the weddings of former residents and quite a few former residents come and work in homes as staff later in life, sometimes alongside the children of the founding family with whom they grew up.

(5) If the idea of children's rights has not been fully incorporated into Japanese society, then it may be that there is a different sense of both the child and of rights in the society. In the UK, debates about children's rights and children in care have led to a determination that such children should be 'given space' and that their voices should be listened to as they are helped to reintegrate into mainstream society; in Japan, the emphasis is on teaching children

⁸ In recent years, large number of social work courses and universities have opened up in Japan in recognition of the need for more social welfare workers to deal with the ageing society. As Ito (1995) points out, however, these tend not to be at the top level universities and hence their graduates seldom pass the competitive

exams to become local or central government bureaucrats. Ironically, therefore, few of those who are qualified in social work can get jobs in local government social work offices; and few of those who work in such offices are qualified.

how to work together in groups and to fit into hierarchies so that they are prepared for the realities of life after institutional care. Sadly, in the UK at least, there has been a vicious backlash against the freedom given to children in care as newspapers run stories about 'delinquents' being taken on safaris and summer holidays as a 'reward' for their bad behaviour; in Japan, where there has been debate on such issues, it has normally been accepted that children in care need discipline as much as love, perhaps more so since they will be very much on their own when they go into the outside world. As is often pointed out, children are Japan's only natural resource and hence it is the duty of the state to prepare them to be useful members of society as much as to educate them in their own rights.

(6) Perhaps most importantly though *yōgoshisetsu* can and do evolve; indeed, in the 1990s, homes have changed more than in any of the previous five decades for a number of interconnecting reasons: debates about the UN convention and growing public awareness of the idea of children's rights; the dramatic decline in the fertility rate and the possibility that within a few years far fewer *yōgoshisetsu* will be needed; the 'discovery' of child abuse in Japanese society and the awareness that many of the children in care are not simply in need of protection but also help.⁹

As a result of these pressures, there have been a number of interesting developments during the 1990s among *yōgoshisetsu*. In particular, there has been a bifurcation between progressive homes, which have tried to set up innovative programmes (including for the first time therapeutic care for abused children and various services to support children in their own homes and to look for foster placements for those

who come into long-term care), and conservative homes, which continue to argue that the style of large, congregate-type of care that relies to a large degree on peer socialisation that is provided in *yōgoshisetsu* is appropriate in a Japanese context and does not need changing. As the 1990s come to an end, it is becoming increasingly clear that only the progressive homes are likely to survive long into the next millennium, since only those homes considered the 'best' by the *jidōsodanjo* will be sent children.¹⁰

While the changes that have taken place may be particular to the 1990s, the way in which they have occurred are consistent with virtually all changes in social welfare institutions in Japan over the past 50 years; they have been led by private institutions needing to be entrepreneurial in order to ensure their survival, in many cases so that the institution can be passed on to the next generation of the same family as a viable operation. There is no doubt that those who run the *yōgoshisetsu* have vested interests in maintaining them as going concerns. There is no doubt also that this may not always be in the best interests of the children in care, since unregulated market forces can lead to some unfortunate results: children being kept in care for longer periods, children who do not need to be in care being taken into care, new programmes being set up to take new categories of children into care without there being the proper support systems or staffing for them once they are there. There is evidence for all of these during the 1990s (see Goodman 1993, 1996; Tszaki 1993, 1997). Where such abuses are regulated, however, there is evidence that when the child welfare market is as competitive as it is in Japan in the late 1990s, then this can lead to change as institutions are forced to become increasingly entrepreneurial in their bid to survive.

⁹ The idea that child abuse is possible is a very recent one in Japan and the figures for abused children remain very low. Official statistics on abused children only began to be collected in 1991 (1101 cases) but immediately began to show the type of exponential growth (5353 cases in 1997) which characterised the 'discovery' of child abuse in the US in the 1970s and the UK in the 1990s. *Jidō gyakutai* (child abuse), though, still remains associated essentially with physical abuse, normally related to over-zealous disciplining; there is little recognition of the idea that adults might indulge in abusive behaviour for sadistic pleasure, or that they might abuse children sexually, both of which have become the common understandings of child abuse in most Western societies.

¹⁰ While the number of children in homes has declined (if only slightly) throughout the 1990s, very few private homes have actually been forced to close, in part because the budget they have received from central and prefectural governments has been based on their capacities and not the actual number of children in their care. The change in this policy as of 1 April 1999 is likely to have a dramatic effect on the poorer (in both senses) homes.

5 Clearing Up the Em/Etic Mess

Which brings me back to where we started. How should we understand welfare systems? Do we develop universal criteria about the 'correct' role for the state in welfare provision and measure societies against those criteria; or do we examine each society purely in its own historical and cultural context and thereby render comparative analysis very difficult indeed? The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (and some progressive *yôgoshisetsu*) clearly feels the former; the Japanese government (and some conservative *yôgoshisetsu*) the latter.

Perhaps our first task as academics, who have access to both the emic and etic versions of social welfare development, is simply to present these to allow others to see the range of possibilities that lie along the regulatory-provider continuum and the outcomes that these different models produce.

In doing so, as we argue in *The East Asian Welfare Model*, it is possible to begin to separate images and discourses about welfare from the actual management and provision of welfare. When the economies of East Asian societies were booming, idealised versions of East Asian welfare discourses were drawn upon by western politicians in order to legitimate their own welfare reforms; as East Asian economies collapse, the fall-out or downside of such systems become only too obvious. For the first

time in 50 years, one can see in Japan queues of unemployed day-labourers lining up at open-air soup kitchens and sleeping in charity-provided tents; in the Airin area of Osaka alone, the number of such homeless in early 1999 hit almost 10,000.

Perhaps most importantly, however, academics should be in a position to draw on emic discourses to confront the most extreme etic ones, and vice versa. Should we accept Boyden's (1990) argument that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the last vestige of Western colonialism, any more than the UN's own line that there is a universal way to protect the best interests of all children? As Gordon, Huck-ju and I discovered in the course of our discussions, the answer was always, 'yes, but ...'; East Asian welfare systems are both similar (from an etic perspective) and yet very different (from an emic one) from each other; they have both developed along their own lines and have been susceptible to the same sorts of political and economic pressures as any other welfare system. Ultimately, though, as Gordon White reminded us, it is the quality of welfare provided that matters and not how it is produced; and if, as academics, we are able to show both how a variety of welfare systems have ideologically developed and how they work in reality, and thereby allow policy-makers to examine their own systems in the light of this full knowledge, then we may have done something worthwhile.

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