

Harsh Choices: Chinese Women's Paid Work and Unpaid Care Responsibilities under Economic Reform

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ABSTRACT

China's economic reforms over the past three decades have dramatically changed the mechanisms for allocating goods and labour in both market and non-market spheres. This article examines the social and economic trends that intensify the pressure on the care economy, and on women in particular in playing their dual roles as care givers and income earners in post-reform China. The analysis sheds light on three critical but neglected issues. How does the reform process reshape the institutional arrangements of care for children and elders? How does the changing care economy affect women's choices between paid work and unpaid care responsibilities? And what are the implications of women's work-family conflicts for the well-being of women and their families? The authors call for a gendered approach to both social and labour market policies, with investments in support of social reproduction services so as to ease the pressures on women.

INTRODUCTION

China's remarkable economic transformation over the past three decades is well documented. An unprecedented pace of structural change has moved the country from a poor, agrarian and centrally planned economy, largely closed to foreign investment and international trade, to one that has dramatically reduced poverty, raised incomes and is now remarkably open and globally integrated. China has become the world's third largest economy, the 'workshop of the world', a major consumer of primary commodities and intermediate products from across the globe, and increasingly a major trading partner and source of investment for low-income countries.

Associated with this dramatic rise in economic power are profound economic, social and demographic transformations. The mechanisms for

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allocating goods and labour in both market and non-market spheres have fundamentally changed; the role of the state and the work unit (*danwei*) as a provider of social goods and services has been eroded; responsibility for social reproduction and 'care' — a domain principally of the state in the urban sector under the planned economy — has returned to the household. These processes have considerable — but largely under-researched — implications for the work and status of women in both the home and the marketplace.

The question of how women have fared relative to men in the transition process has received considerable attention. The reform era started with high levels of female labour force participation and relative (to many other countries) gender equality in the workplace. But this occurred within a state system of labour allocation which created huge inefficiencies and redundancy. A large body of economics literature on the reform era has thus focused on the spread of market allocation mechanisms, the extent to which a more competitive labour market has emerged and, to a more limited degree, the gender consequences of these changes in areas such as labour force participation, enterprise employment and wage rates.¹

This article attempts to broaden the scope of our understanding of the impacts of economic reform on women by focusing on a critical but neglected area — the issue of social reproduction and unpaid care work. The analysis seeks to address the following questions: what are the implications of the reform process for non-market activities, such as care for children and elders, activities which traditionally are the domain of women? How does a care-giving responsibility affect women's labour market outcomes? And what are the implications of work–family conflicts for the well-being of women and their families? Before addressing these important issues, we provide an overview of the economic reform and its impact on women's paid work.

ECONOMIC REFORM AND WOMEN'S WORK

During the Maoist era (1949–76), the status of women in China improved considerably. Much of the progress was attributable to a labour system modelled in accordance with the theory of Marx and Engels that social production is an integrated process of the production of material products and the reproduction of human beings under socialism (Engels, 1972; Grapard, 1997). Inspired by the Marxist doctrine that women's emancipation is contingent on their participation in socialized labour, women's full participation in the labour force played a key role in the leadership's attempt to alleviate discrimination against women (Croll, 1983). In the cities, most working-age women and men were employed on a full-time basis in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The status of state employees entitled women as well as men to secure lifetime employment and a wide range of social services and benefits, from maternity leave, childcare, healthcare and subsidized

1. See Berik et al. (2007) for a literature review on gender and economic transition in China.

housing to retirement pensions. Job security, public health care, death benefits and pension entitlements provided by the employer gave working men and women a sense of economic security for old age. However, the provision of care for children, the elderly and the sick remained, for the most part, women's responsibility.

While Chinese women bore the double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic labour, the socialist labour regime minimized the market 'penalties' that women had to endure due to their role as care givers in a market economy. Because workers were employed for life and wage structures were centrally determined and not closely linked to job performance, women did not have to relinquish employment opportunities for care-giving responsibilities, nor did they suffer substantial wage losses due to reduced work hours or lower labour productivity as a result of their care-giving role. Social services provided by the employer, such as childcare, healthcare and access to retirees' service centres, also helped alleviate the emotional and physical strains resulting from competing care-giving demands on women's time (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008). Thus, despite women's role as primary care givers for children and elders, during Mao's era China's female labour force participation rate was among the highest in the world, and the gender wage gap was remarkably small by international standards (Jacobsen, 1998; Kidd and Meng, 2001).

