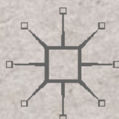
JIPING ZUO

WORK AND FAMILY IN URBAN CHINA

Women's Changing Experience since Mao

POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT
OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA



Politics and Development of Contemporary China

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Jiping Zuo

Work and Family in Urban China

Women's Changing Experience since Mao

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Politics and Development of Contemporary China
ISBN 978-1-137-55464-2 ISBN 978-1-137-55465-9 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016939252

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To my parents,
who have taught me to be a humanist.
To Ming Zhang, my late husband,
who had been my inspiration and support.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by National Science Foundation (SES-0518083) and Funds for Advancement of the Discipline by the Sociology Program of National Science Foundation, to which I am grateful. I thank Yongping Jiang for being my wonderful research collaborator on studies of Mao and post-Mao generations. My thanks also go to Stein Kuhnle for generously sharing with me his data on Nordic countries; to *Science & Society*, Emerald, and SAGE for giving me permission to reproduce my articles published in *Science & Society* (2013), *Advances in Gender Research* (2012), and *Critical Sociology* (online in 2012; print in 2014); and to all those who have lent me various kinds of help and moral support along the way of my pursuit of my book project. Furthermore, my gratitude also goes to Sara Doskow and Chris Robinson from Palgrave Macmillan, whose editorial assistance has further contributed to the success of this book. Furthermore, my gratitude also goes to Sara Doskow and Chris Robinson from Palgrave Macmillan Furthermore, my gratitude also goes to Sara Doskow and Chris Robinson from Palgrave Macmillan, whose editorial assistance has further contributed to the success of this book. In this section my appreciation to the anonymous reviewers of earlier drafts of my book. In terms of technical support, I wish to thank Mary Shrode, for reproducing the charts for me. Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Ming Zhang, my late husband, for his unfailing long-term support for my research and scholarly pursuit.

Contents

1 Introduction 1

Part I State-Socialist Era (1949—The 1980s) 21

2 Equalizing Gender and Class 23

3 Socialist Workers, National Heroines 45

4 Women's Triple Burden 67

Part II Market-Reform Era (The 1990s—Present) 77

5 Labor Denigration and Work–Family Conflict 79

6 Women's Domestic-Role Orientation 97

7 Diverse Roles, A Common Dilemma 119

8 A Different Marital Equality 139

Part III Conclusion 155

9 Conclusion and Implications 157

Epilogue 183

Appendix: Sources of Data and Research Methods 193

References 201

Index 203

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
CCTV	China Central Television
CPC	Communist Party of China
GDP	Gross domestic product
GMD	Guomindang, the Nationalist Party of China
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
STDs	Sexually transmitted diseases
WTO	World Trade Organization
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

List of Figures

Fig. 9.1 Percentage of children (under 18 years) below 60 % of median equivalised income after social transfers in European countries, 2008 167
Fig. 9.2 Income distribution among OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries 168
Fig. 9.3 Gross domestic product per head at fixed prices, constant purchasing power parity (PPP), 1970–2007 168

List of Tables

Table 7.1	H. Wang's expenses for her son's education, September 2004—June 2005	125
Table A.1	Social and demographic characteristics of female informants of revolutionary cohort ($N=80$)	194
Table A.2	Socio-demographic information of female informants of the Mao and post-Mao cohorts ($N=115$)	197
Table A.3	Characteristics of female informants of Mao and post-Mao cohorts by role configuration ($N=115$)	199

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A Puzzle: Women's Growing Domestic-Role Orientation in Urban China

My research on work and family relations in urban China began with my observations in the post-Mao reform era over two decades ago. In 1986 I left my home city of Beijing to study sociology in the USA, and it was on a return visit there in the winter of 1996 that I met up with Dongdong, a close friend from junior high. Dongdong and I had not seen each other for 18 years. She told me that she had gained a degree in political science and had been a professor in a vocational college (*zhi gong da xue*)—an amazing achievement for anyone of our generation whose opportunity to complete high school was dashed by the Cultural Revolution. In 1983, she married an engineer and a year later her son was born. As we touched on the subject of women's careers, Dongdong stunned me by saying: "[to a woman] doing your job well is not as good as marrying well" (*gan de hao bu ru jia de hao*). I could not believe that this long-abandoned phrase of our childhood had come out of the mouth of an educated career woman from the generation who were socialized to believe that women could "hold up half of the sky." During that era, a young woman would be perceived by society as "lacking a broad revolutionary ideal" (*que fa yuan da ge ming li xiang*) and would be looked down upon if her lifetime goal was merely to marry Mr. Right.

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_1

But Dongdong was far from exceptional. On another visit to Beijing in May 1998, a copy of *Hope* (*Xi Wang*), a popular Chinese women's magazine, caught my eye at a news-stand. This issue was devoted to "Mother's Day"—a cultural borrowing from the USA. On the front page, there was a picture of a beautiful young woman with the caption: "*Quan zhi tai tai* (full-time stay-at-home married women) as a new fashion"—the topic of a forum in this issue. I bought the magazine and began to read. Interestingly, stay-at-home married women used to be called "housewives" (*jia ting fu nü*)—a term primarily associated with the illiteracy and backwardness of urban married women in the Mao era. In the post-Mao period, however, the same concept, expressed as *quan zhi tai tai* (QZTT), entails admirable qualities such as good education, wealth, autonomy, leisure, and nobility. The results of an online survey of urban women on this subject (conducted in December 1997) were published in the same issue of *Hope*:

First respondent's profile: Gao Lin, from the city of Dalian, female, age 26, office worker with a college degree.

Question #1:	What would be the greatest advantage of being a QZTT?
Answer:	Not having to be led by a leader, making decisions of my own, doing whatever I enjoy.
Question #2:	What would make you worry the most about becoming a QZTT? How would you deal with it?
Answer:	I'd worry about falling behind in terms of knowledge, social awareness, vision, and elegance. To prevent this from happening, I would keep up my reading and take an active role in society.
Question #3:	What qualifies someone to be a QZTT?
Answer:	Having a loving husband with a monthly income of around 5000 yuan, a child between 3 months and 5 years old, and belonging to a network of other QZTTs.
Question #4:	What would be your plan as a QZTT?
Answer:	I would do more reading, listen to music, do aerobics, travel, and look after the home.

Unsurprisingly, almost all 31 female respondents had a college degree since this was an online survey which was not accessible to the majority of lower-educated urbanites in 1998, but surprisingly, 23 of them were interested in being a QZTT for similar reasons to Gao. The survey report was followed by brief essays written by QZTTs. Most of them claimed its legitimacy by calling

it an "occupation": one that offered autonomy, freedom, and meaning. A few were bored, isolated, and inclined to be irritable.

In addition to this anecdotal evidence, there were quantitative data pointing in the same direction. As I compared the results of the nationwide survey on the social status of Chinese women conducted in 2000 with that of 1990 conducted by the Women's Studies Institute of China (Jiang 2006; Tao and Jiang 1995), I noted that during this ten-year period, Chinese urban women's employment rate had declined from 76.3 % to 63.5 %. By contrast, the percentage of women who supported the separate-sphere ideology (i.e., men work mainly outside the home and women work within it) had risen from 44.8 % to 50.4 %; the amount of time women spent on domestic tasks compared with their husbands had gone up from 1.74 to 2.79 times greater. Of all the non-employed urban women aged 24 to 49 in 2000, 40.3 % were not working for domestic reasons, doubling the percentage (19.8) in 1990. The trend seemed to continue through another decade. According to the Third National Survey on Women's Status in China (Ding 2013) conducted in 2010, more women and men identified themselves with traditional gender roles than their counterparts in the previous surveys. For example, 44.4 % of urban women and 52.9 % of men believed that men should devote themselves more to a breadwinner role and women to family work, an 8.7 % and 11.8 % increase for women and men respectively since 2000. Similarly, 48 % of women and 40.7 % of men agreed that women were less successful in their careers than in their marriages; the numbers rose 10.7 percentage points for women and 10.5 for men, compared to the 2000 survey.

This trend is perplexing, given the near-equality with men in education and employment achieved by urban women, not to mention decades of socialization under the socialist state that had molded women more into non-gendered "state persons" than feminized "wives" and "mothers" (Chen 2003; Zuo 2013). What amazed me even more was that China was not alone; other former socialist countries were experiencing a similar trend (e.g. Fondor 2003; Funk 1993; Kotzeva 1999; Rudd 2003).

What Has Happened and What to Study?

In my earlier fieldwork (Zuo 2003; Zuo and Bian 2001), I attributed this trend mainly to the persistence of the traditional Chinese culture of "separate spheres" that can be seen in the interactions of marriage. I concluded

that the traditional gender culture of working in the home in exchange for greater economic security with their husbands had more to offer women than paid work (and the reverse was true for men). Other studies tend to attribute women's growing domestic-role orientation in urban China primarily to labor-market discrimination (Jiang 2006), women's childcare responsibilities (Parish and Busse 2000), or excessive top-down "women's liberation" and "gender equality" campaigns in the state-socialist period (1949–1978). It could also be argued that growing social acceptance of their domestic orientation gives women greater freedom to balance work and family. But these explanations proved inadequate when I later conducted an oral history of women of the revolutionary generation who had come of age at the dawn of the 1949 revolution. Compared with younger cohorts, an overwhelming majority of urban women, rich and poor alike, did not work outside the home prior to the revolution, mainly due to the age-old influence of traditional gender culture and the unavailability of jobs for urban women. In my interviews with a group of ever-married women and men of the revolutionary generation from various socioeconomic backgrounds, I noted most women's enthusiasm for paid work and their shared provider role after 1949 (Zuo 2013), despite the persistence of traditional gender culture and job discrimination against women that is documented in many studies (e.g. Andores 1983; Croll 1995; Johnson 1983; Wolf 1985). I learned that women's enjoyment of paid work partly stemmed from the changing meaning of work arising from the integration of state and family, and class and gender transformations, rather than merely from economic gains. I then realized that to understand gender configuration and change in the post-Mao period, I needed to move beyond cultural, familial, and labor-market dimensions to take into account the historical processes that have shaped women's varying work–family experiences within and between generations.

Placing the Chinese case in the theoretical context of Marxism and feminism, we see that China's recent reform has been undergoing a rapid transition from state socialism to market capitalism amid unprecedented globalization (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2005). While Marxist class-first and feminist patriarchy-first theorizing on women's subordination and liberation are largely based on women of the Western bourgeoisie facing many sexist barriers to full employment in capitalist societies, in reformed China the opposite holds true. In fact, Chinese women's domestic-role orientation is happening at a time when female employment has been the norm but the workplace has increasingly become a site for market produc-

tion (Zuo 2014a). That said, I note the historical parallel between the "separate-sphere" revival in transitional China and the "cult of domesticity" in the nineteenth-century development of capitalist markets in the industrial West, where the "separate-sphere" ideal developed similarly, first among (white) middle-class women and then among working-class women (Coontz 1988). This interesting parallel has prompted my interest in examining the relationship between market and family in the cult of domesticity in China. Still, unlike Western societies, China's present-day gendered marital division of labor in urban areas has been formulated in response to the disaggregation of the socialist state and families through the abolition of all-encompassing work units (*danwei*) rather than due to the collapse of the corporate family system in the West. China's unique historical contours call for an analysis of the three-way interaction between the state (workplace), the market, and the family that has largely shaped women's work and family roles during the socialist and post-socialist transitions.

This book therefore explores the workplace-engendering processes by which urban women have constructed their work and family roles at varying historical moments. During the Mao era, families and the state/workplace were highly integrated, as indicated by their shared moral values of class and gender equality, and their similar power structures of generation-based patriarchy, as well as their mutual embeddedness, with the latter perceived as an enlarged family and the former as basic cells of the state. Under this arrangement, the workplace, on one hand, performed most welfare functions on behalf of the state, such as providing job security, health care, housing, and free education in urban areas (Bian 1994). On the other hand, it also penetrated family life in every possible way, including aligning family values with those of the state and limiting personal freedom.

While state reform strategies of decentralization, privatization, the smashing of the "iron rice bowl" (lifetime employment) and of "eating from the communal pot" (egalitarian redistribution), and open-door policies are intended to provide individuals with incentives and opportunities to improve their livelihood through competition, the reform processes are often fraught with paradoxes, producing mixed and, sometimes, devastating results for workers, who become increasingly vulnerable to labor denigration and work–family conflict (Zuo 2014; Zuo and Jiang 2012). By labor denigration, I mean that labor is no longer valued as a resource for human existence but is treated as a commodity for capital accumulation;

working-class people lose dignity and humanitarian conditions and are subject to degradation and exploitation through market competition (Marx 1978, Polanyi [1944] 2001). Work–family conflict refers to the situation in which the demands of work make it difficult to fulfil family responsibilities (Voydanoff 2005). More fundamentally, work–family conflict may stem from the inherent contradiction between unrestrained market-based private desires and the need for development for the common good (Polanyi [1944] 2001). In the case of transitional China, it also means the disappearance of family welfare benefits and the safety net. Labor denigration and work–family conflict, seemingly unrelated subjects, are actually closely intertwined. A worker is both a laborer and a family member; denigration of labor worsens family conditions and exacerbates work–family conflict. Likewise, work–family relations in market societies always involve labor allocation, divisions of labor, and labor processes across both domains. In reform China, labor denigration and work–family conflict share the same root causes in the state's repeal of its welfare services and commitment to social justice and family well-being, as well as emerging unfettered market forces whose development turns multifaceted workers into commodities and whose material interests are inherently incompatible with the caring functions of the family. The disaggregation of the state and the family and the antagonism between market and family have generated, among working women, alienation from their workplace on one hand, and mounting role conflict on the other. This is not to say that prior to the reform the state was ultra-friendly to workers or families, but labor was not treated as a commodity, nor was there the fundamental incompatibility between family and state interests that the present study clearly shows.

Labor denigration and work–family conflict may indeed encourage women to redirect their priorities toward domestic responsibilities. In studies of state–citizen relations in post-socialist Eastern Europe, scholars have challenged the rapid advancement of states towards a market economy that has stripped citizens of their welfare benefits and social entitlements in the name of efficiency (e.g. Eyal et al. 1998; Haney and Pollard 2003). Debates arise as to whether the revival of gendered family roles is a indication of regression or a site of resistance amid chaos and unpredictability (e.g. Funk 1993; Haney and Pollard 2003; Rudd 2000; Watson 1993). My work draws heavily on numerous critical theories of labor processes and market–family relations, as well as on their implications for women's work and family roles.

Labor Denigration, Alienation, and Resistance in Market Societies

Since Karl Marx's *Economics and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the relationship between labor denigration, workers' alienation and resistance has been the subject of substantial further development. For example, Karl Polanyi [1944] (2001) pointed out the danger of social destruction as labor (along with land and money) was commodified. Like Marx, Polanyi demonstrated that commodification would degrade workers, threaten their living conditions, and fundamentally destroy the fabric of society. But instead of relying on the strengthening of the working classes as a driving force resisting market brutality, Polanyi envisioned a collectivist countermovement from within society constraining market expansion. According to Polanyi, while a free market in nineteenth-century Europe was achieved through state intervention, resistance to it from various social groups was spontaneous. These groups forged collectivist measures and policies, such as passing legislation in favor of trade unions, social insurance, workers' compensation, and public utilities, despite their varying motivations and interests. Different perspectives notwithstanding, both Marxian political economy and Polanyian "active society" (coined by Burawoy 2003) view labor as a fictitious commodity, and its treatment as such is doomed to meet with resistance from working-class people and society.

Adding to Marxian and Polanyian insights, E.P. Thompson emphasized historical processes of working-class formation and mobilization based on workers' lived experiences. In his influential study of the making of the English working class in the early industrialization period, Thompson (1966) found that working-class consciousness was formed through the pain and suffering inflicted on working people by the Industrial Revolution, which destroyed their old and valued ways of life. Indeed, it was through this "more humanly comprehensible way of life" (p. 830) that Thompson discovered a history of English working-class people who resisted being turned into proletarians and who fought exploitative and oppressive industrial capitalism with their cultural and political resources.

Contemporary labor studies continue to focus on multifaceted levels of analysis linking labor commodification and labor resistance as globalization picks up unprecedented speed (Silver 2003). With the collapse of the communist bloc, capital accumulation becomes more flexible and profitable, enabled partly through states' newfound ability to dismantle the safety net of workers, and partly by capital-friendly international

institutions (e.g. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [the World Bank]—IBRD, International Monetary Fund—IMF, and World Trade Organization—WTO) forcing many developing nations to privatize their national economies and marketize social services (Agarwala 2007; Drainville 2009; Webber 2008). The severe assaults on labor and the sheer plunder of public assets by global capital have led not only to a much greater concentration of wealth among the few but also to further deterioration in working and living conditions for millions of working people (Drainville 2009; Harvey 2005). These intensified labor processes have promoted new waves of labor unrest ranging from peaceful protests to violent insurgence, from street riots to organized labor movements (Drainville 2009; Silver 2003). Meanwhile, labor processes may take various forms for individuals and groups, hence their resistant strategies, given the uneven developments of global capital and prior local, cultural, and political establishments (Thompson 1966). As James Scott (1985) pointed out, these forms include not only open protests and organized labor movements but also covert resistance—mainly used as weapons for the weak in everyday life, such as slowdowns, foot dragging, false compliance, illness, flight, sabotage, and cultural resistance. Moreover, although intentions and consciousness do not necessarily lead to acts of resistance, due to various constraints they provide access to lines of action that may become plausible in future once circumstances change (Scott 1985). Therefore, it is important to understand both consciousness and actions.

Home as a Site of Resistance

Can a home serve women as a site of resistance to market brutality? While it is true that for women under capitalism the home is not a safe haven but an illusion of coherence and safety, as alienated labor, women may continue to see the home as an imagined space of connection and comfort (Nettles 2004). Both historical and contemporary research show widespread devaluation of women's productive and reproductive work with the introduction of capitalist markets due to the privatization of the family, typically evidenced by the loss of their service to kinship, community, and society, be they in the early and present-day industrial West, colonial and post-colonial societies, or among transitional state-socialist countries (Amandiume 1987; Engels 1972; Goldín 2015; Gunewardena 2010; Rofel 1999). In the mid-nineteenth-century USA, for example, the rising cult of domesticity among middle-class women in the course of market

expansion, which posed no real challenge and in many ways even provided support to the market economy, nonetheless reflected women's discontent with commercialized American life (Coontz 1988). Although American women's mass entry to paid employment since the 1960s has been celebrated as women's liberation, more recent statistics noted the first decline in women's employment from the peak of 74.9 % in 2000 to 72.7 % in 2008 (Uchitelle 2008), despite the tendency for women to surpass men for the first time in history in holding down jobs, owing to much higher lay-off rates among male workers in recent economic downturns (Rampell 2009). Many female respondents claimed they dropped out of employment in response to layoffs, outsourcing, stagnant wages, poor treatment, or outright pay cuts. The comparative data of 86.4 % male employment in 2008 seem to suggest that women may be even more reluctant than men to accept degrading jobs (Uchitelle 2008).

Elsewhere, in her historical research on the impact of colonialism on Igbo society, Ifa Amandiume (1987) documented how Igbo women desperately held onto traditional gender norms, trying to save themselves as well as the community from being marginalized by colonialism. More recent studies (Goldín 2015; Gunewardena 2010) of developing nations similarly show the devastating effects for women as their nations' subsistence economies, in which they played a key role, have been undermined by global market forces since the 1980s. As more women become wage earners, like men, their labor is increasingly commodified. Consequently, women workers may return to the home if threatened with dismissal for asking for a pay rise, or when they find their labor is denigrated as unskilled and unproductive. Although low-income women cannot afford to retreat to the home, motherhood tends to remain the primary source of their identity (Chant 2003).

To alienated women, as Nettles (2004, p. 57) observed in respect of the interior migration of Afro-Caribbean women, home is "both affect and location—a place of mind and body.... Seeking home is the search to be one's self, and to be in the company of others who love you and accept you.... the search for home is about a politics of identity and place, one that may be bounded by nation, by gender, by race-ethnicity, by social class … but most often in combinations not easily articulated." A journey of returning home is therefore the journey of resistance to colonialism and globalization, and the one that also leads to self-determination.

Moreover, women's self-determination is often embedded in their concerns about family well-being, increasingly undermined by capital

accumulation. As Brenner (2000) noted, the labor control and exploitative nature of capitalist production and periodic economic crises have been a constant threat to the survival of working-class families. Gendered family divisions of labor may thus be understood as a family strategy to prevent the further descent of family members into waged labor and to ensure collective survival (Coontz 1988). Even successful professional women are sometimes observed to give up their jobs or cut back their hours due to the constraints of the workplace on women's reproductive work and deteriorating working conditions (Mason and Ekman 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2004).

Work–Family Conflict and the Persistence of Women's Domestic Role in Market Societies

Frederick Engels was probably among the earliest scholars to theorize the formation of women's domestic role in the nineteenth century, when capitalist markets were just developing in the West. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (1972) attributed the gendered marital division of labor directly to the privatization of family resulting from the emerging market economy. As the family was privatized, men became wage earners and were ensured supremacy over their wives; for women, by contrast, the public-service nature of their work was lost, their domestic labor devalued and they themselves exploited. Though insightful, Engels' historical speculation was never specific about exactly how the marital division of labor was derived from the capitalist mode of production and whether the meanings of women's domestic role in a capitalist society differ from those in other types of societies (Elizaretsky 1973).

Given that the gendered division of labor predates capitalism, Western socialist feminist scholars coming of age in the mid-twentieth century tended to place the blame on a patriarchy that had been rooted in marriage and kinship systems prior to Western industrialization (Mackintosh 1981). According to them, capitalism seized on this pre-existing division for its own advantage through the unequal treatment of women and men in the labor market, which in turn strengthened the marital division of labor and hence wives' economic dependence on husbands. At the same time, as Heidi Hartmann (1979) argues, capitalism has a tendency to equalize the treatment of labor across race and gender categories; the persistence of gendered divisions in both the labor market and the home can thus be

attributed only to male workers' resistance to gender equality through their relentless and organized trade union efforts.

But socialist feminists do not necessarily agree with one another. Iris Young (1981), for example, criticizes this dual-system argument as "ahistorical," positing that women's economic situations worsened with the advent of capitalism, which has an intrinsic interest in marginalizing women's labor for its own benefit. The benefits include keeping workers' pay at a low level, using women workers as a reserve army or as strikebreakers, making labor management easier, and so on. The bourgeois nuclear family system that emerged in the nineteenth century with an ideological emphasis on women's domesticity was conducive to the capitalist need to marginalize women's paid work. The "separate-sphere" gender ideology was accepted not only by middle-class men but also by working-class men, partly due to the influence of pre-capitalist patriarchal ideology, which helped shape gendered divisions of labor both at home and in the workplace Barrett (1980).

Notwithstanding the contentions that the interests of capital and of men as well as the continuing influence of patriarchal ideology are primary sources of persistent gendered divisions of labor inside and outside the household, the historical evidence, according to Brenner (2000), suggests one major lacuna in previous studies, that is, the missing material basis for the historical development of gender inequality. Brenner does not dispute the arguments of other socialist feminists but points to their inadequacy. In her analysis of the modern histories of Britain and the USA, Brenner (2000) notes that many male trade union-organized movements in the nineteenth century were not just about improving conditions for male workers but for all. On many occasions, male trade unions also supported strikes held by female workers from different industries. A fundamental problem with the desire of male trade unions and male workers to exclude female workers was not merely their deep-rooted patriarchal ideology or their intrinsic male interest in controlling women, but the real threat from female competition posed by the capitalist mode of production. The fact that women were always paid lower wages and were willing to accept them reflected women's biological disadvantage in the labor market, not in terms of biology itself but vis-à-vis capitalist production. Therefore, male workers' resistance to women's waged work seemed to be a response to, rather than a cause of, the marginalization of female labor.

In the case of colonialism, women in many colonized societies lost their economic and social roles in the community as global capitalist production

destroyed their non-market economies (Amandiume 1987; Mikell 1997). During the early days of colonialism, as men became the wageearner, the family was being privatized and women were reduced to domestic labor.

In any event, the historical trend of closing gender gaps in labor markets around the world, no matter how slow it has been, seems to support the Marxist prediction of gender equalization in the capitalist market (Brenner 2000). Since the twentieth century, the further development of capitalist markets has also toppled legal and normative aspects of marriage that had subordinated women, and has turned them into free sellers of labor like men, making women increasingly men's equals (Brenner 2000).

Many seek explanations of existing gendered household divisions of labor in the separation of family life from public life: that is, capitalist production takes away the family's economic function, turns adult family members into waged labor, gradually commercializes many domestic services that most families cannot afford, and leaves unprofitable family needs unmet (Coontz 2000; Elizaretsky 1973). In addition to the devaluation of women's domestic work, the separation between family and economy under capitalism has also substantially increased the importance of the family for the survival of individuals but at the same time undermined its ability to fulfil this function (Brenner 2000; Coontz 2000). On one hand, capitalist accumulation through brutal competition, commodification of labor, and the instillation of individualistic values is destroying social ties and thus communities (Coontz 2000; Polanyi [1944] 2001), leaving individuals with no choice but to turn to families to meet their economic, emotional, and social needs (Coontz 2000; Brenner 2000). On the other hand, individuals' heavy reliance on their families to meet those needs overburdens the family, making it a vulnerable institution without the support of the wider community (Coontz 2000).

The question is: why is it always women who overwhelmingly carry the burden of domestic tasks? As Brenner (2000) found, in the nineteenth-century USA and England, women's reproductive functions—pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation—were inherently incompatible with capitalist production relations. Capitalists' unwillingness to accommodate women's reproductive needs led to tremendous struggles for working-class families in general and for women in particular. Families must complete human reproduction and the reproduction of labor in their own time. In addition, the labor-controlling and exploitative nature of capitalist production and periodical economic crises constantly threatened the survival of working-class families. Married couples used the division of labor as a coping strategy

against such threats; consequently, having the wife stay at home if the couple could afford it became a logical solution. In the capitalist labor market and the workplace, women's family responsibilities hampered their abilities to hold down a full-time job, be mobile in pursuing jobs, reach pay parity with men, form a trade union, or build professional networks.

Although the rapid advances in capitalist production since the beginning of the twentieth century have enabled many women to transcend their biological constraints, women remain largely disadvantaged in the labor market due to their unchanged domestic responsibilities (Brenner 2000). In most households, even though both wife and husband must work full time, the capitalist drive for profit continues to leave many household tasks to families and compels spouses to negotiate them *within* the household. Consequently, working women often end up with the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989). As mentioned earlier, a minority of high-income women or those from high-income families may break this vicious circle by buying out their domestic responsibilities, but the majority of working-class women cannot. This is especially true for poor working women (in the USA they are still primarily racial/ethnic minority women) who must shoulder both provider and homemaking roles (Beca Zinn 1994; Brenner 2000; Coontz 2000).

Interestingly, even though women around the world generally do more household work than men, few perceive it as unfair (Braun et al. 2008; Zuo and Bian 2001). It is widely noted that in the contemporary world of market economies, women, even high-income ones, tend to cut back on their paid work when conflicts between paid and unpaid work arise or when their children are young, due to workplace constraints on women's reproductive work and their families (Mason and Ekman 2007; Maume 2006; Voydanoff 2005). Women's greater devotion to the home undoubtedly reflects the disadvantages they face in a capitalist market economy. On the other hand, women also often make this choice in their own interests and according to their own gender strategies in given market and family circumstances (Hochschild 1989). Faced with the pressure of daunting demands from the workplace with little support for family life, many women, especially those of younger generations, have a tendency to re-champion the notion of "motherhood" (Brenner 2000; Mason and Ekman 2007).

Unlike capitalist or colonial societies, for over 30 years China has been dominated by state socialism characterized mainly by the nationalization of industry, the planned economy, centralized leadership, a fairly egalitarian

distribution of wealth, and a "from-cradle-to-grave" welfare system in urban areas, albeit at a very basic level. China's state socialism has been criticized for its failure to achieve women's liberation and gender equality, indicated by persistent gender gaps in both employment and domestic responsibilities. But there has been little exploration of the issue in the realm of state–family integration, in which gender might not only be multifaceted but might also operate according to an entirely different set of social values rooted in different social relations, producing different meanings of paid and domestic work from those in other societies. For that reason, instead of merely condemning China's state-socialist regime, we may pursue the following questions: What work–family relations did urban women experience when the state and the family were bound up with each other? What did employment and housework mean for women? Why did women identify themselves strongly with their work role and why were they willing to share the provider role with their spouses? What opportunities and constraints did women have in enacting their work and family roles? How did women's subjectivities and agency reflect the socialist configuration of gender? As will be shown in this book, although urban women of the revolutionary generation suffered from role strain, they did not feel the role conflict between work and family as strongly as did women of younger generations. Many missed their working life and suffered feelings of emptiness after retirement. A few even indicated to me they had contemplated suicide when they first retired. This was also the generation who had (and still have) a positive view of their employment, compared to younger generations.

The sharp contrast between the older and younger women's experiences clearly suggests the impact of the market beyond state domination; even the state no longer remains the same under the influence of market forces. To the extent that China's market economy is built on existing socialist conditions, studies of market–family and market–women relations in the post-Mao period will certainly reveal processes, trajectories, and dynamics that reflect socialist legacies on one hand and mark a departure from them on the other. This means that the theorizing of these relations and changes must be grounded in given institutional landscapes and history. As this book will show, the work–family conflicts that urban women face in the post-Mao era do not merely concern long and inflexible working hours, or the lack of affordable childcare, as has been the case in Western capitalist societies; they are reflected much more broadly in cutbacks by the state on its responsibility for family welfare in the name of efficiency and commodification of labor, which reduces the meaning of paid work and devalues

domestic work, fierce competition, which is incompatible with family values of cooperation, and the abandonment of socialist egalitarian practices, which has created unintended consequences for women's incentives to work. Under these circumstances, Chinese women may reveal behavioral and ideological patterns that are similar to or different from those of Western capitalist societies but surely varying gendering processes leading to those seemingly similar patterns. China's unique market transition from state socialism thus provides me with a great opportunity to make theoretical contributions to issues of market–family relations and gender.

Organization of the Book

For comparative purposes, this book is organized around two historical periods: the Maoist state-socialist era (Chapters 2 to 4) in Part I and the post-Mao era of market reform (Chapters 5 to 8) in Part II. The concluding chapter (Chapter 9) and the epilogue form Part III.

Using a historical approach, Chapter 2 examines the process of state–family integration under state socialism during the Mao era (1949–1978). More specifically, it shows how patriarchal families were transformed in an egalitarian direction, and the state was molded into a paternalistic system exercising tight control over the economic and political lives of families while providing extensive social welfare benefits to urban families and forging common interests. It also discusses how the state transformed gender and class both within and outside the family without weakening families as intact reproductive units. The cultural notion of obligation equality is introduced in this chapter to help the reader better understand China's unique contours in gender and class transformation processes.

Chapter 3 explores lived experiences of women of the revolutionary generation who came of age prior to the 1949 revolution. Using the life stories of female and male informants of the revolutionary cohort, this chapter presents urban women's sense of ownership and belonging in their workplace and the sense of heroism they felt through participating in the projects of nation building and socialist enterprise. Urban women's pursuit of obligation equality with men is found to be the main explanation for their devotion to state projects and for the absence on their part of a sense of injustice at being paid less in the workplace and doing more at home. The data also show the variety of experiences of women from different classes. Notwithstanding the general work–family compatibility of the state-socialist period, women still faced various challenges in balancing

work and family, due in part to low levels of socialized domestic services and the lack of modern appliances.

Using the same life stories of the women and men of the revolutionary cohort, Chapter 4 shows the limitations of state socialism as regards women's liberation, not merely from the gender-inequality perspective of many feminists. Rather, from the vantage point of the three-way interaction between the state, families, and women, it seeks to unravel urban women's triple burden in fulfilling their national and family obligations: serving the nation, helping support the family, and continually shouldering the lioness's share of routine domestic responsibilities. Finally, it finds the collective gains for Chinese society are the main source of balancing the sacrifices made by urban women and men.

Chapter 5 provides the backdrop to women's lived experiences in the post-Mao market-reform era (1978–present) in urban China. It first describes the disaggregation of state and family in the post-Mao market reform signaled by the state's retreat from its position of provider of social welfare for urban families and the introduction of market forces shuffling families into the private sector. It then tackles the resulting issues of labor denigration and work–family conflict, compared to the state-socialist period, despite the increased autonomy of the family, individual freedom, and rising standards of living.

Chapter 6 situates urban women's domestic-role orientation since China's market reform in work environments that were undergoing privatization or marketization processes. Data come from in-depth interviews with women of the Mao and post-Mao cohorts. It finds that labor commodification, the undermining of egalitarian socialist redistributive justice, and fierce competition are the main causes of women's alienation from their workplaces, which is leading to their growing domestic-role orientation. In this sense, the author sees urban women's greater devotion to their household responsibilities than to their labor-market work as passive resistance to labor denigration.

Employing in-depth interview data from women of the Mao and post-Mao cohorts in urban China, Chapter 7 examines women's increasingly diverse work and family roles since the market reform. It mainly observes three types of women: stay-at-home moms, women who combine work with family, and employment-/career-oriented women. Regardless of their work–family-role arrangements, women of all three types are found to be subject to work–family conflict in the post-Mao period, indicated

by longer work hours; excessive work demands; rising costs of housing, education, health care, and childcare; and less affordable social services for families.

Chapter 8 examines conceptions of marital equality among the Mao and post-Mao generations of urban women. It shows that, instead of engaging in transactional equity as suggested by Western theories of social exchange, many Chinese women pursue relational harmony with their spouses. To them, it is mutual respect and equal dignity that constitute the essence of marital equality rather than the exchange values of paid market work and unpaid domestic responsibilities. Chinese women's alternative conceptions of marital equality are attributable to their perceived collective family setting in which they share common interests with their spouses. As Chinese women still consider the family as a collective unit, their understanding of marital equality would mainly revolve around spousal cooperation and relational harmony. Alternative marital exchange patterns are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 9 is a concluding chapter which first highlights the main arguments and findings of the present study before discussing its theoretical and social implications. Theoretically, it covers three issues. First, it calls for a broader structural approach to examining gender dynamics. Second, it points out that there might be no real trade-off between economic growth and moderate redistribution of income. Finally, it emphasizes the role of the state in providing public goods, including family and individual well-being. Socially, it echoes the stress laid by many anti-liberal or anti-neoliberal thinkers on the importance of embedding economic relations in social relations to restore collective well-being and strengthen social cohesion.

The epilogue discusses the evolution of the Chinese government since the market reform and recent policy development under the current leadership of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang. It compares their policy orientation and governance style with those of their reform predecessors. While noting the Xi–Li team's greater determination to stick with the socialist pathway, this chapter points out contradictions and inconsistencies between the socialist rhetoric and the market undertakings of the current administration. At the same time, the chapter also touches on some opportunities and challenges in the wake of globalization for enhancing both the well-being of women and their families in urban China, and the integrity of the state.

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PART I

State-Socialist Era (1949—The 1980s)

CHAPTER 2

Equalizing Gender and Class

Class and gender transformations under state socialism in China were mainly effected through the integration of state and family. That is, the party-state incorporated the family as an institution in its nation-building design, demanding that the family align its goals with those of the nation. In the meantime, the state took family well-being into its own hands, providing the family with subsistent but all-encompassing welfare programs to meet basic needs. To be sure, state–family integration is not a socialist invention in China. The state and family had been closely intertwined with each other since ancient times. In fact, the Chinese word for "state" (*guo jia*) comprises two characters: state (*guo*) and family (*jia*). In the eyes of the ancient Chinese, the family was a miniature state and the state, an enlarged family; both had similar social hierarchies—ruled by a patriarch of the highest status—and followed the same order of ruler/ subject and father/son in the political hierarchy. Within the society (or the kingdom), the ruler dominated the subject; within the family, the husband dominated the wife, and the father dominated the son. To enforce this political order, Confucian ethics demanded loyalty (*zhong*) from the subject to the ruler and filial piety (*xiao*) from the son to the father; but *zhong* and *xiao* were not designed to compete with each other given the integrated nature of family and state orders. A man's loyalty to the ruler could not be relied on if he failed to fulfill his duties to his father. Following the same logic, the Confucian philosophy of Chinese politics posits that the successful government of the nation lies in the harmony of the family which, in

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_2

turn, relies on its members to maintain their own moral compliance with the prescribed social order and relations. Consequently, the family served as the main source of socialization and of political stability; likewise, the state helped to support patriarchal families by operating according to patriarchal family values. That was why, in traditional Chinese society, the term "subjects/people" (*chen min*) was often used interchangeably with "sons/people" (*zi min*); and benign government officials to this day are often called "fatherly-motherly officials" (*fu mu guan*).

However, this by no means suggests that there was no conflict between state and family interests. It was often the case, especially during times of war, that a man's loyalty to the ruler would also require him to make a sacrifice of his filial duties to his parents. In the case of conflict between the two, a man was expected to subordinate his family interest to that of the state by putting his loyalty to the ruler above his family duties. This was the same for women, perhaps to a lesser extent, given the rather clear gendered division of labor regarding internal and external affairs prior to the 1949 revolution. Nonetheless China's history contains countless stories of female soldiers and generals who fought on the front line for their kingdom in ancient times and for their nation in contemporary China at the expense of their family duties; examples include the legendary Hua Mulan and Mu Guiying. On the other hand, it was not until the 1949 revolution that Chinese rulers exercised much direct control over families; instead, they mainly relied on the heads of clans or reputable gentries to govern communities below the county level. In the new era, by contrast, the Communist Party of China (CPC) took on a much more aggressive role in bringing families under its direct control.

Under the Maoist rule that began in the 1950s, state–family integration meant that the two institutions were mutually embedded and supported by each other with no clear demarcation between public and private domains. Throughout the Mao period, the family was restructured around the goals of nation building; the economic system, in turn, resembled the traditional corporate family, organizing economic activities and providing all-encompassing welfare to urban families.[1] The political configuration was based on centralized paternalistic leadership, which deeply penetrated the family domain with its policies and ideologies, forging shared interests and nationalist and socialist ideals. In the meantime, economic and social policies aimed at stabilizing and improving the lives of families (except for "unfavorable" classes during the political turmoil). Consequently, the state was quite successful in transforming gender and class both within and outside the family realm without weakening families as intact reproductive units.

Transforming Patriarchal Families for Socialist Projects

At the dawn of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in late 1949, the party-state was fully aware of the nationwide economic devastation and the urgent need to pool all human and limited material resources to build a state free from foreign domination, class exploitation, and hunger. However, most of the material and human resources were controlled by patrilineal families which were potential obstacles to the state's nationalist and socialist projects, although most families had few material resources. For the party-state, therefore, the first step was to take various measures to transform age-old patrilineal families, nesting them in the larger collective system of the state.

Implementing New State-Oriented Marriage Laws

While Western family law has developed mainly to protect individual rights, CPC family laws prior to the market reform aimed at consolidating state power without undermining the intactness of families. As early as 1931, the CPC promulgated a new marriage decree in its occupied Soviet Republic in rural Jiangxi province: it outlawed arranged, forced, and purchased marriages, child-brides, and polygamy; legitimated free-choice marriage, monogamy, divorce, equal rights between husband and wife, equal inheritance rights between genders; and it ensured children's well-being by restricting child labor, forbidding child abuse, and protecting the rights of children born out of wedlock after parental divorce (Duan 2007a). Given that many divorced women lost their allotted land, the 1934 Marriage Law included an article allowing divorced women to continue to own land either by keeping their allotted land or gaining a new piece in their home village. The Law also recognized non-marital cohabitation as marriage to prevent female-partner desertion, specified a male divorcee's obligation to support his ex-wife, and allowed illegitimate children to be raised by their mother as well, or to choose either parent as their carer. The new marriage laws weakened the patriarchal orders between genders and generations, reduced the number of unhappy marriages, enhanced women's economic and social status, and, hence, improved family relations (Duan 2007a). More importantly, the implementation of the new marriage laws mobilized many individuals, particularly women and young people, to participate in economic and political activities in support of the Soviet region, contributing to the development and stability of the region.

According to a 1930s report from the region (Duan 2007a), women filled short-term labor demands while men were fighting at the front; women were actively involved in elections, did laundry for wounded soldiers in hospitals, and collected various forms of donation for the Red Army, such as food, clothing, and cigarettes; some even joined the army. Meanwhile, young children were organized around the Young Pioneer League, and some teenagers joined the army. Both women and children were engaged in economic production while many men joined the Red Army fighting Guomindang (GMD, the nationalists) at the front.

After the 1931 and 1934 marriage laws in Jiangxi Soviet regions, more regulations on marriage were developed and they reflected more government involvement. The 1939 Shaanganning (provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia) Border Region Marriage Regulations stipulated: "Divorce will be granted and the certificate will be issued if one party initiates divorce proceedings according to the divorce criteria, the request is found by the city or township governments to meet the criteria, and if the spouse does not dispute the request. Otherwise, the court will decide whether the divorce will be granted." This article departed somewhat from the 1934 Marriage Law which allowed the immediate granting of divorce as long as one spouse requested it; the purpose was to avoid individuals' abuse of their divorce rights (Duan 2007b). The 1939 Regulations also recognized the rights of all illegitimate children, whether or not their parents were divorced, prohibiting child abuse and desertion.

The 1950 Marriage Law was based largely on the 1930s laws and, again, was designed to meet the national objective of establishing a new democratic regime. It began by advocating a "new democratic marriage" completely doing away with the "feudal marriage system." In addition to the emphasis on free choice, monogamy, gender equality, and the protection of women's and children's rights and interests, as stipulated in the 1930s laws, it spelled out explicit sets of obligations for family members in order to strengthen both the nation and the family. Article 8, for example, read "husband and wife have the obligation to mutually respect, assist, and look after each other, to live in harmony, to participate in productive labor, to raise children, and to strive jointly for family happiness and construction of the new society" (All-China Women's Federation 1979, p. 200). The new Chinese government believed that the 1950 Marriage Law was consistent with people's interests and could only be introduced in new democratic countries like China; more importantly it would promote much greater enthusiasm among people, especially working people, for strengthening the new regime. For that reason, the new CPC-led government went beyond the scope of the law in making several

announcements and launching mass campaigns urging administrators at all levels to promote the Marriage Law (All-China Women's Federation 1979, pp. 206–208, pp. 209–211). The Cultural Revolution marked the peak of the state's involvement in marriages in which the spouses were conceived as revolutionary comrades—they held a Maoist ritual at the wedding, received Mao's works from their co-workers as wedding gifts, and were expected to continually follow the path of revolution set by the party-state.

Sending Women into the Labor Force in the Nationalized Economy

Prior to China's 1949 revolution, few urban women had worked outside the home, and those who did were often stigmatized as poor and inappropriate (Harrel 2000). In 1949 women accounted for only 7.5 % of the urban workforce. The mass entry of women into employment in urban areas only took place as China moved toward state socialism. Following the Marxian political ideology of class elimination, the CPC nationalized the means of production after the 1949 revolution. By 1956 the state had handed nearly 90 % of privately owned industries or business over to the state itself or to collectives. Given that the overwhelming majority of industries and businesses had been family owned, the nationalization of industry and business simultaneously undermined the family's economic function and removed the material base of patriarchal power and male lineage within the family.

