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MARKET SOCIALISM AND *RURALIST* WELFARE REFORM IN POST-MAO CHINA*

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Market socialism — or "the socialist market economy" — in China has practically reinforced the rural-urban divide in social welfare. The danwei *welfare system for urban workers has remained robust, albeit currently through different programs for social security, so that Chinese-style socialism still governs the lives of most urban workers. The market-based and/or private arrangements for social insurances and services complement, not replace, the* danwei*-supported welfare programs. In contrast, the demise of rural collective institutions has caused a desocialization of peasant welfare in most villages across China, as individual families are urged to self-support on the basis of private economic and social resources. Essentially,* welfare ruralism *exhorts primarily peasants (and peasant migrants) to revitalize their traditional values and functions for familial social support, in lieu of state-sponsored social security programs or social services. What Gordon White dubbed as "post-communist neo-Confucianism" regarding the Chinese welfare tradition has been asymmetrically enforced onto rural population due to complicated historical, structural, and political factors. Welfare ruralism is a sort of internal orientalism applied to peasant welfare for which ideological and cultural work, as opposed to institutional and economic work for urban worker welfare, is the main mechanism for reform.*

INTRODUCTION

Pre-reform collective organizations in China were intended to eliminate any need for separate welfare policies through "rectified" social relations of production for the entire peasant population. In contrast, the family-based, market-oriented economic activities in the reform period tend to present threats to secure income opportunities, and thus necessitate *independent welfare mechanisms* in villages. While some people have been allowed to "get rich first" (Deng, 1987: 12) under the liberal development strategy of market socialism, many others have been left impoverished and unprotected (Hinton, 1990). Moreover, the Chinese population is now 'aging' rapidly, mainly as a result of the effective family planning effort.

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In the reform period, institutional decollectivization led to an inescapable result of threatening the already feeble financial and organizational foundations of the rural welfare system that had operated as part of the collective production organizations. To worsen matters, the personnel of rural welfare institutions, such as barefoot doctors, are increasingly lured into personalized professional service sectors under the marketized economic environment. In addition, the fiscal crisis of the Chinese state makes it difficult to financially compensate for the weakened collective welfare. It is critical that all these setbacks are occurring when social groups in need of welfare benefits are rapidly increasing.

There may be three theoretical options to be considered to cope with the crisis of the welfare system in rural China — namely, the adoption and expansion of state-managed public welfare programs, the privatization and marketization of welfare services, and the activation of self-help groups such as family and kin. More than two decades of rural reform seem to enable an overall judgment concerning which direction rural welfare has been transforming. Most local and foreign scholars concur that the encouragement of local self-help among the members of family and kin has been the main policy position of the Beijing leadership. In particular, rural families have been openly exhorted to reinforce their traditional functions of social support for the elderly, children, widowed persons, and ill or handicapped persons.

Family functions in supporting the elderly and other vulnerable persons, and in internally sharing frequent economic destitution, had been acknowledged and encouraged by the Chinese state, even before rural reform. One exception was the communalization drive in the late 1950s, when everyday life was tightly organized by various collective arrangements for child care, elderly care, laundry, sewing, dining, and sometimes even sleeping. Similarly, the pre-reform rural welfare systems in general were much worse equipped and financed than the urban welfare systems. Even the much publicized "five guarantees" were mostly provided by the family itself, while the redistributive mechanism of collective funds played a supplementary role at best.

In the post-Mao era, the Chinese state has further increased its dependence on familial social support, as well as on the mutual aid tradition among peasant families. As Chow (1988: 74) observed, "nearly all proposals for a new social security system stressed the important roles of the family system and the local communities." Thus, the main burden of economically and socially protecting needy or handicapped persons has fallen on the family, among both poor and rich segments of the rural population.

Currently, individual peasant families assume not only *production responsibilities* but also *welfare responsibilities.* The former are formally stipulated, whereas the latter are implicitly — and perhaps deceptively — entrusted. The Chinese state, confronted with a mounting financial crisis and the weakening of its organizational control of villages, has opted to revitalize the welfare functions of the peasant family, in an effort to impose a sort of *household welfare responsibility system.*

Although the use of the familial organization for rural welfare still needs to be supported with tax benefits and other comprehensive state supports, the Chinese state has merely issued frequent calls for rural welfare reform, instead of launching decisive policy measures. The success or effectiveness of this strategic dependence on the family will be largely determined by the extent of economic inequality and social differentiation created in the marketplace. The irony is that those families that are less successful in capturing new private economic opportunities — and thus need welfare protection — are also less likely to have sufficient family resources and networks for self-support.

It is far from unusual that a poor country like China would try to mobilize grassroots traditions and morals for familial self-support in solving the welfare needs of various needy or handicapped people. Even in advanced countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, conservative politicians have often called for family values to replace public welfare. However, this policy necessity in China has been unevenly applied between rural and urban areas. In stark contrast to openly neglected peasant welfare, there has been a wide array of political efforts to ensure the stability of workers' welfare, particularly in state enterprises.

Well into the 1990s, the comprehensive *danwei* (work unit) welfare system — a core element of Chinese-style socialism — was not significantly dismantled for most regular employees in state enterprises, even when many of them were generating severe losses. In fact, numerous loss-generating enterprises were saved from bankruptcy primarily for the sake of their employees' jobs and welfare. The recent adoption of co-payment schemes for social insurance programs for old-age support, health care, unemployment, and industrial accidents has not relieved most state enterprises of such welfare burdens in any meaningful sense, since their expenses for social insurance premiums and in-company social services roughly amount to total wage payments. The proportion of regular employees in state enterprises has continued to decline, and unemployed and underemployed workers suffer from severe poverty and insecurity in rapidly growing numbers. However, these unfortunate workers still constitute a minority, and are

given special considerations in economic activities wherever available. Besides, many of them would enjoy even better material lives by working in lucrative private and/or foreign enterprises. Also, the privatization and marketization of social services such as education, medicine, and housing have rapidly occurred in urban areas. However, much of this trend reflects the growing demands of affluent urban residents for better-quality schools, hospitals, and houses.

