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THE CARE ECONOMY IN POST-REFORM CHINA: FEMINIST RESEARCH ON UNPAID AND PAID WORK AND WELL-BEING

Rachel Connelly, Xiao-yuan Dong, Joyce Jacobsen, and Yaohui Zhao

ABSTRACT

As China embarked on the path of economic and social reforms, social provisions from the Maoist era were dismantled, and care responsibilities shifted back from the state to the household. Rural–urban migration, a steep decline in fertility, and increasing longevity have led to changes in the age structure of the population both overall and by region. Using seven different surveys, the eleven contributions in this volume study the distributive consequences of post-reform care policies and the impact of unpaid care responsibilities on women’s and men’s opportunities and gender inequality. Overall, reduced care services have created care deficits for disadvantaged groups, including low-income rural elderly and children. The shifted care burden has also limited women’s ability to participate fully in the market economy and has contributed to rising gender inequalities in labor force participation, off-farm employment, earnings, pensions, and mental health outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Childcare, China reforms, eldercare, employment, gender inequality, unpaid work

JEL Codes: J16, N35, P36

INTRODUCTION

China’s economic reforms have brought about enormous economic growth and poverty reduction. The reforms have also led to increased inequalities across socioeconomic groups, as well as by gender. While the rise of socioeconomic and gender inequalities in post-reform China has been extensively analyzed, our knowledge about the role of women’s unpaid care responsibilities in this phenomenon remains limited. We also understand little about the dimensions of gender, rural and urban, age, and ethnicity in who does unpaid care work and who benefits from it. The contributions in this volume aim to assist in closing that knowledge gap. This introductory

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essay examines the care policies and arrangements that have emerged in China's post-reform period and their distributive consequences and the impact of unpaid care responsibilities on women's opportunities and gender equality.

Feminist Economics published a previous special issue on China in 2007, focused on gender and trade liberalization. At that time, Chinese data available to study caring labor were minimal to nonexistent. Since then, there have been an increasing number of comprehensive and reliable surveys that can be brought to bear on this topic.¹ The eleven contributions in this volume utilize seven different surveys for their projects, and this relative richness of data now means that we can understand the dynamics of caring labor and gender inequality in a way that was unattainable only ten years ago. The research projects reflected in this volume examine the transformation of the care economy in post-reform China and its implications for gender equality and inclusive growth. The term "care" is used to refer to the daily work, both paid and unpaid, of producing and maintaining human resources, including housework and the care of children, the sick, and the elderly (Razavi 2007). The time and effort involved in the daily work of caring for oneself and others are essential for the capabilities and well-being of individuals as well as the functioning of society and the economy (Folbre and Nelson 2000; Carneiro and Heckman 2003). The term "care economy" is used to refer to the ways in which care is provided, financed, and regulated. Care can be purchased from the market or provided through the household, community, and civil society arrangements; the state can also play a role in financing and provision (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD] 2010). In most countries, care work is predominately undertaken by women at home and is largely unpaid.

The time and effort demands of unpaid care work limits women's ability to participate equally with men in the labor market (Çağatay, Elson, and Grown 1995). Women of low socioeconomic status are particularly impacted by this unequal distribution, as they have less income to purchase care services from the market, often have more children and higher rates of morbidity among family members, and have less access to social services that can help reduce the burden of care (Razavi 2007). The double burden of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities likely deprives workers of adequate time to meet their basic needs for rest and leisure, a phenomenon termed "time poverty" (Vickery 1977). Substantial work has been done to measure time poverty around the world. Women are almost always shown to suffer from higher rates of time poverty than men (Bardasi and Wodon 2010; Chatzitheochari and Arber 2012; Zacharias, Masterson, and Kim 2014; Zacharias, Masterson, and Memis 2014; Antonopoulos et al. 2017).

On a macro level, unpaid care work remains unrecognized and undervalued. Indeed, the issue of care is largely absent from the policy

agendas in most developing countries, where care provision is commonly perceived as women's natural duty and a private matter for families (Benería, Berik, and Floro 2016). Ignoring the care work of women can lead to government policies that create incentives for market work for women, often further adding to the burden on women's time (Benería, Berik, and Floro 2016).

"Fixing" the undervaluing and the inequality in terms of who delivers care work is particularly complicated. Feminist scholars have expressed concern that moving more care into the marketplace leads to a commodification of unpaid care services, which may perpetuate the social and economic disadvantages of having a heavily feminized and poorly paid domestic workforce (Matthaei 2001; Klemm et al. 2011). There are also concerns regarding the total amount of care work provided, who gets more or less care (leading to measured care deficits for some groups in society, including, in particular, poorer children and some or all of the elderly, sick, and disabled), and who provides relatively more or less of both care work and other forms of work (Connelly and Kongar 2017).

Unpaid care work has been identified as a key margin for policy interventions. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 United Nations 4th World Conference on Women, called for member nations to take measures to recognize the value of unpaid care work, reduce the burden of unpaid care work, and encourage a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work within the household (United Nations 1996). Goal 5 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) includes a target for recognizing and valuing unpaid care work (United Nations 2015).

Meanwhile, the care economy in post-reform China has undergone dramatic transformations. Before the reforms during the Maoist era, the state, urban employers, and rural collectives all played a role in care provision (along with families). In the course of reform, social provisions from the Maoist era were dismantled, and more of the care responsibilities were returned to families. The burden of care on women was further intensified by other socioeconomic trends. The structural change that has transformed the Chinese economy from an agrarian to an increasingly industrialized and urbanized one changed the nature of employment for rural women, heightening the tension on them in performing their dual roles as caregivers and income earners. The loosening of restrictions on firms' hiring and firing decisions has led to an increase in labor market discrimination against women. Rural-to-urban labor migration has left behind a large population of young children and elderly people, putting pressure on family care providers – mostly mothers and grandmothers – in the rural sector. China's transition into an increasingly aged society has further increased care burdens on families who provide the vast majority of eldercare. Nevertheless, there are other economic and social trends that help lessen the burden of care. Rapid income growth provides Chinese

families with more resources to pay for care services, simultaneously creating new employment opportunities for women. China's impressive infrastructural development and increased household incomes contribute to reducing the drudgery of domestic chores. Rapid fertility decline, compounded by the long-standing one-child policy, reduces the need for childcare. However, the extent to which women are affected positively or negatively by these social and economic trends depends upon their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

This essay, after providing an overview of the economic reforms and institutional arrangements of care provision in China, examines changes in China's care policies and arrangements and their potential impacts on the well-being of both care recipients and caregivers, as well as considers lessons that can be learned from the eleven analyses contained in this volume. The goal is to provide an overarching framework within which we can understand the eleven contributions and to offer policy measures that could lessen the burden of care on women and reduce care deficits for the disadvantaged.