Economic Reforms in the Urban Sector

In 1978 China embarked on a transition from a planned to a market economy. This transition has fundamentally changed the landscape of the urban labour market, with far-reaching implications for gender equality in paid and unpaid work. The decentralization and privatization of the SOE sector have brought an end to the era of lifetime employment and egalitarian labour compensation for urban workers, eroding the institutional mechanisms that internalized the costs of reproduction and protected women's reproductive role under central planning. Under pressure for profits, enterprises are increasingly reluctant to accommodate employees' care-giving needs; as a consequence, caring for family members places the care giver at risk of losing earnings or being dismissed from the job altogether. Moreover, the dismantling of the employer-based socialist welfare system in China has led to a substantial decline in state and employer support for care provision in the form of subsidized childcare and paid maternity leave, shifting care responsibilities predominantly to the family.² Furthermore, SOE and social welfare reforms have also significantly reduced pension benefits and made healthcare more costly, thereby increasing the needs of the elderly for financial and physical assistance (Zhan and Montgomery, 2003). Under the

2. See He and Jiang (2008), Liu, Zhang, and Li (2008), and Du and Dong (2009) for references on the impact of welfare reforms on childcare, elderly care and healthcare in China.

post-reform social security system, individual entitlements to social security, such as unemployment support, healthcare insurance and pensions, are all directly linked to the individuals' labour market outcomes.³ The employment-based social security system exacerbates the adverse financial consequences of care giving for those who have to forego earnings or employment to look after their children, elderly parents and disabled family members.

The declining influence of socialist ideology also led to a re-emergence of traditional patriarchal values and increasing pressures on women to return to the home. A widely held view in China is that women's labour force participation in China is too high to be justified by market forces. Hence their withdrawal from the labour force, permanently or periodically, would be a solution to rising unemployment in the cities (Yee, 2001). This sexist attitude is clearly revealed by China's gender-differentiated retirement policy⁴ and the government's support for creating flexible forms of employment for women (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008). Indeed, in policy circles, rising urban unemployment in the late 1990s has led to arguments in favour of less secure, 'flexible' forms of employment as re-employment measures, especially in sectors where women predominate (Cook, 2010).

State withdrawal from social reproduction and social protection has increased the difficulty urban Chinese women experience in participating in the labour market. Studies document that women were more likely to be laid off than men and experience greater difficulty finding re-employment in the private sector (Appleton et al., 2002), partly because women are deemed inflexible and unreliable due to their family responsibilities. Consequently, the unemployment rates for women, especially married women, were higher than that of men and women's spells of unemployment were longer (Du and Dong, 2009; Giles et al., 2006). Women have also withdrawn from the labour force at much higher rates since the 1990s (Dong et al., 2006; Maurer-Fazio et al., 2007).⁵ The decline of women's employment was concentrated among those who were married to husbands with low earnings,

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3. For instance, the essence of pension reform is to replace retirement benefits provided by state enterprises with benefits linked to the amount that an individual worker contributes to a retirement account while employed. The idea is to build up individually funded accounts along with social pools that can provide a minimum pension benefit. Payments to both social pools and individual accounts are to be made by employees in the form of wage deductions, as well as by employers (Fan et al., 1998).
 4. In accordance with this policy, the retirement age is sixty for men and fifty-five for women for white-collar employees, and fifty-five for men and fifty for women for blue-collar workers. During the downsizing of the public sector, mandatory early retirements were widely applied to employees who were within five years of the legal retirement age (Fan et al., 1998).
 5. Based on nationally representative labour force surveys and urban household surveys, Dong et al. (2006) estimated that urban Chinese women's inactivity rate went up from 35.4 per cent in 1997 to 45.9 per cent in 2002, and their unemployment rate increased from 9 per cent in 2000 to 12.7 per cent in 2003.

and the fall in married women's employment rates was a major driving force for rising income inequality among urban Chinese households (Ding et al., 2009). Studies also found that women were more likely than men to experience downward occupational mobility, moving into jobs with less pay and lower skill requirements following the public-sector restructuring (Song and Dong, 2009). A growing number of urban workers, predominately women, have been pushed into the informal sector where jobs are typically temporary or part-time, insecure and low paid (Cook and Wang, 2010; Yuan and Cook, 2010). Consequently, the gender wage gap widened markedly in the post-reform period (Dong and Zhang, 2009; Gustafsson and Li, 2000; Maurer-Fazio et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2008).