Market socialism — or "the socialist market economy" — in China has practically reinforced the rural-urban divide in social welfare.[1] Field studies consistently report that the *danwei* welfare system for urban workers has remained robust, albeit now through different programs for social security, so that Chinese-style socialism still governs most urban workers' lives. The market-based and/or private arrangements for social insurances and services complement, not replace, the *danwei*-supported welfare programs. In contrast, the demise of rural collective institutions has caused a *desocialization* of peasant welfare in most villages across China, as individual families are urged to self-support on the basis of private economic and social resources. A sort of *welfare ruralism* has exhorted mainly peasants (and peasant migrants) to revitalize their traditional values and functions for familial social support, in place of state-sponsored social security programs or social services. What Gordon White (1998: 192) dubbed "post-communist neo-Confucianism, involving the conscious manufacture of a set of alleged truths about the Chinese welfare heritage," has been asymmetrically enforced onto rural population due to "the over-determining role of historical, structural and political factors in shaping the trajectory of Chinese welfare reform" (White, 1998: 194). Welfare ruralism is an internal orientalism applied to peasant welfare for which ideological and cultural work — as opposed to institutional and economic work for urban worker welfare — is the primary tool of reform.

[1] While the Beijing leadership may not accept that its welfare reform policy has exacerbated the rural-urban disparities, it at least acknowledges ever-widening rural-urban inequalities as the most critical problem of "the socialist market economy" in China. In 'The Decisions of the Party Center concerning the Improvement of the Social Market Economic System' released on October 21, 2003, the party-state listed the redressing of urban-rural disparities as the first goal of state work for the next ten years (www.yonhapews.co.kr, October 22, 2003).

MAOIST SOCIALISM AND *RURALIST* WELFARE

Peasant Welfare in the Maoist Era

In spite of historical shifts in its contents, rural welfare in Mao-era China embodied the Marxist ideology that rectification of the social relations of production, rather than philanthropy, should be pursued to deal with needy and disadvantaged people. Separate social welfare was not an essential concern in initiating a Marxist revolution and building Communism in a post-revolutionary society. The socialist economic system was supposed to do away with exploitative relations of production that were responsible for poverty and insecurity. If some individuals suffered from poverty, it signaled that the socialist system itself should be further perfected, and not that a separate welfare system should be developed.[2] Physically handicapped people, elderly and children should be universally protected and supported in communal living arrangements, and not through categorical assistance prescribed in administrative welfare programs. These positions were amply illustrated in China's pre-reform policies and practices concerning social welfare.

In Chinese villages under socialism, there were no separate institutional arrangements for welfare, other than collective work organizations. These collective work organizations arranged material assistance for needy members and families as entitlements or rights, rather than as charities. According to Hussain and Feuchtwang (1988: 38), however, such entitlements were "concerned less with providing assistance than minimizing the numbers needing assistance by instituting a formidable array of social and economic imperatives for self-sustenance." The main purpose was not to deliver comprehensive welfare benefits, but to help the needy get back on their own feet. To achieve this purpose, the Communist Party of China (CPC) embarked on a series of economic restructuring measures without hesitation. These included land reform, cooperativization, collectivization, and communalization. The changes in the social relations of production, as Marx had envisaged, were expected to help remove economic destitution from all segments of Chinese population.

Indeed, this ideological position and practical concerns had direct ramifi-

[2] In the Marxist perspective, as Donzelot(1979) argues, the *philanthropically* disguised welfare system is needed only in bourgeois society where labor, while subjected to exploitation and alienation, needs to be maintained in proper quality to ensure smooth operation of the capitalist production system.

cations for role division among the state, collective production units, and peasant families. For peasant welfare, the Communist party-state found its main role not in financing and administering special welfare programs, but in abolishing the exploitative social relations of the pre-revolutionary era through various measures of agricultural collectivization. If some particular needs of the handicapped or unusually poor required separate care arrangements, then families and/or collective units were to be brought in. That is, the central government wanted to play as minimal a role as possible in running *self-reliant* rural welfare, while fully engaging itself in the task of rapid urban industrialization (Dixon, 1981). With the state maintaining its minimal importance, the post-revolutionary history of rural welfare had since been characterized by the role division between the family and the collective.

Since rural families transferred ownership of land and other productive assets to collective production organizations in the process of rural collectivization, their basic economic security then had to be collectively ensured. However, there was a somewhat contradictory policy line advanced to urge the peasant family to preserve the tradition of mutual support and filial piety. This was even codified into the 1950 Marriage Law, which stipulated the duties of parents to "rear and educate their children;" of children to "support and assist their parents;" and, of husband and wife "to strive jointly for the welfare of the family." This legalized exhortation for family support was sustained even when the peasant family lost its autonomous economic basis for production in the already collectivized countryside. Although the principle of self-reliance was introduced to urge localized financing of material relief, it was further propagated to press for each family's self-support. Facing the burden of amassing investable funds at the local level and the pressure from most constituent families for maximum possible income distribution, the emphasis on each family's self-care was an indispensable strategy to *minimize the numbers in need.*[3]

When collective farms were instituted in the mid 1950s, nevertheless, "the promise of a welfare system that would provide security for the elderly, the sick, the widowed, the orphaned, and the handicapped was an important

[3] By the same token, the proportion of the welfare fund in the total collective income was maintained at low levels. Although this proportion varied widely across different villages, counties, and provinces, it usually accounted for 1 to 3 percent of the collective income, i.e., team income, brigade income, or commune income, depending on the different unit of welfare administration in each period (Dixon, 1981). One exception was the communalization drive in which rural communes were encouraged to allocate up to 5 percent of their total income to their welfare fund.

