


Unequal Care, Unequal Work: Toward a more Comprehensive Understanding of Gender Inequality in Post-Reform Urban China

Yingchun Ji¹  · Xiaogang Wu² · Shengwei Sun³ · Guangye He⁴

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Abstract Over the last four decades, as China has transitioned from a socialist centralized economy to a productivity-and-efficiency-oriented market economy, so too have the country's public and private spheres become increasingly differentiated. Although others attribute changing gender inequality to the market transition, we draw from Chinese feminist critical analyses and propose a theoretical framework regarding how the two-sphere separation in contemporary China, embedded in how gender equality was organized in the socialist time, has been driven by the state and is further justified by changing gender ideologies. We review the existing literature and identify gaps in research on how women's disadvantages in the public and private spheres—in the labor market and within the family—mutually reinforce each other in post-reform urban China. We also discuss how the dynamics of, and interactions between, the two spheres are

justified by a changing gender ideology. Finally, by exploring gender inequality in the process of the two-sphere separation in a transitional context, we make an important contribution to the general sociological and gender literature.

Keywords Public and private spheres · Gender inequality · Labor market · Motherhood penalty · Family · Gender ideology

Over the past 60 years, China has witnessed unprecedented economic development and sweeping social changes, having transitioned from a poor, centralized, collectivist socialist state to the world's second largest economy by promoting individual incentives, marketization, and globalization. Scholars debate whether and how social inequality has improved or worsened since China's opening-up and economic reform launched in 1978. Following a “market transition” framework, some sociological research has studied how China's transition to a market economy has shaped gender disparities in education and labor market outcomes in the public sphere. Far fewer studies have looked at changes in the private sphere of the family and even fewer have examined shifts in gender ideology, let alone conversations among the three lines of scholarship. Therefore, this is a critical moment to review recent studies regarding gender inequalities in *both* public and private spheres simultaneously and interactively, as well as how gender ideology has changed at the same time.

Much of the existing sociological research on gender inequality in post-reform China employs the concept of “market transition” from the mainstream stratification literature as an analytical framework (Bian and Logan 1996; Dong and Pandey 2012; He and Wu 2015; Li and Dong 2011; Matthews and Nee 2000; Nee 1989; Shu and Bian 2003; Walder 1995; Wang et al. 2008; Zhang 2004; Zhou and

✉ Yingchun Ji
yingchunji@gmail.com

Xiaogang Wu
sowu@ust.hk

Shengwei Sun
ssun88@umd.edu

Guangye He
hgy.gloria@gmail.com

¹ School of Sociology and Political Science, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China

² Division of Social Science, Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, Hong Kong, China

³ Department of Sociology, University of Maryland at College Park, College Park, MD, USA

⁴ School of Social and Behavioral Science, Nanjing University, Nanjing, China

Moen 2001). Scholars generally agree that marketization has reshaped gender inequality, although they disagree over the nature of the changes. They tend to focus on how market emphases on profits, productivity, and efficiency have widened gender gaps in the labor market, including gender gaps in income and employment rates, increasing discrimination against women, and worsening gender segregation in the labor market (He and Wu 2017; Li and Ma 2006; Li and Xie 2015; Shu 2005).

This generally economically-oriented research focuses on how market mechanisms have replaced the socialist planned and centralized economy, and it discusses components such as wage structure, human capital, and gender discrimination. Although comparisons are made between pre- and post-reform contexts, an emphasis on transition tends to mask the underlying connections and continuity between the two periods. The market transition framework tends to make simplified assumptions about how market forces have replaced political authorities to structure gender outcomes during the short transition period. What the framework lacks, however, is a broader social and historical perspective that considers how the institutional and cultural context shaped gender equality in the socialist era and how this socialist heritage is constitutive of the current context and continues to shape gender dynamics in the marketization era.

Also missing from this market transition framework is attention to the equally profound changes that have transformed gender relations in the private sphere, resulting from the state's reallocation of social reproduction and care responsibilities to individual families through privatization. (The discussion of the private sphere is confined to the private family and the public sphere to the labor market in the present review.) Nor have market-transition scholars considered how changes in gender inequality between the two spheres interact with and reinforce each other or how gender ideology has changed corresponding to changes in the two spheres.

To our knowledge, no one has systematically reviewed empirical literature regarding gender inequality in post-reform China using the conceptual framework of two-sphere separation in light of China's socialist heritage. Very few Chinese feminists have tried to theorize the organization of gender equality under socialism or consider its influence on gender dynamics in the market economy (Song 2011b, 2012; Zuo and Jiang 2009). In short, we still lack sophisticated conceptualization of gender in/equality in contemporary China.

To fill these gaps, we draw from Chinese feminist insights to contextualize our understanding of present gender dynamics as connected to the socialist heritage of gender equality. Recognizing both social continuities and changes, we propose a more comprehensive framework regarding the separation between the public and private spheres in the marketization period. More specifically, we examine how the present separation of spheres has been propelled by the retreat of socialist

state welfare and weakening of state ideology promoting women's liberation in the socialist era, how the interaction between the two spheres exacerbates Chinese women's disadvantages in both spaces, and how an underlying ideological transformation—the waning of Marxist egalitarian ideology and a rejuvenation of Confucianism in conjunction with newly adopted neoliberalism—has both enabled and justified increasing gender inequality. Guided by this comprehensive framework, we review empirical work on changing gender inequality in the labor market and in the private family as well as gender ideology in post-reform China, with a specific focus on urban areas.