Economic Reforms and Developmental Transformations in the Rural Sector

Prior to the reform, Chinese rural households lived in a collective farm system with three levels of administration — team, brigade and commune. The provision of childcare programmes was primarily the responsibility of communes and brigades. While the pre-reform childcare system permitted a broad-based distribution of services among urban families, publicly subsidized childcare in the rural sector was available only in the more prosperous communes and brigades.

China's rural economy has also undergone radical change since the onset of economic reforms in 1978. The household responsibility system, which replaced the commune system, was followed by the expansion of off-farm rural industrial employment in Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in the mid-1980s. These enterprises were rapidly privatized in the mid- to late-1990s. At the same time, rural–urban migration became a major feature of the Chinese economy as tens of millions of peasants moved around the country in search of work (Davin, 1998; Tan et al., 2006). The rural transformations have brought about rapid income growth and massive poverty reduction in rural areas (Chen and Ravallion, 2004).

Although rural women have benefited from rising rural incomes and the growth of non-agricultural employment in the post-reform era, they have not had the same opportunities to participate in new income-generating activities as men. Studies show that women in rural areas are less likely to be involved in local off-farm work than men (Chang et al., forthcoming; Knight and Song, 2003; Xia and Simmons, 2004). In the cities, female migrants are found largely in labour flows to export factories in south China, whilst in the service sector, they work as domestic help, in hotels and restaurants. The pattern of female migration raises a number of issues including the difficulty of accessing services, such as healthcare, education for their children, decent housing and childcare in destination areas. There are also concerns about labour conditions, such as long working hours, particularly in factories, non-payment of wages and poor working conditions which affect workers' health (Pun, 2007).

While a large body of work has emerged examining the impacts of economic reforms on women's labour market outcomes, most of the studies focus on the paid economy and pay little attention to changes in the reproductive economy and the tensions between women's dual role of care giver and income earner. As a result, the unpaid care sector is an understudied area and its implications both for women's participation in the paid workforce and well-being (whether of women, children, the sick or elderly) remain inadequately understood. We seek to address some of this knowledge gap by examining the institutional, economic and demographic changes that have reshaped the care economy in post-reform China, and exploring the impacts of the changing care economy on women's role as income earners and care givers.

THE CARE ECONOMY UNDER STRAIN

As pointed out in the previous section, the overriding concern of the Chinese government in the post-reform period has been to find the most efficient way of restructuring the productive economy, assuming that social reproduction will adjust itself accordingly. As a result, social protections for women's reproductive role have been severely eroded; the support of the government and the employer for care provision has been substantially cut back; and the contribution of women's unpaid care work has been completely ignored in the design of the emerging social security system. These policy changes have exacerbated the labour market penalty on women for their care-giving role, contributing to the deterioration of women's position in the labour market, as the studies cited in the previous section demonstrate. In this section, we take a close look at the institutional, economic and demographic changes that affect childcare and elderly care and intensify the pressure on women to play the dual role as care givers and income earners in China's transitional economy.

With respect to institutional changes, nowhere have the changes adversely affected women with young children more than in the area of childcare provision. During the Maoist era, as in the socialist countries of Central and East Europe and the Soviet Union, China established a public childcare system which provided care to children from the earliest months of their lives until they entered primary school (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008), although publicly subsidized childcare was more accessible to families in the urban sector than in the rural sector. The economic reform has brought about two major changes in China's childcare policy. First, the post-reform policy discourse stressed the role of formal childcare for promoting early childhood education while downplaying its role for supporting working women. This decoupling of the dual functions of childcare programmes was a key feature of the 1989 Regulations for Kindergartens, according to Zhu and Wang (2005). In accordance with the new regulations, publicly subsidized childcare programmes should no longer cover children aged nought to two years for

whom provision of education is considered unimportant. As a result, publicly funded nurseries for children aged nought to two years became almost non-existent (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008).