TRENDS AND POLICY CHANGES IN THE REFORM ERA

As in most countries, in China, families assume a central role in care provision, and women are the major caregivers. However, during the Maoist era (1949–76), many care roles and responsibilities were taken over by the government in order to mobilize women to participate in the formal labor force. In the urban sector, the state provided women employees with paid maternity leave, access to on-site breastfeeding rooms, and subsidized childcare programs through their employers (work-units; Liu, Zhang, and Li 2008). Social support for care of the elderly, sick, and disabled was also provided through pensions, public healthcare, subsidized housing, and retirees' service centers. State-provided services for rural residents were more limited than those for urban residents, and, due to the household registration system, which issued identification cards (*hukou*) that were designated urban or rural to everyone at birth, rural residents were restricted from moving to the cities. Rural residents and their families relied on collectives for access to social services. The main services of these collectives were subsidized primary and secondary education and access to basic healthcare (Perkins and Yusuf 1984). The role of rural collectives in direct care provision was quite limited; it mainly involved temporary daycare during the busy farming season and the provision of social assistance and nursing homes for orphans, the disabled, and the childless elderly. Care for children, the elderly, and the sick in rural areas was thus primarily undertaken within the household on an intergenerational basis. Because the vast majority of the rural labor force was engaged in agricultural production, which allows greater flexibility in location and

work schedule, the needs of employed women in rural areas for socialized care services were not as great as those in cities.

In 1978, China embarked on a transition from a planned to a market economy. During the first two decades of the economic and social reform, the primary concerns of the Chinese government were to stimulate traditionally measured economic growth and improve the efficiency of the economy through gradual liberalization measures. Because income inequality was quite low at the time, distributional concerns, including those related to gender equity, were secondary considerations. Analysts have noticed a close resemblance of China's development strategy to those pursued by the East Asian development states, including Japan and South Korea (White 1998). In the early stages of development, these development states had directed resources to capital accumulation for building a competitive industrial base, while relegating the provision of welfare and care to the household to keep expenditures on social welfare low. The emphasis on the household's responsibility for care provision was often justified with reference to Confucian cultural tradition (Shang and Wu 2011; Cook and Dong 2017). Consequently, the reform process undid many of the mechanisms that had socialized care roles and responsibilities under Mao, and the Confucian patriarchal values, which had been somewhat suppressed under Mao, reemerged, leading to a more widespread acceptance of traditional gender roles (Yee 2001). These changes, therefore, reversed many of the gains experienced by women during the Mao period (see Berik, Dong, and Summerfield [2007] for a literature review on gender and economic transition in China).

In the urban sector, economic decentralization and the privatization of state-owned enterprises and urban collectives brought an end to the era of "cradle-to-grave" socialism and lifetime employment for urban employees. The rapid expansion of private/informal sectors eroded the state's regulatory ability to protect women in their reproductive role. The public sector restructuring also led to a substantial decline in the support from the state and employers for childcare and eldercare (Liu, Zhang, and Li 2008). As childcare services became more expensive and less accessible, employed mothers with young children increasingly sought support from their extended families, mostly grandparents (Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011), or reduced their own labor market attachment (Junsen Zhang et al. 2008; Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011). The Chinese social pension system is employment based; pension receipt is determined by years of employment and wage levels during employment. Thus, when women reduce their labor market attachment in order to fulfill caregiving responsibilities, the financial consequences are exacerbated in old age (Zhao and Zhao 2018).

In the rural sector, reforms began with the implementation of the household responsibility system in the late 1970s, which led to the dismantling of collectives. The implementation of this system was followed

by the expansion of off-farm employment in Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) from the mid 1980s, and these enterprises were rapidly privatized in the mid to late 1990s. The dismantling of collectives and privatization of TVEs reduced the fiscal revenues of local governments, thereby weakening their ability to provide public goods and social services for the rural population (Cook 2006). Between 1995 and 2003, the number of childcare and preschool programs in rural areas fell sharply from 10,700 to 5,000 (Cook and Dong 2011). Without access to out-of-home care substitutes, rural women have to make difficult choices between foregoing the opportunity to participate in higher paying off-farm employment and leaving some care needs unaddressed.

Since the early 1990s, rural–urban migration has become the most common way through which rural workers get a job off the farm (de Brauw et al. 2002). While restrictions on labor movement to cities were gradually relaxed, the government has remained cautious about decoupling welfare provision and *hukou* status. The result is that migrant workers face substantial difficulties accessing social services in their destination areas and, as such, mostly leave their children and disabled or elderly parents behind in their rural homes. According to the 2010 population census, 61 million children under 18 years old – 40 percent of all rural children – were left behind. Thus, they lived with only one parent (mostly mothers), grandparents, or other relatives. Nearly half of the left-behind children were separated from both parents (National Bureau of Statistics of China, United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], and UNICEF 2013). In recent years, as the *hukou* system has been further relaxed, rural couples more often migrate together and take their children with them (Yang and Chen 2013). The 2010 population census shows that 9 million migrant children under 7 years of age lived with their parents in cities, representing 26 percent of urban children in this age group (National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNFPA, and UNICEF 2013). Having access to affordable, high-quality childcare is crucial for migrant mothers to participate in paid work. As has been well documented, economic reforms – while bringing about rapid income growth and lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty – have dramatically increased a wide range of income, wealth, and access inequalities (Li, Sicular, and Zhao 2013). At the turn of the new century, the Chinese government increased efforts to bring equity and social development back into the policy agenda. A series of policy measures were initiated to support the rural sector and less-developed regions and to expand the coverage of social safety nets. A new social security system for the rural population, which includes a new cooperative healthcare program, a minimum living allowance (*dibao*) system, and a new rural pension program, was established (Li 2011). In 2010, the Chinese government pledged to expand early childhood education programs to poor rural counties and rural areas in central and western provinces and to

cover the costs of migrant children education in urban areas (State Council 2010). In June 2010, the State Council (a thirty-five-member body, similar in function to a cabinet, which serves as the chief administrative authority for the state) announced that the *hukou* system would gradually be replaced by a system of residence permits that would enable rural residents to enjoy the same social security benefits as urban residents. The gradual delinking of *hukou* status from access to social security has accelerated the pace of family migration (Yang and Chen 2013), although migrant families' access to public services remains limited by their neighborhood of residence and high housing costs.