It was against this historical backdrop that the party-state sent urban women out to work. The state believed, following Frederick Engels' doctrine, that only through participation in social production could women achieve their ultimate liberation. Through the years, the state created millions of jobs for women. By the 1980s, nine in ten able-bodied urban women were employed (Zuo and Jiang 2009). Women's employment, though it undoubtedly helped with their family's financial well-being, further undercut familial patriarchal power. But unlike many capitalist societies where the weakening of family patriarchy also attenuated cooperative relations between women and men and, hence, collective obligation through market competition and family privatization (Coontz 2000), under state socialism, both men and women were urged to combine their family and work roles to fulfill their dual obligations to the nation and their families. Meanwhile, the state gave preference to mediation rather than adjudication in cases of spousal conflict, which contributed to low divorce rates during this period, along with the existence of cultural and structural constraints on divorce, such as fear of social stigma or restricted access to housing (Diamant 2000).

Although there are no official statistics available for divorce rates prior to 1985, until the 1980s, divorce was very unpopular in urban China, compared to many industrial nations. When it did occur, it was mainly among couples from "unfavorable" classes, triggered by political turmoil, who were often pressured by leaders to divorce their denounced spouses.

Equally importantly, the state's gender strategies were conducive to its broad class projects of universal employment and egalitarianism. According to China's socialist ideal, there should be no unemployment under socialism. Nor should one rely on any means but labor to make a living. In contrast with earlier models, the party-state enforced a reversal of class relations by obliging able-bodied individuals to make a living only through work and by glorifying labor (Rofel 1999). Along with the class transformation, the party-state used its discursive power to move women nearer to the center of the public arena, creating imageries of "new women" firmly located in the working class and in close proximity to machinery and technology (Chen 2003). The mass mobilization of female employment, which peaked in the 1980s, not only expanded women's social roles but also removed the stigma attached to female workers of both being poor and breaching gender boundaries (Harrel 2000; Rofel 1999).

Meanwhile, the state applied the same egalitarian principle at workplaces. The term "equal work equal pay" (*tong gong tong chou*) between genders first appeared on 25 January 1953 in the *People's Daily*, which reported a rural woman trying to achieve "equal work equal pay" with her male counterparts. The report produced a public outcry and the idea of "equal work equal pay" was soon included in the 1954 Constitution. In reality, though, the state's efforts to promote gender equality in employment fell short of its rhetoric, especially during the earlier stages of the PRC (Evans 2008; Liu 2007; Manning 2006). In urban areas, men were still paid more and occupied more skilled jobs and higher positions. In times of excess urban labor supply, women often took the brunt of layoffs and their domestic roles were stressed again by the state (Andors 1983; Croll 1981; Davin 1976). Nonetheless women's mass employment over the years under state socialism was forming a material base for their economic independence in the home. From the vantage point of the party-state, urban women's mass employment enabled the state to make good use of female resources in nation building. As Mao emphasized (1977, p. 269) in 1955: "Women form a great reserve of labour-power in China. This reserve should be tapped in the struggle to build a great socialist country. The principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women must be enforced to encourage women to engage in productive activity." The

party-state was, consequently, also able to monitor the minds of people more closely since the household was considered the place where non-socialist thinking was most active (Rofel 1999), and individuals could be molded into socialist collective beings through their work experiences.

"The Dual Policy of Diligence and Frugality" (*liang qin fang zhen*)—Extending State Policy to the Home Front

During the state-socialist period, there was hardly any separate family policy. Instead, the state often extended its state policies into the domestic sphere. Perhaps the most typical of such policy extension was the dual policy of diligence and frugality (*liang qin fang zhen*) in both national construction and homemaking. Following the 1956 Eighth National Congress of the CPC which emphasized industrialization and economic development as new national objectives, Mao Zedong (1977, p. 419) pointed out in early 1957 that China faced a contradiction between the state's ambition and its impoverished economy; therefore, the Chinese needed to pursue "the policy of building up our country through diligence and frugality; that is, practicing strict frugalness and anti-extravagance." In commenting on the report drafted by the All-China Women's Federation for the Third National Women's Congress in the same year, Deng Xiaoping, the then head of the CPC Secretariat, concluded that women work (*fu nü gong zuo*) from then on should mainly focus on diligence and frugality in both national construction and homemaking for the success of socialism (W. Liu 2007). Deng's proposed *liang qin* principle was further approved by the CPC Central Politburo and thus formally included in the report of the Third National Women's Congress as a main strategic task for women's work in subsequent years. The report called on women to work hard for the nation, and at home, to save every inch of cloth and every penny.

The *liang qin* principle also helped ease urban women's concerns about female unemployment in the 1950s. As then premier Zhou Enlai pointed out in his article titled "A few suggestions concerning labor wages and labor security and welfare," household labor was also a form of social labor and equally glorious. This was because good-quality housework would indirectly contribute to socialist construction by serving other adult family members who directly participated in it. For that reason, Zhou believed that a housewife was entitled to the family income earned by other family members (W. Liu 2007).

Echoing the calls made by Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai, Zhang Yun, then vice-chairman of the All-China's Women's Federation, presented a working report at the Third Women's Representative Assembly of China held in September 1957, titled "Building the nation frugally, running the family frugally for socialist construction." In her speech Zhang urged women to contribute to national accumulation by working hard and being frugal both at home and at work. In addition, Zhang also pointed out the importance of housework and encouraged housewives to take good care of all other family members, so that the working family members could be fully devoted to their paid work and children would grow up in good physical and mental health. These tasks were considered as housewives' "glorious responsibilities." The party-state thus mobilized urban housewives to serve the national agenda indirectly on their home front. Although this mobilizing effort would be meaningless from the point of view of economic incentives since housewives would not get paid for doing it, domestic work took on a broader social significance; it acquired the social function of promoting gender equality by recognizing domestic work as a form of contribution to society, reminding husbands and wives of their common goals and cooperative relations.

Expanding the State's Role in Urban Family Well-Being and Control

Providing a Safety Net and Labor Insurance

While subordinating family development to nation building, at the same time the party-state made a concerted effort to ensure the well-being of the family. With its consolidated economic power, the party-state took several administrative measures to stimulate the flagging economy, curb rampant inflation and unemployment, stabilize the prices of staple commodities, and create new jobs, thus ensuring the basic livelihood of the millions of poor urban families who constituted over 90 % of the urban population (Pang and Chen 1999; Zuo 1986; Song 2001). In the early 1950s, inflation was successfully brought under control. By 1957, 16.7 million jobs had been created, of which one-third were introduced by the government, and the unemployment rate went down from 23.6 % to 5.9 % (Bian 1994). In keeping with the planned economy, the state from 1955 imposed a labor quota system in which job placement was mainly achieved through direct state assignments operated by state labor agencies. But this centralized policy was relaxed during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1959) when large numbers

of workers were needed in urban areas. Between 1957 and 1960, urban employment nearly doubled, enabled by an influx of large numbers of rural workers. The period 1961–1963 saw an economic disaster due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward. The central government tightened its control again and resorted to austerity measures. One of them was to substantially cut the urban population, which had risen from 99 million in 1957 to 130 million by 1960, in order to solve the severe problems of food and job shortages in urban areas. Aware that this measure had the potential consequence of "shaking people's lives," the central leadership ordered governments of all levels to take "a strong determination, careful steps, painstaking work, and a full accountability throughout the process" (Pang and Chen 1999, p. 283). Through the government's careful efforts and ordinary urban dwellers' understanding and cooperation, more than 18 million workers recruited from rural areas returned to their home villages. Largely due to people's trust in the central leadership, few incidents of social upheaval occurred during this period despite this state-imposed urban-to-rural population movement—an unprecedented event in Chinese history (Pang and Chen 1999). The remaining unemployment problem was further eased by the state sending more than one million urban youths to rural areas between 1960 and 1966. During the Cultural Revolution, by contrast, following a radical state policy of eradicating class exploitation, millions of urban temporary and contract workers obtained permanent work status, which triggered another mass transfer of urban youths to rural areas to alleviate the pressure of unemployment. Although 14.5 million new jobs were created in 1978 and 1979, urban youth unemployment was around 5.4 %. For that reason, the state introduced a system called "replacement by substitution" (*dingti*), which meant that workers would retire early and one of their children would take over their jobs (Bian 1994, p. 55). Through all these measures, the state managed to keep the official urban unemployment rate under 2 % for most of the time until 1989 as the market reform began to take shape in cities (Song 2001).

Concomitant with the provision of the safety net was the implementation of labor insurance, beginning in the early 1950s. Given the war-torn economic devastation for the vast majority of the urban population at the onset of the PRC, the State Council in 1951 promulgated the Labor Insurance Regulations which specified various benefits for workers in respect of retirement, sickness, work-related injuries and deaths, hazardous working conditions, and maternity (All-China Women's Federation 1979, pp. 179–181). But at this stage, the Labor Insurance Regulations only covered SOEs, jointly owned enterprises and co-op factories with over 100 employees, as

well as staff in the railway, navigation, and postal industries. By 1953, with the recovery of the economy, the legislation had not only been extended to include all manufacturing, mining, construction, and transportation industries, but had also raised the levels of benefits for workers. The labor insurance provisions had reached 94 % of workers in all industries by 1956 (Song 2001). Social security legislation covering staff in the government and in tertiary industries was also introduced as early as 1952 (Song 2001).

By the mid-1950s, a unified state-/collectively owned work unit (*danwei*) system was created, directly connecting the state with individuals in urban society (Bian 1994; Whyte and Parish 1984). Through the *danwei* system, the state controlled and allocated economic and labor resources on one hand, and ensured the basic livelihood of all urban families on the other, albeit at subsistence level. More specifically, the *danwei* provided every worker/employee with lifetime job security (called the "iron rice bowl"), despite the fact that no one could fully support their family with their own income due to the low level of wages. The *danwei* had thus replaced the family in providing individuals with job security. But the state had no intention of dismantling the family. Instead, it was mainly interested in bringing individuals under its control by helping them improve the material lives of their families, as we shall see below.

Ensuring Family Economic Well-Being

In addition to labor insurance, the state developed more regulations providing welfare benefits to working people and their families. These included the 1950 Labor Union Law, the 1956 Subsidy Measures for Workers with Financial Difficulties (issued by the national Labor Union), and the 1956 Instructions on Several Issues concerning Workers' Livelihood (issued by the State Council). The latter required all work units to subsidize workers whose per capita monthly family income was between 10 yuan and 12 yuan, in addition to financial assistance already provided by the union. In 1962, the ministries of labor and finance and the Labor Union issued further instructions about the proportion of the budget of each work unit to be used for subsidizing low-income workers and their families: not less than 30 % of the welfare fund of an enterprise or 60 % of it if it was a government/professional agency; not less than 20 % of the bonuses of an enterprise; and not less than 40 % of union dues. Cash subsidies for a low-income family amounted on average to about 10 yuan per family during the 1950s through 1970s (Song 2001).

Furthermore, old-age support, which used to be entirely a family responsibility, was also taken into the hands of the state. In 1958, the State Council passed the Tentative Regulations on the Retirement of Workers and Staff which included retirement benefits for disabled workers equivalent to those of other workers, ill-health early retirement, a reduction in the length of service required to be eligible for retirement, 5 % increase in retirement pensions for those who had made special contributions at work; benefits were also extended to a wider population, such as rural retail co-ops and civilian service people in the military (Song 2001). Workers who died on duty would have their funeral expenses fully covered by their work units, and their dependents would receive monthly payments from their work units until they were no longer dependent. Those who died in service, but not on duty, had the same benefits coverage as those who died on duty. Their families would receive a single payment equal to a month's pay of the deceased (Bian 1994).

Of course, individuals and families belonging to "bad classes," such as capitalists and counter-revolutionaries, were not eligible for these benefits. For example, the opening paragraph of the revised 1953 Labor Insurance Regulations made it clear that the prescribed labor benefits would apply to "all workers and staff members (including apprentices) except those whose political rights are deprived" (All-China Women's Federation 1979, p. 179). By contrast, the state took particular care of CPC revolutionaries and their families. Following the wartime CPC practice, in 1950 the Interior Ministry announced five sets of regulations offering preferential and special treatment to disabled service people and to the family members of revolutionary martyrs[2] (Guo 2009). These regulations were revised and developed in 1983 to further ensure the standard of living of the families in the categories of revolutionary martyrs and service people (Guo 2009).

Health Insurance

Health insurance was another benefit enjoyed by working individuals from the founding of the PRC. The 1951 Labor Insurance Regulations stipulated first, that workers from state- and collectively owned enterprises had the cost of doctors' visits, treatment, hospitalization, and non-expensive medicine covered by their enterprises; the enterprise subsidized the cost for those with financial difficulties. Second, for sick leave lasting up to six months, workers were entitled to 60 % to 100 % of their wages, depending on the length

of their service at their work unit. If the sick leave continued beyond six months, workers would be allowed to collect 40 % to 60 % of their wages until they returned to work, became disabled, or died. Third, workers who resigned due to total incapacity would be entitled to welfare benefits—50 % of their wages if they needed physical assistance and 40 % if they did not. Finally, family members were entitled to half the costs of doctors' visits, treatment, and non-expensive medicine to be met by the enterprise. Due to substantial wastage resulting from the state's generous medical coverage, in 1966 the Ministry of Labor and the All-China Labor Union introduced a system to prevent the abuse of medical benefits by individuals[3] (Song 2001). Government officials, professionals, and staff from various institutions, as well as military service personnel enjoyed similar medical benefits under what was called the public health care (*gong fei yi liao*) system which reimbursed their medical expenses. But anyone dismissed by the government or institutions for committing a criminal offence was not entitled to any health benefits.

Housing Benefits

Under the planned economy and socialist ideal of public ownership, private housing underwent a dramatic decline and the housing market almost disappeared. Nationwide, between 1949 and 1987, 95 % of housing was owned and controlled by the state. Housing benefits were claimed mainly through one's (mainly men's) work unit or from the municipal authorities of each city. The size and quality of housing varied according to its ownership type (i.e. state or collective), the size of the work unit (large-scale factories as opposed to small ones), as well as types of organization (e.g. government agencies, government-affiliated institutes, enterprises, or service industries). Regardless, public housing distribution was mainly based on family size within each type of organization; the average monthly rent was less than 2 % of the income of an average wage earner, affordable to all the employed population and their families. Although the government's investment in housing substantially declined from 10.6 % in the early 1950s to 5.7 % in the late Cultural Revolution, it increased again to 20–25 % in the first half of the 1980s (Song 2001).

Protection and Benefits for Women Workers

In her report on urban women workers in 1950, Deng Yingchao, the vice-chairman of the Third Executive Committee of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation, emphasized that unemployed women workers should

be equally entitled to the unemployment relief fund (Deng 1979). According to the 1950 Labor Insurance provisions, women workers enjoyed the same benefits as did male workers, except that the retirement age for women was 10 years younger (age 50) than that of male workers (age 60). It also stipulated that pregnant women workers enjoy free medical examinations and obstetric care , as well as up to 56 days of paid maternity leave after childbirth; women workers and the wives of male workers who gave birth were entitled to childbearing subsidies (All-China Women's Federation 1979, p. 180). When violation of women's health or other interests were noted, the All-China Women's Federation would raise them in national meetings and give instructions for correction. For example, Zhang Yun, the vice chairman of the Fourth Executive Committee of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation, criticized many factories in her 1952 report for ignoring women's issues such as forced marriage, family oppression, childcare burdens, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and illness. The problems were so serious, according to Zhang, that they had "severely undermined women workers' physical and mental health, causing increased absenteeism which in turn has negatively affected productivity." Zhang urged administrations of all levels to help resolve these problems (Zhang 1979, p. 70). To tackle job discrimination against pregnant women, in 1951 the State Council prohibited discrimination in both job recruitment and school enrolment (All-China Women's Federation 1979, pp. 182–183). Women's equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social, and familial activities were written into the Constitution of the PRC in 1954 (All-China Women's Federation 1979, p. 185). Beginning in the 1970s, women's paid maternity leave was extended to three months, and longer maternity leave of up to three years was also possible, depending on the work unit. In the latter case, the pay would be at least 65 % of the woman's salary (Bian 1994).

Moreover, from the inception of the PRC, the party-state urged cities to establish childcare services for working women. Deng Yingchao pointed out in her 1950 report: "In industrial cities where women workers were concentrated in, the first and foremost is to consolidate or increase childcare agencies and kindergartens in factories. In non-industrial cities, we should help women staff and teachers to set up childcare facilities. We should also widely spread childrearing knowledge, new methods...; and determine a childcare agency's service length, living standards, as well as the size of the facility according to people's standards of living, economic capacities, parental needs, and children's interests" (All-China Women's Federation 1979, p. 50). As early as 1950, daycare facilities began to flourish. Statistics suggest the number of work unit-run daycare

centers had reached 2738 by 1952, 22 times higher than those in 1949; there were also 4346 neighborhood-run daycare facilities in large- and medium-sized cities to accommodate working mothers' needs (Deng 1953). By the end of 1956, the number of daycare facilities had grown to more than 26,700, which exceeded the 1949 number by 260 times (Kang 1979). Some work units even provided nurseries for 56-day-old or older babies. Daycare facilities were often available beyond working hours. In large factories, additional childcare services were available, such as hairdressing, bathing, laundry, and dressmaking. In higher-income families daycare services were supplemented by live-in nannies or relatives. Women from low-income families often took their children to their workplaces, left them with neighbors, or simply had elder siblings take care of younger ones (Liu et al. 2008).

The state's advocacy for working women nearly stopped during the ten-year Cultural Revolution, but with the party-state's new modernization goals it was taken up again. To make the best use of 30 million female workers, the state brought in the notion of "the socialization and modernization of housework" to align it with the other four modernizations (industrial, agricultural, national defense, and technological/scientific). It believed that the four modernizations would bring about housework socialization and modernization, which in turn would further relieve women of housework burdens and contribute to the building of the four modernizations. In her working report at the Fourth Women's Representative Assembly of China in 1978, Kang Keqing hailed this vision, calling nurseries, daycare centers, and kindergartens "important aspects of socializing housework" and hence "a great cause." She even touted the ideas of promoting public eating facilities, catering services, food-processing industries, tailoring and laundry services, and so on, to further reduce the burden of domestic chores for women (Kang 1979, pp. 155–174). As later chapters show, this vision of socializing housework remains more rhetoric than reality, as China's course has been set towards marketization since the 1980s.

Education

Consistent with its class-based educational orientation in earlier periods, the party-state reiterated at the onset of the PRC that "education should mainly serve workers and peasants" (Pang and Chen 1999, p. 93). The intention was to eliminate the inequality of the old educational system under which the vast majority of working-class individuals had been deprived of the opportunity to attend school. To provide educational

opportunities to poor workers and peasants, central and local governments ran extensive free educational facilities for workers, peasants, and illiterate cadres, such as “catch-up” middle schools, literacy courses, and specialized training programs which produced many outstanding students who were sent to college by the government for further education (Pang and Chen 1999). The state also paid particular attention to women’s education. The literacy campaigns launched during the 1952–1958 period had lifted 16 million women out of illiteracy (Wei, 1995). Over the course of 30 years of state socialism, there were times when high-ranking officials’ children were given special privileges, with places at the best-quality schools exclusively reserved for them; these practices were corrected by state policies and political campaigns. For example, Mao Zedong commented on 14 June 1952: “The first step is to eliminate the status-based differential treatment among cadres’ children in school; the second step is to do away aristocrat schools as such (Yang 2008, pp. 283–284).” In 1955, schools for high-ranking cadres were eliminated. The Cultural Revolution marked the high point of Maoist efforts to minimize the gaps between ordinary working-class individuals and the privileged classes by attacking the urban-centered formal educational system modeled on that of the Soviet Union. Mao launched an “educational revolution,” urging that education be oriented toward rural areas, grassroots people, and the children of ordinary working people. As a result, many colleges were relocated to rural areas to meet the practical needs of peasants and strengthen the number and quality of teachers. For example, medical schools trained “bare-foot” doctors and medical staff for peasants; agricultural schools provided technical support for agricultural production. In both urban and rural areas, key schools and entrance examinations were abolished, to make education available to a wider range of children. Flexible forms of education were also created to accommodate the needs of ordinary people. In rural settings, “plough-and-read” or “horse-back” elementary schools appeared in sparsely populated areas. On 21 July 1968 a report on factory-based engineer training drew a comment from Mao that universities should shorten the length of courses and engineers and other professionals should be selected for training from among experienced workers and peasants, the “7.21 University” immediately began to flourish, reaching a peak of more than 40,000 nationwide in 1976. From 1970, some universities resumed enrolment for formal education, but they only recruited politically reliable workers, peasants, and army personnel with a minimum of three years’ work experience to the neglect of their aca-

demic capabilities (Yang 2008). The quality of education was undoubtedly compromised during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, some of the programs were so poor that they were forced to close by the end of the Mao era, including the "7.21 University." The recruitment of workers, peasants, and army personnel as students merely based on political criteria and work experience was stopped. That said, this period also saw a large nationwide expansion of elementary and high-school education, because its worker-peasant orientation enhanced enthusiasm at the local level for the development of flexible forms of education for children (Yang 2008).

At the same time, under state socialism, education was no longer a personal choice or family matter. Instead, it was perceived as individuals' national obligation for socialist construction. Children were considered "flowers of their motherland" and "successors of the revolution." This meant that individuals' social (or national) role began in childhood; individual freedom was further suppressed. During the heyday of state socialism in the 1960s and 1970s, high-school and college graduates had very limited career choices. Jobs were largely assigned by central or local government in accordance with central planning.

All the above labor insurance regulations and welfare policies protected workers' rights and livelihood, stabilized society, and paved the way for the party-state's socialist projects (Song 2001). At the same time, the party-state wasted no time in acting as the head of this "enlarged family," making serious attempts by various means to shift individuals' loyalty from their families to the party, to Mao, and to the communist revolution. In the workplace, individuals were required to "obey the organization," or "listen to the call of the party," even if this meant living separately from one's own family due to work assignments, divorcing one's spouse for political reasons, or denouncing one's own parents in political campaigns. In elementary school, children were taught "to be Mao's good children" and "the successors of the revolutionary cause." Loyalty campaigns reached their climax during the Cultural Revolution in which the CPC was perceived as a flawless party; Mao was elevated to a living deity. This was typically represented in the lyrics of a popular song at the time: "The sky and earth are big, but no bigger are they than the party's kindness; the father and mother are endearing, but no more so are they than Chairman Mao" (Zuo 1991). On the other hand, the loyalty campaigns would not have been effective without cultural support and the CPC setting an example by demonstrating that they were also members of this "enlarged family."

The Culture of Obligation and the Example set by the CPC

Unlike Western capitalist societies where the notion of personal rights flourished concomitantly with the emergence of individualistic culture, Chinese society had long emphasized personal obligations to each other and the collective, be it a family or the state, irrespective of hierarchical social relations. In ancient China, for example, Confucian ethics believed in a husband's righteousness to his wife (*fu yi*) while demanding a woman's chastity (*qi zhen*) to her husband, as well as a father's (parents') kindness (*fu ci*) to his (their) children while stressing children's filial piety (*zi xiao*) to their fathers (parents). These mutual obligations are fulfilled through each member performing his or her family role as prescribed by given norms (Lin 2000). On the societal level, an emperor should be benign to his subjects (*jun ren*) while demanding loyalty from them (*chen zhong*). But more importantly, the practice of mutual obligations had a bigger goal—preserving collective solidarity.

The Maoist political culture created in the contemporary era was partly founded on the age-long Confucian tradition, aiming to preserve a collective mind channeled through Maoist class and gender analyses. As early as the late 1930s, the Maoist discourse wiped out individualism, forging the consciousness of self in terms of others and of collectivity. As Mao wrote: "The individual is an element of the collective. When collective interests are increased, personal interests will subsequently be improved" (cited in Woo 1994, p. 290). By retaining individual–collective connections, the Maoist logic was one of struggle and sacrifice by both genders as the precondition of their ultimate liberation (Manning 2006). To maintain its discursive control, the CPC took a series of measures, including dismissing non-Maoist doctrines, unifying the revolutionary ideology, and imposing discipline (Apter and Saich 1994). Beginning with the Yan'an Rectification Campaign (1942–1944), the CPC launched numerous political campaigns and regular study sessions of Maoist texts to form a discursive community in which Maoist Marxism became sacred and institutionalized (Apter and Saich 1994).

Following the same orthodox beliefs, the CPC repeatedly called on women to fulfill their obligations to national projects (Tan 1993). To strengthen its discursive power, the CPC also tapped into cultural resources—the traditional Chinese culture which simultaneously demanded that women fulfill their obligations to the nation while allow-

ing them to transgress gender boundaries by equal participation in patriotic duties. Popular slogans were extended from "A man has responsibility for his country" to "so does a woman" (*tian xia xing wang*, *pi fu you ze*, *pi fu yi you ze*) in the early twentieth century, to "we [women] also have two hands and should not eat unearned food at home" popularized in the mid-1950s, as will be shown in the life stories of female informants of the revolutionary generation in Chapter 3.

In addition, along with male model-worker campaigns, the party-state set up numerous female role models whose selfless deeds signified heroism and honor (Chen 2003). The CPC's cultural strategies, at this historical moment of nationalism and socialist experiments, proved effective in mobilizing labor resources, and this was evidenced in part by the zeal with which heroic laborers took on their model statuses (Hershatter 2000). To the extent that the collectivist discourse was morally charged and hegemonic, individuals' behavior also became highly politicized. According to Evans (1997), accusations such as individualism and selfishness were often used to emphasize the moral qualities of the "collective subject," and carried moral and political consequences for individuals. This generated widespread fear as much as zeal. Such fear, however, came as much from peer pressure as from the leadership, because a work unit established the primacy of small-group interaction which reinforced self–other connections and, hence, the immediacy of mutual obligation (Apter and Saich 1994).

Perhaps more effective was the example set by the CPC in promoting the socialist ideal. Most research tends to focus on the authoritarian and repressive aspects of China's late leader Mao and the CPC to the neglect of their extraordinary abilities to mobilize the populace based on relationships of mutual obligations. As a result, party–people relations were reduced to a simple transactional exchange following the market principle of self-interest. For example, Andrew Walder (1986, p. 6) sees the CPC–people dyad as a "network of patron-client relations" in which the party branches relied on clients who gave their loyalty and support in exchange for career opportunities and other rewards. While this market-like reciprocity might ring true to a certain extent during the final years of state socialism, it was certainly an unpopular practice in the 1950s and 1960s. Missing from the transactional exchange point of view was the party-people non-market social exchange of mutual obligation growing out of shared socialist idealism under the charismatic leadership of Mao and the CPC (Lee 2002).

To be sure, the setting of an example by the leadership was not a CPC invention; it came down from ancient Confucian culture which called on

state officials and educators "to be exemplifiers for others" (Hu 2000, pp. 55–59). But the CPC utilized this cultural mechanism to a much greater extent in order to speed up the socialist transition. As early as 1921, the newly founded CPC claimed to be the "vanguard of the proletarians" who must take the lead in exercising the party's ideology and policies. It claimed "no special interests of its own apart from the interests of the working class and the broadest masses of the people" (Lin 2006, p. 144). "Our duty is to hold ourselves responsible to the people. Every word, every act and every policy must conform to the people's interests" (Mao 1961, p. 16). Despite the presence of official corruption here and there throughout the history of the CPC, the party often openly criticized and even criminalized corrupt cadres, applying various disciplinary measures and rectification campaigns. For example, on the day before the 1954 Marriage Law took effect, the central leadership issued an official announcement calling on all CPC members to take the lead in abiding by the law and threatening to criminalize those who caused injuries or death to those who followed the law (Zuo and Jiang 2009). During the second wage reform in 1956, the party-controlled State Council increased the wages for both female and male staff primarily in non-administrative sectors. Within the state apparatus, attention was given to narrowing the range of income disparity across the board. During the 1957–1960 period, the State Council reduced the salaries of high-ranking officials, men and women alike, by three times to bring down income gaps from 17.6 times to 12.3 times more. Since the 1950s, many Chinese have learned that Mao Zedong, among many who had made great sacrifices for a new China, lost six family members, including his first wife and eldest son. More recently, media interviews with those who had worked closely with some of the top leaders from the early years of the PRC revealed, for example, that Mao had reduced his salary by three tiers and Zhu De by four times during the economic hardship of 1960–1962. When Mao died, he was found to have no savings, only 500 yuan in cash. But he had 1.2 million yuan royalty money in his name which was donated to the party after his death according to his wish.

The dominance of obligation rhetoric in early socialist China prompted urbanites to find that it was in their own interests to allocate resources to collective well-being. However, the discursive hegemony of gender obligation equality should not merely be interpreted as a cultural constant or as manipulation from above by the central leadership. Rather, it may be seen as "cultural negotiations" (Rofel 1999, p. 279) amid China's

ongoing global struggles with colonialism and capitalism. The collective memory of this generation indicates that they might in fact have collectively contributed to the formation of such hegemony, as will be shown in Chapter 3.

Notes

1. In rural areas, by contrast, peasant families, although also organized by communes as part of collective units, received very few welfare benefits from the state during the Mao era, given the state's priority for industrialization conducted in urban areas.
2. These five sets of tentative regulations were: Compensations for the Families of Deceased Revolutionary Service People; Preferential Treatments of Family Members of Revolutionary Martyrs and of Revolutionary Service People; Preferential Treatments of and Compensations for Disabled Service People; Compensations for Disabled and Deceased Revolutionaries; and Compensations for Disabled and Deceased People's Militia and Public-Project Laborers.
3. It was called The Announcement of Issues concerning Improving the Labor Insurance and Medical System.The Announcement increased the proportion of medical expenses to be paid by workers. For example, it asked workers to pay for doctors' visits.

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CHAPTER 3

Socialist Workers, National Heroines

This chapter is devoted to lived experiences of women (and men) who witnessed China's communist revolution and went through the subsequent state-socialist period in the historical juncture described in Chapter 2. As is well known, both China's state socialism and state-orchestrated women's liberation and gender-equality campaigns have generated much controversy and have been criticized particularly by neoliberalism and Western feminism. Here "Western feminism" typically refers to the second-wave white middle-class feminist thoughts which, enlightening as they are, mainly focus on gender dichotomy to the neglect of its interaction with broader social historical forces involving parameters such as class, race, colonialism, post-colonialism, and socialism, among others. With "the end of history," neoliberal thinkers, Chinese and non-Chinese alike, blamed China's economic underdevelopment (relative to that of developed nations) on low efficiency, low work incentives, lack of personal freedom and family autonomy, and, more fundamentally, lack of a market economy and openness to global capitalist investment. In fact, China embarked on its 1978 market reform on similar theoretical grounds (see Chapter 5). Meanwhile, Western feminists have also long been dubious about Chinese state-sponsored feminism in the Mao era. Chinese reform feminists also challenge the party-state for failing to achieve full gender equality for Chinese women both at work and at home. And yet, neither neoliberals nor feminists, whether international or domestic, have listened closely to the voices of ordinary people who lived through the Mao era, whose accounts reveal

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_3

much more complicated work–family relationships and women's liberation issues during the state-socialist period, as state and family became integrated, than could have been anticipated.

State–family integration was undoubtedly achieved at the expense of family autonomy and personal freedom, as discussed in Chapter 2. On the other hand, these institutional arrangements also increased individuals' sense of ownership and belonging to their *danwei* and, for that matter, the nation, as the state incorporated the family's basic needs in its nation-building process. As members of Chinese society, most individuals had also gained a collective sense of freedom from foreign domination and from class exploitation. Therefore, this integrated state–society relationship tended to strive for better social (as opposed to *either* individualist *or* statist) well-being by creating public goods and expanding individuals' social roles through socialist transformation, which reinforced the collective identity of individuals.

"We Are the Masters of the Country": A Sense of Collective Ownership and Belonging

When women of the revolutionary cohort said in their interviews "we are liberated," "we become the masters of the country," they did not say so because they were brainwashed but because they had truly experienced it. As my data show, most women remembered vividly the "bitterness" (*ku*)—poverty, starvation, diseases, chaos, and the brutality of foreign aggression—that was inflicted upon them prior to the 1949 revolution. In the 1950s, with social disorder, scarce resources, and the entire nation still recovering from the war-torn economy, the sense of security women received from the *danwei* system made them feel it was not worth seeking familial autonomy. Many said: "How could my family possibly survive without the strengthening of our nation?"

Ms Zhang (age 73), a retired worker from a residential tailor shop in Beijing, was from a very poor family; she had been in poor health since childhood and her two siblings died before 1949. According to our interview with Zhang in 2000. Her father was a book-keeper in a department store who did not earn enough to support the family. There was no job security at that time; her father lost his job several times due to poor health and seriously impaired vision. Her mother, therefore, often had to collect coal and sell cigarettes in the street to help with family income. In 1945, Zhang married Mr Ding

(age78), an underemployed bus ticket inspector in Beijing. Ding, too, came from a very poor family in Tianjin. His father had no full-time job and his mother died when he was very young. Ding came to Beijing to look for a job when he was only 19 and worked in a car parts shop. Zhang recalled:

> My own family was often starved prior to liberation. I remember one day, I rushed to the grain store as soon as my husband handed me the pay check. I was so hungry that I fainted at the door step of the store. My second son still could not stand at age three due to malnutrition. My oldest son got pneumonia when he was only one year old. My mother had heard of a doctor who could cure that disease and went to ask him for help. But the doctor was reluctant, figuring we might not be able to pay.
>
> My mother kept kowtowing to him until a bump grew on her forehead. The doctor finally came and saved my son's life. Mother then had to sell clothes to pay the doctor.… After the liberation, my husband got a job at the catering department of the State Council; we were later on assigned a public housing apartment. Because we had so much debt accumulated from previous years, my husband's work unit provided us with subsidies averaging 30 yuan a month.[1] Moreover, most of our medical expenses could be reimbursed due to public health care. I myself found a job in our residential tailoring factory in 1958. During those years, I only had one thought: repay my gratitude to the Party—without the Party and liberation, my family would not have fared as well as we have today; we women would have remained at the bottom of society. Everyone in this [residential] area knows that I worked wholeheartedly for socialism in those years.

Socialist imagining led many women like Zhang to increasingly identify with the *danwei*, and feel they were the owners of the nation. Several women said in the interviews: "I did not feel tired working—it was just like working for myself."

The few skilled female workers and many petit bourgeoises in my study mostly complied with the operation of the *danwei* because it provided class equality and a safety net. Ms Tang (age 73) was a skilled worker in the Shanghai Tobacco Factory before liberation. She was paid by piecework and earned a decent income. After liberation, her monthly pay was cut by 25 % to be equal to that of other workers. When asked how she had felt about it back then, Tang replied: "What could I do? But I was not the only one; I did not mind helping low-wage earners in this way. My factory also provided labor security (*lao bao*) for all workers."

Mr Xie (age 79) was the manager of a hardware store in Beijing in the late 1940s; his wife, Ms Liu (age 81) was a housewife. According to Xie, he lost his store when the party-state turned all private businesses into state or collective ownerships in 1956, and he himself became a shop assistant at the Beijing Department Store (*Bai Huo Da Lou*). But he seemed content at the time owing to his newly acquired job security: "Although I lost my business to public ownership, I had gained a lifetime guarantee of a job which allowed me to support my entire family and my retirement. I had nothing to complain about, especially when I saw those big stores also turned into public ones, such as Tong Ren Tang pharmacy."[2] He had worked hard and had won an "advance worker" award in 1977 and some other years. But unlike Tang, Xie did not feel comfortable about being under constant scrutiny from his *danwei* because of his previous status as a small business man:

> Back then, I dared not wear new clothes for fear of accusations of embezzlement or other kinds of economic crimes—party members were watching you. In 1968 during the Cultural Revolution, my younger daughter did not want to be sent down to the country (*cha dui*); but we could not resist—the neighborhood committee ran meetings with the parents; your *danwei* would criticize you and penalize you if you refused to obey. Children were asked only to listen to the party rather than us parents.

Ms Liu shared a story in the interview which seemed to have changed her otherwise similar negative feelings about the CPC: "I remember, not long after the liberation, my family rushed me to the emergency care of Xiehe Hospital[3] due to massive bleeding resulting from [an unexpected] abortion. The doctors gave me immediate treatment without asking my family about our financial situation. I stayed in hospital for eight days. My husband donated blood. I was fed daily with pig's liver to help me replenish my blood supply—to this day I still dislike pig's liver because I got fed up with it in the hospital back then. On the day I was checking out of the hospital, surprisingly there was no charge for my medical or hospital expenses as they had found out our low-income situation." Liu eventually landed a voluntary job on a residential committee in her neighborhood. She said that she enjoyed working outside the family and helping people, even though the job was often onerous. For example, she once answered the call of the residential committee to harvest wheat in a Beijing suburb in the late 1960s. She did it for ten days, leaving her younger children

unattended. But she bore no grudge against her voluntary work. In the interview, Liu proudly mentioned that she had continued voluntary work until the late 1980s, including household hygiene inspections, collecting waste management fees, or being on night duty at the office of the residential committee. According to Liu, night duty in winter could be brutal for there was no heating in the office; but she bore no grudge. "This was because," she said, "first, I felt glorified as an active participant in community service and additionally, the head of the committee took the lead and did more than we did." For those reasons, Liu also encouraged her son and daughter-in-law, who lived with her, to participate in similar work after their retirement. One example was that her son wrote an issue of the neighborhood newsletter. According to Liu, her son did not expect any monetary reward and even said: "I would not have done this for my neighbors had I been offered pay." A caveat about Liu's long-term voluntary work in her neighborhood was that she did expect to earn some form of retirement benefits—*tui yang*, usually paid to retired staff members of residential committees—although at a much lower rate than a formal officer. She was disappointed that her voluntary work did not earn her the status of a formal employee of the residential committee because she did not earn the headship of the residential committee.

Perhaps a sense of ownership and belonging was mostly felt by CPC ideologues. The term "ownership" to them truly meant collective ownership of the oppressed rather than personal acquisition of any property. In fact, quite a few female CPC members came from rich families prior to the 1949 revolution but they gave up their good economic position to join the CPC-led revolution. This was because these women believed that their own social status hinged on the national well-being. Ms Cao (age 76, CPC member), a high-ranking state official, was from a wealthy Christian family in Shanghai; her father was a prominent doctor practicing Western medicine. Concerned that countless mothers died of puerperal infection due to the lack of effective medication in the 1930s, Cao's father recommended his daughters not to marry. To ensure them a comfortable life independent of men, Cao's parents built for her and her two sisters an eight-house compound in the city of Hangzhou, southwest of Shanghai. Cao was influenced from childhood by her parents' "rudimentary feminist ideal" (her own words). At nine, she attended Zhongxi Girls School (McTyeire)—the best missionary high school in Shanghai—and later earned a college degree. But at the age of 15, she joined the CPC for the following reasons:

> In my childhood, I saw prostitutes with STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] waiting to die on the streets, indentured laborers packed naked in window-less rooms to be kept from running away, poor men beaten up by foreign policemen, rich men smoking opium and messing around with prostitutes… I had two questions constantly at the back of my mind: Where would be *my* future if my country was conquered by foreign power? How could my parents [who often helped the poor through charity work] save so many poor people alone? My mother was very kind, giving away food to the poor; but soon there was a long queue every day in front of our house.

Seeing personal troubles through the lens of Marxism, Cao worked with CPC revolutionaries and placed her nationalist and class missions above her personal goals in the search for collective emancipation.

Ms Chen (age 76) was in a similar situation. Her father was a wealthy high-ranking GMD (Nationalist Party) official in the city of Nanjing when she was young. Chen received her college degree in the mid-1940s but in 1948 she went to the "Liberated Region" (*jie fang qu*) controlled by the CPC because of GMD corruption: "GMD was so corrupt at the time that the entire national economy was on the verge of collapse. Many educated young people could no longer put up with it." Ms Liu (age 76, a CPC member) was another high-ranking state official. She came from a rural family in Hebei province and became the head of a local branch of the Association for Resisting Japanese Aggression and Saving the Country (*kang ri jiu guo hui*) at the age of 14. Liu was strongly influenced by her father who had joined the CPC at the age of 30, and believed that her liberation as a woman depended mainly on the success of nationalist and class movements.

After the 1949 liberation, all three of them enjoyed their collective emancipation and had a strong sense of belonging to their workplaces. Ms Liu said in the interview: "Our hard-fought revolution had brought us the final victory, peace, and the elimination of starvation. We [cadres] lived under the "supply system" (*gong ji zhi*),[4] able to eat corn bread, cabbages or pickled vegetables and slept without worrying about being chased by enemies." Ms Chen added: "We were guaranteed jobs, housing, livelihood, and even retirement—fully taken care of by the state."

The combined efforts of the party-state to alter gender and class structures produced liberating results for married working women. To most women, dignified and non-exploitative employment outside the home provided them with new avenues to elevate their social status and enrich

their lives. Depending on their social position, women derived satisfaction from work for different reasons. For female party members and middle- to high-ranking officials, employment became an integral part of their life and a main source of identity. Family work and childcare, on the other hand, became somewhat burdensome and was left to others. For example, other people raised the children of all seven middle- to high-ranking female government officials interviewed in my study. When their roles were in conflict, they put work ahead of their families. Ms Ye (age 72) was then a cadre in a residential affairs office (*jie dao banshi chu*) in Beijing. She remembered having to leave all of her four children behind to be looked after by peasants as she and her husband traveled with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) between 1948 and 1952: "It was very hard to bring young children along; and I did not have good milk either. Every time I gave birth to a child, I would have to leave the child with a peasant family and paid a visit once in a while. This happened when we were in Hubei province." Ye eventually brought her children back to Beijing except for the oldest son, born in 1948. Two more children were born after 1953. Ye hired a nanny until later her mother-in-law moved in with them to take over domestic tasks. She said: "I was very busy—sometimes I did not get home until 10 p.m.… As for our kids' education, I only focused on an older one who had the best grades and had him supervise the homework of the others."

Those female cadres who had to juggle childcare and work often put work ahead of their childcare responsibilities. Ms Liu, for example, was the head of a local police station in the city of Beijing in the early 1950s. According to her, the police officers never had Sundays off or holidays after 1949. During the initial years of the PRC, her police station was located in an old living quarter and her office was also her home where she worked, ate, and slept:

> At that time, there were no rules concerning work hours and we had no life. I began working as soon as I woke up early in the morning and continued through till midnight. At one time, I ran a high fever; the doctor urged me to rest. But I replied: I had no place to rest, nor could I afford to take a break from childcare. Once I called my husband, who worked at the Municipal Military Control Commission (*jun guan hui*), for help. He said, he would do it; but he was equally busy and never found time to do it. Occasionally, I had to tie my one-year-old son to the bed when I needed to work away from the police station. It broke my heart to see him cry and make a mess on the bed. I finally found a childless woman nearby; she

> agreed to look after my son at her home. I gave her 7 yuan a month of the childcare allowance I received from the state. This continued until 1953 when I brought my son back to live with us again…But overall, I enjoyed working and was full of energy every morning when I woke up.

When asked why she had worked so hard, Liu replied: "for our country and for socialist construction." What about childcare? Liu said: "I did not have to worry for they were in the good hands [of the state]..." I commented: "You sound like they were not your children." Liu said: "True. I'd be happy as long as no one interfered with my work."

Those who had never worked outside the home found their employment enriched their lives and broadened their social circles. Ms Li (age 74), whose father and husband were revolutionaries, grew up in rural Shanxi province. She later moved to Beijing to join her husband and parents, and worked in a neighborhood-run tailor's shop. She recalled: "I only did sewing at home after I married and had no idea what it would be like working outside the house. I liked working—you talked and laughed with your co-workers." This was especially true of women with large families who became tired of childcare. Ms Han (age 71) had four children and a great deal of housework, from daily cooking and cleaning to making clothes and shoes for her children and her mother-in-law. Her husband was in the military and did not come home very often until he retired from the army in the 1970s. Han had wanted to work but had been unable to due to her demanding domestic responsibilities until 1967 when her children had entered their teens. She said in the interview that she would still have to make shoe soles even if she did not work outside the home. Paid work would not only enrich her life but also offer her earnings and a retirement pension.