Our article is organized into three main parts. In our first section on two-sphere separation, we first establish a feminist theoretical framework that analyzes the separation of public and private spheres in contemporary China. This framework conceptualizes the separation as deeply rooted in the once-integrated two spheres in the socialist era, which deliberately retained gender-role division in the private family. This section is divided into six subsections, the first three of which discuss (a) gender equality and its social organization, (b) socialist gender ideology, and (c) the dual state apparatus and socialist gender equality. The last three subsections analyze (d) post-reform era gender dynamics along with the separation of spheres and (e) changing complex gender ideology in post-reform China and then finally (f) provide a diagram of how the state, market, family, and ideology work together to shape the complexity of gender dynamics in present China.

In our second major section focused on changing gender dynamics in post-reform urban China, we review how gender inequality has changed in (a) the labor market, (b) the family, and (c) gender ideology. For each of these subsections, we provide a brief literature review, followed by a discussion regarding how to better understand these changes. In the labor market, we cover four topics regarding employment and the gender earnings gap, gender discrimination, occupational segregation, and the motherhood penalty. In our third and final section, we wrap up our review with an emphasis on opening conversations among feminists across the globe and suggest directions for future research.

Two-Sphere Separation

In this section, we conceptualize how increasingly separate public and private spheres, together with changing gender ideology, shape complex gender dynamics in post-reform urban China. Rather than simply borrowing Western feminist perspectives regarding the separation of private and public spheres stemming from the early industrialization context in the West, we introduce two models regarding the organization of gender equality under socialism in China—Song's (2011b, 2012) “private embedded in the public sphere” [*si qian yu gong* or

gong si xiang qian] (Song 2012, p. 117) and Zuo and Jiang's (2009, p. 6) simultaneous "construction of family and state" [jia guo tong gou]. In keeping with Song (2011b, 2012), we recognize that the boundaries between public and private spheres can be different in various social contexts. We further argue that the paths to the separation of these spheres are historically specific. We analyze state gender ideology in the same historical period concerning such issues as gender sameness, obligatory gender equality, and contained family patriarchy.

The second part of this section follows the same order. Based on the analyses of the first part, we conceptualize how the structural separation between public and private spheres organizes gender equality in contemporary China. We then discuss how the advancing and regressing of the state, market, and traditional forces have shaped ideology, which then justifies the new gender dynamics.

Gender Equality and its Social Organization

In "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," Engels ([1891] Engels 1978, p. 744) famously wrote that "the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry; and that this again demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished." Following Engels' idea that women's liberation has to be realized through social production and breaking from the family patriarch, China's Communist Party encouraged women to go outside the home and participate in social production for the new socialist nation (Jin 2006b; Zuo and Jiang 2009). The state built the *danwei* system (work-unit of the State-owned enterprise and collective-owned enterprise in the socialist era) in part to socialize social reproduction, building facilities such as dining halls, laundries, and childcare and healthcare centers. Thanks to the state's convincing propaganda and the *danwei* system to alleviate women's housework burden, Chinese women's employment rates under socialism were among the highest levels in the world and gender earnings gaps were low (Attané 2012; Wolf 1985). Meanwhile, the state issued laws to protect women's rights involving marriage freedom, property, education, and employment (Zuo and Jiang 2009). However, many recent studies point out that gender earning gaps and occupational segregation still existed in the socialist era and that the communist state's promotion of women's labor force participation was primarily utilitarian in nature and contingent on the labor supply for socialist construction (Jin 2006b; Zuo and Jiang 2009). Cast as the "reserve army" of labor, women bore the brunt of urban layoffs in times of labor supply excess, and their domestic roles were often emphasized by the state (Andors 1983; Croll and Croll 1981; Jin 2006b; Song 2011b, 2012; Zuo 2013).

Addressing the socialist heritage of gender equality in China, Song (2011b, 2012) recognizes the concepts of private

and public spheres developed in the Western context, but she argues that in different historical and social contexts, the boundaries between the two can vary. A critical development from Herschatter's (2003, pp. 270–271) idea of household as the "residual" place of "invisible domestic labor" in China, Song (2011b) suggests that the family as the private sphere was *embedded* in the public sphere under socialism, with the goal of social production given the highest priority. The gendered labor division (including paid and unpaid work) was thoroughly woven into the social production system during this period. The *danwei* system took over some of women workers' reproduction responsibilities by socializing housework, but it left the rest as women's "particular difficulties" [te shu kun nan] (p. 132) to be overcome individually within the confines of private families. Housewives' unpaid household labor was treated as secondary to that of their husbands.

Furthermore, during this period, the private family was transformed into a utilitarian tool to realize the public goal of socialist construction, but patriarchy and traditional gender-role division in the private family was intentionally retained by the state. (We follow Hartmann's 1976, definition of the system of male oppression of women, and specifically we refer to Confucian patriarchy in the Chinese context.) The boundary between public and private spheres was thin, with the former easily intruding into the latter, especially during the Cultural Revolution (Song 2011b, 2012).

In a similar but distinct vein, Zuo and Jiang (2009, p. 6) have proposed the model of a simultaneous "construction of both family and state." The state mandated that families share the state's goal of socialist construction on the one hand, and it promised to provide welfare for the family on the other hand. The *danwei* took over family's basic economic functions, became the organizing social framework for economic and social life, and as a result, carried on patriarchal familial control over women. Men and women shared equal obligations as "State Persons" serving the socialist state in the *danwei*, but in the family they were "Gendered Persons" following the tenet of "Men in charge of the outside world and women in charge of the internal affairs." The socialist state neither challenged traditional gender ideals about family roles nor required men to share household labor; working women still suffered from a double burden of paid and unpaid domestic work (Zuo 2005, 2013; Zuo and Jiang 2009).

The models of Song (2011b) and of Zuo and Jiang (2009) demonstrate that the state played a key role in mobilizing women in service of socialist construction through *danwei*—at the cost of individual family's autonomy and women's personal freedom. During the socialist period, the private family sphere was largely integrated into the state/public sphere, which operated through the *danwei* system. The domestic roles remained gendered, and women's double burden was only somewhat alleviated by the *danwei* system.