Population policy reform and demographic change is another important dimension of the post-reform transformation that has reshaped care needs and provision. The one-child policy was enacted in 1980 as a means to slow population growth and promote economic growth. While the one-child policy was strictly enforced in urban areas, in some rural areas, a second child was permitted if the firstborn was a girl, and in the least developed interior regions a second child was permitted regardless of the sex of the first child. At the same time, the rapid growth of better paying off-farm employment and the increasing demand but rising cost of primary education created the economic incentive for rural women to have fewer children (Chen and Summerfield 2007). There is a lively debate in the literature about how much the one-child policy *caused* the fertility decline (Feng, Cai, and Gu 2013; Goodkind 2017). But, for the purpose of our analysis, all that matters is that fertility did decline, from 2.3 in 1980 to 1.6 in 2015, which lowered the need for childcare provision. However, steep declines in fertility, combined with longer life expectancy, have dramatically increased the proportion of aged dependents. Indeed, the percentage of the population ages 65 years and older increased from about 5 percent to over 10 percent between 1982 and 2014 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2015), which has increased the care needs of the elderly.

To boost fertility and slow the population-aging process, the long-standing one-child policy was formally replaced by a new policy in 2016 that allows (even encourages) all couples to have two children. While increased fertility may aid in the stabilization of the age structure in the long run (if enough couples actually choose to have two children), in the short run, population aging will continue to occur at a very rapid rate for many years. This population-aging process is putting tremendous pressure on the labor market and the provision of employer and government pensions and has led to calls for changes in the official retirement-age policy. China's retirement-age thresholds are low by international standards, at 50 for blue-collar women employees, 55 for white-collar women employees, and 60 for men. These thresholds were established in the 1950s, when life expectancy at birth was less than 50 years old. The relatively low

retirement age lowers the opportunity costs of caring for grandchildren or elderly parents for middle-aged people, and grandparents' involvement in childcare is essential for women with young children to stay in the labor market in the post-reform period. However, a low retirement age places tremendous stress on social security programs. In recent years, the proposal to increase the retirement age has gained currency. If realized, this policy change is expected to reduce the availability of middle-aged people as caregivers, and, without an increase in the supply of affordable out-of-home childcare services, one suspects that reproductive-age Chinese couples will hesitate to have a second child.

CARE POLICIES, ARRANGEMENTS, AND DEFICITS

How have China's care policies and care arrangements changed in the post-reform period, and how have these changes affected the manner in which the care needs of the disadvantaged are addressed, particularly in the three policy areas of maternity leave, childcare provision, and eldercare provision?

Maternity leave

In the post-reform era, a series of new regulations have been introduced to safeguard women's employment and reproductive rights in the new market economy (Jia, Dong, and Song 2018; this volume). The Labor Law adopted in 1995 stipulated that employers shall not lay off women employees or lower their wages for reasons of marriage, pregnancy, maternity leave, or breastfeeding. The Labor Contract Law enacted in 2008 introduced the provision that prohibits employers from unilaterally terminating labor contracts with women employees who are pregnant, give birth, or care for a baby postpartum. Under the two labor laws, all women wage employees are entitled to job-protected maternity leave.

Maternity leave benefits have undergone a series of improvements in the post-reform period, to the point that they now compare favorably with the most generous policies currently found in other countries. The length of paid maternity leave was extended from 56 days prior to reform to 90 days in 1988, and to 98 days in 2012. The paid maternity leave duration was further extended to a minimum of 128 days in 2016, after the long-standing one-child policy was replaced by the universal two-child policy. However, the maternity leave provision does not benefit all employed mothers. While permanent employees in the state sector receive maternity leave benefits, most state-sector employees on a short-term contract do not have such benefits. The coverage of paid leave in private sectors is much lower because there are no effective means of enforcing labor market regulations in private sectors (Liu, Zhang, and Li 2008). The erosion of the state's

capacity to protect women's reproductive role has led to increased disparity in access to paid maternity leave among Chinese women, as women of lower socioeconomic status, such as less-skilled workers and migrant workers, are concentrated in the informal/private sectors, where paid maternity leave benefits are generally unavailable.

Using data from the third wave of the Survey on Chinese Women's Social Status (SCWSS) conducted in 2010, Nan Jia, Xiao-yuan Dong, and Yue-ping Song (2018; this volume) document trends in paid maternity leave and estimate the effect of paid maternity leave on breastfeeding duration in urban China from 1988 to 2008. The analysis shows that for 1988–97 and 1998–2008, the proportion of employed urban mothers who took paid leave at the time surrounding their most recent birth decreased from 66.3 to 59.6 percent. The proportion of mothers taking paid leave among employed women with a college education fell slightly from 91.6 to 88.0 percent, and the mean duration of paid leave for these mothers remained unchanged, at 107 days. In contrast, the proportion of mothers taking paid leave among employed women without a college education declined markedly from 57.7 to 36.0 percent, and the mean duration of paid leave for these mothers fell by 23 days, from 62 to 39 days.

The decline in paid-leave coverage among non-college-educated mothers has intensified the trade-off between income earning and infant nurturing confronted by these mothers. The duration of paid maternity leave has a strong positive effect on a mother's ability to sustain breastfeeding. If the length of paid leave increases by 30 days, then the probability of breastfeeding for at least six months increases by 12 percentage points for all mothers in the sample. Based on this estimate, a 23-day decline in the mean duration of paid leave among non-college-educated mothers would reduce their probability of breastfeeding for at least six months by 9 percentage points. In light of the well-recognized health benefits of breastfeeding for children (World Health Organization [WHO] 2003), the rising disparity in access to paid maternity leave creates health disadvantages across generations.

Childcare provision

Under Mao, the state and employers played an important role in childcare provision (He and Jiang 2008). In the post-reform period, low-cost childcare provided by state and collectively owned firms (*danwei*) has been severely reduced. Enterprise surveys show that only 5 percent of companies surveyed provided a breastfeeding room for women employees and that less than 6 percent ran childcare programs (Cook and Dong 2017). Moreover, public expenditures on pre-primary school education were low, as they accounted for only 1.3 percent of the total public education expenditures in the 2000s (Lu 2013). In the face of the dramatic

decrease of publicly funded childcare programs, private kindergartens have grown rapidly. For instance, from 1998 to 2013, the share of private kindergartens in China rose from 17.0 to 67.2 percent. Because of China's high rates of mothers' labor force participation coupled with the competitiveness of their education system, about 70 percent of children ages 4–6 were enrolled in preschool/kindergarten in China in 2012 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2015), which is higher than in many developing countries, although still not as high as in, say, western Europe, where nine out of ten 4-year-olds and 78 percent of 3-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD] 2017).