The second and the most sweeping change has been the substantial cutback in the childcare support provided by the government and employers. With the pace of reforms accelerating and pressure for profits mounting, the vast majority of Chinese enterprises in the urban sector ceased to offer subsidized childcare services to employees. According to the Chinese enterprise social responsibility survey undertaken in 2006, enterprises that still ran kindergartens accounted for less than 20 per cent of SOEs and only 5.7 per cent of all enterprises in the sample (Du and Dong, 2010). Due to the cutback in government funding for social services, many publicly subsidized care facilities were either shut down or transformed into service-for-fee commercial programmes. In the rural sector, the privatization of township and village enterprises in the late 1990s weakened the capabilities of local governments to finance public childcare programmes. As a result, the number of kindergartens and kindergarten enrolments in rural areas fell from 10,700 and 1.6 million in 1995 to 5,000 and 0.9 million in 2003, respectively (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Recognizing the changing patterns of childcare provision, in its 2001 Guidelines for Kindergarten Education the Chinese government formally endorsed a pluralistic approach to childcare, with 'state-run kindergartens as the backbone and exemplar' and 'social forces [an ideologically convenient term for market forces] as the primary providers'. Between 1997 and 2006, the number of publicly funded kindergartens in China fell from 157,842 to 55,069, while private kindergartens grew rapidly with their share rising from 13.5 per cent to 57.8 per cent. For China as a whole, the number of kindergartens decreased by 28.5 per cent between 1997 and 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2007). The childcare reforms have raised concerns about availability, affordability and quality of childcare programmes in China (Corter et al., 2006; He and Jiang, 2008; Liu et al., 2008).

As with childcare, the institutions of elderly care have also faced new challenges during the economic transition. Like many countries in the world, the provision of care for the elderly is primarily the responsibility of families in China. The Marriage Law of 1950 and the Constitution of 1954 stipulate that care for the elderly is the responsibility of Chinese citizens and that it is a criminal offence for an adult child to refuse to perform her or his proper duty to support an aged family member (Palmer, 1995). China's institution of familial care was traditionally sustained by the Confucian ethic of filial piety and was built on the social structure of a patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal family system (Liu, 1998). Women were expected to live with their husbands' families after marriage and to take care of their parents-in-law on a daily basis. Increases in women's economic independence since the founding of the People's Republic of China have markedly weakened patrilocal and patrilineal care norms (Cooney and Di, 1999; Davis, 1993).

In post-economic reform China, family members continue to be the primary care givers to the elderly. Consistent with the approach to childcare, the post-reform elderly care policy discourse emphasizes family responsibility and the role of markets for care provision. The Elderly Rights and Security Law which was enacted in 1996 reiterates that care for frail elderly parents is a non-evadable responsibility of adult children, despite employers' increasing reluctance to accommodate employees' care-giving needs in the workplace. There is growing reference to China's Confucian cultural heritage in policy circles, emphasizing the reliance on the family for welfare services (White, 1998). Although promoting the Confucian ethic of filial piety may offer a way to free the government from assuming fiscal responsibility for elderly care provision, it is likely to reinforce the traditional familial gender norms, and/or simply leave some care needs unaddressed.

China's continuing demographic transition to an increasingly aged society has further increased care burdens on families. According to official statistics, the proportion of the Chinese population aged sixty-five years and above rose from 4.9 per cent in 1982 to 8.3 per cent in 2008 (NBS, 2009: 90). Analysts project that China's age dependency ratio will surpass that of industrialized countries in 2020 and become the highest of any population in the world by the middle of the twenty-first century (Poston and Duan, 2000). Due to the effect of the one-child policy on family demographics, growing numbers of married couples will have sole responsibility for four parents and one child, with the main burden of care again likely to fall on women (Chen and Standing, 2007).