instrument in overcoming the reluctance of peasants to join these [collectives] and give up their land, the traditional source of their security" (Dixon, 1981: 191). Thus, the famous *wubao* (five guarantees) system was introduced in most of the collectivized farming communities. Financed from a collective welfare fund, this system provided some basic needs for a small number of needy persons and families in each collective. The contents of *wubao* varied over time and across regions. Food, clothing, and burial expenses were mostly included; fuel, school fees, medical care and housing were variably included.[4]

When communes were introduced subsequently in the late 1950s, the communalization of peasant life was further intensified. In this period, according to Dixon (1981: 196), the *wubao* system was expanded to seven guarantees (including food, clothing, housing, health care and sick leave, maternity benefits, education, and funeral and wedding ceremonies), to ten guarantees (adding haircuts, entertainment, and heating), or even to sixteen guarantees (adding lighting, tailoring, upbringing of children, transportation, a small marriage grant, and old-age care). Furthermore, the communal (free) supply of these basic necessities was not limited to some destitute families, but universalized to all families. In addition, communal dining halls, elderly care centers, nurseries and kindergartens, and specialized teams for sewing, shoemaking, laundry, and others came to replace the family in most aspects of peasant life. As *Renmin ribao* (October 1, 1958) proclaimed, this situation "was not tantamount to the Communist system of 'to each according to his needs', but it has completely broken the barriers of pay according to labor."

Since rural communes were decomposed into smaller units after the disastrous ending of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), the communal welfare system had to be abandoned as well. Under the so-called three-tier system, the production team became not only the agricultural production unit, but also the basic unit of welfare administration.[5] The list of guarantees was also reduced, so that the *wubao* system was reinstated and has remained to date.

[4] It should be noted that the range of welfare coverage did not fully indicate the strength or efficacy of collective support. No less important was the level (or amount) of support in each guarantee. While this varied widely in different areas and in different periods, it was nonetheless common that collective support rarely enabled beneficiaries to enjoy conditions comparable to their average neighbors (Parish and Whyte, 1978). Furthermore, collective assistance carried immense pressure from neighbors and cadres for possible self-sustenance.

[5] The three-tier system consisted of team, brigade and commune. The team, the smallest unit, undertook agricultural production and accounting as well as welfare provision, whereas the brigade and commune were responsible for relatively large scale projects in education and health care, using funds from commune- and brigade-run enterprises and other sources.

TABLE 1. STATE EXPENDITURE FOR RURAL AND URBAN WELFARE (100 million yuan, %)

	Total state expndtr (100 mil yuan)	Percent of the total state expenditure				
		Rural relief funds	Welfare relief funds[a]	Prote-ctive pension[b]	Urban retiree pension	Natural disaster relief
1970	649.41	0.48	0.59	0.41[c]		
1975	820.88	0.90	0.42	0.46[c]		0.69
1978	1122.09	0.61	0.41	0.26	0.21	0.80
1980	1228.83	0.59	0.44	0.37	0.28	0.57
1981	1138.41	0.80	0.45	0.40	0.30	0.76
1982	1229.98	0.70	0.44	0.40	0.28	0.62
1983	1409.52	0.67	0.47	0.38	0.26	0.60
1984	1701.02	0.56	0.47	0.36	0.21	0.44
1985	2004.25	0.64	0.38	0.36	0.24	0.51
1986	2204.91	0.60	0.39	0.40	0.26	0.48
1987	2262.18	0.55	0.40	0.44	0.30	0.44
1988	2491.21	0.53	0.39	0.45	0.30	0.43
1989	2823.78	0.56	0.38	0.51	0.30	0.46
1990	3083.59	0.53	0.39	0.54	0.31	0.43
1991	3386.62	0.76	0.39	0.51	0.30	0.66
1992	3742.20	0.51	0.38	0.49	0.33	0.42
1993	4642.30	0.41	0.37	0.45	0.30	0.33
1994	5792.62	0.40	0.35	0.43	0.35	0.34
1995	6823.72	0.35	0.35	0.43	0.33	0.40
1996	7937.55	0.55	0.37	0.41	0.13	0.49
1997	9233.56	0.44	0.40	0.41	0.15	0.37
1998	10798.18	0.55	0.33	0.37	0.15	0.48
1999	13187.67	0.32	0.37	0.41	0.15	0.26
2000	15886.50		0.38	0.38	0.15	0.18

[a]Normally used for urban residents.
[b]Pension for disabled persons and bereaved families mostly in urban areas.
[c]Includes both protective pension and retiree pension.

Sources: Compiled and computed from *ZGTJNJ 1997*, pp. 243-246, and *ZGTJNJ 2001*, pp. 252-255.

The post-GLF readjustment period also formalized the system of "five protection households" covering families of ex-servicemen, revolutionary martyrs, cadres, and model workers, as well as five-guarantees families (i.e., the aged, children, the weak, the orphaned, the widowed, and the infirm and disabled). In addition, if the local situation allowed, families with an unusu-

ally high dependency ratio or notably insufficient income were supported, even when they were not classified as "five protection households."[6] During the Cultural Revolution, familial self-reliance was strongly emphasized again and, when assistance was granted, proper political attitudes and class backgrounds were critically considered (Dixon, 1981). Yet, the five protection families were continuously taken care of in this period and subsequently in the 1970s.[7] Partly because of universal work entitlement in collective farming and partly because of ideological exhortation for family self-sustenance, collectively protected families accounted for a very small segment of the rural population throughout the Maoist era.

In sum, the historical changes in the organizational basis and in the range and coverage of collective welfare had direct implications for the self-supporting role of the peasant family, as the negligible contribution of the state made family self-support the only alternative source of rural welfare (see Table 1). When the number of guarantees, the amount of assistance in each guarantee, and the number or categories of protected families were reduced, it automatically signaled that more peasant families had to depend on themselves for more types of basic needs. So far as the collective farming system ensured all families' work entitlement and egalitarian income distribution, self-support was a permanent principle for most families, while collective welfare was perceived as a means of last resort. The Maoist (and Marxist) welfare strategy of rectifying the social relations of production first was upheld faithfully.