This issue of women's family-work conflicts under socialism merits particular discussion. As in many other industrial societies, in socialist China women's double burden was not solved, but it is true that the dual-state apparatus, danwei system, and the state's egalitarian gender ideology provided at least some relief, albeit insufficient. In contrast, in the U.S. context, for example, progress in the public and private spheres was imbalanced (England 2010), with women still having to take on a "second shift" after paid work (Hochschild and Machung 2012), which severely affected their (perceived) performance in the labor market (Budig and England 2001). China's danwei system did alleviate women's family-work conflict to a certain degree. Furthermore, state propaganda promoting gender equality and individual obligation to the state rather than individual rights—the traditional focus of Western feminist movements—contributed, even if only symbolically, to an imagined equality (Zuo 2013).

Socialist Gender Ideology

Although both models touch upon state-gender discourse, they do not systematically discuss how the dynamics of gender ideology were related to (perceived) gender inequality in the socialist period. Zuo (2013, p. 100) uses the term "obligation equality" to describe how the state's propaganda used the ideology of gender equality to mobilize men's and women's equal participation in, and sacrifice for, socialist construction in pre-reform China. Through sacrifice to both their families and to the socialist state, women gained a sense of emancipation and fairness. Yet this state-promoted form of gender equality was largely illusory and required women's sacrifices rather than recognizing any individual rights, as in the West.

Consider, too, popular state slogans such as "Women hold up half the sky"; "As time changes, men and women are the same"; and "If men comrades can do it, women comrades can do it too." To be sure, such assertions of "gender sameness" usefully challenged gendered boundaries in the workplace and broke men's monopoly of technological authorities (Jin 2006b; Jin et al. 2006).

At the same time, however, feminist scholars note that such notions of "gender sameness" essentially erased gender by demanding that women make the same sacrifices as men, but without granting them the same benefits or rights as their male counterparts (Jin 2006b; Zuo 2013) and while simultaneously maintaining male standards (Croll 1995; Jin 2006b; Tong 2008; Yang 1999). These feminist critiques of "gender sameness" under socialism highlight the harm done to women under gender-insensitive policies and the androcentric assumptions behind such slogans.

While the state called on women to make sacrifices and contributions to the project of socialist construction, women were also called upon to "sacrifice their private family for the country" [she xiao jia gu da jia] (Zuo 2005, p. 193). The

public was thus consistently privileged over the private in state discourse. Wu (2009) has pointed out that socialist state gender-equality discourse focused primarily on women's liberation in the public sphere, but it did not elaborate much on the private sphere. Meanwhile, the patriarchal gender discourse lived on in the private domain, although it was suppressed by the dominant Marxist discourse by the state.

Dual State Apparatus and Socialist Gender Equality

What gender equality there was, then, during the socialist era was buttressed by the dual-state apparatus of the danwei system and effective state ideology promoting gender egalitarianism. State ideology emphasized women's obligation and sacrifice to both family and the state, but leaned more towards the latter, in keeping with the subordination of the private family to the state, albeit in the form of relatively integrated public and private spheres.

With market reform, the retreat of the dual state apparatus—the decline in Marxist gender egalitarian ideology and the collapse of the danwei system—fundamentally contributed to the two-sphere separation and the deterioration of gender equality in the later reform period, such as growing gender discrimination, increasing gender earnings gaps, decreasing female employment rates, and escalating work-family conflicts. In this sense, we argue that increasingly separate public and private spheres and the subsequent worsening of gender inequality in post-reform urban China is deeply rooted in the country's socialist heritage, rather than a sudden departure from the past. Yet, it merits clarification here. We do not think the state socialism created gender inequality from ground zero on its own. Largely built from Confucian, feudal relics, the socialist state had greatly improved women's status, but unavoidably under the influence of Confucian patriarchy. It is this socialism-and-Confucian-patriarchy hybrid gender (in)equality that has contextualized changing gender dynamics in post-reform China.

Gender Dynamics with the Separation of Spheres

As we previously discussed, the relatively integrated private family and public social production supported by the dual apparatus of the danwei and the gender-egalitarian ideology promoted by the state helped to improve women's status and facilitated a sense of liberation. Yet the state deliberately retained traditional patriarchy and a gendered role division in the private family to serve the central task of socialist production (Song 2011b, 2012). This lopsided gender revolution thus paved the way to the separation between the private and public spheres in the marketization process when the state shifted reproduction duties to the private family, where women took these over without much resistance (Song 2011b, 2012).

Indeed, the dismantling of the danwei system and the weakening of state ideology promoting gender equality facilitated two-sphere separation during market reform. In the restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as part of a campaign to develop the market and improve productivity and efficiency, the state strategically removed social welfare from SOEs' burden of responsibility (Song 2011b, 2012; Zuo and Jiang 2009). Once privatized, these responsibilities were taken up by individual families and, more specifically, by women's unpaid work at home (Cook and Dong 2011).

Complex Gender Ideology in Post-Reform China

With the crumbling of the danwei system and the intensification of women's double burden, gender ideology also went through complex changes during market reform in order to justify women's disadvantage in the labor market and their second shift at home. Partially as a backlash to the socialist ideology of "gender sameness" or "gender erasing," post-reform China has seen a resurgence of gender essentialism. *Gender essentialism* appeals to a free market logic that emphasizes biological difference and regards women as inferior laborers (Song 2011b, 2012). Rofel (1999, 2007) argues that socialist gender ideology and practices have been discursively reinterpreted and criticized as suppressing human nature by erasing gender differences and forbidding people from expressing their "natural" sexual desires.