One important concern about the shift from publicly subsidized to for-profit and commercialized childcare provision is that the latter may create cost barriers for low-income families. Indeed, studies show that family income is a significant determinant of childcare utilization by urban Chinese families in the post-reform period (Du and Dong 2013; Gong, Xu, and Han 2015). Yueping Song and Xiao-yuan Dong (2018; this volume) find that childcare costs, maternal wage, and unearned incomes are the most significant determinants of the childcare utilization rates of migrant and local urban families with children under 7 years old. Childcare utilization is highly sensitive to childcare costs; a 1-percent increase in childcare costs lowers the childcare utilization rate by 1.1 percent for migrant families and 1.5 percent for local urban families.

The lack of out-of-home childcare services is a major issue for rural parents, particularly in low-income villages. Because the limited public spending on pre-primary education is concentrated in county centers, there is little public investment at the township level or below. As such, children ages 3–5 years in poor villages generally have no access to pre-primary education (Lu 2013). Statistics show that while 55 percent of Chinese children lived in rural areas, they accounted for only 34.4 percent of total kindergarten enrollments in 2012 (Cook and Dong 2017).

A study based on the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS) shows that from 1991 to 2011, the proportion of rural children who were cared for by daycare or preschool programs and by grandparents increased from 11.0 to 26.4 percent and from 27.2 to 48.4 percent, respectively (Chang, Dong, and MacPhail 2017). Owing to massive labor migration, the proportion of preschool-age children who were left behind by both parents and in grandparents' full custody rose sharply, from 3.6 to 26.6 percent. The study also finds that daycare and preschool programs are more likely to be found in villages where income levels are higher, where a larger proportion of the labor force has migrated to other areas, and where there is telephone service and bus stops. Thus, access to daycare and preschool programs is more limited in less developed, more remote villages.

Eldercare provision

As in many countries in the world, provision of care for the elderly in China is primarily the family's responsibility. 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 offense for an adult child to refuse to perform her or his proper duty to support an aged family member (Palmer 1995). In line with the approach to childcare, the post-reform eldercare policy discourse stresses both family responsibility and the role of markets for care provision. The Law of Elderly Rights and Security, which was enacted in 1996, reiterates that care for frail elderly parents is a nonevadable responsibility of adult children. The role of the state in eldercare provision continued to be limited to financing and operating nursing homes only for the elderly and the disabled who have no spouse or children. This policy is, however, gender insensitive, in that while women tend to outlive their spouses, they are more likely than men to have been married and have children and therefore are not eligible for state-sponsored care services.

The aging of the Chinese population and the change of the household structure have undermined the familial nature of eldercare provision. In response to the challenge of population aging, the 12th 5-Year Development Plan for Social Services System for Old Persons (2011–15) proposed to socialize eldercare services through the development of eldercare markets, nonprofit organizations, and voluntary service providers. The new model of eldercare that the plan envisioned is one that has home-based care as the key component, supplemented by community-based services and complemented by institutional care (*jujiayanglao*). According to the plan, the expansion of paid domestic service and care for the elderly will create 7.1 million new jobs.

Indeed, the market for domestic services in China has grown rapidly since the mid 1990s: some 15–20 million employees, mostly women migrants, now earn a living by cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children, the elderly, and the sick for urban families (Hu 2010). Although paid domestic work provides a better-paying alternative to farmwork for migrant workers, as in many other countries, paid domestic work in China is a low-status, low-paid job relative to other urban occupations. Xiao-yuan Dong, Jin Feng, and Yangyang Yu (2017) find that paid domestic workers in Shanghai – particularly those caring for the elderly – earned 20–28 percent less than other employees in the services sector with similar human capital characteristics.

Another concern about the commodification of eldercare services is that paid care services only meet the needs of those who can afford to pay, leaving the needs of low-income elderly people unaddressed. To address this concern, in some more developed areas, local governments

have assumed responsibility for eldercare by purchasing domestic and care services from the private sector (Shang and Wu 2011).

Xinxin Chen et al. (2018; this volume) examine the gender patterns of care provision for the disabled elderly in China, using data from the 2011 wave of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS). Their analyses show that the family-centered traditional eldercare regime remains the mainstay and that this care regime is inadequate for meeting the care needs of the disabled elderly, particularly elderly women. The authors estimate that 26.8 percent of women age 60 years and older and 19.4 percent of men in this age group have difficulties in daily living and require care. However, 11 percent of those who are in need of care do not receive it, and 68 percent of the neglected are women. Further analyses reveal striking gender differences in how the infirm elderly are cared for, mainly owing to the much higher likelihood that women will outlive their husbands than vice versa. Other things being equal, infirm elderly men are 10 percent more likely than elderly women to be cared for by a spouse, while infirm elderly women are 8 percent more likely to be cared by adult children. This gendered pattern of eldercare provision places elderly women in a disadvantaged position for two reasons. First, spouse-provided care is arguably more reliable than the care provided by adult children because altruistic motives tend to be stronger in the former than the latter. Second, women's greater reliance on adult children for care provision places rural elder women at higher risk of having no one to take care of them if their children migrate to cities and leave them behind, a problem which will get worse as the generation with only one or two children ages into the elderly category.

CARE PROVISION AND MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES

How has the burden of care affected Chinese women's opportunities and gender equality in the labor market? China's rapid economic growth in the post-reform period has undoubtedly created new economic opportunities for both women and men. However, it appears that women have not benefited equally, and gender gaps in both employment and earnings have increased markedly. According to the 1990 and 2010 SCWSS, the employment rates for men and women ages 18–64 in the urban sector were 90 and 76.3 percent, respectively, in 1990, and they fell to 80.5 and 60.8 percent, respectively, in 2010 (Liu 2013). Thus, in the span of twenty years, the gender employment gap increased by 6.6 percentage points, from 13.7 to 20.3 percent. The earnings gap between women and men also widened, despite an upward trend in wages in absolute terms for both sexes. In 1990, the ratio of women's earnings to men's was 77.5 percent in the urban sector and 79 percent in the rural sector. In 2010, the earnings ratio dropped

to 67.3 percent in the urban sector and 56 percent in the rural sector. Ironically, the rise of gender gaps in employment and earnings has been associated with impressive improvement in women's education. In 1980, women accounted for 23.4 percent of total college enrollments, and their share rose to 50.8 percent in 2010 (Liu 2013). Similar gains have been made in rural areas at the graduating from middle school and attending high school levels (Connelly and Zheng 2010). Closing the gender disparity in education is apparently insufficient to reduce gender inequalities in the labor market.