Ruralist *Welfare as Enfranchisement Differential*

As a consequence of this Maoist, or socialist, policy of linking basic needs provision to work, social welfare was distributed in such a way that the existing inequality, particularly between urban and rural laborers, was further enlarged. As Davis (1989: 578) emphatically argues,

> The leadership endorsed the ideals of universalizing primary education, bringing health-care to under-served areas and protecting all citizens against the ravages of destitution in old age, but in practice, social services were not distributed according to the need of individuals, but

[6] Besides these criteria, thorough consultations were undertaken among various groups, including potential beneficiaries, collective leaders, mass organizations (the Poor Peasants' Association and the Women's Federation), and other ordinary members in order to effectively limit welfare assistance to truly needy families.

[7] However, the qualifications as cadres and model workers gradually became insignificant in the latter period.

> according to the worthiness of the job status. As a result, "welfare goods" . . . were rationed according to the value the regime placed on certain workers in specific segments of the workforce. . . [The] welfare policy consistently favoured the urban residents and employees in heavy industry over the rural residents and employees of a co-operative or collective on the grounds that the former, as members of the most advanced class working in the vanguard sectors, deserved higher rewards.

Roughly speaking, there was an urban-rural welfare disparity proportional to the widely known urban-rural income inequality.[8] As compared to villagers, city dwellers were "aristocratized" by bountiful welfare benefits (Zhang, Du, and Li, 1992: 110).

This micro-social outcome of welfare differentials between peasants and workers should be understood in the context of the macro-economic and political structure of developmental differentials between rural agricultural collectives and urban state enterprises. Both rural agricultural collectives and urban state enterprises were legitimate elements of the socialist economy, but the main developmental strategy of heavy industrialization necessitated the concentration of critical economic and social resources in urban areas and the austere self-subsistence of the rural population. Despite the failure of the initial Communist insurrections in cities in the revolutionary history, the densely aggregated heavy industrial workers in post-revolutionary Chinese cities never stopped appearing as a potentially threatening force to the CPC. Thus, the socialist state decided to enfranchise urban workers through a very co-optative mechanism of the *danwei* (work unit) system. State enterprises, by definition, constituted an economic responsibility of the state, but workers therein, by choice, constituted a political responsibility of the state. Rural collectives, by definition, were supposed to operate as autonomous associations of producers, but peasants therein, by choice, were practically detached from the state under the rubric of *ziligengsheng* (self-reliance).

Each *danwei*, albeit with some differences across enterprises and regions, provided its workers with such comprehensive material, social, and cultural benefits that White (1998: 177) termed it "the micro welfare state." The benefits list included not only permanent employment and retiree security, but also housing, schooling, health care, injury protection, maternity protection, child care, cultural life, and even funeral/burial (Dixon, 1981). This list was almost tantamount to what Chinese rural population in many areas experi-

[8] For the general situation of urban welfare on the eve of Deng's reform, see Whyte and Parish (1984).

enced briefly (though only on paper) under the supposed achievement of Communism during the Great Leap Forward period. On the part of the rural population, their experience of on-paper Communism required a human toll of somewhere between fifteen to thirty million deaths. On the part of urban workers, their practical experience of near-Communism was buttressed by an unwavering state commitment to urban heavy industrialization and proletarian representation which, in turn, demanded the ultimate sacrifice of the rural population.

In this milieu, the practical reliance on familial social support for peasant welfare, along with the limited public investment in agriculture, reflected a fundamentally *ruralist* political position of the Communist party-state. *Ruralism* denotes "all those social, cultural, political, and economic ideas and actions about rural people and places that have been devised and implemented by urban-based elite groups to justify urban-centered programs of economic and social transformation, and necessitate self-negating changes (and non-changes) in rural people's everyday lives" (Chang, 2003). Ruralism, while reflecting the interests of urban economic, political, and social groups, rather than the realities of rural people's lives, exerts a formidable self-fulfilling power by inducing and coercing rural people to comply with the specific ways of thinking, acting, and relating described or, more precisely, prescribed therein. The supposedly Confucian virtue of familial social support, as it was asymmetrically demanded to collective farmers under the urban-centered political economic system, constituted a critical element of ruralist socialism in post-revolutionary China. Post-Mao reform has fundamentally revised the ruralist development strategy in many aspects, but *welfare ruralism* has been strengthened due to the reasons explicated below.

DECOLLECTIVIZATION AND PEASANT WELFARE

A double-edged threat to peasant welfare was caused by rural decollectivization. The inevitable weakening of collective welfare was paradoxically accompanied by an increasing need for it due to a rapid increase in the number of economically threatened families in the increasingly market-oriented economy. The dissolution of collective farming inevitably disrupted, on the one hand, the entitlement system of work and, on the other hand, the organizational and financial basis of welfare assistance. As Chow(1988: 60) pointed out,

> Though this practice [of collective welfare] has been continued in some

TABLE 2. SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF COLLECTIVE WELFARE EXPENDITURE OF DAHE'S PRODUCTION TEAMS, 1970-1985 (yuan)

	Balance from prior year	Current year addition	Total welfare expense	Support for needy	Education expense	Health care & sanitation	Other
1970	254.8	258.5	169.8	14.0	3.2	55.3	19.4
1971	340.6	213.7	187.3	13.8	5.5	53.1	24.5
1972	390.2	202.4	191.7	7.1	0.9	56.1	32.3
1973	358.7	220.2	206.0	18.3	3.2	62.9	68.4
1974	347.9	243.1	195.7	20.8	2.2	76.0	53.4
1975	608.7	295.1	142.7	18.1	2.2	101.9	45.2
1976	454.6	200.0	130.0	8.5	5.0	83.9	9.9
1977	652.0	407.0	340.1	10.9	6.6	141.0	119.6
1978	750.2	734.8	435.8	11.9	6.0	132.3	72.2
1979	1440.2	1023.0	407.6	106.5	31.9	112.2	118.5
1980	1389.2	1143.4	656.9	50.6	16.3	151.6	482.0
1981	1833.2	1190.3	660.5	55.9	13.4	59.6	531.8
1982	2314.6	1064.2	786.0	40.2	39.7	46.7	636.6
1983	2536.3	582.5	805.6	50.9	154.7	38.3	565.0
1984	2272.3	438.7	664.6	89.6	139.9	20.5	418.4
1985	2070.5	523.3	510.8	39.3	129.3	5.6	349.2

Source: Author's analysis of the original survey data (Putterman, ed., 1989).