The structural change of the Chinese economy from an agrarian to an industrial base has also created new tensions for the care economy. The rapid growth of industrial production and high rates of urbanization separate the workplace from the home, increasing women's needs for non-parental childcare services. However, without access to publicly subsidized childcare programmes, the vast majority of women in rural areas and migrant women in cities have to rely on informal care substitutes or fee-for-service day-care programmes to enable their participation in the labour market.

Rural-urban migration also creates dislocation for migrant families. Due to institutional arrangements related to the residential registration system (*hukou*) and land-use rights, as well as various other economic and cultural factors, migration remains temporary, resulting in a large left-behind population consisting of children, non-elderly married women and the elderly (Fan, 2009). Indicative of the size of the left-behind population, almost 59 million children under the age of eighteen years — 28 per cent of rural children — are left behind, living with only one parent (mostly mothers), grandparents or other relatives (All China Women's Federation, 2008). A growing number of rural elderly people live in 'empty nests' in which elderly females take care of their spouses, while having no one to take care of them after the spouse passes away (Liu, Zhang and Li, 2008).

Economic growth, together with privatization and commercialization of care services and population ageing, have led to a rapid expansion of markets for domestic and care services. Analysts estimate that about 15 to 20 million Chinese workers earn a living by cleaning, cooking and taking care of children, the elderly and the sick for middle- and high-income families (Hu, 2010). Laid-off urban female workers and female migrants account for the majority of paid domestic workers. In China, as in many other countries, the domestic service market is poorly regulated: the work is low status, low pay and not covered by the existing social security system, while domestic workers also face societal discrimination (Hu, 2010; Wang, Si and Chen, 2010). The development of domestic and care service markets has transferred part of the domestic and care burdens from middle- and upper middle-class women to women struggling at the margin of the labour market, thereby perpetuating socio-economic inequality.

THE TENSION IN WOMEN'S DUAL ROLE AS CARE GIVER AND INCOME EARNER

The changes in the care economy associated with policy reforms and demographic transition have heightened the tensions between women's dual role as care giver and income earner. In the remaining part of this contribution, we draw on findings from new empirical analyses to examine the implications of the growing work–family conflicts women face for the well-being of women and their families. We focus on three aspects: first, the way that access to childcare services shapes women's labour force participation; second, caring for elderly parents and parents-in-law and married women's labour supply; and third, 'care deficits' and the well-being of children and elderly people in rural areas.

Access to Childcare and Women's Labour Force Participation

It is widely recognized that the lack of affordable, decent childcare services represents a major obstacle to the participation of women with young children in paid work. Market provision of childcare is generally deemed inadequate because out-of-pocket payments are regressive and often create cost barriers for low-income families. Du and Dong (2010) examine the impact of the childcare reform on women's childcare choices and labour force participation in urban China using data from the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS) for the period 1991 to 2004.⁶ They point out that China's

6. The CHNS was carried out for the years 1989, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004 and 2006. Each survey covers about 3,800 households and 14,000 individuals in both urban and rural areas from nine provinces: Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Shandong, Henan, Jiangsu, Hubei,

pluralistic approach to childcare provision in conjunction with the legacy of employer-based welfare entitlements has created a two-tier system. In this system, subsidized high-quality childcare services mainly reach the already well-off parents — employees of non-profit public organizations and large SOEs which are still able to provide childcare services — while other parents have to rely on the fee-based services of private or commercialized public kindergartens to meet their needs.

Applying multinomial logit regression techniques to a sample of women with children aged six years or younger, Du and Dong explore the implications of China's childcare reform for women and children from different socio-economic groups. The authors find striking disparities in women's labour force participation and children's access to formal childcare among different socio-economic groups. Women with less education or lower levels of family income are more likely to withdraw from the labour market and are less likely to use centre-based childcare. For working women, those married to husbands with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to enrol their children in centre-based childcare. Comparing a family where both parents have primary education to one where both parents are university graduates, the labour force participation rate of the mother is about 11 percentage points higher for the latter than for the former and the probability of using childcare services by the two groups is 34 percentage points apart. The analysis also confirms that public childcare services are less accessible than commercial care services to women with lower levels of education, indicating that public childcare programmes in urban China are failing to play a redistributive role.⁷ In addition, the SOE-sector restructuring appears to have hit mothers with children aged nought to two years the hardest, as evidenced by their declining labour force participation. These findings suggest that gender-blind, market-oriented childcare reforms are reinforcing socio-economic inequalities, including gender inequality as well as inequality in the quality of childcare and early education.