The "return" of women to the home featured prominently in national debates between the 1980s and 2010s. In these debates, a prominent male sociologist and lawmakers publicly demanded that women should go back home, citing gender-essentialist ideologies that regarded women as the inferior and weaker laborer, both biologically and socially (Song 2011a; Wang 1997; Zheng 1994). This gender essentialism not only naturalizes women's reproduction and household duties (Wang 1997), but also helps to sexualize and commercialize women's bodies in the marketization period (Song 2011a). It, therefore, has rejuvenated patriarchal tradition and connected it to market discourse in post-reform China.

As Xiaoying Wu has argued (2009), state egalitarian gender discourse retreats as needed by the demands of the free market. Likewise, traditional patriarchal gender discourse emphasizing traditional gender roles and division of labor aligns with market liberalism that deems women are inferior and less productive labor. Traditional discourse and market discourse thus converge to justify discrimination against women and their double burdens at work and at home, all of which is acquiesced by the state.

Empirical research has also revealed this resurgence of patriarchal tradition and its further alliance with neoliberalism (Ji 2015a, b; Sun and Chen 2015). Women's constrained options in relation to family-work conflict in the separation between the public and private spheres are interpreted as individual

choices and personal (in)competence. In short, in the post-reform period, the state, tradition, and market have all come together to endorse the new gender order in the rapidly separating private and public spheres.

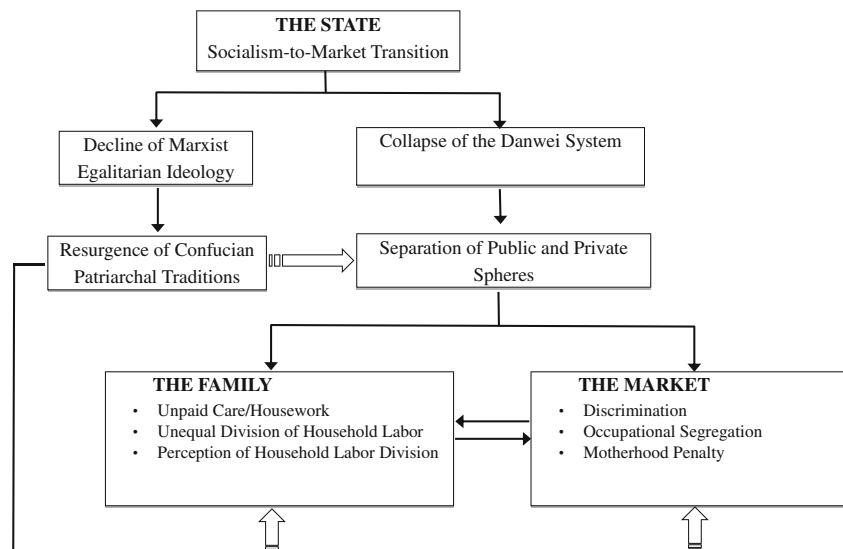
State, Market, Family, and Gender Ideology

In summary, we argue that the collapse of this dual apparatus of danwei and state-egalitarian ideology fueled the rapid separation of the private and public spheres and the deterioration of gender equality in reform-era urban China. Moreover, the retreat of Marxist gender-egalitarian ideology and the resurgence of patriarchal tradition in alliance with neoliberalism further justified women's dual burden and disadvantages both in the labor market and the private family as "personal" issues. In Fig. 1, we provide a conceptual paradigm: During the state driven socialism-to-market transition, the collapse of the dual-state apparatus of danwei and Marxist ideology paved the way of the separation between the private and the public spheres, which shaped, in turn, gender dynamics in the post-reform China.

A theoretical concern deserves mentioning here regarding whether the separation between the private and public spheres will necessarily lead to deteriorating gender inequality. We argue that the impact of the two-sphere separation on gender inequality is contingent on the institutional context—specifically, whether society can develop new supporting institutions to address the needs of social reproduction and care. For example, in various Western welfare states, particularly the Nordic social democratic countries, family policies such as paid parental leave, childcare facilities, legal regulation prohibiting open gender discrimination, and the tax system have been implemented to relieve women's double burden and to promote gender equality at work and at home (DiPrete and McManus 2000; Gornick and Jacobs 1998; Guo and Xiao 2013; Orloff 1996; Van der Lippe and Van Dijk 2002). In a comparison of family policies between Sweden and China, Guo and Xiao (2013) observe that Swedish family policies treat childcare as a public concern and consider both women's labor-market participation and men's involvement in childcare to be important for achieving gender equality. In contrast, China's family policies overlook the unequal gender division of household work and childcare at home.

In post-reform China, the state has relinquished much of its territory to the rule of market forces. At the same time, new, sustainable institutional forces have not been cultivated, and there has been a parallel failure to develop new discourse encouraging men to share responsibilities in the private sphere. Post-reform women are thus forced either to "go back home" or struggle to balance work and family duties, resulting in deteriorating gender inequalities, which we will elaborate in the following sections.

Fig. 1 An orchestration among the state, market, and family: State-driven two spheres separation and a resurging tradition. *Note.* → suggests a causal direction; ⇔ represents the function of gender ideology



This analysis brings us to the role that the state played in the two-sphere separation process in post-reform urban China. We argue that the pathways toward two-sphere separation are context-specific, depending on a society's specific historical heritage and institutional configuration. Among industrialized countries, states assume different roles in promoting social welfare and economic redistribution. For example, the liberal state does not actively intervene to reduce women's dual burdens or provide any paid family leave policies in the United States, whereas in Nordic social democratic countries, the welfare state implements comprehensive family policies to reconcile women's family-work conflicts (Esping-Andersen 1990). Interestingly, the Chinese government actively promoted gender equality and built the danwei system to alleviate women's second shift under socialism, but in the post-reform era, the Chinese state now retreats from providing social services and its egalitarian gender ideology has become decidedly muted, if not silent. This shift, we argue, has facilitated the separation of spheres in the Chinese context.