> communes ..., most local governments have obviously found it difficult to enforce, as peasants are now largely responsible for their own piece of land. As a result, many needy members who have no families to rely on are left unattended to . . . [T]he way in which assistance is provided in the villages is extremely unorganized and a more rational system is urgently called for.

Thus, state intervention was urgently needed to stabilize peasant welfare that was threatened by rural decollectivization. Yet the Chinese state was not organizationally and financially ready to supplant, or even supplement, the waning collective welfare system. There even was devolution of state welfare responsibility from the central government to provincial governments in 1985. It was only "hoped" (Hussain and Feuchtwang, 1988: 70) that collectivism would survive in protecting destitute neighbors at least.

Table 2 shows, for illustration, the size and composition of collective welfare expenditure at Dahe People's Commune in Hebei Province between 1970 and 1985. At this commune, each team's collective welfare budget and actual welfare spending on average increased gradually in the 1970s and the

TABLE 3. COLLECTIVE SUPPORT FOR *WUBAO* FAMILIES IN THE REFORM ERA

Year	Persons (1,000)	Collective support		Collective support sum (1,000)	Per recipient amount (10,000)
		Recipients (1,000)	%		
1978	3150	2678	85.0	12571	46.9
1980	2944	2539	86.2	17223	66.0
1981	2899	2595	89.5	20368	79.3
1982	2989	2690	90.0	28455	107.7
1983	2951	2838	96.2	33867	122.5
1984	2961	2691	90.9	41866	151.4
1985	3008	2238	74.4	52854	214.5
1986	2932	2204	75.2	50526	227.5
1987	2876	2190	76.1	60000	273.1
1988	2826	2072	73.3	64574	303.0
1989	3217	2224	69.1	74922	348.8
1990	2837	2064	72.8	73411	342.4
1991	2844	2039	71.7	81577	400.0
1992	2669	1894	71.0	75558	398.9
1996	2675	2130	79.6	160275	752.5
1997	2791	2003	71.8	170406	850.8
1998	2828	2009	71.0	180639	899.1
1999	3037	1954	64.3	179646	919.4
2000	2706	2081	76.9	204754	983.9

Sources: Adapted from *ZGSHTJZL 1993*, p. 121, and *ZGTJNJ 2001*, p. 767.

early 1980s, and tapered off subsequently. Support for needy team members was larger in the 1980s than in the 1970s (except for 1979), but it is notable how small the amount of support was. Even when all support had been distributed to a few families, this could not have provided anything near bare subsistence. A more serious problem is observed concerning health care and sanitation. Although health care programs had been administered at the brigade level in most localities, it is clearly shown that a rapid reduction of collective health care resources was caused by rural decollectivization.

Without question, the maintenance of the *wubao* system is the key issue in post-collective welfare reform. Official statistics in Table 3 show that the proportion of the *wubao* recipients supported by collective units increased until 1983, and then sharply decreased in 1985 — the year when rural collective units were formally dissolved to be replaced by general administrative

organizations. The total number of *wubao* recipients did not increase, but fluctuated in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the rural (as well as the national) population continued to increase despite the stringent birth control policy, such fluctuation actually meant the diminution of collective welfare. Of course, given the improvement in the general economic status of the rural population in this period, the desired number/proportion of *wubao* recipients may well have declined. However, it is also true that economic reform disadvantaged and alienated various segments of the rural population into desperate living conditions. Thus, the desired number/proportion of *wubao* recipients could have increased. Despite such possibilities, the support amount per recipient kept increasing gradually, so as to keep abreast with the run-away inflation of this period.

Besides immediate practical problems of organizing and financing social security measures, the Chinese government has been confronted with a theoretical problem of profound significance. As welfare protection could not be universally provided as part of collective work arrangements in the decollectivized countryside, a separate system for specifically delivering welfare assistance was needed. In other words, due to the changes in rural production relations, the Maoist (and Marxist) strategy of collectively enabling people to acquire basic social and material needs could no longer be upheld. Even when some localities have been successful in preserving mutual assistance programs, these now have to be managed with resources separately mobilized for collective welfare. Thus the specific and sustained commitment of cadres and villagers to the programs is required. On the part of the state, rural welfare is now a *social policy* that requires its own theoretical, organizational, and financial ground, somewhat independent of general economic management.

As the reform leadership now has to develop welfare programs as a separate social policy in the absence of collective economic organizations ensuring minimum security and welfare, it seems to have two alternatives: expanding the role of the state in welfare programs directly oriented to needy groups, or encouraging families to reinforce traditional functions of social support (with or without financial incentives). The establishment and expansion of private welfare services in the market may be considered still another option, but its applicability is fundamentally limited in small, poor communities like Chinese villages. It is all too clear which policy option the state has taken for rural welfare. Throughout the reform era, the peasant family has had to function as the only effective welfare institution for most rural population. As Chow (1988: 74) noticed,

> For a long time, traditional networks like the family system have been neglected and at times even suppressed for playing protective functions... But the omission of these traditional networks have not diminished their importance as the majority of the Chinese still cannot get the most basic provisions from the state... In its proposal for a new social security system in China, the Ministry [of Civil Affairs] emphasized in particular the roles played by the family system; it is probably a lesson which the Ministry has learned from its work with the needy in the villages.