Rural migrant families are among the most vulnerable socio-economic groups in post-reform urban China. They have limited access to publicly subsidized social services, including childcare, primary or secondary education for their children, and therefore rely on families and for-profit provision to meet these needs. Yuan (2010) explores how married migrant women cope with the tension between paid work and childcare using data from the 2007 Beijing Migrant Family Survey. The analysis shows that in response

Hunan, Guizhou and Guangxi. The survey provides rich socio-economic information on individuals, households and communities in the sample.

7. Public childcare programmes are more accessible to women with higher educational attainments because women with more education have a better chance of working in public organizations and large SOEs which continue to provide subsidized childcare services to their employees in the post-reform period.

to the growing demand of migrant families, private childcare services have grown rapidly in the migrant communities in Beijing. In line with the fact that migrant workers are concentrated in low-paying jobs, the childcare accessible to migrant families is typically characterized by charging low fees and providing low quality services. Most of the childcare facilities are non-registered because they do not satisfy the regulations on safety, sanitation, teacher qualification, student–teacher ratios, and so on. The presence of low-fee childcare appears to be important for migrant women's labour force participation. In interviews, many migrant women indicated that they have to stay at home, or choose self-employment or work irregular hours in order to look after pre-school children. Some working women expressed the view that if they could afford it, they would prefer to stay at home and take care of their children themselves because the childcare services accessible to migrant families are of poor quality. This viewpoint is evident in regression results: the probability that a mother does not participate in paid work and chooses to look after her children increases with the income level of the husband. This finding is thus indicative of the harsh choices women from low-income migrant families have to make, between earning an income and their children's well-being, in the absence of affordable, quality childcare programmes.

The tensions between work and childcare provision are felt not just by migrant women in the cities but also by women in low-income rural villages, where services that can substitute for family provision are generally unavailable and economic pressure to work is enormous. Wang and Dong (2010) investigate the impact of childcare on women's occupational choices in low-income villages using survey data covering 592 households from four state-designated 'poverty' counties in 2001. The authors find that in these low-income villages, grandmothers and older children are the only care substitutes available to women and the lack of access to affordable, decent childcare is a main obstacle to women's participation in off-farm employment. The authors estimate the effect of having young children on the likelihood of women and men participating in off-farm self-employment or wage employment versus farm work. The regression estimates show that, controlling for human capital and demographic characteristics, having an additional child under the age of six increases women's participation rate in agricultural production by 1.94 percentage points and reduces their participation in off-farm self-employment by 1.22 percentage points and in wage employment by 0.7 percentage points. With respect to work hours, having a child younger than six decreases a woman's participation in wage labour by about half an hour a day (-0.586 hour), amounting to more than a third of the difference in mean wage hours between men and women in the sample. These findings thus provide strong evidence that care for young children constitutes a barrier to women's access to more lucrative off-farm employment and wage work.

Care for Parents and Married Women's Labour Supply

The ageing of China's population has increased the burden of elderly care for Chinese families. According to official statistics, the proportion of the Chinese population aged seventy-five and above and eighty-five and above rose from 1.65 and 0.21 per cent respectively in 1990 to 3.39 and 0.53 per cent in 2008.⁸ If we assume that those eighty-five years and older are likely to require care and assistance in their day-to-day living, then the care implications of these numbers are clear. Looking at the relative care burdens of children and the elderly, we can see an interesting shift. While the ratio of the population aged nought to fourteen years to the working age population (fifteen to sixty-four years) fell sharply from 41.5 per cent in 1990 to 27.4 per cent in 2006, the ratio of the population aged seventy-five years or older to the working age population rose from 2.5 per cent to 4.7 per cent.

While research is still limited, some evidence exists for the impact on care givers. In a case study of 110 urban care givers for elderly parents in 1999, Zhan (2002, 2006) examines the impact of elderly care on the psychological well-being of care givers. The study shows that higher care burdens were reported by care givers with higher levels of disability, fewer siblings or lower household incomes. Care givers who were unemployed and had poor self-rated health reported higher levels of depression.