Changing Gender Dynamics in Post-Reform Urban China

Our previous analyses demonstrate our theoretical understanding of how two-sphere separation and gender inequality in post-reform China are embedded in the country's socialist heritage. In the following sections, we review changing gender dynamics in three specific arenas: the labor market, the family, and gender ideology. Based on these empirical findings, we will investigate how present gender dynamics were shaped by the legacies of the socialist era and how the interaction between the two spheres perpetuates women's unfavorable status and how complex gender ideology has contributed to this pattern.

The Public Sphere: Labor Markets

In the socialist era, the Chinese government promoted women's labor force participation as the backbone of state policy, resulting in one of the highest female labor participation rates globally, as well as a relatively low gender pay gap (Stockman 1994; Whyte and Parish 1985). Since market reform, as the state privatized responsibility for social production and the once integrated public and the private spheres separated from each other, gender gaps in labor force participation, earnings, and occupational segregation have all been exacerbated.

Labor Force Participation and Gender Earnings Gap

Most studies on women's labor force participation in urban China show a consistent and steady decline since economic reform. Attané (2012) shows an employment rate for urban women of 77.4% in 1990, 63.1% in 2000, and 60.8% in 2010. Zhang et al. (2008a) report a drop of employment rate for both genders, but note that women's dropped faster than men's. Nonetheless, women's employment seemed to bounce back after the large-scale SOEs' layoffs ceased, driven by women of low family income joining the labor market because of skyrocketing costs of living (Wu and Zhou 2015).

Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, the SOE reform that laid off 30 million workers greatly affected women's employment rates in China (Dong et al. 2006; Giles et al. 2006). Women were laid off disproportionately and faced more difficulties in seeking reemployment. Even if reemployed, they were more likely to work in poorly paid jobs in unfavorable sectors (Appleton et al. 2002; Dong et al. 2006; Du and Dong 2009; Giles et al. 2006; Wu 2010). Appleton et al. (2002) report that among the SOE lay-offs, women and the poorly educated were the most vulnerable. Furthermore, women with

young children faced particular difficulties once laid-off (Du and Dong 2009).

During the socialist-to-market economic transition, the emerging market sectors tended to favor men over women (Shu and Bian 2003). Much research reported in the early reform period through the early-to-middle 1990s that the gender earnings ratio remained mostly above 80% in China (Shu and Bian 2003; Whyte and Parish 1985). Yet Cohen and Wang (2009) state that the gender earnings gap in urban China increased from about 15% in 1986 to 25% in 2000. Still others have found that the gender earnings ratio dropped from around 80% in 1988 to 75% in 2004, and further to 68% in 2009 (Appleton et al. 2005; Chi and Li 2014; Gustafsson and Li 2000; Hughes and Maurer-Fazio 2002; Zhang et al. 2008a).

Gender Discrimination

The younger cohort of women has caught up with that of men in terms of educational attainment. For example, in 2009, the post-1980s cohort of Chinese women surpassed men in college enrollment (Wu and Zhang, 2010; Yeung 2013); however, Chinese women's advancement in human capital during the post-reform era does not seem to have translated to a reduced gender earnings gap in the labor market following the market transition framework.

Many argue that under the socialist centralized redistribution system, state protection has provided a wage premium for women (Dong and Zhang 2009; Zhang and Dong 2008). The remaining state sector in the post-market reform era continues to serve as a protective economic sector for women (Cohen and Wang 2009). Others have reported that the processes of decentralization and marketization unleashed by reform have also brought about more wage discrimination (Li and Dong 2011; Maurer-Fazio and Hughes 2002; Ng 2006; Wang et al. 2008). Chi and Li (2008), for example, have shown that the gender earnings differential in China's urban labor market increased from 1987 to 2004 and can be attributed to a strong "sticky-floor effect" among women at the bottom—that is, women with low skills and low education as production workers in non-state sectors face severe pay discrimination.

Within firms in the post-reform era, managers perceive women employees to be less reliable, less "efficient," and more expensive than male workers are, given the former's potential reproductive responsibilities (Honig and Hershatter 1988). Unfortunately, employer discrimination not only lowers women's earnings, but also negatively affects their motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment to work (Peng et al. 2009; Shaffer et al. 2000).

Occupational Segregation

In Western capitalist economies, occupational segregation by gender is deemed the most prominent contribution to the gender gap in earnings (England 1992; England et al. 1988; Marini and Fan 1997). Research on transitional economies shows that occupational feminization can explain more of the gender earnings gaps in certain contexts (Jurajda 2003; Ogloblin 1999). Together, occupational segregation and occupational feminization account for much of the gender earnings gap in China (He and Wu 2017; Parish and Busse 2000; Shu 2005; Shu and Bian 2003; Summerfield 1994; Yee 2001).

In the 1990s, as the degree of marketization increased, some jobs became feminized with worsening gender pay penalties (Shu 2005). Before the large-scale lay-offs at SOEs, women became increasingly concentrated in less lucrative state sectors that used to be related to better income and status in the socialist-centralized economy, at the same time that they were squeezed out of new market sectors with high incomes. The situations in the private sector were more heterogeneous.

Along with market reform, the regime of segregation and stratification established in the socialist era has persisted and even worsened (Cohen and Wang 2009). Marketization has shifted gender gaps between state- versus non-state-sector affiliated jobs to gendered occupational segregation (Shu and Bian 2003). Women are more likely to work in lower paid occupations, industries, and sectors of the economy (Chen et al. 2013; Cohen and Wang 2009; Xiu and Gunderson 2015; Zhang 2013). As Jin (2000, 2006a) finds, women disproportionately fall into informal employment. Many of these women interrupted their career due to SOEs' large scale lay-offs and due to marriage and childbirth. Upon their return to the labor market, they are then only able to find informal jobs. Once they are trapped in informal employment, their chances of switching to formal employment are slim. Further, the gender earnings gap is increasing due to occupational gender segregation (He and Wu 2017).