The reality does not differ from this governmental (in)action. Based upon their field observations of a Shandong village, Xu and Yang (1994: 211) concluded that "the family takes care of every individual's *shenglaobingsi*" (birth, aging, illness, and death, i.e., the entire life course) as the core institution for social security. Although the overall improvement of rural living standards since reform has been impressive, the burden of economically and socially protecting needy people has rapidly fallen onto the family.

The revised marriage law of 1980 clearly represents this wishful position of the Chinese state. The 1980 Marriage Law reiterated, as legal codes, filial obligation and other elements of family mutual support. Again, legally stipulated were the duties of parents "to rear and educate their children;" of children "to support and assist their parents;" and, of husband and wife "to support and assist each other." Also stipulated were the duties, when affordable, of paternal and maternal grandparents "to support and assist underaged grandchildren whose parents are deceased;" of grandchildren "to give support to their paternal and maternal grandparents whose children are deceased;" and, of elder brothers and sisters "to support and assist underaged younger brothers and sisters whose parents are deceased or unable to provide."

The new marriage law, if compared to the 1950 Marriage Law, expanded the legal range of support relations as the prime institution for welfare protection beyond the confine of the nuclear family to "extended" family and kin members. Amidst the rapid process of rural economic diversification, the expanding relations of economic cooperation among family and kin members also stimulate the relations of mutual material support among them (Chang, 1993). However, regardless of these individual economic circumstances, the family as a universal (and virtually sole) rural welfare institution is socially founded on nothing other than the traditional Confucian ethic of familial economic collectivism. While this is flatly difficult to ideologically justify, the Confucian family has become an indispensable part of

[9] The comparison of the American and the Japanese welfare systems is illuminating because

China's socialism on its material protection side.[9] This ideological work in (rural) welfare has been continually perfected as familial social support is even constitutionally stipulated, legally included in matrimonial pledges, and adopted as a core topic for formal school education and home education (Croll, 1999).

The Confucian tradition of familial social support inevitably exploits hierarchical gender relations. The destabilization of collective welfare services and the familial labor shortage amid rapid economic diversification have required a home-based group of rural workers who undertake family farming and family care simultaneously (Chang, 2000). The theory — more precisely, ideology — of *zirenfengong* (natural division of work) has been openly discussed by Chinese scholars (Judd, 1990). On the part of rural people, it has been practiced out of necessity as more and more villages are deserted by men and young people either seasonally or permanently. Middle-aged women have been in charge of both familial agricultural production and familial social support for elderly, children, etc. (Meng, 1994, 1996). The conservative approach of the state to rural social policy has necessitated a sort of *welfare gender* in the place of the yet-to-arrive welfare state.

On the financial front of welfare, however, many rural communities managed to compensate for the budgetary crisis ensuing from agricultural decollectivization by tapping the unexpected economic opportunity of rural collective industrialization. The official endorsement of rural industrial diversification in 1984 was echoed by a literally explosive expansion of rural industrial and commercial activities, most of which were either collectively run or closely backed by local interest (Zhou, 1996). In the beginning, this was more or less a country-wide phenomenon. The profits, taxes, and contributions from these rural industries not only filled local collective coffers, but also enriched entire villages in the mid-to-late 1980s. Many villages began to rebuild health clinics, nurseries, schools, and elderly homes.[10] Some rural industries were designed to create jobs for handicapped persons, elders, etc. (Kim, 2000). Besides, many villagers employed in rural enterprises were the first rural group to be incorporated in social insurance because their work contract included it. These developments were warmly praised

they seem to by and large parallel the two options available in China. According to Preston and Kono (1988), the family-dependent Japanese system has been much less costly and more effective than the formally institutionalized American system. In this regard, the Chinese strategy of enlarging the welfare function of the family may be somewhat justified, considering China's cultural proximity to Japan and pressing financial difficulty.

[10] See Kim (2000: 551-76) for a detailed description of this process in Dongyingcun, Shandong.

by the central government as it was thereby allowed to maintain its obstinate abstinence from peasant welfare in decollectivized villages (Wong, 1987).

However, the reliance of peasant welfare on rural industries was not long sustainable in many areas for the following reasons. First, both the central and local governments were overwhelmingly concerned about rural economic development over peasant welfare, and concurred on policy changes to allow the "more productive use" (i.e., investment) of enterprise profits (Davis, 1989). There even were policy changes concerning the use of state and collective welfare funds to induce their "productive use." Second, by the early 1990s, their viability of rural industries began to be threatened in many interior regions, whose local protectionism gradually crumbled under the raid of commodities from more competitive coastal regions. The regionally asymmetrical development of rural industries became one of the main causes of the economic disparities between eastern coastal regions and western interior regions.[11] Third, in many areas, both cadres and villagers remain skeptical about the efficiency of collective management of rural industries, so that the management and/or ownership of many collective rural enterprises have been privatized.[12] At the time of privatization, the collective coffer is actually enriched by the prices paid by private entrepreneurs, but privatized enterprises cannot be relied on as a financial basis for rural welfare. The regional and temporal limit of rural industry-backed peasant welfare became apparent by the mid 1990s, so that familial self-support has remained the only universal mechanism for peasant welfare thereafter.

The strains and dilemmas in welfare provision are almost universal across China, except in some rich villages. Proposals and discussions about new systems of rural welfare are not rare. Some localities have experimented with new, voluntary measures for peasant welfare. New forms of social security organizations include local security networks and social security fund associations (for poor people relief and mutual saving). Even private philanthropy and individual insurance policies are encouraged in many localities (Davis, 1989). Inevitably, there are wide interregional variations in the new welfare arrangements. According to official data in *Zhonguo renkou*

[11] Nongyebu (1996), "Xiangzhenqiye dongxi hezuo shifan gongcheng fangan" (The Model Process Method of East-West Cooperation of Township and Town Enterprises), in *Zhongguo xiangzhenqiye nianjian 1996*, pp. 79-119, Beijing: Zhongguonongyechubanshe.