For some women, paid employment also made them equal partners with their husbands in some aspects of their family life. Ms Zhang, mentioned above, who was also a colleague of Ms. Li's, often deferred to her husband when she was a housewife. Her paid work later provided her with some control over her employed life. For example, sometimes she would work until midnight to complete the books for the tailor's shop. Her husband, whose literacy level was higher than hers, not only strongly supported her but also often helped with the book-keeping.

Women from low-income households took advantage of paid work to help support the family. No longer did they feel ashamed of working outside the home. Several poor housewives, who had not worked outside the

home for fear of the stigma prior to the 1950s, expressed feelings towards their employment ranging from "good" to "proud," such was the changing meaning of work under socialism.

Furthermore, employment offered economic independence to women who were trapped in unhappy marriages. In an arranged marriage, Ms Yang (age 77) married into a business family at the age of 17 when her family was struck by poverty due to the Japanese invasion:

> My mother-in-law treated me like an indentured servant (*ya huan*). I had to do whatever she asked me to and finish my work whenever she called it a day. I was not allowed to touch money or to go out. During those years of marriage, I seldom saw my husband who was attending high school and later college, and who did not love me. In 1952, I came to Beijing to look for a job. I first received a five-month training in infant care; I then was assigned to a kindergarten. I finally gained freedom from my in-laws' family and ended my unhappy marriage through divorce. Although I often worked long hours without overtime pay in my *danwei*, I was happy, because I now had regular work hours with pay—no longer treated as an indentured servant. Nor did I constantly starve. Working for the nation was the same as working for myself.

With respect to class emancipation, men shared similar experiences and interests to women. Mr Ding, the husband of Ms Zhang, lost his mother in childhood and was raised by his older sister, who never married due to the need to raise him and his younger sister. Both his sisters having died, Ding got married in 1945 so that his family would have a woman to take responsibility for chores. Ding's first job was as a bus inspector. When the bus company went bankrupt, he landed a job at *Beijing Daily*, a newspaper, as a low-level staff member, earning a very low income hardly sufficient to support the family. Sometimes he had to sell his long gowns in order to feed the family. After the liberation, Ding was assigned to the State Council as a low-level staff member, but his salary was 70 yuan a month, much higher than the salaries of other low-level staff members. Even so his family was deemed to have substantial financial need due to his heavy debt. "*Danwei* asked me to repay my debt at 30 yuan a month but at the same time subsidized me by 30 yuan; it eventually wrote off my remaining debt of 300 yuan." Ding also remembered:

> As we approached the first Spring Festival since I had this new job, we were so poor that we could not even afford wheat flour to make dumplings. Then

> two heads (*ke zhang*) of my section paid a visit to my family, bringing us wheat flour and a cabbage for us to make dumplings. I was deeply touched. In subsequent years, we finally moved out of private housing to a public one to substantially cut down our rental payments. Moreover, my father who was 60 years old in 1950, also got a job as a receptionist in the reception office of a residential area. When my father died in 1955, the State Council paid for his clothing, coffin, cremation, and burial at the People's Tomb in the suburb of Beijing.

Mr Ding's gratitude to the new regime grew into a sense of ownership of the nation and attachment to his *danwei*. Of his father's burial he commented with pride:

> I did not even take one day's leave of absence to attend my father's funeral—didn't even think about it—I was ten thousand times grateful already for the state's burial of him… I have recently told the head of the Division of Retired Cadres not to collect my ashes or run a funeral for me after I die, just take my body to the Ba Baoshan Public Graveyard and cremate it. I would not want to further burden the state; I have been very content with my life.

Ding also recalled how he treasured state assets as if they were his own. Once he was transporting a few pieces of office furniture from his *danwei* to a different place a few kilometers away. In order to save gas for his *danwei*, he loaded the furniture onto a four-wheel cart and rode the cart to the destination.

Mr Du (age 74, non-party member), an electrician from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (now known as the Ministry of Commerce), shared Mr. Ding's feelings:

> I was from a rural area and my [parents'] family had many people and was poor. In 1938 when I was only 12, I went to Beijing to be an apprentice specializing in electrical work in order to support myself. Capitalists were cruel. I had learned that an apprentice could start making earnings only after three years of apprenticeship. There would be a one-to-two-month trial period in which a capitalist might let go of you. During the three years of apprenticeship, you would get free room and board, but the capitalist would not be held accountable if he beat an apprentice to death. The capitalist I worked for only paid me one meal a day when I was in apprenticeship, but I had to work around the clock. I was not only constantly scolded but also hit by the capitalist. I earned very little even after I finished apprenticeship. Under the CPC leadership, we enjoyed a safety net: Everyone could feed himself/

> herself despite our low wages. There were small discrepancies in income, housing, and other benefits between officials and rank-and-file workers. The leaders would visit you when you fell ill. My *danwei* would provide assistance when my family needed help. My family had a per-capita income less than 12 yuan a month; therefore, we received subsidies regularly. Not only all my medical expenses were covered but also those of my dependents were largely reimbursed. Once I spent 120 yuan on the medical expenses of one of my children. According to the policy, I could have half of his medical bill covered, but my *danwei* covered 100 yuan due to the financial difficulty of my family. We were truly emancipated. I felt tireless working. I would have felt guilty had I not worked hard.

"We Also Have Two Hands and Should Not Stay Home to Eat Unearned Food": An Equal-Obligation Ideology

Under the state-socialist system where private ownership was dismantled, basic livelihood ensured, and egalitarian distribution put in place, working-class men and women began to develop shared interests, which reduced the likelihood of competition and rivalry between genders, obscured women's overall sense of gender inequality, and motivated both genders to engage in what were viewed as obligatory contributions to the socialist enterprise, despite gender-based job segregation and income gaps. Ms Feng (age 81), a rural woman from a suburb of Beijing, landed a job in a housing renovation company in 1957. While most male workers were carpenters, bricklayers, or painters, she remained an unskilled worker doing menial labor, such as carrying buckets of cement or passing bricks to male bricklayers; and she only made one-half of men's wages. But she was proud of her work: "I showed my male co-workers that I could do what men could do [referring to her physical strength]; they also applauded me for my hard work!" Obviously what Feng competed with her male co-workers for was not individual rights-based pay equality or job integration but obligation-orientated contributions to the nation.

Ms Feng's failure to recognize gender inequality and her sense of pride were certainly rooted in her perceived collective membership. On the cultural level, her pursuit of gender-obligation equality reflected the Chinese culture of shame—one would win an award for contributing to collective well-being but lose it for not doing so. According to Confucianism, one

should be loyal to other members of one's social circle and fulfill one's obligations to the collectivity without seeking immediate repayment from other members (Fei 1998). In addition, Confucian ethics link the degree of mutual obligation to the depth of one's feelings towards others—the deeper the feeling, the more one has to give (Fei 1996; Zuo 2004). Anyone who fails to do so runs the risk of being ostracised. Meanwhile, Confucian norms require individuals to internalize the values of mutual obligation whether or not they are in the public eye (Sun 2004). The Confucian value of loyalty and mutual obligations grew from what Fei Xiaotong, a prominent sociologist in contemporary China, has called "the society of acquaintances" (*shu ren she hui*), where everyone is somehow related to everyone else either by blood or by marriage (Fei 1996, p. 39).

Although the kinship-based "society of acquaintances" was shattered in urban areas after 1949, a similar society of acquaintances was built by the party-state in the form of *danwei* organizations where one gained lifetime employment but could not change jobs at will. Under state socialism, each *danwei* served as a basic unit of the entire state system. Under these circumstances, individuals were bound by collective values of mutual obligation and loyalty to the CPC, hence continually subject to the culture of shame. Given the CPC's strong discursive power which penetrated every corner of society during the Mao period, the culture of shame was a widespread mechanism used to prompt individuals to make contributions and even personal sacrifice for nationalist and socialist projects beyond the *danwei* setting. Some of my female informants recalled a then popular saying: "Everyone has two hands and should not eat unearned food at home (*ren ren dou you yi shuang shou*, *bu zai jia li chi xian fan*)," implying that women should contribute to socialist undertakings just like men. This emerging discourse generated both pressure on and excitement for women. Except for those who had large numbers of young children, by 1958 all the housewives in my study had begun working outside the home. Many of them, however, worked in neighborhood-run factories and shops, or served on residential committees, which offered little or no pay. But women prided themselves on no longer "eating unearned food." Ms Li said: "I felt so ashamed that I could no longer stay home. I soon landed a job in that tailor shop, leaving my three young kids with my mother to look after during the day. I did not make a lot of money but I was proud to be able to contribute to the country."

Not every housewife had Li's social conscience; in fact, most of them did not. They were, rather, compelled to work to fulfill their national obligations.

And yet, once they started working outside the family, a sense of pride would emerge because of their increased ability to contribute to the collective benefits to which they were indebted. Ms Zhao's (age 70) family once lived on state subsidies due to its low per-capita family income. She remembered her residential committee first trying to persuade her to get a job in 1958; but she could not do it due to her childcare responsibilities, so her father-in-law did it on her behalf. A year later, the committee asked her again. She then started working in a food factory, which lifted her family out of state subsidies. She said: "When people asked me in the morning where I was headed, I told them, holding my head high: I was going to work! I finally gained a social status which made me so happy that I still had energy left after work to make shoe soles and do other chores." This reflected Zhao's combined feelings of empowerment for stepping out of the domestic confine and, more important, of pride for making contributions to the nation equal to others'. The example was again reminiscent of the mutual embeddedness of women's liberation and gender-obligation equality during earlier decades of nationalist movements. Women's pursuit of obligation equality once more brought them recognition and heroic status.

Women's heroic status was further bolstered by "learning and surpassing advanced workers" campaigns (*xue xian jin*, *gan xian jin*). The campaigns promoted competition among workers to make the greatest contributions to the country. Though exhausting, such obligation-based competition could be fulfilling because of the expansion in the social roles of women that it brought. Ms Qian (age 76), a temporary worker, recalled:

> I began working at the Beijing Knitting Mill in 1952. At that time, the factory still offered bonuses. I usually won second-prize bonuses. Then, the party called on technological innovation, asking us to find ways to save raw material. I finally managed to save 5.5 (Chinese) inches of a cotton thread on each leg of the stockings. Our factory not only rewarded me with cash bonuses but also put my name on the honor roll; they even praised me at a factory-wide rally!

By the end of the 1950s, state enterprises no longer offered cash bonuses. My informants said that model workers would at best receive a certificate of merit, a pen, or a towel; and yet people still worked conscientiously for fear of falling behind. This was evident for both male and female workers. Mr Zhang, the head of the carpentry team in a Beijing auto plant, recalled: "Workers competed for overtime despite no extra pay. Those not chosen

were often disappointed, asking me why I did not choose them. I often replied: 'I will next time.' " Why was this the case? According to Zhang, the head usually chose those whose performance was excellent. Therefore, being chosen was an honor and a sign of trust. My informants explained that the 1950s and 1960s were the era when people competed for contributions and honor. This was also echoed in the remarks of Mr Xie (mentioned above), a shop assistant in a department store: "Overload duties were common back then. Being chosen meant a lot of trust. Therefore, I wanted to do overload duties in spite of getting no overtime pay."

Fear is another factor that drove workers to compete to make contributions and chase honors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, under state socialism, individual behavior was morally charged and highly politicized; those who did not participate in the competition might suffer political consequences. Several female workers commented: "Who dared not work hard? Not only would your supervisor criticize you but also everyone else was watching you." No one wanted to lose face by being accused of laziness. Fear was especially rampant among those from bourgeois or petit bourgeois families, given the constant class-based campaigns against the bourgeoisie. Many of them attempted extraordinary feats to compensate for their class deficiency. Ms Chen (mentioned above), a middle-ranking state official, passed up the chance of a salary increase in 1958: "I was not from a good class background, you know. I thought that it would make it easier for me to work with my subordinates if I did so"—meaning that she would be more positively perceived by her peers at work.

Given the prevailing culture of shame, CPC members and their families were also fearful of failing to act as an appropriate role model. Ms M. Chen (age 83), the wife of a high-ranking cadre from Shanghai, reported her awkward experience as a housewife:

> I was asked to serve on our residential committee by virtue of my husband's status as a CPC cadre. I was not interested—I'd feel more comfortable just staying home. But sensing that it would not be quite appropriate to refuse, I ended up serving on the committee. Then we moved to another district. The residential committee there also asked me to serve. I was once more compelled to do so.

Similarly, men's work, which used to be only looking after their immediate or wider family, also became tied to state-socialist agendas. Many of my male informants found this somewhat burdensome, but they were willing

to comply because the safety net of guaranteed employment greatly alleviated anxiety associated with the male provider role. Mr Zhang (age 86), a worker from a Tofu factory, typically reflected men's conflicted self-positioning as collective subjects:

> There were always two-hour meetings after work. The [*danwei*] organization (*zuzhi*) used meetings to unify our thoughts. I was illiterate and did not have many thoughts; I just followed orders. For those who were reluctant to conform to *danwei* rules or the party ideology, factory leaders would educate them in daily meetings until they gave in. The state wanted to know what you were thinking and tried to change you. The only way it would know was to have you speak up in meetings.

And yet, Mr Zhang was content with the overall situation as he compared his life between pre- and socialist eras. At the age of 12, poverty forced Zhang into apprenticeship in Beijing. He could not find a permanent job until the 1950s:

> After liberation, I had a job. Although I only made a little more than 40 yuan a month to feed a family of seven, I did not worry. My *danwei* provided my family with subsidies. During those three years of economic hardship [1959–1961], Chairman Mao kept grain prices low; otherwise, my family would have starved. I thought I should do my part since the state treated us well.

The dominance of obligation rhetoric and the cultural mechanism of shame used in early socialist China undoubtedly formed a discursive hegemony that compelled urbanites to allocate their personal resources around the collective well-being. This hegemony of gender-obligation equality, however, should not be merely interpreted as a cultural constant or as manipulation from above by the central leadership. Rather, it can be seen as "cultural negotiations" (Rofel 1999, p. 279) amid China's ongoing struggles with colonialism and capitalism. The memories offered by individuals of this generation indicate that they in fact collectively contributed to the formation of this hegemony.

The CPC Exemplification and Obligation Equality

In his analysis of shop-floor politics in urban China, Andrew Walder portrayed a "foreman's empire" in China's factories (1986, p. 95) in which workers depended on their shop-floor supervisors. The present study paints a somewhat different picture of shop-floor supervisors as role models for their co-workers in production—a typical phenomenon across occupations in urban China under state socialism, partially enabled by the egalitarian remuneration system and the widespread practice of moral leadership (Lin 2006; Zuo 2013).

China's socialism, built on economic backwardness and the Cold War, required enormous individual sacrifice from all members of society (Lin 2006). To effectively prompt obligatory personal sacrifice, the CPC required all its members to take the lead and act as an example for ordinary people.[5] They were always called on to put the interests of the party and of the people above their own, be the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts. While such selfless behavior is rarely found among CPC members in reform China, many earlier CPC members were committed and disciplined communist ideologues who had survived countless attempts at destruction by their enemies (Esherick 2003).

My data indicate that the pursuit of obligation equality by the masses would not have been possible without the example set by the CPC. Due to the centralized political leadership and planned economy, the administrators of each *danwei*, who were usually CPC members, had very limited control over major production or personnel decisions, although they did enjoy privileges associated with their positions, such as higher salaries, better housing, more furniture, and so on. Nonetheless, in the eyes of my informants, the disparities between cadres and ordinary people were not substantial. Mr Du, the electrician mentioned earlier, recalled:

> In the 1950s, we were largely equal regardless of one's rank. For example, my division chief (*chu zhang*) from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce [now known as the Ministry of Commerce] only had one more bed than us blue-collar workers. He had a bigger and fancier desk (*xie zi tai*) whereas I had a smaller three-drawer desk (*san ti zhuo*); he earned 120 yuan a month and I earned 80 yuan. But we both lived in one-story old apartments (*ping fang*) of a similar size. It was very different from the present-day situation in which I was assigned a 72-square meter apartment whereas my division chief has moved into a new apartment of 150 square meters.

In addition, official corruption was rare prior to the reform era thanks to the example set by high-ranking officials. The aforementioned Ms Liu, a high-ranking state official in the late 1970s, recalled stories of a few top leaders in the heyday of socialism:

> Premier Zhou paid 5 yuan a month for going to work by car. When the premier called a Council meeting, he would put down 20 fen [cents] for every cup of tea he drank and grain coupons[6] on the table for a supper. The premier seldom told others to do the same; instead, he set himself as an example; others would follow.… He often wore shirts with mending patches covered by a Zhongshan suit. When Li Na, Chairman Mao's daughter, was studying at Beijing University, she always took the bus, not a car.…One of the top leaders of Beijing in the 1950s was among the low-income families. One day, we paid him a visit at his home and surprisingly found out that none of the cotton-padded beddings had a cover. That was because he had a lot of children and hence low per-capita family income. We did not find this embarrassing but instead, honorable, given Wang's honesty.

This does not mean that CPC officials enjoyed no privileges; yes, they did. However, even though some privileges enjoyed by high-ranking officials appear substantial, such as allocated cars and phone services, many rank-and-file informants felt that they had earned them by putting their own lives on the line during the war, and that they needed those services for the important work they were doing for the country.

Privileges notwithstanding, many long-term staunch CPC ideologues made an enduring effort to connect with grassroots people, setting an example of class equality in an ideal society. The life of Zeng Zhi (1911–1998) serves as an example. Zeng Zhi, a Red Army woman in the 1930s, was the wife of Tao Zhu.[7] Zeng joined the CPC in 1926. Throughout the bloody decades of the early twentieth century, Zeng survived countless battles, plots, death threats, and even false prosecutions from within the party, not to mention illnesses. Yet, all these never shook her beliefs or altered her behavior despite her much improved material conditions after the 1949 revolution. According to her autobiography (Zeng 2011), upon her appointment as the Bureau Chief of Heavy Industry in the Central-South Region in 1949, Zeng visited Pingxiang Coal Mine—the largest in the nation at the time—to learn about the appallingly strenuous and dangerous working conditions of the miners. To enhance the efficiency of her leadership, Zeng relocated the headquarters of the Bureau to a power plant in Guangzhou and moved her entire family to a workers' dorm in the

plant. The room was so crowded that she often had to sleep in her office. But her grassroots orientation won her the trust of the ordinary people whom she was serving. In her autobiography she wrote (pp. 319–320):

> Summer evenings were hot and humid. Our neighbors often brought out small tables to the *tianjing* (sky-well),[8] lining them up and sitting around them. We ate together, filling the *tianjing* with joyful conversations and laughs, and felt close to one another.…Here people were connected; there was no hierarchy, no boundary, only deep friendship.

As the union at the power plant arranged literacy and technology lessons for workers, Zeng led the way by taking technology lessons, and she seized every opportunity to gain expertise in power production by working closely with workers:

> Knowledge is obtained through practice—Marxist theory was correct in this. To increase my knowledge, I participated in every major maintenance activity of the electric machine—from disassembling, cleaning, and repairing to reassembling. The hardest job was to inspect and repair the boiler which was usually dirty and hot. To race with time, workers must put on damped clothes to get inside the boiler which often remained at 60 to 70 degrees Celsius even after 40 hours of its stoppage. The workers' thick shoe soles were smoking, making sizzling sounds; their clothes, steaming. One could only bear to stay about 10 minutes within the boiler before he got out to catch breaths. It was even more challenging to clean carbon-saving machine within the boiler—it consisted of many iron bars filled with ashes. One could only crawled into it through a foot-wide window, cleaning the dust in the dark under the same temperature.… I could not do the heavy job but I usually stayed with the workers within the boiler, which moved and inspired them, making us get along really well. (pp. 320–321)

The example Zeng set mobilizing human resources can be traced to her shared interests with workers and her commitment to her chosen revolutionary cause. As she repeatedly stated in her autobiography, "I have chosen to join the revolution, not to seek political power, material interests, or status … the party and people have given me a great deal of honor and material benefits, enough for me to enjoy for the rest of my life" (p. 388). She described the millions of "revolutionary martyrs," including two of her late husbands who were killed by enemies, as her role models. Her inspiration also came from the masses who lent strong support to the revolutionaries, ranging from material supplies to saving lives, including hers.

Zeng's stories were echoed by both male and female informants in our study. An overwhelming majority of informants agreed that party members were generally able to "take on onerous tasks ahead of others, but enjoy material benefits after others" (*chi ku zai qian*, *xiang shou zai hou*). Ms Wu (age 70, a non-party member), a garment factory worker, offered the following account: "We emphasized 'taking our factory as our home' (*yi chang wei jia*),[9] and 'cadres taking the lead' (*gan bu dai tou*). I was the head of a working team. I usually arrived in the factory around 6 a.m. to get ready for my shift beginning at 8 a.m. We officially got off work at 5 p.m., but I would check on machines and discharge electricity until 6 p.m. The head of the factory was usually the last one to leave." Mr Chen (age 74, a party member), a high-ranking official from the State Council, recalled: "Back then it was often the leading cadres who worked overtime or were on duty during holidays. A deputy secretariat of the State Council practically worked seven days a week."

The example set by CPC members helped to confirm to the masses that the CPC served the interests of the people, which in turn motivated the latter to participate in nation building as members of this socialist society. The 1950s and 1960s thus became decades of unprecedented devotion by workers, both male and female, to their work. Ms Wang (age 79, a non-party member) worked with her husband at a dining hall in Beijing between 1958 and 1963. Both of them often worked long hours, finishing at 11 p.m. Their two young daughters, one at elementary school and the other still at kindergarten, often ate at a nearby dining hall and put themselves to bed. Occasionally, the couple would be called to make dumplings around 3 a.m. for an important event. Ms Wang said that she worked as hard there as she did at home. But she had no complaint. One obvious reason was that no one dared to complain, but more importantly, the head of the dining hall was also working with them side by side.

In summary, the state-socialist arrangement at structural, cultural, and CPC behavioral levels thus made both men and women indebted to the collectivity, whose well-being was widely imagined to hinge on the success of the socialist state. At the same time, family lives were not undermined by state attacks on patrilineage but, rather, were improved through a stronger nation and the welfare benefits ensured by the state to *both* families *and* individuals. This was especially the case for the overwhelming majority of economically devastated families prior to the 1949 revolution. Seen in this light, individuals' fulfillment of their obligations to the nation was not only indicative of their gratitude to the party-state but also a testimony to

the shared interests between the state and family and between men and women. Consequently, both women and men were molded into "state persons" in the public sphere around the notion of obligation equality. Although the traditional gendered division of household labor remained intact, this should be understood as a "social necessity" (Coontz 1988) employed mainly to meet the needs of nation building rather than to privilege men.

Notes

1. This accounted for more than one-third of Zhang's family monthly income.
2. Tong Ren Tang is the most well-known Chinese pharmacy, founded in 1669 in Beijing.
3. The best hospital in Beijing.
4. A system of payment in kind which was practiced during the revolutionary wars and in the early days of the PRC, providing working people and their dependents with the staple necessities of life.
5. This can be found in almost all versions of the Doctrine of the Communist Party of China, and in all forms of propaganda, such as radio, newspapers, *danwei* bulletin boards, and lectures.
6. Grain coupons were first introduced to urban households in China in November 1953 because of widespread grain speculation by private grain traders as the state began to sell grain at low prices to households to avoid starvation. The CPC-led government rationed grain by issuing monthly grain coupons which would be good only for the month in which they were issued. The calculation of each person's monthly grain ration was based on age, gender, and occupation. The total amount of monthly coupons for each household was decided by the designated grain store in the household's residential area. The grain coupon policy finally ended in May 1993 as food supply became abundant.
7. The third most senior national leader to be denounced following the fall of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping during the Cultural Revolution.
8. An architectural style with an open space enclosed either by houses or by a combination of walls and houses.
9. Also see Ching Kwan Lee. 2002.

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CHAPTER 4

Women's Triple Burden

As mentioned in preceding chapters, the liberation achieved by women through national and class emancipation and their expanded social roles in the socialist enterprise by no means suggests that they achieved parity with men in employment opportunities. Nor did women and men undertake an equal share of household responsibilities in the course of pursuing obligation equality. As feminist scholars correctly point out, China's socialist transformation took place without challenging traditional gender ideas about family roles. As a result, women, especially ordinary working-class women, suffered from the double burden of work and housework (Evens 2008; Liu 2007; Rofel 1999; Wolf 1985). However, there has been little research on men's and women's roles as state persons, which merely added to the complexity of gender dynamics.

According to the social construction perspective, the gender system itself is embedded in a given institutional context (Treas 1993). In its interactions with wider society, the gender system tends to reveal diverse internal power dynamics and multiple sites of power production; it often generates fragmented, complex, and even contradictory results for gender relations (Connell 2002). Typical examples revealing multiple forms of oppression include research on families from racial and ethnic minorities, lower classes, and different societies. Complex intersections between gender and other stratifying factors often overshadow gender inequality, generate similar consequences for women and men in similar social locations, or create conflicting experiences for the two genders (e.g. Baca Zinn 1994; Kandiyoti

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_4

1998; Oropesa 1997; Zuo 2009). From this vantage point, gender can also be seen as situated conduct that emerges from various social arrangements and social structures; it is thus multidimensional, fluid, contesting, and subject to challenge and change over time (Connell 2002). The additional national duties for both genders in socialist China produced profoundly similar as well as gendered impacts on their experiences of work and family—both men and women were constrained by state agendas, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees.

For women, the constraints arose mainly not from their greater share of housework but from the very unbalanced distribution between the demands of state and family. While women's employment was glorified by the state, their domestic work was largely neglected. The popular saying "We also have two hands and should not stay home to eat unearned food" failed to recognize the challenging nature of women's domestic responsibilities and their value to the family, despite the state's recognition of their national value. Working women had to rely on their parents, nannies, kindergartens, or neighbors to look after their children. Those who could not afford help simply locked their children in the house until they returned from work; they also had to do all the housework, including making clothes and shoes in the evening, sometimes through the night. Husbands would take on some routine chores, such as food shopping and cooking, but to a limited extent since the equal sharing of household responsibility was never a part of state gender projects. The problem was especially acute for women whose husbands spent much longer at work than they did or commuted on a weekly or fortnightly basis, or even for longer periods. As a result, working women suffered severely from the strain and conflicts of their role, and from poor health. Ms Zhao, a food-factory worker, mentioned in Chapter 3, told her story:

> Once, my husband got reassigned to another city, leaving me to look after our five kids.… I started working in 1959, earning only 29 yuan a month. Because they lacked adequate care, one of my children got pneumonia; I fell ill too, weighing less than 100 *jin* (110 pounds, 5 feet 3 inches tall). My husband's *danwei* sent a representative to assess my family situation and eventually transferred him back to Beijing.

Some women had to stay at home due to the tremendous conflict between paid and domestic work. Ms Weng (age 86) resigned from her job due to exhaustion, low pay, her large number of children, and her husband's long hours of work as an engineer. In an interview in her apartment, Weng recounted her experience of paid work:

> I liked working so that I could liberate myself. In so doing, I could also help support the family. We had five kids but my husband earned only 89 yuan a month. I myself also wanted some economic independence. In 1958, after my paralyzed mother-in-law passed away, my residential committee asked me to work outside the family. I first worked at a daycare, but I soon got tired of it given how many kids I had myself. I then worked for three years in a photo factory. But it was hard to work while taking care of chores. I had to get up before 5 a.m. to do laundry and cook after I returned from work; the pay was very low. At that time, my youngest daughter was only five years old and sometimes she had to help out.

At this point, Weng's daughter interjected: "I remember once standing on a stool helping my mother make dough." Weng eventually left the job in 1963. To continue to support her family, she did embroidery from home as an outworker. Her school-age children also helped her with the embroidery work.

In fact, the universal employment but low-wage *danwei* system added another dimension to the conflict women experienced between supporting the state and providing for their families. This problem was exacerbated when the state treated women as dispensable labor during economic downturns (1959–1962), which directly contradicted the party-state's claim of "women's liberation." As Ms Wu (who also appears in Chapter 3) reported:

> My husband was a [factory] worker, earning only 53 yuan a month to support a family of four. I began working in a shoe factory in 1959. We had two kids at the time. The older one was one and half years old and the younger one was less than one. Each day, I would get up around 3 or 4 in the morning, putting the two kids in a small cart and taking them to a day care. It cost me 32 yuan a month for childcare, but I was still in apprenticeship, earning only 18 yuan a month. I worked so hard that my weight dropped from 120 *jin* to 98 *jin* in one year. I hoped to be promoted to permanent status in three years. But I did not make it for there were cutbacks of factory workers in 1962 due to economic downsizing. I lost my job; then I had to find a temporary one in a restaurant.

Women from politically defined "bad classes," such as capitalists or rightists, had to cope with political repression that often undermined their personal and family well-being. Ms C. Chen (age 79), whose husband owned a large factory, and Ms Lin (age 74), the wife of a rightist, both lost the financial and practical support of their husbands and had to raise

young children on their own. Both of them juggled work and family, and both suffered from the political turmoil. To them, the notion of women's liberation made little sense. Ms C. Chen worked as a product inspector in a large printing company which her father-in-law used to own and which was turned into a state enterprise in 1958. During the Cultural Revolution, she was forced to clean a public restroom in the factory for a while and then was brought back as a shop-floor worker. Chen began her recollections with a politically correct statement in a sarcastic tone, but then revealed her true feelings:"The new society is of course better than the older one—I had a job and now enjoy a retirement pension.… My family has also gone through a lot: we lost all our family assets and comfortable life, endured persecutions in all political campaigns, and I was eventually divorced for those campaigns really took a toll on my marriage." M. Lin was a skilled midwife working in a large hospital in Beijing in the 1940s. In the interview, she mentioned how much she loved her job. However, as her husband was labeled "rightist" and denounced in 1956, she was asked by her *danwei* leaders to divorce him. After she refused to do so, she was transferred to a food factory to be a nurse in the clinic. She said in the interview: "Of course I was not happy with the party; I did not feel liberated."

Therefore, the real problem lay in urban women's struggle to fulfill their obligations to the nation while meeting domestic needs that were largely neglected in the socialist era. Juggling the two was an enormous task, given the strenuousness of both paid and unpaid work in a subsistence economy. The low-wage system also increased the significance of women's role as family provider. These difficulties created a triple burden for women: fulfilling their obligations to the nation; helping support their families; and performing routine household tasks. Women's triple burden clearly revealed the limitations of top-down, class-oriented women's liberation that ignored their domestic needs.

While women's constraints were mostly about performing too many roles, men's were around doing too few. Like women, men were expected to devote themselves to the socialist enterprise, but they were no longer able to fully exercise their provider role, given the state's complete control over labor allocation and income redistribution (Bian 1994). In the meantime, men still shouldered the main provider role. As several men whose wives either made much less than they did or were not employed under state socialism said: "Of course I am the family provider; otherwise, what would our family eat?" To be sure, the burden of the male provider

role was substantially alleviated by state welfare programs and by women's employment; meanwhile, men continued to enjoy the privilege of not having to share routine chores with their wives. At the same time, state policies and the socialist agenda had substantially limited men's earning power. Either under pressure from or inspired by the ideal of obligation equality, like women, men tended to work diligently without asking for material or status rewards. Their income did not hinge so much on their ability, expertise, or education as on egalitarian principles. This stood in contrast to the situation of the many women employed on piecework who demonstrated their potential as capable providers, albeit secondary ones. Consequently, men sometimes suffered from frustration that they were unable to fulfill their provider role. Mr Du, the electrician, offered the following account:

> I first landed a job in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; then I had another offer, but my *danwei* would not let me go. Because I was on the highest pay scale in my profession (around 80 yuan a month), I had no pay rise for the next 30 years. But I had six kids. So I had to live on state subsidies in order to make ends meet. In 1958, our residential committee asked my wife to get a paid job so that we could be removed from state subsidies. She had a job for a while; then she quit due to the expensive day care, the demanding nature of her job, and heavy chores. When our kids grew older, the residential committee asked my wife again to work, and she did. I helped her with some chores, but not much, because I had a two-hour meeting every evening except for Saturday. Sometimes I had to work overtime. My wife retired at 50 in 1980. Soon after she fell seriously ill due to chronic fatigue and poor nutrition, and died in 1989.

To those from petty bourgeois backgrounds, the constant distrust of the CPC added another layer of constraint to their provider role. Mr Xie, the hardware store manager prior to the 1949 revolution mentioned in Chapter 3, shared in the interview his hard experience of the provider role, despite his earlier positive comments about work:

> My pay back then was only 40 yuan a month to support my wife and five kids, which put me under financial strain. But I had never applied for subsidies except that my *danwei* provided me with subsidies twice. I did not like to apply for subsidies. Because I was poor, the party members were all watching me, for fear of me embezzling money. I therefore dared not even have new trousers made; even if they were made, I would not wear them at

> my workplace to arouse suspicion. At that time, I could neither choose my own job nor find ways to make a fortune [a sigh]. On the other hand, if you kept working hard, your leaders would someday give you a pay rise, and you did not have to worry about it yourself.

The economic deprivation and constant political repression of "class enemies" by the party-state undermined the provider role of those from "bad classes" still further. All four men in my study who were subjected to political persecution in the 1950s had their salaries replaced by a meager subsistence allowance (*sheng huo fei*). C. Chen's husband, a capitalist, was forced to "reform through labor" (*lao dong gai zao*) in the factory he used to own, whereas the three non-capitalist "rightists" (two of them were CPC members and one was Lin's husband) were exiled to remote areas far from their homes. To them, even childcare and other chores became luxuries. Take Mr Luo (age 79, a party member), for example. He graduated from college in 1953 and was assigned a job in a municipal organization in Beijing. In July 1957, Luo was prosecuted by the party for his "rightist comments" and sent to a labor camp away from Beijing in March 1958. At the time, his only daughter was less than two years old. According to Luo, they were treated inhumanly at the labor camp—forced to perform heavy labor for long hours beginning around 4 a.m., criticized in an evening meeting when their day's performance was deemed bad, not to mention the lack of free speech. He often went hungry on a monthly food ration of a mere 26 *jin* (28.6 pounds). His bed was a layer of straw on earth. In the winter, he always felt cold, tired, and hungry in bed. Worse was that his wife divorced him by the end of 1961 and the court granted his wife child custody and the sole right to their apartment. Luo could visit his daughter only for a couple of days every month and had to sleep at the train station at night.

In addition to their weakened provider role, men's health was similarly placed at risk when they were expected to dedicate themselves to paid work as "state persons." Ms Qian (mentioned earlier) recalled:

> My husband was a driver for a house-repair company in Beijing, who often took long-distance trips. Many of the vehicles he drove were old imports from the former Soviet Union and often caused him trouble. He had to repair the vehicles himself, which kept him very busy. One day in winter, he was lying on the snow under the chassis of a vehicle doing repair work; he then fell asleep due to fatigue. He did not feel well after he woke up. He was later diagnosed with thrombosis and died at age 62 after a second relapse in 1984.

Perhaps it was for that reason that, despite the unequal division of household labor, few women felt it unfair and even fewer included that in their liberation agenda. Many women in the study indicated that making their husbands spend more time with the family was beyond their control: "That was the case for everyone back then." "He had no control over when he could come home." Others supported their husbands' devotion to paid work, which they believed was serving "a great revolutionary cause." Ms Liu (age 76), the high-ranking state official mentioned in Chapter 3, commented in the interview: "Men should have lofty [revolutionary] ideals and should not tie themselves to the kitchen."

Contemporary Chinese history demonstrates that the CPC did not simply erase agency and gender by insisting on the collective. Rather, its interaction with the masses dialectically augmented agency in some instances and delimited it in others (Chen 2003). The nexus of mutual articulation between women and men, between individuals and the party-state, produced hegemonic themes of gender-obligation equality among the Chinese. Under these circumstances, what women negotiated was not mainly about the large gaps between reality and the rhetoric of "women's liberation" and "gender equality;" it was about the tensions between fulfilling the demands of the state and meeting the needs of their families. Consequently, it is not surprising that urban Chinese women did not develop a sense of injustice mainly from their lower social and economic status or their greater share of domestic responsibilities compared with men. At the same time, this "postponed" gender revolution should not be interpreted simply as the result of women's compromise with the party-state but also of women's active pursuit of gender-obligation equality in their quest to fulfill their shared dreams of socialism. Women's agency was built, temporally, on the deep misery and humiliation of the great majority of Chinese people in the past, and spatially, on domestic and international challenges. The spatio-temporal linkage of women's agency was mediated by state insurance of women's (as well as their family's) collective rights and basic livelihood, the pervasive political culture highlighting collectivism and obligation equality, and role models provided by the CPC. Enmeshed in the collective life, and with their expanded social roles, women's dedication, however burdensome, contributed to their improved self-esteem, self-confidence, recognition, and heroic status.

This is not to diminish the heavy price that women paid for state projects. The constraints that women and men faced in the years of state socialism demonstrate the limitations of state–family integration—the family and

the state did not necessarily share the same interests, especially immediate ones, on all occasions. The accomplishment of state projects often required individual or family sacrifice, and these sacrifices were not shared equally between all families. For women who suffered tremendous strain or conflict between their roles for economic (e.g. Ms Wu and Ms Zhao) or political reasons (e.g. Ms Chen and Ms Lin), life seemed particularly hard. Family life became especially stressful when the state made serious mistakes in its political or economic policies: these included the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957) and the Cultural Revolution which resulted in the political prosecution of millions of individuals, the Great Leap Forward (1958), a radical economic campaign, and excessively high internal capital accumulation at the expense of consumption and the economic well-being of the vast majority of the peasants (Lin 2006; Pan 2014).

From a broader perspective, though, many drastic political movements and economic policies launched during the Mao era were also "attempts to perpetuate revolution and safeguard socialism" (Lin, p. 50). Although there were many institutional defects, the CPC in the pre-reform era earned its legitimacy by being committed to class equality and public welfare, particularly in urban areas.[1] This long-term commitment, combined with its extraordinary organizational capacity, enabled the CPC to galvanize mass support from ordinary people and produced unprecedented achievements, even compared with many Western developed countries. According to statistics (Meisner 1999), between 1952 and 1977, Chinese industry's output increased at an average annual rate of 11.3 %, a rapid pace of industrialization comparable to that of any advanced country or region during the same period of modern world history. Between 1952 and 1976, annually steel production rose from 1.3 to 23 million tons, coal from 66 to 448 million tons, electric power from 7 to 133 billion kilowatt-hours, crude oil from virtually nothing to 28 million tons, chemical fertilizer from 0.2 to 28 million tons, and finally, cement from 3 to 49 million tons. By the mid-1970s, China was manufacturing jet planes, heavy tractors, modern ocean-going vessels, and so on, had produced nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, and had launched a satellite, making China one of the six largest industrial producers in the world (Meisner 1999).

Socially, despite the lack of individual freedom and family autonomy, along with the constant political persecutions of the out-of-favor bourgeois classes, the party-state substantially reduced class and gender inequality on many fronts in a very short period of time while also shouldering the burden of public services. Moreover, the life expectancy of the

Chinese rose from 35 in 1949 to 65 in 1978, along with an increase in educational attainment and the elimination of many deadly diseases (Pan 2014, Sen 2015). Even more amazingly, these achievements took place against the backdrop of economic backwardness, the Western blockade, the loss of support from the former Soviet Union, and the absence of overseas colonies or assistance (Lin 2006; Meisner 1999). Therefore, the sacrifices borne by individuals, families, and bourgeois families in that historical juncture may be fully understood only in light of the collective gains of China as a sovereign and socialist state.

In the post-Mao market transition, these constraints were largely relaxed; there is greater flexibility in employment, and it is more socially acceptable for women to be stay-at-home moms and men to be the primary breadwinners, as the family becomes increasingly separated from the public sphere. Do women (as well as men) fare better in the post-Mao era in employment and in balancing work and family responsibilities? Are family needs better met as the state (or *danwei*) retreats as the main provider of family welfare? The next three chapters attempt to address these questions.

Note

1. For a recent comprehensive analysis of state policies and practice concerning welfare programs in rural areas in the Mao era, see, for example, *Rural Welfare in China* by Pan Yi. Beijing: Social Sciences and Academic Press. 2014 in Chinese.

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PART II

Market-Reform Era (The 1990s—Present)

CHAPTER 5

Labor Denigration and Work–Family Conflict

China's market reform began to take effect shortly after the end of the Mao era in the late 1970s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Wary of constant mass political turbulence, the post-Mao leaders began to abandon the political agenda of class struggle. Economic development became their top priority, with the adoption of market tools to supplement the planned economy (Meisner 1999). For the first time in its history, the CPC embraced the slogan of "allowing some individuals to get rich first." At the outset of the reform in the early 1980s, though, CPC top leaders had no intention of making China's market reform an imitation of capitalism. As Deng emphasized repeatedly on various occasions, "If we went down the path of capitalism, a single-digit per cent of individuals might get rich, but it would not help with over 90% of the people. Only by sticking with socialism and the distributive principle of to-each-according-to-the-ability (*an lao fen pei*) can we avoid excessive income gaps" (1984, p. 64). Socialism in the reform era, according to Deng, meant "public ownership dominates economy, and economic development follows the path of getting rich together" (1985, p. 149). In the short run, Deng embraced the notion "let some get rich first" and endorsed the open-door policy. Deng's ultimate goal of market reform was to revitalize China's socialist projects through modernization. As he pointed out: "Socialism must eradicate poverty. Poverty does not belong to socialism, let alone communism" (1984, p. 63). This was known as socialism with Chinese characteristics.

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_5

Market solutions undertaken in the 1980s included administrative decentralization, the smashing of the "iron rice bowl", and an open-door approach towards capitalist societies. However, as the reform deepened, the state ceased to be the welfare provider, decentralization was hijacked by privatization, egalitarian principles were abandoned in the name of efficiency, and China rapidly became integrated into the global capitalist system (Lin 2006). All these changes have had profound repercussions on class hierarchies and the functioning of the family. Since the family is a site producing life rather than market efficiency, it is logically shuffled into the private domain. Consequently, as this chapter will reveal, the state–family disaggregation combined with market intrusion has led to labor denigration on one hand, and work–family conflict on the other.

State–Family Disaggregation

Implementing Individual-Oriented New Marriage Laws

The Chinese marriage law throughout the state-socialist period had been an integral part of broader efforts to create a powerful socialist nation-state. With the CPC's shift of focus from class struggle to economic development, new marriage laws have gradually recognized the family as a private sphere, assigning more individual responsibilities to the family as well as honoring personal autonomy and preferences. For example, the 1980 Marriage Law added an article on able-bodied adult children's legal obligation to support their parents or grandparents, in addition to parental or grandparental obligations to support their children or grandchildren if their parents have died (Zhang 2004). But when it comes to marital relations, the 1980 Marriage Law seemed more concerned with individual rights than mutual obligations. For example, the 1980 Marriage Law added in Article 2 the legal right of the elder members. Article 14 stipulated that a person needing support had the right to demand financial compensation if their spouse failed to fulfill his or her spousal obligation. At the same time, it removed the provisions that "the husband and wife are companions to each other" and should have the obligation to "love, respect, and help each other" from the 1980 Marriage Law (Zhang 2004, p. 232). Meanwhile, divorce was also made much easier compared to the 1950 Marriage Law, in that relationship breakdown, rather than fault-based claims,

would be almost the sole ground for divorce. Meanwhile, mediation by the court was no longer necessary prior to divorce being granted. Exceptions included cases when a woman was pregnant or had given birth within the previous year, unless divorce proceedings were initiated by the woman herself.