Studies have endeavored to investigate to what extent the increased gender gaps in employment and earnings are attributable to the rising difficulty women have experienced in reconciling paid work–family conflicts. Margaret Maurer-Fazio et al. (2011) find that the labor force participation rate of prime-age urban women with preschool children fell about 10 percentage points between 1990 and 2000, and co-residence with grandparents became an increasingly important determinant for prime-age urban women to stay in the labor market. Fenglian Du and Xiao-yuan Dong (2013) report that the presence of daycare centers in a community has a positive effect on the labor force participation of urban women with preschool children and that the decline in daycare provision accounted for 46 percent of the decrease in maternal labor force participation during the period of state-sector restructuring between 1997 and 2000. Lan Liu, Xiao-yuan Dong, and Xiaoying Zheng (2010), in their study of the impact of caring for elderly parents on the labor supply of married women in cities, find that while caring for one's own parents does not affect a woman's employment status and work hours, caring for a parent-in-law has a significant, sizable negative effect on a woman's participation in paid work and work hours in urban China. Lu Chen et al. (2015) note that married women who spent more than 15 hours per week on caring for elderly parents are less likely to participate in the labor force, and that intensive caregivers who remained in the labor force spent significantly fewer hours on paid work each week than other women employees.

Evidence also shows that care responsibilities limit rural women's occupational choices and contribute to widening the gender gap in access to better paid off-farm employment. Hongqin Chang, Fiona MacPhail, and Xiao-yuan Dong (2011) find that having children under the age of 6 increases the time spent in agriculture for women, but has no effect on men, indicating that women's caregiving responsibilities are a driving force of the feminization of agricultural production. Rachel Connelly, Kenneth Roberts, and Zhenzhen Zheng (2012) and Fangbin Qiao et al. (2015) report that having school-aged children has a negative effect on rural women's migration decisions, perhaps because mother's presence is needed to assist their children with school work. John Giles and Ren Mu (2007) find evidence that caring for the disabled elderly also affects

men. According to their analyses, the health status of elderly parents has a negative effect on the migration probability of both men and women adult children and that the negative effect is stronger for men than women.

Women's unpaid care responsibilities not only adversely affect their employment and occupational choices, but also reduce their earnings. For instance, Nan Jia and Xiao-yuan Dong (2013) find that mothers earned considerably less than childless women with the same observable human capital characteristics in urban China. The wage losses associated with motherhood increased substantially following state-sector restructuring in 1997, and much of the increase was observed in non-state sectors. Liangshu Qi and Xiao-yuan Dong (2016) report not only that women spend more hours on unpaid care work than men, but also that women's paid work time is more likely to be interrupted by unpaid care work. Holding constant other factors, both women and men earn less income if they spend more time on unpaid care work and/or if their paid work is interrupted by unpaid work. Results regarding the gender-earnings decomposition show that the gender differences in time spent on unpaid care work and its interference with paid work account for 28 percent of the gender earnings gap, which is greater than the effect of gender differences in education and occupation. Similarly, Yuping Zhang, Emily Hannum, and Meiyan Wang (2008) show that women's family responsibilities play a greater role than their disadvantages in human capital in accounting for gender inequalities in employment and wages in the post-reform labor market.

The contributions to this volume add to the growing literature on care and women's paid work in post-reform China by exploring the experience of some of the marginalized and understudied segments of the Chinese population. These studies analyze the interrelations between care provision and women's choices from an intergenerational perspective and explore the intersectionality of gender, age, the rural-urban divide, and religious and ethnic norms across the domestic and public spheres of work. For example, the rapid expansion of off-farm employment (locally or through labor migration) in the post-reform period fueled sharp rises in labor productivity and income for rural women and men, providing them with an effective means to escape poverty. However, Niels Spierings (2014) shows that caregiving responsibilities hinder caregivers' ability to participate in the labor force, and the impact of caregiving varies not only by gender but also by age, location, and social contexts.

Sai Ding, Xiao-yuan Dong, and Margaret Maurer-Fazio (2018; this volume) explore the intersectionality of gender, religious and ethnic norms, and intergenerational relations that shape the division of labor within the household in rural China's minority-concentrated regions using data from the 2012 China Ethnicity Household Survey (CHES). The authors compare the choices of Muslim and non-Muslim rural married women and men at reproductive ages (18–45) related to farmwork,

local off-farm paid work, and nonlocal off-farm paid work. According to summary statistics, Muslim households have lower per capita incomes and higher rates of poverty than non-Muslim households. The gender gap in rates of off-farm employment is much larger for Muslims than non-Muslims. Muslim mothers appear to receive less support than non-Muslim mothers for childcare from adult men in the household. For non-Muslim households, both grandfathers and grandmothers facilitate the ability of parents (men and women) to migrate for paid work. Thus, although childcare needs and access to grandparent-provided childcare are significant determinants of the likelihood of reproductive-age women to participate in off-farm employment for both groups, the choices of Muslim women are more constrained by gendered caregiving roles than those of non-Muslim women.

Using the CHARLS 2011 data, Shangyi Mao, Rachel Connelly, and Xinxin Chen (2018; this volume) explore the interrelationship between caregiving and off-farm employment for women and men ages 45–65 in rural China. People in this age group face the trade-off of taking care of their elderly parents and/or helping their adult children with childcare versus employment on or off the farm. Indeed, 45 percent of women and 39 percent of men in the sample provide care for grandchildren or elderly parents. Such care work is time intensive. The estimates show that taking care of grandchildren decreases the off-farm employment rate of rural middle-aged men and women. Conditional on being employed off farm, it also reduces the hours of off-farm paid work. Moreover, caring for grandchildren statistically significantly reduces annual earnings by RMB 1,913 per year for men and RMB 945 for women. Caregiving for parents does not have the same negative effects on off-farm employment participation, paid work hours worked, and earnings. These results indicate that caring for grandchildren entails substantial opportunity costs for grandparents. In the absence of a well-developed social security system, the economic sacrifice of rural middle-aged people would make them vulnerable to economic deprivation in old age if their children were unwilling or unable to provide support for them if they were incapacitated.

In urban settings, where paid work is generally inflexible with respect to location and time, access to nonmaternal childcare is a precondition for the labor force participation of women with young children. Migrant families are less likely than local urban families to have extended families living nearby to help them with childcare, or owing to the *hukou* system, to have access to publicly subsidized childcare programs. Furthermore, migrant workers are concentrated in low-paying job sectors, which hampers their ability to pay for commercialized care services (Meng 2012). Maurer-Fazio et al. (2011) find that, in 2000, rural prime-age women living in urban areas had a labor force participation rate nearly 10 percentage points lower than urban residents in the same age range.

Song and Dong (2018) estimate the effect of childcare costs on the labor force participation of migrant and local mothers of preschool-aged children in urban China by using data from the 2010 National Dynamic Monitoring Survey of Floating Populations. The estimates show that childcare costs have a strong negative effect on the labor force participation for both migrant and local mothers and that the labor force participation of migrant mothers is slightly more sensitive to changes in childcare costs than that of local mothers. Specifically, a 1-percent increase in childcare costs decreases migrant mothers' and local mothers' labor force participation by 0.301 and 0.229 percent, respectively.