[12] For instance, village cadres I interviewed at Dahe, Hebei in September 2003 candidly expressed their belief in the superior efficiency of private enterprises. They were satisfied to use the rents, taxes, and contributions from privatized enterprises.

tongji nianjian (China Population Statistical Yearbook), it is in rich areas that redistributive types of collective social security have been implemented. In poor areas, reciprocal help organizations such as mutual saving have been common. Many field observations have shown that these new efforts have confronted many unfavorable social and political conditions created by rural reform — i.e., the lack of stable institutional arrangements, the inefficacy of ideological exhortation, and the increased mobility of villagers. These tendencies make it difficult to induce villagers' sustained commitment to local mutual assistance.

MARKET SOCIALISM AND *RURALIST* WELFARE REFORM

While the above evidence sufficiently demonstrates that the Chinese state has tried to minimize its obligation for rural welfare by using (or abusing) the family moral relations for mutual support, the extent and significance of such strategic dependence on the peasant family can be somewhat indirectly delineated by examining the urban-rural differences in state-supported welfare benefits. In urban areas, the desocialization (or privatization) of economic organizations has not yet taken place in full scale, so that socialist welfare benefits have not necessarily been threatened due to institutional changes. Furthermore, the asymmetrical state commitment to urban welfare — one of the few state policies that were consistently maintained regardless of the political and economic vicissitudes — has been further reinforced in the reform period.

It is the very reform policy for urban state enterprises that has induced the expansion of welfare spending on workers. For many years, managers of state enterprises used their enlarged managerial autonomy — a mechanism which state leaders hoped would facilitate profit-seeking and budget-economizing — to increase workers' bonuses and welfare at the expense of state revenues (Walder, 1987, 1989; Baek, 2001). Well into the 1990s, the comprehensive *danwei* welfare system — a core element of Chinese-style socialism — was preserved for most of the regular employees in state enterprises, even when many of them were generating losses. Numerous loss-generating enterprises were saved from bankruptcy primarily for the sake of their employees' jobs and welfare (see Table 4). Ironically, the *danwei* welfarism of state and collective enterprises has spilled over into many newly established enterprises, such as private and joint-venture enterprises. This has occurred under strong political pressure from local cadres and workers and/or for the economic consideration of scouting and keeping competent workers (Francis, 1996).

TABLE 4. STATE SUBSIDIES FOR STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES AND URBAN RESIDENTS (unit: hundred million yuan)

	Subsidies for deficit-making state enterprises[a]		Food price subsidies for urban residents[b]	
	Sum	(% total budget)	Sum	(% total budget)
1978			11.1	(1.0)
1979			79.2	(6.2)
1980			117.7	(10.3)
1981			159.4	(14.3)
1982			172.2	(14.9)
1983			197.4	(15.8)
1984			218.3	(14.5)
1985	507.0	(25.3)	261.8	(14.0)
1986	324.8	(14.7)	257.5	(11.0)
1987	376.4	(16.6)	294.6	(12.0)
1988	446.5	(17.9)	316.8	(11.7)
1989	598.9	(21.2)	370.3	(12.2)
1990	578.9	(18.8)	380.8	(11.0)
1991	510.2	(15.1)	373.8	(9.8)
1992	445.0	(11.9)	321.6	(7.3)
1993	411.3	(8.9)	299.3	(5.7)
1994	366.2	(6.3)	314.5	(5.4)
1995	327.8	(4.8)	364.9	(5.3)
1996	337.4	(4.3)	453.9	(5.7)
1997	368.5	(4.0)	552.0	(6.0)
1998	333.5	(3.1)	712.1	(6.6)
1999	290.0	(2.2)	697.6	(5.3)
2000	278.8	(1.8)	1042.3	(6.6)

[a]Subsidies for loss-making state enterprises became a separate budget-accounting item in 1986.
[b]All price subsidies for consumers were provided for urban-registered residents only.

Source: Compiled and computed from data in *ZGTJNJ 2001*, pp. 247-251.

In stark contrast to openly neglected peasant welfare, there has been a wide array of political efforts to ensure the stability of workers' welfare, particularly in state enterprises. The reform of urban state enterprises has required the increasing responsibility of workers to share the budget for various social security programs, usually in terms of scheduled insurance premiums (Guojiajingjitizhigaigeweiyuanhui, ed., 1995). Newly proposed or

implemented insurances for old-age support, health care, unemployment, and industrial accidents have these co-payment arrangements. However, the actual adoption of co-payment schemes for such insurance programs has not relieved most state enterprises of welfare burdens in any meaningful sense. Their expenses for social insurance premiums and other in-cash supports by state regulations amount to about half the total wage payments: as of the late 1990s, 22 percent for old age insurance, 11 percent for health insurance, 3 percent for unemployment insurance, 1 percent for industrial accident insurance, 1 percent for childbirth, 2 percent for educational expenses, 3 percent for worker welfare, and 2 percent for labor union expenses (Lee, 2003).

Furthermore, various in-company social services also amount to about half the total wage payments (Lee, 2003). Included in the list are employee housing, hospital, school, nursery, kindergarten, stores, and cultural facilities. It has been an important official reform policy to encourage privatization and abolition of these social services because the incurred expenses even exceed the total profits in many state enterprises. But the response of enterprise managers, not to mention that of workers, has been extremely slow. Even when these services are replaced by private means in the market, many enterprises subsidize workers in various ways. Some enterprises have purchased these services from the market in order to provide them for workers permanently. It is undeniable that the privatization and marketization of social services such as education, medicine, and housing have rapidly taken place in urban areas. Much of this trend, however, reflects the growing demands of affluent urban residents for better-quality schools, hospitals, and houses.