The three items that were closely aligned with national agendas were all concerned with the one-child policy in family planning. After two decades of the baby-boom peaks in the 1950s and 1960s, the state decided to curb the rapid population growth through family planning in the 1970s. To help ensure the success of nationally imposed family planning policy in the 1970s, the national legislators wrote it into the 1980 Marriage Law. Article 2 added the phrase: "family planning." Article 5 raised the legal age for marriage from 18 to 20 for women and from 20 to 22 for men. The same article also stipulated: "late marriage and late child-bearing should be encouraged." Article 12 stipulated: "Both husband and wife shall have the duty to practice family planning." Within the family, the 1980 Marriage Law continued to emphasize both obligations and rights of family members to each other, especially economic responsibilities between generations.

By the 1990s, it was noted that some individuals were tying the knot too quickly, divorce rates had been on the rise for a decade, some men were committing bigamy (*bao er nai*), and domestic violence was becoming a serious problem. The Judicial Committee of the People's Congress passed a resolution in 1993 revising the 1980 Marriage Law and published a new marriage law in 2001 (Zhang 2004). The main amendments made by the 2001 Marriage Law were "prohibiting bigamy," "prohibiting cohabitation with others by married individuals;" "prohibiting domestic violence;" and "prohibiting abuse and desertion among family members" (Article 3). Also re-inserted was: "Husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other; family members shall respect the old, cherish the young, help each other, maintain a marriage and family relationships characterized by equality, harmony and civility" (Article 4). The Law prohibited divorce if a pregnant woman had an abortion in consequence of the family planning policy. In this case, the husband was not allowed to file for divorce until six months after the procedure—another example of the state's efforts to align family behavior with state agendas through legislation. On the other hand, it increasingly recognized divorce as a private matter between spouses that should be allowed if the loving relationship has broken down. In fact, marriage as a whole has, since the millennium,

been increasingly considered a private and individualized institution not requiring much intervention by the state with rising complications in family circumstances and relations in market conditions. As another example, the newly added Article 18 in the 2001 Marriage Law recognized individual property of each spouse under certain circumstances, including property owned by one party prior to the marriage, medical payments to a party who had incurred medical expenses due to illness, property inherited or received as a gift by one party, and so on. Accordingly, Article 19 allowed for prenuptial agreements between spouses, which did not exist in previous marriage laws. This retreat by the state from regulating the institution of marriage was also reflected in other government policies, such as the Tentative Regulation of Marriage Registration Work issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2003 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2003), in which the involvement of work units or residential committees in marriage or divorce proceedings was largely abolished.

One of the few aspects of family life over which the state still exercises much control is the reproductive arena. The state has stuck to its one-child policy, only relaxing it since 2013.[1]

From Family Welfare Provider to Market Facilitator: The Changing Role of the State

Over the course of the reform, the role of the Chinese central government has gradually been transformed from public welfare provider to driving force for marketization. Since 1986, the state has promulgated numerous laws to force SOEs to compete with emerging private firms (e.g. the Enterprise Bankruptcy Law in 1986, the Company Law in 1993). As of 1987, medium-sized and small-scale state enterprises have been sold or taken over, whereas the private sector is enjoying a revival. By 1995, the state had put most of the SOEs on the market. The year 1996 marked the peak in the number of workers employed by the state at over 90 million, but this number had shrunk to 40 million by 2001 (Tong 2003). In addition to internal motivation to achieve market efficiency, global capital forces played an active role in the demise of SOEs. As China became integrated into the global capitalist system through the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the mid-1990s, eight million Chinese firms were subject to a unified bankruptcy law, one hundred thousand of which were SOEs (Lin 2006). The surviving SOEs were asked to run on private lines by management (Lee 2007; Oi and Walder 1999; Walder 1995).

Constitutional amendments in 1992 and 1999 formally legitimated the private sector and were included in the 2004 Constitution. According to statistics, the private sector, which was mostly unregulated, accounted for 48 % of urban employment and became the main source of informal employment in 2004 (Park and Cai 2011). By 2007, economic profits generated in the private sector accounted for more than half of the total profits in China's industries (China News Network 2008). More disturbing was "the private embezzlement of public resources and the infusion of political and economic capital … producing a virtue sector of bureaucratic capitalism" (Lin 2006, p. 257). Many Chinese officials abused their positions of power to gain possession of public assets. Statistics suggest that the capital flight caused by these corrupt government officials has amounted to approximately 8 % annually since the late 1990s (Lin 2006). In rural areas, post-Mao development strategies and global competition for agricultural production undermined farmers' livelihoods through dispossession of land (Harvey 2005) and unequal special divisions of labor between urban and rural (Yan 2008).

Meanwhile, there was a trend towards the commercialization of public services, including childcare, education, housing, and health care. According to a report by Yongping Jiang (2007), shortly after the beginning of market reform, daycare centers or kindergartens in many SOEs or institutions were either closed or sold to private owners. In the 1990s, the Ministry of Education also pointed out that pre-school education was not part of the nine-year compulsory education system (elementary through junior high); therefore, the state cut subsidies and increased the proportion to be paid by individual families. By 2007, workplace-run nurseries or daycare facilities for children up to the age of two had virtually disappeared, and the number of neighborhood daycare centers was substantially reduced. Meanwhile, the national budget for pre-school education accounted for only 1.2 % to 1.3 % of the total budget for education in 2005, much lower than in many other developing nations, such as Brazil (5.1 %), Mexico (8.9 %), and Thailand (16.4 %) (Yang 2007). According to one report (Liu et al. 2008), there are at least three major problems with today's commercialized childcare services compared to those of the past. First, it is much more expensive. In the city of Beijing in 2007, for example, the fees charged by high-quality kindergartens rose to 800–1200 yuan a month, accounting for about 60 % of the average working mother's monthly pay. The most costly ones charged monthly fees up to 4000 yuan. In Guangzhou, over half the kindergartens charged large amounts of what a school would call

"donations" (zan zhu fei) (ranging from 2000 to 15,000 yuan a year), putting them beyond the reach of many middle- to low-income families. Second, daycare services tend to focus more on child education than physical care. For-profit daycare institutes have also cut services, for example reducing their opening hours, thus exacerbating work–family conflict as parents working late have to employ someone to pick up their children. Finally, the pursuit of market efficiency coupled with unregulated markets has also undercut the safety and quality of daycare. Perhaps for those reasons, the daycare participation rate in China in 2005 (60 million children) was only 36.3 %, 39 % lower than that of Mexico and 18 % lower than that of Brazil (Yang 2007). Even at the kindergarten level, the participation rate was only 42.5 % in 2006. This means that, although China's domestic-service industry is booming, it cannot cover all family responsibilities and is often beyond the reach of low-income families.

Furthermore, education is also losing its public-service dimension as market reform deepens. In spite of China's double-digit economic growth in most years, national spending on education has remained at 2.5–3.2 % of gross domestic product (GDP) since the 1980s—a low level compared to many developed countries (Shen 2004;). At the same time, in order to get commissions from publishers, many public schools at elementary and secondary levels charge all kinds of fees illegally or force students to purchase reading materials not used in classroom teaching. The total sum plundered by schools nationwide between 1994 and 2003 exceeded 200 billion yuan (Shen 2004). Tertiary education has also started charging and annual tuition fees are increasing. As of 2003, average tuition fees shot up to 5000 yuan, making tertiary education much less affordable for many working-class families (Shen 2004). Moreover, school targets have been reduced to profitability and graduation rates, substantially undermining their credibility as public educational institutions (Yang 2008). As will be shown in the present study, the market-oriented Chinese education system, combined with fierce global competition in education, has generated much anxiety among parents, adding burdens to their family lives.

Women's reproductive benefits, though still presumably protected by state policies, are becoming difficult to enforce due to their incompatibility with the market pursuit of profitability. For example, according to the Stipulations of Protection of Female Workers (Liu et al. 2008), promulgated by the state prior to the reform, women whose babies were under a year old must be allowed at least two 30-minute periods for breast-feeding within one work shift; moreover, the time taken to travel between

home and workplace for this purpose would be counted as working time. The stipulations also encouraged the workplace to set up nurseries and rest facilities for pregnant workers. During the market transition, however, these regulations became harder to enforce. One study indicates that by 2005, less than 5 % of urban enterprises had nurseries (Liu et al. 2008). Similarly, the state-sponsored maternity insurance (*shengyu baoxian*) program introduced during the reform encourages the private sector to hire women at a lower cost while at the same time protecting their maternity rights. However, the program only covers women's paid maternity leave and medical expenses during this time to the neglect of other costs to employers, including wages for workers covering for working women who take sick leave during pregnancy, or leave to breastfeed or care for a sick child after childbirth. Consequently, few employers see reason to purchase the insurance or hire women. By 2004, the maternity insurance only covered 58 % of all female workers in the urban setting.

Finally, the public health care and housing programs that existed under state socialism are also being replaced by private or commercialized health insurance and the real-estate industry. A direct result is a rapid rise in prices of both health care and housing. During the period 1990–2000, average medical expenses incurred by individuals nationwide rose approximately ten times, exceeding income growth five- to sevenfold. By the end of 2003, 65 % of the general population and 45 % of urbanites had no health insurance (Gu 2007). Although per-capita housing had reached 22 square meters in 2006—three times larger than in 1980—runaway housing prices caused by excessive marketization put housing beyond the reach of large numbers of low-income families (Lü 2008).

Labor Denigration

Dispensable Labor

The state's abandonment of job security and family welfare provision with the process of labor commodification and denigration, in other words, this abandonment was in itself part of this process. Under China's market conditions, wage earners are no longer treated as national resources but are seen as a variable cost of production or of business operations. In 1995, the Labor Law was introduced, ending permanent employment of workers. One major impact of this policy was mass lay-offs of urban SOE workers who lost their wages, healthcare benefits, and bankruptcy compensation

(Lee 2007). Statistics show that 3 million workers were laid off in 1993, and the number grew at over 40 % annually to reach 11.51 million in 1997 (Shen 2004). Between 1998 and 2002, 27.1 million SOE workers were laid off, of whom 49.2 % were women (Jiang 2006). Although close to 90 % of all laid-off workers have been re-employed, they, especially women, tend to take temporary jobs in the informal sector which pays lower wages without benefits (Jiang 2006). Meanwhile, millions more rural residents are being forced to migrate to cities, enduring brutal exploitation and discrimination by both domestic capitalists and international corporations (Lee 2007; Li 2008; Pun and Lu 2010).

Conducive to the privatization process is the implementation of labor contracts. The idea of labor contracts, aimed at ending lifetime employment, was first introduced in 1983; it was finally written into the Labor Law in 1994. The legal changes in the 1994 law made it easier for companies to lay off workers and employ them on new short-term contracts (Gallagher and Dong 2011). Moreover, large numbers of migrant workers and those working in the informal sector found the law irrelevant to their working lives: even though they were covered by the law, many companies chose to ignore the law given the absence of effective law enforcement and supervision by local governments (Gallagher and Dong 2011). When they did observe it, they tended to create "bullying contracts" (*ba wang tiao kuan*) (Shen 2006, p. 84), leaving workers' rights at the mercy of authorities who now legitimate their power through "rule by law" (Lee 2007). This transition from the social consensus—an implicit state guarantee of job security and welfare consistent with working-class interests—to a legal contract designed to resolve labor disputes by legal means, is in essence a process of labor control.

Market-Based Income Distribution

Concomitant with the privatization process is the state's abandonment of socialist egalitarian principles of wealth distribution—from each according to the ability and to each according to need. To be sure, socialist principles as such had never completely materialized during the Mao era. The most noticeable was the contrast between high-level state accumulation and low-level wealth redistribution. In addition, many privileges were enjoyed by state officials, and considerable gaps existed between large and small

cities, and between urban and rural areas, as well as among people of different political statuses (Walder 1986; Pun and Liu 2010; Whyte 2010). The gender gaps in income and occupations were never completely closed (Bian et al. 2000). To the reformers, though, it is "equalitarianism" (*ping jun zhu yi*) rather than unequal redistribution that needs to be changed. To justify the reform, they portray workers in the Mao era as unproductive, indolent, undisciplined, and even "uncivilized" in the case of rural migrant workers (Pun 2005). Bolstered by the new ideology—let some people get rich first—the socialist principles are being replaced by the emerging practice of redistribution mainly based on political power, personal connections, and capital. Meanwhile, the introduction of market competition has further undermined the egalitarian redistributive system (Lee 2007). Consequently, income disparity between individuals has skyrocketed since the reform. According to statistics, the Gini coefficient of per-capita household income jumped from 0.18 in 1978 to 0.496 in 2005, and that of per-capita wealth rose to 0.653 in the same period (Li et al. 2007). In fact, the period 2000–2005 witnessed the growth in income inequality in urban cares even higher than that in more recent years (Yang and Chi 2011).

Politically powerful CPC officials are to be found among China's rich. Some attribute this phenomenon to the centralized leadership which does not give equal opportunities to the masses to get ahead. Others blame the decentralization of power that has led to despotism at local levels. However, centralized leadership is nothing new to the Chinese state; it has existed since the founding of the PRC but the consolidated power was previously used to substantially reduce inequality, as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3. Decentralization also occurred twice in the PRC's history: once in 1958 and once in 1970. In both cases the goal was to correct the rigidity of central planning, but the decentralizing experiments eventually ended due to other growing economic and political challenges (Liu 2000). It is the impact of marketization on political power and on rapidly increasing social inequality that needs to be emphasized here. The emerging market system does not merely expand the privileges of administrators but also commodifies political power, making power the political capital for personal gain rather than the means to advance public good. Consequently, simple privileges for government officials and official corruption have become commonplace at all levels, fundamentally transforming the CPC from representing the people to personifying capital.

Women's Loss of Broader Social Roles

With the increasing denigration of labor, women workers are losing their social roles and, hence, their "heroic" status. According to the ten-yearly national surveys on women's social status conducted in 1990 and 2000 (Jiang 2006; Tao and Jiang 1995), employed women in urban areas have experienced drastic changes in the meaning of paid work: while 40.1 % of the women surveyed in 1990 listed "contributions to society" as a main purpose of their employment, only 5.8 % did so in 2000. By contrast, the percentage of female respondents who said that they worked mainly to support their families or themselves went up from 56.7 % to 70.3 % during the same period.

More recent ethnographic research among women workers in post-Mao China provides detailed accounts of how women workers were turned into commodities. For example, Yan's study (2008) shows that, in the course of workplace transformation, female bodies were exploited and their occupation as domestics degraded from socially recognized "serving the people" to humiliating, class-based servants. Otis (2007) noted that subordination of young female service workers to their rich clients in the luxury hotel business was concealed by the cultural scheme of "giving face" deployed by the service regime of "virtual personalism." Hanser (2007) found that sales assistants in a state-owned department store were still able to exercise a degree of dignity and autonomy without undermining their productivity and sense of community, despite the store transitioning toward more flexible employment. This was because the store continued its existing employment practices that emphasized stability, job security, and workers' autonomy and authority. By contrast, sales staff in a privately owned department store were disempowered by a more despotic labor regime and intensive intra-store competition that produced constant anxiety and mutual antagonism.

China's market reform, despite a general improvement in living standards, has intensified labor processes through labor denigration and alienation, which have prompted a growing degree of labor unrest in various forms Lee (2007; Perry and Selden 2003; Philion 2009; Pun 2005; Pun and Lu 2010). More recent reports include the Honda strikes in Zhongshan (Bradsher 2010), the spate of Foxconn suicides in Shenzhen (Barboza 2010), and the Agricultural Bank of China's white-collar protests in Beijing (Jacobs 2010). Other studies reveal ways in which women workers applied hidden forms of resistance, including migrant

domestic-service workers' vehement defense of their work as "serving the people" to ward off class humiliation inflicted on them (Yan 2008); young female sweatshop workers' use of screaming, passing jokes at work, and collective manipulation of body pain (Pun 2005); as well as married women of the post-Mao generation leaving their factories to return home as a way to escape alienated labor (e.g. Rofel 1999). As we shall see in Chapter 6, the present study has similarly found women resistant to labor denigration in the emerging labor market. In addition to strategies that have been popularized around the world, many Chinese women have become more home oriented, juggling their work and domestic roles as another hidden form of resistance.

Work–Family Conflict

Working Hours

Work–family disaggregation has also created tensions between work and family for the working population. As in many industrial societies, long working hours stand out as a major source of tension. According to the 1995 State Council Regulations of Employee Working Hours, standard working hours are 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week. The Labor Law prohibits overtime in excess of 3 hours per day and 36 hours per month. The Law also specifies 150 % pay for overtime on regular days, double pay for weekend overtime, and triple pay for holiday overtime (Liu et al. 2008). But in reality, the laws are hardly adhered to. According to statistics (Liu et al. 2008), the average number of working hours in 2004 was 45.5. In the city of Beijing, less than half of all employed people worked less than 40 hours a week; 44 % worked seven days a week. Generally, men worked longer hours (8.68) than women (7.84), whereas women were committed to much longer hours (4.2 versus 2.02 for men) of domestic chores. According to the third national survey of women's social status in China conducted in 2010 (Tong and Zhou 2014), the average number of hours devoted to paid work by men was 8.6 for non-professionals and 9 for professionals. The average number of working hours for women was 8.2 for non-professionals and 9 for professionals—both genders felt "time crunch" but women seemed to be under more pressure given they spent twice as much time on chores and childcare as men.

Regardless of gender, overtime is commonplace in urban China. In the city of Shanghai, for example, about 42 % of employees worked over

50 hours a week in 2006. A nationwide study by occupation found that workers, be they blue- or white-collar, tended to work the longest hours, sometimes over 14 hours a day. But overall, workers in privately owned firms tended to work much longer hours than those in the public sector. Most enterprises also fail to comply with the overtime regulations. In Sichuan province, 76 % of the work units did not offer overtime pay for working days and 53 % of them did not offer it during holidays (Liu et al. 2008). Extended working hours with little or no compensation mean less time available for family work and family time. While a high-income family can afford to purchase domestic services, for low-income families this is simply unattainable.

These problems can be exacerbated in the informal sector, which has grown rapidly in the post-Mao reform. The informal sector mainly includes laid-off urban workers and rural migrant workers who are concentrated in service or labor-intensive industries such as retail and catering, or in manufacturing, mining, or construction industries where employment has become increasingly flexible in recent years. Most workers employed in the informal sector are low paid and part time, paid by the hour, have no legal contract, and very limited access to social welfare and social security. Although it is alleged that informal employment may enable workers to combine work with their family responsibilities, the real issue is that informal employment represents a much worse deal for workers than work in the formal sector.

With respect to gender, female workers are even more disadvantaged than their male counterparts. According to the second national survey on women's social status conducted in 2000 (see Liu et al. 2008, p. 58), the income gap between male and female workers was 15.6 percentage points in favor of men. Regardless of sector, female employees generally enjoyed fewer social security benefits than their male counterparts.

Paid Leave and Holiday Pay

Prior to the reform, paid leave included 56 days of maternity leave, 2 to 3 days of personal leave, and unlimited sick leave for full-time working individuals in urban areas. For workers with less than eight years' service, sick pay for up to six months was between 60 % and 90 % of their salary, depending on their seniority. Those who had worked eight years or longer would be entitled to full pay. If the worker's sick leave extended beyond six months, they would still enjoy 40–60 % of their wages (Labor Department 1959).

In government agencies and institutions, seniority only counted for those whose sick leave lasted less than six months Interior Department, Finance Department and Human Resources (1956).

In the reform era, according to the Labor Law and the Stipulations of Labor Protection for Female Workers (Liu et al. 2008), female workers' maternity leave has increased to 90 days with an additional 15 days for those who experience difficult births, and another 15 days for each baby in the case of multiple births. In addition, childbirth insurance systems in different provinces all include a childbirth allowance equivalent to monthly income, as well as childbirth-related medical expenses. On the other hand, these stipulations do not prohibit employers from discriminating against women of childbearing age. Moreover, these Law and Stipulations do not cover migrant workers who do not qualify for urban residency. The lack of financial support by the government for women's expenses incurred in childbirth, together with the inability or unwillingness of employers, have made it difficult for women to enjoy full childbirth insurance. Consequently, only 47 % of working women had childbirth insurance in 2007, and they were mainly from government agencies and institutions; some were from foreign firms. Many domestic enterprises, especially privately owned ones, do not cover these benefits for women; some do not purchase childbirth insurance for women; others refuse to pay antenatal medical expenses; still others shorten maternity leave or even dismiss women during maternity leave (Liu et al. 2008).

As for sick leave policies, the new law (Labor Department 1994) sets the upper limit for sick pay at 24 months and has the following vague stipulation: "During the period of medical leave, the affected worker's wages, subsidies, and medical benefits should follow the relevant regulations." Once the maximum amount of sick leave is reached, the law allows the employer to terminate the relevant worker's contract. Personal leave is hard to get especially in private enterprises. Many companies even penalize workers for being as little as one minute late by deducting part of their monthly paycheck. According to one survey conducted in Beijing in 2006, 65 % of adult children cared for the elderly in hospital; of them, 59 % had had deductions from their pay as a result. Some workers in Shanghai reported that if they had ever cared for sick parents in hospital, they were among the first to be laid off in economic downturns (Liu et al. 2008).

Not until 2008 was there paid holiday in the urban setting except for public holidays such as May Day, the National Day, the New Year, and the Spring Festival. Full-time workers who had to commute a long distance

to see their spouse who lived either in a different city or in a rural area were entitled to a 12-day vacation each year. All full-time working individuals also enjoyed paid leave for weddings and family bereavements. The State Council promulgated a new law in 2007 (State Council 2007) which added further paid holiday ranging from 5 to 15 days depending on seniority. Employers who cannot afford to give employees paid time off must pay them 300 % of their daily pay. As wonderful as this might sound, less than 20 % of urban employees had actually taken paid vacations. Those who took paid vacations were mainly from government agencies or institutions or some SOEs (Liu et al. 2008). At the time when the field work of the present study was conducted, this new law had not even come into effect, which implies that working individuals might have been working longer hours. In any event, lack of time for working people to attend to their family's needs implies work–family conflict, and this will be further explored in Chapter 7.

Note

1. China announced its decision to relax its three-decades-long one-child policy on 15 November 2013 at the third plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the CPC. The new policy allows Chinese parents to have a second baby if either parent is an only child.

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CHAPTER 6

Women's Domestic-Role Orientation

This chapter and the next one mainly examine work–family experiences of women of the Mao- and post-Mao cohorts. None of these women have gone through the wars or foreign domination experienced by women of the revolutionary cohort, but the women of the Mao-era generation who were raised during the Cold War received an intensive political education (e.g., on gender and class equality, and communism) similar to that of their revolutionary counterparts. These influences also affected the post-Mao cohort, who came of age during China's market reform.

When I began the interviews in the summer of 2005 in the city of Beijing, I was surprised to find that the overwhelming majority of women either wanted to combine work with family or were home oriented, although less than 15 % of all female informants preferred being a full-time housewife. Similar patterns were found in the subsequent interviews as my research associate and I extended our field work in 2006 to another three large cities—Shanghai, Lanzhou, and Jilin. Many working women expressed their desire to have their husbands be the primary provider when family circumstances allowed them to do so. Where a choice between work and family arose, these women tended to focus more on family well-being than on the workplace. This seemed especially true of the women of the post-Mao generation. Why was this the case? Some scholars attribute it to the persistence of traditional Chinese culture; others see it as a result of the greater freedom that women are finally able to enjoy in their choices of work and family roles. In my 1998 study (Zuo 2003), I similarly blamed

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_6

the gendered culture that tended to reward those who complied with it and punish those who breached gender boundaries. But as I linked urban women's attitudes toward family roles to their changing work experience, I found much more compelling answers to this question. In this chapter and the next, I will unravel gendering processes in the broader context of the post-Mao market transition that has intensified labor processes (Chapter 6) and exacerbated work–family conflict (Chapter 7).

Labor Denigration and Women's Domestic-Role Orientation

Against the background of the emerging market, many workers[1] who had come of age under state socialism no longer saw themselves as the masters of the country (or of their *danwei* for that matter). Instead, with the loss of the safety net, the stripping back of welfare benefits, and labor exploitation at workplaces, they found that their labor power became increasingly commodified and they became estranged from their "leaders" in an employer–employee (*gu yong*) divide. To workers, working increasingly became a matter of earning money with few intrinsic values; the image of an employer was more like the owner of a workplace, controlling and appropriating resources with no regard for workers' welfare. By contrast, the home remained a non-market place, where labor was used to produce and nurture life, and where women maintained a sense of ownership through homemaking and childcare. Ms Tian (age 55), a textile worker in Beijing with 21 years' service, practically lost her job in 1996 when the factory stopped paying workers due to bankruptcy. She managed to hold onto the job by taking sick leave at the paltry rate of 170 yuan a month. She then had to find a temporary low-paid janitorial job with no benefits in order to help support her family. She called her janitorial job *da gong*—working for others as alienated labor. Tian quit the job in 2004 due to rapidly deteriorating health stemming from her strenuous working conditions. She finally earned her retirement at the age of 55 in 2006, collecting a monthly income of 870 yuan. When asked how she felt about her domestic role, she replied: "Chores do not bother me—I am always the one who does more at home, but I do not find it burdensome—doing it for the family is the same as doing it for myself. I especially believe it my responsibility since I stay home now." According to Tian, her husband always looked after her when she was sick. What really bothered Tian were financial pressures; therefore, even though her husband often suffered from migraines, she hoped he could continue to work outside the family.

In several interviews, Tian recalled the years prior to the reform, when workers had often exceeded their production quota for no extra pay, ensured high-quality cloth was produced, and prided themselves on contributing to the national accumulation of foreign exchange through the export of their products:

> It was enjoyable working back then. It was glorious to be a worker.… The factory leaders often came to the shop floor to inspect the quality of our work and would lend a hand wherever needed. In fact, many factory leaders were workers who had been promoted, who understood how work was done on the shop floor. Whenever there was a major innovation project, they would work side by side with workers. Their leadership inspired workers to compete for overtime duties. Some of those not chosen would feel uneasy about it, wondering whether the leader trusted them. Since the factory adopted the contract system, penalties and bonuses are tied to production quotas; workers thus no longer join broken threads in order to save time, and they throw away defective spools to avoid incurring a penalty, which is a great waste.

Tian's story echoes those of the revolutionary generation in Chapter 3. This is not to deny the lack of freedom to balance work and family experienced by women in the Mao era. And yet, due to the fact that labor was treated as a national resource rather than a commodity (Walder 1986), women felt pressured to prioritize their work over their families but not necessarily alienated from it. After Tian's daughter was born, for example, she was not quite happy that her factory leaders put pressure on her to resume her regular three-shift duties as soon as her 56-day maternity leave was over, owing to her exceptional weaving skill which was very much needed for the socialist "Ten Thousand Meters of Non-Defective Cloth" (*wan mi wu ci bu*) campaign of that time. Instead of letting her spend more time with her newborn baby, her leader promised to send two of her co-workers to assist her with childcare at work:

> I did not like the idea but went along with it since I was an "advanced worker" (*xian jin zhi gong*) at the time.…[2] To be honest, I hardly had any time for household duties back then, but I was okay with it—work was fulfilling (*chong shi*). Our *danwei* also treated workers well: The factory leaders promised me housing. Once available, my workshop head helped me move—it was a one-room, single-storied apartment.… They often worked with workers shoulder to shoulder, including performing overtime duties...; sick workers enjoyed labor protection wages (*laobao*)—equivalent to 60 to 80 % of their wages for long-term sick leave, not to mention our lifetime employment.

To be sure, Tian's extraordinary performance earned her a small apartment in the pre-reform period. But it should not be interpreted merely as evidence of "patron-client relationships" between the CPC and Tian, as Walder (1986) argued. This was because Tian did not simply make sacrifices in exchange for housing; as her accounts consistently show, she had multiple incentives from work, such as feeling honored and having a strong sense of being an example for others, as a model worker; and perhaps equally importantly, a sense of pride at being able to play a broader social role and the inspiration of her supervisors' example. This may be partially reflected in her later work. Tian's strong work ethic, shaped by her Mao-era work experience, spilled over to her post-Mao work performance, which sought to restore her sense of pride through recognition at work despite her general feeling of alienation: "I worked as hard as before. I remember my feet barely touching the floor without excruciating pain during the first week of my janitorial job.... I felt proud of myself when I was once more given the 'advanced worker' award."

Feeling alienated from work was not limited to blue-collar workers; it was also shared by professionals—so-called middle-class women. Differences in social status notwithstanding, Dongdong (age 52), the college professor and high-school friend of mine mentioned in the Introduction, offered a similar account to Tian's story. The interview was conducted in the summer of 2005:

> When I took my first job in 1971 as a worker in a seafood company, I worked very hard and had a strong sense of ownership, because old workers were terrific—they had great work ethics; they often touched my heart and were my role models.... My parents' dedication to their broadcasting work also influenced me. I remember not seeing them very often at home; my mother was so busy that many times she only had time to put a piece of candy in each of our mouths before going to work. In 1983 after I earned my college degree, I was assigned to a newly built vocational university affiliated to the municipal Machinery Bureau. The faculty team was small, but the university leaders were honest, non-exploitative, and kind to the faculty. This prompted my desire to live and die with my university. I remember often working extra hours with my colleagues to develop new courses, increase enrollments, and raise the prestige of my university. There was little overtime pay, but we were happy. In 1996, everything was turned upside down. My university was merged with a vocational high school and came under the leadership of the municipal Education Bureau. The high-school administrators knew little about higher education but all took on leadership

> positions in the university. They dictate academic decision making without consulting the departments or courses. To make the university profitable, we have been asked to teach a minimum of 12 credit hours a week, 20 weeks per semester, compared to 6 hours a week and 18 weeks per semester prior to the merger. In addition, our salaries are now tied to the number of credit hours; we will suffer pay cuts if we fail to meet the minimum requirement. I now regularly teach 15 hours a week with four preps, earning about 2000 yuan a month. Some put in even more hours than I do. I would not want to. Otherwise, my research, health, and family would suffer.

The real problem for Dongdong seemed to be the way the administration treated the faculty:

> "We are not allowed to drink water or sit down when teaching, which is hard especially for those of us who teach evening sessions.... For a while the administration closed the restrooms on the faculty offices floor for no good reason, we were forced to go to the restrooms on the admin floor.... They don't really care. The administrators can be brutal to the faculty as well. I remember witnessing my dean once scolding a faculty member in his office; he sounded so fierce that he made her cry and totally lose her dignity.... All this has worn me down so much that I look forward to my retirement in three years. It is just not worth working for *them*."

By contrast, Dongdong found that the home was a "safe haven" (*bi feng gang*) for her: "life at home is relatively peaceful; on top of that, family members have feelings (*you gan qing*) for one another." Although she was not happy about her husband's failure to share chores with her, household responsibilities, such as her seventeen-year-old son's high-school education, provided her with much autonomy and control over family matters. She was concerned that if she worked too much, she might not have time or energy left for her family, which might put a strain on her relationship with her husband. Dongdong's critique of the market reform did not blind her to the structural problems of state socialism. In the interviews, for example, she commented on the rigidity of the personnel system in which it was very hard for anyone to change their job at will, and the very low standard of living that the Chinese had endured prior to the reform. And yet, she also pointed out the need for the state to rein in unbridled market forces and management behavior through regulation and proper monitoring.

Dongdong was not alone. Ms Lian (age 48) was a college professor from another university. Unlike Dongdong or Tian, she was from a "bad

class," according to the political categorization of the Cultural Revolution. Although both her parents were doctors who had worked for the socialist state since the 1950s, her maternal great-grandmother's family were landlords. This made her suffer from low self-esteem in elementary school, so after graduating from high school, Lian was sent to the country to be re-educated by peasants. She believed that she needed the re-education because of her "bad-class" family background and felt no resentment over this discriminatory treatment. She had worked hard until the advent of the market reform, when she began to feel that her contributions to the country were reduced to individual earnings, and herself to the status of a waged laborer: "I was taught from childhood to serve the people and country wholeheartedly; I had worked hard without giving much thought to extra pay; it was glorious to contribute to the country." Like women of the revolutionary generation, she had valued obligation equality: "I had a strong desire to pursue honor; I would not like to fall behind others [in contributing to the country]; I was very much influenced by the belief that 'women can hold up half of the sky'." But these ideologies were turned upside down in the new era of marketization: "Nowadays, I would not want to do more without material compensation." In a follow-up interview in the summer of 2010, Lian told me that she had just submitted her request for early retirement:

> Work has lost its meaning for me—no one cares any more about the department, teaching, or mentoring the new faculty; the chair's job is merely to control bonuses rather than assume leadership; everyone is busy with their own things.... My pay will be cut by 30% after retirement, but my husband [an engineer currently working in another city] makes good money. He is in poor health though. I will be able to look after him and visit my daughter (age 24) in Canada.

Early retirement was unavailable for many laid-off women workers; and yet, labor commodification had equally encouraged them to identify more with their family role than their work role. Ms Li (age 46), a worker from a state-owned construction company in the city of Jilin, was laid off in 1995 and bought out (*mai duan*) with only 13,000 yuan, which was based on a harsh company-imposed formula: 468 yuan multiplied by her 28-year tenure at the company. Her husband, who had worked in the same factory, had to leave in 1996 due to illness and was also forced into a buy-out plan with a lump-sum payment of 14,000 yuan. Li said in the interview (summer 2005):

> We have five married siblings, of whom only one couple have jobs. My husband and I both have parents to support and a child to attend college. Higher education has become expensive; I have learned that it may cost nearly 10,000 yuan total expenses for a three-year college (*da zhuang*). We cannot do all this with this little money! I myself have to wait till 50 to claim my retirement pension which will be about 800 yuan a month.

To support the family, Li took a cleaning job in a state-owned hospital. At the beginning, she did not like the job which was physically demanding and dirty, but she said that she was so financially desperate that she did not really care. Although she only made 10 yuan a day, she thought it was better than staying home earning nothing. She remembered that during the first week of her hospital work, her feet were so painful that she could not stand properly; now she was getting used to it. At home, Li had always done most of the chores until her husband returned home due to illness. She said, "I was always the one who did more at home. I remember doing almost all the chores and child care back then when my husband always left home early for work, sometimes throughout the night. His job was driving a crane in our factory. I also went to work during the daytime and looked after our son in the evenings; I was not bothered at all, in fact, I was happy. Now, my husband stays home. He cooks for us all." Like Tian, Li attempted to restore her sense of heroism from the socialist past. She worked as hard in the hospital as she had in her factory and was recently promoted to head of her cleaning team. She was also happy that the hospital paid one-third of her social security payments and bought 20,000 yuans' worth of accident insurance for her.[3] The difference in the meanings of work in the present and the past nonetheless still exists for Li: in the past she felt that she worked for the country whereas now she works to support the family. In the interview, she indicated that she liked working but felt resentful about the market reform that shut the door behind her and her fellow Mao-era workers who had made great contributions to the country. In future, she would like to engage in a career of her own choice if possible—an expression of refusing to be alienated.

By comparison, many women of the post-Mao cohort felt little political zeal or socialist work ethic as China's market reform was moving the country away from politically charged economic processes. Instead, they saw growing income gaps between privately owned industries and SOEs as well as failed leadership in their work units. However, their wariness of the public sector did not necessarily make them embrace the market if

their labor was degraded. Ms Huang (age 36), a laid-off lab assistant from a state-owned ore enterprise outside the city of Lanzhou in 2000, shared with us (in the summer of 2006) that she had seldom worked hard since she was hired in 1992 for precisely these reasons. After the lay-off, she landed a job in a beauty salon in Lanzhou. She quit the job six months later not only because she was made to work more than 12 hours a day but also because she could no longer put up with her employer who kept watching her, left her no time for lunch, forced her to sell store products to customers, and constantly yelled at her for being "unproductive." Wang complained: "My employer treated me like a slave. Compared with my factory, this place was hell." She then expressed how much she missed working in that ore factory: "We'd have lunch on time, enjoy one hour break, take a shower at 3:30 p.m., and head home by company shuttle bus. I could even argue with the head of the factory who had no power to demote or fire workers." Huang finally retreated home to look after her son (aged 10) and husband—a program director from a local TV station with a monthly income around 4000 yuan. Her husband often worked overtime and went on business trips. Huang's routine tasks included grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, cleaning, and taking her son to school which was an hour away by bus. Although staying at home was not her first choice, she felt good about herself for providing "a warm home" for her loved ones and being recognized for her domestic contributions: "My husband often compliments me in front of his colleagues: 'My wife is a good cook and makes good woollen sweaters,' which makes me happy. "

Like Tian and Li, Huang wanted to work outside the home but was more reluctant to seek employment at the moment, partly because she had little patience with alienating jobs: "I could certainly find a job if I wanted to for I am still young. I can always land a crappy one, but a good job is hard to find, considering that I do not have a college degree or any skill. Yes, it would not pay for me to take an unrewarding job and hire a nanny to take care of my family's needs."

Many rural migrant workers, men and women alike, were among those who were hardest hit in urban areas and at their workplaces. Although rural migrant workers were paradoxically often found to be less resentful than non-migrant ones (also see Lee 2007), they were nonetheless alienated, as indicated by their reluctance to perform unfulfilling jobs unless promised better pay and improved working conditions. Ms Ma (age 33) moved with her husband and the younger two of their four children from rural Gansu province to the city of Lanzhou in 1999 due to the loss of their land. They had been

living in a one-roomed slum apartment ever since. Ms Ma's husband initially intended to run a small business with two other men but was defrauded and lost all his investment capital. He then borrowed money to buy a motorcycle to become an underground motorcycle taxi driver. His motorcycle was soon confiscated by the local police. To help pay the debt, Ma found a temporary job in a private bottled-water company. She worked ten hours a day transporting bottles from one spot to another with no weekend, not to mention her two-hour daily walking commute. She made only 300 yuan a month without benefits—roughly one-third of the average income in Lanzhou at the time. She eventually quit due to a wrist injury. When asked whether she wanted to work again, Ma said: "Yes, because we desperately need money but my husband opposes it for he thinks paid work is too hard for me." Ma's husband (age 40) said in a separate interview: "My wife will not have to work any more when I make sufficient earnings." Ma's response was similar when asked whether she would want to continue to work if her husband could support the family. The reason? She first cited her Islamic faith which does not encourage women to work outside the home; she then gave the real reason—she could hardly find a job closer to home that would pay more and be less strenuous. Instead, she would have a chance to relax while doing chores at home. When asked about the risk of losing her economic independence if she were not employed, she replied, "My husband would give me money," implying her sense of equal partnership in the economy of the home and of entitlement to her husband's earnings (also see Zuo 2003).

Another inter-cohort difference was that post-Mao women had little idea what it meant to be "masters of the country" (*zhu ren weng*), hence little attachment to their workplaces. The separate-sphere ideal was quite popular among these women, but many considered it an unrealistic dream, given the tight labor market and rising costs of childcare, education, health care, and housing. Ms L. Zhang (age 36), a contract worker in a textile factory in Lanzhou, was employed in 1990 when this SOE had just been converted to a joint-stock enterprise. Her monthly pay rose from 400 yuan to 1000 yuan in 2007—about the average income of the city, but all the holiday bonuses were removed. Meanwhile, she suffered a monthly wage penalty between of 100 yuan and 300 yuan for making defective cloth. She said in an interview in summer 2007: "I often feel tired and wish I could stay home; but I then would lose all my retirement, health and unemployment benefits, let alone paying off my mortgage or saving money for my son's college education. I work basically to help support my family," a similar alienating sentiment to those of other female informants mentioned earlier.

To those post-Mao women who had young children at home, though burdened with child care, they did not necessarily find it more stressful than paid work. In fact, many cherished motherhood, more so than did their revolutionary and Mao-era counterparts who had been dedicated more to their paid work than childcare. Ms Yan (age 31), a college graduate, resigned from her job in an insurance company after her son was born in 2005. Her husband was the head of a KFC franchise in Beijing, earning about 50,000 yuan annually at the time of the interview in summer 2005. She said she had had three different jobs prior to the birth of her son due to lack of autonomy and control over her pay or job security. She thus felt she was achieving more by raising her son than by keeping her job. According to Yan, her son grew faster than the average child both cognitively and physically, thanks to her hard work. She also planned to raise her son in such a way as to be a security for her own old age. Meanwhile, Yan would like to pursue a career of her own that would offer her autonomy and a sense of control. We learned in the interview that she planned on joining a multilevel cosmetic marketing business, hoping to do it from home. As the next chapter shows, however, the intrinsic conflicts between market and family had made it all the more difficult for her to juggle work and childcare.

At the same time, we found that those women who did not see themselves as commodities tended to be attached to their work, whether they were from the Mao- or post-Mao cohorts. Below are two stories of female entrepreneurs: one came of age in the Mao era and the other in the market transition. Both were from Shanghai and both were interviewed in the spring of 2006. Zhou was the CEO of a state-owned women's service company. She contracted the company, which was on the verge of bankruptcy, with of Shanghai Women' Federation in 2000. When she first took the position in 2002, the company was on the verge of bankruptcy. It took her four years to finally turn it around for all the workers who then got paid again. Zhou considered her company "a big family," of which she took strong ownership: "I am paid by the state and trusted by the leaders, and all the staff have high expectations; I must make sure that what I achieve not only benefits myself and my own family [including her laid-off husband and handicapped daughter] but also my collective unit and the country." Zhou's collective attitude could be traced back to her upbringing under state socialism. When she had just graduated from high school, she signed up for one of the most unpopular factories in Shanghai—a sewage disposal factory—believing that was the right thing to do to con-

tribute to "socialist construction." After that she was promoted to several administrative positions, all related to public welfare, such as the president of the workers' union and of the women's federation in the Shanghai Municipal Management Bureau. Her public-service work experience had led her to believe that the value of an enterprise lay in its ability to benefit wider society in addition to its profitability; a service industry should serve the public interest while making a profit. As she linked her work with public interest, she gained a sense of collective ownership rather than developing feelings of commodification and alienation.

Ms Yu (age 29), a young entrepreneur from the post-Mao generation, certainly would not share Zhou's lofty philosophy. Nonetheless, the fact that she worked for a family-owned garment factory similarly contributed to her development of a sense of ownership. Yu changed jobs several times after gaining her college degree; in 1999 she finally settled down in an internet company in Shenzhen, making an annual income of 200,000 yuan. She was happy where she was until she met her husband. They then moved to Shanghai and lived with her mother-in-law, who owned a garment factory. Her husband worked for an internet company in Japan. Yu took a short break after giving birth to her son in 2005 and soon returned to work. She said: "I have never had even the slightest thought of returning home. A woman must have her own career." Yu recently took over as CEO; she hired a nanny and she herself worked daily from 9 a.m. to midnight, but she enjoyed the fact that her mother-in-law seldom interfered with her management style and the factory was booming. Her only regret was that her she had too little time to be with her son and her husband.

Perceived Redistributive Injustice of the Workplace and the Rewards of Domestic Work

In the Mao era, the distribution of wealth was based solely on labor contributions, be they manual or intellectual. But as mentioned in the preceding chapter, China's market reform is dismantling the egalitarian redistribution system through privatization and the smashing of the "iron rice bowl," generating a renewed sense of social injustice. Although the reformers perceive work incentives under the pre-reform egalitarian redistribution system as low, our data point to the opposite: we noted that workers did not have a strong sense of injustice *until* the advent of market reform. Most Mao-era women workers in the present study reported a commitment to work in the pre-reform period. According to their recollections,

there were only "a tiny proportion of lazy workers." The reason was simple: "Everyone was treated the same," meaning everyone made a living off his/her labor and enjoyed similar benefits, and cadres worked as hard as ordinary workers; therefore, there was no reason for anyone to not work hard. One mechanism used to keep up workers' incentives was again a culture of shame, like that for workers of the revolutionary cohort, which stemmed from the Chinese moral tradition of mutual obligations mentioned in Chapter 3. As Ms Xu (age 52), a former worker in a freezer plant, put it: "My job was to wind wires onto reels. Each of us had the same daily quota to fulfill. You would not get deductions from your pay if you failed to fulfill the quota but you would be criticized by the supervisor and looked down on by your peers. No one would risk losing face by being shamed. In fact, we were secretly racing with each other to achieve an honorable status. For example, my master (*shifu*) would finish 12 reels hourly when she saw me finish 10 within an hour."