Motherhood Penalty

It is well documented in the sociological literature that having children, especially following a birth and having young children, has a negative impact on mothers' labor force attachment in Western industrialized countries (Desai and Waite 1991; Taniguchi and Rosenfeld 2002; Waldfogel 1997, 1998). Yet much of the research on women's labor market outcomes in China remains insensitive to the increasing family responsibilities relegated to employed women during the state-driven marketization and privatization of social services. A small group of scholars has begun to look at the role of family status and the implications of women's work-family conflicts on women's labor market outcomes (Cook and Dong 2011; Ji 2015a; Zhang and Hannum

2015). Indeed, Zhang and Hannum (2015) argue that a feminist perspective is needed to understand how the state, market, and family work together to create a motherhood penalty in contemporary China.

Studies have consistently found marriage and motherhood penalties for women during the post-reform period. Zhang et al. (2008b) show that women's disadvantages in human and political capital explain little in terms of the gender gaps in employment and earnings. Instead, it is mostly married women and mothers who are disadvantaged by these gaps; the sharpest decline in labor force participation, for example, is concentrated among women with young children (Du and Dong 2013).

When it comes to gender gaps in earnings, married women and mothers face significant disadvantages (He and Wu 2016; Hughes and Maurer-Fazio 2002; Jia and Dong 2013; Zhang et al. 2008b). Each additional child can decrease women's hourly wage by around 7% (Yu and Xie 2014). Whereas the motherhood penalty tends to be more severe when women live with parents-in-law, it disappears when women live with their own parents (Yu and Xie 2016). Compared to both single and married women, mothers in market sectors can suffer the most because the state sector tends to provide more social services and enforce gender-egalitarian policies (Jia and Dong 2013; Zhang and Hannum 2015).

Chinese women's motherhood penalty has to be understood in the context of the transition from a socialist to market economy. The restructuring of SOEs and the retreat of the state from providing social services placed the shared burden of reproductive work back on women's shoulders, with significant implications for urban women's labor market outcomes (Cook and Dong 2011; Ding et al. 2009). Further, childcare reforms led to a dramatic decline in publicly funded childcare programs, adversely affecting women and children, particularly those in low-income families (Du and Dong 2013). As the state retreated from supporting social reproduction and care, the boundaries between the public and private spheres were more and more demarcated; consequentially women disproportionately carry on household duties. Thus, Chinese women's family status has become the key to understanding the tensions between their labor market outcomes and household responsibilities.

Moreover, we would like to point out that most empirical studies on motherhood penalties in the context of reform-era urban China do not look further at the varying experiences of working-class women and upper/middle-class women. Given differential human capital, financial resources, and the kinds of social and family supports available, middle-class and working-class women face very different sets of resources and constraints both in terms of work opportunities and family responsibilities. For example, it is harder for working-class women to access publicly-funded childcare services or afford private services (Du and Dong 2013). The difficulty in

accessing high-quality, affordable childcare contributes to intensified work-family conflict for working-class women, which further translates into their labor-market disadvantages.

Although our review focuses on urban China, it deserves mention that rarely has research ever investigated the motherhood penalty in rural China. One such study by Mu and Xie (2016), which focused on the effect of the 1.5 child family-planning policy, did not find any motherhood penalty, although they admitted that their income measure may be problematic for their rural population. It is thus important to highlight class inequality as well as rural/urban disparities among women, rather than assuming homogeneity.

In summary, women's labor force participation has dropped and their earnings increasingly lag behind those of men. Gender discrimination, occupational segregation, and the motherhood penalty have all exacerbated women's unequal position in the labor market. Further, women's disadvantages are not shared equally by all women. Poor women with less education and skills tend to have more difficulty not only in the labor market but also in seeking affordable quality childcare. Facing a motherhood penalty in pay, women with young children are at a higher risk of withdrawing from the labor market altogether or being squeezed into informal jobs.

The post-reform women's employment rate, which dropped largely due to SOE lay-offs, seems to have simply continued the historical pattern of women's fluctuating labor force participation in the socialist era, which, as Jin (2006b) argued, was instrumental for the goal of socialist construction—the state encouraged women to join the labor force or stay at home contingent on labor supply. A gender earnings gap and occupational segregation, which existed under socialism (Jin 2006b), now seem much more aggravated. Compared to the situation since marketization, overt gender discrimination was rare in the socialist era; yet, for all the propaganda around “gender sameness,” women were still treated as inferior to men and many women accepted the fact that men were more highly paid (Jin 2006b; Yang 1999). It is important to recognize this history in order to understand gender discrimination today. The danwei system lightened, but did not solve, working women's household responsibilities. Gender-role division was deliberately retained in the private family, which has the potential to trap women in severe family-work conflicts once the supporting system of danwei is weakened. The serious motherhood penalty at the marketization period is the live evidence of this potential realized. In short, the socialist heritage of gender equality had already paved the way for women's unfavorable situation today.