Urban workers have to increasingly rely on the market for basic goods and services. In particular, the abolition of *liangpiao* (grain coupon) in most provinces has produced enormous financial pressure on urban worker households because of rapidly rising grain prices. Inflation has been practically an essential means of reform — e.g., raising prices for agricultural products in the early stage of reform, abolition of regulatory (low) prices for various industrial inputs, and market-based price determination of consumer goods. In the mid 1980s, however, the Chinese government acted quickly to freeze grain procurement prices, and to provide price subsidies for various basic goods. Throughout the 1980s, these price subsidies alone amounted to more than 10 percent of the total state budget, even exceeding the entire defense budget in many years (see Table 4). Ironically, as shown in Table 5, Chinese food producers have continued to suffer from rural-urban nutritional inequalities even when they have clearly outperformed urban

TABLE 5. RURAL-URBAN NUTRITIONAL INEQUALITIES (per capita consumption kg)

	1981		1985		1990		1995		2000	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Grain[a]	257	135	262	131	259	97	249	82		
Vegetable	124	152	131	144	134	139	104	116	112	115
Edible oil	3.1	4.8	4.0	5.8	5.2	6.4	5.8	7.1	7.1	8.2
Meat, poultry	9.4	20.5	12.0	22.0	12.6	25.2	13.1	23.6	18.3	25.5
Eggs	1.2	5.2	2.0	6.8	2.4	7.2	3.2	9.7	5.0	11.2
Seafood	1.3	7.3	1.6	7.1	2.1	7.7	3.1	9.2	3.5	9.9
Sugar	1.1	2.9	1.5	2.5	1.5	2.1	1.3	1.7	1.3	1.7

[a]Refers to unprocessed grains for rural households.

Sources: Compiled and computed from the sections on “People’s Livelihood” in SYC 1988, *ZGTJNJ 1997*, *ZGTJNJ 2001*.

residents in economic activities.

The proportion of regular employees in state enterprises has continued to decline, and unemployed and underemployed workers suffer from severe poverty and insecurity in rapidly growing numbers. Nonetheless, these unfortunate workers still constitute a minority, and are given special considerations in economic activities wherever available. For instance, the institutionalization of *xiagang* (going down to the edge) attests to not only the economic effort for enterprise restructuring, but also the political consideration to provide a temporary material buffer for unneeded workers. *Xiagang* workers are those who are temporarily laid-off due to critical managerial problems, but still maintain employment contracts and receive compensatory payments. As of the end of 2000, there were 9.11 million such workers, with 6.57 million belonging to state enterprises (Lee, 2003). *Xiagang* is an interesting socialist strategy of achieving labor market flexibility. It also needs to be pointed out that many of those who quit state enterprises do so to enjoy even better material conditions by working in lucrative private and/or foreign enterprises. It is common for married couples to diversify their employment in state and foreign/private sectors. In this way, a couple can enjoy the perks of rich welfare benefits provided by a state enterprise and the high wage income paid by a foreign/private enterprise.

Not all urban workers are beneficiaries in this regard as the urban industrial structure has become increasingly heterogeneous and as non-state sector workers outside the administrative boundary for welfare provision (such as contract construction workers and informal sector peddlers) have disproportionately increased (S. Chang, 1996). However, an increasing pro-

portion of non-state sector workers are migrants from rural areas (Yang and Goldstein, 1990), so that their rural origin — to the extent that it implies their administrative exclusion from state-sector employment — perpetuates the pre-migration disadvantages in social welfare (Solinger, 1999). In other words, the welfare disparity between peasants and state employees has been replicated in the urban arena between peasants-turned-workers and state employees. Thus, for the peasant population, the family must continue to function as a central welfare institution whether they remain in the countryside or move to cities.

In sum, market socialism in China has practically reinforced the rural-urban divide in social welfare. The *danwei* welfare system for urban workers has remained robust, albeit now through different programs for social security. The market-based and/or private arrangements for social insurances and services complement, not replace, the *danwei*-supported welfare programs. In contrast, the demise of rural collective institutions has caused a desocialization of peasant welfare in most villages across China as individual families are urged to self-support on the basis of private economic and social resources. *Welfare ruralism* has exhorted mainly peasants (and peasant migrants) to revitalize their traditional values and functions for familial social support in place of state-sponsored social security programs or social services. What Gordon White (1998: 192) dubbed "post-communist neo-Confucianism, involving the conscious manufacture of a set of alleged truths about the Chinese welfare heritage," has been asymmetrically enforced on to rural population. Welfare ruralism is a sort of internal orientalism applied to peasant welfare for which ideological and cultural work is the main mechanism for reform. It is amazing how openly and consistently the policy discussions about social security reform have alienated the world's largest peasant population.

CONCLUSION

A paradox of rural reform is that a rapid increase of needy people in the increasingly privatized and marketized economic environment has been met with an abrupt dismantling of the collective mechanisms for welfare provision — a direct corollary of the decomposition of collective production organizations themselves. That is, rural decollectivization in China not only entailed an organizational restructuring of various production activities, but also ramified a fundamental dismantling of the rural welfare system. While rural production is now formally delegated to individual peasant families through various systems of *household production responsibility*, rural welfare

has been neither formally assigned to individual peasant families nor incorporated into the state-organized and financed welfare programs. Instead, a sort of *household welfare responsibility* has deceptively emerged under which the morally defined relations of mutual support in the family are now acclaimed as a genuine socialist element of Chinese society.

The Confucian family tradition of moral relations of mutual support, even encompassing grandparents, grandchildren, and married siblings, has been formally encouraged for peasant welfare as a functional equivalent to the welfare state, whereas public welfare benefits continue to be the exclusive privileges of official urban residents. Although this ideological exhortation for familial social support is not formally confined to the rural population, policy-makers cannot miss the reality that "the Chinese urban family hardly conforms to the Confucian stereotype" (White, 1998: 193). After all, Confucianism is a legacy of China's agrarian millenia in the past. In short, post-Mao welfare reform has been openly and tenaciously *ruralist*, and few peasants seem to appreciate the culturalist manipulation of rural life even when they actually abide by traditional norms for familial social support.

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