The new redistribution system was primarily based on power, connection, and capital ownership, coupled with a rapidly growing income disparity between the powerful and the powerless, which generated a strong sense of injustice among working women of both cohorts, albeit pointing to somewhat different sources. To the Mao-era women in the reform period, social justice means compensation for their loss of the social consensus of low social wages, guaranteed employment, welfare benefits, and public ownership. Therefore, their notion of injustice was vertically linked to the socialist accumulation; many did not believe it was justifiable to shut them out of post-Mao economic gains, given their significant contributions to high levels of state accumulation prior to the reform. Even more outrageous to them was that while workers were losing their jobs, factory leaders still managed to maintain their own positions and doled in large sums... through the failures of their factories. As Tian commented: "While the factory could no longer afford to pay us wages, the factory leaders got an Audi for themselves.... Now our factory head has secured housing not only for himself but also for his children and grandchildren."

Ms Y. Chen (age 55) was an accountant at a garment factory in Shanghai and had seen top factory leaders gradually turning public assets into their "little gold treasures" (*xiao jin ku*):

> We were allocated 3 % more fabric each season, which enabled us to make more clothes than the quota set by the municipal textile bureau. Factory leaders often kept the money earned from the extra sales. They also

> committed fraud. When they sold obsolete fixed assets for 30,000 yuan, for example, they would report 10, 000 yuan only; the remaining 20,000 yuan went to their little gold treasures which had exceeded one million yuan before I retired in 2001. Moreover, the factory director, the party secretary, and the head of the finance section all allocated themselves several apartments. Take the factory director for example, he not only secured three apartments for himself but also got one for his granddaughter. By comparison, workers' lives were hard. Their working day began at 8 a.m. and ended at 4.30 p.m. with half an hour for lunch. The workers' quotas were based on careful time calculations. Workers would have wages deducted if they came to work late or failed to fulfill the quota. For example, the factory required workers to attach one sleeve per minute, hence a minimum 480 sleeves in eight hours; otherwise, they would not be allowed to go to the restroom. But they only made a few hundred yuan a month. 50 % of the workers came from rural areas, and they provided the factory with its cheapest labor (interview conducted in spring 2006).

The official plunder and accumulation of public assets generated a deep sense of theft and betrayal among workers. Many angrily commented: "We would not mind increasing income gaps if officials got rich through their own capabilities.... All our past contributions now go down the drain because of them!" Like Tian, those who found temporary jobs call them *da gong* (meaning working as alienated labor), whereas housework was performed for themselves. Women from transitional state-affiliated agencies (*shi ye dan wei*) where power was decentralized *and* marketized faced similar problems. Ms Wei (age 43), an editor working for a state-owned publisher, was very unhappy about the editor-in-chief's abuse of his power when it came to promotion and bonuses. According to Wei, the editor-in-chief often made decisions based on favoritism and punished those who challenged his authority. Wei learned that although favoritism also existed in the Mao era, it was generally prohibited by the central leadership and, more importantly, leaders at all levels were given very limited power to handle major decisions such as promotions or pay rises. Bonuses were virtually non-existent in state agencies. During the early years of the reform when bonuses became available, a large proportion went to primary editors. In her previous workplace in the early 1990s, for example, a primary editor would receive 70 % of the bonuses for each book edited, the secondary editor, 20 %, and the editor-in- chief, 10 %. Consequently, Wei became estranged from her paid work and leaned more toward chores such as cooking and sewing. As she commented: "Doing

chores is more enjoyable because it serves your loved ones. Of course," she added, "I do chores only within the degree of my acceptance."

Although post-Mao women did not have much historical sense of justice and many even denounced the pre-reform remuneration system as equalitarian (*ping jun zhu yi*), some of them nevertheless also suffered what they perceived as injustice in present-day workplaces. Many young working women in our sample cited a nationwide popular saying: "Those who work hard do not earn money, whereas those who don't, do!" The continuation of power- and connections-based redistribution prompted a public outcry among working women of both cohorts, pushing especially the post-Mao cohort towards home where they found domestic work that was both rewarding and appreciated by their family members. Ms N. Li (age 30), a college graduate, was a book-keeper in a private advertising company in Shanghai. She recently quit her job due to outrage that her employer had promoted another book-keeper instead of her. N. Li said that, unlike her rival—"a sweet talker,"—she was hardworking and dedicated to the company, but she was underappreciated by her employer. She found childrearing not as stressful as she had thought: "I sometimes get bored and tired, but it is so much fun to play with my son and see him grow fast." Meanwhile, she kept looking for another job. As she said: "I enjoy working. I liked my first employer who recognized my hard work. Two years ago, she even threw a baby shower for me.… I then lost my job due to my maternity leave." Nonetheless, she perceived herself as a secondary breadwinner whereas her husband should be the primary one. To N. Li, work was mainly about the pursuit of her career, and was therefore intolerable if it was unsatisfying. She recently even turned down a job offer, feeling that her dignity had been violated when the employer asked her to provide proof of her clean record at a job interview: "I shouted at them: 'of course I am clean! You may launch an investigation if you do not believe me!' They eventually offered me the job but I turned it down—I just could not take such an insult!"

By contrast, women workers in some non-restructured workplaces were still able to maintain a sense of justice, despite their growing concerns about their factories' future. For example, Ms Dai, who worked in human resources for a state-owned electric-wire factory in Lanzhou, told us in summer 2006 that monthly pay for all workers consisted of basic wages/salaries and allowances; the former was mainly determined by seniority and state guidelines, whereas the latter were fixed and remained slightly higher for shop-floor workers (220 yuan in 2007) than staff and

administrators (200 yuan in 2007)—the same pay structure as in the Mao era. The highest-paid administrators (900 yuan) earned less than twice the lowest-paid migrant workers (480 yuan). In addition, the factory provided health, unemployment, and retirement insurance cover for all current 112 workers plus 140 pensioners. In her office, Dai showed us a chart hanging on the wall displaying the pay scale and benefits by job assignment and seniority—the information was freely available to everyone. She said that most workers were content with the factory's fairly egalitarian remuneration system and transparent administration. According to Dai, workers did complain about their low wages, but they were concerned about increasing income gaps between their factory and other companies which offered much higher-paying jobs.

Dai's observations were confirmed by other workers from the same factory. Ms Shi (age 42), a shop-floor leader earning 640 yuan a month, often worked overtime without extra pay. Her story revolved around the factory's collective well-being and reflected her contentment with the egalitarian remuneration system: "We cannot afford to shut down the machines when stoppages occur; nor can we delay fixing problems; we [the factory] would lose thousands of yuan if we did.… I like my job and think our remuneration system is fair. No one makes an extremely high income, everyone enjoys the same benefits, even including small items distributed monthly such as soap, towels and gloves. We all work hard. The workers on my shop floor support my work.... I also like my factory head who seldom uses punitive measures when accidents or errors occur." When asked about the household division of labor, Shi replied: "whoever gets off work earlier will do food shopping or prepare the dinner. I believe in marital equality." But ideology is also shaped by circumstances. Ms Liu (age 38), a worker from the same factory earning 570 yuan a month, had a somewhat different view about gender given her family's need to support her son's education:

> I enjoy working here—we talk and laugh together, and our pay scale is fair. But my son [age 14] will soon attend college which will cost us several thousand yuan. My husband has a temporary job driving a coach for a private transportation company after being laid off from a state-owned factory. He earns 700 yuan a month. Our income is nothing compared to some 20-year olds in other places who already make more than 1000 yuan a month. I do not think that I can ever make that kind of money. Nor can I easily switch my job for I have no other skills. I should do more chores and have my husband make more money—that is the tradition!

Home as a Refuge from the Vicious Competition of the Workplace

One rationale for smashing the socialist "iron rice bowl" is to raise individuals' incentives to work through competition. Although competition also existed in the state-socialist period, its nature was fundamentally different. Previously, workers competed to make contributions to their work units prompted by non-material incentives (e.g. honor or shame), which often enhanced collective solidarity. This was typically reflected in stories told by several female informants from the Mao era as well as those of the revolutionary generation. In the reform era, by contrast, competition is mainly directed towards market efficiency, acting to maximize individuals' material gains (e.g. money and power). Although this promotes individual gain, it runs the risk of undermining social relations by enforcing self-interest and locking individuals into zero-sum games (Brenner 2000); I call this "fierce competition"—a term commonly used by my informants.

Although competition based on non-material incentives did not always work under socialism, market competition relying on material incentives in the reform era has its own problems as outlined earlier. Consequently, it often reduces, rather than enhances, workers' incentives in the sense that they lose interest and creativity in their work—my female informants called this phenomenon "passive work incentives" (*bei dong ji ji xing*). These passive work incentives are manifested in several important ways. First, market competition divides individuals, who tend to develop negative feelings (e.g. jealousy, hatred) or actions (e.g. back-stabbing) toward their rivals. Ms Tang (age 27), an editor for a publishing company in Hebei province, remembered being given a higher rank than many experienced colleagues as soon as she was hired, by virtue of her MA degree from a top university in Beijing. This not only put much pressure on her, but also invited hostility from some colleagues who saw her as a threat to their promotions. "I feel very uncomfortable about the whole thing," said Tang, "I like competition for the collective good, such as for higher-quality work or for saving more paper in daily operations."

Second, conflicts between workers caused by slander or dirty-tricks campaigns are exacerbated by competition without fair rules. This is not to say that these situations did not arise in the pre-reform era; in fact, they occurred during various political campaigns of the Mao years. But nothing can compare with the scale of the adversarial tactics being employed for material gain in the ongoing market transition. The problem seems

particularly acute among white-collar workers and managerial personnel. Ms Lee (age 38) was an accountant in a state-owned company in Lanzhou with a college degree and wide accounting experience. However, in an interview in 2006, Lee said that her boss had recently promoted another female accountant, who had a lower degree, less work experience, and was from another branch of the company. Lee alleged that the newly promoted accountant bribed the boss and had sex with him. As a result, her rival's monthly pay went up by 200 yuan, leaving her very embittered.

Many of our informants shared a dislike of vicious competition which prompted some to retreat to the home. Lee, the accountant mentioned above, did not return to her job after the birth of her daughter in 2005 and was supported financially by her husband, the CEO of a hotel chain with an annual income over 500,000 yuan. She began to run a small business—renting out apartments in Lanzhou and Shanghai—and found it much more enjoyable than her previous employment: "I had never had a chance to enjoy the scenery from the window of my bedroom or to feel as relaxed as I do now. I constantly talk and sing to my daughter and even speak English to her to encourage her intellectual development. Sometimes I go to the gym to work out, or enjoy a massage, or visit a beauty parlor." When asked how she felt about raising her child, she replied: "I do not think it burdensome; I feel the joy that my daughter brings me far exceeds the effort I have put into my paid work. She is a very sweet girl."

Ms Zeng (age 32, party member) was a district official in Lanzhou. She was often the victim of slander by co-workers for her administrative ambitions. As she vividly put it: "I have got a '[bad-]relationship-phobia syndrome.' I would want to go home as soon as my husband could support me." Many working women said that vicious competition had become a major source of distress for them. Women of the socialist cohort missed the good old days when they had covered for each other for childcare or caring for sick relatives and had helped each other out. Among those of the reform generation, some performed their daily work without much enthusiasm or creativity; others worked hard for fear of demotion or losing their jobs. Still others had changed their jobs at least once, hoping to land a better one. Some wished to give up work, as did Zeng.

Finally, material mechanisms encourage employees to put in the best effort that money can buy or fabricate achievements for material rewards. Tang, the editor mentioned above, was unable to freely choose manuscripts with both a social and market value, as the publisher prioritized profit over quality. Instead, she was often compelled to assemble supplementary

textbooks and study guides for high-school students, which guaranteed a handsome profit. Coupled with her concern about the ongoing vicious competition, Tang thought about resigning, but the money was good (60,000 yuan per annum in 2005). She said in the interview that she now puts the minimum amount of effort into her paid work, but uses her skills to help her brother run a small business. For those who were stuck in minimum-wage employment as manual workers in the informal sector, feelings of alienation undercut their incentives to work. Li, the hospital cleaner, made this observation about her workplace: “Many believe that ‘eating from a common pot’ (*da guo fan*, meaning egalitarianism) reduces the incentive to work; one has to work harder in order to earn more money. Now I see that individual workers may still become lazy without supervision under market conditions. For example, some cleaning ladies take the opportunity to rest whenever or wherever they can when no one is watching.”

Although an increasing number of women of the reform era had to work for economic reasons, few believed that material gain was their driving force at work. To them, meaningful work was the key to keeping them interested in working outside the family, even if it meant little or no material gain. Mao-era women commonly reported workers’ dedication to their paid work prior to the reform, despite the absence of material incentives, precisely because of their pursuit of then meaningful socialist ideals. Quite a few women characterized their working experience in the socialist era as “idealistic” (e.g. working for a great cause) and “glorious” (e.g. women can hold up half the sky).

Material incentives tend to reduce the meaning of work to economic survival, thus substantially limiting women’s potential to pursue non-economic goals through paid work. To be sure, few female informants would oppose material incentives, especially those in low-income families. The point, however, was that they found it more fulfilling when work provided them with multiple sources of satisfaction. For example, in spring 2006, we interviewed Ms Liang (age 37), editor of a popular family magazine sponsored by a city-level women’s federation in Shanghai:

> Since I joined the team, we have created several new sections. One of them —the one which I myself created—has won a city-level [non-monetary] signature prize. This gives me a sense of achievement. The leaders also speak highly of our magazine—it is the best one among all magazines in our [women’s federation] system.… One should pursue something one believes worthwhile, whether there is material compensation or not.

When asked whether she believed in the "separate-sphere" idea, Liang responded immediately: "I do not think so. A woman should stay in touch with society at large; otherwise she would get bored.… My husband and I share the chores and he does a bit more than I do."

Zeng, mentioned above, said that should she decide to quit her job some day, she would want to be a voluntary rural teacher. Others, who failed to find satisfaction in paid work, found childcare and domestic work more meaningful than paid employment. Ms Luo (age 32) came to Beijing as a migrant worker in 1997. She started off as a nurse in a hospital and then became the manager of the waiting staff in a hotel restaurant until she got married in 2003. Luo offered the following account in summer 2005:

> I had endured lots of discrimination, insults and slander in those years due to vicious competition.… I finally married my husband [who was more than 10 years her senior]. He owns a small construction business. I gave up work after my son was born two years ago. I no longer want to work full time. Working is really tough. The only reason for me to work would be money, but I do not need much money. What is the use of making much money without a family? I am now happy where I am.

Meanwhile, Luo also valued her economic independence. Like Yan, she planned to join a multilevel cosmetic marketing business to make money without being dependent on an employer.

The Impact of Adversarial Family Relations on Women's Domestic-Role Orientation

We noted that married women's gender ideology, identity, and performance deviated from the patterns described in the preceding sections when family relationships were under strain. Two specific patterns were identified among our female informants who were trapped in adversarial family relationships. First, in a marriage under strain, a woman might prefer to work more to maintain her economic independence or minimize her interactions with her husband at home, regardless of her workplace situation. In these circumstances, the woman might reject the "separate-sphere" ideal. Ms Wang (age 41), a laid-off worker from a chemicals factory in Beijing, found a temporary dish-washing job in a state-owned company. Her work was monotonous and the pay was meager (800 yuan a month in 2005 compared with the average income of 1100 yuan in Beijing), but she preferred to work. This was because she did not want to spend time under

the same roof as her husband who had had an affair with another woman and whom she could not divorce due to housing constraints.

Second, when a woman did not get along with her in-laws who lived under the same roof as her, she might prefer to work more to minimize physical contacts with them irrespective of her gender ideology or identity. Ms Niu (age 51) was an elementary school teacher. Forced to retire early in 2005, she quickly found a temporary consulting job in a high school. In the interview, conducted in summer 2005, she said she chose to spend long hours at work because she did not want to be around her mother-in-law much, as she did not want to get bored.

This part of the study shows that women's domestic-role orientation trend in the post-Mao market transition is neither due to the persistence of traditional cultural norms nor is it a reaction to "excessive" women's liberation orchestrated by the party-state. When this trend is viewed in the context of labor denigration processes amid China's transition from state socialism to market capitalism intertwined with sweeping global capitalism, it becomes clear that labor denigration reduces women workers from socialist heroines to labor commodities, and marginalizes them in the emerging market economy. The state's failure in its commitment to social justice has generated further disappointment and outrage from many working women. Moreover, market competition, originally introduced to boost work incentives and market efficiency, has paradoxically put an end to those incentives by creating adversarial working relations and by preventing women from pursuing paid work for the sake of its intrinsic values.

The emerging antagonism between the market and working women has generated among urban women a sense of deprivation and alienation from the workplace, as Karl Marx (1978) predicted more than a century ago. Given increasingly hostile working environments, it is not surprising to see some women leaning towards a domestic role which remains, relatively speaking, meaningful in that it involves productive, life-enhancing activities and, hence, offers women a better sense of ownership and self-fulfillment. Seen in this light, women's domestic-role orientation may be understood as passive resistance to labor denigration using cultural resources (Thompson 1966) in the new age of economic liberalism. "Passive" means that, instead of fighting labor denigration head on in the workplace, alienated women choose to either reduce their enthusiasm for work or escape it altogether. Nonetheless, women's resistance strategies vary according to their class and family circumstances. While middle-class women can afford to turn to the home, working-class women must share the provider role with their spouses. Alienated women with young

children seem more likely than others to retreat to the home when they have financial support from their spouses.

This part of the analysis therefore demonstrates that unbridled marketization diminishes the work incentive for women who would otherwise enjoy it. In this sense none of the home-oriented women in our study were given a real choice by the market. The family may thus be understood as a mini society in which women participate in non-market home economy (Gibson-Granham 1996; Polanyi [1944] 2001). Compared to organized labor movements, it might be more convenient for some women to use family as a site of resistance which offers them and their families some immediate gains (cf. Scott 1985), as shown in this chapter.

Notes

1. Here, "workers" refer to all wage and salary earners who make a living by selling their labor as opposed to make a living by capital investment.
2. In the same interview, I discovered from Tian that her factory leaders failed to live up to their promise.
3. A type of life insurance that covers death, disability, or hospitalization due to accident.

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CHAPTER 7

Diverse Roles, A Common Dilemma

Chapter 6 focused on labor denigration and the resultant alienation as primary reasons why many urban women of the post-Mao era identify more with their domestic than their provider role. But this is not the whole story. As mentioned in Chapter 5, China's market reform requires the boundaries between work and family to be redrawn, effectively placing the family in the private sphere. As a result, this chapter shows the increasingly diverse work–family patterns of urban women, compared to earlier years, including the emergence of stay-at-home moms in the Mao- and post-Mao cohorts. Can we simply say that this is an indication of the growing social acceptability of women choosing domestic responsibilities over their work role, a choice unavailable during the Mao era, as some scholars believe? Examining work and family life in contemporary Western capitalist societies, Rosemary Crompton (2006, p. 9) sharply criticized the shift from "politics of redistribution" to "politics of identity" associated with the rise of neoliberal economies that tend to attribute individual behavior to personal choices rather than structural forces. Consequently, work–family imbalance is reduced to an individual problem and the broader trend of global capitalism that has created this imbalance receives scant attention. From this vantage point, I explore urban women's diverse construction of their work and family roles in the context of state–family disintegration that has led to growing work–family conflict. To be sure, work–family conflict also existed in the Mao era, as discussed in Chapter 3, but the

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_7

same data suggested that the conflict was mainly between big collectives and small collectives and did not involve fundamental clashes between family interests and the interests of the workplace. In the ongoing market transition, by contrast, urban women (as well as men) face similar dilemmas to those of their counterparts in capitalist societies. On one hand, the state–family disaggregation has promoted the role of the family in ensuring the economic well-being of its members; on the other hand, the family as part of the emerging private sphere must fulfill all domestic tasks in its own time and with its own resources, including childcare and education which used to be subsidized by the state. The competing interests of market and family have aggravated work–family conflict. This chapter will demonstrate that no matter what "choice" an urban woman makes, she does so not merely due to personal preferences but through family circumstances shaped by larger social environments.

Heightened Work–Family Conflict in the Market Transition Era

As the party-state is to a great extent shedding its welfare functions, there is a sense of urgency among workers from transitional SOEs about securing the financial well-being of their family. In our study, all the female workers of the Mao generation who had been laid off expressed concerns about providing for their families. Ms Tian (age 55), also mentioned in Chapter 6, finally secured her retirement in 2006. In a follow-up interview with her conducted in 2006, she offered the following account:

> In the past, I had always believed that my [rice] bowl would be filled if the big pot was full; therefore, I had worked hard to help the state to accumulate foreign exchange reserves through textile exports. I always thought that my factory was where I belonged since the state had given me the "iron rice bowl." From the mid-1990s, my factory could no longer afford to pay us regular wages; I then accepted a meager monthly wage of 170 yuan by staying home and had to find a janitorial job. Now that I have finally obtained my formal retirement I get paid 850 yuan a month, much more than what I was paid before. But my medical insurance only allows me to be reimbursed for 70 % of my medical expenses for an annual premium of 1,300 yuan, compared to the next to nothing I had paid in the past [the Mao era]. My husband has been working for our factory as a contracted sales person after he got laid off a few years ago, only making 500 yuan until very recently. Now he makes about 1,000 yuan; but his health is also

> deteriorating. I am worried that, if he cannot hang onto his job any longer, we may not be able to pay his medical bills which are already mounting....

In fact, all women workers who had been laid off before the official retirement age (generally 50 for blue-collar workers and 55 for staff members or professionals from government agencies or other types of state-owned institutes) were anxiously waiting to collect their retirement pension. Many of them said: "How I wish I were retired now."

Although female workers from non-transitional SOEs did not have immediate concerns about lay-offs, they faced an uncertain future in terms of the prosperity of their factories and the increasing gaps between their income and average incomes in society at large, mentioned by workers in the Lanzhou electric-wire factory (see Chapter 6). It was still state owned during our visit in the summer of 2006. To maintain its competitive edge in the market, the factory kept the prices of its products low despite the rising costs of copper wire, which reduced its profit margin. The factory workers suffered low monthly incomes (ranging from 480 yuan to 900 yuan) compared with the average income of 900 yuan in Lanzhou in 2006 when the interviews were conducted. Most workers were dedicated to their work, and were hoping to increase revenues for their factory. Ms Shi, a shop-floor supervisor, often left most of the housework to her husband who had worked part time for a department store after being laid off by a factory three years before. The workers of this factory were getting increasingly anxious about their economic future, and the shrinking coverage of their health benefits due to the rising costs of medicine as well as their static earnings. As Ms Dai told us, although the workers' health benefits remained the same as they were in the past, an increasing number of drugs, often expensive ones recommended by doctors, were not covered by their health insurance. Workers were even more concerned about losing all their benefits if their factory became privatized. As many workers said, under state ownership, they did not have to worry about bankruptcy if the factory did not do well, but they could lose all their savings in such circumstances if they were asked to buy shares in the factory when it converts to a privately owned enterprise—a rumor which was circulating at the time of the interviews.

Many women of the same cohort, especially educated women who worked in the public sector, not only managed to keep their jobs but also did well economically and socially, precisely because they were still largely protected by the old work-unit (*danwei*) system. While the overwhelming

majority of SOEs were privatized, government agencies and state-affiliated educational and cultural institutes (e.g. universities, research institutes, publishers, TV and broadcasting) remained under state control. Therefore, government officials and professionals from public institutes who came of age prior to the accelerated marketization of the 1990s were able to enjoy the same benefits and, meanwhile, reaped various economic gains through market reform. Housing was a stark example. As members of the Mao cohort, many working women were able to enjoy heavily subsidized housing before it officially ended in the new millennium. Women of this group tended to remain attached to their work units, albeit to a lesser degree. Ms Jiao (53), a senior researcher, reported: "I was allocated a two-bedroom apartment about 10 years ago. My work unit has recently replaced that apartment with a much bigger one below the market price. Although I no longer consider my work unit as a big family, I am still attached to it for it ensures my job security and all the welfare benefits."

To post-Mao women, job security and benefits ensured by the state were a thing of the past. This was compounded by the increasing costs of housing, childcare, and education. Many women of the post-Mao generation often felt compelled to work more than their pre-reform counterparts at the expense of their domestic and personal needs. This was especially the case among women in low-income families. Women who were forced into employment or moonlighting tended to find their work more burdensome than fulfilling and tended to prefer a stronger domestic role to paid work. Ms Xia (age 27) was a migrant worker who came to Beijing from Anhui province at the age of 17 in 1995. She married Mr Wang (age 29), a fellow migrant worker, in 2000. In 2003, Xia gave birth to her son and had to leave him with her mother-in-law in her home village. Xia and her husband were both janitors in a university in Beijing, earning meager wages (545 yuan monthly for Xia and 600 yuan for Wang) with limited health and unemployment insurance. To earn money for their son and extended rural families, both of them moonlighted. While Xia's husband collected and sold recyclables found in dumpsters on the side, Xia routinely took on an hourly-paid job cooking and cleaning for private households. Xia gradually developed stomach problems because of her irregular meal hours. In the interview, Xia said: "I certainly want him [husband] to make a bit more money than I do; he is a man."

Although many female workers were overworked with reduced benefits, others simply could not find a job. This was particularly the case for rural migrant women. In our sample, none of the six wives of rural

migrants from Gansu Province could find a job in the city of Lanzhou, nor did some of the husbands. To support the family, they often engaged in underground economic activities, such as cleaning sheep intestines for the wholesale business, and making or selling street food as illegal peddlers. Those who found jobs in the informal economy, such as Ms Ma (see Chapter 6), tended to work long hours.

Another challenge that many mothers of young children encountered was the rapidly rising cost of education due to the marketization of education. Although the state provides nine years of compulsory education from elementary- to middle-school levels, many schools, including kindergartens in large cities, informally charge donations (*zan zhu fei*) when they admit students. If a student is from a different district or rural area, out-of-district fees will be charged. This is especially the case in top-notch schools. Increasing competition among school-age children to succeed academically and parental desires to send their children to good schools have substantially increased the financial burdens on families across the board. The information I gathered from various sources about annual donations or out-of-district fees charged by some kindergartens and schools in Beijing alone in 2004 is as follows:

One municipal bureau–affiliated kindergarten: 1000 yuan to 1500 yuan;
One ministry-affiliated kindergarten: 2000 yuan;
Another ministry-affiliated kindergarten: 4000 yuan to 6000 yuan;
One city-level key elementary school: 30,000 yuan to 40,000 yuan;
One residential kindergarten: 500 yuan;
One district-level key high school: 3000 yuan (out-of-district);
One good elementary school: 15,000 yuan;
One ordinary elementary school: 2000 yuan.

There are no official sources for these figures, as they all operate "under the table." While parents are required to fill in a form if they agree to make a donation, they must tick the box marked "voluntary." The figures were confirmed by quite a few informants of ours in Beijing in interviews in summer 2005. Ms Lian, a college professor (see Chapter 6), said:

> Canyun elementary school [a pseudonym] is a city-level key elementary school which charges entrance donation fees ranging from 30,000 yuan to 40,000 yuan. Even so, demand far exceeds supply. The school opened two more branches to accommodate the need; still not enough.... For an ordinary elementary school, donation charges are still around a few hundred yuan. Children of rural migrant workers are no exception, but many parents

> do not make much money. Xiao Sun, our hourly worker (*xiao shi gong*) wanted to send her child to an ordinary elementary school and was told to pay 3,000 yuan as a donation. But their total monthly family income was only slightly over 2,000 yuan. The school then said to them: "Send your child elsewhere. We are not worried about empty seats. If you do not go to school here, others will."

Xiao Sun complained to the Beijing Municipal Educational Bureau, which responded that they had not heard about this school charging donations. This was because this school, like any other school, would not issue receipts to donors or record donations in their accounts. Finally, the couple was compelled to pay the donation to send their child to this school.

Ms Yu (age 54):

> We came to Beijing from rural Shangdong province in 1994. We sent our daughter to an elementary school in 2000 with a fee of 200 yuan per semester; by 2003, newly enrolled students must pay 1,000 yuan. On top of that, students were also asked to make 1,000 yuan of loving-heart (*aixin*) donations. My daughter is looking for a good middle school for the fall semester, but we have learned the high school that she is interested in charges 15,000 yuan donation fees—equivalent to two years of our family's living expenses. We both are getting older without making much money [a total monthly family income slightly more than 1000 yuan].

Mr Zang (age 50):

> In addition to donation fees, the district key school that my son went to a few years ago took commissions from a catering company which provided packed lunches for the students. They were so small that some students were still hungry, so they decided to go out to eat. The vice principal in charge of catering then stipulated that no student be allowed to leave the campus at lunch time.[1]

To ensure their children's academic success, many parents also jumped on the bandwagon to offer their children all the resources they could afford, which exhausted parents' energy as well as increasing their financial burdens. Ms H. Wang (age 48) was a staff member for a state health agency. H. Wang and her husband decided to send their son to one of the top elementary schools in Beijing in 2004. To do so, they rented a two-bedroom apartment near the school. The husband quit his job in

Table 7.1 H. Wang's expenses for her son's education, September 2004—June 2005

Item	*Unit price (yuan)*	*Quantity*	*Amount (yuan)*
Rent	26,000	1 apartment	26,000
Olympic mathematics	1000	1 class	1000
Hualuogeng mathematics	1600	2 classes	3200
Xinqiao English	1200	9 weeks	10,800
General English	60	30 times	1800
Pre-exam English lessons	100	10 lessons	1000
School fees	2000	1 year	2000
Donation	30,000	Once	30,000
Total			*75,800*

1996 and became a stay-at-home dad, having saved up a good deal of money from an oil business in which he had previously been involved. H. Wang always sneaked out of her *danwei* around 3 p.m.—two hours before the official end of the working day—to tutor her son in English or do food shopping. She said she did not care much about promotion for that was hard to achieve: "Our division chief was only 38 years old but he has lots of gray hair creeping up, much more than I do." Their investment in their son's education meant a huge increase in their expenses that would be beyond the reach of many middle- and working-class families in the 2004–2005 period. Table 7.1 lists their expenses on their son's education alone.

The marketization of education has therefore caught the parents in the dilemma of working more to save money for their children's education against the amount of time needed to attend to their children's various classes and lessons. Even though low-income parents might not spend much money on their children's extra-curricular lessons, their out-of-pocket educational expenses have increased substantially due to various kinds of fees being charged. Moreover, many low-income, working-class parents have little chance of reducing their regular work hours or purchasing domestic services in order to put more effort into their children's education.

To many urbanites, the financial burden can be heavier if their own parents (mainly those who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s) had a low income or no income. Although parental financial need is generally low in urban areas, given the state-guaranteed employment, housing, and retirement policies of the pre-reform era, such need could be much higher

if the parents live in rural areas. This is because there have never been state-sponsored retirement programs for rural residents. During the Mao era, the party-state created a dual rural–urban social structure maintained by a residential registration system which prevented peasants from moving to cities without the government's approval, given the huge gaps in the standard of living between rural and urban areas and the limited resources available for the state to guarantee urban employment, and particularly to pursue industrialization. Therefore, the state mainly relied on family members and collective production units to look after elderly people in rural areas, despite its very limited welfare funds for rural residents (Pan 2014). With market reform, the old collective production units gave rise to the new family contract system of agricultural production. Given that only 15 % of the land was arable whereas more than 80 % of the Chinese population was rural, there was a large amount of surplus rural labor looking for other ways of making a living. This problem was compounded by the fact that a growing proportion of farm land was being turned into real-estate properties by local governments and developers. These "push" factors combined with the lure of better job opportunities in cities pulled many middle-aged and young rural residents out of their villages to urban areas, leaving many older people and children behind. As a result, the pre-reform old-age security no longer works effectively. While the state and provincial leaderships have explored new ways to restore old-age security for rural residents, many of them have not been successful due to the incompatibility of their initiatives, such as rural social old-age insurance or non-profit mutual aid funds (Pan 2014) with a market economy which emphasizes individual responsibility, market efficiency, and profitability. Meanwhile, ongoing market reform has witnessed continuing gaps between state provision of rural and urban welfare benefits. For example, during the 1991–1998 period, while the state's per-capita welfare payments to an urbanite increased from 554 yuan to 1462 yuan, welfare payments to a rural resident went up from 5.1 yuan to 11.2 yuan (Pan 2014).

This situation in rural areas has prompted many families who have low-income rural parents to make additional savings for them. Ms Shan (age 27) was one example. Shan grew up in a village in Anhui province. After obtaining a three-year college degree, she began working in a textile factory in Shanghai and was recently promoted to manager of a production department, earning a monthly salary around 1000 yuan. Shan's husband was a salesperson in the textile industry, making approximately 5000 yuan a month in 2006. Although the total family income had reached middle-class

levels in 2006, when a typical family income in Shanghai was less than 2000 yuan, Shan was getting worried: "We have a 15-month-old son who is going to cost us a bundle growing up. My mother now is helping me look after my son. She is from a rural area and has no pension fund. I feel that our educational system is heading too far down the market road. If it keeps going this way, I will have no money left to fulfill my filial duties to my parents."

Financial strain and marketization of welfare benefits are not the only indicators of work–family conflict. In the modern workplace, individuals often feel pressure to improve their skills due to competition. Ms Xu (age 37, a low-level government official) worked in a District Education Bureau in the city of Shanghai. She enjoyed working and worked hard. But she was wary of excessive demands from her work unit. One of them was various training programs required for promotion. According to Xu, to get promoted, one had to participate in training programs such as computer skills, English, and technology related to that particular position. Employees who applied for promotion would be put onto a credit system in which they had to pass all the exams of those programs. This would still not guarantee them a promotion; it would depend on many other factors as well. In addition, Xu felt a leadership position at work could be a formidable challenge to her: "I would have many sleepless nights, thinking about how to run a meeting next day, how to delegate, on and on."

Three patterns of lived experiences in their work and family roles were identified among our female informants, and these are analyzed below.

Stay-at-Home Moms' Ambivalent Feelings

While the state's withdrawal from public welfare provision has pushed women from low-income families to work more, the same policy change, combined with rising global competition in education, takes some women from middle- or upper-income families out of the workforce and into the home to be full-time mothers. In our study, eight working women with young children retreated to the home. Ms Huang (age 36), mentioned in Chapter 6, a former worker in a private beauty salon in Lanzhou, now a housewife, gave another reason for quitting her job: "It takes my son about an hour to get to [elementary] school by bus across town, but this is a very good school! My husband is a TV program editor and often comes home late. No one would prepare meals for my son or supervise his homework if we were both working. Nor would we still look like a family if we always came home only to find empty pots and a cold stove."

Ms Jiang (age 36), from Beijing, left her factory job to become a salesperson in a private-sector clothing business in 1991. Her son was born the following year and her in-laws looked after him until he went to kindergarten at age five. She then had to give up her job, since her ageing in-laws were unable to take her son to kindergarten in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon on a regular basis; nor was her employer willing to offer her flexible hours to accommodate her family needs.

Stay-at-home moms had done their husbands and children a favor by taking on most domestic tasks. They themselves also felt somewhat relieved from the tensions between work and family. Stay-at-home moms generally felt positive about their decision and justified it with cost–benefit analyses. Ms Lee, the accountant from Lanzhou mentioned in Chapter 6, did not return to her job after giving birth to her daughter in 2005. She commented in the interview that she had actually saved money by raising her daughter herself. Ms Yan, the mother of a one-year-old, said: “I am strengthening the bond with my son by looking after him myself. I can also raise him as a filial son [for old-age security].” In this way stay-at-home moms not only eased work–family conflict but also turned childrearing into a home economy that enabled them to invest in their children in the long run.

Benefits notwithstanding, given the greater values of paid work compared with unpaid domestic work under market conditions, women must have financial resources and spousal support in order to stay at home. Huang’s husband made an annual income of 60,000 yuan and supported her decision to be a stay-at-home mom. In our sample, all the stay-at-home moms had a husband with an annual income of at least 50,000 yuan who agreed with or even encouraged their decisions.

But none of these women stayed at home without ambivalent feelings. While they were now able to ease the tensions between the demands of work and family, they found themselves increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, not only with a loss of income but also with reduced social roles and shrinking social networks. To maintain their economic independence and keep themselves busy, they needed to find financial sources of support. Ms Jiang made money by trading stocks online, but she also missed the good old days. Below was my interview with her in summer 2005:

> I am one of those grudging quitters—I was a successful sales person and would have been a senior manager by now had I not quit my job a few

> years ago. Now I am very isolated living in a residential area near where my husband works but far away from the city proper with few parks or other recreational places nearby to go to and meet people. My son is not doing well in school. That worries me and makes me feel guilty since I am a full-time mom now. I often feel tired.

Ms Yan always believed that she was more capable of career success than her husband, the manager of a KFC franchise in Beijing; she looked forward to finding work after her son was old enough to attend kindergarten. For the moment, she was preparing for a small multilevel cosmetics marketing business from home, hoping to manage it without being locked into the rigid schedule of the workplace. But her business not only put her in a risky financial position but was also time-consuming, and often interfered with her childcare responsibilities. She said: “sometimes I am so frustrated that I cannot help crying.”

Another source of frustration for stay-at-home moms was that they were stuck with domestic responsibilities with little help from their husbands, relatively successful career men who tended to work long hours or go on frequent business trips. Nor were they able to spend much time with their husbands for the same reason. Accountant Lee’s husband was a realtor and a millionaire in Lanzhou. He was so busy that he seldom ate at home. When asked whether her husband helped her with any type of housework, Lee replied: “How could he help *me*? It is the other way round. In the past, we ate almost all meals together, but nowadays, we hardly even eat together twice a week!” This sentiment was commonly shared by stay-at-home moms. More devastating for Lee was the discovery that her husband was having affairs with other women. I obtained this piece of information from the friend who introduced me to Lee. According to my friend, Lee would sometimes appear at her husband’s office, call him names, and threaten him with divorce. But the husband did not want a divorce because of her good looking and her higher social status as a native of Shanghai.

Indeed, the devaluation of domestic work under the market economy is stressful for many housewives. Huang once attempted to teach her son about being careful with money. Her son responded: “I am not spending *your* money but my father’s.” Huang felt hurt and told her son: “[Your] mother used to be employed; now she stays home for your sake.” But her son seemed unmoved, added Huang in the interview: “In his opinion, both his father and he himself have worked hard. I am the only one who

stays home doing nothing." Moreover, Huang would feel uneasy whenever her husband went on a business trip. She would ask who was going with him, a man or a woman, which made her husband feel uncomfortable. Now Huang was having second thoughts about whether staying at home was a good idea for her.

It was noticeable, however, that the devaluation of domestic work did not happen in extremely poor families where both domestic and economic tasks were vital to the survival of the family. This part of the analysis includes four Muslim migrant-worker families for whom making a living in the city of Lanzhou was a constant struggle. All of them lived in substandard and crowded housing. Both spouses had a hard time finding a job due to their lack of skills and non-resident status. In two of the families, the husband was an illegal street peddler selling food. The wife had to get up around three o'clock in the morning to cook the food, then during the daytime, she would fetch water, prepare meals, look after the children, and make clothes. In this tough household economy, productive and reproductive work were intertwined. In the other two families, while the husband went out to earn money, the wife thought that it was "natural" for her to stay home since, like the above-mentioned migrant families, they had between two and four young children at home. The major concern of these families was economic. All of them expressed their desire to have the opportunity to make a decent living in Lanzhou and send their children to proper schools. For now, all their children went to an informal school called Loving Heart Elementary School intended for very poor rural migrant children who otherwise could not afford education. The school was located in a poverty-stricken area with only three classrooms offering classes to first and second graders. The school mainly relied on funding from charities, including Oxfam based in Hong Kong, so it lacked financial stability. The school employed eight teachers; occasionally short-term volunteer teachers from various colleges in China and overseas taught in the school as part of their teaching support (*zhi jiao*) projects.

Family-Oriented Working Women's Dilemma

Approximately 66 female informants could be categorized as family-oriented working women. For the majority of this group, staying home was neither ideal nor an option. Instead, the women combined work with family. But few were willing to pursue their work role at the expense of their family's well-being. This was particularly so for post-Mao women

who came of age when the state no longer provided them with job security and welfare benefits. For many women of this generation, work was what they did but the family was why they lived. This was similar to what was found among their American counterparts (Hochschild 1997) but different from women of the Mao generation. Ms Yang (age 32), a college graduate and social researcher from Beijing, shared her opinion with me: "I can understand why social researchers of previous generations were so devoted to our institute; this was the place where they obtained permanent employment, housing, health care benefits, and reciprocal assistance—just like a family. We do not have any of those. I am always to be laid off or fired.... I feel completely secure only when I am with my family." Ms Cheng (age 27), also a college graduate working in the health department of a state agency, further explained that unlike the workplace, the family could meet multiple needs for an individual, including psychological, emotional, and material. One can afford to lose a job but not one's family. Both women had young children under two; both put childrearing and domestic responsibilities ahead of their career; and both expected their husbands to be the primary breadwinner.

In other cases, excessively demanding workloads often led women to reduce their work commitments and increase their contribution to domestic tasks. Ms Xu, mentioned above, was a productive official and highly valued by the bureau leadership. But due to mounting workloads, she had no intention of furthering her career. Even in her current position as the head of her office, she often returned home totally exhausted and had little energy left to help her son with his homework. She commented in the interview: "I will do my best to fulfill my duty as the head of my office. But I do not wish to climb higher up the career ladder for it will be too hard to meet those expectations. I am just an ordinary person and am happy where I am. My main goal is to see my child grow up healthily and enjoy a good family life—every family has one child only nowadays." Therefore, she insisted that the ideal would be for a woman to raise her own child until the child reaches three. She believed that a child's abilities and personality are usually determined by age three and a mother should play a key role in shaping her child's potential. She had nine months of paid maternity leave and jokingly said that she would not have minded if she had had up to three years of maternity leave. This reflected the fierce competition of higher education and in the labor market. As she commented: "A young person should attend a good university in order to get a good job." On returning to work from her nine-month maternity leave, she first hired a nanny and then her mother-in-law looked

after her son. After she and her husband bought an apartment, her parents moved in with her and helped with childcare until her son went to daycare at 18 months old—the minimum age required for daycare. But no matter who was looking after him, Xu always did it herself after work.

The incompatibility of work and family also created conflicting messages for women. Ms Lin (age 27) had just started her teaching career in a university and her husband was also a junior college professor in another university in the city of Lanzhou in 2006. They had a one-year-old daughter. Lin complained: "Society wants women to be successful in *both* career and motherhood. How can this be possible? I always let my husband take training courses first when opportunities come up, and he always gets to receive training at a top university in big cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, whereas I often end up doing it in Lanzhou because of child care." Although she believed in marital equality at home, she also preferred her husband to be more devoted to his career than she was to hers; for herself, she preferred to balance work and family by paying more attention to child care than her paid work.

Work–family conflict was worse when women had to shoulder both breadwinning and domestic responsibilities. Ms Xin (age 38) lost her job because the state-owned cement factory she worked for in the city of Jilin went bankrupt in 2000. To help support the family, Ms Xin took an hourly-paid domestic-service job in Jilin, averaging eight hours a day, 25 days a month with a monthly income of 600 yuan. Her husband started a small business in 1994 but was not successful. To help save up for their son's college fund, Xin's husband took a factory job as a fitter in southern China in 2004, earning 1500 yuan a month. This means domestic responsibilities fell entirely on Ms Xin's shoulders. She often scheduled her work around her son's school hours to make sure that she was there when he came home. She completed all housework in her limited spare time. Her dream now was that her son would eventually attend college so that she could rejoin her husband in southern China.