Meanwhile, household caregivers also continue to reduce their labor force participation. Using data from the CHARLS conducted in 2011–12, Yafeng Wang and Chuanchuan Zhang (2018; this volume) estimate the impacts of caring for grandchildren and elderly parents on the labor supply of women and men ages 45–65 in urban China. In the sample, 60 percent of middle-aged women and 45 percent of middle-aged men were engaged in grandchild care, while 26 percent of women and 24 percent of men provided care for elderly parents. In terms of labor supply, 74 percent of men and 54 percent of women participated in the labor force. The majority of men and women workers were employed on a full-time basis, spending 45.8 and 40.7 hours per week on paid work, respectively.

The regression analyses show that caring for grandchildren is associated with a 5.8-percentage-point decline in labor force participation for women, and, conditional on their being in the labor force, caring for grandchildren reduces women's labor supply by 10 hours per week. In contrast, there is no statistically significant association between grandchild care and labor supply for men. Thus, unlike their rural counterparts, urban middle-aged men do not adjust their employment to accommodate the need for grandchild care. For both women and men, there are also no statistically significant relationships between caring for elderly parents and labor supply. Caring for elderly urban parents appears to be more flexible and less intensive than caring for a preschool child, a finding that is parallel to that of Mao, Connelly, and Chen (2018) for rural areas.

Similarly, the analysis by Wang and Zhang (2018) shows that in the post-reform period, urban grandparents' involvement in childcare has cushioned the negative effect of the declining supply of low-cost childcare services on maternal employment, though at their own expense, and the economic sacrifice is particularly large for grandmothers. From a household perspective, this gendered intergenerational division of labor seems rational because the opportunity costs of childcare are higher for fathers than mothers and for parents than grandparents. However, from the perspective of the caregivers, unpaid care work hinders their ability to earn income and accumulate wealth, thereby forcing them to rely on spouses and adult children for support in daily life and old age. Moreover,

because women bear the primary responsibility for unpaid care work, gender inequalities in the labor market are exacerbated.

TIME POVERTY AND MENTAL HEALTH

According to the analyses by Mao, Connelly, and Chen (2018) and Wang and Zhang (2018), caring for elderly parents has no significant effect on the employment and earnings of middle-aged women and men. But this does not mean that caring for the elderly has no economic cost. For those whose employment does not appear to be affected by their caregiving responsibilities, the sacrifice of caring for others may take the form of a “time crunch,” owing to the need to cope with the simultaneous demands of a job, the household, and eldercare.

In China, as is the case globally, women’s total work burden is heavier than men’s. Based on the 2008 China Time Use Survey (CTUS), Liangshu Qi and Xiao-yuan Dong (2018; this volume) find that whereas both employed women and men in the urban sector work for pay on a full-time basis, women’s average weekly hours of unpaid care work are double men’s. Consequently, the total work time of employed women is higher than that of their men counterparts by 8.7 hours per week, leading to concerns that women experience time poverty at higher rates than men do. The time-use decisions of workers with family responsibilities are shaped not only by those constraints affecting unpaid work time, such as gender roles and access to affordable care services, but also by those constraints influencing paid work time, such as labor market regulations and workplace practice.

Using synthetic data from the 2008 CTUS and the 2008 Chinese Household Income Profile, Qi and Dong (2018) estimate time-poverty rates and compare the profiles of time-poor men and women workers in urban China. The authors introduce three time-poverty indicators to differentiate those who work excessively long hours for pay by choice from those who have no choice but to work long hours for pay to escape income poverty. Results show that women are more likely than men to be time poor (that is, spending more than 68 hours on paid and unpaid work each week), at a rate of 37.6 percent for women and 18.9 percent for men.

The regression estimates show that the probability of being time poor is positively correlated with personal characteristics such as being a woman, being a low-paid worker, being married, and living with preschool- and school-age children or the elderly. Moreover, time poverty is more rampant in counties with higher overtime-work rates and lower minimum wage standards, indicating that long paid work hours and low earnings are among the driving forces of the high incidence of time poverty among Chinese workers. Simulations indicate that raising the minimum wage standard to 60 percent of the provincial median wage and enforcing work time regulations could reduce time poverty.

Lan Liu, Fiona MacPhail, and Xiao-yuan Dong (2018; this volume) investigate how work burden, including both paid work and unpaid care work time, affects the mental health of urban prime-age workers by using data from the 2010 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). Based on six-item mental health scores, statistics show that gender differences in mental health exist, with women's mental health being worse than men's. The regression results indicate that long paid work hours and time poverty are negatively related to the mental health of both women and men. Additional analyses show that the gender gap in total work hours and the likelihood of being time poor account for 25.9 and 18.5 percent of the gender gap in mental health scores, respectively.

Liu, MacPhail, and Dong (2018) further explore the gendered relationship between the separate components of work burden – namely, paid work and unpaid care work – and mental health. The investigation is motivated by the question of why women spend a much greater amount of time on unpaid care work than men and, therefore, have a heavier work burden, even though women and men spend similar amounts of time on paid work. Because of the legacy under Mao, there is widespread support and acceptance of women participating in paid work (Zuo and Bian 2001). However, the traditional mentality that domestic care is a natural duty of women endures. Men, thus, resist taking on more unpaid care work, and women hesitate to negotiate a more equal distribution of care burden and leisure time (Pimentel 2006). As such, the paid work–mental health relationship may not be gendered because paid work is socially expected of both women and men; however, the relationship between unpaid care work and mental health may differ between women and men because doing unpaid work is in conflict with a masculine identity, but consistent with a feminine identity. The regression analysis estimates show that paid work hours are negatively correlated with mental health for both women and men, whereas a negative correlation between unpaid care work hours and mental health is observed for men, but not for women. Further, compared with paid work, unpaid work has a greater negative effect on men's mental health. These results shed new light on the strength of gender norms and barriers to the redistribution of unpaid work from women to men that is necessary to reduce the gender gap in total work burden.