Liu, Dong and Zheng (2010) study the impact of caring for parents on married women's labour supply in urban China using data from the CHNS for the period 1993–2006. The study focuses on women aged between thirty-five and fifty-one years old, as adult children aged thirty-five or older are more likely to provide care to an elderly relative than those in the younger age group. To take into account the influence of patrilineal familial norms, the authors explore the differences between caring for parents and caring for parents-in-law. They argue that as a reflection of patrilineal norms, married Chinese women are expected to care for parents-in-law to gain their husbands' approval and support. Furthermore, the pressure to participate in paid work is likely to be greater for women who care for their own parents than those caring for their parents-in-law. This is because husbands would arguably be more supportive of wives foregoing employment or reducing paid work hours if they cared for their parents-in-law than if they cared for their own parents. Thus, the authors contend that, all else being equal, caring for parents has a less negative effect on the care giver's labour supply than does caring for parents-in-law.

The authors first explore the determinants for the care patterns classified as (a) not providing elderly care, (b) caring for own parents, and

8. The figures are from the 1990/2000 Population Census of the People's Republic of China for 1990–2000; China Population Statistics Yearbook for 2001 to 2005; and China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook for 2006–08 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2001, 2006, 2009).

(c) caring for parents-in-law. The regression results indicate that women confront competing care demands, not only between their own parents and their parents-in-law but also between older parents and their young children. Patrilineal norms still play a role in prioritizing care-provision responsibilities by adult children in that having a living mother-in-law reduces the probability of providing care for one's own parents, whilst it increases the probability of caring for parents-in-law. In addition, having a young child reduces the probability of a woman taking care of elderly parents and parents-in-law.

The authors next examine the impact that caring for parents has on women's employment status and labour supply. The regression results reveal marked differences between caring for parents and caring for parents-in-law: caring for parents does not affect the care giver's employment status and work hours, whereas caring for parents-in-law has a significant, sizeable negative effect on the care giver's probability of working and hours of work. This finding supports once again the contention that traditional patrilineal norms still play a role in shaping the intra-household allocation of care responsibilities in urban China. The result suggests that, intertwined with gender and familial norms, the effects of unpaid care are multifaceted. For those who provide care for parents-in-law, unpaid care work means the loss of income and employment-based entitlements to social welfare and security and thus leads to greater economic dependency and vulnerability. By contrast, for those who look after their own parents, unpaid care work implies longer work hours and less time available for rest, personal development and socializing. Regardless of what form it may take, women are paying the price for the rising elderly care burdens under the existing familial care system.

'Care Deficits' and the Well-being of Children and the Elderly in Rural Areas

Massive rural–urban migration has left behind tens of millions of children, non-elderly married women and elderly people. The gendered, generational patterns of internal migration tend to modify the household division of labour along gender and generational lines, with adverse implications for girls, their mothers and grandmothers. Using data from the CHNS for the period 1997–2006, Chang and Dong (2010) examine how labour migration affects the time-use patterns of left-behind wives, school-age children and elderly people. The study focuses on the amount of time that married women aged between sixteen and fifty years, elderly people aged fifty years or older, and children aged between seven and fourteen years spend on two types of activity: farm work and domestic work (including care provision). The authors find that because agricultural labour and land markets and social services are underdeveloped, labour migration has increased the work burdens of left-behind rural populations. Specifically, in the event a family

member migrates, an increase occurs in married women's time spent on farm work, children's time on domestic work, elderly men's time on farm work, and elderly women's time on both farm and domestic activities. Migration has striking gender differentiated impacts with the increase in work time being greater for elderly women and girls than for elderly men and boys. The presence of pre-school children also has a significant impact on time-use patterns, increasing the time spent on farm and domestic work for married women and the time spent on domestic work for school-age children and elderly men and women. The changing time-use patterns highlight the adverse effect of domestic responsibility on women's occupational choice and time autonomy and raise concerns about the quality of care provided for left-behind pre-schoolers, children's time available for school work and childhood development, and elderly people's time available for leisure and rest.

