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〈書評〉

**Patricia Boling**

***The Politics of Work-Family Policies: Comparing Japan, France, Germany and the United States***

Cambridge University Press, 2015 (Pp. 1-228)

Itay Macover

In *The Politics of Work-Family Policies: Comparing Japan, France, Germany and the United States* (2015), Patricia Boling investigates why it is so difficult for parents to raise children while maintaining their jobs in some countries, whereas in other countries this task seems to be easier. She compares work-life policies, labor market practices, and household-labor divisions, in addition to economic and cultural trajectories in Germany, France, Japan, and the United States. Boling asks why these four countries demonstrate diverse social policies on issues such as: childcare, parental leaves, and female employment patterns, and to what extent each country succeeds in implementing these policies. She also offers an explanation for why work-life practices are different in various countries. By assembling a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which different social and cultural norms create different social policies, the author examines why not all family-work policies are ideal. Furthermore, Boling describes what conditions or constraints contribute to the formation of different systems. In her own words: "This book has grown out of my puzzlement about what makes many countries so recalcitrant about enacting work-family support policies" (11).

One of the author's main arguments is that comparative studies of the implementation of family-work policies tend to look up to perceived utopias such as France or Sweden, but do not attend to the question, "What gets in the way of other countries (like the United States or Japan) adopting the best practice?" (20) She suggests that "political institutions, policy making regimes, veto players, and historical factors" (ibid) shape particular paths. Other influencing factors are labor market practices, child care systems, provision of parental leave, housework division of labor, and welfare policies. She argues that countries are set on particular trajectories, encompassing various factors, and through examining them, we can obtain insight into why all countries cannot become a utopia.

Boling（2015）uses Gosta-Esping Andersen's division of countries according to their welfare policies: liberal (American), social-democratic (Scandinavian), continental-conservative (France and Germany), and her addition, Asian conservative（Japan）. The author examines female labor force participation rates and the labor markets in different states. She concludes that "The drivers of fertility among the wealthy OECD countries are the working-mother-friendliness of labor market structures, work-family reconciliation policies, and values, all

working synergistically and in combination" (79).

Next, the author analyzes her four cases, starting with France, that "generously supports work-family policies, but grants women with long leaves" (112) that keeps them away from working for long periods and hence perpetuates the male-breadwinner model. The fact that private forms of childcare are out of reach for the working and lower-middle class, puts many middle class families out of the childcare equation. Widespread political support for family exists in the form of policy innovations, which are designed to increase public responsibility for child rearing.

"German family policy," Boling writes, "has changed dramatically since 2007, with the introduction of a Swedish-style parental leave and significant increases in child care for toddlers" (113). Notwithstanding, Germany can be characterized as a society of low fertility rate and a rapidly aging population. Moreover, mothers tend to work part time, and child poverty is increasing. At the same time, poor mothers are being discouraged from having children, mainly because they can stay at home with their kids under conditions of

parental leave up to twelve months and no more. German family policies have supported married couples and reinforced a male breadwinner model. The author links this to a strong Christian tradition that is part of the national politics. Childcare facilities provide mothers with a partial solution, because they cannot pursue a career while raising children. The labor market is rife with inequality, adding to the hardships of working mothers.

Japan is the most outstanding case among OECD democracies, reflecting low fertility rate, aging population, and discriminatory labor market practices that create huge wage gaps between working men and women. The famous M curve that reflects Japanese female employment patterns across the life span (i.e. leaving the workplace after giving birth and returning ten or fifteen years later), shows that once having a child, the average Japanese woman leaves her work place never to return to the same position. Additionally, childcare in Japan is insufficient. Waiting lists for nursery schools are long, and parents must often turn to unlicensed forms of childcare. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party's traditional preference for corporate-based family policies has contributed to Japan’s ongoing demographic crisis.

The United States offers the worst family policy of the four nations. In fact, there is virtually no work-family policy in America, according to the author. Although the American labor market is the most egalitarian among the four, market-based leave provisions, market-based childcare, and a lack of social policies result in a large gap between the rich and the poor.

Boiling's book provides a comprehensive analysis of the social, economic, and political factors that contribute

to the formation of various family policies, and thus, makes a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge on the subject. The scope of her inquiry and the clarity with which she presents her findings, make this essential reading for students and scholars of family and labor issues. Readers may question why the cultural aspect of policy does not get more attention. The author touches on culture when she refers, for example, to Germans as

hard-working people. However, closer attention to the cultural dimension would better complete the picture. What about the over-working Japanese? Or French people, who cherish leisure time? Cultural practices affect the implementation of various policies, but lurk just outside the scope of this book. The author's main contributions are the suggestions she makes for scholars and politicians regarding social and political factors that eventually lead to social policies. She concludes by saying, "Taking seriously historical context and institutional-political organization and power is crucial to getting the story [of why all countries cannot legislate and implement an ideal work-family policy] right" (227).