

Summary of Articles

Political Economy of the Welfare State : Theoretical Development and Contemporary Challenges

Takuji TANAKA

The purpose of this study is to examine the theoretical development of the field of comparative political economy and to reveal its theoretical challenges. Research on the political economy of the welfare state began developing in the 1970s with a focus on the relationship between the capitalist class structure and institutions. Since the 1980s, neo-institutionalists have focused on comparative studies of welfare institutions, stressing the independence of these institutions from the economic environment. Since the 2000s, with the advance of globalization and post-industrialization, political economy research has examined actors' strategies for adapting to the new economic environment. Contemporary political economy, which adopts an actor-centered approach, tends to neglect structural and social cleavages such as labor-market dualization and conflicts over globalization based on culture or values. It needs to extend its theoretical perspective to examine the interrelationships between structure, institutions, and actors.

How has Historical Institutionalism Tackled Inequality in Comparative Political Economy?

Takeshi HIEDA

This article reviews the works by historical institutionalists in comparative political economy and assesses how historical institutionalism has accounted for inequality. First, it examines the 'neo-corporatism' debate, which reoriented the focus of contemporary political science from 'political behaviors' toward 'political institutions.' Neo-corporatism refers to the system of interest intermediation between hierarchically and comprehensively organized employer and labor groups. Through this debate, comparative political economists came to realize the importance of institutions in understanding unemployment and income disparities. Second, this article explores the implications of power resources and welfare regime theories for inequality. Power-resources theory claimed that well-organized and potent trade-union movements tilted the power balance toward labor against the capitalist class and forced capitalists to accept a generous welfare state. Welfare-regime theory also maintained that strong labor movements and the presence of social democratic governments *decommodified* labor and led to the achievement of more equal (less stratified) societies. Third, this article probes the feminist critiques of Esping-Andersen's welfare-regime theory. Feminist welfare-state scholars asserted that his key concept of 'decommodification' only applied to the male worker and ignored the subordination of women to male breadwinners because while 'commodification' logically came prior to 'decommodification,' women were unable to be 'commodified' because of their unpaid care burden. These feminist critiques clarified that gender-blind analyses concealed the existence of gender inequality, and that 'commodifying' programs, which gave female citizens access to paid work, were important in remedying that inequality. Fourth, this article considers the cross-class alliance and varieties of capitalism theories. While the theory of cross-class alliance problematized the assumption of power-resources theory that labor and capital are monolithic blocks, it directed its focus to the interests and organizational capacities of employers. Retaining this perspective, the varieties of capitalism approach argued that advanced industrialized democracies can be divided into two regimes of capitalism: the liberal market and the coordinated market economies. It suggests that the latter have achieved more egalitarian societies than the former. However, according to this approach, these differences derived not from the clout of organized labor but from the production strategies of employers and institutional complementarities supporting each regime. Fifth, this article appraises inequalities under globalization, the service economy, and financialization. Even in coordinated market economies, there are growing inequalities under dualized labor markets. Recent comparative political economists focus on 'social investment' policies, which are intended to upgrade the labor supply through various 'commodifying' programs and to balance economic growth and equality.

Inequality and Norms in Political Economy : An Analytical–Marxist Perspective

Soh KANEKO

This paper reviews the conceptual background and (potentially) the disciplinary features of ‘political economy’ since the 18th century and links them to the intellectual strategies of Analytical Marxism (AM) as an extension of them. Political economy tended to exhibit the following features : (i) as a term, ‘political economy’ was used to distinguish the field from ‘economics’, which from the mid-19th century developed into the reductionistic study of economic phenomena ; (ii) as a discipline, it pursued a comprehensive perspective for envisioning conceivable socioeconomic systems; and (iii) it adopted frameworks for discussing surplus and distribution, especially in the context of a given class structure. Additionally, (iv) it implicitly contained normative criteria that highlighted problems in the socioeconomic system of the time, and offered certain concepts of value to express those criteria. By way of comparison, AM can be summarized as follows: (i) its members sought consistency in their arguments, and some of them employed the methodologies of economics to achieve this; but (ii) like both political economy and traditional Marxism, AM aimed to establish a vision of socioeconomic systems. In addition, (iii) it continued to recognize class structure and distribution as important themes, and (iv) it developed arguments that made the normative implications of inequality more explicit. The main results of exploitation theory stemming from the AM research program not only relativized the traditional view of class structure and shed light on the general mechanisms involved in the emergence of exploitation and class, but also helped clarify normative issues that had been ambiguous in the classical debate.