It is not the goal of our paper to focus on the “incomplete,” “unthorough,” or “compromising” dynamics of the socialist gender (in)equality. Our review indicates that there is no doubt that Chinese women have made impressive strides in both socialist construction and the private family. Yet, we have to admit that gender segregation and disparity still exist in the

domain of socialist construction or labor force. Although various means (such as the danwei system) were created or implemented to reduce women's potential work-family conflict, the family domain is regarded as affiliated to the grand socialist construction; women are still assumed inferior to men although not very explicitly; and work related to women's activity, either socialist construction or domestic unpaid labor (particularly the latter), is still devalued. Further, the corresponding gender norms (i.e., the Confucian patriarchal norms), although largely overshadowed by egalitarian Marxist gender ideology in different periods of the socialist time, were only partially or selectively attacked. Gender-role segregation coexists with the prevalence of the dual-income family. It is in this sense that the socialist time has provided an historical context for woman's unfavorable situation today through continuing, challenging, modifying and, to some degree, also strengthening the various aspects of gender inequality that it inherited from a Confucian, feudal China.

Any approach focused solely on the effects of the market transition or market mechanisms ignores how women's labor market outcomes are negatively influenced by their family responsibilities. It is the separation between the public and private spheres, with the state retreating from providing services for social reproduction and care, that underlies the increasing gender disparities in the labor market. At the same time, women's disadvantage in the labor market can also affect their bargaining power in the private family. To further understand the changing dynamics in the public sphere of the labor market, it is thus important to investigate changes in the private family.

The Private Sphere: The Family

Feminist scholars have long called attention to the unequal distribution of unpaid household labor between men and women (for a review, see Federici 2012). Hours spent on unpaid household labor can further cut into the amount of time available for leisure and self-care outside of paid work and thus have important implications for quality of life (Fraser 1994). Even in socialist-era China, despite state policies to encourage women's labor force participation and promote gender equality in the workplace, housework largely remained women's responsibility.

In post-reform China, the pattern of a "second shift" in addition to women's work life can now be consistently found, mirroring the trend elsewhere in the world (Chen 2005; Dong and An 2015; Liu et al. 2015; Tong and Liu 2015; Yang 2006; Yu and Xie 2011). Chen (2005) reports that the average Chinese wife's housework time changed from 18.9 h to 17.6 h per week from 1991 through 1997, whereas housework time changed from 3.5 h to 2.8 h for Chinese husbands. Switching non-agricultural jobs cut women's housework time without increasing that of men (Chen 2005). Yang (2006)

reports that women's daily housework time is almost three times that of men. Dong and An (2015) find that in China, men spend 11.3 more hours per week than women do on paid work, whereas women spend 16.7 more hours than men do on unpaid care-work per week. These contrasting figures imply that women's unpaid work not only outpaces men's long hours at work but also facilitates the smooth running of the entire market.

Despite the unequal household labor division among husband and wife, Chinese women continue to subscribe to traditional gender-role expectations. Investigating infant parents' work preferences and gender roles in Nanjing, China, Kim et al. (2010) find that all research participants, regardless of gender and income level, still subscribed to the traditional, gendered expectation that women should perform the bulk of household duties and sacrifice more than men do for the family. As Ji (2015b) reports, many single, educated women in Shanghai value their career advancement and insist on not giving up their career for men; yet these same women are also willing to take care of the family duties and sacrifice more for their future husband. Similarly, Zuo and Bian's (2001) interviews with 39 dual-earner couples in Beijing find that most couples regard unequal housework division as fair, and feel that the husband-as-breadwinner and wife-as-housekeeper roles are still important. Furthermore, Zuo's (2003) study confirms that in dual-income families, it is the husband, not the wife, who is perceived as the provider, even when the wife is a significant contributor. This gendered boundary around the category of "provider" is meticulously maintained in daily life. Consistent with the above research, hypergamy (marrying a person of a higher socioeconomic status) is widely practiced and even increased in recent years (Mu and Xie 2014; Xie 2013).

In summary, in socialist China, the public and private spheres were relatively integrated. Yet, within the family, patriarchal tradition was retained and a traditionally gendered division of labor was honored (Song 2011a; Wu 2009). As Song (2011b, 2012) has argued, this gendered division of labor was deliberately preserved and woven into the production system during the socialist era to maintain long-term high levels of employment with low pay. In the post-reform era, the traditional gender-role division remains largely unchallenged and is still generally perceived as fair. With the collapse of danwei system and the separation of the private sphere from the public sphere, reproductive costs have been relegated to women without compensation, exacerbating their work-family conflicts and further jeopardizing their labor market outcomes. Profit-driven employers thus perceive women as less productive and more expensive, which negatively affects women's employment opportunities and their career trajectory. In this vicious cycle, women's disadvantaged status in the labor market affects their resources and bargaining power within the family, resulting in the perpetuation of an unequal

distribution of housework and traditional gender-role expectations in individuals' daily life.

We argue that to better understand gender dynamics in present China, we have to contextualize them in the socialist heritage. We cannot gain a deep understanding of women's labor market outcomes without having a solid knowledge of women's responsibilities in their private family; indeed, women's disadvantaged status in the two spheres negatively reinforce each other. To fully understand these gendered patterns in the public and private spheres, it is necessary to examine how gender ideology has changed over time in China, alongside fundamental structural shifts.

Asymmetrical Gender Ideology

To explain the structural disjuncture between the public and private spheres in the “uneven, stalled” gender revolution in the United States, England (2010, p. 150) pointed out the coexistence of an unequal gender ideology and belief in gender essentialism alongside an ideology of gender egalitarianism. Corresponding to the changes in women's status in the labor market and in the family in China's transition to a market economy, Wu (2009) notes that patriarchal tradition has been rejuvenated as previously gender-egalitarian state discourse has yielded to market demands. Given space limitations, we focus here on how the dynamics of gender ideology, particularly patriarchal tradition, affect men's and women's daily lives.