RETIREMENT POLICIES, PENSION PROGRAMS, AND CARE PROVISION

Rui Zhao and Yaohui Zhao (2018; this volume) investigate the gender pension gap and its underlying causes by using data from the 2013 wave of CHARLS. Descriptive statistics from the survey show that Chinese women older than 60 receive only about half of what men receive for their social

pension. A decomposition exercise attributes nearly three-quarters of the gap to women's lower likelihood of receiving the occupational pension offered to employees in government, government-funded institutions, and urban firms; the remaining quarter is attributable to the smaller amount of pension benefits women receive if they have such a pension. Further analyses indicate that women's disadvantages in access to more generous pension programs and pension benefits are almost entirely linked to women's lower educational attainment and their disproportionate share of employment in sectors that offer employees lower pension benefits. Further, among recipients of an occupational pension, nearly one-third of the gender benefit gap can be explained by women's fewer years of employment and lower pre-retirement salaries. These results suggest that the large gender gap observed in the labor market has translated into an even larger income gap at older ages under the current pension program.

As mentioned above, grandparents caring for grandchildren is a widespread practice among urban families in post-reform China, and the vast majority of grandparent caregivers are under 65 years of age. Do China's low retirement age thresholds play a role in facilitating urban grandparents' involvement in childcare? Jin Feng and Xiaohan Zhang (2018; this volume) examine the interaction between retirement and grandchild care among urban men and women ± 10 years from the official retirement age by drawing on panel data from the 2011 and 2013 waves of CHARLS. The estimates show that the transition to retirement increases a woman's likelihood of taking care of a grandchild by 29 percentage points and a man's likelihood by 21 percentage points. These results lend support to the contention that China's low retirement age facilitates urban grandparents' participation in childcare. Thus, raising the retirement age could have a strong negative effect on the childcare provided by grandparents.

Another question of interest is whether access to old-age pensions encourages care of grandchildren by grandparents. Evidence from South Africa indicates that receipt of an old-age pension in that country enabled grandmothers to shift their time from income-earning activities to caring for their grandchildren (Budlender and Lund 2011). In China, the New Rural Pension Program (NRPP) was introduced in 2009 to provide old-age security for rural residents. Unlike urban pension programs that are defined entirely by the contributions of employees and employers, the NRPP includes a small basic pension, payable to people who have reached 60 years of age. Those who have already reached age 60 at the start of the program are eligible to receive this basic pension (initially RMB 55), even if they have never contributed. People younger than 60 years of age must make annual contributions (a minimum of RMB 100) to be eligible for both the basic pension and a contribution-dependent pension when they reach age 60.

Qin Li, Yafeng Wang, and Yaohui Zhao (2018; this volume) examine the impact of the NRPP on the work patterns of rural women and men age 60 years or older by using the panel data aspect of the 2011 and 2013 waves of the CHARLS. The analysis shows that the introduction of the NRPP induced elderly men to shift their work from farming to grandchild care. However, the pension program did not have a statistically significant effect on elderly women's work patterns. These gender differences are perhaps attributable both to the pension benefit being small and to women already spending less time on farmwork than men and more time on grandchild care prior to the implementation of the NRPP. These findings highlight the potential of expanding and strengthening social security programs that lower the economic costs of grandchild care for the rural elderly.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY DISCUSSION

In this introduction, we examined the transformation of the care economy in post-reform China and its implications for the welfare, employment, and incomes of Chinese women and men, and the well-being of their families. We first documented the changes in policy in the areas of paid maternity leave, childcare, and eldercare provisions that came with economic reform and then in the post-reform period and their impact on the way by which the care needs, particularly of the disadvantaged, are addressed.

In terms of maternity leave, the analysis finds that with the expansion of private/informal sectors, access to paid maternity leave among employed urban mothers without a college education has become more limited, and this change has a strong negative effect on these mothers' ability to sustain breastfeeding. With regard to childcare policy (or the lack thereof), as the supply of publicly subsidized formal childcare services has dwindled, families increasingly rely on for-profit, commercialized childcare programs and grandparent-provided childcare to meet their needs. In urban areas, accessing affordable childcare services has become a major challenge for low-income families, especially for migrant families who are more likely to be bringing their children with them than they did ten years ago. In rural areas, daycare and preschool programs are largely unavailable in low-income and remote villages. The analysis of eldercare indicates that the family-centered traditional eldercare regime remains the mainstay and the care arrangements within the family are gendered, making elderly women more vulnerable than elderly men to the risk of having their care needs unaddressed.

We next considered the impact of unpaid care responsibilities on women's opportunities and gender equality in the labor market. The new research presented in this volume collectively shows that childcare responsibilities generally hinder rural women's participation in better-paying off-farm employment and urban women's labor force participation.

However, the impact of caregiving responsibilities varies by ethnicity, residential status, and age. Compared with non-Muslim prime-age women, the employment decisions of rural Muslim prime age women are more constrained by gendered care roles and arrangements. The labor force participation of rural-to-urban migrant mothers with preschool-age children is more adversely affected by the lack of access to affordable childcare services than that of their local urban counterparts.

With grandparents' involvement in childcare, having young children does not represent a binding constraint on mothers' employment. However, caring for grandchildren entails appreciable economic costs for grandparents, particularly grandmothers, because it adversely affects their employment and earnings. Middle-aged women and men not only help adult children with childcare, but also bear the responsibility for taking care of elderly parents. Unlike caring for grandchildren, caring for the elderly does not have a significant effect on the employment decisions of caregivers of both sexes. In this case, the sacrifices of caring for others may take the form of time poverty.

Other contributions in this volume explore the impact of unpaid caregiving responsibilities on time use, mental health, and retirement pensions. These analyses show that urban women workers work more hours in total than their men counterparts and are, therefore, more likely to be time poor. Part of this time poverty is attributable to the lack of effective protection in the labor market for workers with family responsibilities. In addition, women's longer work hours and higher time poverty rate are significantly correlated with the gender gap in mental health. A gendered relationship between the separate components of work burden and mental health emerges, underscoring the strength of gender roles and obstacles to redistributing unpaid care work from women to men within the family. In addition, other work in this volume shows that women's pensions are substantially lower than men's and much of the gender pension gap can be explained by gender differences in employment and earnings, for which women's unpaid caregiving responsibilities are an important driving force. Yet another study estimated the impact of retirement age policy and a rural pension program on the supply of care from extended family. That analysis indicates that social pension programs have potential both to reduce the opportunity costs of caregiving for family members and to facilitate caregiving.

Two main lessons can be drawn from the collective findings presented in this volume. First, the gendered, household-centered care arrangements that have emerged in the post-reform period cannot properly address the care needs of the disadvantaged. Care deficits experienced by children of socioeconomically disadvantaged families can lead to the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages in skills and capabilities. Second, the state's retreat from the sphere of reproduction in the post-reform period has

increased the care burden on women, hampering their ability to participate equally in the new market economy. Women of low socioeconomic status are most affected. Thus, the lack of recognition for unpaid care work in public policy is an important cause of growing inequalities, and gender inequalities in particular, in post-reform China.