The rural economic transformation over the past three decades has also dramatically altered the patterns of labour force participation for rural women, exacerbating the tensions between the demands of work and childcare for working mothers. These tensions are commonly framed as involving a trade-off between the negative effect of reductions in the quantity as well as the quality of time spent on childcare and the positive effect of additional income (Glick and Sahn, 1998). The potential negative effects of maternal labour supply can be mitigated by making high quality maternal childcare substitutes widely accessible to rural households. Using data from the CHNS for the period 1991–2006, Liu and Dong (2010) estimate the effects of maternal labour supply and maternal childcare substitutes on the health status of pre-school children in rural areas using three anthropometric indicators: height-for-age Z score, weight-for-age Z score and age-adjusted body mass index (BMI). The results confirm the presence of a potential trade-off: increased time spent on paid work worsens children's health status, while the increased income accruing to the household partly through women's labour earnings⁹ improves children's health status. The overall impact will thus depend on which effect dominates.¹⁰ The results also indicate that maternal childcare substitutes in rural areas are of poor quality as increased non-parental childcare hours have a negative effect on child health status. Why would rural mothers engage in paid work given its negative consequence for children's health? In interviews by one of the authors, women claimed that

9. To reduce the required number of instrumental variables, the earnings of a wife and a husband are aggregated into one variable. As a result, the authors were unable to assess the increased earnings resultant from a mother's labour supply and the net effect of maternal labour supply on children's health.
10. In a separate study, Liu (2009) estimates the net effect of maternal labour supply on children's weight-for-age Z score using the CHNS data. She finds that the negative labour hour effect of maternal labour supply dominates its positive income effect and therefore maternal labour supply overall has a small but statistically significant negative effect on children's health.

they must work to earn enough money to offer their children a better education and to support the women themselves when they are old. The findings of this study once again shed light on the harsh choices women from disadvantaged socio-economic groups have to make between paid work and unpaid care work, and between meeting short-term economic needs and long-term investment in future capacity and human capital.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the reforms began in 1978, China's economic growth has been impressive and women as well as men have gained much from the new opportunities. However, studies on the process of economic transition indicate that women have been adversely affected in terms of their ability to participate equally in the new market-oriented economy. This article adds to the growing body of literature on gender and economic transition by looking at the social and economic trends that intensify the burden of care provision, and the pressures this places on women, in particular in their dual roles as care givers and income earners.

The article shows that the state's retreat from the sphere of reproduction during economic transition has exacerbated the weight of domestic responsibilities which women have to balance alongside their participation in the labour force, limiting their occupational choices and time autonomy. Women from disadvantaged socio-economic groups are most affected. Privatization and commercialization of childcare services not only limit the occupational choices of women from disadvantaged socio-economic groups but also deny their children access to quality childcare. Population ageing, in conjunction with the growing emphasis on Confucian values and family responsibility in policy circles, has exacerbated the dilemma for middle-aged, married women who attempt to fulfil multiple responsibilities as income earners as well as care givers for family members at different stages of the life cycle. Social dislocation associated with labour migration has increased work burdens of the left-behind middle-aged, married women, school-age children and elderly people. The emergence of off-farm wage employment and the lack of affordable, decent out-of-home childcare substitutes, force rural women with pre-school children into making harsh choices, intensifying the conflict between the employment of mothers and their children's well-being.

These choices may compromise the care and education of children as well as the care of the elderly. They also constrain women's labour force participation and options, and thus ultimately their own incomes and well-being. It is increasingly clear that women have been disproportionately pushed out of formal employment opportunities, are more likely to drop out of the labour market than men, and are concentrated in low paid, irregular forms of informal employment. While analysis on the side of labour demand suggests explanations arising both from human capital and discrimination,

the studies reported here point to the need for analysis of the supply-side constraints — particularly the need to balance care responsibilities — that undermine women's capacity to undertake wage employment. The longer-term outcome is that these women have limited access to social protections or pensions, thus perpetuating the care responsibilities of the next generation. Ultimately, a gendered approach to both social and labour market policies, with investments in support for social reproduction services, will be needed to break this cycle.

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