As mentioned earlier, Ms Xia, who earned a living by working as a janitor along with her husband in Beijing, had been separated from her son since he was born in 2003. According to Xia, her husband did not even make it back to their home town for his son's birth due to his work schedule. When their son was a little older, they were able to talk to him on the phone only twice a week. Although Xia managed to pay an annual visit to her son and her in-laws, who looked after him, she often felt that the mother–son bond was missing. What made her even more frustrated was that there was nothing

she could do when she disagreed with her mother-in-law about her permissive grandparenting style. But their housing and financial constraints did not allow her and her husband to bring their son to Beijing. She was determined at the time of the interview in 2005 that she would return to her village to supervise her son's school work when he reached school age in three years. In may follow-up interview with her, Xia told me that she had brought her son to live with her in Beijing after she and her husband could afford to rent a one-room apartment for themselves.[2]

Career-Oriented Women: A Resourceful Group

In our sample, there were 32 work-/career-oriented women in both state and private sectors. These women seized career opportunities brought by market reform and many had impressive achievements to show for it. In addition to their personal effort, these women's opportunities were widened because of their high educational attainment, their favorable economic class location, the booming of certain industries (e.g. the internet and law), continued job security and improved benefits for civil servants in government agencies, and their employment in state-monopolized industries (e.g. TV journalism and oil production). For example, Ms Han (age 50), a professor and senior administrator from one of the best public TV journalism schools in China, said in the interview that the TV industry had become very profitable in the market transition, which had contributed to the rapid and above-average pay rise, ranging from 100,000 yuan to 200,000 yuan annually, of all their faculty and administrators, at least in 2006 when she was interviewed. The state's monopoly of large journalism schools as well as national and provincial TV stations further ensured job security and welfare benefits for full-time employees in the state sector by limiting competition from the private sector. This was especially true for the Mao generation, to which Ms Han belonged, who started work in the 1980s. Han had lived in school-subsidized public housing on the campus since the late 1980s to ease the burden of a 20-mile commute between her home and her school; she would go home every other week. She also had medical insurance of over 90 % with a very low monthly premium.

In addition, most successful career women had at least one of the following advantages: a strong social support network, affordability of commercial services for domestic tasks, childlessness, or a combination of the above factors. Han did not have children. Because of her dedication to her work, she had won the Outstanding Teacher award in a national contest

and served on the boards of several national professional associations of journalism. She seldom felt work–home conflict; to her, work was an essential part of her life, and her colleagues, members of her big family. Nor did she subscribe to the separate-sphere idea. She hired a part-time helper to attend to domestic tasks at both her university campus and home apartments. Her husband, a high-ranking administrator in another university, also strongly supported her career.

Female entrepreneurs from the private sector, compared to those in the public one, do not gain support from the state. Nonetheless, some ease their burdens by purchasing domestic services. Ms Yu (age 28), the CEO of the private garment factory mentioned in Chapter 6, had a husband who worked for a transnational corporation in Japan and came home to her twice a week. After the birth of her daughter in 2005, Yu hired a live-in nanny; she herself would work in the factory from 9 a.m. to midnight without a weekend off or a vacation. She had a strong desire to make the garment factory successful and had enjoyed her sole decision-making power at the workplace. At the same time, she complained about lacking time for her daughter and husband. She said that when the garment factory became more securely established, she would want to change her career to one that would allow her to enjoy the best of both worlds.

Still other career women relied on their extended families to mitigate work–family conflict. For example, Ms Ding (age 37), a division chief in a district government agency in Lanzhou, not only worked long hours but also often brought her work home. Her mother had been the primary caregiver of her son until he was four and a half years old; then her husband, a college professor, took on the bulk of the childcare responsibilities since he had more flexible hours. Ms Huo (age 43), a professor and an associate dean (since 2004) of the Civil Engineering Department in a university in Shanghai, had her parents and parents-in-law take turns to look after her son until he reached school age. Then, Huo and her husband, a colleague of hers, sent their son to an expensive private boarding school for his elementary- and high-school years. Huo said gratefully: "I have been extremely busy teaching, conducting research, supervising PhD students' dissertations, doing administrative work, and so forth. At home, my husband and I prepare meals together. Every evening, we return to our offices after dinner, working till around 11 p.m. I do not think that I could have handled all these tasks without the support of my parents and in-laws, as well as my husband."

Resources notwithstanding, due to the inherent incompatibility between workplace and home, career women similarly face work–family conflict and often blame themselves if anything goes wrong within the family. Ms Qi (age 55), another college professor from Lanzhou, offered the following account in summer 2006:

> I would say that I am quite successful in my career—my university sent me abroad in 1995 for two and half years to advance my degree, and I was fully promoted a long time ago. My biggest failure in my life is that I did not take good care of my son! Before I studied abroad, I had tutored and supervised his school work since he was in elementary school, and he had been one of the best students in most of his classes. By the time I returned from abroad, however, his grades had fallen to the bottom of his classes. He eventually failed the entrance exams for college.… If I ever had a second chance I would not want to study abroad again.

Qi also complained about her husband, the editor-in-chief of a publishing company, for neglecting their son's education; this had put a strain on their marriage.

The present study examines the effect of China's economic transition on women's construction of their work and family roles in urban areas. Despite increasing opportunities for some individuals, it is evident that urban women, especially those of the post-Mao generation, face growing tensions between work and family as state welfare support of working people and their families is being withdrawn. The tensions are mainly found in working people's struggle with the shrinking safety net of welfare benefits for health care, housing, child care, and education, as well as old-age support in rural areas. Therefore, women's role priorities are often part of family strategies in response to the marketized workplace and a society in which the market's need for profit is becoming increasingly at odds with the family's need for nurturing. Given the differential impacts of markets on families and individuals from different sectors of society, the strategies that women use vary according to work and family circumstances. Women who suffer severe work–family conflict but have economic resources tend to stay at home; those who cannot afford it must juggle work and family. Career women are able to dedicate themselves to the workplace mainly because they encounter lower levels of work–family conflict, indicated by the continuing safety net and welfare benefits from their workplaces, social

support from a wider social circle, and the assistance they receive from their extended families.

This by no means suggests that non-career women prefer domestic responsibilities to paid work. Although the present study does not focus on this, our data indicate that most women enjoy working, and find that it enriches their life and expands their social networks. However, with the disaggregation of work and family, not only does the family become overburdened with productive and reproductive functions, but the workplace and marketplace demands also become incompatible with the needs of the family. To the extent to which women's role construction is a function of work–family conflict, the fact that some women lean toward the domestic role should not merely be interpreted as adherence to traditional gender values. Instead, it may be understood as women's attempt to cope with excessive market forces to protect their family's well-being. As the family struggles to fulfill its functions, women tend to bear the brunt of work–family conflict. Our data demonstrate that, no matter what strategies women use, they *all* face challenges from a marketplace that puts family relations at risk by devaluing housework while enhancing the value of paid work, separating family members from one another, and creating rifts between spouses or between parents and children (cf. Coontz 1988; Polanyi [1944] 2001).

From the global perspective, women around the world face the dilemma between work and family. This includes other former state-socialist societies (Funk 1993; Kotzeva 1999; Rudd 2000), developing countries (Chow and Berheide 1994; Haney and Pollard 2003), and advanced capitalist countries (Gerson and Jacobs 2007; Uchitelle 2008). In fact, work–family conflict has been exacerbated precisely by capitalist globalization, which undermines family well-being by privatizing it and separating it from the public sphere (cf. Coontz 1988; Engels 1972). Furthermore, although women have made concerted efforts to help alleviate work–family conflict, they do so at the expense of their own interests. Considerable research similarly shows that women's socioeconomic disadvantages are the results of their domestic responsibilities in capitalist societies (Brenner 2000). For that reason, one of the urgent tasks for China as well as other parts of the world in the twenty-first century is, perhaps, to curb unbridled market forces and restore a public good, indicated in part by family–work integration, so as to create a women-friendly work and social environment.

Notes

1. This part of the book was written in the summer of 2015, ten years after my field work in Beijing, and while I could not find much information about the charging of entrance donation fees, I noticed that it was still common practice at least in some parts of the country. For example, according to an online report (Guo and Hu 2014), a prominent private elementary school in Guangzhou charged 80,000 yuan of donation per pupil for admission, 50,000 yuan more than in 2013. The tuition was 9000 yuan per semester, totaling nearly 200,000 yuan for a student to complete elementary education in six years. But this continuing practice is not limited to private schools. According to a list of donation criteria in the city of Guangzhou which I found online, the entrance donation fees charged by approximately 50 elementary schools for 2015 ran from 10,000 yuan to 190,000 yuan, and most of them were public elementary schools (source: http://jingyan.baidu.com/article/5d368d1e1349ae3f61c05762.html, first accessed on 20 July 2015).
2. I did a follow-up interview with Xia in 2009.

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CHAPTER 8

A Different Marital Equality

Chapters 6 and 7 showed the tendency of urban women to shift their priority from paid market work to unpaid family work, due to either market hostility toward workers or work–family conflict. How do urban women reconcile themselves to marital inequality both in the household division of labor and possibly in major decision making at individual and family levels? The literature on gender or marital inequality originates predominantly from Western market societies, which believe that women are disadvantaged if they do more at home because their economic power is reduced by non-participation in the workplace. Equity theory would argue that inequitable distribution of economic resources creates women's economic dependence on men and therefore undermines women's power when they try to negotiate with their husbands for less work or greater authority at home (Blood and Wolfe 1960; Homans 1961). However, this gender-neutral cost–benefit analysis has been challenged both empirically and theoretically for neglecting the gendered meanings of employment and family work (Ferree 1990). Many studies have noted that although women generally do much more at home regardless of their economic status, few perceive this inequality as unfair (e.g. Ferree 1990; Lennon and Rosenfield 1994; Thompson 1991). Gender theory attributes this discrepancy to the persistence of gendered ideology that assigns a higher value to men's paid work as breadwinning than it does to women's; therefore, it reduces the bargaining power of women who might otherwise seek

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_8

an equitable distribution of housework (Ferry 1990). Although gender theory does not necessarily see domestic work in such an adverse light for women as does equity theory, it nonetheless applies market principles when evaluating its relative worth to women, drawing a similar conclusion that women are disadvantaged when they are engaged more in unpaid domestic work than market work. When Lennon and Rosenfield (1994) tested these two competing theories against data, they found that it was power differences between spouses that shaped the meaning and outcomes of gendered division of housework. Because women had fewer alternatives to marriage, their bargaining power was compromised and so was their ability to perceive the injustice in gendered division of household labor.

It is undoubtedly true that women in market societies are disadvantaged if market values are the sole standard used within the family. However both equity and gender theories, and the power difference argument, fail to explain why some women actively engage in such unequal divisions of labor in favor of their husbands or even vehemently defend it. Do married women and men always follow the market logic of power determination in their negotiations of paid and unpaid work? In an earlier study on marital division of household labor in urban China, my associate and I (Zuo and Bian 2001) developed an integrated view of equity and gender theories, as Lennon and Rosenfield (1994) did, but came to the opposite conclusion. More specifically, instead of considering the gendered meaning of housework as produced by the power difference between the spouses, we argued that differential power was derived from gendered meanings of market work and of housework that produced gendered cultural resources for men and women. In other words, power was gendered because resources were gendered. It meant that traditional gendered culture enabled women to derive more power from their domestic responsibilities and men from their provider role. Equity would be reached when both genders committed themselves to their culturally prescribed roles. Our argument was different from the other three perspectives in two ways. First, we did not have a preconceived notion of domestic responsibilities as necessarily a disadvantage for women which they would want to avoid, given alternatives. What if women's domestic responsibilities are sanctioned by gendered culture in a collective family setting and offer greater rewards than the alternatives? Second, we found that wives and husbands assess the fairness of the household division of labor within the larger comparative framework of provider and homemaker roles, achieving a more broadly defined marital equality that takes into account both family roles of breadwinning

and homemaking. Our approach lends explanatory power to the scenarios of women's active participation in domestic work and men's reluctance to fully embrace the equal gender divisions of household labor when paid market work and non-paid domestic responsibilities are treated as family roles rather than personal resources.

As I proceeded to conduct similar studies in rural China in subsequent years, I realized that our gendered resource theory was in fact an extension of the market exchange model which assumes self-interest, transactional equity, and rational choice. What if marital exchange was situated in a collective family setting where cultural values embrace giving, cooperation, and mutual obligations rather than taking, competition, and personal rights? How would marital equality be understood and construed? In his study of archaic Polynesian and other societies, French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1990) noted that gift exchange—one form of social exchange among individuals and communities—was often used to enhance relationships and group well-being rather than maximize personal benefits. The emphasis was on mutual obligations rather than transactional equity. According to Cutis (1986) and Treas (1993), marriages in collectivized societies reject market principles in favor of social mechanisms, such as societal norms and cultural values, which reduce the negative consequences of self-interest in the course of marital exchange. In my 2001 fieldwork among migrant families in rural Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, where women took on almost all the agricultural and domestic responsibilities while the husbands were away working in cities, I similarly found that few women perceived this gendered division of family labor to be unfair (Zuo 2004). To these women, the word "fairness" was not only unheard of but also viewed negatively as "haggling." Instead, they emphasized their own obligations to the family in marital exchange. In so doing, the husband and the wife pooled family resources, showed their mutual appreciation, and, hence, enhanced their marital relations, which I termed "relational exchange" (Zuo 2004). Relational exchange recognized the wife's domestic contributions to the family as equally valuable and thus not only granted women access to their husbands' financial contributions to the family but also affected their views about domestic responsibility and hence their definitions of gender equality. The spousal relational exchange that I had observed in those villages in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region seemed warranted by the harsh environment and the official corruption which caused those villages to rank among the most impoverished areas in China in 2001. Spouses needed to work closely together to ensure their collective survival.

My Guangxi study did not address the meaning of the agricultural and domestic work that villagers were engaged in, partly because many peasants in this region (perhaps in other regions as well) were people of few words, as we had learned from our Guangxi research partners. However, my subsequent research on urban women and families offered me a welcome opportunity to explore what domestic work meant to women and how that had helped formulate their definitions of marital equality. There are two significant features of this part of my analysis. First, most of my female informants in the urban setting largely remained group (i.e. family) minded and relation oriented, despite the culture of individualism that is emerging under market influences. Second, regardless of their employment/career status, women from all walks of life shared definitions of marital equality which were remarkably different from market definitions, to which I now turn.

"Domestic Work Is an Unpaid Contribution to the Family"

In a typical market economy, domestic labor has little economic value in the sense that it brings neither profit to capital nor economic resources to individual homemakers; it is merely a service to other individual family members. But in transitional China, where the family was still largely viewed as a collective unit during the period 2005–2008, stay-at-home moms conducted a cost–benefit analysis of housework and childcare based on their own family as a unit rather than on themselves as unpaid individuals, believing that domestic work was an unpaid contribution to the family that had an economic value. Ms T. Wang (age 46), from Beijing, retired informally (*nei tui*) from her factory in 2002 due to the factory's financial difficulty. Her monthly pay was 570 yuan. She then found a job as a member of the neighborhood committee (*jü wei hui*). But she was dismissed six months later because of internal politics in her work unit. Fortunately, her stepfather bought her an apartment which brought her additional rental income of 1000 yuan per month from 2003 to 2005. At the time of the interview in summer 2005, Wang was a housewife who did most of the routine and non-routine chores (such as renovating their apartment), childcare and education, while her husband, a retired engineer, was re-hired by his *danwei* (*fan pin*) as a contract engineer, making an annual income of 65,000 yuan. Wang commented in the interview: "I

save the cost of hiring hourly workers by taking on household tasks myself. It is also economically worth it if I take good care of my child and have him grow healthily."

Intrinsic Benefits of Domestic Work for Women

While women in many societies throughout human history have been the primary bearers of domestic responsibility, the value of domestic work, no matter how much it varied across societies, did not decline until the advent of capitalism, which tends to regard family work, service, and reproduction alike, not only as high costs to capital but also as unable to generate profits. As a society evolves towards capitalism, social exchange among its members is reduced to market-like transactions aimed at maximizing individual material interests. Guided by popular Western social-exchange theory, which assumes personal interests and emphasizes transactional equity, domestic work signifies drudgery and powerlessness, and hence is disadvantageous to women. I do not deny these negative characteristics associated with domestic tasks from the market's point of view, but at the same time domestic work brings a joy to women (as well as men) as people, which cannot be explained by the social-exchange theory of capitalist market societies.

Motherhood is similarly beneficial to women as it brings joy, satisfaction, self-esteem, hope, and a sense of self-fulfillment to women (as well as to their spouses in a marriage situation). And yet, the benefits of childbearing and childrearing have been somewhat neglected in studies of the industrial West. Instead, children have been perceived as a source of family stress and instability, and childrearing as somewhat burdensome compared to market work. In the present Chinese case, women have mainly expressed the positive aspects of childrearing and, more importantly, their sense of duty to their children. Women's main sources of satisfaction and sense of duty also lay in the fact that most them were allowed to have only one child. As many women commented: "We only have one child; we are trying to raise him/her successfully given the fierce competition of society."

When I visited Wang at her home, she proudly showed me around the three-bedroom apartment to which they had moved two months earlier: "I am the one who did all the cleaning, decorating, and furniture buying. It is enjoyable when I read and drink coffee by a bright window and a clean coffee table (*chuang ming ji jing*)." She then proudly changed

the subject to her son: “My son is very good looking; he has inherited good elements of me and my husband except that he may have gained a little bit of weight. Like me, he is intelligent and sensitive. Not only that, he is an independent thinker, which distinguishes him from many of his classmates. Once in one of his classes, the teacher asked the class to solve a maths problem and hand it in. All the students except him did so following the method that the teacher had taught them. The method my son used turned out to be a better one. The teacher asked the whole class: ‘Who did it?’ I felt so proud when I heard that.”

Ms Xin (age 38), an hourly worker from the city of Jilin (see Chapter 7), practically raised her son alone for her husband had to work in a distant city. Although work was something she had to do to support the family, raising her son and running the family were, in her own words, “a real job” (*zheng shi*). Despite her double burden, Xin found much enjoyment in raising her son:

> My son (age 12) was only 4 *jin* (approximately 4.4 pounds) at birth…; but now he is growing up tall and strong. He is not a superb student but he is a thoughtful and mature kid. He also studies hard. Once he told me that he wanted to reach the “outstanding” rank among all the students of his grade. I took him to the book store to purchase the material he needed. He later made steady progress in his grades, which makes me very happy for him!

Housework as an Expression of Care and Love

Housework can certainly in many ways be synonymous with drudgery—tedious, repetitive, and dull. In Western literature, housework is often associated with low value, low prestige, and powerlessness. When I looked at women’s housework in conjunction with their market work, I found that many urban women held onto it because of their unsatisfactory market work or work–family conflict, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Doing housework could also be a way for women to express their care and love for their husbands. The following three examples illustrate this point.

Ms Kong (age 49), a biochemical researcher from Shanghai married to a physician, undertook almost all the housework. According to her, she did so not because she did not enjoy her work or she liked doing chores—she did not enjoy doing chores! In fact, she found housework particularly burdensome when she came home tired. She did it mainly out of a

sense of responsibility: “I want to fulfill my duty.” Why were chores *her* duty? What about her husband? Kong replied: “He shoulders the heavier responsibility of saving people’s lives. He is seldom home and always on call. Sometimes he must go to the ER in the middle of the night if he is called. In these circumstance, I would not think of letting him look after the housework.… But he always helps when he is available.”

Ms Zeng (age 38), a district official (see Chapter 6), was not happy about the fact that her husband did not share much of the housework with her and would occasionally take him to task. She began to delegate part of the housework to her husband, but if he did not complete it she would not do so either. At the same time Zeng continued to do more around the home. This was not because her husband’s socioeconomic status was higher than hers, but because she still loved him and wanted a happy marriage, for which she was prepared to make sacrifices. As Zeng said: “We still love each other very much. If I divorced him because of his failure to share chores with me, I would have to handle the pain of living without him.” Ms Zhang (age 49), a worker from a Shanghai textile factory, similarly commented in an interview: “If the one who does more at home is always thinking how unfair it is to himself or to herself, the marriage might risk breaking up.”

Ms M. Zhang (age 46) was a presiding marriage judge in a district court in the city of Lanzhou. Her husband, an SOE worker, had been laid off a few years ago, since then he had had a series of temporary jobs. According to Zhang, her husband did some chores, including light cooking, but she was in charge of most of the routine chores. Her explanation for doing the greater share of the housework was that her husband was not good at some of the chores, such as cooking or food shopping, but more fundamentally, she did it because she was sorry for her husband for losing his job. According to Zhang, it was not her husband’s fault; it was beyond his control. To help maintain his self-esteem, Zhang tried to make him feel like the head of the household. As she shared the story with us: “My husband always treats me well; he also has a strong sense of humor—he still believes that he is the head of the household…” When my colleagues bump into me in the street, asking: “are you still the one who does the shopping?” I reply: “Who else do you think should do it?” They go: “Doesn’t your husband do it?” I go: “Why on earth should my husband do grocery shopping?!” [laughing]. They go: “Do you still cook as well?” I go: “Who else do you think should cook?!” By vehemently

affirming her domestic role, Zhang was protecting her husband from possible humiliation.

The above examples demonstrate that doing housework can be a way for women to express their care and love for their husbands, which may in return result in a stronger marriage. This may be particularly successful in cases where women occupy a higher socioeconomic status than their husbands. Below was the narrative of Zhang's husband in a separate interview:

> My wife is a government official (*gong wu yuan*) and a junior leader in her work unit; but she has never looked down on me or boasted about her higher income and status. She always consults me regarding family decisions. This is a great relief for me and prompts me to do more around the home since she is much busier. I would not think myself inferior for washing dishes or cleaning the apartment because I do so out of my love for her. I want to ease her burden so that she can keep well…We have been married for 26 years and we seldom argue with each other. In this way, we have also set a good example to our child and have facilitated his healthy growth.

This example offers an alternative explanation to gender theory as to why some female main providers still do more around the home than their husbands—they do so not because of the constraint of patriarchal culture but because of their love for their spouses. On the other hand, this also means that using housework to strengthen the marital relationship may not work if the spouses no longer love each other.

Ms Zhao (age 41) was a clerk at the service desk of a big hotel in Lanzhou from 1982 to 1997. She was laid off in late 1997, partly due to the financial difficulties of the hotel and partly due to the severe injuries she had sustained as a result of domestic abuse. Zhao was a beautiful woman. She married twice and divorced twice because of violence inflicted upon her. She first married an accountant from a pretty well-to-do family in 1988. They moved in with her parents-in-law's family on their marriage and their son was born in 1989. According to Zhao, she was very family oriented—she liked to keep their apartment tidy and take good care of her husband. But her husband was spoiled by his parents. He did not always go to work on time or sometimes did not show up at all at his workplace. He did not seem to care because he had rich parents. As Zhao recalled in the interview: "He finally stopped going to work and often just lay in bed. His mother would cook for him and bring meals to his bedside. He would watch TV while eating his meals—he was such a spoiled mommy's

boy." Moreover, Zhao's husband was very controlling: he wanted Zhao to come straight home from work; he would get upset if she did not get home on time; he did not let her visit her own family without his approval. He would beat her if she disobeyed him. The situation became worse when Zhao's husband started using illegal drugs. They finally filed for divorce in 1995. After the divorce, Zhao's in-laws took her ex-husband and her son and moved to the city of Ningbo (in Zhejiang Province) without her knowledge. Zhao was in agony. While desperately trying to locate her son, Zhao married again in 1996. Her second husband was a driver. In the first couple of years of their marriage, her husband never laid a finger on her, nor even raised his voice once. Zhao again tried to be a good housewife. She kept the apartment clean, put the dinner on the table when her husband came home from work, and had clean underwear ready for him to change into after he took a shower. But her husband loved drinking and sometimes he drank through the night, which upset Zhao. At one time, she threatened him with divorce. He took her at her word and became desperate. He poured petrol over Zhao and set light to her during an argument; she was rushed to hospital. Her husband was jailed for two years and had to pay Zhao's medical bills which amounted to over 100,000 yuan. They finally filed for divorce after he got out of jail in 2000. Zhao's case might be more easily explained by theories of domestic violence than by the relational-exchange perspective, where her performance of housework did not contribute to strengthening her relations with her ex-husbands.

"Raising a Filial Child"—Some Women's Expectations

As in many non-industrial and pre-industrial societies, Chinese families have primarily relied on male members of the younger generations to provide old-age security to older family members. The Mao era was no exception. The market reform launched in the early 1980s, however, is gradually chipping away at this obligatory bond between generations due to a substantial improvement in urban housing supply that has effectively changed family structure from extended or stem families to nuclear families, a massive domestic and international migration of younger generations that has made the physical care of elderly parents all the more difficult from a distance, and the privatized labor allocations that have reduced the financial stability of millions supporting their aging parents.

All these factors are compounded by the one-child-only national policy which unfailingly adds burdens to the millennial generation who must provide old-age security to all four parents and in-laws. According to one large-scale survey of five big cities in China in 2008, the number of nuclear families accounted for 70.3 % of all types of urban families, a 5.9 % increase compared to 66.4 % in 1982. By comparison, the number of extended families accounted for only 0.2 % of the total number of urban families, a 91 % reduction from 2.3 % in 1982. Stem families also declined by 43 % from 24.3 % in 1982 to 13.8 % in 2008 (Li 2011). Although nursing homes have been considered the least acceptable type of care in old age according to traditional Chinese culture, the same survey found that only 27.3 % of older people chose their own children to be their primary caregivers; 16.6 % preferred to hire their primary caregivers; and the remaining half chose nursing homes for their later years. This reflected older people's concerns about relying on their children or grandchildren for their main source of support in old age (Li 2011).

Most of our female informants had little expectation that their own children would be providing security for them in their old age. But some still did. For instance, Ms Yan (see Chapter 7), said in the interview that she wanted to raise her son in such a way that he would support her when she became old. Some other women said that they would have their children to fall back on in the event that they might need assistance. At this point, we may say that Chinese mothers do have personal material interests as do their Western counterparts. As far as support in old age is concerned, their material interests seem to be derived from inter-generational exchanges throughout the course of their life, rather than immediate gains offered by the market, such as power and money. Moreover, old-age support materializes only through well-maintained inter-generational ties, unlike market gains which are often achieved at the expense of family relations due to work–family conflict.

"Mutual Respect" and "Equal Dignity"—The Meaning of Marital Equality

Despite the benefits of domestic work, most Chinese women still do the lioness's share of chores in the home. They are, after all, chores. How do urban women come to terms with it? What does gender equality mean to urban women in a collective familial setting? To what extent are existing

theories able to explain the subjective experiences of urban women in China? Similarly to what I had found in my study of rural Guangxi in 2001, urban Chinese women did not aim to reach transactional equity when assessing marital equality; instead, they pursued obligations and relational harmony. What were emphasized in assessing equality, therefore, were mutual respect and equal dignity. In the fieldwork for the present study, the most common responses we heard regarding the meanings of marital equality were "mutual respect" (*xiang hu zun zhong*), and "equal dignity" (*ren ge ping deng*).

More specifically, although the majority of female informants embraced the "separate-sphere" ideal, they claimed the value of their domestic work was equal to that of their husbands' provider role, and firmly believed they deserved equal respect and dignity from their husbands and others. As Ms Y. Wang (age 32), a secretary from a university in Beijing, commented:

> "The Amounts of housework performed by each spouse should not be used as a standard not for gender equality, but instead, for the extent to which each spouse respects the other's dignity and recognizes each the other's labor [contributions to the family." Wang's point was that housework should not be used as a measure for gender equality but mutual respect and equal dignity do."]

Wang's husband was a young professor working in the same university. According to Wang, she was the one who always did the grocery shopping after work and cooked dinner for the family. Her husband helped clean vegetables but he often failed to do a good job, according to her standards—she had to clean them again before cooking. But she appreciated her husband for his initiatives (*zhu dong*) in helping out, for being, in her own words, "able to see the work and do it" (*yan li you huo*), not wait to be asked. Here an initiative reflected the husband's thoughtfulness and care for the well-being of the wife and, hence, an indication of his respect for her domestic work and her dignity.

For many stay-at-home moms, it was unrealistic to demand their spouses share chores and childcare with them equally, but they expected their husbands to show thoughtfulness and care in other ways. Take, for example, again Ms Lee, the accountant from Lanzhou mentioned in Chapters 6 and 7. There was a huge difference between her income and her husband's. Whereas he owned property and several luxury hotels with assets worth over a million yuan (in 2006), Lee made only a few thousand yuan a month, including her rental income. Instead of feeling powerless,

Lee took a positive attitude toward her disproportionate share of domestic tasks. She believed women did not have to achieve what men did; likewise, there were things that men might not be good at. Regardless of differences in economic status and housework performance, women and men were spiritual equals and should be treated with equal respect and dignity. This meant that men should not dominate women simply because they had higher economic status. In fact, throughout the interview, Lee did not complain how little her husband contributed to chores or childcare but about her husband's insensitivity to her needs, the need to have him have dinner with the family regularly, and not to ignore her feelings. According to Lee, her husband used to eat with her every evening, but now he hardly ate at home at all, allegedly due to his busy schedule. One of her friends, a sociology professor, told me privately that Lee had long suspected her husband of extra-marital affairs (see Chapter 7). At one time, Lee even made a big scene at her husband's office, which undermined (or weakened) their relationship.

Lee's example by no means suggests that the husband's share of chores is not important to stay-at-home moms. It is! Although many stay-at-home moms did not expect chores to be shared equally with their husbands given their gendered ideology and for practical reasons, they wanted them to help out in any way they could. To these women, the husband's participation in domestic labor not only alleviates their own burden but also, more importantly, shows his care for his wife and family. Ms T. Wang complained in the interview:

> We had finished the interior decoration of our new apartment six months ago; my husband still did not want to move. I had to do all the preparatory work myself; I then injured my wrist. He was still reluctant to help; instead, he kept complaining about the move. I then had to call his mother, asking: 'What is wrong with your son? Is he suffering from menopause?' His mother said it might have something to do with his work. I responded: 'What has this got to do with his work? No one says he is going to be fired.' His mother later called him; he finally brought a truck to help with the move. But I was the one who mainly transported the stuff, whereas he was just smoking and chatting with his friends downstairs.

For women who combine work and family roles, some openly demanded that their husbands share chores. Ms Jin (age 43), an elementary school teacher from the city of Lanzhou, said in the interview that her husband

was totally spoiled by his mother who never let him do any chores. Jin began to teach her husband to cook after a few years struggling with his failure to share routine housework with her. One day, Jin and her husband invited their extended families to come over for dinner, including her mother-in-law. She made her husband make dough in the presence of her mother-in-law. Although she could tell that her mother-in-law was not quite happy about it, Jin felt proud of herself for challenging the traditional patriarchal ideology.

To both stay-at-home moms and working women who made less money than their husbands, equal respect and dignity also meant many other things, including women's equal access to their husbands' higher income. Many said: "Equality between husband and wife means the husband should not yell at the wife, dominate her, or control how much money she spends." Ms Li from Shanghai, mentioned earlier, who lost her job after giving birth, commented: "Marital equality means he [husband] listens to my opinion, and I listen to his. But there should be no clear separation of our purses. For example, he should not hide any private money (*si fang qian*). All the money should be pooled—the money belongs to the entire family; it is not just yours or mine."

Many career women no longer shared the "separate-sphere" ideal. Meanwhile, they also agreed with the notion of mutual respect and equal dignity. Given most of the female egalitarian believers also enjoyed economic status equal to that of their husbands, they emphasized "do whatever each can do" (*shui neng zuo shen mo jiu zuo shen mo*), "mutual benefits and win–win" (*hu li shuang ying*). To these women, it did not matter who did what and how much around the home but whether each had done his or her best. Therefore, initiatives were appreciated just as much by career women as by the other two types of women mentioned earlier. Ms Ding, a city government official from Lanzhou mentioned in Chapter 7, had had a very busy work schedule since she started her job and often worked overtime. When her daughter was born, it was her mother who helped with childcare until her daughter was four and a half years old. Her husband, a college professor, did not have strict 9-to-5 working hours and took on the main childcare tasks—including taking her to school in the morning and picking her up after school, food shopping, and cooking. This division of labor, according to Ding, was out of "overall consideration" of the family well-being, not the outcome of negotiations with her husband for gender equality. Ms Huo, a civil engineering professor (see Chapter 7), displayed a somewhat different pattern. She had most of the cooking and

childcare taken care of by her parents and in-laws. The other chores, such as cleaning and laundry, she said she often did with her husband. This was partly because her husband, a professor working in the same department, always went to work with her in the morning, and came home with her in the evening, no matter how late it was. Therefore, it made sense to them to do other activities together as well, including housework. Huo said: "We enjoy doing things together."

Like stay-at-home moms and family-oriented working women, career women also noticed whether their husbands cared about them as much as they cared about their husbands. Their husbands' caring behavior included taking the initiative to share the effort of chores. Take, for example, Ms K. Zhang (age 49), who owned a furniture store with her husband in Shanghai. At work, Zhang was in charge of marketing and public relations, and was involved in many social activities after work. Her husband was mainly responsible for product development and internal management and, therefore, had regular working hours. For that reason, Zhang's husband tended to do more chores at home than she did herself. Zhang commented gratefully: "He often serves me a cup of boiled water and runs the bath for me when he sees me coming home late. In the morning he will get the breakfast ready for all of us."

Unsurprisingly these patterns were at odds with market evaluations of the relative worth of paid and unpaid work and the transactional principles of marital exchange. With Chinese women still considering the family as a collective unit, their conceptions of marital equality would mainly revolve around cooperation and harmonious relationships.

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PART III

Conclusion

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that, following the disaggregation of state and family in post-Mao market-reform China, individuals and families do seem to have gained some autonomy and freedom on many legal and policy fronts, such as more individualized marriage laws, the labor contract law that allows workers to move more freely in the labor market, the removal of the universal employment mandate, and the abolition of housing rationing in urban areas along with many other rigid regulations. At the same time, individuals and families have lost the assurance that their basic needs will be met, including job security affordable housing, health care, and education, despite a rapid increase in cash income and standards of living compared to the pre-reform period. Equally problematic is the state's pursuit of excess markets, which has tended to commodify and denigrate labor and create work–family conflict, both of which have left urban women (as well as men) and their families "freely" struggling for material and social well-being. Under market conditions, individuals may achieve higher economic status at various points in time when the economy is booming, but many of them do so at the expense of their non-material needs, such as mental health, meaningful work, cooperation with others, relational harmony, or a sense of community. Similarly, market competition mechanisms designed to incentivize women to work have paradoxically put paid to their incentives as creative human beings, which I termed "passive work incentives" in Chapter 6, due to increasingly fierce competition between workers for

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9_9

material gains. Finally, work–family conflict has exacerbated the problems of married women suffering from role strain, role conflict, and anxiety, whether they are stay-at-home moms, those attempting to combine work with family, or work-/career-oriented women.

Although urban women and their families were, in comparison, strongly tied to state projects during the Mao era, women had achieved heroic status and hence meaningful work by playing broader social roles beyond the confines of the family that included their socialist duties. China's socialism would not have made any sense to Chinese women if none of the following had happened: China's freedom from hundred-year-long foreign domination; women's attendant freedom from family patriarchy; the state's gender egalitarian redistributive policies; and the self-sacrificing example set by CPC leaders and rank-and-file members alike. More fundamentally, women's active participation in various socialist projects might not have been possible without the party-state's ability to forge collective interests through public ownership and a class-based universal benefit system against the background of China's devastating economic situation at the time of the 1949 revolution. The historical data show that millions of impoverished urban families, accounting for over 95 % of urban families in 1949, had their livelihoods stabilized due to the state's political and economic interventions, and welfare provisions. In the absence of market domination, women (as well as men) were able to avoid labor exploitation and degradation, enjoy the dignity of work, and suffer low levels of anxiety about the safety net. This largely explains why women of the revolutionary generation had (and still have) more positive attitudes toward employment than those of the post-Mao generation; and why some women of the Mao era changed their views about paid work from positive to negative, despite their early socialization in gender equality. It is true that the Mao-era women also suffered from role strain and role conflict, and certainly from tensions between the workplace and the family. But they were mainly tensions between national well-being and personal or familial interests. If national well-being was defined as national sovereignty and collective survival in an economically and internationally adversarial environment, part of individual and familial interests were fulfilled through collective efforts and individual sacrifices. For example, the individual's need for lifetime job security was generally ensured by the state's universal employment policy through most of the Mao era, although individuals were not allowed to freely choose or change their jobs. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of families had their livelihoods protected under state socialism,

despite the fact that it was achieved by subordinating families' other needs, such as family economic prosperity, family time, and family autonomy, to those of the state. On the political front, individuals from so-called "bad classes" and their families constantly took the brunt of class and other political assaults as the party-state engaged the entire nation in various stages of the Cold War and struggles with Soviet-led revisionism within the communist bloc.

What seems unchanged over time is women's failure to seriously challenge the unequal division of household labor. However, this does not mean that urban women in China are too weak or too traditional to strive for marital equality. On the contrary, as social agents, they have actively pursued various types of gender equality that have made sense to them according to their own work and family circumstances at each historical juncture. While women of the revolutionary and Mao generations considered performing domestic tasks part of their pursuit of obligation equality under state socialism, the Mao and post-Mao generations in the reform era understand equality as mutual respect and equal dignity. Although women of different cohorts use different terminologies to describe what they mean by gender equality, there are no fundamental distinctions between them: in both cases, women interpret the meaning of gender equality in a collective family setting as equality of obligation. Therefore, the husband and wife assess each other's contributions to the family mainly based on their culturally prescribed or individually modified family roles rather than their personal resources. This can be done only when both spouses respect each other's work and treat each other as dignified human beings regardless of their economic status. What about Chinese women's individual rights? Don't they also pursue social justice through more equitable division of household labor? Unlike Western women, who see their rights as personal prerogatives to protect their individual interests, Chinese women perceive their rights as a collective property to be shared with other members of society. They thus identify their personal interests with collective well-being, which is maintained through individual members' fulfillment of their obligations to and sacrifices for the collectivity while entitled to collective benefits. Whereas women in the Mao era juggled a triple burden fulfilling their national and family duties, women in the reform period seek the gendered marital division of labor that resists emerging market constraints and work–family conflict to protect their family's well-being as their nationalist and socialist identity wanes. In this sense, women's various combinations of work and family roles in given historical contexts

may be seen as instrumental and marital divisions of household labor, as family strategies for maximizing family well-being. It is the *social* principles of "mutual respect" and "equal dignity," which recognize both unpaid domestic responsibility and paid work as legitimate contributions to the family, that reflect the essence of social justice at home. Women may not develop a sense of injustice (or unfairness) about the household division of labor unless these social principles of marital equality are violated. This explains why Chinese women do not feel particularly burdened by their greater shares of chores, and why they feel equally entitled to economic resources that their husbands bring to the family, no matter how much more money their husbands make. Chinese women's non-market thinking regarding marital equality is rooted in the Mao-era collective social system at both state and family levels, and has been largely preserved within families during the market transition. Nonetheless, the families do not exist in a vacuum. As market forces penetrate the economic lives of individuals, they also challenge non-market communal thinking, hence the collective family culture.

The changing state–family relations and urban women's work–family experiences seem to suggest first, as Karl Polanyi (2001[1944]) pointed out, that human economies are always embedded in society and subordinated to various political, religious, and social relations. Any attempt to disembed economies from society, such as letting markets dictate all social relations, would run the risk of destroying human society and be doomed to meet with resistance. Second, the interests of the market and of the family are intrinsically oppositional to each other (cf. Brenner 2000; Coontz 1988). While the latter is created to produce and nurture life, the former aims at maximizing profits. Throughout the present study, we see that the impact of market on Chinese society is multifaceted. At the individual level, women's resorting to gendered family divisions of labor may further disadvantage them in the labor market and make them vulnerable to family patriarchy. At the family level, the retreat of the state and the intrusion of the market have added a significant burden to the family in coping with external uncertainties and, hence, have increased the risk of family instability.[1] Politically, shuffling families into the private sphere may substantially reduce the level of cohesiveness provided by the state to millions of families and individuals, undercutting its mobilizing ability. Finally, at the social level, continued privatization may aggravate unbridled market forces, social inequality, conflict among interest groups,

and atomization of individuals, all of which may eventually lead to social upheaval and the destruction of the fabric of society.

The present study also sheds light on gender theories and theories of state–society relations, with Chinese women's unique experiences of gender, class, and the state shaped by the historical, cultural, and political processes of a state-socialist country. More broadly these processes have been closely intertwined with international environments, as highlighted below.

Theoretical Implications

Gender in Context—A Structural Approach

Although a bourgeoning international literature has demonstrated the usefulness of a sociological structural approach in understanding gender dynamics, women's handling of their work and family roles is still largely conceived as an issue of personal choice rather than a result of structural opportunities or constraints (e.g. Coontz 1988, 2000; Crompton 2006). This has been the case in China as well. That is, instead of seeking solutions in structural transformations, many state think tanks advocate raising women's qualities or gender consciousness (Judd 2002). The present study illustrates that women's decisions about work and family roles are not pure personal "choices" but are outcomes of a host of marital, familial, workplace, and market considerations. Likewise, some women's domestic orientation signifies the persistence not only of traditional cultural ideals but also of the cultural resources that urban women in post-Mao China utilize to resist labor denigration and help alleviate work–family conflict. Behind women's beliefs and choices lie the interests of women and their families, shaped by a constellation of historical, societal, and family circumstances. It would therefore be meaningless and even counterproductive for scholars or the public to accuse some women of being culturally backward (such as stay-at-home moms) and others of being selfish (such as career-oriented women). In addition, the revival of gendered marital divisions of labor in the reform period cannot simply be explained as women's (and men's) reaction to the "excessive" liberation campaigns of the Mao era, although this may be true for some women of the Mao and post-Mao eras. Otherwise, it would be hard to understand why women of the revolutionary cohort have more positive attitudes to their work experience than women of younger cohorts, as shown in the present study. We should therefore seek to tackle the unfettered market processes that attempt to

shift the entire burden of reproduction onto families, which may force the gendered division of family labor on families, given women's unique childbearing capability. A similar pattern was observed in the nineteenth-century USA, where early industrialization processes challenged the agrarian way of life by sending men to the paid workforce, but it did so without socializing services which made the overwhelming majority of women stay at home to look after the household (Brenner 2000; Coontz 2000).

How then do we understand gender inequality within the household at the interpersonal level in reform China? The present study reveals gendering processes that are substantially different from those described by popular equality and gender theories developed in the West. Like the villagers in rural Guangxi, most married couples do not follow the market model of transactional equality in their daily interactions but the cultural trajectory of relational harmony. In spousal exchange, therefore, they seek marital equality along the social dimensions of mutual respect and equal dignity rather than the economic method of cost–benefit analysis. Unlike the economic definition of marital equality, the social dimensions of equality are often not measurable, let alone quantifiable. Spouses mainly judge each other by the extent to which the other spouse is perceived to have made the best possible effort (*jin li*) to fulfill their obligations to the family. Such an assessment is subjective and takes into account external factors that often operate beyond personal control. Therefore, married individuals' fulfillment of their obligations to the family is mainly indicated by perceived efforts, not necessarily by actual outcomes, although the interpretations of "efforts" in respect of each gender are still to a considerable extent tied to gendered cultural expectations for men and women. Non-market exchange tends to enhance spousal cooperation and marital relations, for it does not involve a resource-based power struggle or haggling, and, more important, it is achieved through mutual respect and equal dignity. Power struggles or haggling may occur only when one spouse is believed to be shirking his or her family responsibility. There are also couples who believe in egalitarianism and who enjoy near-equal economic and social status; they may do chores together instead of negotiating with each other about them, as in the case of Professor Huo (see Chapter 7). This is because they are committed to their collective well-being and are willing to share with each other otherwise personal resources; in this way, they mutually benefit each other and reach a win–win situation. Equity-oriented transactional marital exchange seems more popular among individualized families (Treas 1993) or among those whose marital relations

are already strained, such as Ms Wang, a laid-off worker from a chemicals factory in Beijing, whose story was told in Chapter 6.