The dynamics of patriarchal Confucian tradition in the post-reform era began to draw some scholars' attention (Chen 2005; Cook and Dong 2011; Fincher 2014; Hooper 1998; Ji 2015b; Ji and Yeung 2014; Pimentel 2006; Sun and Chen 2015). This change can be seen in both mainstream discourse and individuals' private relationships. Less concerned about gender discrimination, but more interested in women's marriage and private life, the mainstream media increasingly prescribes individualistic and conservative solutions to women's issues that result from structural inequalities (Sun and Chen 2015). Research has provided strong evidence of a revival of patriarchal tradition and its alliance with neoliberal ideologies emphasizing personal choices and responsibilities. Echoing mainstream gender discourse, informants in one recent study complained that as single, educated women, they were not applauded for their personal achievements, but rather were judged by their marital status—as if the latter were the only standard of success for women (Ji 2015b). One post-1980s woman (born in 1980s) narrated the return of patriarchal tradition in recent years by contrasting it with the gendered expectation to be an independent woman when she was at school in the 1980s and 1990s.

Do men and women experience the same change in gender ideology? Or as England (2010) suggested in the Western context, have women's activities simply changed more than

men's, making women, in turn, more gender egalitarian than men are? Are Chinese women similarly more progressive than Chinese men are? Investigating changes in gender ideology and household behaviors among married Chinese, Pimentel (2006) finds that across cohorts, young women tend to be more gender-egalitarian, whereas young men seem to be less progressive. Arriving at similar findings, Ji and Chen (2015) further report that education has made women more egalitarian, but it does not seem to have affected men in the same way. Consistently, one of Ji's (2015b, p. 12) female informants complained about Chinese men being “brainwashed by the 5000 years of feudal thoughts.”

Meanwhile, acceptance of women's status is complicated and the road to gender egalitarianism remains long and seemingly rocky. Shu and Zhu (2012) report a universal acceptance of women's paid employment, but they find that gender equality in other aspects of social life, particularly women's leadership and equal opportunity, receives less support. Similarly, Yang (2006) confirms that although women's dual work-family role is supported, societal attitudes remain reserved with regard to women's leadership and gender egalitarianism. More recently, Yang (2016) reports a regression in gender ideology concerning gender-role division, particularly in the social domain, but progress in gender ideology regarding personal competence and a husband sharing housework. This complex dynamics of gender ideology echo what England (2010, p. 149) observed as an “uneven and stalled gender revolution,” except that the conservative ideology seems to go even further in the Chinese context.

In summary, during the Chinese state-led transition to a market economy, the ideological shift from a Marxist gender-egalitarian ideology to a rejuvenated Confucian patriarchal tradition aligned with neoliberalism seems to have gone hand-in-hand with the structural separation of the public and private spheres, propelled by the state's retreat from both providing social services and actively promoting egalitarian gender ideology. In the socialist period, the government promoted women's liberation through their labor force participation. But patriarchy and traditional gender ideology have been meticulously maintained in the family domain (Song 2011b, 2012). The rise of gender essentialism in the post-reform period has linked traditional gender norms and market discourse together; meanwhile, the state has become much less active about promoting egalitarian Marxist gender ideology (Wu 2009). With the impressive improvement concerning Chinese women's status particularly in the public sphere under socialism, the traditional gender ideology in the private sphere was never eradicated; the decline of Marxist ideology is likely to create a vacuum for the rejuvenation of patriarchal Confucian tradition.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on the insights of Chinese feminists, we develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the causes and consequences of intensified gender inequality in recent decades in urban China. We point to the increasing separation of the private and public spheres in post-reform China, driven by the retreat of socialist state welfare (i.e., the collapse of the danwei system) and the weakening of state ideology that once promoted gender equality, even if it did not always completely deliver it.

Via this theoretically-informed review of empirical research on post-reform gender inequalities in urban China, we seek to contribute to ongoing conversations between Western and Chinese feminist scholarship, as well as open the conversation between feminists in China and other transitional societies. We emphasize, in particular, the various forms of boundaries between the public and private spheres and the different pathways toward the two-sphere separation in different contexts. Although a comprehensive comparison is beyond the scope of our paper, future research should follow this direction and produce richer and more theoretical interactions among feminists and gender scholars in different contexts.

For future research, we believe the following topics will help our further understanding of gender dynamics in China. First, we have to consider how ongoing demographic shifts and trends—such as low fertility, a rapidly aging population, a highly skewed sex ratio, and the newly announced two-child family policy—may affect gender inequalities. Second, it is important to consider how changes in marriage as a social institution might shape women's future motivations and opportunities, considering that marriage is still early and near-universal while young women pioneering late marriage are now castigated as “leftover” women. Third, analysis of how changing gender ideology may affect girls' aspirations regarding family formation and educational achievements would be illuminating. This will further affect women's performance in the labor market and how they cope with family-work conflicts.

Fourth, further attention must be paid to the diverse experiences and conditions among women themselves, for example, among women of different class backgrounds and family statuses. Fifth, research should examine how regional/ethnic heterogeneity affects gender inequality within families. Finally, it should be noted that we did not include health disparities in our review, but future research could employ a gendered perspective to investigate diverse health needs and outcomes in China.

In conclusion, our theoretically oriented review on gender dynamics in post-reform urban China provides a comprehensive conceptual framework that investigates how the state, market, and family play different roles—sometimes

collaboratively, sometimes coercively, and other times contradictorily—in shaping the two-sphere separation and corresponding gender ideology during China's historical socialist-to-market transition. We further review how the increasing separation of private and public spheres during the marketization era, on both institutional and ideological levels, shapes individual women's life opportunities and outcomes in the labor market, private family, and the domain of gender ideology. We emphasize the necessity of understanding and conceptualizing gender dynamics in particular institutional and cultural contexts. Through this review, we hope to bridge theoretically oriented research and empirical studies, inspire collaborations and critiques among feminists and gender scholars from different backgrounds and social contexts, and open more conversations rather than end on-going debates.

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