From a policy perspective, the neglect of care arises, in part, because public policies in the post-reform period valued efficiency and traditionally measured economic growth more than equity and fairness. The adverse effect of unpaid care work on women in a wide range of indicators should raise wider concerns about gender justice in public policy. It is nevertheless difficult to make a case for gender justice in unpaid care work when distributive justice is of secondary consideration for policymakers. Moreover, because the work of caring for dependents has “public good” qualities, both private and public enterprises take the provision of unpaid care work for granted. They reward workers who devote themselves to paid work, while being reluctant to accommodate workers’ caregiving needs. This approach can pay off at the firm’s bottom line and make some market sectors look more efficient, but at a societal level, this strategy is inefficient. Thus, without a society-wide commitment to assuming some of the costs currently borne at the individual and family level through greater public-sector provision and/or subsidization, this social inefficiency cannot be addressed.

Care is also neglected because the deep-rooted nearly universal mindset that caring for dependents is a woman’s natural duty and a private family matter. Elson’s three-part framework regarding unpaid work reform of “recognize, reduce, redistribute” is a useful guide when considering various policy measures that could be taken to address this mindset (Elson 2017). Hidden, woman-assigned caregiving makes public policies insensitive to potentially negative consequences for women as caregivers. The contributory pension program is a primary example. Whereas early childhood development and eldercare have become topics of policy debate in recent years in China, much of the discussion focuses on the well-being of care recipients, with little attention devoted to the situation of caregivers. When care is defined as a women’s issue, policies related to care provision become, for the most part, the responsibility of organizations such as the All-China Women’s Federation (a nongovernmental organization closely allied with the Chinese Communist Party that acts as the official head of the women’s movement both within and without the government), rather than the concern of mainstream government agencies (Cook and Dong 2017).

Since entering the new century, the Chinese government has strived to move away from a strategy that narrowly focuses on economic growth toward one that places greater emphasis on inclusiveness and more widely shared prosperity. China is a signatory of the UN 2030 SDGs, and at the 2015 World Summit, President Xi pledged that China is fully committed

to the 2030 SDGs and gender equality, in particular. The analyses of the eleven studies in this volume and synthesized here illustrate the central importance of supportive care policies for gender equality and inclusive growth. China's commitment to the 2030 SDGs provides an excellent entry point for integrating the care economy into the national development agenda.

Based on the empirical findings of this volume, we make the following specific policy recommendations:

- (1) Integrate care needs and provision and gender equality into broader development agendas and address the issues of care provision through the mainstream policymaking process. At the macro level, the state should make a budgetary commitment to achieve the 2030 SDGs in child health and early education and gender equality. Economic programs, such as poverty alleviation and job creation, should reflect the awareness that women are both income earners and caregivers by not only creating economic opportunities, but also addressing the caregiving constraints that impede women's ability to benefit equally from the new opportunities. Urbanization programs should recognize social reproduction and care by accelerating *hukou* reform and encouraging family migration. In this way, migrant workers will no longer be forced to choose between paid employment and family life, with its associated reproductive and care responsibilities. Childcare needs and provision should also be factored into the formulation of policies on fertility, employment, and retirement. Given the important caregiving role of middle-aged people, retirement age policies should be sufficiently flexible to allow them to decide the timing of retirement based on their family's care needs and employment prospects. In addition, social security programs should contain measures that mitigate the negative ramifications of the contribution-based pension insurance for women as caregivers. All these policy reforms are both realistic and feasible. The current retirement age policy is much stricter than in most countries and compared to what the labor market demands; if the new retirement age policy were tied to higher, less contribution-specific pensions it would not necessarily lead to many more elderly staying in the labor market, which would alleviate childcare provision stresses. Finally, *hukou* reform, which is already well underway, can also help alleviate the childcare stresses of migrant families who will be able to bring their elders with them to both provide and receive care as needed.
- (2) Increase the role of the state in providing and financing care, with greater attention to the needs of disadvantaged segments of the population. The coverage of paid maternity leave should

be gradually extended to include migrant workers and workers in the informal/private sectors. Making childcare and preschool programs accessible to children in low-income, remote villages, migrant children, and children of urban low-income families should be a policy priority. Eldercare policies should also pay attention to the fact that elderly women, who tend to outlive men, have greater care needs, but a more limited ability to purchase care services or bargain for care from adult children. Politically, expansion of benefits to make them more universal should be not overly controversial, given continuing support for the social service provision aspects of the communist state.

- (3) Expand the role of the market and community or other organizations in service provision. Policies that enable the market and community or civil society to meet the diverse needs of families with different affordability require more careful research, as do policies that help service providers resolve the conflicts between care recipients' need for affordable, quality services and care workers' need for desirable working conditions and decent pay. To expand paid care services, the state should play a more active role in providing skill training and fostering social respect for care workers.
- (4) Accommodate care duties in the workplace. State enforcement of the regulations that safeguard women's employment and reproductive rights in non-state sectors is essential for maintaining steady labor force participation over the lifecycle for women of low socioeconomic status. More concerted efforts in this area are also needed to minimize the negative repercussion of the universal two-child policy for reproductive-age women in hiring and promotion. Further, the policy debate over paid working hours and minimum wage standards should strike a proper balance between firms' concerns about competitiveness and employees' need to have adequate time to care for themselves and their dependents. Family-friendly workplace arrangements, such as flexible employment arrangements and part-time jobs, should also be encouraged so that employees can better balance between paid work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Employer support is additionally important to minimize paid work-family conflicts through the provision of on-site breastfeeding rooms and subsidized childcare, eldercare, and other family services.
- (5) Increase support for the endeavor to transform gender roles and norms and encourage more equitable sharing of care responsibilities within the household. Educational campaigns to involve men in unpaid care work and to change norms and attitudes are necessary to promote a more equal division of labor between genders, reduce women's double burden and total working time, and improve gender

equality in well-being. To a large degree, the continuing centralized nature of governmental control in China, if harnessed into the service of one of the central themes of pre-reform China, that of transformation of gender roles and norms, can potentially move this project along more quickly than in countries where control is decentralized and past support for such a project nonexistent. Such is one of the continuing paradoxes of China: its great potential for transformational change, along with the great challenge of determining what that change should be.

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NOTE

- ¹ Around ten years ago, a series of general-purpose longitudinal surveys were initiated by Chinese universities and made available to the public, most notably the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) and China Family Panel Study (CFPS), both run by Peking University. The emergence of these surveys reflected the rising prominence of social problems at the micro level that have long-term impacts on society and the macroeconomy, such as familial stability, social and

economic inequality, and population aging. These datasets fundamentally changed the landscape of social science research in China and prompted greater openness with respect to micro data collected by the government.

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