This shows that the meaning of marital equality is multifaceted, situational, fluid, and subject to change, depending on types of spousal relations and the wider circumstances. The functions of equality also vary. Whereas in a capitalist market society marital equality is the ultimate goal to which both spouses aspire in their pursuit of what they perceive as marital justice, pursuit of equal obligations to the family appears to be a strategy used by Chinese couples to reach relational harmony; it is the notions of mutual respect and equal dignity that reflect the essence of marital equality. This alternative interpretation of gender equality has transcended rational-choice market thinking. Does this mean that women do not care about their personal interests? The answer is no, quite the contrary: women understand that only through this non-market marital exchange can their household labor be properly recognized and their access to their husband's material advantages be fully realized where the socioeconomic status is weighted in favor of the husband. Therefore it is gendered family roles that are exchanged between spouses.

Not all couples practice gendered or market models in the household division of labor. Also found in the present study is a pattern in which both spouses embrace the egalitarian ideology of family roles and reach equality in their contributions to household labor. However, this equality is not achieved through the market exchange of transactional justice but through cooperation between spouses. That is, both spouses take the initiative with household tasks and childcare; they do not have a fixed division of labor but revolve tasks mainly around the time available or the needs of the family. Typical examples are Professor Huo and Ms Zhang, a factory worker whose story was also reported in Chapter 7. Despite their different socioeconomic backgrounds and family circumstances, both Huo and Zhang pursue marital equality with their spouses by applying the principle of mutual benefits and by cooperatively sharing domestic tasks. This forms a sharp contrast, first, to the market model in which the pursuit of equality often requires close monitoring and distasteful negotiations in the course of exchange. Second, it also deviates from gender theory or the gendered-resource perspective, in that it renders gendered culture irrelevant. For the above reasons, this new pattern may be best explained by the theory of "shared resources." Shared-resource theory sees resources (such as personal income or housing) which might otherwise be defined as individually owned, as collective assets. In other words, there is no

clear demarcation between spouses to distinguish "what is yours and what is mine." All benefit both spouses and the family. The shared resources encourage spousal sharing of all work since such behavior is mutually beneficial and helps create a win–win situation for both spouses.

To the extent that couples engaged in gendered arrangements of household tasks also share economic resources, some may argue that shared-resource theory might also apply to them. The difference is that spouses in gendered arrangements of family responsibilities are still caught up in some form of exchange; rather than an exchange of private economic resources it may be an exchange of family roles based on gender, albeit in a collective family setting. Resource sharing by spouses in gendered divisions of labor is therefore conditioned by the maintenance of gender boundaries. Once such boundaries are breached, the shared interest may be at risk (Zuo 2003; Zuo and Bian 2001). In this case, the gendered-resource theory expounded earlier may have a stronger explanatory power than the shared-resource perspective. Resource-sharing theory explains the situation in which spouses are largely free from gendered expectations, which bring them to a new level of mutual respect and equal dignity. What may be stressed here is that both role-based exchange and resource-sharing theories mark a departure from the market model of transactional equality; they promote relational harmony which I would also call *social* well-being.

Unfortunately, the ongoing excessive marketization in China is shattering the sharing of collective well-being by husband and wife and instigating marital conflict by privatizing family interests and marital resources. Looked at in a more profound way, capitalism is doing a good job pitting one group of individuals against another, for example, in Ms Wang's family (see Chapter 6), her school-age son saw her husband's income as his personal asset and lost his respect for his mother who did not have a job. As social scientists, we should not fall for it. Although China still claims to be a socialist country, the privatization and marketization that dominate post-Mao economic processes have effectively undermined social well-being and created sharp divisions among emerging interest groups.

As some women try to maintain the integrity of the family by staying at home, some caution must be voiced. Women may be both subject to family patriarchy *and* further disadvantaged in the labor market. On the societal level, a new economic system that treats all female (and male) workers as social beings rather than commodities needs to be established so as to enhance workers' creativity through their engagement in socially meaningful activities.

Equality and Efficiency—A Big Trade-Off?

The debate over trade-offs between income equality and market efficiency—simply meaning economic growth—dates back to Arthur Okun, who argued over 40 years ago in *Equality and Efficiency: The Big Tradeoff* (Krugman 2014) that income equality would take a toll on economic growth. Since the 1980s the prevailing view has echoed Okun's argument that more equal redistribution would have a negative impact on economic growth. A similar debate was held in China during the initial years of the market reform: should China's economic growth be achieved at the expense of income equality (Yang 1997)? The prevailing opinion at the time among decision makers and scholars seemed positive. Looking back, it is undoubtedly true; China's GDP has reached double-digit growth rates in most of the years since the reform, but income increase has been trailing behind economic growth. Society has paid a considerable price. The literature and the present study show a trend towards: the commodification and denigration of labor; increasingly divided interest groups; exacerbated work–family conflict; the lack of a safety net for families; hugely increased income inequality; growing anxieties among many workers and their families; and women's (as well as men's) loss of meaningful social roles and sense of belonging to their workplaces, community, and society as a whole. All of the above does not include the environmental costs of China's economic growth, which is beyond the scope of this study. Is China's GDP growth being achieved through increased productivity? Part of the growth is surely due to technological development and advanced training for workers, but this is apparently not the whole story. To be sure, many SOEs were not "efficient" prior to the reform, according to the market standard of low costs and high yields. But the main reasons were that they offered non-exploitative wages, they provided workers with safe working environments, they provided welfare benefits for their workers; and they maintained higher prices for much higher-quality products given the same technology. Ms Tian's 20-plus years of work experience in a textile factory clearly illustrates this point in Chapters 6 and 7. Even during the extreme redistribution of the Mao era, China managed to maintain an economic growth rate around the global average (Li 2008; Lin 2006). By contrast, many emerging private companies have increased their "efficiency" by doing just the opposite to what SOEs did for their workers—at least this was the case in the 1990s and the first few years of the new millennium when the present study was carried out. Many SOEs went

bankrupt not because workers were uncompetitive or less productive but because of the heavy debt burden, which in some instances reached 80 to 90 %, due to the marketization of Chinese banks (Han 2014). With state decentralization, SOEs must rely much more on banks—which are now profit oriented—as a main financial source for investment. This has thrown many SOEs into debt crises, forcing them to close (Han 2014). Even in many government or government-affiliated agencies, cut-throat competition, pure material incentives, and unreasonable evaluation systems for promotion seem to have reduced work incentives rather than increasing them. Ms Xu, a low-level administrator from Shanghai, is an example (see Chapter 7).

Similar examples can be found in Western societies. When Doug Henwood (2003) compared productivity between the USA and European industrial nations, he noted that, although the USA has the highest average GDP in the world, it is mainly achieved through long working hours, suppressed wages, and profits made on Wall Street. Even so, the productivity increase in the USA, according to Piketty (2014), was twice as high in 1950–1970 as in 1990–2010, when American income gaps were much smaller. In addition, a recent study from the US Census Bureau (Lowrey 2013a) shows that median American family incomes have been either stable or in decline since the 1980s. Since the recession ended in 2009, income gains have accrued almost entirely to the top earners. The top 5 % of individuals have recovered their losses. But the bottom 80 % make considerably less than before, hit by high rates of unemployment and no wage growth. In terms of capital gains, the richest 10 % of households own about 90 % of the stock, expanding their net worth and their incomes when they sell out and receive dividends (Lowrey 2013b). Overall, in 2012, the top 1 % took more than one-fifth of the income earned by Americans, one of the highest levels on record since 1913, when the government instituted an income tax. And this huge income gap was mainly the result not of economic growth but of capital gains for the top 1 %, and unemployment and stagnating wages for workers (Lowrey 2013b). In fact, as Piketty (2014) demonstrates, the principal reason for increasing income inequality between the rich and the poor around the world is that the rates of return of the capital have exceeded the rate of economic growth. Meanwhile, the USA has the largest gap between rich and poor and the highest poverty rate compared with its European counterparts. By comparison, countries doing a lot of redistribution along with their economic stability, education, environmental protection, and social

tolerance are found to do better in providing their citizens with top social well-being than those that do less (*New Beijing Newspaper* 2015). The top ten countries include Norway, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, and Singapore. China was ranked 76th. In a similar study of Nordic countries, Stein Kuhnle (2015, p. 23) found that "Comprehensive, egalitarian and relatively generous welfare states can go hand-in-hand with efficient and productive market economies." According to Kuhnle (2015), Nordic countries, which generally have the most progressive income taxes in the world, are among those with the lowest poverty rate (Fig. 9.1) in Europe and the highest income equality (Fig. 9.2) in the world, and manage to maintain the highest long-term economic growth (Fig. 9.3).

Two more recent worldwide studies published by the IMF (Berg and Ostry 2011; Ostry et al. 2014) of the relationship between economic growth and redistribution point to similar patterns to those found in the above-mentioned studies. Non-extreme redistribution is associated with more durable economic growth. By contrast, large inequality has an adverse effect on sustainable growth. To the extent that these studies mainly focused on fiscal redistribution, that is, direct taxes and subsidies rather than in-kind government provision of health care and education,

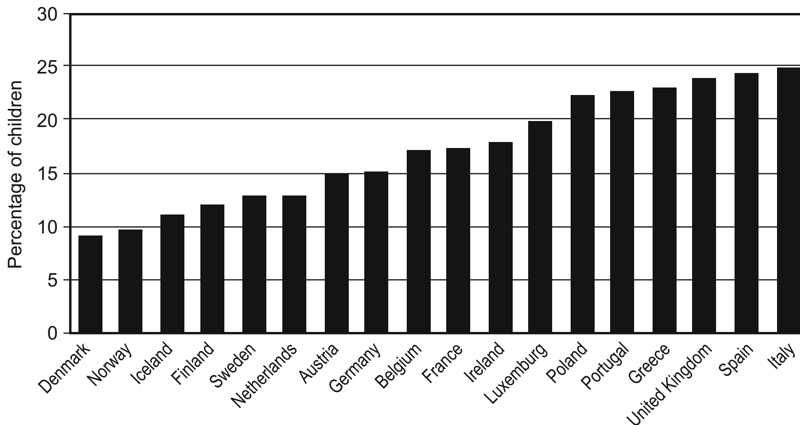

Fig. 9.1 Percentage of children (under 18 years) below 60 % of median equivalised income after social transfers in European countries, 2008. Source: Stein Kuhnle. 2015

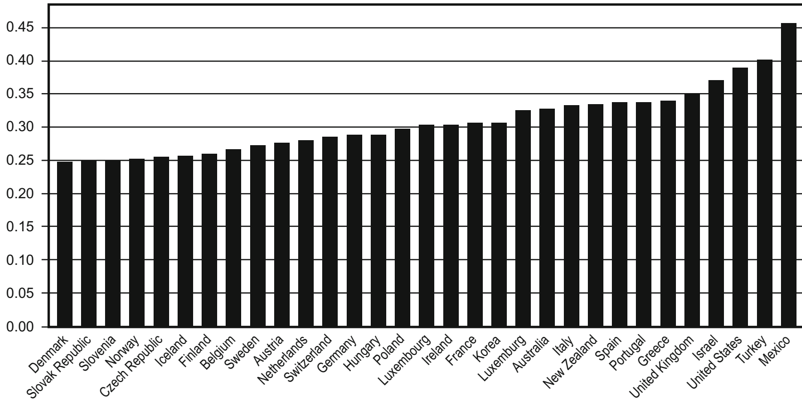

Fig. 9.2 Income distribution among OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. Source: OECD: Income Distribution. https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm

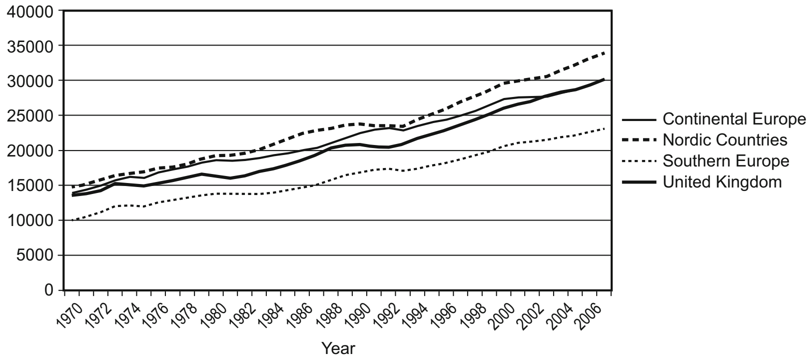

Fig. 9.3 Gross domestic product per head at fixed prices, constant purchasing power parity (PPP), 1970–2007. Source: Matt Alestalo, Sven Horte, and Stein Kulnle. 2009

the positive effects of redistribution on economic growth might be even stronger given the greater growth-friendliness of in-kind government subsidies (Ostry et al. 2014). Of course, caution is also expressed by Ostry, Berg, and Tsangarides about extreme redistribution schemes which might slow down economic growth.

The State's Role in Enhancing the Well-Being of Family and Individual

In most capitalist societies, the state has long been perceived as an obstacle to economic growth and personal freedom. Economic neoliberalism emerging in the 1970s, particularly in the USA, arose in response to the Western stagnation that directly challenged the legitimacy of capitalism (Volscho 2015). Neoliberalism believes in markets' self-regulating ability and opposes government interventions, advocating privatization, deregulation, free market, free trade, low government public spending, and low corporate tax cuts (Harvey 2005). In reform China, various emerging societal problems are often blamed on the party-state for not allowing market forces to work at full speed. Many social science scholars advocate political reform and turn to Chinese civil society, represented by China's rising urban middle class, hoping to emulate those models long existing in liberal market societies and use them to defeat the state's monopoly.

This neoliberal view completely misses the historical truth that the market economy of the West had never developed on its own as an autonomous force. In his examination of the historical processes of market development in Western capitalist societies, Karl Polanyi (2001 [1994]) pointed out that the so-called free market has never existed; in fact, none of the market economies were possible without the support of the state. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci (1971) argued that the free market is also a form of state regulation deliberately imposed on society by the state. This can be seen clearly in the deregulation measures that Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher took in the 1980s in the USA and UK respectively to save their countries from the economic crises of the 1970s. By the beginning of the new millennium, the relations between big corporations and law makers had became even closer in capitalist societies, such as the USA where law makers increasingly represent the economic interests of corporations at the expense of those of ordinary people (Huffington 2003; Wacquant 2009). Pro-market approaches adopted by a state often lead to concentration of the capital, growing income inequality, and unsustainable economic growth (Berg and Ostry 2011; Piketty 2014). The 2008 sub-prime credit crisis in the USA was an excellent example of a total failure of the state's free-market policy and practice that almost brought down the Wall Street financial institutions and threw millions of middle-class families into poverty.

At the same time, there are countless examples in the world of a state as a powerful political institution to create public good. Well-known ones include Nordic countries where democratic welfare states create fairly egalitarian income distribution and generous welfare for their citizens through progressive taxation and government programs, as mentioned earlier. In fact, the presence of the state in providing public services, public employment, and welfare is so strong among Nordic countries that Kuhnle calls this type of welfare system "stateness" (2015, p. 17). This stateness has gained strong support from citizens in these countries. Therefore, in Nordic welfare states the distinction between the public and private sectors is unimportant. Even in the most liberalized countries such as the USA there have been times from the 1930s to the 1970s when the government created jobs and a safety net for its citizens and substantially cut income inequality (Piketty 2014). The most recent example is the Obama administration's stimulus package of $787 billion creating jobs, and extending unemployment benefits and tax cuts after the 2008 financial meltdown in order to quickly jump-start economic growth.

The neoliberal perspective similarly neglects the enormous capacity of the Chinese party-state to provide public welfare under the socialist system and its changing position in favor of markets in the reform era as a main source of labor denigration and work–family conflict. It is clear from this study Li 2008; Lin 2006 and elsewhere that the CPC centralized leadership lifted over 400 million Chinese out of absolute economic devastation, disease, and exploitation within less than ten years, beyond the imagination of any country in the world. And more importantly, this was achieved through self-sufficiency rather than imperial expansion, as had been the case with many capitalist nations during colonial and imperialist periods. The CPC's domination in economic and social developments prior to the market reform undoubtedly also caused serious problems and national disasters (such as the starvation of millions in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward of 1959–1961, and mass persecutions of political dissidents and all others believed to be enemies of the socialist enterprise). To the extent that the state's measures were largely designed to create a more humane society and were carried out under adverse domestic and global conditions, these disasters may be understood as lessons to be learned from China's socialist experiment rather than as evidence of fundamental clashes between the interests of the party-state and those of Chinese society. In fact, this book demonstrates that the state and society in Maoist China were not oppositional to each other but mutually

embedded, partially through state–family integration. By removing the private sector (over 90 % of the families did not own means of production prior to socialism anyway), the party-state effectively eliminated class-based oppression and was able to provide almost all urban families with permanent employment, health care, affordable education, and security in old age, albeit at subsistence level. Meanwhile, by sending women into the workforce outside the household, the state enabled women to expand, but did not deprive them of their family roles, to include service to nationalist and socialist projects, which was consistent with women's nationalist, class, and female interests as new women (Chen 2003), despite the triple burden that women suffered during the heyday of state socialism. Furthermore, unlike some developed nations such as Sweden, where state welfare programs mainly target individuals (e.g. women or children), the appropriation of welfare benefits in Maoist China was household based, enabling, and at the same time compelling, individuals to maintain family ties while demanding their loyalty to the state. By coordinating the family's and the state's needs, the Chinese socialist programs effectively forged a public good that nurtured a collective mind-set, cooperation, and social empowerment. Finally, the development of collective solidarity and social employment in urban China laid the foundations for the achievement of individual self-realization and human freedom (Lin 2006).

In the market reform period, by contrast, the party-state has changed its behavior dramatically. To improve market efficiency, it is abandoning its commitment to social welfare and class and gender equality. Not only that, but the state has also begun to adopt various market-friendly ways of facilitating marketization processes. Some of these measures, as shown in the present study, include privatization, the introduction of foreign capital, redistribution based on political power, personal connections, and capital, and the use of market competition mechanisms. Therefore, the real problem in reform China is not the state's reluctance to abandon its economic and political domination but its relinquishing of public duties combined with its active facilitation of the privatization of public assets and marketization of public power (Lin 2006). Therefore, the Chinese state should be reformed in such as a way as to increase its ability to maintain public good, rein in market forces, and resume public service to the people. Only in this way can the CPC maintain its claims to have "no special interests of its own apart from the interests of the working class and the broadest masses of the people," and "'wholeheartedly' serve the people" (Lin 2006; p. 144).

Under unruly market conditions, public good is being replaced by highly divided private interests; accordingly, the authority and legitimacy of the Chinese state have become attenuated. This trend is continuing as political power becomes marketized, despotic, and abusive, largely serving the interests of government officials and their associates at the expense of ordinary people. With the retreat of the state and the intrusion of the market, the family, along with other parts of the social fabric, becomes more vulnerable than ever. Creating a civil society independent of the state in market conditions with polarized interests may not be a solution for a strong society (Lin 2006). Therefore, rather than relying on civil society, the main task for the Chinese may be to restore the state's commitment and capability to maintain public good and public welfare by reducing the private sector and, hence, the influence of those highly divided interest groups. But this is by no means to propose the highly centralized political structure of the past. A new political system can be negotiated between the political leadership and the Chinese people according to changing global and domestic circumstances. To maximize societal well-being, public good must be established while recognizing individual interests. Some kind of reintegration, to some extent, of state and society (to include the family) may be an effective way to coordinate public and personal interests. Therefore, the debate should focus not on whether we should have a bigger or a smaller government, but on what type of government is needed.

Social Implications

In the age of neoliberalism, "economic development" has become a buzz word and the sole measure of economic success for many countries. But what constitutes growth? At what price? Whose success are we talking about? More fundamentally, what are we developing the economy for? As Karl Marx sharply observed over 150 years ago, the whole history of advanced economic development in capitalist societies has been one of exploitation, plunder, deprivation, and oppression. In a capitalist system, economic development has been achieved at the expense of social equality, environmental protection, and social harmony. In his speech at the opening ceremony of a 2015 forum hosted by the International Social Development Association, Amartya Sen (2011), winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics, pointed out that economic development should be treated as a means for a better life rather than an end in itself. A better life

includes social needs such as education, health care, and life expectancy. To be sure, economic development has the potential to advance living standards and alleviate poverty, as in the case of effective poverty reduction in China, which has been going through rapid economic growth since 1979. However, GDP growth does not automatically bring social benefits to the population without the intervention of the state. In the first 30 years of the PRC, life expectancy increased from an average of 40 to 68 years, an amazing result of health care campaigns, despite China's much lower GDP growth compared with wealthy nations. In the reform era, however, the growth in life expectancy has slowed down to a surprising extent: over a quarter-century it has risen by only 4 years to reach 72 because of the marketization of public health care. Sen (2015) also compared life expectancy between India and China: life expectancy in India in 1979, at the beginning of China's market reform, was 54, fourteen years shorter than in China, whereas the growth rate in life expectancy in India was three times faster than that of China and since then has reached 65 years, despite India's much slower economic development compared to China's. Sen's study shows that social development may be more relevant to individuals' well-being than economic development.

What can be seen in the present study is the destructive effect of an excess of market economy on both social and individual well-being. In a typical market society, material gain (e.g. wealth, power, occupational prestige) is taken as the most important measure of individual well-being. But as Karl Marx (1978) correctly pointed out, human beings have historically engaged in purposeful and productive work for the sake of their own existence and their work can be rewarding if pursued freely as a life activity. With the advent of capitalism, human labor becomes the objective of human existence, enslaving human beings. When humans work mainly for money, the meaning of work is significantly narrowed down, and working people may feel alienated, which was the case among many women in the present study. To Chinese women it is their social role and social honor that bring meaning to their work, not just material incentives. Following this logic, what protects individuals from anxiety and gives them a profound sense of social justice is, again, egalitarian distribution and redistribution rather than large income differentials. Egalitarianism helps break down class and gender hierarchies, reduces tensions among people of various classes and genders, brings a sense of commonality to individuals, and reduces the social distance between them. Nonetheless, it would take a whole package to get individuals to come to terms with

egalitarian distribution and redistribution. For instance, a near equalitarian redistribution worked in urban China in the Mao era because education was publicly funded.

To make class and gender equality and social harmony possible, it may be crucial to restore public ownership and collective interests. According to Marx (1844), a real freedom for the human species lies in our relations with other people and in our community; private ownership is the main source of human divisions, isolation, and distrust, because privatization divides people into interest groups and atomizes individuals. Furthermore, in a typical capitalist market society, reciprocity among family members and society members gives way to market exchange principles in everyday social interactions, which attenuates family and social relations by de-emphasizing community-oriented mutual obligation and stressing self-centered personal rights. The present study demonstrates that Chinese people have a tendency to seek social ties and build communities. To reach that goal, individuals are willing to share resources with one another, following the social principle of mutual respect in social exchange, and strengthen social relations and the community by pursuing obligation equality rather than transactional equity. No wonder Karl Polanyi (2001 [1994]) pointed out in his analysis of Western market societies that market-based rational thinking is not natural, as many Western philosophers have believed, which is why, Polanyi argued, economic relations must be embedded in social relations, not the other way round. In response to the Mao fever and socialist nostalgia of many Chinese and China's long historical pathway of communalism, Lin Chun (2006, p. 278) proposes a vision of a "caring economy" or "solidarity economy" (p. 27) that provides for the needs of the environment, the community, and every individual. In this kind of non-exploitative economy, all able-bodied individuals will be safeguarded with a "social wage" regardless of their employment status or class category. Lin believes human freedom and liberation can ultimately be achieved only through a more humane arrangement of the socialist economy.

Policy Implications

This study also carries the following policy implications. First, the family may be returned to the public arena in policy making. Family welfare should be brought into broader social, economic, and political considerations. This is because national well-being is closely intertwined with family

well-being. As is well documented (e.g. Blum 2014), the aging population and the decline in fertility, particularly in the West, have negative impacts on the supply of the workforce. Likewise, the high cost of childcare and parental leave policies that are less than generous exacerbate work–family conflict and discourage women from participating or fully participating in the workforce. My study confirms this line of argument with a comparison of women's work and family experiences before and during the market reform. In addition, family policies may aim not merely at limiting family behavior, such as family planning, but also enabling family functioning with support from society at large through welfare provision. But this by no means suggests the kind of deep government penetration into family life that occurred in the state-socialist period. Extensive state provision of welfare benefits without a tight control over family life, which has been the case in many other countries, may be feasible in contemporary China, given its depoliticized social environment and the greater abundance of material resources that can be spread around.

Second, Chinese policy considerations may reject the free-market models which have been popular in China since the market reform. The free-market model assumes demarcation between the public and private spheres. But the so-called public sphere, according to the free-market model, simply means the market sphere in which all businesses and productions operate on market values of profit maximization. By contrast, the functioning of the family rests on biological and social values of human reproduction, nurturing and sustaining lives rather than profiting from them. This demarcation will thus pit the "public sphere" of the business world against the "private sphere" of the family, creating disharmony between the two spheres. Chinese policy makers might consider a non-market or at least a hybrid model (such as Nordic social democratic models of state ownership of social services combined with privately owned business companies) to increase public good and create a truly public sphere by restoring parts of public ownership. For example, should health care, childcare, and education be further privatized and run on market lines, or should they mainly serve human or family needs in these areas? I am deeply suspicious of private companies' ability to operate mainly on behalf of the interests of their employees or their employees' families.

Third, it is surely unrealistic to ask private or marketized enterprises to look after their workers' material well-being at the expense of their own economic objectives. And yet, workplace interests under market conditions may be reconciled by government intervention. The government,

for example, could encourage privately owned enterprises to include various kinds of welfare benefits, such as paid parental leave, maternity leave, and health care. Then the government partially or completely subsidizes private firms to help cover their financial losses due to their provision of benefits to their workers. Experiences in developed nations indicate that without government intervention, companies in the private sector might not voluntarily provide employee benefits when there is surplus labor supply. Even in the case of a labor shortage, employment benefits would still work to the advantage of companies. For instance, decisions as to whether or when to offer the "flexible" working hours developed in Western companies are often made by management (Crompton 2006). In urban China, many private companies are reluctant to provide maternity leave for women precisely because of their increased financial cost (see Chapter 5).

Fourth, family policies might consider minimizing gender and class differences. One of the consequences of China's market reform is the substantial increase in gender and class gaps in employment and income distribution among and within each family. These gaps are certainly related to pro-market state policies, as shown in the present study. To fill the gender and class gaps, state policies may be geared in that direction. At this point, it may be helpful to review the pros and cons of government welfare policies in targeting gender and class equality. In France and Germany, the state offers comparatively advanced support for housework, but the policies only target women. Consequently, they fail to ensure full employment and equal sharing of housework between husbands and wives (Crompton 2006). Let us take a few more specific examples. In France, excellent maternity and daycare services have reduced the burden for women in the workplace and at home; therefore, men do not feel that they need to share domestic tasks equally with their wives. In Germany, husbands have traditionally been expected to work to support the entire family, whereas wives received cash subsidies from the government for doing housework. But the cash benefits for care work have not been large enough to narrow gender gaps in income (Schober 2014). In addition, this regime, according to Crompton (2006), has strengthened gender inequality both in the workplace and at home. By contrast, in Sweden, the state has promoted a dual earner/career model by providing well-paid maternity and paternity leave and widely available public childcare facilities but low cash benefits, which has enabled Swedish society to achieve much stronger gender equality than many other European countries (Schober 2014). Inspired by the

Swedish model, Germany launched a reform in 2007 adding two "partner months" to be paid if the other parent (usually the father) goes on leave as well as an income subsidy of 67 % of the parent's last earnings. Meanwhile it has made huge efforts to increase childcare facilities (Blum 2014). In a nutshell, individualized entitlement to paternity leave and parental leave quotas reserved for each parent, coupled with relatively high compensation, seems a good incentive for the father to take paternity leave in Europe (Schober 2014).

In terms of class equality, the central leadership in China in the state-socialist period reduced class disparity by administrative means. Under market conditions, scholars have found that money transfer from the rich to the poor through progressive taxation and direct money transfer is useful, as mentioned in my literature review of the trade-offs between market efficiency and social equality in this chapter. Two lessons may be learned regarding the reduction of class inequality under market conditions. First, social welfare should be provided equally to everyone (e.g. affordable health care and childcare to all families) rather than being means tested. The latter tends to create a stigma for the recipients who feel they are labeled poor, incapable, or undeserving, and resentment from people from other class categories. Such is typically the case in the USA. In sharp contrast, China's practice of equalizing classes in the Mao era, extreme as it was, seems to have generated low levels of resentment in society, perhaps due to a general consensus at the time. Nordic countries have provided good examples of social harmony when state welfare programs indiscriminately cover individuals and families of all classes. Second, there should be sincerity and well-coordinated plans at the national level to reduce class inequality. We can learn some lessons from the USA which has much higher inequality and lower levels of social welfare programs aimed at reducing inequality. Given the historical dominance of the elite culture of the free market and corporate interests in American society, there has been a lack of comprehensive federal family policy in the USA. The elite segment of American society has been especially hostile to racial/ethnic minority groups and the working poor. Consequently, welfare programs such as childcare subsidies or paid parental leave have been noticeably absent (Ruhlen 2014). The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a federal assistance program put in place in 1935, aiming to provide financial assistance to children whose families had low or no incomes, was replaced in 1996 by the federal government with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). According to TANF, a welfare recipient must find a job and leave

the program within five years. However, it turns out that many of them land a job that pays little, far from sufficient for them to cover childcare costs. This does not just happen to TANF recipients but to all the working poor in the USA (Ruhlen 2014). Therefore, it may be necessary for a government to consider providing all families with affordable childcare while encouraging all able-bodied adults to participate in the labor force.

Fifth, social and family policies could aim at promoting the family's collective well-being instead of merely considering individuals' well-being. In the case of rural migrants in China, for example, it is certainly helpful to issue work permits and temporary residence cards to migrant workers, but China's decades-long residence registration system has prevented migrant workers from enjoying the same benefits as urban families, such as education, low-cost housing, and job opportunities. Consequently, millions of family members of migrant workers are left behind, creating long-distance split households and a large population of left-behind wives/husbands and children. Many couples have lived separate lives for as long as five years, and many children have been cared for by their grandparents or other family members for up to or over ten years (Jin 2014). In addition, a definition of the family may not be limited to nuclear families as such, because, in many parts of China, adult children's parents and in-laws are also considered part of the extended family. The separation of husband and wife thus has a profound impact on the care of the elderly in rural areas. According to research, a direct consequence of the wife being left in the village while the husband is working in the cities is the reduced amount of care the wife's parents-in-law receive from her, as she reallocates her time between domestic tasks (Jin 2014). In addition, the prolonged long-distance separation of households has substantially increased marital instability. Rural couples in such household arrangements tend to have much higher divorce rates than those who live under the same roof (Jin 2014). Therefore, family and social policies might take into account the well-being of the extended family as defined by rural residents, in addition to doing away with the rigid registration system in urban areas. How about local governments reinvesting in township building in their economic and social development plans, as Fei Xiaotong, a prominent Chinese sociologist, suggested over 20 years ago? This makes particular sense given the persistent popularity of traditional collective family values and the belief in mutual obligations between and within generations among contemporary families in China (Xu 2014). Family-oriented policies as such may help strengthen family ties and reduce family instability.

Finally, to the extent that capitalist markets are profit driven, some industries that are concerned with the basic welfare of individuals and families should not be privatized or marketized; or at least, the government should have strong regulation in place or use fiscal or other administrative means to limit the scope of private industries' market operations. This type of industry may include, but not be limited to, health care, childcare, education, and housing. Only in this way do I believe that those industries mentioned above may truly serve the people rather than pursuing the interests of capital.

Note

1. According to recent statistics, the divorce rate in China increased over sevenfold from 46 to 350 per 10,000 couples during the period 1985–2013. *China Statistical Year Book*, 2014, Table 22-23: Statistics on Marriages and Divorces. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2014/indexeh.htm.

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Epilogue

The present study was designed and conducted shortly after the Hu Jintao–Wen Jiabao team succeeded the Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin regimes with a singular emphasis on economic growth, in 2003. Although there was no fundamental change in their vision of reform, compared with their predecessors, the Hu–Wen administration became more aware of the widespread discontent resulting from the state's excessive emphasis on economic development to the neglect of people's livelihoods and social well-being, which had intensified social tensions and conflicts. In the third plenary of the 16th CPC Congress in October 2003, Hu for the first time raised the notion of "the human oriented" (*yi ren wei ben*), "coordinated and sustainable development" (*xie tiao de ke chi xu fa zhang*), and of "harmonious society" (*he xie she hui*), attempting to shift the attention of the CPC from "things" (*wu*) to "human beings" (*ren*) in China's development strategies. The Hu–Wen administration also took a series of measures to improve the lives of ordinary people, such as policies that would encourage enterprises to hire, free employment services, subsidies for job training, oversight of rural migrant workers' pay, the 2008 new Labor Law designed to protect workers' rights, exemption from agricultural tax, and an emergency fund for poor rural and urban families whose family members suffered from major diseases. Meanwhile, the party-state had launched anti-corruption campaigns, emphasizing the CPC's service to the public and people (*li dang wei gong*, *zhi zheng wei min*). Yet, the

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9

social problems described above, although reduced, persisted against the background of the continuing privatization of enterprises and marketization of medical, housing, educational, and childcare services. Under the Hu–Wen leadership, official corruption was also not curtailed, owing to the ineffectiveness of senior leaders and their lack of determination to address the problem.

Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang came to power in 2012 with another smooth transition in top leadership. The Xi–Li administration is closely aligned with the political ideology of the CPC, with its dominant leadership and market-reform, open-door economic policies. They have not only vowed to continue with multiple ownerships but also to upgrade the role of markets in the regulation of daily economic activity from a "basic role" (*ji chu xing zuo yong*) to a "decisive role" (*jue ding xing zuo yong*), announced by Xi Jinping in his speech to the Third Plenary of the 18th CPC Congress. Interestingly, the purpose is not to have markets dominate all economic activities but to prevent the state from direct involvement in resource allocation so as to reduce the possibility of abuse of power as well as to ensure fair competition among economic enterprises in market conditions, which Li Keqiang (2015) terms "the government's revolution on itself" (*zheng fu zi wo ge ming*). The state should act as a "visible hand" to regulate and manage the "invisible hand" of markets at the macro level. Unlike Western market societies where the government is often perceived as being in opposition to market forces, the current Chinese administration sees the two as complementing each other in sustainable and healthy development. The logic behind this presumed state–market compatibility is not the interest of capital but the livelihood of the masses, according to the party-state. Extending on Hu's notion of "the human oriented," Xi called for "the people oriented" (*yi min wei ben*) in governance. In a speech as early as November 2012, Xi stated: "Our people love life; they are longing for better education, more stable jobs, more satisfied income, more reliable social security, better quality health care services, more comfortable living conditions, and a better environment. Moreover, they want their children to grow up well, work well, and live well. People's expectations of a good life is our goal" (Xi 2014, p. 108). Xi has made similar speeches on many occasions (2015). The most recent version of the CPC Constitution (2012, p. 19), reminiscent of its earlier versions, reiterates that the party must "serve the people wholeheartedly. The CPC has no special interests of its own apart from the interests of the working class and of the broadest masses of the people." According to the Xi–Li administration, so-called

sustainable economic development will make sense only when all people's lives are improved.

To make their promise into a reality, the Xi–Li team's leadership style seems somewhat different from those of their reform predecessors. First, they are more determined to take the unique Chinese pathway founded on long-standing Chinese culture and experience, including those of the CPC in the past. Instead of being critical of China's earlier belief systems and practices, the leadership of this generation considers Chinese traditional culture the "root" and the "soul" of the Chinese; therefore, they point to the "confidence in the Chinese road, theory, and system" of China's self-proclaimed "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Xi 2015, p. 22). In his 2013 visit to Confucius' home town, Xi advocated promoting Chinese culture as a vital condition for China's "great revitalization" (*wei da fu xing*). Xi said (2014, p. 100): "We can only have a future if we know where we came from; we can only be more innovative if we are good at [cultural] inheritance."

Second, for that reason, the Xi–Li administration relies much more on the traditional wisdom and practice of the CPC than on Western models in developing its governance strategies. One of the visions that they wish to revive is that of "state–family integration." They believe in mutual dependence between Chinese families and the state for a prosperous and stable family life and for a strong nation, and they similarly believe in the primacy of national strength in determining family well-being (Xi 2014). In addition, although the Xi–Li administration emphasizes more than ever the rule of law, they also stress the importance of the morality-bound rule of benevolence (*de zhi*) that requires the ruler to be mindful of the people's interests. In his 2015 Report on the Work of the Government, Li laid out in detail a plan for improving people's lives in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health care. In other aspects of governance, the Xi–Li team reminds the Chinese of the CPC's historical mission as the vanguard of the working class, its glorious tradition of promoting thrifty work and lifestyle, the Chinese democracy of the masses that allows common people's voices to be heard and implemented through a democratic centralized system of "from the masses, to the mass line," criticism and self-criticism extending to CPC cadres, as well as the example set by the CPC leadership in promoting state agendas and in self-discipline (Xi 2015). To the Xi–Li administration, much of Chinese traditional culture provides the government and people not only with wisdom and guidance, but, more important, a main moral source of socialist core values

and a cultural foundation for the Chinese in the current world of cultural turmoil. As Xi points out: "We would have spiritual lifeblood cut if we abandoned our tradition—our fundamentals" (Xi 2015, p. 164). For that reason, in addition to the emphasis on the rule of law, Xi (2015) urges all CPC officials to take the lead in removing formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and extravagance, starting with themselves.

Third, the Xi–Li administration sees the post-market reform as a continuity rather than a negation of the Maoist socialist enterprise of the state-socialist period.[1] To them, denying the first 30 years of China's socialist experiment is not only factually wrong but also politically dangerous. Learning from historical lessons both domestically and internationally, they understand that to remove a kingdom or a country, it is necessary for someone to erase its history first. To this administration, negating the first 30 years of the Maoist state-socialist program is tantamount to fundamentally challenging the legitimacy of the CPC rule, which they are part of, and is not acceptable.

Finally, the current administration begins to emphasize "fairness" (*gong ping*) and "justice" (*zheng yi*), the concepts abandoned in earlier years of the reform. They seem determined: the economic gains of the reform must "benefit everyone," implying that the rapidly growing social inequality of the past 30 years in China is unjust, and economic growth must be sustainable and healthy (Xi 2015, p. 96).

Compared to the Hu–Wen administration, the Xi–Li team seems equally good at passing laws, regulations, and policies but much more effective at implementing them. Two recent examples concern the well-being of disadvantaged social groups. On 8 July 2015, the State Council announced that financial support to poverty-stricken college students would be strengthened by reducing their loan interest, increasing the payback period of their loans, and providing funding for poor student-loan takers who became either physically or mentally disabled upon graduation.[2] At its cabinet meeting on 22 July 2015 the State Council decided to widen the coverage of medical insurance to the entire country by the end of the year. The decision was made to help the tens of thousands of people in both rural and urban areas who are in serious financial need due to chronic disease or serious illness (Zhang 2015).

In the area of cracking down on official corruption, I learned it in 2014, after the "Eight-Point Rules"—an anti-bureaucracy, anti-corruption, and anti-extravagance measure published by the 18th Central Politburo—that by December 2012, many up-market restaurants were forced to close due

to the rapidly declining numbers of customers, which had not been seen before since the reform. As I attended academic conferences and visited my relatives and friends during the summers of 2013 to 2015, many of the expenses of government officials or scholars were no longer covered by public funds or individuals' grants; other items had to go through tight accounting scrutiny before being approved. Conference dinners were allowed only when provided by catering services within the walls of the hosting institution rather than a restaurant. Effectiveness in policy implementation is also evidenced by the persistence of policy enforcement. In one of his speeches to the Central Disciplinary Committee—the CPC's top anti-graft body—Xi stressed (2015, p. 386): "The keys to anti-corruption and promoting honest governance are 'frequent' (*chang*) and 'long-term'" (*chang*). Between December 2012 and January 2015, the central government published 35 regulations and measures concerning honest governance of the party-state, which mainly focus on five aspects: management and supervision of government officials; the example to be set by government officials; the promotion of thrift in daily operations; rules on business expenses; and the prohibition of gift giving using public funds (People's Press 2015). One policy I have been following is that of central inspection tours beginning in 2013. This is an oversight measure that the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission has designed to crush official corrupt behavior and practice in government agencies and state-owned, now called centrally owned, enterprises. The way that government agencies and centrally owned enterprises are selected has evolved from random to targeted selection driven by problems either detected by central government or notified via tip-off hotlines. The length of an inspection has also been doubled to two months since 2013; a unit can be inspected more than once in a short period of time, depending on the seriousness of the problems; and follow-up inspections can be done without notifying the targeted institution in advance. Seven rounds of major central inspections of over 30 state agencies and centrally owned firms had been conducted as of the end of June 2015 while I was finishing the writing of this book; more than 200 high-ranking administrators were found guilty of corruption and disciplined. Wang Qishan, the head of the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission, emphasized at a meeting in February 2015 "have the inspection sword hang high over [officials'] heads and the deterrence be forever present." According to a more recent report by the CPC's top anti-graft body, 19,000 officials were reprimanded for violating frugality rules in the first six months of 2015, which brought the total

number of those punished since late 2012 to more than 120,000. But the 2015 figure was a significant drop from the year before, when more than 71,000 officials were punished, signaling that the "Eight-Point Rules" introduced in 2013 were taking effect (*China Daily* 2015). At central level, the fall of the three highest-ranking officials—Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Politburo, Xu Caihou, the vice chairman of the Central Military Committee and a member of the Central Politburo, and Ling Jihua, the vice chairman of the 12th Political Negotiation Committee—seemed a good illustration of the commitment made by the current administration to crack down on official corruption.

The ideological orientation and political efforts that the Xi–Li team have been making seem to demonstrate their commitment to China's continuing socialist experiment. Compared to the former Soviet Union and other former socialist nations, China always articulates the market economy as a way of reaching its socialist goals of economic advancement and high living standards for all members of society (Lin 2006). If so, this may lend support to Lin Chun's argument (2006, p. 283): socialism in China, "after being made and unmade, could still be remade." This seems to make sense as China's market reform has paid a high social and environmental price for the fast economic growth it has achieved, which forces the country to keep searching for alternative pathways. Moreover, the ongoing internal and external challenges that endanger the stability of the nation and the CPC regime also compel the party-state to remain on a socialist course. External challenges include a hostile international environment that the party-state sees as a threat to China's sovereignty. Internally, the downward trend of economic growth coupled with widespread discontent about huge inequality and ethnic conflicts has raised the CPC's concerns about the legitimacy of its rule. Based on the CPC's 90-plus years of history and experience, the current administration is well aware that the CPC would not have taken hold of China's political landscape without the long-standing support of the masses. Metaphorically, CPC–people relations have been long articulated as those of flesh and blood in the CPC discourse. As Xi (2015, p. 387) similarly points out: "If we did not make correction of our unhealthy leadership style, it would be just like a wall erupting between our party and our people. Our party would then lose the foundation, the blood, and the strength." Therefore, "people's support of the CPC is concerned with the life and death of the party" (Xi 2015, p. 368). This prompts the CPC to want to represent the broadest masses again.

