6 Social Welfare and State Policies

Gender relations cannot be understood apart from the state, politics and policy. Welfare has been a key area for their [scholars’] investigations of the state’s role in reproducing gender order.

– Orloff (1996: 3)

As discussed in Chapter 2, the intervention of state policies has a strong direct and indirect influence on gender relations. Nowadays, women must face a new relationship with the state, especially those women in the labour market. Therefore, it is interesting to see how far state policies intervene in the utilization of the female labour force and how the state copes with the traditional patriarchal family system under the development of capitalism. Since different states have different impacts on gender relations and on women’s opportunities to participate in the labour market, this chapter aims to discuss the changes of state policies on working women, which will lead to a better understanding of the relations between the state and women.

As far as women’s role in the labour market is concerned, there are four kinds of policies which affect women’s opportunity to participate in the labour market. First, the provision of social welfare for women. Socialist feminists regard the welfare state as a social system to support the family system; radical feminists think that the aim of welfare is to keep men in a position of dominance and privilege. We can consider this issue from an analysis of welfare provision in Taiwan. Secondly, employment policies indicate how the state utilizes the female labour force and whether it encourages women to participate in the labour market. Thirdly, the state may have protective legislation and equal opportunities policies for women workers. The emphasis on the former is placed on protecting women as weak workers and
mothers, while the latter seeks to provide equal environment for both male and women workers. Lastly, care policies, including policies on childcare and care for other family members, also affects women’s opportunity to participate in the labour market. The last policy helps working women reconcile their roles in work and at home. In the following sections, I would like to present the operation of these policies in Taiwan.

When considering each kind of policy, except the first policy, we will analyze the change of state policies in chronological order. The analysis of policy will include legislation, the pronouncement and constitution of the KMT government, and related measures. Secondly, the policies of the two main opposition parties in Taiwan, the DPP and the New Party, are examined. The DPP, founded in 1986, was a representative opposition group even before the lifting of Martial Law. This party has to some extent affected state policies in the past ten years. The New Party, which split from the KMT in 1994, is a conservative party and on the far Right. Compared with the DPP, the structure of the New Party is not so mature. The ‘White Paper on Policies’ of the New Party represents the stand of the party, but is not a constitution and cannot be regarded as a definite commitment to the future action of the party. The opposition parties, however, play a more important role nowadays, as the KMT no longer holds an advantageous position in the Legislative Yuan. So it is necessary to take the policies of opposition parties into account when we review state policies on working women. Finally, practical actions taken by the state, including their output and outcome, are discussed in this chapter as a supplementary indicator. ‘Policy’ usually means a proposal or a set of proposals carrying commitment to future actions (Levin, 1997: 20). Nevertheless, it would be easy to come to an incorrect conclusion if we only take account of policies on paper. The state in Taiwan may have fruitful policies but often fails to put the policies into practice. Even if the state actually implements some policies, only few people benefit from them. The analysis of policy may represent the changing ideology of the state, but may not be a good evidence of past, present or future actions.

Welfare provision for women

Welfare provision for the family and working women is important in analyzing the extent to which women can choose to stay at home as full-time carers or join the labour market as workers, although the