Reconfiguring Welfare in the Triple Transition: Comparative Perspectives from Europe and East Asia

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Welfare states in Europe and East Asia stand at a critical juncture shaped by a "triple transition" of unprecedented scale: rapid demographic ageing, accelerating digitalisation and automation, and escalating climate risks. Although European welfare states are often viewed as mature institutional systems and East Asian ones as relative latecomers, both regions now confront converging structural pressures that challenge existing models of social protection, governance, and legitimacy.

East Asia is experiencing particularly compressed demographic change alongside rapid technological adoption, AI-driven transformation of labour markets, care systems, and public administration, and growing exposure to climate-related risks such as heatwaves and natural disasters. These developments increasingly strain welfare institutions designed for the industrial growth era and productivist policy paradigms. Recent shifts toward recognising welfare as a social right signal partial convergence with foundational Western welfare principles. Europe, despite distinct historical trajectories, faces parallel tensions in balancing fiscal sustainability, social protection, and political legitimacy under similar transformative conditions.

At the same time, East Asian innovations including hybrid provident funds and digital welfare platforms offer important counterpoints to Western-centric theories and highlight alternative pathways of reform. Systematic East–West comparison therefore enables a bi-directional dialogue that not only captures welfare state reconfiguration but also challenges persistent notions of East Asian exceptionalism. Across regions, welfare systems increasingly operate within a shared landscape shaped by demographic transition, artificial intelligence, and planetary boundaries.

The stream conceptualises these developments as generating "third-generation social risks" that extend beyond labour-market insecurity and post-industrial family change to encompass algorithmic governance, digital exclusion, care deficits under extreme ageing, climate-induced inequality, and the redefinition of social citizenship in technologically mediated societies. It seeks to examine how welfare states are being reshaped not only in policy instruments but also in normative foundations and political coalitions.

The stream particularly welcomes East–West comparative studies addressing, among others, the transformation of social policy architectures under digitalisation and automation; responses to demographic transition and care crises; eco-social policy integration; changing patterns of inequality and stratification; the political economy of welfare reform in high-growth versus post-growth contexts; and the role of ideas, expertise, and public attitudes in sustaining welfare legitimacy. Methodologically, the stream encourages mixed-method and theory-driven approaches that reassess established welfare regime typologies and analytical frameworks through comparative historical, political economy, and network-based perspectives. We also encourages exploratory and innovative research that advances new theoretical, conceptual, or methodological directions, even where findings remain preliminary.