On the other hand, this administration's dance between capitalist and socialist roads also reveals contradictions in their rhetoric and policies, given the incompatibility of socialist principles and market logic found in the present and previous studies. More specifically, first, China's continued privatization has put 48 % of urban workers in the hands of the private sector which is also a main source of informal employment (Park and Cai 2011). This contradicts directly the state's people-oriented ideology. In practice, this also implies likely continued labor commodification and the lack of a safety net for millions of workers in the private sector. Second, it is well known that market competition will eventually lead to monopoly which may undermine markets' ability to set open, fair, and correct prices for commodities or services that the party-state desires. Moreover, markets coupled with privatization may inevitably lead to concentration of capital and thus further widen gaps between the haves and have-nots. This may destroy the party-state's original intention of getting rich together. Third, there is a contradiction between the state's need for the frugal use of natural resources for sustainable economic development and the same state's desire to encourage consumption in order to stimulate economic growth under market conditions. Without resolving this contradiction, consumers' market-stimulated needs for more consumption (e.g. constant upgrading of durable goods or the purchase of branded consumer products) may be confounded with people's needs for a better life (e.g. affordable health care, housing, education, and childcare), resulting in more extravagance, depletion of natural resources, and/or environmental contamination. Fourth, in the 14th meeting of the Central Leadership Team of Comprehensive and Deepening Reform on 1 July 2015, Xi Jinping required all centrally owned cultural enterprises to give priority to social benefits and social values in production and, in the meantime, combine economic with social benefits. But the parameters of social values are often incompatible with economic ones, for example the cultural value of a product for society as a whole as opposed to its exchange value for an enterprise. Similar contradictions may be seen in the areas of education, health care, housing, and childcare in which free or low-cost services may enhance family well-being and bring broader social benefits; such practice will surely reduce the economic gains of the above-mentioned industries if they are run by the private sector. Finally, although the state is taking various measures to crack down on official corruption, it has yet to eliminate market conditions that tend to aggravate corrupt behaviors such as rent seeking, private embezzlement of public funds, nepotism, and favoritism.

Bearing in mind the ambiguity of the term "socialist market economy," my question is this: is it wishful thinking to successfully remake socialism in China by expanding the private sector, allowing the accumulation of capital, and maintaining market mechanisms? Compared with many market societies, the only logic of a negative answer to my question that I can think of is, paradoxically, the centralized leadership in China. The CPC as the dominant ruling party, authoritarian as it may be, has the advantage of rising above the fray of various interest groups and has incentives to balance them out and even channel those differing interests towards the common good. In this case, the CPC's legitimacy is judged by the extent of its popular support rather than the support of interest groups through multiparty competitions. Popular support in the Chinese context does not refer to a simple numerical majority but to working-class people, who always constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, as opposed to capital which tends to be controlled by a handful of people. The CPC's legitimacy would be called into question once it stopped representing the working class. As the dominant party, the CPC could push through policies that would benefit working-class people without having to go through endless political wrangling with other parties, as several cases in the present study have shown. To take another stark example, in the face of a sharp fall in the Chinese stock market since mid-June 2015, the central government swiftly coordinated a number of activities to stabilize the stock market and save nearly 100 million small stock holders at least temporarily during the short period between 7 July and 21 July 2015. First, the Ministry of Finance took the lead, pledging to hold onto its blue-chip shares; they also urged centrally owned enterprises not to sell shares in which they had a controlling interest and even encouraged them to purchase more shares. It further supported the development of state-owned financial firms so that they could provide services to the real economy. Meanwhile, the People's Bank—the Central Bank of China—injected 35 billion yuan into the money market through open operations to reverse the nose-diving pattern of the stock market. The Ministry of Public Security also made a concerted effort to crack down on illegal behaviors, such as insider trading and malicious selling. All three branches of government called on financial institutions and major stock holders to be "responsible stock holders," "shoulder social responsibility," and "protect medium and small share holders' legal rights and benefits." Following the actions of the state, the Security Association of China and the Insurance Association of China, two government-affiliated institutions, established specific policies

prohibiting large stock holders from selling stocks and raising the costs of selling them until the stock market stabilized. Other government-affiliated financial institutions all followed suit. For instance, the state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, the state assets regulator, urged 112 centrally owned enterprises to buy more shares in their own firms, and it prohibited major shareholders and senior executives of listed companies from selling stocks in their own firms for at least six months. As a result, the stock market began to recover at the end of the week of July 10.

Another advantage of the CPC is its enormous mobilizing capacity given its omnipresent political structure and grassroots political networks, as well as state-controlled economic, cultural, and other political resources accumulated from its revolutionary and socialist past. It has the ability, when properly done, to substantially increase the efficiency of governance of a large country like China through good planning and unified ideology. As I was writing this section, I learned from China Central Television (CCTV) news that the CPC Central Committee had called a national conference of the party-affiliated mass organizations, such as the Labor Union of China, the Communist Youth League of China, All-China Women's Federation, and others, in early July 2015. This was the first time in the CPC's history that it had organized a mass conference. Xi wasted no time tapping into these resources, asking these organizations to help unite the 1.36 billion Chinese around the party for what he saw as a great common cause of the party and of the people.

Finally, the CPC has a long history of criminalizing undisciplined or corrupt members, especially those in leadership positions, to protect the party's unity, strength, and legitimacy. The most prominent cases range from the classic death penalties for Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zishan, two high-ranking state officials found guilty of embezzlement in the early 1950s, to the life sentence pronounced on Zhou Yongkang, mentioned earlier. The Xi–Li administration has vowed repeatedly since coming to power to "strictly manage and discipline the party." If the CPC can successfully continue this tradition, it might help increase the odds on its surviving the test of the ongoing market transition.

Given the 90-plus years of the CPC's persistent pursuit of socialist ideals and 60-plus years of China's socialist experiment, there is still a possibility that socialism in China will develop further with Chinese characteristics. According to a recent statistical report by Wang Baoan, the head of the Statistical Bureau of China, there was coordinated income and

economic growth in the first half of 2015. During this period, there was an economic growth rate of 7%; income grew at the slightly higher rate of 9%. Net income growth was 7.8% after taking into account inflation. Employment was 7.18 million, completing 71.8% of the national plan during first half of 2015. By comparison, unemployment was under control at 5.1%. Wang attributed these achievements to macro-level adjustment and the greater power released to markets.[3] On the other hand, the continued and widespread processes of privatization and capital accumulation, and the financialization of capital at both global and domestic levels may make the Chinese socialist road a very bumpy one. Whether the party-state can survive globalization and where it will lead China if it does remains to be seen.

Appendix: Sources of Data and Research Methods

The present study takes a qualitative approach for an in-depth understanding of women's changing experience with work and family in urban areas under China's socialist transitions since its 1949 communist revolution. My primary source of data is narratives from married individuals of the revolutionary, Mao-era, and post-Mao cohorts.

In the summers of 2000 and 2003, I interviewed 80 married individuals, who were all above the age of 69 in 2000 and lived in the city of Beijing. To enable various voices to be heard, I used three strategies to ensure diversity in sampling. I began by working with four residential committees in three different urban districts in Beijing, who recommended and introduced prospective informants. In the meantime, I obtained interviews through relatives, friends, and acquaintances. The final strategy was to approach prospective informants myself in neighborhoods and parks in Beijing. I finally obtained similar numbers of individuals from the different strategies that I employed (27 from the first two and 33 from the last one). The sample also covers a wide spectrum of demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic attributes, summarized in Table A.1.

The sample includes 31 women, 11 men, and 19 couples, totaling 80 married individuals, or 61 marriages. Forty-two of the marriages were represented by one informant and 19 by two informants. The informants originally came from 14 provinces in both rural and urban areas upon marriage; the youngest informant was 70 years old and the oldest was

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9

Table A.1 Social and demographic characteristics of female informants of revolutionary cohort ($N=80$)

	Total (80 persons/59 marriages)			*Females (50 persons)*			*Males (30 persons)*		
	Value(%)	*Mean*	*SD*[a]	*Value(%)*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Value(%)*	*Mean*	*SD*
I. Marriages									
Marital status (persons)									
Married	47(59)								
Widowed	25(31)								
Divorced	1(1)								
Remarried	4(5)								
Recovered marriage	2(3)								
Length of marriage		53	8.9						
Number of children		3.8	1.7						
Child care									
Wife	35(60)								
Parents/daycare/other	22(37)								
Wife and her mother	2(3)								
II. Individuals									
Age					76	5.1		77	4.2
Ethnicity									
Han				42(84)			27(90)		
Hui				6(12)			2(7)		
Manchurian				2(4)			1(3)		
Self-identified class prior to 1949									

Very poor or poor	24(48)	15(50)
Between poor and rich	17(34)	7(23)
Rich or very rich	9(18)	8(27)
Education		
(Semi-) illiterate	31(62)	10(34)
Elementary	4(8)	4(13)
High school	10(20)	10(33)
College	5(10)	6(20)
Employment		
Government officials	7(14)	7(23)
Professionals	5(10)	6(20)
White-collar workers	4 (6)	3(10)
State/collective-enterprise workers	8(16)	14(47)
Neighborhood-enterprise workers	6(12)	0
Temporary workers	11(22)	0
Never employed	9(18)	0
Party affiliation		
CCP	8(16)	9(30)
GMD	0	1(3)
None	42(84)	20(67)
Place of birth		
Rural	22(44)	14(47)
Urban	28(56)	16(53)

[a]Standard deviation

91; educational attainment ranged from illiteracy to college degrees; and economically, the sample included very poor families such as those of landless or jobless laborers all the way up to those of plant owners and rich professionals.

All interviews obtained through the assistance of the residential committees and my personal connections were conducted in informants' homes; the rest were completed either in a public place or in informants' homes. When a couple was selected, separate interviews were arranged for each spouse. Follow-up interviews were scheduled when additional information was sought or clarification was needed. The average length of each interview was around two hours, and the average number of interviews for each person was about 2.5. Tape recording, with permission, was the primary data-recording device. Note taking supplemented tape recording whenever necessary. The interview data were transcribed in Chinese by hired professionals; I only translated into English the sections of the data cited or quoted in this book.

For the Mao and post-Mao cohorts, the target population was married women born after 1949. Four large cities—Beijing, Lanzhou, Shanghai, and Jilin—from different geographical regions were selected as research sites. These cities varied in levels of reform, hence comprising the diverse population needed for this study (Weiss 1994).

From the summer of 2005 to 2007, my research associate and I recruited 115 married women who either currently held a job or had retreated to the home from the workplace but were under the official retirement age of 50 (for female manual workers) or 60 (for female administrators or professionals). To capture women's diverse work experiences and underlying historical and institutional forces, we selected female informants along a wide range of domestic-role orientation, employment status, economic sectors and occupations, political and socioeconomic status, as well as marital and familial circumstances.

Given the qualitative nature of this project, we employed the "maximizing range" sampling technique (Weiss 1994) which enabled us to identify women with various characteristics matching the aforementioned criteria. We mainly relied on local branches of the Women's Federation, personal and professional networks, and our informants from previous studies to form the sample. As Table A.2 shows, of all female informants, 75 came of age in the Mao era (born during the 1950s) and 40 in the reform period (born after the 1950s); both samples include women of diverse backgrounds.

Table A.2 Socio-demographic information on female informants of the Mao and post-Mao cohorts ($N=115$)

	Mean (SD)		*Median*		*f (percent)*	
Characteristics	Mao $N_1=75$	Post-M ao $N_2=40$	Mao	Post-Mao	Mao	Post-Mao
Age of informants	47 (5)	32 (3)				
Length of marriage	20 (6)	6 (4)				
Number of children	1.1 (.6)	1 (.7)				
Age of children	17 (8)	5 (4)				
Work status					$N_1=75$	$N_2=40$
Employed (full time)					58 (77)	33 (82)
Underemployed					4 (5)	0
Non-employed					6 (8)	5 (13)
Early retired					4 (5)	0
Unemployed					3 (4)	2 (5)
Work sector					$N_1=66$	$N_2=33$
State owned					49 (74)	23 (7)
Collectively owned					2 (3)	2 (1)
Privately owned					12 (18)	2 (1)
Foreign owned					2(3)	4 (12)
Other					1(2)	2 (1)
Occupation					$N_1=66$	$N_2=33$
State senior managerial					4 (6)	2 (6)
Corporate senior managerial					5 (8)	5 (15)
Entrepreneurs					1 (2)	1 (3)
Professionals					22(33)	10 (30)
White-collar workers					11 (17)	8 (24)
Manufacturing workers					8 (12)	6 (18)
Small business owners					3 (5)	1 (3)
Service workers					12 (18)	0
Monthly income (yuan)	6722 (25,712)	2303 (2182)	2020	2000		
Annual family income (yuan)	111,599 (160,963)	134,325 (231,514)	60,000	68,400		
Education of informants					$N_1=75$	$N_2=40$
Less than junior high					6 (8)	3 (8)
Junior high					14 (19)	2 (5)
Senior high/vocational					17 (23)	9 (23)
Three-year college					10 (13)	7 (17)
Bachelor's degree					20 (27)	12 (30)
Postgraduate					8 (11)	7 (17)
Ethnicity					$N_1=75$	$N_2=40$

(*continued*)

Table A.2 (continued)

	Mean (SD)	*Median*	*f (percent)*	
Han			70 (93)	33 (82)
Hui (Muslim)			5 (7)	5 (13)
Other			0	2 (5)
Region			$N_1 = 75$	$N_2 = 40$
Beijing			34 (45)	16 (40)
Lanzhou			16 (25)	14 (35)
Shanghai			19 (22)	10 (25)
Jilin			6 (8)	0
Role orientation			$N_1 = 75$	$N_2 = 40$
Home oriented			8 (11)	5 (13)
Combining work with family			44 (59)	27 (67)
Work/career oriented			23 (30)	8 (20)

The interviews took place primarily in informants' homes or workplaces. Wherever appropriate, we also interviewed these women's spouses, co-workers, and supervisors to gain a better understanding of their home and work environments. To the extent that researchers' presence may have mixed and sometimes negative impacts on informants' well-being or bias the data due to the unequal power relations between researchers and subjects, we made a concerted effort to build a rapport with our informants, interview through conversation, and ensure an equal partnership with them (Wolf 1996).

Using a combined process analysis and comparative strategies (Mahoney 2000), I first identified mechanisms of workplace engendering processes (e.g. competition) that had influenced women's construction of family roles in each case. My central concern about causal relations between the two variables was the time sequence (Pierson 2000). For example, to women of the Mao generation, was gendered ideology always present but merely suppressed by the hegemonic gender-equality discourse prior to the reform, or did it emerge after the passing of state socialism? Similarly, did younger women's domestic-role orientation stem from their revolt against the image of "state persons" of their mothers' generation or was it a result of changing meanings of work in the market transition?

Besides the above within-case analysis, I took a cross-case approach to compare women's experiences across work environments and generations (Burton 2004), as mentioned earlier. The cross-case and cross-cohort analyses helped me extend the generalizability of findings within each case.

Table A.3 provides a breakdown of the female informants of various work–family role configurations: stay-at-home moms (17 cases), family-oriented working women (66 cases), and work-/career-oriented women (32 cases). It shows that stay-at-home moms were considerably younger, had lower levels of education, and had younger children present at home, compared to the other two groups of women. This table pertains to data analysis in Chapter 6, in which I examine ways in which urban women of the Mao and post-Mao cohorts construct their work–family roles in the broader context of work–family conflict amid China's market transition.

Table A.3 Characteristics of female informants of Mao and post-Mao cohorts by role configuration (*N*= 115)

	Stay-at-home moms (n = 17)	*Family-oriented working women (n = 66)*	*Work-/career-oriented (n = 32)*
Age of informants (frequency (%))			
20–29	–	6 (9.1)	2 (6.3)
30–39	9 (52.9)	26 (39.4)	12 (37.5)
40–49	7(41.1)	19 (28.8)	7 (21.9)
Over 50	1 (0.7)	15 (22.7)	11 (34.4)
Length of marriage (mean (min; max))	17.4 (3; 32)	14.5 (1; 28)	15.8 (1; 31)
Number of children (mean (min; max))	2.4 (1; 4)	0.9 (0; 2)	0.91 (0; 2)
Age of children (mean (min; max))	6.3 (0; 31)	13.4 (0; 26)	14.8 (0; 30)
Work sector (frequency (%))			
State owned	–	47 (71.2)	24 (75)
Collectively owned	–	1 (1.5)	2 (6.2)
Privately owned	–	10 (15.2)	4 (12.5)
Foreign owned	–	2 (3)	2 (6.3)
Other	–	6 (8.1)	–
Occupation (frequency (%))			
State senior managerial	–	2 (3)	4 (12.5)
Corporate senior managerial	–	2 (3)	7 (21.9)
Entrepreneurs	–	–	2 (6.3)
Professionals	–	19 (28.8)	13 (40.6)
White-collar workers	–	15 (22.7)	3 (9.4)
Manufacturing workers	–	11 (16.7)	2 (6.3)
Small business owners	–	2 (3)	1 (3.1)

(continued)

Table A.3 (continued)

	Stay-at-home moms (n = 17)	*Family-oriented working women (n = 66)*	*Work-/career-oriented (n = 32)*
Service workers	–	7 (10.6)	–
Migrant workers	–	1 (1.5)	–
Underemployed workers	–	6 (9.1)	–
Annual income (yuan) (median (min; max))	0 (0; 120,000)	24,000 (4800; 204,000)	59,400 (30,2000; 1 million)
Family income (yuan) (median (min; max))	36,000 (6000; 620,000)	64,600 (10,000; 1,048,000)	211,062 (26,000; 1,036,000)
Education of informants (frequency (%))			
Less than junior high	7 (41.2)	3 (4.5)	–
Junior high	3 (17.6)	12 (18.2)	2 (6.3)
Senior high/vocational	4 (23.5)	16 (24.2)	4 (12.5)
Three-year college	1 (5.9)	10 (15.2)	6 (18.8)
Bachelor's degree	2 (11.8)	18 (27.3)	12 (37.5)
Postgraduate	–	7 (10.6)	8 (25)
Region (frequency (%))			
Beijing	7 (41.2)	37 (56.1)	7 (21.9)
Lanzhou (Gansu Province)	9 (52.9)	14 (21.2)	8 (25)
Shanghai	1 (5.9)	13 (19.7)	13 (40.6)
Jilin (Jilin Province)	–	2 (3)	4 (12.5)

Notes

1. Xi's speech at a seminar on Implementing CPC 18th National Congress' Spirit to Newly Recruited Committee Members:"Our party has led the people in socialist construction which can be divided into pre- and post-reform periods. The two periods are related but at the same time different in major ways. But in both periods the socialist exploration and practice by the people were conducted under the leadership of our party. To be sure, 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' was a creation of the reform era, but it was based on the Chinese socialist system established more than 20 years ago. Therefore, we must make a correct evaluation of pre-reform history; we should not negate it with the reform history, or vice versa. Our pre-reform experience and practice bred the conditions for those of the reform era, whereas our practice and exploration in the reform era were of instance, reform, and development of our prior experience" (Source: Mei Hong "How to correctly assess two 30-years before and during the reform." The News Network of the CPC. 19 February 2013. http://www.cpc.people.com.cn).
2. The source of the information came from the CCTV evening news, 7 July 2015.
3. The information was obtained from the evening news, 17 July 2015.

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9

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Index[1]

A
Afro-Caribbean women, alienated, 9
Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), 177
All-China Women's Federation for the Third National Women's Congress, 29
Amandiume, Ifa, 9
anti-corruption campaigns, Hu-Wen administration and, 183–184
Anti-Rightest Movement, family life and, 74

B
"bad classes"
benefit exclusions and, 33
divorce and, 28
political repression of, 72
women from, 69–70, 101–102
bankruptcy law, impacts on Chinese firms, 82–83
"bare-foot" doctors, 37–38
bullying contracts, 86

C
capitalism. *See also* global capitalist system; market-reform era
after fall of communist bloc, 7–8
and demise of collective well-being, 164
Deng, Xiaoping and, 79
and denigration of domestic work, 8–10, 143
impacts of, 169, 172–174
marital equality and, 163
in market-reform era, 108
and politics of identity, 119
in pre-revolutionary China, 54–55
work–family conflict and, 10–15
Xi-Li administration and, 189–190

[1] NOTE: Page numbers with 'n' denotes notes, 'f' denotes figures and, 't' denotes table.

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J. Zuo, *Work and Family in Urban China*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55465-9

capitalist societies
feminist theory based on, 4–5
and perception of state as obstacle, 169
capitalists, exclusions during Mao era, 33
caring economy, 174
Central Leadership Team of Comprehensive and Deepening Reform, 189
child abuse, Mao era restrictions on, 25
child labor, Mao era restrictions on, 25
childbirth allowance, after market reform, 91
childbirth insurance, after market reform, 91–92
childcare
commercialization of, 83–84, 175
during Mao era, 36, 51–52, 99
children, illegitimate, in Mao era, 26
children's rights, in Mao era, 25
China
external and internal challenges of, 188
GDP in, 165
initiation of market reform, 45
integration into global capitalist system, 80, 82–83
recent policy developments in, 17 (*see also* (Xi-Li administration))
socialist *versus* capitalist influences in, 4–5
Chinese military, women in, 24
Chinese stock market, stabilization measures and, 190–191
class emancipation
in Mao era, 171
men's experience and, 53
"class enemies". *See* "bad classes"
class equality, policy considerations, 177
class inequality, Mao era achievements and, 74
class relations, in Mao era, 28
collectivist measures/policies, examples of, 7
collectivized societies, marriage in, 141
colonialism
Igbo society and, 9
resistance to, 9
Communist Party of China (CPC)
achievements of, 74–75
cultural resources and, 40
culture of obligation and, 39–42
culture of shame and, 56
current advantages of, 190–191
example set by members of, 39–42, 60, 63, 64n5
external and internal challenges of, 188
family control and, 24
leadership wealth after reform, 87
members' commitment and discipline and, 60–64
motivations for joining, 49–50
petty bourgeois distrust of, 71–72
Xi-Li administration and, 184–185
competition
without fair rules, 112–113
market, divisive nature of, 112
for non-material *versus* material incentives, 112
as source of stress, 113
vicious, 112–115, 166
worker, 57–58
Confucian ethics
family and state roles and, 39
mutual obligation and, 55–56
state and family implications of, 23–24
Constitution of 1954, equal work equal pay provision of, 28
Constitution of 2012, 184
contracts, bullying, 86
corporations, role in USA, 169

corruption
during Mao era, 41, 61
in market-reform era, 83
Xi-Li administration and, 186–187, 189
counter-revolutionaries, exclusions during Mao era, 33
Crompton, Rosemary, 119
Cultural Revolution
education during, 37–38
family life and, 74
lack of women's advocacy during, 36
leaders denounced during, 64n7
loyalty campaigns during, 39
state involvement in marriage and, 27
transfer of urban youth and, 31
culture of obligation, 39–42, 102. *See also* equal-obligation ideology
revolutionary generation and, 108
culture of shame, 55–56, 58, 108

D

danwei (*see* work units *(danwei)*)
data sources, 193–200
daycare. *See* childcare
Deng, Xiaoping, 64n7, 183
diligence and frugality principle and, 29
market-reform era and, 79
Deng, Yingchao, on childcare provisions, 36
diligence and frugality policy, 29–30
disabled service people, preferential treatment of, 33, 42n2
diverse work–family patterns, 119–137
of career-oriented women, 133–136
family-oriented working women and, 130–133
heightened conflict and market transition, 120–127
of rural Muslims, 130
stay-at-home moms and, 127–130
divorce
in market-reform era, 80–81
Marriage Law of 2001 and, 81–82
divorce rate
during Mao era, 28
during market-reform era, 178, 179n1
Doctrine of the Communist Party of China, 64n5
domestic-role orientation
adversarial family relations and, 115–117
after market reform, 16
explanations of, 116–117
explanations of preference of, 97–98
labor denigration and, 6, 98–107
moms' ambivalent feelings and, 127–130
as passive resistance to labor denigration, 116–117
tentative explanations of, 3–4
domestic work
capitalist perspective on, 143
devaluation of, 68–69, 129–130
as expression of care and love, 144–147
gendered resource theory and, 140–141
intrinsic benefits of, 143–144
in Mao era, 68
in post-Mao era, 1–2, 10–15, 105–111
unequal division of, 159
as unpaid family contribution, 142–143
Western devaluation of, 144

E

economic development
income redistribution and, 166–168
neoliberal perspective on, 172
prioritizing of, 79
social implications of, 172–174
economic independence, for women workers, 53
economic well-being, during Mao era, 32–33
education
during Cultural Revolution, 37–38
during Mao era, 37–39, 75
marketization of, 83–84, 123–125, 125t, 130, 137n1
national *versus* private spending on, 84
near-equality of women *versus* men, 3
efficiency, *versus* equality, 165–168
egalitarianism
abandonment of, 80, 86–87
in Mao era, 28
market reform and, 107
"Eight-Point Rules", 186–188
employment. *See also* "iron rice bowl"
in market-reform era, 83
near-equality of women *versus* men, 3
universal, 28
employment rate, of urban women, 3
Engels, Frederick, on women in social production, 27
entrepreneurs, female, from Mao- *versus* post-Mao eras, 106–107
equal dignity, marital equality and, 148–152, 159–160
equality
danwei system and, 47, 60
versus efficiency, 165–168
equal-obligation ideology, 55–59
equity theory, marriage inequality and, 139

F

family. *See also* work–family conflict
in market-reform era, 80, 160
privatization of, 8
under state socialism, 23, 147–148
family planning, Marriage Law of 1980 and, 81
family relations, adversarial. *See also* work<->family conflict
domestic-role orientation and, 115–117
family roles
Confucian ethics and, 39
in Mao era, 67
family structure, transition from stem to nuclear, 147–148
family well-being
collective *versus* individual focus of, 178
Mao era policies and, 30–39; education, 37–39; family economic well-being, 32–33; health insurance, 34; housing, 34–35; safety net/labor insurance, 30–32; women worker protection/benefits, 35–37
state's role in, 169–172
Fei Xiaotong, 56, 178
France, family policies in, 176
free market. *See also* capitalism
state imposition of, 169
frugality rules, Xi-Li administration and, 187–188

G

GDP (gross domestic product), negative corollaries of, 165–166

gender inequality
Mao era achievements and, 74
structuralist approach to, 17, 161–164
Western-oriented research on, 139–140
gendered family roles, as resistance *versus* regression, 6
gendered resource theory, domestic work and, 140–141, 163
gender-obligation equality. *See* obligation equality
gender system, social construction perspective on, 67–68
Germany, family policies in, 176–177
global capitalist system
China's integration into, 80–83, 116
work–family conflict and, 136
globalization
labor commodification and, 7–8
resistance to, 9
grain coupons, 61, 64n6
Gramsci, Antonio, 169
Great Leap Forward
failure of, 31
impacts of, 74, 170
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, research in, 141–142

H

health care
commercialization of, 83
socialist worker response to, 48–49
health insurance, market transition and, 121
health policy, Mao era achievements and, 75
Henwood, Doug, 166
home
as refuge from vicious competition, 112–115
sense of ownership and, 98
as site of resistance, 89
Honda strikes, 88
"horse-back" elementary schools, 38
household labor. *See* domestic work
housing
commercialization of, 83
in Mao *versus* post-Mao eras, 122
housing policy
during Mao era, 34–35
in market-reform era, 85
Hua Mulan, 24
Hu Jintao, 183
Hu-Wen administration, policy shifts of, 183–184

I

identity, politics of, 119
Igbo society, colonialism and, 9
incentives, non-material *versus* material, 112
income disparities
CPC interventions and, 41–42
male–female, 90
market-reform era and, 87
income distribution, market-based, 86–87
income redistribution, social well-being, economic growth and, 166–168
individual rights
Marriage Law of 1980 and, 80–81
Marriage Law of 2001 and, 82
individualism
Maoist discourse and, 39–40
in reform-era workplace, 112–115
work–family imbalance and, 119

industrial production, Mao era achievements and, 74
Industrial Revolution, English resistance to, 7
inflation, during Mao era, 31
informal labor sector, work–family conflict and, 90
informants. *See also* voices of informants
characteristics of, 193, 194t–195t, 196
female; characteristics by role configuration, 199t–200t; socio-demographic information on, 197t–198t
international institutions, capital-friendly, 7–8
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 8, 167
"iron rice bowl"
danwei and, 32
job security and, 158–159
smashing of, 5, 80, 107, 112, 120

J

Jiang Zemin, 183
job security. *See* "iron rice bowl"

K

Kang Keqing, 36–37
Kuhnle, Stein, 167, 170

L

labor contracts, introduction of, 86
labor denigration
commodification of women workers and, 116–117
defined, 5–6
domestic-role preference and, 98–107
in market-reform era, 85–89, 157
and women's loss of social roles, 88–89
labor insurance, during Mao era, 30–32
Labor Insurance Regulations of 1950, 32, 34, 35
Labor Law and the Stipulations of Labor Protection for Female Workers, 91
Labor Law of 1995
impacts on workers, 85–86
working hours and, 89
Labor Law of 2008, 183
labor studies, focus of, 7–8
Lanzhou electric-wire factory, 110, 121
leadership
CPC/Confucian cultures and, 41
as examples, 49, 60, 64n5
workplace, corruption in post-Mao era, 108–109
life expectancy, Mao era achievements and, 74–75
Li, Keqiang, 17, 184
Li Na, 61
Lin, Chun, 174, 188
Ling Jihua, 188
literacy campaigns, during Mao era, 37
Liu Qingshan, 191
Liu Shaoqi, 64n7
loyalty campaigns, during Cultural Revolution, 39

M

Mao era, 15. *See also* state socialism; women of Mao era
Confucian tradition and, 39–40

corruption and, 61
family-state integration in, 24–25
favoritism in, 109
marriage laws in, 25–27
state accomplishments during, 170–171
state/workplace integration in, 5
wealth distribution in, 107–108
women's status during, 158
work–family conflict in, 119–120
Mao Zedong
deification of, 39
diligence and frugality policy and, 29
on education policy, 37
sacrifices of, 42
on women in labor force, 29
marital equality, 139–153
and economic value of domestic work, 142–143
and husband's share of chores, 150
and intrinsic benefits of motherhood, 143–144
Mao era and post-Mao era conceptions of, 17
mutual respect and equal dignity as meaning of, 148–152, 159–160
relational harmony as key to, 17, 149, 162–164
transactional equity *versus* relational harmony and, 149
marital inequality, Western-oriented research on, 139–140
market competition, negative impacts of, 116–117
market-reform era, 77–153
abandonment of social welfare and equality in, 171–172
changing state role in, 82–85
and devaluation of domestic work, 129–130
income distribution and, 86–87
initiation of, 79
labor denigration in, 85–89
marital equality in, 139–153
marriage laws in, 80–81
old-age security in, 147–148
policies of, 80
redistributive injustice and, 107–111
Slegal and policy gains in, 157
social costs of, 165
socialism in, 79
state-family disaggregation in, 80–85
transition to, 4–5
women's domestic role orientation in, 97–117
women's role diversity in, 119–137
work–family conflict in, 89–92, 120–127
workplace alienation and harsh treatment in, 103–104
Xi-Li administration and, 184
market societies
domestic work valuation in, 139–140, 142
family stability and, 160, 179n1
state-supported development of, 169
work–family relations in, 6
marriage
market *versus* social mechanism perspectives on, 141
relational exchange in, 141–142
women's prioritizing of, 1–2
marriage law
in market-reform era, 80–81
under state socialism, 25–27
Marriage Law of 1934, provisions | of, 25
Marriage Law of 1950, 26–27
Marriage Law of 1954, 41

Marriage Law of 1980, 80–81
Marriage Law of 2001, 81–82
Marx, Karl, 7, 27, 116, 172, 173
maternity leave
  before and after reform, 90–91
  during Mao era, 35
Mauss, Marcel, 141
medical benefits, preventing abuses of, 34, 42n3
medical expenses, in market-reform era, 85
medical insurance, in market-reform era, 120
men's roles during Mao era
  health impacts of, 72
  provider *versus* household, 70–71
men workers, state-socialist agendas and, 58–59
migrant families, Muslim, 130
migrant workers. *See also* rural migrant workers
  in market-reform era, 86
Mu Guiying, 24
  mutual respect, marital equality and, 148–152, 159–160

N

neoliberalism
  criticism of state socialism and, 45
  economic development and, 172
  philosophy and policies of, 169–170
  politics of identity and, 119
Nordic welfare states
  class equality and, 177
  and support of public good, 170
nuclear families, *versus* extended families, 148

O

Obama administration, stimulus package of, 170
obligation equality
  hegemony of, 42, 59, 64, 73
  pursuit of, 15, 55, 57, 60, 67, 71, 73, 102, 159, 174
Okun, Arthur, 165
old-age security
  in Mao era, 33, 126–127
  in market-reform era, 147–148
one-child policy
  Marriage Law of 1980 and, 81
  old-age security and, 148
  revision of, 82, 92n1
ordinary people. *See also* voices of informants
  versus cadres, 60
  corporations *versus,* 169
  CPC members as examples for, 60
  CPC support from, 74
  education for, 38
  in post-Mao era, 172
overtime, in market-reform era, 89–90

P

paid leave, before and after reform, 90–91
paternalism, of state socialism, 15
patriarchy
  CPC undercutting of, 27–28
  in service of socialist projects, 25–29
personal freedom, in Mao era, 5
personal leave, after reform, 91
petty bourgeois, distrust of CPC and, 71–72
"plough-and-read" elementary schools, 38
political persecution
  of "bad classes", 72
  repressive political policies and, 74
politics of identity, 119
Polyani, Karl, 7, 160, 169, 174
power difference theory, 140
private sector, employment and, 83

privatization
divisive impacts of, 174
and labor commodification, 88–89
in market-reform era, 80
social well-being and, 164
of SOEs, 122
worker fears about, 121
worker impacts of, 189
public health care, in market-reform era, 85
public services, commercialization of, 83
public welfare
marketization of, 127
in market-reform era, 157
state socialism's provision of, 170–172

Q

quanzhi tai tai (QZTT), and survey of urban women, 2–4

R

Reagan, Ronald, 169
redistribution system in reform era, bases of, 108
redistributive injustice, market reform and, 107–111
relational harmony, in marital equality, 17, 149, 162–164
reproductive benefits, in market-reform era, 84–85
research methods, 193–200
resistance
home as site of, 6, 8–10, 16
to Industrial Revolution, 7
by women workers after marketization, 88–89
retirement age, during Mao era, 35
retirement benefits, during Mao era, 33
revolutionary martyrs, families of, preferential treatment of, 33, 42n2
rural migrant workers. *See also* migrant workers
in market-reform era, 86, 122, 126
workplace alienation and, 104–105
rural population
barriers to urban migration in Mao era, 126
dilemmas and neglect of, 126
welfare benefits and, 42n1

S

safety net
abandonment of, 85–86
continued lack of, 189
danwei system and, 47
loss of, 98
during Mao era, 30–32, 158
sampling technique, maximizing range, 196
Scott, James, 8
Sen, Amartya, 172–173
separate sphere ideology. *See also* domestic work; domestic-role orientation
revival of, 5
women's support for, 3
service people, disabled, preferential treatment of, 33, 42n2
7.21 University, 38
shame, Chinese culture of, 55–56, 58
Shangganning Border Region Marriage Regulations of 1939, 26
shared-resource theory, 163–164
shop-floor politics, Walder's analysis of, 60
sick leave
before and after reform, 90–91
during Mao era, 34
social construction perspective, 67–68

social democratic models, 166–168, 170, 175
social inequality, marketization and, 87
socialism, with Chinese characteristics, 79, 188
socialist countries, separate sphere ideology and, 3
socialist workers, 45–65
  competition and, 57–58
  and equal-obligation ideology, 55–59
  fear as motivation for, 58
  and sense of collective ownership, belonging, 46–55
social security legislation, during Mao era, 32
social well-being. *See also* family well-being; public welfare; safety net
  in caring economy, 174
  economic, during Mao era, 32–33
  income redistribution and, 166–168
  top-rated countries, 165, 167f, 168, 168f
society of acquaintances, 56
solidarity economy, 174
state
  as agent of public good, 170
  role in enhancing individual/family well-being, 169–172
state–family integration
  in Mao era, 15
  under state socialism, 23
  Xi-Li administration and, 185
stateness, in Nordic welfare states, 170
state-owned enterprises (SOEs)
  benefits of, 165
  Labor Insurance Regulations and, 32
  in market-reform era, 82–83, 85–86, 166
  market transition and worker concerns, 120–121
  privatization of, 122
state socialism
  limits for women's liberation, 16
  patriarchy in service of, 25–29
  and provision of public welfare, 170–171
  and transition to market capitalism, 4–5
  Xi-Li team and, 17
state-socialist era, 21–76
  gender and class equity, 23–44
  socialist workers/heroines in, 45–65
  women's triple burden in, 67–75 (*see also* (women's triple burden))
stay-at-home moms. *See also* domestic-role orientation
  cost-benefit analysis by, 142
  frustrations of, 128–129
  Ms Ding, 151
  Ms Huang, 127, 129–130
  Ms Huo, 151–152
  Ms Jiang, 128–129
  Ms Jin, 150–151
  Ms Kong, 144–145
  Ms Lee, 128–129, 149–150
  Ms Li, 151
  Ms Wang, T., 142–144, 150
  Ms Wang, Y., 149
  Ms Xin, 144
  Ms Yan, 128–129, 148
  Ms Zeng, 145
  Ms Zhang, 145–146
  Ms Zhang, K., 152
  Ms Zhao, 146–147
stock market, Chinese, stabilization measures and, 190–191
Sweden, family policies in, 176

T

Tao Zhu, 61, 64n7
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), 177–178

"Ten Thousand Meters of Non-Defective Cloth" campaign, 99
Thatcher, Margaret, 169
Third National Survey on Women's Status in China, 3
Thompson, E. P., 7
Tong Ren Tang pharmacy, 48, 64n2

U

unemployment rate, during Mao era, 31
United States
- class equality and, 177
- corporation-law maker links in, 169
- income gaps in, 166
- 2008 sub-prime credit crisis in, 169
- women's employment in, 8–9

V

voices of informants
- Mr Chen, 63
- Mr Ding, 53–54
- Mr Du, 54–55, 60, 70–71
- Mr Luo, 72
- Mr Xie, 48, 71–72
- Mr Zhang, 57–59
- Ms Cao, 49–50
- Ms Chen, 50
- Ms Chen, C., 69–70
- Ms Chen, M., 58–59
- Ms Chen, Y., 108–109
- Ms Dai, 110–111, 121
- Ms Ding, 134, 151
- Ms Dongdong, 1–2, 100–101
- Ms Feng, 55–56
- Ms Han, 52, 133–134
- Ms Huang, 104, 127, 129–130
- Ms Huo, 134, 151–152
- Ms Jiang, 128–129
- Ms Kong, 144–145
- Ms Lee, 113, 128–129, 149–150
- Ms Li, 52, 56, 102–103, 151
- Ms Li, N., 110
- Ms Lian, 101–102, 123–124
- Ms Liang, 114–115
- Ms Lin, 132
- Ms Liu, 48–52, 61, 73, 111
- Ms Luo, 115
- Ms Ma, 104–105
- Ms Qi, 135
- Ms Qian, 57, 72
- Ms Shi, 111
- Ms Tang, 47, 112
- Ms Tian, 98–100, 109, 117n2, 120–121
- Ms Wang, H., 124–125
- Ms Wang, T., 142–144, 150
- Ms Wang, Y., 149
- Ms Wei, 109
- Ms Weng, 68–69
- Ms Wu, 63, 69, 74
- Ms Xia, 122, 132–133
- Ms Xin, 132, 144
- Ms Xu, 108, 127, 131–132
- Ms Yan, 105, 128–129, 148
- Ms Yang, 53, 131
- Ms Ye, 51
- Ms Yu, 107, 124, 134
- Ms Zang, 124
- Ms Zeng, 113, 115, 145
- Ms Zhang, 46–47, 145–146
- Ms Zhang, K., 152
- Ms Zhang, L., 105
- Ms Zhao, 68, 74, 146–147
- Ms Zhou, 106–107

W

Walder, Andrew, 60
Wang Baoan, 191–192
Wang Qishan, 187
wealth distribution, 8. *See also* income disparities
- in Mao era, 107–108

wealthy classes, and motivation for joining CPC, 49–50
welfare states, democratic, 170
Wen Jiabao, 183
Western feminism, omissions of, 45
women entrepreneurs, from Mao- *versus* post-Mao eras, 106–107
women, in Chinese military, 24
women of Mao era
  attitudes toward employment, 158
  continuing inequality of, 67
  domestic-role orientation and, 97
  experiences of, 15–16
  female role models and, 40
  in labor force, 27–29
  and obligations to national projects, 40
  political education of, 97
  target population of, 196
women of post-Mao era
  attitudes toward employment, 158
  career-oriented, 133–136
  experiences of, 16–17
  family-oriented working women, 130–133
  heightened family conflict and, 120–127
  historical sense of justice and, 110
  separate-sphere ideal and, 105–207
  stay-at-home moms, 127–130
  target population of, 196
  types of, 16–17
  work motivations of, 114–115
women's agency, preceding and during Mao era, 73
women's choices, contextual factors in, 161
women's education, during Mao era, 37
women's productive/reproductive work, devaluation of, 8–9
women's rights
  individualist *versus* collective perceptions of, 159–160
  top-down, class-oriented, 70
women's triple burden, 67–75, 171
  agency and, 73
  components of, 70
  and inequity of state-family demands, 68
  men's roles and, 70–71
  and women from "bad classes", 69–70
  women's attitudes toward, 73
women workers
  commodification of, 88–89, 98–99, 102, 116–117
  and CPC alterations of gender/class structures, 50–51
  equality with husbands and, 52–53
  heroic status of, 57
  protection/benefits during Mao era, 35–37
  work satisfaction of, 51
Work and Family in Urban China
  organization of, 15–17
  policy implications, 174–179
  research methods and data sources, 193–200
  social implications, 172–174
  theoretical implications, 161–172
worker alienation/resistance, theories of, 7–8
workers. *See also* socialist workers; women workers
  dismantling of safety net and, 7–8
work–family conflict
  defined, 6
  in Mao era, 119–120
  in market-reform era, 89–92, 120–127, 158
  and women's domestic role in market societies, 10–15
  working hours and, 89–90

work–family patterns. *See also* diverse work–family patterns
global perspective on, 136
in market societies, 6
working-class consciousness, 7
working hours, work–family conflict and, 89–90
workplace
and egalitarianism during Mao era, 28
in Mao era, 5
sense of belonging and, 50, 64n4
workplace leadership, corruption in post-Mao era, 108–109
work units *(danwei)*
abolition of, 5
childcare and, 36, 99
and class equality and safety net, 47
creation of, 32
society of acquaintances and, 56
thought unification and, 59
women's sense of security and, 46
worker attachment to, 54
World Bank, 8
World Trade Organization (WTO), 8, 82

X
Xiche Hospital, 48, 64n3
Xi Jinping, 17, 184, 189, 191, 200n1
Xi-Li administration
and continuation of socialist experiment, 188
versus Hu-Wen administration, 186
leadership style of, 185
Maoist socialist policy and, 186
philosophical and policy shifts of, 184–190
Xu Caihou, 188

Y
Yan'an Rectification Campaign, 40
Yongping Jiang, 83
Young Pioneer League, 26

Z
Zeng, Zhi, example set by, 61–63, 64n8
Zhang, Yun
on diligence and frugality principle, 30
on neglect of women's issues, 35
Zhang Zishan, 191
Zhou Enlai
on diligence and frugality principle, 29–30
example set by, 61, 64n6
Zhou Yongkang, 188, 191
Zhu De, 42